

Disraeli and Bentinck and Personal and Political Relationship in
History and Memory

by Thomas Charles Pritchard

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD in History

The University of Leeds

School of History

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my parents without whose help and support this project would not have been possible.

I must also extend thanks to the office staff at the School of History in Leeds who have supported and administered this thesis throughout. Similarly I must also take the chance to acknowledge the help I have been given from the respective teams of the special collections departments at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the University of Nottingham and Liverpool Records Office who have been so helpful in enabling my research.

I would also like to remember the support given to me by the late Professor Malcolm Chase who supervised this thesis in its formative stages and who made such a great impression on my thinking.

Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank Professor Simon Green for his unwavering support over the last five years. This thesis would have been quite impossible but for his sagacious wisdom and support.

Abstract

Benjamin Disraeli has long been the source of wonder and examination for the academic world. Indeed, is now perhaps the most discussed nineteenth-century politician. His political practices, ideas and writings have been extensively mined to come up with a coherent understanding of his life and career. He has for so long been understood in relation to the contemporary allegation that he was an adventurer, opportunist, and man of few political principles. A man apart from his parliamentary colleagues who distrusted and disliked him. A view largely cemented by the formidable professional histories of the 1960s. More recent works on Disraeli have explored his ideas on race, empire and his own Jewish identity. This work attempts to move away from those valuable contributions to once again explore Disraeli's politics and political thought.

It is all too easy to lose the bigger picture. It would have been quite impossible for a metropolitan, middle-class, Jewish novelist dandy and parvenu to climb to the top of British politics, where he stayed for over thirty years without both political principle and a extraordinary ability to collaborate. Therefore, this work attempts to re-establish Disraeli in his own contemporary context. An Englishman and a thorough-going Tory, who rather than being different or apart from his colleagues, was a first-rate political collaborator.

Contents

Introduction: Disraeli a Reassessment	p.6
Chapter One: The Early Years	p.13
Chapter Two: Young England to the Front Benches	p.35
Chapter Three: Young England and the Trilogy	p.60
Chapter Four: Lord George Bentinck and the Leadership	p.131
Chapter Five: Disraeli in the Age of Equipoise	p.159
Chapter Six: Beaconsfieldism and Elysian Fields	p.265
Conclusion: Death and Legacy	p.297
Bibliography	p.303

Introduction:

Disraeli has long been the subject of historical interest, both academic and popular. From almost immediately after his death in 1881, historians and political commentators have attempted to explain and indeed, make sense of, his political career. He is now undoubtedly the most discussed politician of the nineteenth-century. This is a trend that has shown no real sign of abating. Indeed, one scholar has recently described the last ten years as a ‘Disraeli decade’.¹ No doubt Disraeli still remains a fascinating figure to modern readers as he was to many contemporaries. Born into a middle-class metropolitan Jewish family, he was converted to Anglicanism at the age of twelve. Having first come to public attention as a popular, if somewhat disreputable, novelist, his reputation was made more disreputable still by scandals and crippling debts. He would later enter politics, having first stood unsuccessfully as a radical, in the Tory interest and, after destroying his own leader Sir Robert Peel, would come to lead the Conservative party throughout the greater part of the mid-nineteenth-century. How did a man with such glaring disadvantages and such a different social background come to lead the landed and largely aristocratic Tory party left by the schism of 1846? How did someone who looked, spoke, thought and acted so differently from his parliamentary colleagues and who shared none of their extra-parliamentary enthusiasms come to lead them in the last age of aristocratic government? These are the questions that historians have grappled with over the last 140 years. These are the questions that this thesis will revisit. The existing historiography has done so much to illuminate Disraeli’s life. But his ideas and psychology still remain elusive. We are far from having reached a consensus whereby Disraeli’s career is made coherent and rendered compatible with our understanding of mid-Victorian society.

Broadly speaking three main historiographical interpretations have emerged that have sought to rationalize Disraeli’s career and to explain his success in the face of the obvious obstacles facing him. The first of these is the ‘Tory-Democrat’ view. This interpretation was the creation of Conservatives during the 1880s, 1890s and early twentieth century who, almost immediately following Disraeli’s death, saw themselves faced with the challenges of an increasingly industrial, working class and democratic society. On paper, Disraeli seemed the perfect ‘fit’ as a way of coping with that problem. After all, Disraeli had first entered parliament as a Tory-radical and his novels of the 1840s had painted a bleak picture of English working-class life as a result of careless industrialisation and unsympathetic land-owners. Moreover, in 1867 he had trusted the good-sense and deference of the English working people by extending to them the vote, hence enacting a long-held vision of Tory-democracy. In 1874, having delivered the party its first majority in nearly thirty years, he put his ideas of the 1840s into practice and began the most comprehensive programme of social legislation ever seen, in order to improve the condition of the working-classes. Finally, he returned Britain to its place on the world stage by executing a popular programme of assertive foreign policy, culminating in his great triumph at the Congress of Berlin where he averted war and boosted British prestige.²

This highly idealized and over principled construction of Disraeli’s politics was almost totally dismantled, at least in academic circles, by the work of a wave of professional historians, writing during the 1960s. They replaced the principled tory-democrat portrayal of Disraeli with a less sympathetic interpretation that stressed his political inconsistency and highlighted his political pragmatism at the expense of political principle. Most notable amongst these efforts was Robert Blake’s impressive biography, that still forms a cornerstone of most modern scholarship surrounding

¹ A Review of David Cesarani’s *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* by Michel Pharand (Director, the Disraeli Project at Queen’s University, Ontario, Canada, 2009-2015)

² On this transformation into a Tory Democrat plaster saint: P. Smith, *Disraeli: a brief life*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) pp.213-215; M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People. 1880-1935*, (Oxford, OUP, 1985) p.8-31

Disraeli. It remains an invaluable piece of political analysis which served to paint a more realistic portrait of Disraeli by replacing a plaster-saint vision with a healthy dose of worldly scepticism. By contrast with the romanticized and high-minded tory-democrat interpretation, Disraeli's pragmatism was highlighted, any lack of consistency was celebrated, and his ideas and principles watered down to vague and inefficient notions; the rest was just 'mere nonsense and rhodomontade'.³ Blake's labours were supplemented in the same decade by Maurice Cowling's shrewd analysis of the 1867 Reform Act. This revealed how political expediency and parliamentary manouvering had been far more responsible for the bill's passage than any high-minded principle.⁴ Similarly, with regard to social reform, Paul Smith's study highlighted just how little Disraeli had to do with his government's programme of domestic legislation.⁵ Richard Millman's slightly later examination of Disraeli's later foreign policy also stressed its opportunist rather than principled nature.⁶ That interpretation was supported by at the time by the works of Hesketh Pearson and of Richard Davis, who suggested that for Disraeli, 'politics was a perpetual jockeying for power and place, and little else'.⁷ More recently, this view was taken even further by Douglas Hurd and, most notably, Ian Machin, who considered Disraeli to be 'entirely pragmatic' and in the examination of his politics found it 'difficult to say what ideals he had'.⁸ It should, of course, be noted that charges of political inconsistency did not originate in the 1960s, but rather began as insults by his contemporary opponents: Liberals who could not stomach him, Peelites who never forgave him for the destruction of their leader, and many high-Tories who could not understand Disraeli's insistence on pursuing seemingly unprincipled combinations with the radicals during the 1860s, a suspicion proved right in their eyes at least by the 1867 Reform Act.⁹ This charge, in addition to its apparent veracity, was fuelled by personal dislike, snobbery and anti-Semitism. This may at least in part explain why what started as a simple sneer by his enemies – that is, the idea of an unprincipled and opportunist interpretation of Disraeli, and one that stressed his lack of serious beliefs or guiding principles, at least with reference to practical politics – has proved so persuasive and long-lasting.

Over the last thirty years, a new trend has emerged in the historiography, which has viewed Disraeli from a quite different angle. This interpretation has stressed the continental and Jewish influences on Disraeli's political thought. That understanding has stressed the significance of Romanticism, German philosophy and Disraeli's own Jewish heritage had in trying to appreciate his complex psychological make up. John Vincent was the first to attempt to revise the opportunist interpretation by attempting to establish Disraeli as a coherent and intellectual political thinker through an intelligent analysis of Disraeli's prose. That said, his work did little to establish a link between Disraeli's intellectual life and his practical politics.¹⁰ Paul Smith has become the foremost exponent of this revisionist school.¹¹ Yet, while this intellectual and indeed psychological analysis of Disraeli is a welcome and insightful addition to the wealth of scholarship surrounding Disraeli, it has done little to help us understand his politics. Disraeli's writings were not politically significant, and certainly not a 'programme for political action', but rather a means 'to achieve the integration of

³ Blake, *Disraeli*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966): p.764

⁴ Maurice Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, (London: CUP, 1967)

⁵ Paul Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform*, (London: Routledge Keegan Paul, 1967)

⁶ Richard Millman, *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-1878*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979)

⁷ Hesketh Pearson, *Dizzy: A Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, (London: Methuen and Co., 1951); Richard Davis, *Disraeli*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1976), p.222

⁸ Hurd, *Disraeli*; Ian Machin, *Disraeli*, (Harlow: Wiley Blackwell, 1985)

⁹ Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *The Historical Journal*, vol.43, issue 3 (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p.703; William Flavelle Money Penny and George Earl Buckle (hereafter M&B), *Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, vol.4, p.44

¹⁰ John Vincent, *Disraeli*, (Oxford: OUP, 1990)

¹¹ Paul Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics', *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol.37 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987); Paul Smith, *Disraeli: a Brief Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Charles Richmond & Paul Smith ed., *The Self-fashioning of Disraeli*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

different aspects of [his] personality'.¹² These works have been far more fruitful in showing how Disraeli used the influences of continental thought and his Jewish heritage to self-fashion himself and to reconcile his genius, 'within the bounds of time, place and tradition: the genius must compound with the *genius loci*'.¹³

A similar, more high-minded and psychological approach has been taken in the discussion of Disraeli's novels. The works of Richard Levine and Daniel Schwarz were among the first stand-alone works in modern scholarship to recognise the importance of Disraeli's fiction to his political outlook. This took the debate forward a step from Blake's analysis, which had focused more on the literary qualities of his novels than their allegorical significance.¹⁴ That debate has been continued more recently by William Kuhn who, among other scholars, has attempted to bring Disraeli to life through an analysis of his novels, highlighting the novels autobiographical features and demonstrating the insights that Disraeli's writing gave to the psychology of the author.¹⁵ This approach has been followed in more detail by Robert O'Kell, who stressed the 'Psychological Romance' of Disraeli's novels and showed how he used fiction to relieve the tension between private life and public image: 'continuously reconstituting or reshaping his sense of identity, by providing rationalizations of the past, and by exploring the dramatic possibilities of the future'.¹⁶ Disraeli's novels are undoubtedly a gold-mine of autobiographical detail. However, these more recent secondary works have had the effect largely of divorcing his practical politics from the ideas and psychology of his novels. In that way, the contemporary context of his writing has often been overlooked in favour of a rather esoteric analysis of the influences of continental philosophy, classical Greek tragedy, and early nineteenth century romanticism, which constructed Disraeli's complex psychological make up.

Loosely attached to this school of thought, Disraeli's fiction has also been used as evidence for the creation of a self-consciously modern portrait of Disraeli, one that focuses primarily on his Jewish heritage. Almost certainly owing to the great expansion in cultural and imperial studies over the last fifty years, there has been a great deal of scholarship examining Disraeli's ideas on race and of the influences of his Jewish heritage on his personal and political psychology. These works have made a welcome contribution, and indeed, a major contribution to the Disraelian historiography. Lord Blake, in his seven-hundred page biography, only mentions Disraeli's Jewishness once. And when he does mention it, he effectively dismisses it.¹⁷ Even John Vincent's astute biography argued that, 'there is enough evidence to create a mystery about Disraeli's Jewish dimension, [but] there is not enough to solve it'.¹⁸ Disraeli's views on Judaism were first explored long ago by influential political thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt, who recast Disraeli as a Jewish figure. For Berlin Disraeli's Jewish experience was fairly typical of other European experiences. In this understanding, Jews were allowed to succeed within in the parameters set out by the state.¹⁹ For Arendt, Disraeli was a classic middle-class Jewish parvenu figure in a transitional period for Jewish rights. His outlandish boasting in relation the Jewish race only helped to give rise to more dangerous anti-Semitic theories

¹² Smith, *Self-fashioning*; Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics', p.85

¹³ Paul Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics', *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, Vol.37 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987) p.73. For more of this interpretation see, *The Self Fashioning of Disraeli*, ed. by Charles Richmond and Paul Smith, (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); Patrick Brantlinger, 'Disraeli and Orientalism', *The Self Fashioning of Disraeli*, ed. by Charles Richmond and Paul Smith, (Cambridge: CUP, 1998)

¹⁴ Daniel R. Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979); Richard Levine, *Benjamin Disraeli*, (New York: Twayne, 1968)

¹⁵ William Kuhn, *The Politics of Pleasure*, (London: Free Press, 2006); see also: Jane Ridley, *The Young Disraeli*, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995) which offers so inciteful analysis of Disraeli's early fiction; Stanley Weintraub, *Disraeli*, (London: Penguin, 1993) is another biography of Disraeli which leans heavily on Disraeli's fiction.

¹⁶ Robert O'Kell, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, (London: University of Toronto Press, 2013)

¹⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.49

¹⁸ Vincent, p.115

¹⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity', *Transactions & Miscellanies of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, Vol. 22 (1968-1969)

of the twentieth century.²⁰ More recently, this view has itself been revised. Phillip Rieff essayed an extremely persuasive argument around the idea of chosenness within Disraeli's political and racial thinking.²¹ His argument suggested that Disraeli saw in himself as existing in the marriage of the 'Two Jerusalem's', the old and the new: in short, synthesising the ancient chosenness of the Jewish race, and the new chosenness of the English aristocracy. Among a host of other more recent work on the Jewish elements of Disraeli's personality and politics, Todd Endelman edited an important volume on Disraeli's Jewishness which included several interesting articles, most notably his own on Disraeli's propagation of the myth of Sephardic Jewish superiority.²² This myth which allowed Disraeli to claim for himself a certain type of aristocratic class among an already aristocratic race. More recently, there has been further exploration into Disraeli's theories on race, most notably that of Simone Beate Borgstede, who attempted to investigate the complex ways in which mid-Victorian discourses of identity and belonging were interwoven with discourses of race, and who examined Disraeli's responses to the antisemitism of the period which, she argues, ultimately lead to his conviction that race was the key to understand how society works.²³

The danger of these interpretations is that they tell us little about how these psychological influences affected Disraeli's political activity and only serve to make Disraeli more exotic and unlike from his contemporary politicians. This has the effect of constituting a self-perpetuating narrative of Disraeli's sense of apartness. It suits those scholars who have argued that his sense of Jewish chosenness and natural aristocracy engendered Disraeli with an innate belief in his own right to govern. However, what this way of thinking offers in psychology, it lacks in the way of solid political analysis, certainly in any sense of showing how Disraeli put these beliefs into action. Indeed, while these, loosely grouped, 'continental' approaches have done so much to recognise the importance of Disraeli's political thought, enormously enriching our understanding of his psychology, also given full weight to the influence of his Jewish heritage and ideas around race, and rehabilitated the significance of Disraeli's fictional writing, they have done little to challenge the orthodoxy of the opportunist argument with regard to Disraeli's practical politics.

More recently there has been a distinct change in direction in the historiography. This has seen scholars tentatively attempt to address the excesses of the opportunist school, by furnishing Disraeli with a consistent political outlook, while simultaneously examining Disraeli's political thought alongside his politics within a more realistic contemporary context. Peter Ghosh's study of Disraeli's attitudes to finance during the 1850s and 1860s attempted to establish a more principled interpretation of his policies, which saw him (unsuccessfully) challenging Gladstone for Peel's mantle of financial expertise.²⁴ Similarly, Allen Warren's articles have sought to establish Disraeli's track-record for consistent and coherent policy-making with regard to the Anglican Church and Irish policy.²⁵ In the same vein, David Brooks has attempted to put into a more contemporary context the ideas surrounding religion in his novels, while Jane Ridley's study of his early life has attempted to

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt, 1951), pp.68-79

²¹ P. Rieff, 'Disraeli and the Chosen of History', in *Freud, the Mind of a Moralist*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979)

²² Todd Endelmann, 'Benjamin Disraeli and the Myth of Sephardi Superiority', in *Disraeli's Jewishness*, ed. by Todd Endelmann & Tony Kusher, (London: Valentine Mikhell, 2002); Todd Engelman, "'Hebrew to the end": the Emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness', *The Self Fashioning of Disraeli*, ed. by Charles Richmond and Paul Smith, (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); Richard Davis, 'Disraeli, the Rothschilds, and Anti-Semitism', *Jewish History*, 10.2 (1996)

²³ Simone Beate Borgstede, *"All is Race": Benjamin Disraeli on Race, Nation and Empire*, (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2011)

²⁴ P.R. Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism: A Financial Approach', in *The English Historical Review*, vol.99, no. 391, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

²⁵ Allen Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives and the National Church, 1837-1881', *Parliamentary History*, 19, (1999), pp.96-117; *Ibid*, 'Disraeli the Conservatives and the Government of Ireland: Part 1, 1837-1868', *Parliamentary History*, vol.18 (1998); *Ibid*, 'Disraeli the Conservatives and the Government of Ireland: Part 2, 1868-1881', *Parliamentary History*, vol.18 (1998)

dispel some of the undeserved disapprobation of earlier scholars.²⁶ In a different way, the eminent scholar of Anglo-Jewry, David Cesarani has, in a recent biography, sought to diminish the apparent importance of Disraeli's Jewish identity, suggesting that since the 1980s Disraeli's Jewishness has mistakenly been placed at 'the heart of his private life, fictional writing, his political thought, and his career as a politician', that his novels for all their quotable evidence for his preoccupation with the Jews, are 'neither autobiography nor blue-print for a life yet to be lived', and that those seemingly telling pronouncements, when placed in their temporal context, take on far less importance to Disraeli's character.²⁷ Perhaps the most important contribution in this direction has been Jonathan Parry's recent work on Disraeli, which has sought to temper the enthusiasm of the 'continental' interpretation, by emphasising Disraeli's deep attachment to England and the thoroughness in which he constructed his ideas on national character.²⁸ Parry also stressed the consistency of Disraeli's political outlook, which was formed by the emergence of the destructive ideas in the 1840s, and argued that his career was thus a three-decade struggle against these same cosmopolitan ideas that would rot the country's social cohesion. His politics was thus an 'ambitious but coherent marriage of elitist insight, deft manouvre and reflections on Englishness'. His envisaged role in English politics was therefore that of a heroic, deeply conservative, defender of "traditionary' English values', who sought to relieve the great tensions weakening the great national institutions, the country's social fibre and Britain's place in the world.²⁹

The aim of this current work is to take these most recent, post-revisionist, interpretations a step further. For Disraeli's life, career, and ideas to make sense they must be viewed within their contemporary context. Parry has made great strides in this direction in presenting Disraeli as a far more English and less exotic figure than previous revisionists have suggested, but also in viewing Disraeli's thoughts concerning politics and national character through the microscope of contemporary considerations and preoccupations.³⁰ This work will go into more detail still to establish Disraeli's consistency of purpose throughout his political career, but not by re-establishing any false reputation as a highly-principled, prescient, heaven forbid, 'modern' leader. Rather, it will examine the broad tenets of his political philosophy, his unique insights and interpretations of English history, and his 'Tory idea' in which he constructed an answer to the great political and social questions of his formative years. It will also put the consistency of these beliefs to the test, through a detailed analysis of his front-bench political career. For, fully to understand Disraeli we cannot compartmentalise his life into separate, non-interacting spheres as Lord Blake did with his early years and his career after 1846, and as later scholars have done with regard to his political philosophy and political action.³¹ That, integrated understanding, also necessarily includes study of his novels and political writings which all too often have been divorced from Disraeli's politics and examined in their own vacuum of time and context. To be understood in relation to Disraeli's political thought they need to be interpreted within the context of their creation, in order to appreciate how contemporary concerns and the prevailing political landscape influenced the ideas contained within their pages.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, this thesis will attempt to give a more coherent answer to the question that always surrounds Disraeli's political career: how, as Hurd put it, 'was it that... a bankrupt Jewish school dropout and trashy novelist, came to exert such a hold on the Victorian

²⁶ David Brooks, 'Disraeli's Novels: Religion and Identity', *Studies in Church History*, 57 (2016); Ridley, *The Young Disraeli*.

²⁷ David Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician*, (London: Yale University Press, 2016), p.5

²⁸ Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *The Historical Journal*, 43.3 (2000)

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.704

³⁰ Jonathan Parry, '[COMPLETE]

³¹ Blake, *Disraeli*. Paul Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics'; *Ibid*, *Disraeli: a brief life*.

Conservative Party'.³² The answer will be two-fold. First, that he was much more than a disreputable Jewish novelist on the make. The Whig magnate Lord Argyll, by no means a friend of Disraeli, recognised at the time that, 'it really is nonsense to talk of a man in such a position as a mere "Jew Boy" who by the force of nothing but extraordinary genius attained to the leadership of a great party'.³³ Disraeli's background was not as obscure as it at first may seem. His Jewishness was not so much of an impediment as perhaps it first seemed; it was not as though he was the first converted Jew to sit in parliament. Rather, we should look appropriately to lessen the real differences between Disraeli and his, largely speaking, more aristocratic parliamentary colleagues. However, Argyll was correct in one sense. A man of Disraeli's background and reputation could not have risen to the head of the Conservative party by sheer talent alone. Moreover, if he was truly as unprincipled and opportunistic, as some scholars would have us believe, then the chances of him reaching such a preeminent position become vanishingly small. Disraeli's climb to the 'top of the greasy pole' must instead be explained in a more cogent manner. This work will argue, that in terms of political principle, Disraeli was far more closely related to colleagues than has generally been suggested. His mode of expressing those opinions was undoubtedly very different. But in essence he wanted what nearly every other Tory politician of his generation wanted: the protection of the country's institutions and the preservation of the existing class hierarchy and social status quo. In Disraeli, they could not have found a more committed champion.

Furthermore, to make sense of Disraeli's success in politics, particularly within the post-1846 Conservative party, we need to seriously consider-- for the first time-- his ability to collaborate. This is an element of Disraeli's character that has generally gone unmentioned. That is largely because the dominant historiography of the opportunist school has portrayed Disraeli as a ruthless and unprincipled political operator, so that partnership and collaboration was always dismissed as disingenuous. However, the fact remains that Disraeli could not have achieved what he did in the party if he had not had the support, friendship, or trust of influential aristocratic members. The fact remains that, even on the face of it, Disraeli had a long record of successful political collaboration with men outside his own background: first with Lord Lyndhurst who helped to launch his political career; then with youthful aristocrats of Young England who brought him to national attention as a politician. Later, his partnership with Lord Derby would help to steer the Conservative party through nearly two decades of Liberal majority rule. After he became Prime Minister for the second time in 1874, he presided over what Hardy described in reflection over their last cabinet meeting as 'the most unified cabinet that ever existed.'³⁴ But perhaps the most important, and the most significant collaboration for his career was Disraeli's partnership and close personal friendship with Lord George Bentinck. Bentinck is a character who has not traditionally been too kindly treated by historians. But he was central to Disraeli's contemporary and future success to the party.³⁵ Bentinck's collaboration with Disraeli to defeat Peel and his support as leader the Protectionist party gave Disraeli exactly the aristocratic respectability which he was lacking at that time. His death was a cruel blow, but not before Bentinck had installed Disraeli in Hughenden and raised him to the rank of a country squire and member of the landed classes. This opened up a career in the Conservative party in a similar way to how his baptism had paved the way for a political career back in 1816. Disraeli literary tribute to Bentinck's memory bore testament to Disraeli's genuine friendship. It is this

³² Douglas Hurd and Edward Young, *Disraeli; or the Two Lives*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2013) p.xx

³³ George Douglas, Duke of Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, (London: John Murray, 1906) vol.1, p.280

³⁴ Nancy Johnson ed., *The Diaries of Gathorne Hardy, later Lord Cranbrook, 1866-1892*, p.446-447

³⁵ Angus Macintyre, 'Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists: a Lost Cause?', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 39, (1989); along with Robert Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1979) have thus far been the only attempts to somewhat rehabilitate the reputation of Bentinck who played, albeit briefly, such an important role in shaping British politics.

relationship, among these relationships that truly needs further investigation in order to construct a new collaborative interpretation of Disraeli's career.

To make sense of Disraeli's career we also need challenge the idea that he was an intrinsically disreputable figure as well as an unprincipled political opportunist. Disraeli was undoubtedly far from respectable by moralistic Victorian standards. But he was not quite as rakish as some versions of his life would have us believe. Moreover, in the context of the grave and serious personal standards of mid-Victorian public life, it is very unlikely that Disraeli could have survived long without some guiding principles. Disraeli did more than nearly any other contemporary to make his ideas on history, national character and politics clear. Yet so much fog still surrounds what he believed. He certainly did not have well-defined or specific political principles with regard to legislation. However, his views on the necessity of social hierarchy, the importance of the aristocratic settlement, the preeminence of land, and the need to find a new form of social cohesion to combat the divisive and dangerously egalitarian principles that emerged in the 1830s and 1840s, added up to a consistent outlook. The difference between Disraeli and most Tories was that his principles were not pinned to the fate of certain pieces legislation. He did not think their cause of institutional and social preservation would live or die on the fate of one vote, but rather on the permanence of an attitude which could be adapted to the spirit of the age. Whatever his differences with many Conservatives, the fact is that he could not have survived long in the Conservative party on talent alone. His success was both a concrete and an explicable matter, down to his sharing a conservative vision of the country and not least to his considerable, and largely unrecognised, powers of collaboration which allowed him to forge and maintain effective working and personal relationships with those who, aside from politics, he had very little in common.

Chapter One: Politics before Parliament

The years before Disraeli entered parliament in the Tory interest have largely been misunderstood with regard to reading his career in terms of a consistent political purpose. These years have in fact largely been dismissed by serious political historians as years of youthful romantic thought. In Blake's words, 'mere nonsense and rhodomontade', when compared to his actual political principles when he led the party.³⁶ Even Smith, who made a point of seriously examining Disraeli's early political thought considered the importance of his principles 'unimportant'. Instead focusing, not on Disraeli's consistency, but rather on the influence of continental ideas, his use of political thought for the process of self-fashioning his identity: 'the genesis and instrumentality of Disraeli's political postulates rather than their status as 'principles.''³⁷ However these early years are in fact every important to complete our understanding of Disraeli's political career. First and foremost that these, along with the turbulent 1840s which followed them were instrumental in defining him as a political thinker. The political theory and his idiosyncratic understanding of English history expressed in political writings he produced before entering parliament expressed ideas and principles which guided his political thought for the remainder of his life. Secondly, that Disraeli from the very outset had shown that he was instinctively a Tory. Scholars claims that he would have been willing to stand for any party so long as he was successful are misleading.³⁸ His political vacillations between the radical and Tory interest were far more consistent with his political principles than previously claimed. The fact remains that Disraeli at this stage in his life was undoubtedly ambitious and someone who wanted to make his mark in society. These elements of his young career cannot be easily dismissed, they certainly made him easily influenced by the more successful and established political and literary figures with whom he tried to ingratiate himself. However, not every young man can really be expected to enter the world of politics fully formed with his ideas chiselled in marble. Not least someone with Disraeli's fertile and unbounded imagination. Examination of his early political ventures both in the realm of practical politics and in political theory give us a clear insight into the formation of his political ideas. For by the time Disraeli entered parliament his ideas were quickly maturing into guiding political principles which formed, with very little modification, the foundations of his understanding of British polity for the rest of his career.

Disraeli's early career, at least from a biographical perspective, has been largely discussed with reference to his considerable literary output and with reference to his personal life. In this Ridley's study of his early life has led the way alongside a whole host of more modern biographies in charting the personal and literary struggles of Disraeli's early life.³⁹ These studies have proved invaluable in broadening our understanding of Disraeli's personal and family life. His baptism, Jewish heritage, unorthodox schooling, and far from uncomplicated family life all undoubtedly played a major role in shaping Disraeli's complex psychology. Moreover, scandals in his personal life, financial misfortunes and literary controversies in the 1820s and 1830s all played a considerable role in creating Disraeli's reputation, at least in his early political years, as a disreputable and rakish figure. However, the limits of this current work do not allow for any detailed exploration of so much of Disraeli's early life. Instead our examination must for the most part deal with Disraeli's politics, the political implications of his literature and the importance of the relationships that he forged with contemporary politicians and political figures.

³⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.764

³⁷ Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics', p.65

³⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.85; Davis, *Disraeli*, p.27

³⁹ Ridley, *Disraeli*; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, pp.1-172; Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.3-143; Hibbert, *Disraeli: a personal history*, pp.3-87; Bradford, *Disraeli*, pp.1-77

Disraeli's first foray into the world of politics came through his association with the eminent publisher John Murray, the owner of the staunchly Tory *Quarterly Review*. Disraeli had come into contact with Murray, and later into partnership with him, during the disastrous speculation on Latin American mining in 1824. Canning, as foreign secretary, had begun the process of recognising the new South American republics that had formed after the Spanish empire began to crumble. This resulted with the opening of new trade routes, the removal of tariffs and ultimately, a huge boom in the city where Canning was now a hero to the bankers who grew rich on the frenzied speculation on South American mining shares.⁴⁰ Disraeli who had borrowed and invested heavily in South American mining, and who had been assisting Murray with various editorial tasks, involved Murray in the speculation.⁴¹ When the government started warning against the South American speculation, with Lord Eldon threatening to invoke the Bubble Act of 1720, Disraeli was employed by Murray to write a series of pamphlets criticising the government's behaviour and assuring the safety of South American mining shares.⁴² His attempts to make his name in financial speculation were destined for ruinous failure, but before Disraeli would realise his folly with regard to South America, he had already set his eyes on a bigger prize: politics.

From 1817 *The Times* had been under the editorship of Thomas Barnes who had increasingly led the paper to take a more radical line.⁴³ While *The Times* later in Disraeli's career would be the undisputed arbiter of moderate and respectable opinion, it was not necessarily the case in 1825. In 1807 Murray, along with Sir Walter Scott, had successfully set up the *Quarterly Review* as a Tory editorial to combat the opinions the Whig *Edinburgh Review*. They had been largely successful. Therefore, it did not take much convincing from Disraeli that Murray should launch a daily Tory newspaper to combat the radical leanings of *The Times*.⁴⁴ This was Disraeli's first taste of politics as he acted as Murray's factotum in setting up the project. By August 1825 the details of the business were agreed upon: Murray would put up half the capital, Disraeli and the merchant banker Powles would put up a quarter each. Murray was to publish and manage the paper which would follow the staunchly Tory tone of the *Quarterly Review*, whilst also expressing support for Canning's liberal foreign policy which had been so important in opening up the South American markets where all three members had become financially involved.⁴⁵ Its name: *The Representative*. The following month Disraeli was dispatched to Edinburgh on his first assignment. Namely, to find an editor for their new paper. Disraeli therefore, went to Edinburgh to enlist the services Walter Scott's son-in-law J.G. Lockhart. For such an eminent name such as Lockhart the editorship of an as yet unpublished newspaper was not an offer that really enticed him to leave Scotland. Therefore, as many confident and ambitious young might be tempted to do, Disraeli over-played his hand. Instead of offering the editorship he naturally exaggerated the role suggesting Lockhart would come to London 'not to be an Editor of a Newspaper, but the Director-General of an immense organ, and at the head of a band of high-bred gentlemen and important interests.' Moreover, he even offered Lockhart a parliamentary seat to go with the editorship telling Murray that '*Parliament for M. [Lockhart] indispensable, and also very much to our interest...If this point could be arranged, I have no doubt that I shall be able to organise, in the interest with which I am now engaged, a most immense party, and a most serviceable*

⁴⁰ Ridley, *Disraeli*, pp.30-33; Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.23-24

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.25

⁴² Benjamin Disraeli, *An Inquiry into the Plans, Progress, and Policy of the American Mining Companies*, (London: John Murray, 1825); *Lawyers and Legislators: or, Notes on the American Mining Companies*, (London: John Murray, 1825); *The Present State of Mexico: as detailed in a report to the General Congress by the Secretary of State for the Home Department and Foreign Affairs, at the opening of the session in 1825*, (London: John Murray, 1825)

⁴³ Ridley, *Disraeli*, p.34

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.34; Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.16

⁴⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.27; Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.17

one.⁴⁶ Despite Disraeli's optimism it seemed that the project was already unravelling behind his back. Lockhart had never really wanted the role at the new *Representative*, but rather the editorship of the established and successful *Quarterly Review*. Having secured for himself both roles he immediately discouraged Murray from pursuing the *Representative* to the injury of the *Quarterly*.⁴⁷ From December of 1825, most likely due to the banking crash caused by the failure of South American shares, Disraeli disappeared from the picture somewhat. How far he was ever involved with the day-to-day operations of *The Representative* still remains somewhat unclear. What was clear was that the paper was a total disaster. It failed after only six-months after its first publication and cost Murray a fortune.⁴⁸ Why Murray, a world-renowned publishing tycoon entrusted the task of setting up a new newspaper to a twenty year-old Disraeli who had no real experience in either journalism or politics does seem odd. He certainly must have seen something in Disraeli to inspire such trust. Writing to Lockhart regarding Disraeli he claimed: 'he had never seen a young man of greater promise. He is a good scholar, a hard student, a deep thinker, of great energy, equal perseverance, and indefatigable application, and a complete man of business. His knowledge of human nature, and the practical tendency of all his ideas, have often surprised me in a young man who has hardly passed his twentieth year.'⁴⁹

Murray's opinion of Disraeli would change the following year, and nor was this a particularly accurate portrait of the young Disraeli. He was undoubtedly talented, but still with many practical flaws. Nevertheless, this idealized vision of Disraeli as presented by Murray in private correspondence showed how from an early age Disraeli was an effective collaborator. *The Representative* may have been the first in a series of failures in his early career, but if nothing else it demonstrated his natural Tory instincts and his ability to form effective working and political relationships.

Having failed in his first attempt at becoming involved in politics and now heavily in debt, Disraeli turned his hand to fiction in an attempt to extricate himself from his problems. His first novel *Vivian Grey* was written in two volumes sometime between 1825 and 1826. Inspired by Robert Plumer Ward's *Tremaine or Man of Refinement*, it set the tone for fashionable fiction for the next twenty years.⁵⁰ Published anonymously and written from the perspective of an insider who moved in the highest circles, it portrayed the activities of the aristocratic elites of fashionable London society. Admittedly, Disraeli might have, until quite recently brushed shoulders with some powerful individuals in the literary and publishing world, he had even met George Canning. However, he was by no means an insider. The novel which follows the schooling, education and career of the eponymous character was in fact more autobiography than fiction. It's plot is a thinly veiled satire of the affair of the *Representative*, the story of failed journalism transposed into a plot nominally about politics. We meet the young Vivian Grey, 'an elegant lively lad, with just enough dandyism to preserve him from committing *gaucheries*, and with a devil of a tongue'.⁵¹ Having been expelled from public school the young hero completes his education in his father's library where he studies everything from ancient Greek, to classical and even modern philosophy. But it is among his historical reading that he discovers 'a branch of study certainly the most delightful in the world...the

⁴⁶ Disraeli to Murray, 21st of September 1825, cited in M&B, vol.1, pp.65-66

⁴⁷ Lockhart to Murray, 27th of November 1825, cited in Samuel Smiles, *Memoirs and Correspondence of the late John Murray*, (London: John Murray, 1891) vol.2, p.225-226

⁴⁸ For more details on *The Representative* and the relationship between Murray and Disraeli see: Regina Akel, *Benjamin Disraeli and John Murray: the Politician, the Publisher and the Representative*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016)

⁴⁹ Murray to Lockhart, cited in Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.14

⁵⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.35

⁵¹ *Vivian Grey*, (London: H. Colburn, 1926), p.52

study of POLITICS.’⁵² Young Vivian rejects his father’s desire for him to attend Oxford and, just as Disraeli did, rejects joining the Bar, for ‘to succeed as an advocate, I must be a great lawyer; and, to be a great lawyer, I must give up my chance of being a great man.’⁵³

Therefore he enters the world of politics by becoming a wire-puller for a great political magnifico who has lost his influence, the Marquess of Carabas. Vivian with all his natural charm and intelligence convinces the Marquess to undertake to form a new political party which will return to him his rightful influence. While supported by his followers and allies, they need someone to run the House of Commons. Just as Disraeli did not take the editorship of the *Representative* for himself, Vivian is sent by Carabas to enlist the help of Cleveland. Almost before it gets started the great party is destroyed by the jealousy of Mrs. Lorraine, the sister-in-law of Carabas whose advances Vivian rejects. She works against them to turn their own allies against them. Carabas is stripped of position and his co-conspirators deny any knowledge of their acquiescence in his scheme. Vivian exacts his revenge on those who wronged him. The death of Mrs. Lorraine is brought about by falsely telling her that her political intrigues had been reversed and he was to be returned to parliament, which prompts a heart attack. While Cleveland who betrayed both Carabas and Vivian is killed by our hero in a duel. As Vincent puts it, ‘the story ought to end here with Vivian a ruined boy. It ought to but unfortunately it does not’.⁵⁴ It continues for several hundred more pages with a melancholic Vivian wandering around the Rhineland penitent and seemingly directionless.

As a novel it had many flaws. The plot was ridiculous and certainly does not sustain a book of such length. Its major characters are hardly unoriginal having been taken directly from life.⁵⁵ Its second volume was so different in mood, style and quality it detracts from the various merits of the first. Moreover, its author had little knowledge of the aristocratic world of high-society of which he was writing. As Vincent put it, it was an ‘account of society – high society and high politics – by an untutored middle-class town boy who had never experienced either’.⁵⁶ Yet it was not without merits. Despite all of this it was huge popular, much talked about and garnered wide public acclaim. It caused a great stir in fashionable London society among those whom it concerned, and while Disraeli had published anonymously, these are secrets that are hard to keep forever.⁵⁷ However, the thinly veiled basis of the plot and the characters taken directly from personal experience with little to hide their true identity made the author easy to guess among those who knew what happened with *The Representative*. While any book should be judged on its merits rather than the reputation of its author, ‘there are passages in *Vivian Grey* which no one could have read in quite the same light after knowing that the author was a youth of twenty-one who had never moved in society’.⁵⁸ Once the authorship was known Disraeli came in for vicious personal criticism from the literary establishment.⁵⁹ In addition he acrimoniously fell out with Murray who was appalled by the novel.⁶⁰ All of this was deeply damaging for Disraeli’s reputation, ambitions and his self-confidence. For someone as openly ambitious as Disraeli to receive the hostility and ridicule of both society and the literary establishment it was almost too much to bear. Having lost everything on the markets and failed in his first foray into political journalism, to now be considered a failure and a disgraceful laughingstock as an author was

⁵² *Ibid*, p.53

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.55

⁵⁴ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.59

⁵⁵ Vivian is Disraeli, his father Horace was Isaac. Vivian’s grand magnifico the Marquess of Carabas who becomes his patron was Murray. His toady and factotum, Stapylton Toad was Croker. While Cleveland was an unflattering portrait of Lockhart.

⁵⁶ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.58

⁵⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.40

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.41

⁵⁹ See, Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.40-42; Bradford, *Disraeli*, pp.24-25; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, pp.48-49

⁶⁰ Ridley, pp.48-49

the straw that broke the camel's back. He fell into a state of deep depression from which he would not emerge for nearly four years.⁶¹

When the first symptoms of his impending nervous breakdown emerged, Disraeli was invited to travel through Europe to sojourn in Italy with the Austens, during the autumn of 1826. To get away from London to warmer climes, which always suited him, was an instant boost to his spirits and morale.⁶² He returned to England with enough energy and enthusiasm to write the second volume of *Vivian Grey* which was published in early 1827, though to no great public acclaim. That was hardly surprising given its inferiority to the first.⁶³ After its publication that Disraeli, perhaps exhausted from the events of the previous year, collapsed into a state of deep lethargy and chronic depression. He even became something of a recluse from the world. This was what his father described as an 'almost blank' period of his life.⁶⁴ In a way, Disraeli's response to these initial failures in his career set the pattern of how he would respond to later political set-backs. He retreated into books and began once again to write fiction. In 1828 he managed to turn out *Popanilla*, a work underrated amongst Disraeli's early fiction.⁶⁵ It was, once again, a society novel with an unlikely hero and a somewhat fantastical plot, but it had much of the charm of *Vivian Grey*, whilst also carrying a political message. It satirised humourless Benthamite utilitarians, stood up for George IV and poked fun at high-minded middle-class morality: in short 'it shows off the authors ability to make the readers laugh'.⁶⁶ It was not a substantial work, nor did it make much of a splash amongst contemporary readers. However, in its way it, foreshadowed many of the ideas Disraeli would later frame in a more serious context. Following *Popanilla*, Disraeli closeted himself in Isaac's library at their new home Bradenham, and read extensively on Judaism, Jewish history, the history of the Middle East and Islam.⁶⁷ Here, he laid the foundations for his later novel *Alro*. But first he needed to write another money-spinning popular society novel, to keep his creditors at bay and fund his planned tour of the Near East. This took the form of *The Young Duke*. It was another novel set amongst aristocratic society, but was informed by a far more manageable storyline than either *Vivian Grey* or *Popanilla*. Much like the previous two novels, it had many of the same stylistic formulas, and carried the same light, unserious and slightly mocking tone of satire. It also betrayed many signs of Disraeli's ignorance of aristocratic and high-society life, with its artificial style, 'far-fetched witticisms, convoluted antitheses [and] elaborate epigrams'.⁶⁸ But it did continue from *Popanilla* in poking fun at utilitarianism and contrasting what the author imagined as the pleasurable life-style of the aristocracy with the moralistic temperance of the middle-classes, whilst also tentatively airing the ideas that would appear so forcefully in his trilogy of the 1840s.⁶⁹ For all that, it had no important political message. As one scholar put it, 'if it has a serious point it is that amusement and affection are more worth having than earnestness and social improvement'.⁷⁰ Despite the expected criticisms of the authors suitability to write on such a subject, it was generally well received by readers and proved an enjoyable piece of fiction. Moreover, whilst it was not published until Disraeli had set off for the East, the advance of £500 from Golburn helped to finance the trip.⁷¹

Though there had been a gradual improvement in his health and mood during 1829, Disraeli's full recovery was not made until he undertook his Grand Tour of the East with his sister's fiancé William

⁶¹ Parry, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield', *ODNB*, (online edition 2011); Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.46

⁶² A more detailed account of this trip can be found in Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, pp.52-58

⁶³ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.58

⁶⁴ M&B, vol.1, p.116

⁶⁵ Disraeli, *The Voyage of Captain Popanilla*, (London: H. Golburn, 1828)

⁶⁶ Kuhn, *Pleasure of Politics*, p.81

⁶⁷ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.71

⁶⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.57

⁶⁹ Michael Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli: Novel as Political Discourse*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005) pp.17-19

⁷⁰ Kuhn, *Politics of Pleasure*, pp.98-99

⁷¹ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.32

Meredith. This was a trip that broadened Disraeli's horizons and changed his view of the world. Disraeli was a young man, and this tour of the Mediterranean and the Near East was perhaps one of the most important and formative experiences of his life. As Blake astutely noted, 'historians do not always sufficiently weigh the influence of the emotions, prejudices and sympathies of early youth upon the choice of sides made by statesmen later, when they are confronted by the great political questions of the hour.'⁷² So it is perhaps ironic that Blake recognises the formative importance of the Eastern tour to Disraeli's later politics, but is so quick to dismiss so many other features of these early years from his later practical politics.

The sixteen-month trip saw Disraeli travel from England to Gibraltar, from there through Spain, before sailing to Malta. Thence, he went to Yanina in the Ottoman province of Albania where he met the Grand Vizier. Subsequently, they ambled through Greece basking in classical antiquity. After taking in some of the Greek islands they headed to Constantinople where Disraeli fell in love with Eastern culture and the Turkish way of living. Having spent some six weeks there, he made for the port of Jaffa in the Holy Land, before being escorted to Jerusalem which left him in awe. From the Holy Land he made for Egypt and the rest of his party, visiting the Nile, Thebes and Alexandria before settling in Cairo. However, the trip was sadly cut short when tragedy struck in Cairo. Meredith contracted smallpox and died. This meant that Disraeli, instead of heading back through Italy and France as planned, headed directly back to London. The full history of this life-changing trip is covered elsewhere in far more detail than the present work can allow.⁷³ However, it cannot be stressed too greatly how important his tour was, not only for later fiction such as *Alroy*, *Contarini* and *Tancred*, which could not have feasibly been written without his first hand experiences of the East, but also, far more importantly, for his attitude to foreign and imperial policy.⁷⁴ Not only would the East and the Ottoman Turks play such a large role in foreign affairs when Prime Minister over forty-five years later. This tour gave Disraeli a certain belief that he understood the world better than many of his contemporary Englishmen. Lastly, the experience not only restored his health but also his confidence which had been shattered. After visiting the East he returned 'the young Disraeli of 1832...with sufficient inner confidence to face the world of fashion and politics'.⁷⁵

If the Eastern tour had been an personal formative experience which coloured his view of foreign affairs for the rest of his life, Disraeli returned to England in 1831 during the beginning of the truly formative political crisis of his lifetime. He arrived in London the very day that Parliament was prorogued after the second Reform Bill had been defeated in the House of Lords.⁷⁶ The Reform Act that passed into law the following year would be a defining moment in Disraeli's political identity. That will be discussed later. The Reform crisis of 1831, with all its constitutional implications, once again drove Disraeli towards politics. To be sure, ever since his involvement with Murray and *The Representative*, it seems likely that politics was his ultimate goal. The tumult of 1831 certainly hastened it. Indeed, in response to the rioting after the Lords rejection of the Reform bill Disraeli wrote to Austen, in a defiantly Tory vein that, 'the times are damnable. I take the gloomiest view of affairs, but we must not lose our property without a struggle.'⁷⁷ Whatever, signalled Disraeli's return to politics his instinctive Toryism, which was at odds with his supposed radical stance.

Certainly, Disraeli's first foray back into the world of politics after his travels was to contribute to a patriotic critique of the government's foreign policy, entitled *England or France; or, a Cure for*

⁷² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.59

⁷³ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.59-70; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, pp.79-100; Robert Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour: Disraeli and the Holy Land 1830-1831*, (Oxford: OUP, 1982)

⁷⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.71

⁷⁵ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.34

⁷⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.84-85

⁷⁷ Disraeli to Benjamin Austen, cited in M&B, vol.1, p.203

Ministerial Gallomania. Monypenny has suggested that this was little more than ‘a violent diatribe against the foreign policy of Palmerston and against the friendly understanding with France upon which this policy was for the moment based.’⁷⁸ Still, that Disraeli’s first move upon entering practical politics was to comment of foreign affairs is hardly surprising. In his own eyes at least, he was now a well-travelled man of the world who had genuine insight into the world of foreign policy. Its stance and tone were perhaps more remarkable for a self-proclaimed radical. Indeed, it has often been noted that the view Disraeli took here was very much inconsistent with his later attitudes towards France and King Louis Phillipe.⁷⁹ However, it must be remembered that Disraeli was only one of a number of contributors.⁸⁰ Moreover, unlike most of his other literary efforts, this was one of which he was none too proud. He told Mrs. Austen that ‘I am anxious that my name should not be mentioned in reference to the work you have been lately reading. . . . You are so familiar with my writings that you will not give me credit for every idiotism you meet in its columns’.⁸¹ Meanwhile, he reassured his sister that despite its ‘very John Bull’ attitudes that ‘I am still a Reformer, but shall destroy the foreign policy of the Grey faction.’⁸² It seems clear that the more vitriolic arguments in *Gallomania* are not really Disraeli’s. He may have played a big part in writing it. But many of the sentiments were not truly his own. Indeed, while he already hostile to Whiggism, he was unwilling to let either Croker, who read the proofs, or Murray who published it, to insert any High Tory or anti-Reform sentiments in the text. He informed Murray after Croker’s revisions that ‘it is quite impossible that anything adverse to the general measure of Reform can issue from my pen’.⁸³

It therefore seems likely that Disraeli’s attitudes to Reform had clearly begun to crystalize. These were informed by a general desire to address problematic anomalies within the electoral system and a sympathy towards the movement for broadening the electorate. They were also motivated by a clear distrust of the Whigs, their motives for Reform, and the principles on which they were founding their new constitution. But, for Disraeli, the Tory party’s point-blank opposition to Reform was equally damaging. Some scholars have even suggested that Disraeli did not yet know which side he was going to pick.⁸⁴ The fact was he had little choice. All his instincts naturally pushed him towards Toryism, but given his general attitude to Reform, he could hardly pin himself to a party so bent on resisting the popular consciousness. As he stated in *Gallomania*: ‘I am neither Whig nor Tory. My politics are described by one word, and that word is ENGLAND’.⁸⁵ So, with no real option, he stood in the radical interest, though by now how radical his views on any subject really were remained to be seen.

In 1832, a year of political turmoil, Disraeli made his first attempts to enter Parliament, as a radical, by twice standing for the borough of High Wycombe. He did so first in a by-election under unreformed political system and secondly in the general election, occasioned by the passage of the Reform Act. These early attempts to enter parliament were quite revealing of Disraeli’s political dilemma. More than anything else, they disclosed his obvious Tory instincts. To be sure, in both his attempts to attain a seat a Wycombe, he stood in ‘the high radical interest’.⁸⁶ However, he was far more happy in the company of high-bred conservatives than he was in that of radicals. Having had dinner with a deputation of the Birmingham radicals, he considered them ‘poor things’ and their

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.206

⁷⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.173

⁸⁰ M&B, vol.1, p.207

⁸¹ Disraeli to Sarah Austen, cited in M&B, vol.1, p.207

⁸² Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 22nd of February 1832, cited in M&B, vol.1, p.204

⁸³ Disraeli to John Murray, 30th of March 1832, cited In *Ibid*, pp.209-210

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.210; Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.76; Blake, *Disraeli*, p.85

⁸⁵ Disraeli, *Gallomania*, p.78

⁸⁶ M&B, vol.1, p.211

leader Thomas Attwood ‘a third-rate man with a vicious Warwickshire accent.’⁸⁷ In contrast, he had taken great delight in dining with the Tory MP Lord Elliot, where he discussed politics sat next to Robert Peel.⁸⁸ His radicalism was not that of the working classes, but strongly aristocratic and romantic. Moreover, when he stood for Wycombe as a radical he did so with the blessing of Lord Chandos, son of the Duke of Buckingham and leader of the Buckinghamshire Conservatives. His political agent for his campaigns, one John Nash, was a Tory, and the local representative of the same great county magnate.⁸⁹

Disraeli’s first attempt to win Wycombe also saw him at the height of his dandyism, gaudily dressed, his banners and carriage adorned in pink and white. It was here that he made his now famous speech from the portico of the Red Lion public house. Gripping the painted stone lion, still standing to this day, and looking more like a fashionable novelist than a serious politician, he surprised everyone with his powerful and eloquent oratory. He had an instinct for the dramatic effects which held the attention of the assembled mob. In dramatic style, he concluded that ‘When the poll is declared, I shall be there,’ he exclaimed, according to a Wycombe tradition, pointing to the head of the lion, ‘and my opponent will be there,’ pointing to the tail. By the admission of all, including his opponents, the speech was a great success and ensured his popularity with the crowd.⁹⁰ Despite this glorious and defiant effort, popular acclaim counted for little in seats such as High Wycombe in the unreformed parliament. In the 1832 by-election only 32 votes were cast and Disraeli lost out to the Whig candidate Charles Grey.

However, all was not lost. The Reform Act had received royal consent and a general election under the new reformed system was imminent. Indeed, in the case of Wycombe campaigning continued with little interruption. The second election is perhaps more interesting, as it gives us more insight into Disraeli’s political ideas at this fascinating stage of his political life. He was very clear in his hostility to the Whigs: ‘that rapacious, tyrannical, and incapable faction, who, having knavishly obtained power by false pretences, sillily suppose that they will be permitted to retain it by half measures’.⁹¹ But he also tried to walk a tightrope between his supposed radicalism and local Tory support. His sister thought as much: ‘What will happen? I should be sorry to give up the plan of regenerating Wycombe and turning them all unconsciously into Tories.’⁹² Addressing the electors, he gave his public support for the ballot and triennial parliaments. But simultaneously, he offered tentative support for the Corn Laws and defended the influence and position of the Church. In another address to his supporters, many of which were Tories, he applauded the fact the Tories had joined with the popular elements in Wycombe and reverted to the traditional Tory tenets of Sir William Wyndham and Lord Bolingbroke-- who had both advocated triennial parliaments in ‘the most laudable period’ of the party’s history. The ballot, he considered a decidedly Conservative measure which protected voters not only against the jealousy of the mob but also prejudices of oligarchy.⁹³ As Bradford put it, Disraeli was attempting to ‘stand upon a Radical platform that included Tory planks’.⁹⁴ Yet he was always careful to stress his independence. He addressed the electors of the borough ‘wearing the badge of no party and the livery of no faction.’ While speaking to his supporters he claimed ‘I care not for party. I stand here without party’ rather he was ‘a Conservative to preserve all that is good in our constitution, a Radical to remove all that is bad.’⁹⁵ In practical terms, he needed

⁸⁷ Cited in Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.115

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp.115-116

⁸⁹ M&B, vol.1, p.214

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.214

⁹¹ Cited in *Ibid*, p.218

⁹² Sarah Disraeli to Disraeli, cited in M&B, p.211

⁹³ *Ibid*, p.219

⁹⁴ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.57

⁹⁵ Cited in M&B, vol.1, pp.217-219

to attract both the votes of radicals and also the votes of local Tories and anti-reformists if he was to manage to split the Whig majority in the constituency. But the implied cynicism does Disraeli a slight injustice. His principles were not those of simple political expediency and opportunism. They were perfectly consistent with his general vision of the state of English politics.

Once again, Disraeli failed to gain the support of the voters of Wycombe. But he put up a respectable performance, with the final poll showing: Smith 170; Grey 140; Disraeli 119. Moreover, this was a defeat caused by the effects the 1832 Reform Act had on towns such as Wycombe. The electorate had increased, but the new £10 householder voters were largely Whigs and religious non-conformists who, having achieved the vote, now wanted little to do with further Reform. They also hated the Tories and the established Church.⁹⁶ That taught Disraeli an important and long-lasting lesson. This was that patrician Tory-radicalism would struggle to succeed under the new post-1832 system in provincial boroughs such as Wycombe. Soon after his second defeat, Disraeli's politics became quickly more closely aligned with Toryism than radicalism. In fact, a few days later with the poll still open for the county of Bucks, he attempted to stand alongside Chandos against two Whigs for the representation of the County. He did not name explicitly identify himself as a Conservative. He was still ostensibly an independent, but he announced that he had come 'forward as the supporter of that great interest which is the only solid basis of the social fabric' and argued that the sound prosperity of England depended upon the 'protected industry of the farmer'.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, Disraeli was too late. Another Tory had announced himself as a candidate and Chandos, who clearly admired Disraeli, persuaded him to stand down lest he split the Tory vote. But this event marked Disraeli's clear drift towards permanent allegiance with the Tories.

It was, in many ways, a logical transmission. Disraeli saw his own aristocratic radicalism as an extension of the eighteenth-century radicalism of Wyndham or Bolingbroke. He was not alone in making that connection. Sir Francis Burdett, the radical MP for Westminster, described his politics along much the same lines: 'a Tory in the reign of Queen Anne'.⁹⁸ Both were enemies of the Whigs and their unnatural oligarchy. The Tories, now out of power, needed to rediscover their popular origins which had made them the enemies of the Whig ascendancy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-centuries. Therefore, in a way the Tories and Radicals were on the same side. Ridley has suggested that Disraeli really believed that 'the natural allies of the Tories were the people – not the ten pounders but the mob'.⁹⁹ Disraeli would have not put it that way, and many Tories would have violently disagreed. However, it is not far wide of the mark. Disraeli had always talked of 'national', 'popular' and 'democratic' parties, which might combat the narrow oligarchy of Whiggism. By this he meant not demagogic organisations but broad institutions, representative of the country's interests. In this view, the radicals and the Tories represented, to an extent, two sides of the same coin. While that logic fails wholly to convince, it was consistent with all of Disraeli's major political and historical principles. He was unfortunate that the political system that emerged from 1832 made it increasingly difficult to reconcile in reality the two.

In 1834, following another return to society and literature, Disraeli returned actively to pursuing politics. The years after the Reform Act were a time of political upheaval for the Whigs. Radical Jack Lambton, now Lord Durham, had abandoned the government over its failure to bring about further reform in March, 1833; Stanley and Graham, who represented the other end of the spectrum of the party, left in May of 1834. Faced with these departures, Lord Grey himself retired in June of the same year. Melbourne then succeeded as Prime Minister and the Whigs limped on in some disarray. Disraeli, now back in London, had still not declared himself a Tory and still mixed in radical circles.

⁹⁶ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.122

⁹⁷ Cited in M&B, vol.1, p.221

⁹⁸ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.121

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.122

In June 1834, he gained the acquaintance of Lord Durham and enjoyed the intrigue and political schemes which naturally thrived with the Whig government so weakened. He also dined with great Irish leader Daniel O'Connell who Disraeli then considered, somewhat ironically with the advantage of hindsight, 'as agreeable as I had often previously heard'.¹⁰⁰ Later that year, Disraeli made a new acquaintance who would quickly become his new political patron. Lord Lyndhurst had already served three Tory administrations as Lord Chancellor.¹⁰¹ The two met at dinner and instantly took a liking to each other. They certainly had similarities. Like Disraeli, Lyndhurst was a something of a political outsider. He was the son of an American painter and had originally made his name as a political lawyer. Unlike Disraeli, he had received a formal education at public school and Trinity Cambridge. But he had not risen to political eminence until later in life and was by no means an aristocrat. Even then, he was never amongst the first rank of statesmen. He was a congenial figure, and full of life but he was also one who, as Monypenny recognised, 'suffered from a lack of seriousness, and the crowning gifts of lofty purpose and severe integrity were denied him.'¹⁰² Moreover, Lyndhurst at least when it came to women, had somewhat of a reputation of his own. Indeed, Disraeli and Lyndhurst were introduced by Henrietta Sykes with whom both were having an affair.¹⁰³

Disraeli and Lyndhurst quickly became close allies and fast friends. Lyndhurst became Disraeli's political patron and his first serious political collaborator. Very soon after, the wily old Peer brought Disraeli into his confidence. It was his opinion that 'the end of Whiggism was at hand'. If that was the case, then it was a good time for Disraeli to have found such a powerful ally in the Conservative party. A living embodiment of the Marquess of Carabas and Vivian Grey, Lyndhurst proved to be correct, at least in the short term. In November, the Whig government was turned out of office. This was not the result of any intrigue that Lyndhurst and Disraeli had been fomenting with the agricultural interest, to challenge the Malt Tax.¹⁰⁴ Instead, the government's position had been weakened by the death of the Earl of Spencer which led his son Viscount Althorp, who had served as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons, to succeed him and take his place in the Lords. His only plausible successor was Lord John Russell, who the King would not accept. King William IV, sensing how this weakened Melbourne's government, seized the opportunity to dismiss his Ministers and make way for Peel and Wellington. That action caused an instant frenzy. As Blake put it, 'the political world hummed with intrigue and everyone made plans for the inevitable general election' that would follow Peel's return.¹⁰⁵

Disraeli, desperate for a seat in Parliament, was not entirely decided on his party allegiances. In his opposition to Whiggism, he was still caught between the extremes of constitutional Toryism and romantic radicalism. While Lyndhurst applied his good offices, Disraeli also reached out to Durham to see if he could intervene to ensure Disraeli's candidacy in Aylesbury. Nothing came of it, despite the radical Earl's best wishes.¹⁰⁶ Lyndhurst was similarly unsuccessful, having applied to Lord George Bentinck to secure Disraeli's place as the second Tory candidate for King's Lynn. Bentinck's cousin, Greville, hearing of the application dryly noted that anyone 'wavering between Chandos and Durham... must be a mighty impartial personage. I don't think such a man will do'. Bentinck clearly

¹⁰⁰ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.150

¹⁰¹ All three of these were spanned by only three years (1827-1830) however he would go on to serve as Lord Chancellor twice more under Peel in 1834-35 and 1841-46.

¹⁰² M&B, vol.1, pp.261-262

¹⁰³ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.153

¹⁰⁴ Lyndhurst had used Disraeli as a go between with Chandos to bring the agricultural party on board to launch a bill to repeal the Malt Tax. It never came to fruition as Wellington would not have it. For more, see Disraeli's memorandum on the subject in M&B, vol.1, pp.261-263

¹⁰⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.120

¹⁰⁶ Disraeli to Lord Durham, 17th of November 1834, cited in M&B vol.1, p.267; Blake, *Disraeli*, p.120

agreed, as the next day Greville wrote of his cousin: 'Disraeli he will not hear of.'¹⁰⁷ This was their, as far as we can tell, their first encounter. It would be a strange twist of fate that led the two to later form such a strong friendship and political allegiance. In the end, Disraeli chose to make a third and final assault on High Wycombe, not as a radical, but this time as an independent. This was not so because he refused to align himself with the Conservatives, but rather because Wycombe would never elect a Tory MP. Indeed, Lyndhurst provided Disraeli with £500 for electoral expenses acquired from Conservative party funds.¹⁰⁸ At Wycombe, Disraeli delivered a speech he later published as part of his political writings. This pointed to an evolution in his position as he moved closer towards Toryism. Yet, once again, he stressed his neutrality of party. He claimed he could not 'condescend to be supported by the Tories because they deem me a Tory, and by the Liberals because they hold me a Liberal'.¹⁰⁹ But there was clearly some development in his opinions. Most notably, he moved towards the agricultural interest who were 'fearful depressed' and who should be helped by 'at least the partial reduction of the malt tax', adding that he would 'petition for the whole'.¹¹⁰ Similarly, he would not give in to that 'popular cry of the country', namely Church Reform. He supported the abolition of Irish tithes and municipal corporation reform. But was strikingly quiet on the ballot and triennial parliaments, which had featured so strongly in his 1832 addresses.¹¹¹ One clearly hostile witness, writing to the Bucks Gazette, commented that Disraeli's difficulties were 'ably met and judiciously avoided; to steer between the shoals of Toryism on the one hand and quick sands of radicalism on the other (for he was supported by two parties) required his utmost skill, and well did he acquit himself.'¹¹² However, once again Disraeli was to be disappointed when the polls returned him bottom of the list, 19 votes behind Grey in second place.¹¹³

Despite yet another failure at High Wycombe Disraeli did not have to wait long to get another chance at entering Parliament. After the Conservatives resigned, the Whigs once again took office. In order to accept ministerial positions, members of the Commons had to fight a by-election. Disraeli was put up for Taunton to challenge the Whig incumbent, Henry Labouchre. This was the first election he had fought as an official Conservative. He went to Taunton with the recommendation of Francis Bonham the Tory party agent, who wrote to Mr. Beadon the agent in Taunton introducing Disraeli as a 'Gentleman for whom all the Conservative Party are most anxious to obtain a seat in the H. of Commons'.¹¹⁴ This was an important step, as he was now a nominee of the party, and while very few expected him to win in Taunton against a man selected as a minister of the Crown, it put him on the path to a safe seat in future.¹¹⁵ Disraeli certainly made a great impression at Taunton. One observer him as 'showily attired in a dark bottle-green frock-coat, a waistcoat of the most extravagant pattern, the front of which was almost covered with glittering chains... Altogether he was the most intellectual-looking exquisite I had ever seen.' When he began speaking the same witness noted 'the dandy was transformed into the man of mind... into a practical orator and finished elocutionist.'¹¹⁶ His election at Taunton however was to be the scene of one of his bitterest and most well-publicised personal quarrels. Daniel O'Connell read an inaccurate report of Disraeli's speech to the electors of Taunton which misrepresented Disraeli's statements in such a way that they were taken as a grave insult by the Irishman. Fuelled by this misinformation, he fired off a tirade where he described

¹⁰⁷ Lytton Strachey and Roger Fulford (ed.), *The Greville Memoirs*, vol.3, p.117

¹⁰⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.121

¹⁰⁹ Disraeli, 'The Crisis Examined', *Whigs and Whiggism*, p.10

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.10

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p.11-14

¹¹² *Bucks Gazette*, 16th of January 1835, cited in M&B, vol.1, p.274

¹¹³ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.122

¹¹⁴ F.R. Bonham to Mr. Beadon, (undated) c.20th of April 1835, cited in Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, (London: Longmans, 1953) p.462

¹¹⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.124

¹¹⁶ Cited in M&B, vol.1, pp.281-282

Disraeli as ‘a reptile’, ‘a miscreant of...abominable description’, an ‘egregious liar’ and accused him of ‘superlative blackguardism’ for having been ‘twice discarded by the people, to become a Conservative. He possesses all the necessary requisites of perfidy, selfishness, depravity, want of principle’. He finished with a miserably anti-Semitic attack: ‘his name shows that he is of Jewish origin...the lowest and most disgusting grade of moral turpitude’, descended from ‘the blasphemous robber, who ended his career beside the Founder of the Christian Faith’.¹¹⁷ It was an assault on a fellow politician with few parallels in British politics. The fall out was equally extreme: the challenge of a duel between Disraeli and O’Connell’s son Morgan, a series of vituperative responses Disraeli published in the newspapers, and general bad feeling all round.¹¹⁸ Against the backdrop of this all too public feud, Disraeli lost the Taunton by-election by 170 votes: Labouchere 452; Disraeli; 282. For a constituency that was universally expected to go the Whigs, this was not a bad result. Moreover, Disraeli had shown great courage in the face of much of the abuse he had received from O’Connell. It put him in a good position for the next election. But how long would he have to wait?

Following his two failures standing in the radical interest at High Wycombe, Disraeli started a short-lived, though very productive period of his life writing political prose. In these works, he outlined his understanding of the English constitution, his revulsion to the dominant political spirit of the age, a denouncement of Whiggism which would prove life-long, a strong partisan spirit for the Tories, and his first clear elucidation of his own unique interpretation of English history. Disraeli’s first piece of political prose *What is He?*, published in 1833 attempted to explain this difficult juxtaposition of identity and principle: his position of standing as a radical with seemingly obvious Conservative sentiments. It was a short, and in places insignificant work, but the fact Disraeli felt the need to write it is important. It was his first attempt to set forth his own political views in written form for public consumption. On the face of it *What is He?* is a restatement of his radical principles which seemed to suggest the death of the aristocratic government. Instead, it was a work that presented a choice: ‘we must either revert to the *aristocratic* principle, or we must advance to the *democratic*.’¹¹⁹ The former Disraeli felt was impossible. Not only was it reactionary, but it was also wrong-headed. For the the aristocratic principle had been destroyed in England ‘not by the Reform Act, but by the means by which the Reform Act was passed’.¹²⁰ Instead of reaction against so-called progress, he called for national unity against ‘the unhappy party in power’ and for the Tories and radicals to ‘combine together for the institution of a strong government’.¹²¹ It was hardly an endorsement of radicalism. He may have described the ‘aristocratic principle’ dead, but he was not advocating democracy. When Disraeli talked of democracy throughout he life he very rarely meant it in a negative or literal sense. Rather it was used as the rhetorical foil for the narrow-minded oligarchy of aristocratic Whig government. In an odd way Disraeli was also right. 1832 may have disguised its true ramifications because it was ‘so essentially aristocratic’, but it’s reforms had irrevocably changed the British constitution. In 1833 Disraeli was simply asking it’s opponents to accept that there was no going back.

This was followed in 1834 by *The Crisis Examined*, the speech which he delivered at High Wycombe on December the 16th 1834. This saw an evolution from 1833 in that he was now far more clearly identifying himself with the Tory interest. He claimed to the electors of High Wycombe to be ‘influenced by the same sentiments that I ever professed, and actuated by the same principles I have ever advocated’.¹²² Here Disraeli was far more clear, in the first half of this open letter he attacked the

¹¹⁷ *The Courier*, 6th of May 1835, cited in M&B, vol.1, pp.287-288

¹¹⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.124-126; M&B, vol.1, pp.287-293

¹¹⁹ Disraeli, ‘What is He?’, *Whigs and Whiggism*, p.3

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, pp.3-4

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p.6

¹²² Disraeli, ‘The Crisis Examined’, pp.9-10

government's policies of Ecclesiastical Reform, while the second half was a more scathing attack on the record and conduct of the Reform ministry more generally with several leading Whigs picked out for ridicule. In the end it calls for the end of the Reform ministry and the formation of a 'National Administration and a Patriotic House of Commons'.¹²³ More than anything it contains the roots of Disraeli's trademark historicity which would become much clearer in his later prose. By August and September 1835 Disraeli, now in close collaboration with his mentor Lord Lyndhurst, wrote a series of anonymous articles in the *Morning Post* collected under the title 'Peers and People'.¹²⁴ This marked the beginning of his relationship with the press as a political writer, one that would continue sporadically for most of his career. In these letters of 1835, he showed a real warming to his natural themes. They contained the first outlines of his views on serious constitutional questions and give us some insight as to his conception of the English constitution that he would lay out in more detail later that year.

Later in 1835 Disraeli's published his first serious piece of political prose which incidentally was also his only truly serious work of political theory. Everything that followed was either more partisan, more satirical or more polemical. That is not to say *The Vindication of the English Constitution* was not polemical. But it had enough serious political philosophy to be taken seriously as a piece of serious political thought. Published in 1835 and styled as an open letter to his political patron Lord Lyndhurst, his *Vindication* served a dual purpose.¹²⁵ First, it laid out Disraeli's theory about the nature and structure of England's political organisation. In so doing, it allowed him to introduce his peculiar interpretation of English history in tracing the origins of the nation's great public institutions. Secondly, the *Vindication* was an attack on Utilitarianism, a political doctrine with which Disraeli was wholly at odds. John Vincent has nicely summed up Disraeli's the aims in the *Vindication*. 'Within one cover he sought to say both what the world was like and what the world was not like'.¹²⁶ Disraeli saw the English Constitution as a naturally evolving body of institutions which created a set of checks and balances, with the effect that no one interest group could ever acquire a truly preponderating influence. Disraeli identified these political institutions as: 'the King and the two Houses of Parliament', along with, 'trial by Jury, Habeas Corpus, the Court of King's Bench, the Court of Quarter Sessions, the compulsory provision for the poor and...the franchises of municipal corporations'.¹²⁷ In his later work of 1836, *The Spirit of Whiggism*, he also insisted that along with those already mentioned the Church had, 'maintained the sacred cause of learning and religion, and preserved orthodoxy while it has secured toleration'.¹²⁸

More importantly, these institutions had not been created through abstract political theory. Rather, their influence, in his opinion, had developed organically in accordance with England's national history: 'So national are our institutions, so completely have they risen from the temper and adapted themselves to the character of the people, that when for a season they were apparently annihilated,¹²⁹ the people of England voluntarily returned to them, and established them with renewed strength and renovated vigour'.¹³⁰ Disraeli attributed paramount importance to the natural organicism and historical evolution of a nation's political institutions. He argued that, 'a nation is a work of art and a work of time'.¹³¹ A nation was not made overnight but evolved from its history and political institutions. The

¹²³ *Ibid*, p.22

¹²⁴ Disraeli, 'Peers and People', *Whigs and Whiggism*, pp.23-77

¹²⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, *The Vindication of the English Constitution*, in *Whigs and Whiggism*, (Washington: Regnery, 2006) pp.79-173

¹²⁶ John Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.18

¹²⁷ *Vindication*, p.108

¹²⁸ Benjamin Disraeli, *The Spirit of Whiggism*, in *Whigs and Whiggism*, (Washington: Regnery, 2006) p.246

¹²⁹ This 'season' refers to the protectorate of Cromwell in which many of the country's political institutions were nearly destroyed.

¹³⁰ *Spirit of Whiggism*, p.246

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p.257

importance Disraeli attached to national history and national character became most apparent in his denunciation of the French Revolution and his open ridicule of Louis XVIII's restoration monarchy. Prior 1789 he saw, 'there existed all the elements of a free Constitution...in its ancient States, its Parliaments, its corporations, its various classes of inhabitants, its landed tenure, its ecclesiastical and chivalric orders, there might have been found all the variety of interests whose balanced influences would have sustained a free and durable constitution'.¹³² Instead of embracing these potentially liberating institutions, the Revolution destroyed them. The revolutionaries annihilated the aristocracy and disbanded the Church. Furthermore the revolution destroyed the regional character of French provinces and replaced them with ignorantly devised, equally measured sections of land.¹³³ In short, the Revolution succeeded only in destroying the building blocks of a nation.

Even the best efforts of Napoleon could not completely repair the damage done by these ideological levellers.¹³⁴ The Emperor could not find any building blocks of government left intact by the excesses of the revolution. Napoleon, claimed Disraeli, 'was not a man of abstract principle. His was an eminently practical mind ... his sagacious mind deferred to the experiences of ages, and even his unconquerable will declined a rivalry with the prescriptive conviction of an ancient people. He re-established the tribunals; he revived chivalry; he conjured a vision of a nobility; he created the shadow of a Church. He felt that his empire, like all others, must be supported by institutions'.¹³⁵ Disraeli had respect for the Emperor. By contrast, Disraeli had little or no respect for the restoration monarchy of Louis XVIII:

'The lunatic with a crown of straw is as much a sovereign as a country is a free country with a paper Constitution. France, without an aristocracy of any kind, was ornamented with an Upper Chamber of hereditary peers, and a Second Chamber invested with all the powers which, after more than five centuries of graduated practice, we ventured to entrust to our House of Commons, was filled with some hundreds of individuals who were less capable of governing a country than a debating society of ingenious youth at one of our universities...The King of France had no idea that political institutions, to be effective, must be founded on the habits and opinions of the people whom they pretend to govern.'¹³⁶

Disraeli was clear in his belief that a constitution secured on a piece of paper, rather than through history and character could never work. The representatives within those chambers must represent the complex mixture of interests that make up a nation.¹³⁷ 'The French Chambers', Disraeli claimed, 'represented none—they were only fitted to be the tools of a faction'.¹³⁸ The strength of England's constitution was that it was made to purpose. It had been molded by the history and customs of England, and shaped by that country's great men. It could not be imposed to the same effect in France, nor anywhere else. Disraeli had travelled to Sicily with his sister's fiancée William Meredith in his grand tour of Europe and the East in 1830-31.¹³⁹ He recorded his impression in *Vindication*: 'there were no roads—I found a feudal nobility and a peasantry untaught, even in the slightest degree, by letters, and steeped in the grossest superstition: I found agriculture generally neglected, or unchanged in its pursuit since the days of Theocritus; ...no manufactures, no police; mountainous districts swarming with bandits...occasionally I reposed in cities where a comparative civilisation had

¹³² *Vindication*, p.91

¹³³ *Ibid*, p.91

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.91

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p.92

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p.92

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p.93

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p.93

¹³⁹ A good summary of this trip, is contained in, Robert Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour: Benjamin Disraeli and the Holy Land, 1830-31*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982).

been obtained under the influence of a despotic priesthood. And these are the regions to which it is thought fit suddenly to apply the institutions which regulate the civil life of Yorkshire or Kent!’¹⁴⁰ Disraeli’s argument, in essence, was this: there could never be any permanence in a constitution that was artificially created. The institutions that had been so successful in securing a free constitution for England could never have been successful in somewhere so culturally disparate as Sicily. Governing institutions had to evolve, organically, through history and custom. If not, ‘invincible nature will reject the unnatural novelties, and history, instead of celebrating the victory of freedom, will only record the triumph of folly’.¹⁴¹

It is therefore unsurprising that a vital aspect of Disraeli’s early writing was its historical revulsion of utilitarianism. These new, ‘anti-constitutional writers’, he claimed, ‘submit the institutions of the country to the test of UTILITY, and form a new Constitution on the abstract principles of theoretic science.’¹⁴² Disraeli argued that the very term ‘utility’, precisely because of its protean meaning, rendered it useless as a tool of political terminology. A material object could have its utility tested for a material purpose. There was, however, no such test for the moral or political utility of government.¹⁴³ The utilitarian slogan of his era was, ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’. Disraeli was quick to point out many forms of government could meet this test: absolute monarchy, a military empire, ecclesiastical superstition, and indeed, periods of religious or racial persecution had probably passed this same test of utility.¹⁴⁴ Utility was therefore, ‘a mere phrase to which a man may ascribe any meaning’.¹⁴⁵ It was not even a radical term, rather it was politically neutral as a test of government efficiency. Because Utilitarian reformers thought the worst of the world, they believed that Britain’s institutions needed reforming. These reformers who based political science on utility, founded their science of morality on the principle of human self-interest. And that was a cardinal error.

The Utilitarians, Disraeli argued, also grossly over-simplified this principle of human nature.¹⁴⁶ They only admitted one or two of the human motives; ‘a desire for power and a desire for property; and therefore infers that it is in the interest of man to tyrannise and rob.’¹⁴⁷ Misled by this oversimplification they deduced that if all men are driven by a selfish self-interest towards power and property, then the King and aristocracy must represent the grossest form of selfishness. The solution of the utilitarians was to entrust the government of the country to, ‘a representative polity, founded on universal suffrage’.¹⁴⁸ But that only placed the power of the country in the hands of the middle-classes, making them the most favoured sect instead of the crown and aristocracy. Disraeli attacked the logic as well as the motives of the Utilitarians. He claimed that to say that man acts from self-interest is meaningless: men in all situations acted from self-interest. Therefore, ‘to say that a man acts he acts from self-interest is only to announce that when a man does he acts’. But to claim that ‘the self-interest of every man prompts him to be a tyrant and a robber, is to declare that which the experience of all human nature contradicts.’¹⁴⁹

His denunciation of utilitarianism was entirely just. As Vincent has put, Disraeli believed it was, ‘epistemologically weak and logically superficial’.¹⁵⁰ Disraeli’s point was that its foundation was in abstract political principles, rather than in history. He appreciated that the ambition of this new school

¹⁴⁰ *Vindication*, p.94

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.95

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p.81

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p.81

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp.81-82

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.82

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.83

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.83

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.83

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.84

¹⁵⁰ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.19

of statesmen was ‘to form political institutions on abstract principles of theoretic science, instead of permitting them to spring from the course of events, and to be naturally created by the necessities of nations’.¹⁵¹ But he insisted that theories of this character did not account for human nature. They failed to understand the history of a nation or its natural character. The result was both bad psychology and bad sociology.¹⁵² Disraeli’s criticism may not have been profound but it was thorough. He certainly addressed all the major problems with British utilitarianism. The degree to which it succeeded in expelling such thoughts, even from contemporary conservative sensibilities, is another matter. As Vincent has observed, Lord Salisbury would later be both a philosophical utilitarian and a keeper of the conservative conscience.¹⁵³ Secondly, Disraeli did a good job of exposing the practical flaws in Utilitarian methodology: not least in the degree to which he cast doubt on its capacity either to define ‘utility’, or to measure it. Thirdly, he pointed out the narrowness of British radical utilitarianism: insisting that a radical democracy, based on universal suffrage, was not the only system of government able to secure the greatest good for the greatest number. Lastly, and perhaps most interestingly, Disraeli argued that rarefied political theories and abstract concepts were all but meaningless when not corroborated by a nation’s history and customs.

Vincent has suggested that, based on his analysis of utilitarianism, Disraeli might have made an interesting political philosopher had he had the stamina and the motive to do so.¹⁵⁴ However, it seems clear that Disraeli never had any real interest in political theory. But if he only made one short foray into serious political philosophy, Disraeli’s anti-utilitarianism was life-long. It remained a prevalent theme in his later written work.¹⁵⁵ History guided his political thought and the *Vindication*, together with the shorter, more polemical *Spirit of Whiggism*, allowed him to develop his unique interpretation of English history. To be sure, Disraeli’s version of English history has divided scholarly opinion. Vincent has argued that Disraeli’s writing in this respect ‘lurched wildly between the fanciful and the penetrating’.¹⁵⁶ One historian described Disraeli’s history as the work of a, ‘clever propagandist’.¹⁵⁷ Another as ‘clearly writing for the Tory party and for his own election’.¹⁵⁸ While Lord Blake, in rather typical fashion, has also dismissed these earlier writings. He even claimed that Disraeli did not take them very seriously himself, and that too much, ‘ink has been expended by pious conservatives seeking to discern a consistent political creed running through these and later effusions’.¹⁵⁹ While, in similar fashion Hurd has concluded that Disraeli’s ‘Tory’ interpretation of English history, withers when, ‘confronted with the dogmatic vehemence of Macaulay and the Whig version’.¹⁶⁰

Perhaps it would be well to make certain distinctions here. Disraeli was never dogmatic in his approach to politics. This work has no intention of arguing that he was. However, his views on history were among his most consistent pronouncements. It simply does not do Disraeli enough credit to suggest that his history was written purely ‘for his own election’, or was just some form of clever Tory propaganda. To the contrary, these early writings represented a serious attempt to join the national debate about the government of England. More recently Peter Jupp has suggested that Disraeli’s version of history was far from just polemic. He argued that, ‘some elements of this thesis have not survived the scrutiny of modern scholarship...But the main body of the thesis has survived

¹⁵¹ *Vindication*, p.85

¹⁵² Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.19

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p.20

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.20

¹⁵⁵ All of the Young England Trilogy: *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred*, contain a strong anti-utilitarian motif. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Young England was its focus on medievalism and history versus utilitarian legislation.

¹⁵⁶ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.24

¹⁵⁷ Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, (London: Arnold, 200) p.24

¹⁵⁸ Albert Tucker, ‘Disraeli and the Natural Aristocracy’, in *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 28 No.1, (London: Wiley, 1962) p.5

¹⁵⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.92

¹⁶⁰ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.61

remarkably well'.¹⁶¹ To repeat, Disraeli attributed a great deal of importance to history. That would suggest that his idiosyncratic view of English history can give us an understanding of how Disraeli thought about English politics. As Jonathan Parry has suggested, Disraeli believed that 'politicians must understand the temper and genius of the nation—by reading its history. Few politicians conceived of present-day problems more resolutely in terms of their relation to the past. Disraeli hardly ever made a speech without invoking numerous historical precedents and parallels'.¹⁶² Disraeli may have been an anti-Whig. But he wrote something often very close to Whig history. It is therefore no surprise that his version traces the origins of English liberty back to the 14th century where, 'liberty flourished under the Plantagenets'.¹⁶³ To be sure, the House of Commons had no legislative power. But the equestrian order - the knights of the shires and burghers of the towns - came to Westminster to impart knowledge, offer council, and inform the King about state of the realm and present to him the grievances of his subjects.¹⁶⁴ English civil liberty had originally sprung from the Declaration of Right, and was broadened by the Petition of Right, whose happy precedents were properly secured by the 'blessed deed' of Magna Carta.¹⁶⁵ Disraeli's history takes us into the fifteenth century. In this period, under Henry the Sixth, the legislative right of the Commons was firmly established. The liberty of the constitution in this period rested upon the balance of power between and understandings of the two estates and the monarchy. This balance was destroyed in the War of Roses which were, 'mortal to the great peers and chivalric commons of England.'¹⁶⁶ This imbalance led to Tudor despotism where liberty was 'crushed under the oppression of the star chamber'.¹⁶⁷ The corruption of the Tudors saw the liberties of the English constitution suspended for nearly two centuries.

But at that point, things began to change. Disraeli saw Charles the First not so much as the hapless exploiter but as the victim of this Tudor degradation. The aristocracy was refreshed and reinvigorated by half a century of peace and sought to reinstate the constitution of the Plantagenets. Disraeli described it as an 'old suit of armour...although somewhat antiquated in style, possessing all the necessary powers of protection and offence'.¹⁶⁸ The Long parliament achieved this restoration of ancient civil liberties. Indeed, the sacrifices made by Charles the First were so great that, 'the Revolution of 1688 added no important feature to our constitution.'¹⁶⁹ However the extremists of the 1640s went much too far and succeeded in transforming the Commons from one estate of the realm into the country's supreme power. After the execution of Charles came the rule of "the People", which saw British liberties destroyed and the constitution once more degraded. Finally, 'the Nation, the insulted and exhausted Nation, sought refuge from the Government of "the People" in the arms of a military despot'.¹⁷⁰

As Disraeli's history moved into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so the history of England changed course; the struggle between, 'the power Crown and the liberty of the subject, ceases forever, and the war of the parties succeeds to the struggles of Kings and Parliaments'.¹⁷¹ After the abdication of James the Second the Whigs aimed to establish an oligarchy. The glorious revolution of 1688

¹⁶¹ Peter Jupp, 'Disraeli's interpretation of History', in *The Self-fashioning of Disraeli*, ed. by Charles Richmond & Paul Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p.149

¹⁶² Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.706

¹⁶³ *Vindication*, p.117

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.111

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.97

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.119

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.118

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.127

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.129

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.132

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.153

brought William the Third to the throne. Had William been ‘a man of ordinary capacity, the constitution of Venice would have been established in England’.¹⁷² Fortunately, he proved something more than that. However, his failure to produce an heir, coupled with the machinations of the Whig grandees, resulted in the Hanoverian succession. George the First lacked the statesmanlike qualities of William. He was propped up by the Whigs, and the Whigs, in an effort to reward themselves and reduce the power of the Crown, introduced the Peerage Bill. This was an attempt to secure their oligarchy by making the House of Lords independent from the Crown, transforming it into, ‘an odious oligarchy of exclusive privilege’.¹⁷³ Although the Tory country gentlemen were able to defeat that measure, the Whigs succeeded in increasing their influence through the Septennial Act. The Whig party in this period consisted of: ‘haughty’ Peers, religious non-conformists, and the new, ‘monied interest’, who elbowed the country gentleman from their seats by, ‘the long purse strings of Plutocracy’.¹⁷⁴ The other ninety percent of the nation in this period was represented by the Tory party. That situation had not changed by the nineteenth century. The Whigs still represented ‘a small knot of great families who have no other object but their own aggrandisement, and who sought to gratify it by all means possible’.¹⁷⁵ In the Eighteenth century they attacked the House of Lords by swamping the Commons, in the nineteenth century, they swamped the Lords and remodeled the House of Commons through their, “Great” Reform Act.¹⁷⁶

While the Whigs had represented the party of oligarchy and aristocratic corruption, Disraeli portrayed the Tories as the party of the majority. Throughout the 18th century they were led by a succession of great political thinkers who had provided the party with ‘true’ Tory principles. This began with Disraeli’s hero Bolingbroke, who, ‘discarded *jure divino*’, and placed Toryism on a more national foundation.¹⁷⁷ He was followed by, ‘one of the suppressed characters of English history’:¹⁷⁸ Lord Shelburne. The intelligence and ability of Shelburne restored the original system of Bolingbroke, but his short and successful ministry was defeated by the oligarchy of, ‘the famous Coalition with which “the Great Revolution families”, who commenced the fiercest contention for the patrician government of royal England’.¹⁷⁹ Shelburne was succeeded by his young protégé Pitt the Younger, who was the last of the true Tories. Pitt, who intended to continue the great work of his predecessors, was frustrated by the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.¹⁸⁰ These wars exposed Pitt’s, ‘meagre knowledge of continental politics’. Pitt was, ‘forced to act, he acted not only violently, but in exact opposition to the very system he was called into political existence to combat...[He] revived the old policy of oligarchy he had extinguished, and plunged into all the ruinous excesses of French war and Dutch finance’.¹⁸¹

As his history moved into the 19th century Disraeli perceived the total corruption of Tory principles. These ‘Pseudo-Tories’, had ‘shuffled themselves into power by clinging to the skirts of a great minister, the last of Tory statesmen, but who...had been forced, unfortunately for England, the relinquish Toryism’.¹⁸² These men, ‘made Exclusion the principle of their political constitution, and Restriction the genius of their commercial code...They were determined to put down the multitude. They thought they were imitating Mr. Pitt, because they mistook disorganisation for sedition’.¹⁸³ Lord

¹⁷² Benjamin Disraeli, *The Spirit of Whiggism*, in *Whigs and Whiggism*, (Washington: Regnery, 2006) p.248

¹⁷³ *Vindication*, p.141

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.159

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.155

¹⁷⁶ *Spirit of Whiggism*, p.249

¹⁷⁷ *Vindication*, pp.162-163

¹⁷⁸ *Sybil*, p.18

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.20

¹⁸⁰ Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby*, Bradenham Edition vol VIII (London: Peter Davies, 1927) p.74

¹⁸¹ *Sybil*, p.22

¹⁸² *Coningsby*, pp.70-71

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, pp.71-73

Liverpool, was derided as, ‘the Arch-Mediocrity who presided, rather than ruled, over this Cabinet of Mediocrities’.¹⁸⁴ While the Duke of Wellington, even though he brought fame, renown, and great administrative talents to his cabinet, failed in the leadership of the party.¹⁸⁵ He broke up his government, wrecked his party, and ruined his reputation to a point that he could only take a subordinate role in the councils of the sovereign.¹⁸⁶ Why was this the case? Disraeli argued that Wellington, who had spent so long abroad, had no understanding of the country which, he came to rule.¹⁸⁷ Disraeli, believed that Wellington had committed to an exclusiveness, ‘so gross that in 1830 the aristocracy had overthrown him’.¹⁸⁸ The mediocrities who had followed Pitt had drifted from the true course of Bolingbroke, they had misunderstood Pitt and had taken up the stance of reaction and exclusion.

Disraeli turned the Whig interpretation of history on its head. He attempted to show that self-conscious progressivism and parliamentarianism did not necessarily secure civil or political liberty. This was important. By 1832, even the Tory party had largely come to accept the Whig myth. Within that framework, they saw themselves, as Vincent has put it, merely ‘as a thin blue line holding back the forces of anarchy’.¹⁸⁹ Disraeli’s genius lay in his ability to invert this narrative: the Whigs were now the oligarchic, anti-national minority. The Tories: the nationally grounded, ‘democratic’ majority;¹⁹⁰ and ‘the people’ who had so haunted previous Tory leaders were shown to be nothing other than sound, patriotic and deferential. This interpretation of history may not be as forced as it at first appears.

Britain under Walpole may well have been a Whig republic with a Tory majority. The Whig elite who ruled in that period were a small group of exotic, very closely related, landed, families, not ‘the people’.¹⁹¹ Disraeli insisted that ‘the people’ who the Whigs represented was, ‘in fact a number of Englishmen not exceeding in amount, the population of a third-rate city’.¹⁹² While the Tory party was supported by ‘nine-tenths of the nation’, The Whig party had always been, ‘odious to the English people...even now they are only maintained in power by the votes of Scotch and Irish members’.¹⁹³ Even these claims were far from self-evidently fantastical. In fact, Disraeli may have been far more accurate than most scholars could have imagined. Linda Colley has suggested that throughout the 18th century, ‘one-party whig government had been superimposed on a two-party, predominantly tory state’.¹⁹⁴ In addition the Tory Party had been much more, ‘in tune with the opinion of the majority of Englishmen outside of Parliament’.¹⁹⁵ Therefore Disraeli’s interpretation of history may well have been a much more lucid and penetrating than merely a Tory-partisan version, to counter the more established Whig narrative.

More: he made clear the Whigs had never been the progressive party. Attempts to reduce the power of the Crown was not aimed at the creation of popular government but instead was an attempt to implement a Venetian constitution and replace the monarch with a doge.¹⁹⁶ “Civil and Religious Freedom”, was, ‘a Doge and no Bishops’.¹⁹⁷ The Whigs, Disraeli claimed, had always been at war

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.75

¹⁸⁵ *Sybil*, p.26

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.27

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.27.

¹⁸⁸ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.710

¹⁸⁹ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.23

¹⁹⁰ *Vindication*, p.160

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.24

¹⁹² *Spirit of Whiggism*, p.252

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p.159

¹⁹⁴ Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: Tory Party 1714-1760*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p.95

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.145

¹⁹⁶ *Vindication*, p.153

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.157

with the constitution. Despite being ‘professors of popular opinion’, they, ‘seized every opportunity of curtailing popular privileges.’¹⁹⁸ The Whigs hid their true motives behind the eighteenth-century Septennial Act, concealed under a veil of, ‘preserving England from Popery...their real object was to prolong the existence of the first House of Commons in which they had a majority.’¹⁹⁹ The 1832 Reform Act was treated with the same, salutary, scepticism. Rather than seeing it a progressive democratic advancement, Disraeli argued that it was an attempt to check the power of the House of Commons by affording a preponderating influence to a Whig voting lower middle-class. Thus, he painted it as almost un-democratic measure. Instead of extending the franchise broadly in an effort to include most of Britain’s political interest groups, it was aimed at directly enfranchising a new portion of the electorate which was commercial, cosmopolitan, and largely non-conformist. To Disraeli it stank on cronyism and anti-nationalism. In this Disraeli was somewhat prescient. The 1832 settlement ensured a Whig majority, with a brief exception, until seven years after a new Reform Act was passed in 1867.

More to the point, as Adam Kirsch has argued, Disraeli successfully portrayed the Whig party as anti-national.²⁰⁰ He accused them of cynically replacing James II with William III. When William failed to produce an heir, the Whigs again, and no less instrumentally, secured the coronation of George I. Who, according to Disraeli, was ‘unsupported by the mass of the people, ignorant of our language, [and] phlegmatic in temperament’.²⁰¹ In the same breath as crowning a German King, they implemented the first stage of their long-term goal: a Venetian constitution; a common accusation in Disraeli’s early political writing. Later, he accused them of an addiction to the, ‘triple blessing of Venetian politics, Dutch finance and French Wars’.²⁰² Disraeli thereby attempted to portray the political manoeuvres of the Whigs as the machinations of a foreign, exotic and anti-national party which sought principally to corrupt a glorious and historical Albion. He argued that the reforms of 1832 were opposed by the majority of the nation who did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the actions of this, ‘vaunting moiety of a class privileged for the common good, swollen though it might be by jobbing Scots and rebel Irish...as the will of the people’.²⁰³ By showing the Whigs as seizing power through foreign *coup d’etat* he was able to show the Tory party as the national protectors of England’s liberties.

Besides his *Spirit of Whiggism* in 1836, a shorter more polemical version of *Vindication*, the vast majority of his writing between that work and his successful bid to enter parliament were somewhat vulgar attacks on the members of the opposition written anonymously under the pseudonym ‘Runnymede’.²⁰⁴ They showed some crude partisan spirit for his new party, but they showed very little of the intelligent, philosophical or historical thought of his more serious pieces of political prose. These were at best witty satire, at worst coarse and unrefined insults. It is unfortunate that Disraeli did not have the inclination or energy to write more political theory as his political writings of the 1830’s showed great evolution, perhaps more accurately, a solidification of both his political ideas and his Toryism. These works of political prose are the first written evidence we have of Disraeli’s reaction to the Reform Act. He was never a Whig, but these works show just hostile he had become. Disraeli was formed by the Reform crisis of 1831, he was disgusted that the Whigs would use it to gain political advantage. His despoliation of Whiggery and the utilitarian doctrines that had become so prevalent in 1830s England were life-long. These were the political challenges that formed his mind and his

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.156

¹⁹⁹ *Spirit of Whiggism*, p.251

²⁰⁰ Adam Kirsch, *Benjamin Disraeli*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2008) p.72

²⁰¹ *Vindication*, p.154

²⁰² Disraeli, *Sybil; or the Two Nations*, (London: Peter Davies, 1927) p.25

²⁰³ *Ibid*, p.2

²⁰⁴ Disraeli, ‘The Letters of Runnymede’, *Whigs and Whiggism*, pp.173-244

opinions. Once formed these opinions proved to be life-long. His interpretation of history would be added to and updated, but never repudiated. His support for the territorial aristocracy and the landed settlement would go on until well after it's lifespan had realistically finished. As the threats of the 1840s emerged both domestically and on the continent, Disraeli would not find these principles changed, but rather reinforced. The need for aristocratic leadership, powerful public institutions, a robust constitution and a strong social fabric were all the more necessary.

In 1837, the death of William IV triggered an immediate general election. For once Disraeli was well placed. Backed by relatively influential figures such as Lord Lyndhurst and Lord Chandos and with a track record as a Tory writer he was veritably flooded with offers of candidacy.²⁰⁵ After consideration he took the option to be the second Tory candidate for Maidstone in Kent. It had been shared between the sitting candidate Mr. Wyndham Lewis and a Whig Member who decided not to put himself up for re-election given the Tory feeling in the seat. Maidstone was ranked among the most venal seats in the country, therefore it could be considered wise not to throw money at a lost cause. Indeed, Disraeli only managed to stand for the seat because his running mate Wyndham Lewis paid for a great deal of his electoral expenses.²⁰⁶ In the end the election was contested after a radical candidate opposed them at the last moment. The campaign turned, like many nineteenth-century elections, into something more scurrilous and abusive. Disraeli was met with the usual anti-Semitic jeers of 'Old Cloths' and 'Shylock', but he was unperturbed and delivered a brilliant speech supporting the constitution and the agricultural interest and the Church while launching a blistering attack on the almost universally unpopular New Poor Law passed by the Whigs in 1834.²⁰⁷ Wyndham Lewis was clearly impressed with his fellow candidate writing that 'Disraeli was on his legs more than an hour; he is a splendid orator and astonished the people'.²⁰⁸ The result saw Disraeli returned with a majority of more than 200 over the radical candidate. He was elected to parliament at last on his fifth attempt. The wife of his partner, Mary-Anne Wyndham Lewis wrote to her brother: 'Mark what I say — mark what I prophesy: Mr. Disraeli will in a very few years be one of the greatest men of his day. His great talents...[and] Wyndham's power to keep him in Parliament, will ensure his success. They call him my Parliamentary *protégé*.'²⁰⁹

After a long road going back all the way to 1825 and Disraeli's involvement with Murray and *The Representative* he had finally reached his goal of becoming a Member of Parliament. There had been so many setbacks and there were many blows to his reputation from which he would, unjustly or not, never fully recover. However, as this chapter has shown this period before his election to parliament was neither as disreputable or as unprincipled as previously thought. Disraeli had certainly been ambitious and at time unscrupulous, but he had also been dreadfully unlucky and somewhat naïve. From a political point of view the vast majority of his political statements and actions are coherent with his later career. He certainly did not emerge with fully formed political opinions. But rather, like so many contemporaries one way or another, his politics was defined by the constitutional crisis which surrounded the Reform Bill and his reaction moulded by the partisan nature of the Reform Act. As Vincent astutely recognised, 'Each man has a formative decade...in literary and moral outlook Disraeli was a man of the Byronic 1820s, in politics he was a man formed by the experience of the 1830s'.²¹⁰ His instincts had never been narrow or partisan, rather they had always been broadly Tory but he was not a reactionary opponent of Parliamentary Reform in its own right. Therefore in 1832 it made sense for him to stand as a radical. As he told Benjamin Austen, 'Toryism is worn out, and I

²⁰⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.147

²⁰⁶ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.94

²⁰⁷ M&B, vol.1, p.373

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.373

²⁰⁹ Mary Anne Wyndham Lewis to Major Viney Evans, 27th of July 1837, cited in *Ibid*, p.376

²¹⁰ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.18

cannot condescend to be a Whig'.²¹¹ Even then, as we have seen, his radicalism was far from conventional and not even very radical. His friendship and collaboration with Lyndhurst proved to him that Toryism was not yet dead and would be the most effective defender of the existing social and political contract. From 1833, with the publication of *What is He?* his political writing charted this quite natural evolution from radical to Conservative and set in the motion the process by which his political principles and ideas were made clearer both to himself and his readers. His idiosyncratic version of English history and his revulsion of dominant liberal and utilitarian political principles were to be hallmarks of his entire career. Indeed, by his election in 1837 Disraeli had emerged as Tory politician who had done more than most contemporaries to make his views known. More crucially the early years show us from the outset his natural ability for collaboration and connexion. They showed us his considerable ability for serious political thought which formed the genus and foundation of his politics for the next forty-five years, and most importantly it showed that far from being simply an unprincipled careerist he was an instinctively Conservative politician with views that, whilst they were expressed in a manner totally individual to himself, chimed in with the vast majority of Conservative opinion.

²¹¹ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Benjamin Austen, 2nd of June 1832, p.198

Chapter Two: Young England to the Front Benches

Following his election, Disraeli's political career did not get off to the trailblazing beginning for which he hoped. Indeed, his maiden speech on the 9th of December 1837 has gone down in parliamentary history as one of the most disastrous performances in the history of the House. Almost upon his entry Disraeli attempted to take it by storm. He chose to speak on the validity of certain Irish elections. He caught the Speaker's eye immediately after his old adversary from Taunton-Daniel O'Connell- had sat down. Of course, did he have to contend with the organised abuse of the Irish members. But it was widely acknowledged that the tone and delivery of his speech was wholly inappropriate. Such was the bravado and folly of the young Disraeli that he approached his maiden speech as though he was an elder-statesman of the house. Greville recorded him as, 'beginning with florid assurance, speedily degenerating into ludicrous absurdity, and being at last put down with inextinguishable shouts of laughter'.²¹² The culmination of Disraeli's speech could hardly be heard above the growing cat-calls and laughter, forcing him to shout over the crowd, 'I will sit down now, but the time will come when you will hear me'. It was a defiant end to a disastrous effort. Hobhouse described the speech as, 'such a mixture of insolence and folly as I never heard in my life before'.²¹³ Similarly Monckton-Milnes, who would later become an ally of Disraeli's in Young England, claimed that, 'Disraeli nearly killed the House...Peel quite screamed with laughter'.²¹⁴ Amongst later historians Robert Blake has attempted to pull some sliver-linings from the dark clouds of his first exhibition: the behaviour of the Irish did engender some sympathy towards Disraeli, and there were reports that Peel did his best to cheer Disraeli on.²¹⁵ Perhaps he is right to suggest that the rowdiness of the Irish members limited the damage to simply a disaster, as opposed to something worse.²¹⁶ However, even the consolations of his loyal patron Chandos could not hide the fact that, Disraeli's first parliamentary performance was considered little better than a train-wreck.²¹⁷

Whatever, Disraeli's maiden speech certainly did not act as the stage by which he imagined he would announce himself in the great pantheon of British politics. Even for a man with his irrepressible optimism, it had hardly gone according to plan. His old friend Bulwer Lytton, invited Disraeli to meet the veteran Irish MP R.L. O'Sheil, who while no ally of Disraeli's, was no friend to O'Connell either. Disraeli recorded the Irishman's sagacious advice in a letter to his sister: 'Now get rid of your genius for a session. Speak, often, for you must show that you have not been cowed, but speak shortly. Be very quiet, try to be dull...astonish them by speaking on subjects of detail. Quote figures, dates, calculations...and in a short time the House will sigh for the wit and eloquence which they know are in you'.²¹⁸ Disraeli took this advice. For a period he became more reserved, saving his speeches for short succinct points on which he had some expertise.²¹⁹ In the next few years, Disraeli did very little by way of making a reputation in the party, despite the claims he made to his sister Sarah and wife Mary Anne. However, it is actually quite hard to measure exactly the success Disraeli had in his first few years in parliament, certainly if we take his own glowing accounts with a pinch of salt. His sister and wife were the adoring audience that the great performer needed to exhort them. But

²¹² Fulford and Strachey (ed.), *The Greville Memoirs*, vol.3, p.404

²¹³ John Cam Hobhouse, *Recollections of A Long Life*, vol.5, (Cambridge: CUP, 2011) p.112

²¹⁴ James Pope-Hennessy, *Monckton Milnes: The Years of Promise, 1809-1851*, (London: Constable, 1949) p.100

²¹⁵ M&B, vol.2, p.12

²¹⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.140

²¹⁷ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Sarah Disraeli, 8th December 1837, vol.2, pp.326-328

²¹⁸ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Sarah Disraeli, 11th December 1837, vol.2, pp.329-330

²¹⁹ He was listened to attentively on a technical point surrounding copyright later that year. see *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debates, 14th of December, 1837, vol.39, cc.1093

aside from his own dispatches, there is very little mention of him by contemporaries, and perhaps Blake is right to suggest that this silence is significant in its own right.²²⁰

The historian looking back now can discern some notable speeches between 1837 and 1841. These certainly read very well. First, he responded to his old friend Charles Villiers over a motion to abolish the Corn Laws in 1838. Disraeli claimed that the Corn Laws were in no way to blame for a slight downturn in British manufacturing. Rather he asked: ‘Whose interest was it to have the Corn-laws repealed? It was the interest solely of the manufacturing capitalist, who had contrived to raise a large party in favour of that repeal, by the specious pretext, that it would lead to a reduction of rents, and by obtaining the co-operation of a section in this country, who were hostile to a political system based on the preponderance of the landed interest.’²²¹

This speech was followed by a courageous condemnation of the new Poor Law, in response to the latest Chartist petition. Disraeli sympathised with the Chartists. However, he was not ashamed to say, however much he disapproved of the Charter that he sympathised with those who marched for it: ‘They formed a great body of his countrymen; nobody could doubt they laboured under great grievances’.²²² As much as he disagreed with their proposed solutions, he believed that the problem they pointed to needed to be addressed. The Reform Act had changed the nature of the constitution. Above all, these newly enfranchised members of society who had, ‘thus possessed power without discharging its conditions and duties were naturally anxious to put themselves to the least possible expense and trouble. Having gained that object, for which others were content to sacrifice trouble and expense, they were anxious to keep it without any appeal to their pocket, and without any cost of their time’.²²³ He deplored the current trend of cheap and centralised government which invaded the civil rights of English people. In particular the new Poor Law:

‘The New Poor Law Act was an invasion of their civil rights. They could not deny, that they had based that New Poor Law upon a principle that outraged the whole social duties of the State—the mainstay, the living source of the robustness of the commonwealth. 249 They taught the destitute not to look for relief to those who were their neighbours, but to a distant Government stipendiary.’²²⁴

He returned to this theme later in the month when he was one of only three MPs to vote against the use of central funds to raise a police force for Birmingham, the purpose of which was to deal with the Chartist Convention taking place in the city.²²⁵ He took the opposite stance over the Irish Municipal Corporations Bill in the same year, but for clear, and indeed principled, reasons: ‘In England where society is strong’, he argued, ‘they tolerated a weak government; but in Ireland, where society is weak, the policy should be to have a strong government’.²²⁶ He questioned why there should be a U-turn in policy over this principle of centralisation, which had been effective in Ireland over the last forty years regardless of party. In this instance, he was speaking against his leader Robert Peel who had taken a position of supporting the bill in that session. Despite the split in the Conservative vote, Peel is thought to have congratulated Disraeli on taking the proper line of opposition in his speech.²²⁷ Throughout 1841 he reiterated his criticism of the Poor Law, indeed he voted against party leadership on the Poor Law on no further than four occasions. He was consistent in his opposition the principles of centralisation and the harshness of the Poor Law. In a speech calling for a postponement on the Poor Law Amendment Bill he claimed:

²²⁰ Blake, p.162

²²¹ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debates 15th of March 1838, vol.41, c.941

²²² *Ibid*, HC Debates 12th of July 1839, vol.49, cc.250-251

²²³ *Ibid*, c.248

²²⁴ *Ibid*, cc.248-249

²²⁵ *Ibid*, HC Debates, 23rd of July 1839 vol.49, c.694

²²⁶ *Ibid*, HC Debates, 8th of March 1839 vol.49, c.181

²²⁷ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Sarah Disraeli, 9th of March 1839, vol.3, p.155

‘There were some who thought the Government should not interfere; and so far as domestic policy was concerned...They had destroyed the parochial constitution of England for a mere sordid consideration, and they were placed in the miserable condition of not having attained their object.’²²⁸

Many scholars have asserted that Disraeli, upon his entry to parliament was a man without any clear principles. As a result, he was more than willing to heap praise and flattery on Peel. But when snubbed for ministerial office in 1841, he reinvented himself in opposition to his leader. This is certainly the view of Robert Blake who saw ‘no hint in his speeches or writings of the major defects in Peel’s conduct and outlook from 1832 onwards, which he was to expose in *Coningsby* and *Sybil*’.²²⁹ Similarly Dick Leonard has suggested that prior to 1841 Disraeli had a largely justified reputation as an ‘unprincipled opportunist with no abiding political philosophy’. Leonard also argued that it was only upon Peel’s rejection that he reinvented himself and formulated his romantic tory vision of history, above all, about the aristocracy and the role they might play in finding answers to the country’s social ills.²³⁰ Yet these judgements are more problematical than they seem. For there are two striking dimensions to Disraeli’s parliamentary contributions between 1837 and 1841. The first is how often he spoke and voted against his own party. He was one of only three Conservatives who voted against the Birmingham Police bill. He also spoke in sympathy of the Chartists and in criticism of the Poor Law which his own party leader had explicitly supported. He had argued directly against Peel over his support of the Whig’s Irish Municipal Corporations Bill. In fact the vast majority of his significant speeches were in opposition to, rather than in support of, Peel’s brand of conservatism. Secondly, given how widely accepted Disraeli’s political charlatanism remains in this period, it is surprising to observe just how closely the ideas expressed in his parliamentary contributions marry up with earlier professions on these subjects, found in his writings and in his speeches before election to Westminster. His hatred of centralisation as a Whig method of neutralising the influence of local gentry was particularly stressed in *Vindication* and *Spirit of Whiggism*.²³¹ While his opposition to the Conservative’s support of the Poor Law was the striking feature of a speech to the electors of Maidstone: ‘That Bill bears fearful tidings for the poor. Its primary object is founded not only on a political blunder, but on a moral error- it went on the principle that relief to the poor is a *charity*. I maintain that it is a *right*!’²³²

Disraeli’s politics as seen in his “Young England” novels, after 1841 were not a reinvention. Rather they were a continuation of the politics he espoused even before he arrived in parliament. His attitudes towards The Reform Act of 1832, and the Chartist Petition in 1839, were not reconfigured after 1841. Instead, they were reaffirmed. Disraeli’s early vacillations between Radical and Tory candidacies were not purely expedient. He proved that in his stance as a largely independent Tory-Radical between 1837 and 1841. It is not the aim of this work to claim that Disraeli was a principled idealist. It is beyond doubt that he was an ambitious politician and sought to climb to the top of British politics. After all, as early as 1834 when asked by Lord Melbourne what he wanted to be, the young Disraeli replied, ‘I want to be Prime Minister’.²³³ He certainly possessed an arrogant brashness and disproportionate sense of self-assuredness to match his ambition. But Disraeli was certainly not short of intellectual opinion or of political direction in these early years.

²²⁸ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 8th of February 1841, c.377

²²⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.162

²³⁰ Dick Leonard, *The Great Rivalry: Gladstone & Disraeli*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013) pp.47-48

²³¹ *Vindication of the English Constitution*, p.118, p.143. *Spirit of Whiggism*, p.248, p.266

²³² Disraeli address to Freemen & Electors of Maidstone 8th of July 1837: Monypenny & Buckle, vol.1, pp.373-374

²³³ W.M. Torrens, *Memoirs of the Right Honourable William: second Viscount Melbourne*, (London: Macmillan, 1878) p.275

Much of the confusion stems from what has been made of Peel's rejection of Disraeli for a cabinet post in 1841. Scholars have been guilty of making too much of this snub. Peel kissed hands on 30th of August 1841, and within the next couple of days had assembled the majority of his cabinet. Disraeli had yet to receive a summons. He wrote to Peel a letter asking for a position in the cabinet. The missive ended:

'I have tried to struggle against a storm of political hate and malice which few men ever experienced...I enrolled myself under your banner, and I have only been sustained under these trials by the conviction that the day would come when the foremost man of the country would publicly testify that he had some respect for my ability and my character'.²³⁴

This was followed up by a separate letter Mary-Anne sent to Peel without Disraeli's knowledge. She was good friends with Peel's sister and in her letter she pleaded with Sir Robert that, 'literature he has abandoned for politics. Do not destroy all his hopes, and make him feel his life has been a mistake'.²³⁵ These requests for office now seem improper, and perhaps even slightly shameless to a modern public conception of how Cabinet Government works. The reality is that these kind requests litter the private correspondence of nearly all nineteenth century prime ministers. As Douglas Hurd has put it, 'It was reasonable that Disraeli should write a begging letter; it was equally reasonable that Peel should turn it down'.²³⁶ After all, Peel had many other senior Tories to consider for cabinet posts, men who he had relied upon in opposition or who distinguished records having held office before. He did include Disraeli's mentors in Lyndhurst and Chandos. But as Feuchtwanger has pointed out, Peel was obliged to do so, and did so without enthusiasm. He would have known that Disraeli was a protégé of theirs. However, in his eyes that would have hardly been an endorsement.²³⁷ The fact is, that there was never really a personal connection between Disraeli and Peel. Even from Disraeli's correspondence we get the impression of an artificial relationship between the two. It was forced courtesy on the part of Peel, rather than any genuine interest in Disraeli's talents. The scholarly consensus is that Disraeli was unrealistic to expect office from Peel in 1841. Peel gained nothing from including a maverick backbencher over more experienced and influential members of the party.²³⁸

Indeed, Peel's rejection of Disraeli's pleas can be made to look controversial only if we assume that Peel had always intended to include Disraeli but was persuaded otherwise. Thus, as Blake has noted there is no real mystery as to why Disraeli was passed over, if we look at contemporary evidence and ignore claims made after Disraeli had risen to the top of British politics and Peel had been defeated.²³⁹ There were three main theories as to why Peel may have changed his mind about including the talented, if out-spoken, Tory-Radical. George Smythe suggested that it was the intervention of the party hacks: the Bonham's and Crocker's on whom Disraeli would later claim literary revenge as his Tadpole, Taper, and Rigby of *Coningsby* and *Sybil*.²⁴⁰ Philip Rose, Disraeli's solicitor and final executor suggested that Stanley was to blame. He had never been a great supporter of Disraeli: an upstart Jew who he still suspected of being involved in the scandal surrounding his gambler brother Henry some ten years earlier.²⁴¹ We probably will never know the truth of Disraeli's involvement in the Henry Stanley affair, but the evidence we do have suggests that Disraeli acted very creditably, and that Stanley's grudge against him was somewhat unjustified. We are told that Stanley, still provoked by this grudge, delivered an ultimatum to Peel that, 'if that scoundrel were taken in he

²³⁴ M&B, vol.2, pp.118-120

²³⁵ C.S.Parker, *Sir Robert Peel from his Private Papers*, 3 volumes (London: John Murray, 1891-1899) vol.2, pp.486-487

²³⁶ Douglas Hurd, *Disraeli; or the Two Lives*, (London: Phoenix, 2013) p.94

²³⁷ Edgar Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, (London: Arnold, 2000) p.42

²³⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.166. Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.84. Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, pp.41-42. Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.255

²³⁹ *Ibid*, p.165

²⁴⁰ George Smythe in *The Press*, January 7th 1854

²⁴¹ C.L. Cline, 'Disraeli and Peel's 1841 Cabinet', in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol.11, no.2 (University of Chicago Press, 1939)

would not remain himself'.²⁴² The third theory suggests that it was the cloud that still lingered over Disraeli from his affair with Henrietta Sykes-Lyndhurst played a part in his decision to exclude him.²⁴³ However all these theories have one problem in common: they assume that Peel wished, and indeed, intended, to include Disraeli. There is no evidence to suggest that he was ever willing to do that. It is only from Disraeli that we get a sense of expectation. Peel would have gained nothing from including him and it was unreasonable for Disraeli to expect anything from the new premier.

Despite the unrealistic nature of Disraeli's expectations, Disraeli was devastated by Peel's rebuff. However, it is inaccurate to suggest, as Blake has, that, 'his attitude to his leader naturally became more critical' and a direct result of his exclusion from the cabinet.²⁴⁴ In many ways, Disraeli continued much as he had before. He supported initiatives such as the reintroduction of income tax and the sliding scale for duty on corn with reservations and an element on independence. He produced a masterpiece of a speech proposing a merger between the consular and diplomatic services, arguing that the consular service served no real purpose and just created jobs for destitute aristocrats. It was jobbery and served no purpose. Moreover, this accusation: of redundant and functionless aristocracy, was a theme that Disraeli returned to later in *Sybil*. To be sure, the independence he had displayed in opposition certainly quietened down. Blake claimed that Disraeli, 'bent over backwards to display his orthodoxy during the first year of that new Parliament'.²⁴⁵ There is an element of truth in this. As Ridley has pointed out, he took no part in the debate when Duncombe introduced the huge Chartist petition in May 1842, nor did he take a stance when Ashley agitated for factory reform: two themes on which he had been conspicuously outspoken in the last parliament.²⁴⁶ However, Disraeli himself gives us a clue to this change of psychology in a letter to his sister: 'You cannot conceive how solitary I feel. Utterly isolated. Before the change of Government, political party was a tie among men, now it is a tie among men who are in office. The supporter of the administration, who is not in place or power himself, is a solitary animal'.²⁴⁷ There was and still is a great distinction between the politics of opposition and those of government, and Disraeli knew it.

Speeches and views that clashed with his party leadership could be tolerated in opposition, especially in an age when rigid party structures were yet to be developed and attitudes towards organised opposition still bordered on suspicion. Government was a different beast, and despite his differences with Peel, Disraeli was undoubtedly a party politician. There was no advantage to be gained in irritating the party leadership, even if he was still sore from rejection. He knew that this was not the time to challenge Peel. He was a first minister with a large majority. Disraeli admitted as much to his wife: 'Income Tax...is a thunderbolt- but Peel can do anything at this moment'.²⁴⁸ Moreover, as he would remember nearly forty years later in *Endymion*, parliament in 1842 was dominated by 'political economy': 'finance and commerce are everybody's subjects, and are most convenient to make speeches about for men who cannot speak French, and have no education'.²⁴⁹ Political economy was certainly not Disraeli's forte. Not only did he despise the notion, he had very little understanding of its concepts. This combined with his more respectful and cautious stance towards the party leadership helps to explain the cautious approach he adopted throughout 1842.

On the 11th of March 1842 Disraeli wrote to his wife claiming, 'I already find myself without effort the leader of a party chiefly of the youth and new members'.²⁵⁰ This was typical of the kind of

²⁴² M&B, vo.2, p.122

²⁴³ *Ibid*, vol.1 p.520

²⁴⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.167

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.167

²⁴⁶ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.263

²⁴⁷ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Mary Anne, 25th of February 1842, vol.4 pp.17-18

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, D to Mary-Anne, 12th of March 1842, vol.4 p.33

²⁴⁹ Disraeli, *Endymion*, Bradenham edition, vol. XII, (London; Peter Davies, 1927) ch.71 p.323

²⁵⁰ *Disraeli's Letters*, to Mary Anne, 11th of March 1842, vol.4 p.31

exaggeration Disraeli often made throughout his career, particularly when writing to his wife. But it was the beginning of what would become the political group known as Young England. This body was made up of a small group of Eton and Cambridge educated young aristocrat MPs, who enlisted Disraeli as their leader. Young England sprung out of a wider revulsion of the utilitarian spirit of the age. 1842 was a year that saw a revival of romantic medievalism in art, architecture, and literature. A byproduct of this romantic movement was a widespread nostalgia for the middle-ages. As Charles Kegel long-ago discerned, ‘Confronted with the tremendous social, political, and religious dislocations which accompanied the industrial revolution, many nineteenth-century thinkers longed for the stability and unity which they thought characterised medieval life’.²⁵¹ It was out of this wistful nostalgia that Young England was born. Its members worshipped the feudalism of the middle ages. Heartless utilitarian industrialism and supply and demand economics had left the lower orders in poverty. Young England believed that a revival of *noblesse oblige* and with it more responsible aristocracy would protect the people and provide their betters with a new platform as the natural protectors of England’s emerging working classes.

The origins of ‘Young England’ lay with John Manners, George Smythe, and Alexander Baillie-Cochrane: three aristocratic, Eton educated, Cambridge graduates. They had been profoundly influenced by the teaching of Frederick Faber, an Oxford don, and one of the leading disciples of J.H. Newman who followed him to Rome. They saw him speak at Ambleside while on a reading holiday in 1838. His sermons and poetry sparked something of an epiphany among the Cambridge students. So much so that Manners recorded, ‘We have virtually pledged ourselves to attempt to restore what? I hardly know. But it is still a glorious attempt...I think a change is working for the better, for all, or nearly all, the enthusiasm of the young spirits of Britain is with us’.²⁵² From these obscure beginnings the principles of ‘Young England’ became slowly more recognisable. It stemmed from a dissatisfaction with the proliferation of industrialism and the increasing predominance of commercialism in contemporary society. This was twinned with a concern for those social questions that Thomas Carlyle had encapsulated in the ‘Condition of England Question’. Feuchtwanger has summed it up nicely as a ‘reaction against the selfish greed and the loss of mutuality and community in a society based on the individual and the market’.²⁵³ However these three Cambridge graduates, much like Disraeli, thought that the answer lay in politics, while Faber thought quite the opposite. He prophesied of a collision between Church and State, that would end in the Church’s supremacy.²⁵⁴ Ridley perhaps goes too far when she suggested that Disraeli was totally impervious to the religious fervour generated by Newman and the Oxford Movement. But he certainly was far less excitable about religious issues when compared to his patrician colleagues.²⁵⁵ Young England was certainly a nostalgic movement which regretted the loss of structure in society. Conceived through its rose-tinted spectacles this structure was epitomised by the feudal aristocracy, ably assisted by a powerful and ubiquitous pre-reformation Church. The ideas of Young England have been too readily dismissed by scholars mainly because of the fantasies implied in their most blithe extravagances: for instance, Smythe’s suggestion for the reintroduction of Royal touching as a cure for scrofula, or Manners 1843 pamphlet which called for the revival of public holidays on holy days, in an effort to return to the more Christian medieval past.²⁵⁶ John Manners’ infamous couplet has traditionally been the subject of significant ridicule:

²⁵¹ Charles H. Kegel, ‘Lord John Manners and the Young England Movement: Romanticism in Politics’, in *Political Research Quarterly*, vol.14, issue. 3 (Utah University Press, 1961) p.691

²⁵² C. Whibley, *Lord John Manners and His Friends*, (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1925), vol.1, p.66

²⁵³ Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, p.46

²⁵⁴ Richard Faber, *Young England*, (London: Faber, 1987) pp.30-43

²⁵⁵ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.247

²⁵⁶ Lord John Manners, *In Defence of Holy Days* (1843)

‘Let wealth and commerce, laws and learning die,
But leave us still our old Nobility.’²⁵⁷

However, Young England, cannot be dismissed quite so easily. Remove the youthful folly, puerile extravagance and medievalist trumpery: then we are left with a coherent creed closely related to a large canon of contemporary High-Tory romantic ideology that concerned itself with the pressing social questions, spawned by a rapidly changing, increasingly urbanised, and progressively more industrialised society. Young England’s answer to these questions lay in a reinvigoration of the Church and a revival of dutiful aristocracy: through these two agents, spiritual, social, and political leadership could be reestablished to combat the harshness of free-trade industrialism and heal the wounds in England’s sense of community.

While Disraeli had known Smythe and Manners long before they came to parliament in 1841, they only became political acquaintances during the first session of 1842.²⁵⁸ However the understanding that Young England to act a parliamentary group was not formalised until the autumn of 1842. While on an extended break in Paris, Disraeli met with Smythe and Baillie-Cochrane: two of the three founding members of Young England. They, with the consent of John Manners, asked him to join and lead their group in parliament. Disraeli was delighted to accept. For the first time in his political career he had a following. Disraeli seemed, and in many ways was, an odd leader of these young patrician friends. Yet given the similarities of their ideas it was perhaps not so surprising. Scholars who have contrasted Disraeli with his Young England peers, have tended to focus on age, class, education (or Disraeli’s lack of it), and background. More rarely have they considered their ideas. They were not without some differences: certainly Disraeli often arrived at the same conclusions by a different route. Disraeli did not really embrace the High Church Oxfordism in the same way as the other members of Young England. Moreover, Disraeli’s conception of the world he lived in, and of English society in general, was driven almost totally by history rather than religion.²⁵⁹ Smythe was most likely accurate when he remarked that, ‘Dizzy’s attachment to moderate Oxfordism is something like Bonaparte’s to moderate Mahomedanism’.²⁶⁰ But the fact remains that Disraeli’s ideas, as he expressed them in his earlier polemics, speeches, and novels were strikingly similar to those of his younger colleagues.

In another way, Disraeli’s ambition has often been contrasted with that of his younger patrician colleagues. This has been described by one scholar as a, ‘source of friction’.²⁶¹ It was less a source of friction than it was a difference of initial approach. The three founders had originally intended it to be their own group in which they would potentially enlist the help of outsiders, but keep the direction down to their small innermost counsel. Disraeli’s ambition was for a large and influential parliamentary bloc. Smythe wrote to Manners expressing his amazement at Disraeli’s professed influence:

‘*Most Private.* Dizzy has much more parliamentary power that I had any notion of. The two Hodgsons are his, and Quitin Dick. He has a great hold on Walter and ‘The Times’. Henry Hope who will come in soon is entirely in his hands... We four vote, and these men are to be played upon and won and wooed, for the sense in which we esoterics may have decided’²⁶²

²⁵⁷ Lord John Manners, *England’s Trust and Other Poems*, (London: Printed for J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1841) p.24

²⁵⁸ Disraeli was a friend of Smythe’s father Lord Strangford. While Disraeli had come across Manners while campaigning on behalf of Lyndhurst for the Trinity College high stewardship. See Ridley, pp.45-46 for a full account.

²⁵⁹ Jonathan Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, *The Historical Journal*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.706

²⁶⁰ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, p.149

²⁶¹ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.269

²⁶² Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, p.143

Baillie-Cochrane was the main source of obstruction in the group. He had favoured keeping the party small and in many ways objected to the inclusion of Disraeli. He wanted to keep it as the three musketeers of Eton and Cambridge. He did not know Disraeli nearly so well as the other two, and was perhaps jealous of his influence on Smythe. Indeed Smyth suggested this himself in a letter to Manners: 'You see Kok does not know him well and sometimes dreads his jokes, and is jealous of his throwing us over'.²⁶³ Baillie-Cochrane similarly displayed his jealousy of Disraeli when he wrote of Disraeli's meetings with Louis Philippe in Paris during 1842 in a sneering note: 'Disraeli's salons rival Law's under the Regent. Guizot, Thiers, Mole, Decazes and God wots how many deiminores are found in his antechamber, while the great man himself is closeted with Louis Philippe at St.Cloud and already pictures himself the founder of a new dynasty with his manfred love-locks stamped on the current coin of the realm.'²⁶⁴

This was clearly jealousy on the part of Baillie-Cochrane. He was the least talented of the three companions. He resented Disraeli's obvious sense of self-importance, and he sneered at his show of ambition. Yet Baillie-Cochrane and his friends were just as ambitious as Disraeli. Indeed they overruled him when he suggested that the group should turn down offers of cabinet position.²⁶⁵ As Weintraub has observed, his spiteful remarks often highlighted the paradox of Disraeli: that these aspiring Tory politicians needed Disraeli far more than he needed them. He had the arrogance and ability to make something of their ambitions.²⁶⁶ The fact is faced with this hostility from his 'friends' Disraeli must have been an exceptional collaborator to do what he did in politics. Perhaps John Manners was accurate to describe Disraeli as 'an easy man to get on with, and incomparably clever'.²⁶⁷ But Blake was shrewd to suggest that Disraeli was never the easiest man to know. He concealed his true thoughts behind an ice-cool facade. He had embarrassed himself in his youth with debts, love-affairs, feuds, and of course his maiden speech. Thus he became more reserved and more calculated.²⁶⁸ It also perhaps explains why so many people were initially mistrustful of Disraeli before they became properly acquainted. Finally Baillie-Cochrane was appalled that Disraeli's conception of Young England differed so far from his own clique of friends: 'the impression he conveys to others of his great personal influence in the House is calculated to embarrass all our movements...D'I's head is full of great movements, vast combinations, the mere phantasmagoria of politique legerdemain'.²⁶⁹

In many ways, Baillie-Cochrane was justified in observing that he conveyed to others a greater influence than he actually wielded. He was also correct that Disraeli's head was indeed full of grandiose ideas, great combinations and grand coalitions. It was a trademark of his whole political life. In one of his earliest pamphlets, *What is He?* he called for the Radicals and Tories to coalesce to form a 'National Party'.²⁷⁰ During the 1850s, he made several attempts to enlist the support of the radicals to support his post-1846 Tories. In the 1860s, he attempted to combine staunchly Anglican Tories with the Roman Catholics against the non-conformist supported Whigs. In 1867 he was successful in forming a Tory-Radical coalition in order to by-pass the Whigs and settle the question of Reform. In the early 1840s Disraeli wished to unite the Youth of the Party to bring influential force against a breed of politics which he thought had failed truly to answer the problems the nation faced. Many of these schemes failed, but Disraeli was a far more effective collaborator than any historian

²⁶³ *Ibid*, p143

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.141

²⁶⁵ Ridley, *Young Disraeli* p.268

²⁶⁶ Weintraub, *Disraeli*, p.206

²⁶⁷ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1 p.159

²⁶⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.175

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp148-149

²⁷⁰ *What is He?*, in *Whigs and Whiggism*, p.4

has yet given him credit for. Young England was one of the first examples of that. For a few sessions, Disraeli was able to lead these patrician youths and to collaborate with their supporters to form a recognisable extra-Peelite ginger group that made considerable waves for a period in the 1840s. Young England punched well above its weight considering its small numbers. Even Blake has conceded that, ‘like the Fourth Party...they made a splash out of all proportion with their weight and numbers’.²⁷¹

It must be pointed out that Young England achieved nothing of substantial political value. Its formal membership never really exceeded that of a small handful of back bench members. It was possibly a movement that was doomed to failure. It was formed by a group of largely young back-bench MPs who did not come across as the most serious of characters. Smythe was a profligate womaniser who had debonair charm in equal measure to his impetuous temper. Wildly extravagant and inevitably in debt, although possessing considerable ability, he did not cut the most profound figure. John Manners, although considered somewhat of a prodigy at Cambridge, was a man who spent his career attempting to defend a series of lost causes.²⁷² Finally it was led by Disraeli, who despite his obvious talent, was remembered by many in Parliament as the rakish protege of Lyndhurst, who had presented himself as the society dandy and made a fool of himself on more than one occasion in his youth. Moreover, the group never really agreed on a specific set of principles, but rather, ‘a hotch-potch, each surrendering his own to the majority’.²⁷³ At times they did not even vote together crucial issues. All of this was coupled with the ridicule and suspicion of the Tory leadership who thought that they were either living in a medievalist fantasy, or believed they were part of a vendetta engineered by Disraeli. This was certainly the view of Sir James Graham, the pompous and ultra-loyal Home Secretary. He wrote to John Wilson Croker: ‘With respect to Young England, the puppets are moved by Disraeli, who is the ablest among them; I consider him unprincipled and disappointed and in despair he has tried the effect of bullying’.²⁷⁴ Yet the most damning criticism heard about Young England, was not so much that they achieved nothing practical. That would have been incredibly difficult given their difference with the party leadership. But rather it was that they proposed no practical solutions to the problems that they championed. In a way this is hardly surprising. As a group they condemned parliament for trying to solve important social questions using utilitarian legislation like the Poor Law. As John Vincent has so astutely pointed out, their failure to offer a panacea of legislative measures was not Disraeli’s (and Young England’s) weakness. Their generality was their strength. In its most general terms Young England put up an attitude rather than policy. This was the attitude of class peace and greater mutual affection.²⁷⁵

Perhaps if Young England had been longer lived, it would have achieved more. Given its lack of organisation, this in itself seems rather unlikely. Certainly, it has made its way into the history books as a blueprint for other such forlorn hopes. By 1845, Young England had ceased to operate as practical parliamentary group. Their split over Peel’s proposed increase to the Maynooth Grant in 1845 was the nail in the coffin. Disraeli has often come under fire from historians who have been quick to criticise his abandonment of Young England. ‘The truth is’, claimed Blake, ‘that Disraeli had principles when he led the party and believed in them sincerely, but they were not the ‘principles’, if that word can be used at all, of Young England’.²⁷⁶ For Blake and other scholars, Young England was

²⁷¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.176

²⁷² Blake reports that the formidable Whewell fellow of trinity once claimed that he would, ‘rather be John Manners than any man who had passed through the university’, *Disraeli*, p.170.

Among these: feudalism, the revival of English monasticism, Carlism. Indeed the only thing he like about modern urban society was the part most condemned: the mills, in which he saw a perfect feudal society.

²⁷³ Whibley, *Lord John Manners* vol.1, p.171

²⁷⁴ Louis J. Jennings, *The Croker, Papers*, vol.3, (London: John Murray, 1885) p.9

²⁷⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, pp.82-83

²⁷⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.762

nothing more than an instrument for his early opportunism: a stick to beat the man who had refused him office. When opportunity for real power arose he was quick to ditch his younger counterparts. Roger Weeks typifies this view. He claims, that ‘Young England was fine to state principles and attract attention, but Disraeli was over forty now, and his young colleagues were not the ones who could open the doors to power’.²⁷⁷ Paul Smith has even belittled his involvement as, ‘an agreeable fling, the last lark of Disraeli’s springtime, with no political weight’.²⁷⁸ And Hesketh Pearson has suggested that, ‘Disraeli was not content to be captain of a clique or to embalm their dreams in fiction...[after 1846] ‘Young England’ was forgotten and its ideals were filed for reference’.²⁷⁹ Thus Blake has concluded that Disraeli’s ambition singly outgrew the company of his young, patrician colleagues. For Disraeli, who was turning forty, ‘It was no longer enough to be ‘hero-worshipped by the patrician youths of Young England, and to be the dominant figure in their exclusive coterie.’²⁸⁰

These sort of statements are doubly problematic. First they assume that Disraeli’s leadership of Young England was nothing more than a platform for him to create noise and grab the attention of the party leadership. Secondly, they ignore Disraeli’s own explanation of the Young England’s failure. A closer reading of *Tancred*, written two years after the dissolution of the Young England parliamentary group, provides us with Disraeli’s subtly conceived reasons for its failure. Far from becoming bored with leading a small Tory splinter group with unrealistic aims, or abandoning the principles and filing them ‘for reference’, Disraeli believed it represented the failure of ‘the new generation’ rather than its principles. Harry Coningsby, the fictional embodiment of George Smythe, the glittering and talented hero of *Coningsby*, failed to live up the youthful promise in *Tancred*. The young scion had become a complacent and flippant MP, whose prosperity had developed ‘a native vein of sauciness’. On the Commons benches he ‘often indulged in quips and cranks that convulsed his neighbouring audience’. His insouciance entertained those around him with, ‘gay sarcasms, his airy personalities, and his happy quotations’.²⁸¹ Even Blake has acknowledged, that George Smythe, while old for his age at Eton and Cambridge, never matured further; ‘he was the spirit of the eternal undergraduate’.²⁸² Bradford has concurred that ‘he was destined to flitter away his talents and to be... “a splendid failure”’.²⁸³ Charles Egremont, according to *Tancred*, the new Lord Marney, went the same way. Despite his abilities as a speaker and a parliamentarian, he had shunned his duties. He was a man, ‘of fine mind rather than brilliant talents’. Notwithstanding his belief that the ‘state of England...was one of impending doom, unless it were timely arrested by those in high places’, he ‘little dreamed of the responsibility which fortune had in store for him’.²⁸⁴ In a different way, Monckton-Milnes, an associate of Young England for whom Disraeli never had much time, was satirised as the pompous Vavasour: ‘Mr. Vavasour’s breakfasts were renowned’, anyone was welcomed, ‘provided you were celebrated’.²⁸⁵ Ridley has summed his character up nicely as ‘a socialite and a snob, pompous greedy and self-important; certainly not the serious political or literary figure he considered himself to be’.²⁸⁶ These portraits furnish Disraeli’s explanation the failure of Young England. Disraeli never distanced himself from the principles of the movement. But he became conscious that the ‘Young Generation’ had failed to realise their potential as political leaders.

²⁷⁷ Roger Weeks, ‘Disraeli as Political Egotist: A Literary and Historical Investigation’, in *Journal of British Studies*, vol.28 no.4, (Cambridge: CUP, 1989) p.403

²⁷⁸ Smith, *Disraeli: a Brief Life*, p.58

²⁷⁹ Pearson, *Dizzy*, p.96

²⁸⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.118-119

²⁸¹ *Tancred*, p.151

²⁸² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.169

²⁸³ Bradford, *Disraeli* p.121

²⁸⁴ *Tancred*, pp.142-143

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.146

²⁸⁶ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.315

The first signs of real strain between Disraeli and Peel began to show in 1843. Peel, at the time, probably thought Disraeli was nothing more than an irritant: a troublemaker on the backbenches. However Disraeli's opinion of Peel was beginning to border on genuine enmity. In August of 1843, Disraeli delivered a speech condemning government policy in Ireland. It was made during the height of agitation in Ireland and the same year as Daniel O'Connell addressed his monster meetings.²⁸⁷ He argued that government policy was fatally flawed and thus no particular reform of the government of Ireland would improve the happiness of the people of Ireland, or the satisfaction of the people of England. Only wholesale overhaul of the administration of Ireland would suffice. Disraeli argued that coercion would be futile and that Ireland should be 'ruled according to policy of Charles I., and not of of Cromwell'.²⁸⁸ Much as he had done in 1839, he argued that a return to the old Tory policy of government in Ireland which he at least considered 'competent', would be preferable to Peel's proposal. He ended on a thunderous note, claiming he would continue to abstain from voting as, 'there were some measures which to introduce was disgraceful, and which to oppose was degrading'.²⁸⁹ He followed this up less than a week later with a criticism of Government's inaction over Russian interference in Serbia, and the danger it posed to the Ottoman Empire. 'The real question' said Disraeli, 'was this, whether England would maintain the independence and integrity of the Turkish Empire, and whether that independence and integrity were endangered by the late conduct of the British Ministry?'. Referring to Peel's previous response over Serbia Disraeli stung his party leader by describing it as, 'couched... in Parliamentary language, and made with all that respect which he felt for the right hon. Gentleman, and to which the right hon. Gentleman replied, with all that explicitness of which he was a master, and all that courtesy which he reserved only for his supporters.'²⁹⁰

Before the 1844 session, Peel made a decision that Hurd has accurately described as, 'his first serious mistake'.²⁹¹ He did not send Disraeli the usual party circular asking his supporters to attend parliament and support him in the upcoming session. Disraeli took this as a serious snub. He wrote a letter to Peel in which he denied in no uncertain terms that he had consistently opposed the government. Indeed, he laid the blame at Peels door, by citing 'the want of courtesy' that Peel had shown him in debate. He finished his letter by saying, 'I look upon the fact of not having received your summons, coupled with the ostentatious manner in which it has been bruited about, as a painful personal procedure, which the past has by no means authorised'.²⁹² Peel replied two days later suggesting that he doubted Disraeli could be counted as a supporter, but happy to be proved otherwise. He offered Disraeli a frosty apology for any 'want of Respect of Courtesy, which I readily admit was fully your due'.²⁹³ However, the damage was irreversible.

Throughout the 1844 session, Disraeli's rhetoric became more invective, as he became increasingly estranged from his party leader. Peel, by contrast, became more imperious towards his backbenchers. Disraeli did not speak much during the 1844 session, but when he did, he made sure it stung Peel. In May, the government was defeated over Ashley's amendment to the Factory Bill, Ashley's amendment which sought to further reduce the working hours of women and children to ten per day, down from the Factory Bill's twelve, passed with the support of Disraeli and Young England. Peel got round this by introducing another bill to the House and practically forced his members to pass it by threatening to tender his resignation over the issue. It passed, with much grumbling, but it

²⁸⁷ Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, p.49

²⁸⁸ M&B, vol.2, p.172

²⁸⁹ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 9th of August 1843, cc.430-438

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, HC Debate, 15th of August 1843, cc.833-839

²⁹¹ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.102.

²⁹² *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Sir Robert Peel, February 4th 1844, vol.4 pp.116-117

²⁹³ C.S. Parker, *Sir Robert Peel: from his Private Papers*, February 6th, 1844, vol.3, pp.145-147

damaged Peel's credit in the long run. Moreover, Peel pulled a similar stunt the following month over sugar duty. He had wished to equalise the cost of colonial and foreign sugar, by reducing the duty on free-grown foreign sugar far more than that on slave-grown colonial sugar. This effectively removed the protection that had previously existed on colonial sugar. An amendment was passed a group pro-colonial Tories and anti-slavery opposition, with the support of Disraeli, to lower colonial sugar duty by the same level free-grown foreign sugar. Peel was incensed and demanded the House rescind the vote and change their mind, again threatening resignation. He called a party meeting at the Carlton and made a speech which even his loyal protégé Gladstone thought, 'haughty and unconciliatory'.²⁹⁴

Peel's speech to the House later that day was hardly any better. It had the air of astounding arrogance and Disraeli was quick to pick up on it. He argued Peel, 'should deign to consult a little more the feelings of his supporters. I do not think he ought to drag them unreasonably through the mire'. While he claimed that despite Sir. Roberts professed abhorrence of slavery, 'it seems that the right hon. Baronet's horror of slavery extends to every place except the Benches behind him. There the gang is still assembled, and there the thong of the whip still sounds'. He finished with a sucker punch to Peel, when he claimed that should a dissolution come, he could go back to Shrewsbury with confidence that he had not, 'weakened my claims upon the confidence of my constituents by not changing my vote within forty-eight hours at the menace of a Minister'.²⁹⁵ John Hobhouse reported that: 'There was a tremendous cheer and Peel, Stanley, and Graham, sat in most painful silence and submission to the rebuke amidst the applause of many near and all opposite them'.²⁹⁶ Peel in the end survived by twenty-two votes. But as Feuchtwanger has astutely pointed out that, 'Peel's hectoring and cracking of the whip had not induced many of his backbenchers to change their vote. Only two did so over the reversal of the factory legislation, and two over the sugar duties'.²⁹⁷ The government had instead been rescued by a change in the number of MPs abstaining or showing up to offer their support. One Tory backbencher had commented to Hobhouse that 'Peel thinks he can govern through Fremantle [the chief whip] and his little clique, but it will not do'.²⁹⁸

In addition to his parliamentary performances, 1844 was the year that Disraeli published *Coningsby*. This contained many jibes aimed at Peel and his allies. But perhaps the most long-lasting had been his description of the Tamworth Manifesto as, 'an attempt to construct a party without principles', a claim to which he would regularly return in the ensuing years.²⁹⁹ After all, it was a bad session for Peel, and a good one for Disraeli. Still he had his own problems to think about. First he had to go to Shrewsbury, where he had neglected his constituents. He need to check if the confidence which he had boasted about to the House in June was still a reality come August. There were rumours that Disraeli was worryingly unsafe in Shrewsbury should an election be called. Having arrived alone in Shrewsbury, he reported to Mary Anne that there was much support in the borough for his opposition to Peel, though, 'a little alarm in some quarters... about Popery, Monasteries, and John Manners'.³⁰⁰ In a speech to his constituents, he covered talked about the Condition of England question, but remained noticeably quiet on the Church and Ireland perhaps due to the presence of some newspaper reporters from London.³⁰¹ He denied that any rift between him and his premier had been caused by Peel refusing for office: 'Robert Peel knows me too well' said Disraeli, 'to think for a moment that any pecuniary circumstances influence my conduct'. He concluded his speech with a

²⁹⁴ John Morley, *Life of W.E. Gladstone*, vol.1, p.644

²⁹⁵ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 17th of June 1844, cc.1027-1030

²⁹⁶ J.C.Hobhouse, *Recollections of a Long Life*, vol.6, p.118

²⁹⁷ Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, pp.53-54

²⁹⁸ John Morley, *Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, vol. 1, p.296

²⁹⁹ *Coningsby*, p.104

³⁰⁰ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Mary Anne, 27th of August 1844, vol.4 p.139

³⁰¹ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.289

defiant stab at the Prime Minister: 'I was Peel's supporter in adversity- in prosperity I will not be his slave'.³⁰²

There can be no doubt that Disraeli was motivated by more than disappointed ambition as he increased the intensity of his attacks on Robert Peel throughout the course of his second ministry. Hurd has observed that these attacks were in part fuelled by a need to accelerate his career, and he is correct to point out that, 'self-advancement is no crime in a politician and it came as second nature to Disraeli'.³⁰³ And it would be ludicrously naive to suggest that Disraeli's ambition to lead the party did not help to drive his attacks upon Peel but there was certainly something else that kept the fire well fuelled. Disraeli and Peel were almost diametrically opposed as individuals: personally and ideologically. First, their attitudes to party could not have been more divergent. Disraeli was one of the first truly party politicians. He had, from his earliest conceptions of politics, envisaged it as a battle between parties, and game that could be played and won not just by clever manoeuvres but also by grand principles.³⁰⁴ Certainly, Disraeli thought elections should be fought on principles and won or lost on those principles. To be sure, his commitment to adversarial party politics, in which everything was dominated by the 'great game', at times degenerated into severe political short-sightedness. Disraeli's account of Daniel O'Connell's last speech to the Commons in 1846, which describes a silent House straining to hear the almost inaudible O'Connell's plea to save his starving country 'as if the future of a party hung upon his rhetoric'.³⁰⁵ It was a shocking lack of perspective. Angus Macintyre's condemnation still rings true as, 'it was not a party but a people that depended on his words'.³⁰⁶ But at his more thoughtful, Disraeli conceived of party and principle acting together. The one was the vehicle for the other.

Peel, by contrast, wished to govern very much as an executive, above the cut-and-thrust of party politics. Upon kissing hands in 1841, and having secured the strongest majority in history, he might have expected him to be grateful for the party's support in opposition and their role in his success. He was not. When Melbourne's Whigs were in their death throws,³⁰⁷ Peel made clear that, 'If I exercise my power, it shall be upon my conception— perhaps imperfect— perhaps mistaken— but — my sincere conception of public duty. That power I will not hold, unless I can hold it consistently with the maintenance of my own opinions'.³⁰⁸ And he stuck to that view, even after seeing the greatest party victory in British political history. Peel saw the cabinet as, 'an inheritor of the ancient executive role of the Crown', and he made it quite clear that he placed his duty as Prime Minister, well above his commitment to his role as Leader of the Conservative Party.³⁰⁹ What Peel could not see that he would have not been Prime Minister if he had not been Leader of the Conservative Party. Moreover, he refused to see how this obliged him to pursue politics in accordance with the interests of the party. As Donald Reed has put it: Peel, if he paid his backbenchers too little attention, paid his cabinet far too much.³¹⁰ But it was not as if he deferred to his Cabinet either. He wished to be involved in the details of every department. Indeed, he dominated his cabinet and invested a superhuman level of personal time and effort into the act of government. Blake is surely right when he suggested that Peel 'has often been described as the last Prime Minister to exercise a detailed control over all the departments of state. The truth is...that he was the first as well as the last, and that he was unwise to

³⁰² *Disraeli's Letters*, vol.4, p.xxiv

³⁰³ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.104

³⁰⁴ *What is He?*, p.4. *Vindication*, p.153, pp.157-160

³⁰⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: a Political Biography*, (London: Longmans, Green, and co., 1872) p.103

³⁰⁶ A. Macintyre, *The Liberator: Daniel O'Connell and the Irish Party, 1830-1847* (London, 1965), p. 290

³⁰⁷ Melbourne did not leave office after the result of the general election, rather he waited to be defeated over the first vote of the new session before resigning.

³⁰⁸ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 27th of August 1841, vol.59 c.429

³⁰⁹ Donald Reed, *Peel and the Victorians*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1987) p.98

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.99

do it'.³¹¹ The sheer amount of the work that Peel burdened himself with revealed an aspect of his character that had previously not been recognised. He became more tetchy and quick to temper, 'at times he scarcely bothered to conceal his contempt for the more wooden-headed of his supporters'.³¹²

During the course of his government Peel increasingly demanded the loyalty of his backbenchers, while decreasingly listening to their concerns about his politics. His imperious attitude to the rump of the party over factory reform and sugar duties was a case in point. Through 1843-44 the party still backed him. After all, he had delivered them a landslide. But they did so with more and more reluctance. A separation began to appear in the party between the old landed interest: the backwoodsmen and country squires to whom Peel had shown so little appreciation, and the government men: the ministers, secretaries, and general talent of the party who the most part would later follow Peel to become the 'Peelites'. Robert Stewart has identified three main grievances his back benchers had against their chief. First that social, economic, and religious policy had taken a much more liberal turn. Secondly, that these transitions of policy had undermined the trust of the voters who had put him in office as leader of the Conservative party, and therefore he had no mandate to do some. Lastly, that the bullish methods which he had used to implement policy had undermined the constitutional purpose of the party and had left his backbenchers feeling ignored, maltreated, and resentful.³¹³

Peel was undoubtedly a great statesmen. But he had never been particularly popular with a large section of the party. Although he was a warm-hearted man in his personal life, he often came across as cold and aloof, most likely through a combination of shyness and an unrelenting work. Moreover, Peel was, in many ways, not a strong debater and as early as 1837, before any personal rift may have formed, Disraeli commented that Peel's style, though effective was, 'both solemn and tawdry; he cannot soar, and his attempts to be imaginative and sentimental must be of offence to every man of taste and refined feeling'.³¹⁴ Unlike Disraeli, he was not fluent and his speeches did not often contain any creative flair. This was a regular criticism that Disraeli had levelled against him.³¹⁵ But Disraeli's aversion to his chief was more than political. Certainly, it went far beyond the philosophical. He disliked Peel's manner, his way of speaking, his approach to politics, and his lack of imagination. To Disraeli, Peel was, 'a second-rate schoolmaster, always lecturing in slow and plodding detail'.³¹⁶ That attention to detail gave Peel an air of authority, but by way of a priggish superiority drawn from informed righteousness. Disraeli, who was notoriously bad with detail,³¹⁷ could not abide self-assuredness that was not derived from great imagination.³¹⁸ Furthermore, Peel's condescension towards the Tory backbenchers, on whose support he relied, grated on him. Disraeli by contrast spoke in a playfully eloquent style, slowly and quietly building up to a stinging point with an emotionless facade, each word dripping with sarcasm.³¹⁹ Jenkins has astutely suggested that 'Disraeli was able to do far more damage to Peel by ridiculing him than he could ever have achieved if he had trespassed onto the Premier's home territory and tried to recite official statistics'.³²⁰

³¹¹ Blake, *Disraeli* p.176

³¹² *Ibid*, p.176

³¹³ Robert Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1971) p.2

³¹⁴ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Sarah Disraeli, 17th of January 1837, vol.2, pp.212-213

³¹⁵ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.104 & p.371

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.106

³¹⁷ *Political Diaries of the Fourth Earl of Carnarvon, 1857-1890*, ed.by Peter Gordon, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p.151, p.252

³¹⁸ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.106

³¹⁹ A passage in *Frazer's Magazine*, a contemporary publication gives a full and detailed account of Disraeli's oratorical style and can be found in full in, Hurd, *Disraeli*, pp.107-108

³²⁰ Jenkins, *Parliament, Party and Politics*, p.27

The following year marked the beginning of open war between Disraeli and his chief. Despite a shaky previous session, Peel returned in 1845 in a position of relative strength. He still had the support of his party, however reluctant, and he still had a strong majority. Disraeli had certainly found a way to hurt Peel with his corrosive snipes and biting invectives. They were something to which Peel were totally unaccustomed and particularly vulnerable. As Hurd has pointed out: ‘his pondering speech and detailed knowledge had been enough for years to hold the Commons in submission’.³²¹ Disraeli, was different: witty, sarcastic, quick on the draw, and most dangerous of all, imaginative. However, for Peel, safety still lay in numbers and his vast majority could still keep Disraeli very much on the fringes: capable of drawing blood, but at too far away to inflict mortal damage. The main talking point in 1845 would be Ireland, and the main battle-ground was the proposed increase to the Maynooth Grant. Maynooth was a Catholic seminary which received a small government subsidy of £9,000 a year. Peel proposed to more than triple the grant to £30,000 per annum.³²² In many ways, his motives were sound. He thought that the lack of funding to Maynooth only produced an environment which encouraged the training of Catholic priest hostile to the state: ‘The state gets to credit for indulgence or liberality. They style of living, the habits engendered at the College, the aquirement probably of the Tutors and professors bearing a relation to the stipend provided for them all combine to send forth a Priesthood embittered, rather than conciliated by the aid granted’.³²³

Peel wished to renegotiate the relationship between the Irish priesthood and the British state in order to forge a new understanding of co-operation and goodwill.³²⁴ According to Reed, he hoped this increase in funding would raise the social and intellectual level of the priesthood in a way that they might moderate politics rather than allow them to descend into partisan demagoguery.³²⁵ Against a backdrop of O’Connell’s mass meetings, with discontent in Ireland growing, and with O’Connell’s campaign for the repeal of the union gathering pace, Maynooth might be a useful instrument of appeasement. After all, as Shannon pointed out, ‘Peel...had vivid memories of how O’Connell had extorted Catholic Emancipation out of panic-stricken Tory ministers in 1828-29’.³²⁶ As sensible as this policy may have been, it was another in a long list of policy changes Peel had undertaken in ‘the national interest’, moving away from established Tory policy. The back-benches of the party were incandescent, and Disraeli detected an opportunity to inflict damage on the premier. After all, the Tory party was the party of Church and State, and the staunch defenders of the Anglican Church, some opposed the government paying a subsidy to Maynooth at all, let alone tripling it. Maynooth, showed just how deep anti-Catholic feeling still ran, not only in his party but in the country at large. Gladstone may have been the only high-profile figure to resign from the cabinet. He resigned as a matter of principle, given the stance he had taken in his 1838 pamphlet *The State in its Relation with the Church*. But many others were similarly concerned.

The line Disraeli took may seem to be the obvious one if we are to view his opposition to Maynooth in purely opportunist terms: that, once again, Peel was performing a volte face over a well establish Tory principle and one he had professed while in opposition. Disraeli’s philippic was certainly dazzling. He opposed Maynooth because, ‘the government were not morally entitled to bring the measure forward such a measure’³²⁷ But, Disraeli also argued that parties should be elected on the principles they declared, form policy in accordance with those principles, and be held in check by a constitutional opposition. Instead of this, ‘we have a great Parliamentary middleman. It is well known

³²¹ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.108

³²² For a detailed account of the mythes, details, and aims of Maynooth, see: Donal A. Kerr, *Peel, Priests, and Politics*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) pp.224-289

³²³ Quoted in Reed, p.138

³²⁴ Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics*, (London: Hambleton, 2007) p.44

³²⁵ Reed, *Peel and the Victorians*, pp.44-45

³²⁶ Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics*, p.44

³²⁷ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 11th of April 1845, vol.79, c.561

what a middleman is; he is a man who bamboozles one party, and plunders the other, till, having obtained a position to which he is not entitled, he cries out, "Let us have no party questions, but fixity of tenure." I want to have a Commission issued to inquire into the tenure by which Downing-street is held.³²⁸ The House erupted in cheers and laughter, J.C. Hobhouse recorded the event: 'Peel hung his head down, changing colour and drawing his hat over his eyes, and Graham grinned a sort of compelled smile, and looked a good deal at me'.³²⁹

Disraeli has been the target of considerable criticism for his supposed hypocrisy over Maynooth. Weintraub likened Disraeli's statements on Roman Catholicism to, 'paddling a canoe—first one side, then the other'.³³⁰ Blake suggested that, 'He ought on his own principles to have been in favour of the grant... Disraeli had shown in *Sybil* much sympathy for 'the old faith'. Surely he should not have grudged [it] £17,000 pa'.³³¹ For Ridley, Maynooth mirrored, 'the so-called cavalier policy for Ireland urged by Disraeli and Young England the previous session—that of allying with the Irish Catholics'.³³² Feuchtwanger takes a similar line, having suggested that given his previous criticisms of Peel's policy towards Ireland as too negative, 'he might have been expected to welcome this move'.³³³ But these suggestions quickly prove problematic. They only make sense, if we assume that Disraeli was being wholly opportunist in his conduct towards Peel. That is not to say that there was no element of opportunism in Disraeli's hounding of Peel. There clearly was. However, Disraeli's earlier pronouncements generally supported these sentiments much more than they opposed them. With regard to Irish policy in 1844, he did not believe that coercion would work. More saliently, he believed that the only way to solve the question of Ireland was a complete reorganisation and reconstruction of 'the government, and even the social state of Ireland'.³³⁴ Tripling the grant to an underfunded Catholic seminary hardly met these criteria. Moreover, with regard to his supposed Catholic sympathies, he most certainly believed that there should be more sympathy afforded to English Catholics, like *Sybil's* Eustace Lyle.³³⁵ He even got slightly misty eyed over the structure of the pre-reformation monastic culture.³³⁶ But Disraeli's attraction to Catholicism was far more historical than it was religious. He had no religious attraction to Oxfordism, only political links. His version of history may have looked back on the pre-reformation Church with a jaundiced eye, but Disraeli never thought that Conservative Party policy should be there to provide financial support to the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. In his earliest writing, he had eulogised the union of Church and State, and had attacked the Whigs for being kept in power on the back of non-conformist and Irish votes.³³⁷ While Disraeli's attacks on Peel were certainly opportunist, and were sometimes motivated more by personal difference than they were purely by policy, the positions that Disraeli defended were far from hypocritically conceived in the way that Robert Blake has suggested.³³⁸ He believed in- and long believed in- a good deal of what he was saying.

At the end of 1845, Peel once again tested the loyalty of his party. He moved to repeal the Corn Laws: the protective tariffs that safeguarded the price of British grown corn, by imposing a duty on grain that was imported. Following a bad harvest, and reports of a potato blight in Ireland, Peel felt compelled to open the ports so that food would become more readily available. This enraged the largely landed back-benches of the party who felt betrayed. Peel had already tinkered with the Corn

³²⁸ *Ibid*, cc.565-566

³²⁹ Hobhouse, *Recollections of a Long Life*, vol.6, pp.140-141

³³⁰ Weintraub, *Disraeli*, p.233

³³¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.188

³³² Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, pp.306-307

³³³ Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, p.58

³³⁴ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 9th of August 1844, vol.76, c.438

³³⁵ *Sybil*, pp.152-155

³³⁶ *Ibid*, p.67

³³⁷ *Vindication*, p.159, *Spirit of Whiggism*, p.266

³³⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.188

Laws in 1842, when he had introduced a sliding scale for Corn Duty which had more than halved the duty which been established in 1828. This measure, though unpopular, had been reluctantly accepted as a final settlement on the question of agricultural free-trade.³³⁹ The Duke of Buckingham, one of the leading agriculturalists, had resigned from the cabinet over the issue. Hobhouse reported that Buckingham and Richmond, along with a few other saw that this reduction foreshadowed Peel's commitment to total repeal. But Richmond was skeptical of Hobhouse's prediction that it might only lay a few years away.³⁴⁰ Disraeli's attitude was perhaps more characteristic of the majority at this point. He assured his constituents at Shrewsbury not to desert Peel 'because you think he will do a certain act that I think he will not'.³⁴¹ Disraeli was proved very wrong as Peel came to that conclusion less than four years after his Corn Law of 1842.

There has been much debate behind Peel's true motives behind full repeal in 1845-46. His more generous biographers have seen him as putting nation above party and acting in the national interest: Gash argued that Peel, sacrificed party advantage in the cause of national interest. The potato famine was a national emergency and allowing cheap grain into the country could alleviate that problem.³⁴² Hurd argues much along the same lines as Gash: that the potato famine was the largest factor in Peel's decision. 'It was wet weather', Hurd argued, 'that finally convinced Peel to repeal the Corn Laws—the weather and the failure of the Irish potato crop... Taken together [they]... created a crisis in Westminster leading to the repeal of the Corn Laws and the break-up of the Conservative party'.³⁴³ Michael Lusztiġ's article perhaps formulates the most novel, if not the most persuasive, suggestion; that Peel repealed the Corn Laws as an act of institutional preservation: 'Corn Law repeal', he argued, 'emerges as a by-product of larger institutional objectives, specifically, Peel's desire to preserve the integrity of the British constitution in the face of the potential agitation by groups dissatisfied with the institutional status quo'.³⁴⁴ In a different way, Stigler been seen repeal as an inevitability, brought about by the shift in class predominance, and in no way relating to any economic conversion on Peel's part: 'economists exert a minor and scarcely detectable influence on the societies in which they live . . . if Cobden had spoken only Yiddish, and with a stammer, and Peel had been a narrow, stupid man, England would have moved toward free trade in grain as its agricultural classes declined and its manufacturing and commercial classes grew.'³⁴⁵ Conversely, Lord Robbins believed that 'Any account . . . of the coming of free trade in the United Kingdom which omitted the influence of economic thought and of economists would be defective and, indeed, absurd.'³⁴⁶

Boyd Hilton leads a group of scholars who have been much more skeptical. He contends that 'Peel's economic policies, were not flexible at all, but rather rigid; that though he may have been politically pragmatic, willing to bide his time for favourable moments in which to implement his ideas, the ideas themselves were usually held dogmatically'.³⁴⁷ With specific regard to Peel's intention the repeal, he argued that the potato blight should be 'rightly regarded as a mere pretext for repeal'.³⁴⁸ Blake saw Peel's situation much in the same way as Hilton: that he was personally committed to free trade from a much earlier date and could not morally continue to uphold protection. He could not bear to argue that he wanted the suspend the Corn Laws as a temporary expedient, but nor could he openly

³³⁹ Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, pp.11-13

³⁴⁰ Hobhouse, *Recollections of a Long Life*, vol.6, pp.51-53

³⁴¹ M&B, 9th of May 1842, vol.2, p.141

³⁴² Gash, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel after 1830*, (London: Longman, 1972) pp.609-611

³⁴³ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.109

³⁴⁴ Michael Lusztiġ, 'Solving Peel's Puzzle: Repeal of the Corn Laws and Institutional Preservation', in *Comparative Politics*, vol.27, no.4, (New York: City University of New York, 1995) p.408

³⁴⁵ George J. Stigler, *The Economist as Preacher and other Essays*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982) pp.63-64

³⁴⁶ Lord Robbins, *Politics and Economics*, (London: Macmillan, 1963) p.9

³⁴⁷ Boyd Hilton, 'Peel: A Reappraisal', *The Historical Journal*, vol.22, no.3, (Cambridge: CUP, 1979) p.589

³⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.598

declare in favour of free trade as he would leave himself totally open to charges of apostasy. Therefore he exploited the famine in Ireland, ‘on grounds of emergency that he could justify his actions in personally piloting repeal through the House’.³⁴⁹ In a slightly different way Douglas Irwin has also argued that Peel’s U-turn over the Corn Laws cannot be attributed to the influence of abstract economic theory, but rather to the more subtle source of power of different interest groups and a gradually evolving conviction that protection was no longer necessary, informed by his experiences experimenting with free-trade and tariff reforms in other industries, convinced him of the necessity to repeal.³⁵⁰ But one thing is perhaps clear: Peel certainly did not intend to break his party over the issue. As Macintyre has argued, ‘The party’s stomach for unpalatable medicine was a measure of its toughness, and it was still Peel’s natural instrument of government. He did not intend to break his party; even after he moved for substantive repeal of the Corn Laws, he did not expect more than another murmurous, unproductive mutiny.’³⁵¹

That lack of perspective is astounding. Despite the trials Peel imposed on his back-benchers, he still expected their support. A letter written by Monckton-Milnes perhaps summed up their attitude to Peel’s expectations best: ‘Peel is absolutely indefensible; he is asking from his party all the blind confidence the country gentlemen placed in Mr. Pitt, all the affectionate devotion Mr. Canning won from his friends, and all the adherence Lord John and the Whigs get from ‘family compact’ without himself fulfilling any of the engagements on his side’.³⁵² The fact was that things had changed from the days of Canning and Pitt. The Royal prerogative was not what it once had been. The Reform Act, while it had not changed how politics looked on a local or national level, had in many ways changed everything.³⁵³ Disraeli had from a very early time understood the importance of Reform Act: the floodgates had been opened, and that like it or not, despite the limited nature of the measure, politics had become popular. As Stewart has suggested, 1832 had afforded a new importance to constituency opinion which meant that Peel needed much more support from his party than previous Tory leaders.³⁵⁴ Norman Gash has suggested, in typically sympathetic fashion, that Peel fully understood that support of the rank-and-file had replaced the Crown as the rock upon which ministries stood.³⁵⁵ But if he was so aware of this necessity then this does beg the question as to why he was so condescending towards his party regulars. Moreover: why was he so unwilling to take consultation of their opinions?

As 1846 broke, Disraeli emerged as one of the leading figures of the back bench opposition to Peel. The storming philippics and stinging invectives for which he had become known now increased in volume and intensity as he was cheered on by the majority of his fellow backbenchers. On the 22nd of January 1846 Peel introduced the proposal to the House with a, ‘long and tedious speech full of details...so involved that scarcely anyone could follow it’. This was followed by an intervention from Lord John Russell, that Blake has rightly described as ‘an even less intelligible speech’.³⁵⁶ Both were met with silence by the House. Having been bored into lethargy by these opening addresses the members momentarily seemed to have neither the will nor energy to oppose them. Then Disraeli rose to his feet and responded with a masterpiece. He first claimed he would, ‘have abstained from

³⁴⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.222

³⁵⁰ Douglas Irwin, ‘Political Economy and Peel’s Repeal of the Corn Laws’, in *Economics and Politics*, vol.1, No.1, (John Wiley and Sons, 1989) pp.41-59

³⁵¹ Macintyre, ‘Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists: a Lost Cause?’ p.143

³⁵² T.W. Reid, *The Life, Letters, and Friendships of Richard Monckton-Milnes, First Lord Houghton*, vol.1, (London:1962) p.331

³⁵³ Norman Gash famously remarked that ‘This is not to say the Reform Act changed nothing...[But] there was scarcely a feature of the old unreformed system that could not be found in existence after 1832’. Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.x. An observation still known to plague undergraduates in their exams.

³⁵⁴ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.20

³⁵⁵ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, p.54

³⁵⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.226

intruding myself on the House at the present moment, had it not been for the peculiar tone of the right hon. Gentleman.³⁵⁷ This was somewhat disingenuous. As Blake has observed, it was not an impromptu speech. Rather, it was a cleverly planned exercise in invective. He compared the Peel to a Turkish admiral who sailed his fleet into an enemy port: “I have an objection to war. I see no use in prolonging the struggle, and the only reason I had for accepting the command, was that I might terminate the contest by betraying my master.”³⁵⁸ Next he compared Peel’s conduct to that of the nurse who kills the baby Protection:

‘the nurse, in a fit of patriotic frenzy, dashes its brains out, and comes down to give master and mistress an account of this terrible murder. The nurse, too, a person of a very orderly demeanour; not given to drink; and never showing any emotion except of late, when kicking against protection’³⁵⁹

Finally, Disraeli ridiculed the flexible principles of Peel: great statesmen represented great ideas, and that he did not care:

‘what may be the position of a man who never originates an idea — a watcher of the atmosphere — a man who, as he says, takes his observations, and when he finds the wind in a certain quarter trims to suit it. Such a person may be a powerful minister, but he is no more a great statesman than the man who gets up behind a carriage is a great whip. Both are disciples of progress. Both, perhaps, may get a good place.’³⁶⁰

Disraeli made it clear that his opposition to Peel was on the grounds of political principle; that Peel had completely abandoned his election promises, corroded the respectability of his office, and betrayed his party. Peel, who had dismissed the competence of his party and the interests of their electors, had asked to be judged by posterity. This did not sit well with Disraeli:

‘Posterity is a most limited assembly...while we are admitting the principles of relaxed commerce—there is extreme danger of our admitting the principles of relaxed politics. I advise, therefore, that we all, whatever may be our opinions about free trade, oppose the introduction of free politics. Let men stand by the principle by which they rise—right or wrong. I make no exception. If they be in the wrong, they must retire to that shade of private life with which our present rulers have often threatened us... it is not a legitimate trial of the principles of free trade against the principle of protection, if a Parliament, the majority of which are elected to support protection, be gained over to free trade by the arts of the very individual whom they were elected to support in an opposite career...Do not, then, because you see a great personage giving up his opinions, do not cheer him on—do not yield so ready a reward to political tergiversation. Above all, maintain the line of demarcation between parties; for it is only by maintaining the independence of party that you can maintain the integrity of public men, and the power and influence of Parliament itself.’³⁶¹

It is striking how little Disraeli actually mentioned the principles of free-trade or protection during his 1846 speeches. He had refused to oppose Peel’s sliding scale in 1842 when Vyvyan attempted to enlist him.³⁶² It seems likely that he had no particular aversion to free-trade. Indeed, he would boast about a conversation with Palmerston some years later which Stanley recorded in his

³⁵⁷ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC debates 22nd of January 1846, vol.83 c.111

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, c.112

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, c.120

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, c.116

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, cc.122-123

³⁶² *Disraeli’s Letters*, D to Mary Anne, 13th of March 1842, vol.4, p.38-39

diary: “Search my speeches through, and you will not find one word of protection in them.”³⁶³ But Disraeli was in every sense a party politician. He understood the popular element that the Reform Act had let loose. And for Disraeli the answer for the question it asked was clearly demarcated parties with coherent election principles on which governments might be established. For him, Peel’s attempt to govern by executive, trample upon the principles of the Conservative party, and sully the election pledges his MPs had made to their constituents was an aberration of his conception about how post-1832 politics should work.

Disraeli’s speech had the backbenchers cheering on as he lambasted his leader. This was at least because Disraeli gave them what they wanted to hear. After all, as Ridley has suggested, these country squires came up to Westminster, ‘sullen and apprehensive but not yet defiant’.³⁶⁴ Among those watching Disraeli from the back-benches was a man who few would have guessed might play a decisive role in 1846: Lord George Bentinck. He was the second son of the Duke of Portland, one of the largest land-owners in the country and regarded by many, including Charles Greville, with whom he had long held a grudge, as, ‘the leviathan of the Turf’. Lord George has been MP for Kings Lynn for eighteen years, and had remained a silent one up until 1846. He had been a colossal figure in the British racing scene and had made a reputation for cleaning up the sport’s more disreputable practices. For some historians this seems to have been all that mattered about him. For Leonard he was simply, ‘a leading figure in the Jockey Club’.³⁶⁵ For Norman Gash, Bentinck brought ‘the ruthless determination and single-mindedness which he had formerly shown in hunting down dishonest trainers and crooked jockeys on the Turf’ to politics.³⁶⁶ Certainly throughout 1846 Bentinck brought the methods and language derived from his ‘sporting word’ and with it ‘a new and degrading element’ to the practice of parliamentary leadership.³⁶⁷ Hurd is equally dismissive, ‘better known as King of the Turf, a racing fanatic...[who] supplied Disraeli what Disraeli was lacking—wealth, pedigree, a noble name and therefore credibility among the Tory squires’.³⁶⁸ The only modern biography written of Bentinck, by Michael Seth-Smith is entitled, *Lord Paramount of the Turf*, and brushes over his politics in favour of a detailed breakdown of his horse racing career.³⁶⁹ This interpretation of Bentinck- as the aristocratic racing enthusiast whose first interest in politics was aroused eighteen years after arriving in the House, and who commanded the respect of the Tory squires through his high-birth and racing reputation- is not entirely wrong, but is certainly misleading. To be sure, that oversimplification of Bentinck’s politics, and minimisation of his political status makes sense of the interpretation of Disraeli that sees him as picking sides with the booby-squires and die-hard protectionists on purely opportunist grounds. By contrasting their ignorance with Disraeli’s brilliance, he is conceived to be taking lead of a political group with whom he had no sympathies or political affinity. But this was clearly not the case.

Bentinck is at times hard to pin down as a politician, Gash’s interpretation is far too unforgiving. By contrast Disraeli’s hero-worship of him in his 1852 political biography, while a remarkable work and invaluable tool for understanding the Corn Law crisis, is too flawless and too far removed from reality to be of much help. He was certainly not the die-hard Tory ultra that some scholars have portrayed him to be, but nor was he Disraeli’s 1688 Whig, even if Blake thought is accurate.³⁷⁰ Macintyre’s suggestion that he was a Canningite Tory is perhaps the best assessment of

³⁶³ *Derby Diaries 1849-1869*, p.8.

³⁶⁴ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.150

³⁶⁵ Leonard, *The Great Rivalry*, p.58

³⁶⁶ Gash, *Sir Robert Peel after 1830*, p.275

³⁶⁷ Norman Gash, 'Lord George Bentinck and his Sporting World', in *Pillars of Government and Other Essays on State and Society c. 1770-c. 1880*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1986) pp.162-175

³⁶⁸ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.112

³⁶⁹ Michael Seth-Smith, *The Lord Paramount of the Turf: Lord George Bentinck*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1971)

³⁷⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.228

Bentinck's politics.³⁷¹ After all, he was the grandson of one Prime Minister and the nephew of another.³⁷² His political career was somewhat meandering. But it leaves an impression of the broad political principles in which he believed. He had been a Tory under Canning, and had supported Catholic Emancipation. He defected to the Whigs and supported electoral reform in 1832. Thereafter he had been a central member of the 'Derby Dilly', with whom he came back across to the Conservatives. He became an ardent supporter of Robert Peel. Despite his reputation as a silent MP, he had turned down ministerial office on two occasions: 1830 under Pitt, and 1841 under Peel, which as Macintyre is keen to point out, 'made him a backbencher by choice'.³⁷³ The picture we get therefore, is of a man who far from naturally leading the protectionist Tory ultras in 1846, was one with a record of toleration and moderate reform. His religious beliefs are largely unclear. Blake and Macintyre are most likely both correct to suppose that he supported religious toleration and the established Anglican Church, but disliked clericalism and artificial religious zeal.³⁷⁴ This was all combined with a firm belief in the preeminence of a landed aristocracy and importance of a territorial constitution, in a general defence of the bucolic way of life which furnished Britain with a stable social stratum. He was a man of no small ability, and one with great capacity for work, also unrelenting drive. However Bentinck also possessed a violent temper and occasional tendency towards vindictiveness. John Manners, a supporter of Lord George, wrote to Disraeli of his 'stern vehemence' which led him to 'never argue out a point with him'.³⁷⁵ Put another way: he was a man who, aside from his more unsavoury qualities, was in so many ways a natural leader in British politics during the first half nineteenth century.

As far as we can tell, Disraeli and Bentinck had no interaction before 1846. However, after hearing Disraeli's speech against Peel's introduction of repeal, Bentinck quickly made moves to introduce himself and enlist the help of the former leader of Young England. Despite his eighteen years in the House, and the respect in which he was held among back-benchers, he was not an experienced debater. He possessed a weak voice and shied away from public speaking. Disraeli later reported that he had even tried to get a legal representative to read his first speech on the Corn Laws on his behalf.³⁷⁶ He saw in Disraeli someone who had all the skills he required, and detected someone who might serve the protectionist cause far more eloquently than he could. Moreover, while the Tory squires enjoyed Disraeli's philippics and generally shared his sentiments, they would not have been willing to follow him. In 1846, his reputation was still somewhat dubious. His reputation as a novelist, his debts, his scrapes with the D'Orsays, the dandyish appearance of his younger years, and his leadership of the romantic Young England, all still counted against him in the eyes of the respectable Tory squirearchy. This is why Bentinck and Disraeli's relationship was really quite remarkable. They each needed each other equally as much: Bentinck needed Disraeli's oratory and political counsel, while Disraeli needed Bentinck's status within the party. Disraeli has largely been credited with Peels downfall, but as Macintyre has suggested, 'A rebellion was certain. Without Bentinck's leadership, it would not have ended in Peel's deposition, the proscription of the Peelites and the continued existence of an independent protectionist party'.³⁷⁷ Lord Blake takes a similar line claiming that, while it is true that Disraeli overthrew Peel, 'it is very doubtful whether even he could have managed it without Bentinck. Certainly he would have been the last person to claim otherwise'.³⁷⁸ However it was not a simple *pro quid pro* relationship. They had very similar political

³⁷¹ Macintyre, 'Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists', p.145

³⁷² He was the grandson of 3rd Duke of Portland, and the nephew of George Canning, who was married into the family.

³⁷³ Macintyre, 'Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists', p.145

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.149. Blake, *Disraeli*, p.228

³⁷⁵ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Lord John Manners, 12th of October 1850, vol.5, p.360 fn.1

³⁷⁶ Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography*, (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1972) p.90

³⁷⁷ Macintyre, 'Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists', p.144

³⁷⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.230

sentiments, and quickly became close friends. It was certainly not as Ridley describes it, that ‘Bentinck needed a Jockey as much as Disraeli needed the ride’.³⁷⁹

Throughout the 1846 session, Bentinck and Disraeli put a great deal of work in to derailing Peel’s Corn Law legislation. Neither Bentinck nor Disraeli had previously had any involvement with the grassroots protectionist movement, the ‘Anti-League’, before the former assumed the Protectionist leadership in 1846. It was a very effective political force for protectionism ‘out of doors’. The activity and organisation of the Anti-League have been well-charted.³⁸⁰ It was more decentralised, less theatrical, and almost certainly more effective than Cobden’s Anti-Corn Law League. It had originated as an organisation for disgruntled tenant-farmers, but evolved owing to the financial backing of the greater landowners, who had been spurred into activity by Cobden’s anti-Landlord, anti-Aristocracy rhetoric.³⁸¹ It became a vital tool in the opposition to Peel’s free-trade policies. It took the battle to the registration courts. It gathered petitions to be sent to both House of Parliament, and threatened MPs from agricultural seats, who might abandon their electoral promises, with defeat at the next election.³⁸² Moreover, it unified the parliamentary party. Landowners, agriculturalists of all descriptions, as well as those from the colonial sugar lobby, and Ultra-protestants whose noses had been put out of joint by Maynooth, all became more unified in their distrust and indignation over Peel’s conduct. Macintyre has suggested that the effectiveness of the Anti-League was one of the main reasons that Peel faced far more opposition to repeal than he suspected he would, or had previously faced in 1844 and 1845.³⁸³

Back ‘indoors’, Disraeli and Bentinck began open warfare with Peel. Bentinck felt betrayed by Peel and later claimed that his aim was: ‘to rally the broken and dispirited forces of a betrayed and insulted party, and to avenge the country gentlemen and landed aristocracy of England upon the Minister who, presuming upon their weakness, falsely flattered himself that they could be trampled upon with impunity’.³⁸⁴ Bentinck demanded that Tory MPs who wished to vote in favour of repeal call a bye-election and go to their constituents to ask for the authority to do so. He was inspired by a high aristocratic notion of honour, and became exasperated by the attitudes of such MPs who had been voted in promising to protect the Corn Laws, but were now considering supporting repeal. He was also infuriated by his friend and ally Stanley who advised the party against this course:

‘It would have been very good and very Constitutional advice to have given them before they got elected, ‘to give no pledges’- but having been elected by virtue entirely of specific pledges, it is too late to repent the indiscretion of having given them. Honour- Honest- and every feeling of a Gentleman dictate in my opinion in such cases the obligation to resign their seats before giving a vote in breach of these pledges I think the most damning fact of the whole of this bad business will be the shock that will be given to the mind of the Middle Classes of the English People by such wholesale examples of political lying and pledge-breaking on the part of the more educated and exalted Rank of Men who constitute their Representative and the Peers of Parliament.’³⁸⁵

Through Bentinck’s vehemence and by way of moral pressure from the Anti-League, some MPs who had come to believe in the necessity of repeal, were convinced that they could not honourably retain their seat and should therefore, submit themselves for reelection. Of such bye-

³⁷⁹ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.324

³⁸⁰ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, pp.56-58, and *Foundation of the Conservative Party*, pp.206-212; Mary Lawson-Tancred, ‘The Anti-League and the Corn Law crisis of 1846’, in *Historical Journal*, Vol.3, No. 2 (Cambridge: CUP, 1960) pp.164-182

³⁸¹ Macintyre, ‘Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists’, p.142-143

³⁸² Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.57

³⁸³ Macintyre, ‘Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists’, pp.143-144

³⁸⁴ *The Croker Papers*, vol.3, p.146

³⁸⁵ Bentinck to Stanley, 20th of January 1846, cited in Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.58

elections, the Protectionists were by-and-large predominant: winning 16 out of 24 in the first half of 1846.³⁸⁶ The debate on the first reading of the Corn Importation Bill took place on the 9th of February 1846, and was dragged out by the protectionists until the 27th. Over a hundred back-benchers stood up and spoke in defence of the Corn Laws. On the 8th night Disraeli delivered his first speech since his great philippic against Peel. It was an uncharacteristically methodical speech in which he debated the principles of political economy behind repeal. He claimed that repeal would create deflation on gold, while discussing the various problems of countering protective duty with free trade. He argued that British agriculture under the Corn Laws had become the most productive in the world as it had managed to raise production to feed a rapidly burgeoning population that had doubled in the previous fifty years. Furthermore, he insulted that because agriculture bore the burdens of Britain's territorial constitution, it should be provided with special dispensation.³⁸⁷ It was a different approach to the debate from Disraeli. And had a mixed reception. Greville thought the speech poor and worthless.³⁸⁸ A junior minister Sir George Clerk proved that, not for the first nor last time in his career, Disraeli's figures were inaccurate and facts mistaken.³⁸⁹

The more interesting contribution to the debate however, came in the form of Lord George Bentinck's first speech to the House. The speech lasted three hours in which he spoke with no notes and reeled of series of detailed statistics from memory. He started by apologising for his intrusion on the House in which he had always felt unworthy to address. His speech challenged the various advocates of free trade and countered the suggestion that industries which had already relaxed protective duties had duly prospered from it. Lord George also confronted the assertion that domestic industries such as timber, meat, wool, and silk, which had been relieved of their protective tariffs were now more profitable and that prices had not been effected. It was competent, well-researched, and attacked Peel on what was always considered his home ground: figures and statistics. Indeed, if he had been a more accomplished public speaker it may have been considered a great oration as it certainly reads very well today.³⁹⁰ Lord George was a staunch supporter of the Crown and the other great institutions of the nation. But he was not a blind supporter of the House of Hanover, and even less of Queen Victoria's husband Albert. The Prince Consort was a free-trade supporter and an advocate of industrial innovation who had become a great admirer of Sir Robert Peel. On the first night of Peel introducing his Corn Law repeal, Prince Albert had sat in the public gallery and watched the debate. Reed has acknowledged how this was 'rightly taken as a sign of royal support'.³⁹¹ His presence did not escape Bentinck:

"Sir, with regard to our limited monarchy, I have no observation to make; but, if so humble an individual as myself might be permitted to whisper a word in the ear of that illustrious and royal Personage, who, as he stands nearest, so is he justly dearest, to Her who sits upon the throne, I would take leave to say, that I cannot but think he listened to ill advice, when, on the first night of this great discussion, he allowed himself to be seduced by the First Minister of the Crown to come down in this House to usher in, to give éclat, and, as it were, by reflection from the Queen, to give the semblance of the personal sanction of Her Majesty to a measure which, be it for good or for evil, a great majority at least of the landed aristocracy of England, of Scotland, and of Ireland, imagine will be fraught with deep injury, if not ruin, to them—a measure which, not confined in its operation to this great class, is calculated to grind down countless smaller interests engaged in the domestic trades and industry of this Empire, transferring the profits of all these interests—English, Scotch, Irish, and Colonial—great

³⁸⁶ Macintyre, 'Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists', p.144

³⁸⁷ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 20th of February 1846, vol.83, cc.1318-1347

³⁸⁸ *The Greville Memoirs*, vol.5, p.302

³⁸⁹ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 20th of February 1846, vol.83, cc.1420-1439

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, HC Debate, 27th of February 1846, vol.84, cc.303-349

³⁹¹ Reed, *Peel and the Victorians*, p.168

and small alike, from Englishmen, from Scotchmen, and from Irishmen, to Americans, to Frenchmen, to Russians, to Poles, to Prussians, and to Germans... If we are a proud aristocracy, we are proud of our honour, inasmuch as we never have been guilty, and never can be guilty, of double-dealing with the farmers of England—of swindling our opponents, deceiving our friends, or betraying our constituents.”³⁹²

It can be argued either way whether any constitutional boundaries were broken when Albert came to watch from the gallery. Regardless, royal support for Robert Peel was implied. Bentinck’s speech could hardly have helped the Tories in the long-run as one of the features of protectionist politics over the next decade would be the royal hostility under which they laboured. But in the short term the contrast in styles and approach between Disraeli and Bentinck on the question of the Corn Laws probably served the Protectionists a good turn. It gave a breadth and variety to the debate. Lord George preferred to defend protective duties on their economic merit. He argued that they ensured national self-sufficiency and secured a stable price for both consumer and producer. Disraeli, by contrast, had very little to say at all about protection. The 15th Earl of Derby recorded that he later boasted to Palmerston about this very fact.³⁹³ It is likely that Disraeli had no belief in protection on abstract terms, and for the most part he probably thought free trade the preferable principle of the two. That said, he had a long running commitment and consistent track-record of support for the Corn Laws. Even when he took radical candidature in the early 1830s, he was still committed to the preservation of the Corn Laws. He had always voted in favour of the protective legislation. True, he had voted for Peel’s Corn Law of 1842, and even turned down a chance to speak in opposition.³⁹⁴ But that was seen by all but the most hard line of protectionists as a fair settlement of the question surrounding the heavy duty being levied on foreign grain. Disraeli’s belief in the Corn Laws did not stem from any confidence he may have had in the economic advantages of them, but rather in the social role they played in protecting and insuring the continuing influence of a landed aristocratic ruling class. Disraeli’s belief in the predominance of land was one of the most consistent hallmarks of political career. It was this deference to land more than anything else which eventually endeared him to the gentry which he came to lead.

Disraeli’s relationship with Bentinck was one that, in many ways, defined his political career. They had never spoken at the start of 1846. By the end of the year they had become intimate friends. Bentinck’s support of Disraeli brought him into the party fold and with his patronage took him from a talented back-bencher of somewhat dubious reputation, and left him as his natural successor to the leadership the Protectionist Party in the Commons. The change of formality in the way Bentinck addressed Disraeli in his letters is as good an indication as any of genuine character of their friendship. On the 31st of March 1846, in first letter to Disraeli, he addresses him as ‘My Dear Sir,’ and signs it off, ‘Very sincerely yours,’. By the middle of June when Peel was about to be defeated over the Irish Coercion Bill, he started his letter, ‘My Dear Disraeli’, and ended, ‘Always yours most sincerely’. At the end of the year he wrote to Disraeli and addressed him, ‘My Dear D.’, and signed it off, ‘Yours ever’. As Blake has observed, this change from formal to informal address was, ‘as intimate a mode of subscription and signature from any of Disraeli’s close friends- save one or two exceptions like George Smythe’.³⁹⁵ The other fact is worth considering: Bentinck was a man with a short and violent temper. He was an easy man to fall-out with and he was one to hold a grudge. However he never argued with Disraeli. It is beyond doubt that their friendship was genuine and heartfelt. Despite the best efforts of some historians to contrast their backgrounds, interests, and political careers, the two saw the world in much the same way. It was Bentinck who had stood

³⁹² *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 27th of February 1846, vol.84, cc.349-349

³⁹³ *Derby Diaries 1849-1869*, p.8.

³⁹⁴ *Disraeli’s Letters*, D to Mary Anne, 13th of March 1842, vol.4, pp.34-35

³⁹⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.229

alongside Disraeli and defied his party when they introduced Jewish Emancipation in 1848. Similarly, it was Bentinck who helped Disraeli realise his ambition of leading the party: he recognised that to lead the protectionist Tories after 1846, a man would need to be a land-owner, and if he was not an aristocrat he would need to represent a county seat.³⁹⁶ Disraeli was already the MP for Buckinghamshire, but there was no way that he could afford, or expect his father to be able to afford, the land-owning status he required. Bentinck and his brothers loaned him the money to buy Hughenden outright. They did not realistically expect repayment, as they knew Disraeli could never afford it.³⁹⁷ But this gesture gave Disraeli the foundations for party leadership. He became an country squire in his own right. It was an investment, by Bentinck, not only in his friend, but in the future of the party.

Disraeli and Bentinck's relationship was summed up best by a short anecdote from 1848. Lord George had been defeated by the government over an amendment to reintroduce a protective duty of sugar. Moreover, the day before he had watched at Epsom as Surplice, a colt bred from his beloved horse Crucifix, went on to win the Derby, a race that had alluded him throughout his racing career. He had sold Crucifix with the rest of his stables in 1846, when he turned his attentions in full to politics. And now its offspring had gone on to win the Derby. So it was understandable, given this double blow, that Disraeli came to him in the House of Commons library and offered consolation. Bentinck, in his state of despair, retorted that Disraeli didn't understand horse-racing, let alone the importance of the Derby. Disraeli made a now famous reply: 'It is the blue riband of the Turf'.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ Bentinck represented the borough of Kings Lynn, but as the son of Duke his status was somewhat guaranteed.

³⁹⁷ The loan was complicated somewhat by the sudden and early death of George Bentinck. The deal was later completed when his brother agreed to pay the sum.

³⁹⁸ For the full account of the 1846 Derby and this exchange with Disraeli see: Seth-Smith, *Lord Paramount of the Turf*, pp.154-158

Chapter Three: Young England and The Trilogy

I: 'Young England'

Between 1844 and 1847 Disraeli wrote those books that have become known as his 'Young England Trilogy'. These three novels: *Coningsby; or The New Generation*, *Sybil; or The Two Nations*, and *Tancred; or The New Crusade* were among Disraeli's most highly rated works. To be sure, they did not achieve the public acclaim or financial success of his later novels, *Lothair* and *Endymion*. But, it is this trilogy that has attracted the most scholarly attention. That is not without good reason. Nowhere in Disraeli's other fiction were his political ideas and historical views so clearly and unflinchingly expressed. Moreover, they provide a wealth of material for the study of many different disciplines. *Coningsby* constitutes a brilliant political novel, the first of its genre in the English language. *Sybil* was a social novel which rivalled the achievements of Gaskell and Carlyle. As Lord Blake commented Disraeli 'would be remembered for these if he had written nothing else and had never become a minister'.³⁹⁹ Even the infamously critical literary scholar F.R. Leavis, when constructing his *Great Tradition*, commented: 'The novelist who has not been revived is Disraeli. Yet, though he is not one of the great novelists, he is so alive and intelligent as to deserve permanent currency, at any rate in the trilogy *Coningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred*'.⁴⁰⁰ *Tancred* stands a little apart. Certainly, it has divided historical opinion as to its merits, and indeed its message. Its importance has often been overlooked. Disraeli took the time to finish *Tancred* when his career was in the ascendancy. The message it conveys was, no doubt, controversial and did nothing to ingratiate himself with his Protectionist party colleagues. That said, Disraeli rated it as his favourite novel. That alone merits some further investigation. These novels were inspired by his colleagues from Young England. This cannot be described as a party. But as a parliamentary group it gathered a disproportionate amount of influence and public attention. These novels have often been described as a 'manifesto' for Young England. This is an over-simplification. Young England was central to the writing of these novels. But the ideas of the movement are not central to the message of the trilogy. Whether consciously or not, the trilogy is much more a record of Disraeli's political collaboration with the young patrician aristocrats of the Young England than a representation of the groups political thought. Moreover, despite the more explicitly political message of these novels, they represented no great departure from his earlier silver-fork fiction. Disraeli rarely strayed from the romantic society fiction with which he had found his early success. There is a great deal of continuity from the themes of Disraeli's earlier romances, and also in the idiosyncratic views on history and politics of his polemics and political writing, with the teachings that are conveyed through the trilogy of the 1840s.

In recent years there has been a great deal of scholarship dedicated to Disraeli's reputation as a novelist and into the Disraeli's merits as a political thinker.⁴⁰¹ In 1966, Lord Blake expressed surprise that there had not been a book devoted to Disraeli's novels.⁴⁰² Since then some great strides have been made to achieving a more complete view of Disraeli as a politician. However, when considering Disraeli's trilogy of the 1840s, much of the scholarship has encountered a problem. Those studies that have considered Disraeli's novels, and the ideas contained within them, from a more literary point of view, have often been so engaged with the detail of the text and the psychology of the

³⁹⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.191.

⁴⁰⁰ F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p.1

⁴⁰¹ For analysis Disraeli's fiction see: Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, (London: University of Toronto Press, 2013); William Kuhn, *The Politics of Pleasure*, (London: Free Press, 2006); Daniel R. Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1979); Richard Levine, *Benjamin Disraeli*, (New York: Twayne Publishing, 1968). For scholarship on Disraeli as a political thinker see: Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *The Historical Journal*, vol.43, issue 3 (London: Cambridge University Press, 2000); John Vincent, *Disraeli*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

⁴⁰² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.190

author that the contemporary historical and political context, and the wider landscape of his career, is overlooked. In the other case, political biographers of Disraeli have often been guilty of dismissing the importance of this trilogy, and indeed Disraeli's involvement with Young England, with which these novels are irrevocably entwined. Lord Blake belittled the importance of Young England and the ideas they espoused: 'The truth is that Disraeli had principles when he led the party and believed in them sincerely, but they were not the 'principles', if that word can be used at all, of Young England'.⁴⁰³ Views such as these are overly problematic. But they point to popular assumption that has proved hard to shift. Yet if we are to understand the ideas of Disraeli's trilogy, we must look at Young England as a serious political group, notwithstanding the considerable contemporary derision. To truly understand the trilogy in its proper context, we must first consider how Young England Movement formed, and what it aimed to achieve.

The central figures of Young England were George Smythe, John Manners and Alexander Baillie-Cochrane. However, it was Disraeli's intimacy with Smythe and his friendliness with Manners that was the driving force within the movement. George Smythe was the eldest son of Disraeli's old friend Lord Strangford, a destitute member of the Peerage, whom Disraeli and Mary Anne had visited on their honeymoon. Disraeli had first made Smythe's acquaintance when campaigning in Lord Lyndhurst's bid to become High Steward of Cambridge University.⁴⁰⁴ Smythe's attractiveness, and indeed 'magnetism', are hard to appreciate fully. He was undoubtedly an intellectual and romantic figure: brilliant, witty and impetuous. Leader of an aristocratic intellectual clique at Cambridge, he cut an almost Byronic figure. He was good looking, imaginative, devastatingly successful with women, and had almost the same profligate disregard for money. Blake had it right when he described him as the 'Bonnie Prince Charlie and Randolph Churchill' of Young England.⁴⁰⁵ However, while talented, Smythe never really realised his potential. There was no real record of his achievements aside from the memory of a burnt out talent. As Whibley remarked, Smythe was a man to whom 'the fairies brought every gift save the gift of success...and who permitted a native indolence to make his talents of no effect'.⁴⁰⁶ Disraeli was enamoured with Smythe, and forgave him his inconsistencies and vagaries which he might not have overlooked in other colleagues. Yet if Smythe was given the starring part of Harry Coningsby in *Coningsby*, he is perhaps better depicted as Waldershare of *Endymion*:

'Waldershare was profligate but sentimental; unprincipled but romantic; the child of whim, and the slave to an imagination so freakish and deceptive that it was impossible to foretell his course. He was alike capable of sacrificing all his feelings to worldly considerations or of forfeiting the world for visionary caprice'.⁴⁰⁷

There was a warm retrospectivity to Disraeli's description of Waldershare. This was the cosiness of rose-tinted spectacles, looking back on an old friend.⁴⁰⁸ While we shall never know the true extents of Disraeli's relationship with Smythe, he was never one of Smythe's critics.⁴⁰⁹ The fact was that George Smythe, while old for his age at Eton, and perhaps even Cambridge, never really matured into a serious figure. He embodied the 'spirit of the eternal undergraduate'.⁴¹⁰ He was too reckless and

⁴⁰³ *Ibid*, p.762

⁴⁰⁴ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.246

⁴⁰⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.168

⁴⁰⁶ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, p.55

⁴⁰⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.169

⁴⁰⁸ Smythe died in 1857 from tuberculosis, twenty-four years before the publication of *Endymion*.

⁴⁰⁹ Disraeli commented to Monty Corry that he had enough letters from Smythe to fill three volumes. Yet in the Hughenden collection, only five survive. If Philip Rose had a part in censoring this we will never know.

⁴¹⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.169

profligate, and like the Mountchesney's of *Sybil*, burnt himself out in his youth, leaving an unfortunate legacy in his later years.

While George Smythe can be discounted as a 'splendid failure', John Manners cannot be so easily dismissed. Smythe may have been the nominal leader and 'spoilt child'⁴¹¹ of their exclusive coterie. But Manners embodied the truest principles of the movement. Second son of 6th Duke of Rutland (his older brother was Lord Granby who later led the party with Disraeli), Manners came from the top rank of Britain's aristocracy. He was a far more serious figure than Smythe. Moreover, his geniality and good nature was widely respected. 'He collected friends as readily as Smythe with his mordant and reckless wit made enemies'.⁴¹² Although perhaps not the intellectual equal of Smythe he was 'superior in character'.⁴¹³ Indeed, the distinguished and formidable William Whewell:⁴¹⁴ philosopher, theologian, and longstanding Master of Trinity College once said: 'I had rather be Lord John Manners than any young man who has passed through the University'.⁴¹⁵ Manners was intelligent, capable, and of highest integrity. More than anything else, Manners was the true disciple of the Oxford Movement. His commitment to their unique strain of romantic Toryism as expounded by Young England, was unwavering. Manners was the industrious and diligent defender of lost causes: he visited the Carlists in Spain and wrote poetry in favour of their cause, saw the redemption of Manchester in the revival of monastic institutions, and admired the mills as a feudal social order in northern society. Later in his career campaigned against Lord Palmerston for a gothic redesign of the Foreign Office, and in 1843 published a pamphlet which argued for the revival of public holidays on holy days, in an effort to return to the more Christian medieval past.⁴¹⁶ In all cases, the result was the same. Nonetheless, he proved a close ally of Disraeli's and a popular and talented member of Conservative party.

Disraeli initially attracted the admiration of the aristocratic youth of Young England in March of 1842. He did so by catching the attention of the House after his stylish attack on Palmerston and Whig foreign policy. He denounced the consular service as a haven for aristocratic jobbery and expressed his surprise that the commercial interests of 'the first commercial nation of the world', should be entrusted to an avowedly inferior service, whereas the political interests were served by the much superior diplomatic service.⁴¹⁷ The speech garnered praise from many quarters. Disraeli reported to Mary-Anne in dispatches that his attack on aristocratic nepotism had been praised the radicals Tom Duncombe and Richard Cobden, with both of whom Disraeli was on good terms with. However, the greatest admirers of the speech were from among the Tory benches, 'all young England, the new members etc, were deeply impressed.' The effect it had on these young patricians was great, if we are to take Disraeli at his word: George Smyth was excited, and John Manners came to sit with Disraeli in the House. Moreover, walking with Disraeli to the Carlton after the speech, Henry Baillie told Disraeli, 'Upon my soul, I am not sure, it was not the best speech I ever heard'.⁴¹⁸ Indeed so much was the effect of this performance, that a few days later, Disraeli would comment that, 'I find myself the leader of a new party- chiefly of the youth and new members...my position is changed'.⁴¹⁹ This was typical of Disraeli's hyperbole when writing to his wife or sister. The statement was

⁴¹¹ *Ibid*, p.170

⁴¹² *Ibid*, p.170

⁴¹³ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, p.55

⁴¹⁴ He would perhaps be best described a scientist, but having been credited with inventing the term, it seems a little out of place.

⁴¹⁵ Quoted in Blake, *Disraeli*, p.170

⁴¹⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.170-171. Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, pp.105-107. Lord John Manners, *In Defence of Holy Days* (1843)

⁴¹⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 8th of March 1842, vol.61, c.220

⁴¹⁸ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Mary Anne, 9th of March 1842, vol.4, pp.27-28

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid*, Disraeli to Mary Anne, 13th of March 1842, vol.4, pp.34-35

premature. The speech against Palmerston had boosted his profile. But a ‘new party’ had yet to be formally agreed.

A more formal establishment of the principles of ‘Young England’ came in the Autumn of 1842. Disraeli and Mary Anne left London to sojourn in Paris while Parliament was in recess until January. During their trip to Paris, the Disraeli’s managed to ingratiate themselves within Parisian high society. They enjoyed the hospitality of the Duchess of Grammont, the Sister of D’Orsay, in whose company some of the Parisian celebrities could still be found. Through Lewis Goldsmith, they were thrown a great dinner littered with diplomats and foreign officials. Once more Disraeli sent dispatches to his sister boasting of the great names he had encountered in Paris.⁴²⁰ However, the crowning glory of this trip to Paris was a private audience with Louis-Phillipe himself. Disraeli gained the audience through his friend Henry Bulwer, who introduced him to General Baudrand, Louis-Phillipe’s aide-de-camp. Disraeli drafted an intriguing memorandum on the subject of his visit. In this letter he criticised the Palmerston’s management of Britain’s alliance with France and professed his own intention of restoring that relationship between the two countries. It was consistent with Disraeli’s recent attacks of Palmerston’s foreign policy, and it struck a chord with the French Kings wish for a reestablishment of the old alliance between the two countries. Disraeli suggested ‘an influential member who has the ear of the House’ should call for a debate upon the relationship between Britain and France, ‘a debate that would teach men to think...give principles to that vast majority who must be led...[and] afford an opportunity to a great section of the Opposition to repudiate the late policy of Lord Palmerston’.⁴²¹ Further, he argued that among Peel’s majority of ninety, there was 40 or 50 agricultural malcontents, but also ‘it was obvious therefore that another section of conservative members full of youth and energy... must exercise an irresistible over the tone of the Minister. Sympathising in general with his domestic policy, they may dictate the character of his foreign’.⁴²² Disraeli commented that he had ‘already been solicited to place himself at the head of a parliamentary party which there is every reason to believe would adopt his views on...Foreign Policy... a party of the youth of England, influenced by the noblest views and partaking in nothing of the character of a parliamentary intrigue’.⁴²³ Lastly, he proposed organizing the press in favour of such a change in Foreign policy: ‘a comprehensive organisation of the press in favour of and English and French alliance... [and to] speak in journals of every school, and sound in every district’. It was, he argued, ‘with a machinery of this description that the ideas of a single man, acting upon latent sympathies...soon become the voice of the nation’.⁴²⁴

As O’Kell has noted, this memorandum sheds lights upon, ‘the ways in which fantasy and external reality are connected in Disraeli’s mind’.⁴²⁵ Indeed, much of Disraeli’s self-inflated reputation as an expert upon Foreign policy stemmed from his eye-catching attacks on Palmerston during the previous session, his ability to lead a party of youth capable of steering Peel’s Foreign policy, from his early discussion with the nucleus of Young England, and his confidence that one man could influence the national consciousness, based upon the moderate success of his articles in the *Morning Post*, and *Letters of Runymede* back in 1835 and 1836. To be sure, Disraeli was ambitious. He certainly possessed no lack of belief in his own talent. And it is widely acknowledged that his imagination was perhaps without parallel in politics. Yet this letter is an exceptional example of how these traits manifested themselves. There was an element of truth to all Disraeli’s claims. But the grand schemes, and the fantastical political combinations that he devised went well beyond the

⁴²⁰ *Ibid*, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 21st of December, vol.4, pp.69-71

⁴²¹ *Ibid*, Memorandum to Louie Phillipe, Vol.4, Appendix III, pp. 371-373

⁴²² *Ibid*, p.372

⁴²³ *Ibid*, p.373

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*, p.373

⁴²⁵ O’Kell, *The Romance of Politics*, p.210

possibilities of *Realpolitik*. However, what O’Kell fails to recognise, is that while Disraeli expressed an unsurpassable mind for political fantasy, these dreams only returned him to the real world of parliamentary politics with renewed vigour.

George Smythe and Alexander Baillie-Cochrane were also in Paris at the time of his visit. They had come direct from seeing John Manners in Geneva, where Smythe had received permission to speak for Manners when trying to enlist Disraeli into their cause.⁴²⁶ Upon his return to London, Smythe reported back to Manners that ‘We have settled, subject to your approval, to sit together, and to vote together the majority deciding. Beyond this we have settled nothing...in relation to individual details or to political principles’.⁴²⁷ Indeed, Manners commented on the lack of fixed principles: ‘this is the germ of our party’, he wrote, ‘no particular principles, but a hotch-potch, each surrendering his own to the majority.’⁴²⁸ Thus the initial structure of Young England was established, not yet an organised party, but the ignition of a new parliamentary group. Whibley long ago commented, ‘Never did a party come to its beings under happier auspices’.⁴²⁹ This was certainly true of Smythe and Manners who were ardent admirers of Disraeli. However, Baillie-Cochrane’s comments about Disraeli tell the story of differing approaches and clashes of personality. Baillie-Cochrane hardly knew Disraeli in 1842, but the initial impression was not positive. Smythe informed Manners, ‘Cochrane is a little alarmed at Disraeli’s influence.’⁴³⁰ It was clear that Disraeli’s ambition was a point of consternation for Baillie-Cochrane. As Smythe has recognised, ‘His object was a more a party of you, me, and him—exclusively’.⁴³¹ About Disraeli’s political ambition and flagrantly self-inflated reputation, he was sarcastically scathing. In Paris he observed that, ‘Disraeli’s salons, rival Law’s under the Regent. Guizot, Thiers, Mole, Decazes, and God wots how many *dei minores* are found in his antechamber, while the great man himself is closeted with Louis Phillipe at St. Cloud, and already he pictures himself the founder of some new dynasty with his Manfred love-locks stamped on the current coin of the realm.’⁴³² Upon his return to London, Baillie-Cochrane once again expressed concern that Disraeli’s ambition for a parliamentary group of considerable size and influence..⁴³³

The reality of forming such a parliamentary bloc would be difficult, especially given a lack of discernible principles, with possibly only ‘youth’ as a binding factor. However, Cochrane was suspicious of Disraeli. The Scot was cautious by nature and not gifted with Disraeli’s imagination. While Cochrane was perhaps right to worry about Disraeli’s manipulative political strategies for Young England, there is nothing to suggest that Disraeli was not genuinely attracted to the purity and high-minded nobility of Young England’s central aims. Moreover, Disraeli’s ambitious, and undoubtedly improbable, scheme for a large and influential parliamentary group was almost diametrically opposed to Baillie-Cochrane’s preferred method of operating. What is perhaps more surprising, was that given these personal differences, Disraeli was able to collaborate as effectively as he did with Young England.

The differences between the members were not simply personal. There was a serious divergence in the most fundamental matters of doctrine. It is worth noting that the roots of Young England, a group committed to the reinvigoration of the Church and a restoration of feudalism, had been growing for some time before Disraeli was approached. The seeds of Young England had been sown during their time at Cambridge, when the trio of Eton aristocrats had come under the influence

⁴²⁶ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, .139.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid*, p.142

⁴²⁸ *Ibid*, p.145

⁴²⁹ *Ibid*, p.141.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid*, pp.143-144

⁴³¹ *Ibid*, p.144

⁴³² Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, p.141

⁴³³ *Ibid*, pp.148-149

of Frederick Faber and the ideas of the Oxford Movement. This occurred while they were on a walking holiday in the Lakes during the summer of 1838. Manners recorded that he went ‘to Ambleside to hear Smythe’s idol, Faber, preach...altogether I was charmed, and highly gratified at being introduced to him by Smythe’.⁴³⁴ Faber’s effect on the young aristocrats was both significant and immediate. Barely a fortnight later Manners would write, ‘we have virtually pledged ourselves to attempt to restore what? I hardly know-but still it is a glorious attempt...I think a change is working for the better, and all, or nearly all, the enthusiasm of the young spirits of Britain is with us’.⁴³⁵ However, as Ridley has argued, while Faber talked of a collision between Church and State, a clash intended to leave the Church in supremacy, Manners and Smythe saw their path forward in politics.⁴³⁶ There in lay the germs of Young England. Young England has been described by one scholar as ‘the Oxford Movement translated by Cambridge from religion to politics. Both stemmed from the same origin- an emotional revulsion against the liberal utilitarian spirit of the time’.⁴³⁷ Young England was an expression of revulsion against the latitudinarian and evangelical beliefs which had come to dominate Anglican theology. The Oxford movement sought to revive customs and ritual inspired by both the pre-Reformation and contemporary Catholic customs. The driving force behind Young England was a similar nostalgia. This was a yearning for merry old England, and a restoration of ancient feudal society. In that way, it attempted to resurrect a lost, indeed mythical, vision of England; ‘a benign, hierarchical system of the Middle Ages, in which the various strata of society attended to each other’s needs in a spirit of reciprocity’.⁴³⁸ Central to all of this was a revival of chivalry, of *noblesse oblige*, and reinvigoration of Britain’s landed classes. While many of Young England’s ideas seem nonsensical to today’s readers, as they did to some contemporaries, they reflected an important dimension of contemporary conservative thought, whose sentiments were echoed in their ‘principles’. Thinkers such as Coleridge and Carlyle found inspiration in the same romantic, conservative philosophy which advocated an organic vision of society. The central tenets of Young England, and also of his novels of this period, were the total opposition Benthamism, utilitarianism, and a materialist, society which enshrined representative political institutions as the cure for all of society’s problems.

Disraeli’s belief in the principles of Young England, and the sincerity of his involvement with the group, has often been called into question. Michael Flavin has argued that ‘there is no direct and simple equation between his own politics and those of the movement with which he was associated’.⁴³⁹ For Blake and other scholars, his espousal of this group was purely an expression of his opportunism.⁴⁴⁰ Roger Weeks has contended, ‘Young England was fine to state principles and attract attention, but Disraeli was over forty now, and his young colleagues were not the ones who could open the doors to power’.⁴⁴¹ Paul Smith has belittled his involvement as, ‘an agreeable fling, the last lark of Disraeli’s springtime, with no political weight’.⁴⁴² Hesketh Pearson has suggested that, ‘Disraeli was not content to be captain of a clique or to embalm their dreams in fiction...[after 1846] ‘Young England’ was forgotten and its ideals were filed for reference’.⁴⁴³ But the truth is not so clear cut. Much of the problem lays with Young England’s lack of clear principles. All scholars, regardless of their conclusions agree that they never had a manifesto. They had many things in common.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid*, pp.65-66

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, p.66

⁴³⁶ Ridley, *The Young Disraeli*, p.247

⁴³⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.171

⁴³⁸ Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p.71

⁴³⁹ *Ibid*, p.72

⁴⁴⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.211

⁴⁴¹ Weeks, ‘Disraeli as Political Egotist’, p.403

⁴⁴² Paul Smith, *Disraeli: a Brief Life*, p.58

⁴⁴³ Pearson, *Dizzy*, p.96

Disraeli's earlier historical and polemical works had expounded a nostalgic version of Tory history which struck a clear chord with the historical views of Young England. Disraeli had a similar revulsion against the utilitarian spirit of the age. After all, the main theme of his *Vindication* had been an attack on utilitarianism. Both Disraeli and the rest of the group had been inspired by the writing of Bolingbroke. Still, the question of Disraeli's trustworthiness was often raised when talking about this period, a hangover from the reputation he had gained in the 1820s and '30s. Many of his colleagues found themselves asking the same question. Manners wrote in his diary, 'Could I only satisfy myself that D'Israeli believed all the said, I should be more happy: his historical views are quite mine, but does he believe them?'⁴⁴⁴

In the case of Disraeli's historical views, Manners need not have worried. It was with religion that Disraeli diverged from his colleagues. Manners was the true disciple of the Oxford Movement. Much like Gladstone, Manners was a High Churchman in politics. They looked to the Church for many social remedies, often skeptical of political solutions.⁴⁴⁵ They believed a restored Church of England had to lead the spiritual revival against materialism which had come to degrade society. Evangelicalism could not be depended upon as it had been adopted by all urban classes and was thus allied to industrial capitalism, the great ally of the materialism they despised. As both Blake and Ridley have recognized Disraeli, was careful to steer clear of any political declarations for Puseyism. He understood how unpopular it was, and any effort to accommodate that creed was made only to please his friends.⁴⁴⁶ While Disraeli had agreed to 'moderate Oxford principles' as 'standard of Christianity' in Young England, George Smythe noted 'Dizzy's attachment to moderate Oxfordism, is something like Bonaparte's attachment to moderate Mahomedanism'.⁴⁴⁷ Smythe was most likely correct. Disraeli very rarely set foot in a Church, and was certainly not a serious, or at least conventional, believer. He could not take seriously the spiritual element of Young England's principles. Indeed, Smythe remarked that when explaining Puseyism to Henry Hope at Deepdene, 'Dizzy attempts to rob it of all its religion'.⁴⁴⁸ Disraeli's admiration for the High Church movement stemmed not from any religious conviction, but rather through an aesthetic and organic appreciation of the Church in a better and imagined past.

Disraeli's adherence to the principles of Young England are therefore hard to pin down. His views on history, and his chivalric notions of aristocratic duty were consistent with theirs. There was an understandable divergence on religious doctrine. Nonetheless, Disraeli was able to collaborate very effectively with the group. However, the question remains: to what end. Disraeli's ambition to form an influential parliamentary group certainly clashed with other in the group. Even Smythe expressed some surprise at the parliamentary influence Disraeli claimed to wield: 'Dizzy has much more power than I had any notion of. The two Hodgsons are his, and Quitin Dick. He has a great hold on Walter and 'The Times'. Henry Hope (who is to come in soon) is entirely in his hands.'⁴⁴⁹ Baillie-Cochrane expressed his own fears about Disraeli's ambition for a large and influential group, which would embarrass the efforts of their current group of friends.⁴⁵⁰ Moreover, there was concern that Disraeli was in some way manipulating the group, The Duke of Rutland wrote to Lord Strangford, 'It is grievous that two young men such as John and Mr. Smythe should be led by one of whose integrity of purpose I have a similar opinion to your own, though I can judge only by his public career. The admirable characters of our sons only makes them the more assailable by the arts of a designing

⁴⁴⁴ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, p.149

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.139

⁴⁴⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.172. Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.269

⁴⁴⁷ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, p.153

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.185

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.143

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.148

person'.⁴⁵¹ Thus Flavin has suggested that, 'Disraeli found in the otherwise homogenous grouping of idealistic, university educated young men a convenient platform from which to present his own political vision to a wider audience'.⁴⁵² And more recently, O'Kell has put it that 'however much as a political outsider he felt the necessity of intrigue and manipulation, Disraeli was equally and genuinely attracted by the purity of Young England's motives and ideals, perhaps best exemplified by Lord John Manners's generous nobility... for Disraeli it both manifested the ideology of true Toryism and shrouded the gratification of his ambition.'⁴⁵³ These arguments are not without some merit. It is clear that Disraeli enjoyed the attention of a political following, and reveled in Smythes hero-worship. Moreover, his ambition to play a leading part in parliament, especially after being over-looked for office, is without doubt. Young England on the face of it fulfilled those desires. However, to conceive his leadership of Young England as simply a vehicle for his own political outlook, a launch pad for his political career, or siege engine with which he could assail Peel's defenses is to overlook those clear and perceivable similarities in their world view. That said, it is striking how the most popularly conceived ideas of Young England were not central to the trilogy. He did not go in for the medieval absurdities in the same way as his colleagues. Even the passages of feudal socialism, High Church Tractarianism, or medieval revivalism were often a colourful aside from the main themes. In that sense there never was a 'Young England Trilogy'. These works Disraeli's ideas on history, politics, aristocracy, society, and religion, transmuted from practical politics to fiction. Disraeli's leadership of Young England should therefore not be seen in terms of strict political and religious principles. After all they did not clearly define them themselves. Instead Young England, and the novels he wrote during the 1840s should be seen as an interesting and formative political collaboration between, on the face of it, unlikely partners.

Disraeli set about planning *Coningsby* in 1843, while staying with Henry Hope at Deepdene. The Disraeli's stayed at their friends Italian-esque villa throughout most of September.⁴⁵⁴ Since their parliamentary debut, Young England had come under fire from both opponents and sections of their own party. They had gone into open rebellion over government policy in Ireland. This represented Disraeli's first clear split from Peel, emboldened perhaps, by his new entourage. Graham was quick to pour scorn on Disraeli, who informed Croker: 'with respect to Young England, the puppets are moved by Disraeli, who is the ablest among them; I consider him unprincipled and disappointed and in despair he has tried the effect of bullying... Disraeli alone is mischievous, and with him I have no desire to keep terms'.⁴⁵⁵ Disraeli did not seem concerned by this and took the attitude that all press is good press: 'if I was to give you a report of all that has been written on this fruitful topic, it would be a volume'.⁴⁵⁶ He seemed to take glee in quoting one assailant who sneered that Disraeli 'thinks himself equal to both Wm. Pitt and Wm. Shakespeare'.⁴⁵⁷ Perhaps this was the inspiration Disraeli needed as he began writing during that September. Retrospectively, Disraeli claimed that he aimed to pen 'a real trilogy; that is to say treat of the same subject, and endeavor to complete that treatment. The origin and character of our political parties, their influence on the condition of the people of this country, some picture of the moral and physical condition of that people, and some intimation of the means by which it might be elevated and improved'.⁴⁵⁸ The trilogy did attempt to achieve them. But this was written some 25 years later. He had originally aimed to achieve this in *Coningsby*, but found

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.174

⁴⁵² Flavin, pp.71-72

⁴⁵³ O'Kell, pp.211-212

⁴⁵⁴ For more about the Hope's house, Deepdene, see: David Watkin, *Thomas Hope and the Neo-Classical Idea, 1769-1831*, (London: John Murray, 1968)

⁴⁵⁵ Jennings, *Croker*, vol.3, p.9

⁴⁵⁶ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Sarah Disraeli, 29th of August 1843, vol.4 pp.106-107

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.107

⁴⁵⁸ General Preface to 1870 collected edition of Disraeli's novels. *New York Times*, 9th of Novemeber 1870, p.2

that he required more space in which to grapple with these themes. However, while the trilogy had not been conceived prior to writing *Coningsby*, the purpose of that novel was clear from the outset. Smythe and Manners had encouraged him to write a novel filled with the ideas of Young England. He may not have achieved that, but in 1849 he wrote, 'it was not the intention of the writer to adopt the form of fiction as the instrument to scatter his suggestions, but, after reflection, he resolved to avail himself of a method which in the temper of the times, offered the best chance of influencing opinion'.⁴⁵⁹

II: *Coningsby; or The New Generation*

Coningsby has been generally described as the first novel of its genre: the first political novel in the English language. Indeed, most scholars, of whom Blake is the most representative have agreed that it was something 'quite different from anything he had written before'. Further many have similarly concurred that, a 'wide gulf separates them from his silver fork novels and historical romances of the 'twenties and 'thirties'.⁴⁶⁰ In many ways this was true. The political message in *Coningsby* is far more explicit than his earlier fiction. However, on a closer reading it is really a novel in two parts: one part political tract, the other a society romance as the young Harry Coningsby searches for fulfilment. O'Kell is correct to suggest that to overcome a natural reluctance to treat *Coningsby* as a work of fiction, rather than a political treatise, 'is to be forced to the conclusion that there is a strong continuity between it and his earlier works, from *Vivian Grey* and *The Young Duke*, through *Contarini Fleming*, *Alroy*, and *Henrietta Temple*'.⁴⁶¹ This is a shrewd assessment. While it is the 'political' scenes that stand out to a critical reader, the greater part of the novel takes the form of a society romance. There are also many of the autobiographical features in *Coningsby* that pervade his earlier novels, and much like his earlier works many of the characters that appear are drawn directing from life. Moreover, one of the common criticisms of Disraeli's trilogy of the 1840s, is the implausibility of his plots, 'ill constructed, a series of scenes rather than a story; and what plot there is often implausible, sometimes impossible'.⁴⁶² There is not so much a failure of the plot itself, but more the failure to successfully wed political tract with society romance. For on the whole these novels had far more in common with his earlier fiction than they diverged from it.

Many of the inconsistencies, so often levelled against Disraeli's novels, are present in *Coningsby*. But we are also treated to all of Disraeli's strengths as a novelist. His ability to portray the aristocracy and his skill at accurately portraying both the seriousness and, at times, comedy of contemporary politics was unrivalled in his age. Even Blake conceded that Disraeli was far better than his Victorian literary contemporaries: 'To say that [Disraeli was the best at this] is not to disparage such creations as the Sir Lester Dedlock or the two Dukes of Omnium. But neither Dickens, Thackeray nor Trollope could shed a sort of middle-class uneasiness towards the nobility'.⁴⁶³ The reasons behind this were perhaps two-fold. Firstly, central to all Disraeli's political thought, and despite his own middle-class origins, was his unswerving belief that the aristocracy should not only exist, but should predominate. How they acted, should act, and the role they should play was open to question. But their existence and place within English society never was. Secondly, he had experience in moving in those circles. His earlier silver-fork fiction had initially been derided. But by 1844 and the publication of *Coningsby*, Disraeli had spent time in that world. While he had not mixed among the grandest of the aristocracy, he had visited Beaumanoir and spent time at Rosebank. Much of

⁴⁵⁹ Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p.68

⁴⁶⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.190. Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.95. Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli*, pp.67-68.

⁴⁶¹ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, pp.213-214

⁴⁶² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.219

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, p.216

Coningsby had been written at Deepdene, the house of Henry Hope. And Disraeli had, at one time, been the protégé of Chandos, the heir to the great seat of Stowe. Much the same goes for Disraeli's depiction of politics in his novels. First and foremost, unlike many of his contemporaries, he was a politician. Indeed, politics was central to his existence. His depiction of political manoeuvring, the wildfire of rumours, and the amusing characters such as the Tadpoles and Tapers, displayed his understanding and experience of the political world. Blake shows considerable, and understandable, admiration for the writing of Trollope, a man he claimed who was 'in most ways he was a far superior writer to Disraeli'.⁴⁶⁴ But the fact was that Trollope's novels were the writing of a civil servant, and Disraeli's those of a politician. Blake concedes this: 'He [Trollope] tried and failed to get into Parliament as a Liberal and was bitterly disillusioned in the process'.⁴⁶⁵ It was in this trilogy and his later novels that Disraeli's strengths in this department are so evident. His plots came from experience, the background and the characters from life, and as this current work has argued, so often the ideas were inspired by contemporary events.

Coningsby, like the other books in the trilogy sought to answer a question surrounding, widely conceived, 'the condition of England'. In this case: 'WHO RULES?' It answered that question by following the journey of young Harry Coningsby, a young scion who forsakes his aristocratic background to go on a voyage of discovery. He is the archetypal hero of Disraeli's fiction: pure, noble, but in many ways vacant and naïve. Coningsby was the hero of Eton and Cambridge, the fictional embodiment of George Smythe. It is he who plays a leading part, supported by John Manners as Henry Sidney, and Alexander Ballie-Cochrane as Buckhurst. Coningsby was the orphaned grandson of the immensely rich Lord Monmouth, who upon the completion of his grandson's education wanted to enter him to parliament. Coningsby seeks to find political faith and answer the question, 'why governments were hated, and religions despised? Why Loyalty was dead, and Reverence only a galvanised corpse?'⁴⁶⁶ Disraeli tackled this question by commencing the novel shortly after the passage of the 1832 Reform Act, the defining moment of his own political life. Disraeli's understanding of 1832, and the far-reaching, less tangible, effects of the Reform Act are central to our understanding of the message in the novel. The central non-fictional question the book asks is clearly recognisable: how would British politics respond to the advent of mass politics?⁴⁶⁷ On this Disraeli's thoughts are perspicacious: a policy of resistance, whichever form it took, was futile. Echoing his thoughts in *Vindication* Disraeli argued:

'In treating the House of the Third Estate as the House of the People, and not as the House of a privileged class, the Ministry and Parliament of 1831 virtually conceded the principle of Universal Suffrage. In this point of view the ten-pound franchise was an arbitrary, irrational, and impolitic qualification.'⁴⁶⁸

It was an attack Disraeli had often levelled at the Whigs. In 1832, they had squandered the chance for a general and far-reaching measure of reform, based on national foundations. Instead the Reform Act had taken property as its sole arbiter of suffrage, and thus, in Disraeli's eyes at least, had conceded universal suffrage as an inevitable principle:

'On one hand it was maintained, that, under the old system, the people were virtually represented; while on the other, it was triumphantly urged, that if the principle be conceded, the people should not be virtually, but actually, represented. But who are the people? And where are you to draw a line? And why should there be any?'⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.217

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.217

⁴⁶⁶ *Coningsby*, p.122

⁴⁶⁷ Vincent, p.85

⁴⁶⁸ *Coningsby*, p.37

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.38

The novel was on the face of it about political parties. In many ways however, *Coningsby* asks a more profound question. It asks how political parties might adapt themselves to a new age of politics.

Disraeli begins this by offering a treatise filled with his own, historical, interpretation of Tory politics. We are told that Peel was unfortunate in that he, ‘first entered public life, to become identified with a political connexion, which having arrogated to itself the name of an illustrious historical party, pursued a policy, which was either founded on no principle whatever, or on principles exactly contrary to those which had always guided the conduct of the great Tory leaders’. These Tories ‘were men distinguished by none of the conspicuous qualities of statesmen. They had none of the divine gifts that govern senates and guide councils... This factious league had shuffled themselves into power by clinging to the skirts of a great minister [Pitt], the last of Tory statesmen, but who, in the unparalleled and confounding emergencies of his latter years, has been forced, unfortunately for England, to relinquish Toryism. His successors inherited all his errors without the latent genius, which in him might have still rallied and extricated him from the consequences of his disasters... Impudently usurping the name of that party of which nationality, and therefore universality, is the essence, these pseudo-Tories made Exclusion the principle of their political constitution, and Restriction the genius of their commercial code.’⁴⁷⁰ In this sense, *Coningsby* advanced an inherently anti-Tory motif. As John Vincent has correctly identified, *Coningsby* was ‘first and foremost an anti-Tory novel’.⁴⁷¹ It saw Liverpool as ‘the arch-mediocrity’, who had perverted the course of true Toryism and presided over a cabinet of mediocrities.⁴⁷² The great Tory principles of Shelburne and Pitt had been abandoned, religious freedom, widening of the franchise and commerce liberation had been thwarted by restriction and protectionism. It was only Canning who had attempted to restore the party to its true principles, but Canning had been betrayed. Robert Peel to his credit had tried, but failed, to extricate himself the association of these pseudo-Tories: ‘Sir Robert Peel who had escaped from Lord Liverpool, escaped from Mr. Canning, escaped even from the Duke of Wellington in 1832; was at length caught in 1834; the victim of ceaseless intriguers, who neither comprehended his position, nor that of their country’.⁴⁷³ For in 1834 Peel had issued the Tamworth Manifesto, ‘an attempt to construct a party without principles; its basis therefore was necessarily Latitudinarianism; and its inevitable consequence has been Political Infidelity.’⁴⁷⁴ Disraeli’s treatment of Peel in *Coningsby* was critical of the conservatism he had fostered. That was, the Toryism of the Tamworth Manifesto: solid, moderate, but unimaginative. On a personal level, Disraeli had not yet split so openly with Peel in 1844, as he had a year later when writing *Sybil*. This context alone explains his treatment of his party leader.

By attempting to propound his own unique understanding of politics, ‘a fiction that looks retrospectively upon the formation of Disraeli’s Tory ideology’,⁴⁷⁵ Disraeli was able to criticism the barrenness Peel’s conservatism as a an unfortunate by-product of the age he came to prominence, and present his own ideology as the representation of true apostolic Tory values, putting him in the line of Bolingbroke, Shelburne and Pitt. The book reaches its conclusion when Coningsby eventually tells his grandfather that he, ‘could not support the Conservative party’.⁴⁷⁶ As Vincent has shrewdly recognized, ‘if the hero of the novel cannot support Conservatism, why should anyone else?’⁴⁷⁷ By creating his own idiosyncratic definition of Toryism, Disraeli could lampoon the existing creeds and practices which clashed with his own interpretation. These, he argued, had corrupted true Tory

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.67

⁴⁷¹ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.84

⁴⁷² *Coningsby*, p.70

⁴⁷³ *Ibid*, p.10

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.98

⁴⁷⁵ O’Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.214.

⁴⁷⁶ *Coningsby*, p.430

⁴⁷⁷ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.83

principles. Peel's conservatism comes under attack throughout the novel. Peel had created a party which, 'having given up exclusion, would only embrace as much liberalism as is necessary for the moment', and which, 'wish[ing] to keep things as they find them for long as they can, and then will manage them as they find them as well as they can'.⁴⁷⁸ This was what Tory party principles had been reduced to under Peel: 'an attempt to carry on affairs by substituting the fulfilment of the duties of office for the performance of the functions of government; and to maintain this negative system by the mere influence of property, reputable private conduct, and what are called good connections'.⁴⁷⁹ The central political message of *Coningsby* was that the Conservative party needed to set the agenda in British politics. But it should do so in the right way. As John Vincent has suggested it 'wanted conviction politics to replace the ratchet effect of passive, ever-leftward movement...it saw the need to put the clock forward...it praised Manchester, the middle classes, manufacturers, and Lord John Russell. Only incidentally is it about political medievalism'.⁴⁸⁰ In this sense, and in this sense only, was *Coningsby* a modern novel. It argued that Tory politics needed revitalization. It assumed that 1832 had changed the proper boundaries of parliamentary politics, and it supposed that aristocracy had to adapt to survive. As Vincent has put, it reasoned that, 'a modern statesman had to satisfy the imagination of the people'.⁴⁸¹

In doing so much, the novel also expressed some considerable contempt for the existing forms of Toryism that had strayed from the path of 'pure' Conservatism. It is not just Peel and Tamworth Conservatism that were criticised. *Coningsby's* Lord Monmouth was a Tory peer of immense wealth and influence. He was closely molded on the recently deceased Lord Hertford, who Blake accurately recorded as being, 'celebrated alike for his wealth, arrogance and profligacy— Lord Steyne of *Vanity Fair*, the Lord Monmouth of *Coningsby*'.⁴⁸² As a character, Lord Monmouth dominates the book. He is certainly the most interesting. He was a corrupt, reactionary, magnate of gross selfishness and arrogance, 'stately yet venal'.⁴⁸³ He was representative of the old aristocratic order that embodied reactionary Toryism. He encapsulated the failure of both the aristocracy and conservative politics around the passage of the Reform Act. He had proudly spread his influence and bought more borough seats, acquiring greater rank and title. Having lost his rotten boroughs in 1832, he vowed to make up for his loss with a dukedom.⁴⁸⁴ Despite his great influence, he was not really a political leader. During the reform demonstrations of 1831, Monmouth, 'who detested popular tumult as much as he despised public opinion, had remained...in his luxurious retirement in Italy, contenting himself with opposing the Reform Bill by proxy'.⁴⁸⁵ Indeed, Monmouth who, 'resided almost entirely abroad',⁴⁸⁶ was an absentee peer in the true sense of the phrase. He was an anachronism, painted in the model of a great eighteenth-century magnifico. Indeed, Monmouth had a strong air of Louis XIV about him: he received his guests at a 'morning levee, (Lord Monmouth performed this ceremony in the high style of the old court, and welcomed his visitors in bed)'.⁴⁸⁷ His London house was a miniature Versailles, the entrance to the palatial Monmouth House is decadent to the point vulgarity.⁴⁸⁸

Monmouth exerted his influence through his odious factotum Nicholas Rigby. Rigby was a slashing portrait of the well-known Tory press agent and bitter enemy of Disraeli's, John Wilson

⁴⁷⁸ *Coningsby*, p.371

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.98

⁴⁸⁰ Vincent, *Disraeli*, pp.83-84

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.84

⁴⁸² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.114

⁴⁸³ Ridley, *The Young Disraeli*, p.84

⁴⁸⁴ *Coningsby*, p.p.9-11

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.14

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.10

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.14

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp.17-18

Croker, a leading contributor to Tory literature and Lord Hertford's man of business.⁴⁸⁹ Rigby was a member for one of Monmouth's constituencies, the manager of his parliamentary influence, and his general man of business. He had arisen from obscure beginnings; he 'was not a professional man'.⁴⁹⁰ His qualities were that 'he was bold, acute, and voluble; with no thought but a good deal of desultory information'.⁴⁹¹ He gained his reputation from 'a few cleverish speeches and a good many cleverish pamphlets...and articles in reviews to which it was whispered he had contributed'.⁴⁹² Lord Monmouth, who had recognized Rigby's considerable 'talents', bought him as if he was buying a horse. He purchased 'his clear head, his indefatigable industry, his audacious tongue, and his ready and unscrupulous pen; with all his dates, all his lampoons; all his private memoirs, and all his political intrigues. It was a good purchase'.⁴⁹³ Yet, despite all Rigby's abilities, he was never considered more than the fixer of a mighty peer. He was, 'confided in by everybody, [but] trusted by none. His counsels were not deep, his expedients not felicitous; he had no feeling, and he could create no sympathy'.⁴⁹⁴ In that way, Rigby and Monmouth represented the reactionary principles which corrupted Disraeli's 'historic' and 'pure' principles of Toryism.

These reactionaries had no sympathy for the people and no comprehension of what the Reform Act had changed. Before 1832 they borough-mongered and, despite the advent of reform, Monmouth still seemed to believe that reactionary Tory government could go on as before. They were, 'determined the put down the multitude'.⁴⁹⁵ Monmouth saw Peel as a commoner doing aristocratic business, a necessary manager for a greater estate of the realm. Yet he bemoaned the fact that, 'we [the peerage] have let the chief power out of the hands of our own order'. He wished to return to the age where, 'if a commoner were for a season permitted to be the nominal Premier to do the detail, there was always a committee of great 1688 nobles to give him his instructions'.⁴⁹⁶ When Coningsby enquires what Conservative principles were, Monmouth tells that they amounted to no more than, 'To gain your object. I want to turn our coronet into a ducal one'.⁴⁹⁷ Monmouth thus epitomized the greed and ignorance of reactionary conservatism. It had failed to understand the needs of politics after the Reform Act. The world had changed, and despite the 'undemocratic' nature of reform, popular forces had been awoken. As Coningsby tells his grandfather in the climactic scene of the novel that he could not support the Conservative party in its present form.

⁴⁹⁸This was the greatest problem with Monmouth, Rigby and their ilk. They continued as if 1832 had not changed everything. Disraeli believed, quite rightly, that it had. It was the dawn of the age of representative politics. As John Vincent has acutely put, the problem with the 'hard-faced sterility of the pre-1832 hard right... [was] not just that it was unappealing; its real crime was that it was an anachronism and did not know it'.⁴⁹⁹

While this famous scene was directed to his grandfather Lord Monmouth, this was not just an attack on the heartless Toryism of the reactionary hard-right. It was as much an attack on the Conservatism of Robert Peel. It was an invective against a political creed with no fixed principles. The fact that men like Monmouth could support it was perhaps proof enough. In the same vein, the party agents, who had risen to prominence after 1832, also found themselves upon the receiving end of Disraeli's satire. These political 'fixers' who had been so vital to the Tory revival after 1832 were

⁴⁸⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.188. Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.84

⁴⁹⁰ *Coningsby*, p.10

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.10

⁴⁹² *Ibid*, p.11.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid*, p.11

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.441

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.73

⁴⁹⁶ *Coningsby*, p.431

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.432

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp.434-435

⁴⁹⁹ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.85

not well portrayed in *Coningsby*. Whether or not this was driven by any personal dislike for Francis Bonham, as one historian has suggested, is unclear.⁵⁰⁰ The fact remains that Tadpole and Taper are undoubtedly among the more amusing characters of the Trilogy, and two of the most memorable. If Monmouth, through Nicholas Rigby had sought to ‘put down the multitude’, then Tadpole and Taper sought to manipulate them by other means. In the run up to the election of 1841:

‘Tadpole and Taper saw it in a moment. They snuffed the factious air, and felt the coming storm. Notwithstanding the extreme congeniality of these worthies, there was a little latent jealousy between them. Tadpole worshipped Registration: Taper, adored a Cry. Tadpole always maintained that it was the winnowing of the electoral lists that could alone gain the day; Taper, on the contrary, faithful to ancient traditions, was ever of opinion that the game must ultimately be won by popular clamour.’⁵⁰¹

These two party intriguers form a colourful double-act throughout the novel’s political pages. While they worked closely with Nicholas Rigby, they also differed greatly from him. Rigby, ‘surrounded by his busts and books, he wrote his lampoons and articles; massacred a she liberal (it was thought that no one could lash a woman like Rigby), cut up a rising genius whose politics were different from his own, or scarified some unhappy wretch who had brought his claims before parliament’.⁵⁰² Rigby, just like Croker, had a prodigious literary output, much of it clever, none of it truly intelligent or profound. Indeed, despite his ‘cleverness’, there was a certain superficiality and shallow ignorance to his political thought: ‘he told Coningsby want of religious faith was solely occasioned by want of Churches’.⁵⁰³ This is contrasted with the native intelligence and purity of Coningsby, whose ‘deep and pious spirit recoiled with disgust and horror from such lax, chance-medley maxims’.⁵⁰⁴ Tadpole and Taper were lampoons of a new political class. They were the party agents who had risen to prominence after 1832. Peel recognised himself that the ‘Reform Bill has made a change in then position of Partiers, and in the practical working of public affairs, which the author of it did not anticipate. There is a perfectly new element of political power—namely, the registration of voters’.⁵⁰⁵ Disraeli’s humorous depiction of these two party agents, he had also recognised the unintended revolution Reform Act, had enacted voter registration. The clauses enforcing registration of the electorate became an important catalyst for party organisation after 1832.⁵⁰⁶ Of all scholars, John Prest has certainly attributed the most import to the registration clauses, having seen registration as the germ of political innovation after the Reform Act.⁵⁰⁷ An argument Norman Gash famously disputed. Disraeli’s main criticism of the Tadpole’s and Taper’s were that they tried to manipulate the electorate. Be that by the management of the registration, or by some popular cry they sought to win through the tactics of electioneering, not by winning a battle of ideas. Their schemes, much like Rigby’s publications, were clever, but they were devoid of real intelligence and imagination.

While much of the novel is a critique of existing elements of the Conservative party and a thinly veiled attack on, not only, Tamworth Conservatism, but on national political character, it was

⁵⁰⁰ Blake, *Disraeli* p.217

⁵⁰¹ *Coningsby*, p.456

⁵⁰² *Ibid*, p.12

⁵⁰³ *Ibid*, p.123

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.123

⁵⁰⁵ Parker, *Peel*, vol.2, Peel to Charles Arbuthnot, 8th of November 1838

⁵⁰⁶ John A. Phillips and Charles Wetherell, ‘The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England’, *The American Historical Review*, 100.2 (1995) pp.411-436; Philip Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002) pp.19-87

⁵⁰⁷ John Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden*, (London: Macmillan, 1977); Gash savagely reviewed this book remarking that Prest turns electoral registration into a ‘King Charles’ Head’: the root cause and explanation of all issues. *History*, vol.63, no.209 (1978), pp.488-489

not a wholly negative narrative. Disraeli filled Harry Coningsby with ‘positive’ ideas from varied, and at times surprising, sources. The first of these is the Mr. Millbank, the middle-class Lancashire manufacturer, and father of his Eton friend Oswald. Millbank is a honest and dutiful employer. Instead of a tight-fisted utilitarian, Coningsby encounters a generous and paternal patriarch. Michael Flavin has stressed the contrast between ‘representatives of the corrupted and narrow-minded present, and embodiments of a potentially better future’.⁵⁰⁸ His mill town is painted as an idyllic industrial paradise, a place where social values are at the center of a workplace built for the comfort and pleasure of his workers. Thus the mill town of Millbank is painted as a bucolic and tranquil vision of responsible and harmonious industry. It really is striking how the satanic mills and the pictures of industrial squalor so vivid in *Sybil* are absent in this picture. When Coningsby meets Millbank for the first time he is a ‘visage of energy and decision’.⁵⁰⁹ When Coningsby gets a chance to see his mill he ‘beheld in this great factory the last and the most refined inventions of mechanical genius. The building had been fitted up by a capitalist as anxious to raise a monument of the skill and power of his order, as to obtain a return for the great investment’.⁵¹⁰ Thus we receive the distinct impression that Millbank is not simply a man who works for financial gain or to further some personal agenda. Rather he is depicted as a paragon of his class. Indeed the clerk, an employee of Millbank, who gives Coningsby a tour of the works and who clearly idolises his master informs Coningsby of ‘the plans which Mr. Millbank had pursued, both for the moral and physical well-being of his people; how he had built churches, and schools, and institutes; houses and cottages on a new system of ventilation; how he had allotted gardens; established singing classes’.⁵¹¹ Before the author introduces the elder Millbank in person, we already have a clear impression that he is the dutiful and paternal form of ‘aristocracy’ that Disraeli propounded. As Flavin has commented, ‘he is less important as an industrialist than as an embodiment of Disraeli’s preferred form of government’.⁵¹²

When Coningsby finally engages Millbank in a conversation, his views are in so many ways the views of the author. Over dinner Millbank lectures Coningsby on the state of the aristocracy in the country. Millbank’s argument is that the English aristocracy had lost its function. It was no longer the predominant class that it had once been. It had ceased to be distinct in any quality form the other classes, and no longer took their role as the country’s natural leadership seriously:

‘But, sir, is not the aristocracy of England,’ said Coningsby, ‘a real one? You do not confound our peerage, for example, with the degraded patricians of the Continent.’ To which Millbank eventually replied, ‘the spoliation of the Church; the open and flagrant sale of its honours by the elder Stuarts; and the boroughmongering of our own times. Those are the three main sources of the existing peerage of England, and in my opinion disgraceful ones.’⁵¹³

This lengthy exchange is the key moment in the novel. Here, through Millbank, Disraeli reveals most explicitly, his ideas about natural aristocracy and the need for aristocratic renewal in England. Millbank’s criticism of the supposed ‘ancient lineage’ is a direct foreshadowing of what Disraeli would explore in more depth during *Sybil*. Indeed, Millbank’s ideas around Anglo-Saxon industry and the ancient lineage among the Saxon peasantry, indicate Disraeli’s own thoughts on the subject: that aristocracy was not so much a birth right, as it was a set of privileges and duties. We are told that the English aristocracy no longer distinguish themselves from other classes through their wealth, culture,

⁵⁰⁸ Flavin, *Disraeli*, p.77

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.57

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.59

⁵¹¹ *Ibid*, p.60

⁵¹² Flavin, *Disraeli*, p.78

⁵¹³ *Coningsby*, p.167

learning, or public service. Moreover, this small group of men who are given so much preponderance do not give back; they do not create industry, nor build towns. Millbank, much like Walter Gerrard of *Sybil*, is the embodiment of the natural aristocracy of the country. He is dutiful, diligent, benevolent and philanthropic. Millbank talks about some of Disraeli's favourite criticisms, the spoliation of the monasteries, which he would further decry in *Sybil*, and the factious nature of the 1832 Reform bill, which he had attacked in *Vindication*. If there is perhaps one difference between Millbank and Disraeli it is to the extent to which the corruption has sunk. Millbank seems to believe that as a class the problems are endemic. 'a symptom of a fundamental, structural flaw within the aristocracy itself'.⁵¹⁴ Disraeli still believed that the aristocracy were to be central to the revival of national character, and saw a reinvigorated and dutiful aristocracy as the force with which many national ills could be swept away, and the ancient constitution maintained.

One question that is not often answered is why Disraeli used a middle-class Lancashire manufacturer to raise these important points. Disraeli was no supporter of that class, and had very little experience of that world. It has been suggested that Disraeli's own situation as a sitting MP for the middle-class borough of Shrewsbury may have been influential in his treatment of industry in *Coningsby*. As Vincent acknowledged, 'he sat for Shrewsbury, a seat whose voters compromised all too many middle-class men who needed to be appeased. A novel by a Shrewsbury MP who wished to survive had to go easy on new men'.⁵¹⁵ However, Disraeli's treatment of industry goes much further than just being polite to his electors. Indeed in *Coningsby* we see protagonist praise Manchester as 'the most wonderful city of modern times!'⁵¹⁶ More: 'rightly understood, Manchester is as great a human exploit as Athens.'⁵¹⁷ Indeed, Sidonia, who tells Coningsby to visit Manchester tells him 'The Age of Ruins is past. Have you seen Manchester?' a phrase that is repeated several times.⁵¹⁸ 'Is it the philosopher alone who can conceive the grandeur of Manchester and the immensity of its future'.⁵¹⁹ While Coningsby is left to consider how the wealth of industry was 'rapidly developing classes whose power was imperfectly recognised in the constitutional scheme, and whose duties in the social system seemed altogether omitted'.⁵²⁰ Certainly, it is here in *Coningsby* that Disraeli's most modern capitalist sentiments are unveiled. He may have wished to escape his middle-class roots, but he seemingly had no quarrel with business when it was conducted responsibly. Disraeli was referring to the development of wealth and the spawning of new classes which as yet had not found their place in the traditional politics of England's landed constitution. That their increasing power and influence had not yet been fully recognised was a warning to his Conservative colleagues of the challenges the advent of mass politics might bring. As John Vincent has recognised, 'politically as well as economically, standing still is not an option; Manchester symbolizes this. Manchester as a symbol of proletarian misery – Disraeli was writing in the same year as Engels – is conspicuously absent'.⁵²¹ In this sense Millbank, the middle-class manufacturer and self-admitted 'Disciple of Progress', becomes a clever mouthpiece for Disraeli's warnings.

In book three, before we come across Mr. Millbank the readers are also introduced to Eustace Lyle, another figure who contributes to the Coningsby's political education. Eustace Lyle was a portrait of Ambrose Phillips de Lisle, an friend of Manners and Smythe from Eton. When first introduced we are told that, 'Eustace Lyle, a Roman Catholic, and the richest commoner in the

⁵¹⁴ Flavin, *Disraeli*, p.78

⁵¹⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.83

⁵¹⁶ *Coningsby*, p.116

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.150

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.149

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.151

⁵²⁰ *Ibid*, p.153

⁵²¹ Vincent, *Disraeli*, pp.88-89

county'.⁵²² Sidney [Manners] informs Coningsby that the Lyle's are 'a Roman Catholic family, about the oldest we have in the county, and the wealthiest.'⁵²³ His politics are confusing. His family of old had been among the most fervent Whigs. However, as an ancient and wealthy 'Cavalier' family he could not avail himself to support the coalition of radicals, sectarians, and democrats that were counted among the Whigs. Yet, he could neither support the Tories. While they were the party that represented his natural instincts, he would not support a party 'who never lose an opportunity of insulting his religion, and would deprive him, if possible, of the advantages of the very institutions which his family assisted in establishing'.⁵²⁴ This was a stab at the more fervently protestant members of his party, many of whom who had never forgiven Peel for his volte-face over Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Disraeli had already laid out his view on that subject in book two, where it had: 'rescued of our Roman Catholic fellow-subjects from the Puritanic yoke, from fetters which have been fastened on them by English Parliaments'.⁵²⁵ Disraeli had always taken a sympathetic view towards English Catholics, a belief that was tested in 1850, and had a certain admiration for the Old Faith, 'because it has seemingly withstood outside influences and thus functioned as a present, live expression of an uncorrupted past'.⁵²⁶ Lyle tells the assembled guests that upon his estate 'I have revived the monastic customs at St. Genevieve... There is an almsgiving twice a-week.'⁵²⁷ Lyle, it becomes clear, is exceedingly generous with his wealth, distributing food to the needy across all the neighbouring parishes. The ceremony surrounding this had a clear purpose: 'Perhaps your Grace may think that they might be relieved without all this ceremony,' said Mr. Lyle, extremely confused. 'But I agree with Henry and Mr. Coningsby, that Ceremony is not, as too commonly supposed, an idle form. I wish the people constantly and visibly to comprehend that Property is their protector and their friend.'⁵²⁸ The importance that is attributed to ceremony and tradition is important. Disraeli saw these ancient customs as a force for national renewal, and one that fought utility, the most pernicious spirit of the age. Lyle's character may seem on the face of it as an appeal for greater state welfare to tackle poverty. It is quite the opposite. We are later told how at Christmas at St. Genevieve 'all comers might take their fill, and each carry away as much bold beef, white bread, and jolly ale as a strong man could bear in a basket with one hand. For every woman a red cloak, and a coat of broadcloth for every man'.

This is because the problem of poverty was not simply a 'knife and fork question'.⁵²⁹ It was not simply about feeding the poor, but displaying that paternal benevolence which Disraeli wished to see revived. As we are told by Lord Henry Sidney, the 'mere mechanical mitigation of the material necessities of the humbler classes, a mitigation which must inevitably be limited, can never alone avail sufficiently to ameliorate their condition... that a simple satisfaction of the grosser necessities of our nature will not make a happy people; that you must cultivate the heart as well as seek to content the belly; and that the surest means to elevate the character of the people is to appeal to their affections.'⁵³⁰ In short, the aim here was not just the tackling of hunger. Rather it was aimed a creating something far more powerful: social cohesion between the classes. These forms and ceremonies, while seemingly obsolete, harked back to a nostalgic past where a sense of community had existed between the classes. To be sure, Eustace Lyle is not a major character. He only appears in two chapters. Nonetheless, he remains an important one. This is as close as Disraeli gets in *Coningsby* to

⁵²² *Ibid*, p.127

⁵²³ *Ibid*, p.129

⁵²⁴ *Ibid*, p.130

⁵²⁵ *Ibid*, p.74

⁵²⁶ Flavin, *Disraeli*, p.77

⁵²⁷ *Coningsby*, p.133

⁵²⁸ *Ibid*, p.143

⁵²⁹ *Ibid*, p.432

⁵³⁰ *Ibid*, p.434

enthusiastically trotting out the Young England principles, even if it is somewhat of an aside. Given how well received Lyle's customs and comments are, and how much approval they garner from the plot and he receives as a character, it is likely that these were ideas of which Disraeli at least approved. Moreover Lyle's claims that the principles of Peel's Conservative party 'treats institutions as we do our pheasants, they preserve only to destroy them' certainly rings with Disraeli's voice.⁵³¹ Practically speaking, Lyle's character and practices are somewhat ridiculous. However, when boiled down to their core principles - benevolent aristocracy, benign pastoral reciprocity, social cohesion, and strengthen community between property and labour - we can see the clearly conceived tenets behind Disraeli's ideas of national revival by which the spirit of the age might be challenged. The most important character in the development of Harry Coningsby's political views is perhaps also the most surprising and controversial: the mysterious figure of Sidonia. This shadowy Jewish financier is a key figure in Coningsby's educational journey. Moreover he represented a return to the Jewish motif in Disraeli's writing, a theme that had been absent since *Alroy*. Sidonia is without a doubt one of the most striking figures who recurs in Disraeli's novels. The inspiration behind this character has been debated among scholars. Lord Blake had identified him as 'a strange fantasy fulfillment of a cross between Baron de Rothschild and Disraeli himself'.⁵³² This view was echoed more recently by Weintraub.⁵³³ While Jane Ridley has seen the character as an embodiment of Disraeli himself: Ridley has seen Sidonia as, 'Disraeli in a part he had invented for himself since his rejection from Peel'.⁵³⁴

However, such a conclusion is an oversimplification of Sidonia's true purpose and representation. True, he did have many of the same traits as the famous Rothschild family: he was magnificently wealthy and that wealth had been multiplied when, 'He arrived here after the peace of Paris, with his large capital. He staked all he was worth on the Waterloo loan; and the event made him one of the greatest capitalists in Europe.'⁵³⁵ Moreover, he had spread his influence across most European nations through loans, and 'had established a brother, or a near relative, in whom he could confide, in most of the principal capitals.'⁵³⁶ Despite his financial support for many European governments, he was still barred from parliament due to his faith as a Jew: 'Can anything be more absurd than that a nation should apply to an individual to maintain its credit, and, with its credit, its existence as an empire, and its comfort as a people; and that individual one to whom its laws deny the proudest rights of citizenship, the privilege of sitting in its senate and of holding land? for though I have been rash enough to buy several estates, my own opinion is, that, by the existing law of England, an Englishman of Hebrew faith cannot possess the soil.'⁵³⁷ From this the similarities were obvious to see, and did not go unnoticed by many contemporaries.⁵³⁸ Given Disraeli's recent connection to the Rothschild family, so positive a characterization was not surprising. It is made perhaps more clear still to later readers, when the resolve with which Disraeli held these views was tested only a few years later as he pledged his support for the Jew bill after Lionel de Rothschild was elected to represent Westminster in 1847.

However, there the similarities between the two end. It was well known, we are told, that 'Sidonia was not a marrying man.'⁵³⁹ Sidonia was a cold figure, 'void of all self-love, public approbation was worthless to him; but the individual never touched him. Woman was to him a toy,

⁵³¹ *Ibid*, p.144

⁵³² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.202

⁵³³ Weintraub, *Disraeli*, p.214

⁵³⁴ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.264

⁵³⁵ *Coningsby*, p.209

⁵³⁶ *Ibid*, p.210

⁵³⁷ *Ibid*, p.244

⁵³⁸ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.280

⁵³⁹ *Coningsby*, p.233

man a machine.’: the love of another human, ‘the most divine of divine gifts, that power and even fame can never rival in its delights, all this Nature had denied to Sidonia.’⁵⁴⁰ The Rothschild’s were all family men, while Disraeli had the love of his wife Mary-Anne. His debt to her influence was life-long and his attachment to her was unshakeable. Moreover, Sidonia, as much as he has similarities with Rothschilds, was the descendent from a noble Aragonese family of Sephardi Jewish ancestry. The Rothschild’s were from the more persecuted Ashkenazi branch of northern Europe. In a letter to his Young England colleague Monckton Milnes, he admitted that the German Jews were, ‘now the most intelligent of the tribes’ but did not, ‘rank high in blood’.⁵⁴¹ Stanley recorded a conversation with Disraeli in a diary entry for 1851. With regard to the Jewish resettlement of Israel Disraeli, ‘saw only a single obstacle: arising from the existence of two races among the Hebrews, of whom one, those settles along the shores of the Mediterranean look down on the other, refusing even to associate with them. “Sephardim” I think he called the superior race.’⁵⁴² Disraeli was in fact guilty of reviving this particular racial myth which had faded out of popular existence by the nineteenth century: the myth of Sephardi superiority. This myth had originated in the medieval Iberian Peninsula. It suggested that the Sephardi Jews of Spain and Portugal were superior to their Ashkenazi brethren by virtue of their culture, wealth, learning, and even breeding.⁵⁴³ This myth had spread from the peninsula after the inquisition drove the Sephardi Jews into northern and western Europe in the fifteenth century. That Disraeli helped to revive and actively propagate this myth is striking rather than surprising. Disraeli wrongly traced his own roots back to Sephardi nobility. Thus he was able to claim lineage to the aristocratic branch of an naturally aristocratic race.⁵⁴⁴

As for seeing Sidonia as Disraeli in a fantasy vision himself, there is some merit here, but once again the picture is incomplete. Intellect and wisdom may have been Sidonia’s greatest asset, traits that Disraeli certainly saw within his own genius. While Sidonia had been excluded from the participation of politics through his religion, Disraeli had been overlooked for office and his talents ignored by the leadership of his party. We are told that: ‘Sidonia had exhausted all the sources of human knowledge; he was master of the learning of every nation’, but that ‘His religion walled him out from the pursuits of a citizen; his riches deprived him of the stimulating anxieties of a man. He perceived himself a lone being, alike without cares and without duties.’

Disraeli, certainly felt underappreciated by his party. He was a self-identified genius of his age, over-looked and ignored by a party who he had served since coming into parliament. So these connections were there to be made. However, there are many problems with these kind of identifications. Sidonia was not Disraeli. Disraeli was, if anything, a Christian by religion. He was an Englishman first and foremost. While Sidonia’s religion had walled him out from politics, Disraeli had been elected to parliament and had established a presence in the House. Moreover, however idealised the portrait might be, Disraeli could never claim to have the worldliness nor intellect of Sidonia. Therefore, it seems more likely that Sidonia represented something more than Disraeli dressed up in the costume of one of the Rothschild family. Sidonia was not drawn from life like many of Disraeli’s best characters. There was some obvious inspiration, and nods to both the Rothschild family, and to his own background. But Sidonia was more the embodiment of Disraeli’s idiosyncratic views on the Jewish race rather than a particular member of that race. He was the symbiosis between ‘the intellectual and the political’.⁵⁴⁵ There was more to Sidonia than just his Judaism. There were

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.214

⁵⁴¹ *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Monckton-Milnes, 29th of December 1844, vol.4, p.153

⁵⁴² *Derby Diaries: 1849-1869*, p.32

⁵⁴³ Todd Endelman, ‘Benjamin Disraeli and the Myth of Sephardi Superiority’, in *Disraeli’s Jewishness*, ed. Todd Endelman and Tony Kusher, (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2002) p.24

⁵⁴⁴ Endelman, ‘Disraeli and the Myth of Sephardi Superiority’, pp.76-82)

⁵⁴⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.85

elements of his character that are not intrinsically Jewish. His intellect rather than his Jewishness predominated. While much of this was representative of Disraeli's philo-semitism, his revenge for Fagin, it was also something separate. It was his obsession with the genius. As Vincent so astutely recognized, 'It was more Byronism in Judaic Garb, the cult of the man of genius'.⁵⁴⁶ Thus while Sidonia was excluded from politics, he was also representative of the claims an intellectual could make. Those were the rights of genius to be considered on equal footing with rank, wealth, and breeding. This is one of the central messages *Coningsby* delivers: 'Brains every day become more precious than blood. You must give men new ideas, you must teach them new words, you must modify their manners, you must change their laws, you must root out prejudices, subvert convictions, if you wish to be great. Greatness no longer depends on rentals, the world is too rich; nor on pedigrees, the world is too knowing'.⁵⁴⁷ Thus Sidonia, throughout *Coningsby*, glides through the novel, acting as a mentor to the youthful protagonist, not only mouthpiece for Disraeli's views on the position of the Jewish race, and on race more generally, but also educating Harry Coningsby's to the changing world of politics and to the advantages of genius.

Disraeli's attachment to his Jewish background cannot be overlooked. Certainly, there is very little evidence to credit Blake's claim that 'it was not so much the Jewish, as the Italian streak which predominated' in Disraeli's character.⁵⁴⁸ With this in mind it is perhaps unsurprising that Blake makes little effort to investigate the Sidonia, and the character's deeper meaning. For in *Coningsby* we see, for the first time since his earlier novels, a clearer picture of Disraeli's racial doctrine and its connection with his Jewish ancestry. Understanding Sidonia is central to understanding this. As a character he appears almost superhuman, wealthy beyond measure and intelligent without rival, he carves an almost omniscient figure. Philip Rieff once argued, 'Sidonia was Disraeli's affirmation of the myth of the super-Jew'.⁵⁴⁹ Yet as Rieff also identified, Sidonia's power, knowledge and authority is in many ways in some sense 'pathetic'. His religion separated him from western society and 'walled him out' from full acceptance.⁵⁵⁰ The same fate did not befall Disraeli. Certainly, Disraeli felt this isolation during his formative years and was subject to serious anti-Semitism in his early political career, and later.⁵⁵¹ This certainly must have fueled his desire to reverse these racial stereotypes in his fiction. However, Weintraub has argued he overcame this abuse through pride in his race: Disraeli 'faced his identity in the mirror every day, as well as in the relentless public perception of him as an outsider. He could fight his way in life only by turning his identity to his advantage'.⁵⁵² Similarly Rieff has argued that Disraeli could never escape the perception of his Jewishness in others, and that Disraeli chose to make that isolation his pride and his greatest strength.⁵⁵³ The fact remains that Disraeli was baptized at thirteen. This opened the political world to him. Though he never actively shied away from his Jewish ancestry, he realized that it would be possible for him to do so. As Cesarani has displayed also was never the great defender of the Jewish cause that some might presume.⁵⁵⁴ Indeed the scholarly effort to claim Disraeli for the Jewish race has often been shaped far more by contemporary anti-Semitism than by Disraeli's own beliefs. It is not helpful to look at Disraeli as a quasi-Jewish philosopher. Rather he should be seen in a more realistic context. That of a politician and an Englishman.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.87

⁵⁴⁷ *Coningsby*, p.447

⁵⁴⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.49

⁵⁴⁹ Rieff, 'Disraeli and Chosen of History', p.82

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp.82-83

⁵⁵¹ Abused by O'Connell at Taunton as 'the worst kind of Jew'. He was famously taunted by the electorate at the on election, where they goaded him with a piece of pork on a stick while jeering, 'a piece of pork for the Jew'. While later in his career he was often subject to anti-Semitic cartoons in *Punch* and racist remarks in other publications.

⁵⁵² Weintraub, p.214

⁵⁵³ Rieff, 'Disraeli and the Chosen of History', p.83

⁵⁵⁴ Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (2016)

Regardless of this, Disraeli still had a considerable admiration for the historical position of the Jews. Sidonia tells the young Coningsby that: ‘The fact is that you cannot destroy a pure race of the Caucasian organisation. It is a physiological fact; a simple law of nature, which has baffled Egyptian and Assyrian Kings, Roman Emperors, and Christian Inquisitors. No penal laws no physical tortures, can effect that a superior race should be absorbed in an inferior, or be destroyed by it. The mixed persecuting races disappear; the pure persecuted race remains.’⁵⁵⁵ This idea of permanence and indestructibility seemed as odd to many of Disraeli’s readers then, as it does to us today. However, the fact Disraeli thought about race in such a manner is interesting in itself. Disraeli’s pattern of thought in these matters was guided by the same nostalgic, and historical impulses as his views on politics. Nostalgia brought with it a sense of the past that probably never existed. It certainly transcended the realities of Disraeli’s position and indeed the reality of the position of the Jewish race in western civilization. Sidonia thus takes the form of a mouthpiece for his ideas on racial superiority and natural aristocracy. He informs Coningsby of the secret influence the persecuted Hebrew race still held over the powers of Europe which still barred that great race from the rights of citizenship. For you
‘you cannot destroy a pure race of the Caucasian organisation.’ but ‘in spite of centuries, of tens of centuries, of degradation, the Jewish mind exercises a vast influence on the affairs of Europe. I speak not of their laws, which you still obey; of their literature, with which your minds are saturated; but of the living Hebrew intellect.’⁵⁵⁶

It was this enduring permanence and intellect which, we are told, had infiltrated European governments, academic institutions, military hierarchy, and the arts: Sidonia goes on to list a group supposedly Jewish influential figures that included Napoleon’s marshals Soult and Massena, a academics, diplomats and politicians as Rossini, Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn. Therefore by playing into, but inverting, common stereotypes Disraeli attempted to display the secret influence of the Jewish race. Forced through persecution to hide their true selves, they nonetheless, due no doubt to their racial purity, rose to the highest positions in a whole host of disciplines and occupations. Disraeli, in *Coningsby* and again later in *Tancred* and *Lord George Bentinck*, endorses a conspiratorial view of politics. This was a view of politics where clandestine influence trumps representative liberal democracy. Sidonia’s influence rested not only upon his vast wealth, but rather more upon his political influence. This influence was spread throughout Europe through a network of ‘secret agents and political spies’.⁵⁵⁷ Sidonia tells his young protégé, ‘So you see, my dear Coningsby, that the world is governed by very different personages from what is imagined by those who are not behind the scenes.’⁵⁵⁸ Disraeli’s reframing of this conspiracy was well intentioned. It was a pro-Semitic account of how the Jewish race had endured persecution and were intrinsically a conservative race with the same tendencies and deference towards established national character. The clear implication was that if only Europe were to extend to them the rights of citizenship, they would find themselves a natural talented ally in the Jewish race. Indeed, in Disraeli’s eyes, the ability and natural capacity of that race was, or might soon be, arrayed against them because of Europe’s ignorance. To that end, it was unfortunate that in trying to turn the anti-Semitic argument on its head, that this argument would become something like a handbook for the forces of anti-Semitism in later decades and centuries.⁵⁵⁹

Sidonia was not just an organ for Disraeli’s musings on innate racial superiority. He also plays an important role as Coningsby’s political mentor. The worldly character of Sidonia is central to

⁵⁵⁵ *Coningsby*, p.263

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.346

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.215

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.247

⁵⁵⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.207; Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician*, p.235; Ardent, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp.68-79

the political education of the contrastingly innocent protagonist. It was to this effect, that the ideas espoused by Sidonia are those of the author. Indeed it is striking how all of Sidonia's 'lessons' are spoken with the author's voice. Yet, while Sidonia appears to advocate a rather conspiratorial view of politics, a world in which politics is controlled from behind the curtain by shadow organisations and clandestine agents, this is not the central tenet of Sidonia's message. Politics he argued was the really the battle between imagination and rationality a criticism of Utilitarianism which had failed to account for. For, 'Man is only truly great when he acts from the passions; never irresistible but when he appeals to the imagination'⁵⁶⁰ This denunciation of utilitarian principles was a theme in which Disraeli was well versed. It is no surprise that Sidonia returns to it in *Coningsby*. A lack of imagination in Tory politics was a criticism that he often levelled at Peel's own brand of liberal Conservatism. It was the politics of the age, and indeed, the spirit of the age that Disraeli found so underwhelming. Sidonia also teaches Coningsby about the power of the individual to influence events: . 'The Spirit of the Age is the very thing that a great man changes.'⁵⁶¹

Here is the very evident overlap between Disraeli's own nostalgic imaginings for a different age. Moreover, Sidonia appears here, not simply as a mentor, but also as an Oracle. Sidonia, just like Disraeli, perceived that at the heart of England there was an essentially pure sense of community. It also suggested how this might be revived and how the ruling fears of 1840s might be alleviated was through imagination: not through rational thought, nor through well calculated legislation, but rather through a dynamic shift in that great ruling spirit. In this sense, Sidonia premeditated the central concerns of *Sybil*. Thus Sidonia, really comes to represent the claims of the great intellectual genius in politics. What were his lessons to the young protagonist? That imagination, youth, and intellect is needed to reverse the spirit of the age and restore Britain's national happiness. He informs Coningsby that the decline of England's national character was 'in the fact that the various classes of this country are arrayed against each other.'⁵⁶² The classes of the country, of Britain's imagined and physical community, were in a state of impending collision: 'In what is more powerful than laws and institutions, and without which the best laws and the most skilful institutions may be a dead letter, or the very means of tyranny in the national character. It is not in the increased feebleness of its institutions that I see the peril of England; it is in the decline of its character as a community.'⁵⁶³ What is perhaps surprising is that Sidonia tells Coningsby that the power to remedy this lay not necessarily in the sacrosanct power of parliamentary government: 'in the history of this country: the depository of power is always unpopular; all combine against it; it always falls...For one hundred and fifty years Power has been deposited in the Parliament...In 1830 it was endeavoured by a reconstruction to regain the popular affection; but, in truth, as the Parliament then only made itself more powerful, it has only become more odious.'⁵⁶⁴ Thus, understood broadly, Sidonia teaches Coningsby to reject the bogus rationality of utilitarian attempts to reconstruct British society, and to embrace imagination over reason as the guiding force of national character.

Ridley has argued that 'Sidonia is the leader and teacher of the Young Englanders, yet he shares few of the ideas associated with Young England. Nor does he advocate the radical Toryism Disraeli had urged before 1841... Sidonia's idea of politics; politics is about *control*, manipulating governments behind the scenes, secrecy and conspiracies. Manipulation and control were the characteristics of High Toryism...With Sidonia Disraeli invented a new persona for himself – Jewish, High Tory and a leader, completing the metamorphosis begun when Peel denied him office in

⁵⁶⁰ *Coningsby*, p.236

⁵⁶¹ *Coningsby*, p.115

⁵⁶² *Ibid*, p.234

⁵⁶³ *Ibid*, p.235

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.236

1841.⁵⁶⁵ Much of this interpretation is sound. Sidonia's penchant for enlightened monarchy, his conspiratorial perspective on politics, and his clandestine influence of governments certainly cut a High Tory figure. In the battle between reason and imagination, these were very useful positions for Disraeli to adopt, especially when using a shadowy and seemingly omniscient financier as a mouthpiece. However, it is misleading to argue that Disraeli undertook any meaningful conversion between 1841 and *Coningsby's* publication. Nor was Sidonia a self-portrait. Broadly conceived, neither the aims of his politics had fundamentally altered, nor the central tenets of his political beliefs changed. The maintenance of the aristocratic settlement, the protection of Britain's historical national position, and the opposition to utilitarian rationalisation, which were evident amongst his earliest political writing and political ambitions. Any transition between radicalism, ultra-Toryism, radical Toryism and then, contestably, High Toryism, was an alteration of means rather than ends. As Ridley herself concedes, 'As a Radical he opposed Utilitarianism. As a Tory he opposed Peel's Conservatism or Liberal Conservatism'.⁵⁶⁶ His goals in politics were largely static. How these might be achieved, and where the realisation of his dreams lay was fluid. *Coningsby* is a testament to that.

Therefore, when *Coningsby* is seen in its entirety, what might be described as a slightly incomplete picture emerges. If it was a dissertation upon the state of parties, as Disraeli suggested it was, then it becomes a poorly disguised attack upon his own party. The Ultra-Tories and their hangers-on are ridiculed as venal and outdated, walking anachronisms in a world tacitly changed by the Reform Act. The new party machinery occasioned by 1832 and the registration clauses, were lampooned by his depiction of the manipulative wirepullers, undoubtedly comical, but with no real political significance. Tamworth Conservatism, the politics of his own party leader, was derided as a characterless and unimaginative creed. In the words of Taper, "A sound Conservative government," said Taper, musingly. 'I understand: Tory men and Whig measures.'⁵⁶⁷ Beyond critical scenes and amusing satires, we see very little of the larger Tory party. The country squires are not discussed, nor really appear. The land more generally, the rural England from which the party gained its support was not discussed. These are themes that Disraeli covered in greater depth in *Sybil*. While the book becomes a quest for 'true' Toryism, a definition unique to the author, the plot finds Coningsby's education and allies in unlikely places: a Lancashire manufacturer (albeit a wealthy one), a medievalist Catholic landowner, and perhaps most importantly a fabulously wealthy and powerful Jewish financier. These were not the foundations of any Tory party. Disraeli had condemned Peel for building a Tory party without Tory principles. By the same token, 'Disraeli was building a party without Tories'.⁵⁶⁸

Moreover, if we are to see *Coningsby* as a Young England novel, then it is also striking how absent the ideas of Young England are from the main plot. The sentimental paternalism, social feudalism, and nostalgic medievalism which had come to define the movement are kept away from the core message. Eustace Lyle, who is the representative of medievalism in the novel, is a relatively minor character and constitutes something of an aside. Indeed, when Harry Coningsby makes the 'Young England' arguments to his grandfather, they are dismissed as 'fantastical puerilities'.⁵⁶⁹ While Monmouth is undoubtedly the antagonist of the novel, he is no fool. As Kuhn has put it, 'Monmouth may be corrupt, but he speaks rough common sense'.⁵⁷⁰ Therefore in the end, *Coningsby* is not really a novel about the ideas and principles of Young England. The trilogy as a whole fails on that front. It is a record of the political collaboration between the young romantic aristocrats, filled with the

⁵⁶⁵ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.282

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.283

⁵⁶⁷ *Coningsby*, p.101

⁵⁶⁸ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.279

⁵⁶⁹ *Coningsby*, p.404

⁵⁷⁰ Kuhn, *Politics of Pleasure*, p.199

nostalgia of the Oxford movement, and their political leader, Disraeli. *Coningsby*, for its many faults, successfully records the beginning of this partnership, their ambitions of changing Tory politics, and the beginning of an open rift between Disraeli and his party leader.

III: Sybil; or the Two Nations

After the publication of *Coningsby* in 1844, the public attention that both Disraeli and the Young England group received was greatly enhanced. *Coningsby* was widely reviewed. It was a political novel, and therefore it was unsurprising that the reviews it received were generally political in nature. They were not always sympathetic. Indeed, Disraeli wrote to his friend, and Young England sympathizer, John Walters the editor of *The Times*, complaining about one review: ‘considering the influence of *The Times*, and the generally understood sympathy of its columns with many of the topics treated in *Coningsby*, the review is one calculated to do the work very great injury’.⁵⁷¹ In general reviews were mixed. For instance, Monkton-Milnes, despite his disappointment at not featuring like the more prominent members of Young England, praised Disraeli’s faith in his own race which he found ‘deeply interesting in our cold skeptical days’.⁵⁷² Perhaps the most typical form criticism came from Thackeray. Written in the Whig supporting *Morning Chronicle*, his review did not fail to praise the popularity of the novel, nor to put on record that his belief that Disraeli ‘[was] not only a dandy, but a man of genius’. However, it criticized the novel as a fashionable society novel pushed to the very edge of intellectual acceptability: ‘dandy-social, dandy-political, dandy-religious. Fancy a prostrate world kissing the feet of a reformer – in patent blacking; fancy a prophet delivering heavenly messages – with his hair in papers, and the reader will have our notion of the effect of the book’.⁵⁷³ As Ridley has commented, Thackeray’s equivocal reaction was ‘typical of the Victorian intellectual aristocracy, the George Eliots, Anthony Trollopes, and Thomas Carlyles. Grudgingly, they admitted Disraeli’s cleverness, but they disliked his flashiness, and were repelled by his theory of Jewish racial superiority’.⁵⁷⁴ Indeed the Jewish element of his writing that spawned the anti-Semitic literary lampoons in North’s *Anti-Coningsby*, and Thackeray’s *Codlingsby*, both of which heavily satire the Jewish motif of *Coningsby*.

Despite the antipathy of the great and good of nineteenth century literature, *Coningsby* was undeniably a success. Financially, it sold and sold well. The publication of the novel was well timed, coinciding with increased public interest with Young England. *Coningsby* helped stimulate this fashion. It printed three editions in as many months. Disraeli informed his sister Sarah of its sales: in June ‘Coningsby keeps moving about 40 a day on average’.⁵⁷⁵ By July: ‘Its success has exceeded all my hopes’.⁵⁷⁶ But it was not just a financial success, it also saw Disraeli’s celebrity stock rise quickly. He commented to his sister that ‘Every day, every hour, something is said, or heard, or written [about *Coningsby*]’.⁵⁷⁷ During this same summer, and into the following year, the celebrity of Young England reached its zenith. The public had come to take real interest in these young, attractive, aristocrats. It is perhaps not surprising that these young patrician youths, who became celebrated for their matching white waistcoats, should have captured the public imagination.⁵⁷⁸ Their politics may

⁵⁷¹ *Disraeli’s Letters*, D to John Delane, 14th May 1844, vol.4 p.122

⁵⁷² R.W. Stewart, *Benjamin Disraeli: A List of Writings by him and Writings about him, with Notes*, (Metuchen N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1972) pp.180-183

⁵⁷³ *The Morning Chronicle*, Monday 12th of May 1844. In William Makepeace Thackeray, *Contributions to the Morning Chronicle*, ed. Gordon N. Ray, (Oxford: OUP, 1955) pp.39-40

⁵⁷⁴ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.285

⁵⁷⁵ *Disraeli’s Letters*, D to Sarah Disraeli, 13th of June 1844, vol.4 p.129-130

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid*, D to Sarah Disraeli, 9th of July 1844, vol.4, pp.132-134

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid*, D to Sarah Disraeli, 10th of June 1844, vol.4, p.128

⁵⁷⁸ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.289

have been somewhat eccentric. But they were undoubtedly the glamour boys of early Victorian politics. The buzz around *Coningsby* even led Disraeli, Manners, and Smythe, the leaders of Young England, to receive invitations to address a meeting of the Manchester Athenaeum, in October of 1844.

On October 3rd at Manchester's Free Trade Hall, with Disraeli in the chair, this trio enraptured the artisans of Manchester with the ideas of Young England. As Whibley has shrewdly recognised, 'to Manchester they went...as if conscious that they were on public trial, each one of them surpassed in eloquence even the expectations of their colleagues'.⁵⁷⁹ Disraeli, as if continuing on directly from *Coningsby*, delivered a speech 'brilliant with imagery'⁵⁸⁰ that praised intellect and knowledge, and encouraged the youth of England. First praising Manchester for having "dethroned Force and placed on her high seat Intelligence", he then entered into perhaps his most celebrated passage on knowledge:

"Knowledge is like a mystic ladder in the patriarch's dream. It's base rests upon the primeval earth – its crest is lost in the shadowy splendor of the empyrean; while the great authors that for traditionary ages have held the chain of science and philosophy, of poesy and erudition, are the angels ascending and descending on the sacred scale, and maintaining, as it were, the communication between man and heaven."⁵⁸¹

Following this famous passage, as if delivering a message from the heavens himself, he declared that "the youth of a nation are the trustees of their posterity". To them Disraeli declared, "I give that counsel which I have ever given to youth, and which I believe to be the wisest, the best – I tell them to aspire".⁵⁸² It was a masterful oration, and a resounding personal success. Moreover, it was matched by the efforts of both Manners and Smythe. Manners, as if trying to 'breathe into his audience the spirit of antiquarianism',⁵⁸³ elucidated the historical nature of their movement:

"I rate highly the good which may accrue to his country from having its past history, not a mere record of the Kings who reigned and the battles they fought, but the history of its inner life, the habits thoughts, and tastes of its people, the real aims and objects of its governors, laid faithfully before us, because I am everyday more and more convinced that half the mischief which is done to a country like this by its legislators and rulers is done from a misunderstanding of its past history".⁵⁸⁴

Through this peroration he and his friends in Young England aimed, "to soften the harsh tendencies of toil and wealth by the gentle means of literature and art".⁵⁸⁵ Smythe's speech was no less well received, a speech which 'dazzled the eyes of its mind with the vision of a poet'.⁵⁸⁶ His oration praised the power of literature, celebrated the success of Manchester, and finally eulogized Canning who, much like Disraeli, who had been subjected to, "the absurdities, the barbarities, or, what is even worse, the vulgarities or our party warfare".⁵⁸⁷ It was a speech which surpassed both Disraeli's and Manners' in its eloquence and literary sublimity.

⁵⁷⁹ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, p.175

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid*, vol.1, p.175

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid*, vol.1, p.176

⁵⁸² *Ibid*, vol.1, p.176

⁵⁸³ *Ibid*, vol.1, p.177

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid*, vol.1, p.177

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, vol.1, p.177

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*, vol.1, p.177

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid*, vol.1, p.178

The evening was a tremendous success, *The Times* reported that over 3200 ladies and gentlemen were in attendance at this ‘most brilliant and magnificent spectacle’.⁵⁸⁸ Moreover, the speeches were recorded and published in pamphlets that were distributed around the country. News of their performance soon spread throughout the country’s clubs and salons. For Disraeli it was also a personal triumph. This gave him hope that ‘with careful management of his opportunities, his literary fame and social acceptance can transcend the doubts about his political loyalties and personal trustworthiness’.⁵⁸⁹ This proved somewhat unfounded. The address to the Manchester Athenaeum has been described by one scholar the ‘high-water mark of [Young England’s] success’.⁵⁹⁰ In a sense it was. It was also, as Whibley recognized the ‘swan song of Young England’.⁵⁹¹ As the tectonic plates of British politics shifted once again over the Maynooth Grant, only a few months later, Manchester would be ‘the culminating point in the glory of Young England’.⁵⁹²

In the interim, passing glory was more than mitigated by scathing criticism. Some pointed to the possibilities being missed. Thomas Carlyle, writing to Monckton-Milnes, asserted that ‘if Young England would altogether fling off its shovel hat into the lumber room, much more cast its purple stockings into the nettles; and honestly recognizing what was dead, and leaving the dead to bury that, address itself frankly to the magnificent but as yet chaotic and appalling Future, in the *spirit* of Past and Present; telling men at every turn that it knew and saw forever clearly the *body* of the Past to be dead... what achievements might not Young England perhaps manage for us!’⁵⁹³ As Ridley has argued, ‘For him [Disraeli], Young England was about the regeneration of aristocratic leadership, which Carlyle too had diagnosed in *Past and Present* as a fundamental need of the times’.⁵⁹⁴ Some thought that a bridge too far when it came to serious remedies for contemporary political problems. Karl Marx was scathing in his criticism of Young England. He wrote in the *Communist Manifesto* for 1848: ‘In this was arose Feudal Socialism; half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to its very hearts’ core, but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history... “Young England”, exhibited this spectacle’.⁵⁹⁵ A still more typical view of Young England can be found in twenty-three-year-old Frederic Engels’ *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. There he commented both kindly and condescendingly upon Young England. ‘The hope of Young England’, he wrote, ‘is a restoration of the old “Merry England” with its brilliant features and its romantic feudalism, this object is of course unattainable and ridiculous, a satire upon all historic development; but the good intention, the courage to resist the existing state of things and prevalent prejudices, and to recognize the vileness of our present condition is worth something anyhow’.⁵⁹⁶ This was perhaps the rub of it. For, while the sentiments of Young England held much merit, and indeed contributed to a large cannon of romantic revivalist thought, the fact of the matter was that both the absurdity of some of their more extreme ideas (Maypoles, revival of Touching, alms-giving), and the nature of the people who constituted the group that ensured that they were never taken seriously by the more respectable political circles. That this group of young wealthy aristocrats should have taken a genuine interest in the condition and happiness of the people was no bad thing. The problem was that, despite their glamour, and the public interest that attracted, they were not taken for serious intellectual figures.

⁵⁸⁸ *The Times*, 5th of October 1844, p.5

⁵⁸⁹ O’Kell, p.236

⁵⁹⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.181

⁵⁹¹ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.1, p.179

⁵⁹² M&B, vol.2, p.247

⁵⁹³ *Carlyle Letters*, Carlyle to Monckton-Milnes, 13th of March 1844, vol.17, p.311-312

⁵⁹⁴ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.291

⁵⁹⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1910) pp.44-45

⁵⁹⁶ Frederic Engels, *The Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844*, (New York: John W. Lovell, 1887) p.97

There was just one year between the publication of *Coningsby* and that of *Sybil*. It was no mean achievement for Disraeli to write another novel in what proved to be a congested social and political calendar. So much so that it has been suggested that the need to write *Sybil* so soon after *Coningsby* was that the former failed in its aim. ‘Part of that motive’, O’Kell has argued, ‘must also have been his realization that the enormous success of *Coningsby* derived less from any appreciation of his reflexive attempt to define the proper contemporary role of heroic sensibility than from the widespread conviction that he had produced as “manifesto of Young England”...Disraeli’s intentions in writing *Coningsby* had been a much broader and deeper than such notoriety acknowledged’.⁵⁹⁷ Certainly it was a tale which more fully explored the social implications of Disraeli’s political outlook. Moreover, Disraeli had also come to realize the limited sway parliamentary speeches, reported via newspapers, had over public opinion. As O’Kell has shrewdly observed, ‘the novel offered peculiar and remarkable advantages to a person of imaginative genius with that ambition, for not only did fiction easily accommodate both the revision of history and topical political comment by means of discursive digression. It also offered opportunity for satire, parody, and melodrama which spoke loudly to a newly emerging political constituencies within the middle classes.’⁵⁹⁸ These were both powerful motives to embark once again on the publication of another novel. But both miss the ever-shifting landscape of politics, particularly in the 1840s.

Disraeli’s position had changed after *Coningsby*. The public popularity of Young England had reached its zenith. They had seemingly broken ranks with Peel before its publication. By 1844, when Disraeli undertook the writing of *Sybil*, Disraeli and his colleagues were in open rebellion against their chief. Young England played a major role in the success of Ashley’s amendment to the factory bill, reducing maximum children’s working hours ten a day. Manners and Cochrane spoke forcefully on the issue and all of Young England voted with the back-bench rebels for the amendment.⁵⁹⁹ The government was defeated. However, Peel sent the amendment back to the House the following day to rescind the vote. In June Young England played an important role in defeating the government once again, this time over sugar duties. Disraeli and Young England sided with the prominent protectionist Miles, whose amendment effectively stymied Peel’s bill to free up the sugar trade. The amendment passed. Peel was infuriated. He called a meeting of Tory MPs at the Carlton, aiming to bring them onside with the government before the debate over the Sugar Duties continued at the House at evening. Peel’s speech opening the debate was dictatorial and arrogant, criticizing his supporters for abandoning him over Miles’ amendment. This time Disraeli spoke and offered a stinging rebuke. With his trademark sardonic drawl, he commented that the ‘Baronet’s horror of slavery extends to every place except the Benches behind him. There the gang is still assembled, and there the thong of the whip still sounds.’⁶⁰⁰ He finished by saying ‘I shall at least not be ashamed to do so, nor shall I feel that I have weakened my claims upon the confidence of my constituents by not changing my vote within forty-eight hours at the menace of a Minister.’⁶⁰¹ It was a stinging attack which signalled Young England’s increasing alienation from their party leadership. This time the government scraped through by 22 votes, Queen Victoria expressed alarm not only to how close it was, but also about the prominent role Young England played in Peel’s narrow escape, writing to her uncle Leopold: ‘we really are in the greatest possible danger of having a resignation of the

⁵⁹⁷ O’Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.256

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp.234-235

⁵⁹⁹ Smythe did not vote against Peel for the amendment, on this occasion it seemed that he was unable to deny his father’s insistence that he vote with his Premier.

⁶⁰⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 17th June 1844, vol.77, c.1029

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid*, c.1030

government without knowing to whom to turn, and this from the recklessness of a handful of foolish half 'Puseyite', half 'Young England' people'.⁶⁰²

If open revolt was not enough, Disraeli, invited to dinner with Lionel de Rothschild, commented to Hobhouse, and in the company of other leading Whigs, that he believed 'if our party [the Whigs] played their cards well...they would be out by five o'clock the next day'.⁶⁰³ In the same vein, Disraeli declared to Hobhouse that 'Peel had completely failed to keep together his party and must go, if not now at least very speedily'.⁶⁰⁴ This shows just how much Disraeli's dislike of Peel and his disapproval of his policies had grown. Ridley has even suggested that this dinner was in fact a cabal aimed at the creation of anti-Peel bloc in parliament. There is little hard evidence to support this conclusion. A historian must speculate heavily to establish it. However, that seems to pose no problem to Ridley, who has argued that, 'we know of Disraeli's intrigues only because Hobhouse kept a diary. Who knows what conversations Disraeli held with the Whigs or with the Rothschilds?'⁶⁰⁵ This leaves the question unanswered. However, it is difficult not to conclude that Disraeli's well documented and life-long aversion to Whiggism would suggest the unlikelihood of such an alliance.

The fact was that Disraeli had many motives for writing *Sybil* so soon after *Coningsby*. His political situation had changed a great deal in a short time. And his first novel of the 1840s had left many of the implications of his political thought as yet not fully elucidated. *Sybil*, on the face of it, follows a similar matrix to that of *Coningsby*. It begins with a young scion of a noble house, who embarks on a journey of discovery. The common theme was 'Condition of England'. In a sense, *Sybil* answers this problem, in a more traditional way than *Coningsby*. That is not to say, in the narrowly defined sense: sewers, trade union legislation, and the Poor Law, or other such specific legislation. Rather, it was concerned about who ought to rule; on what terms should power be held, and how could the traditional territorial constitution, and the traditional relationship of Church and State, be maintained in the face of the problems facing Britain in the 1840s?⁶⁰⁶ *Sybil* allowed Disraeli to continue to develop his idiosyncratic view of English history, going further than he had in either *Coningsby* or *Vindication*. It allowed him to explore his views on religion further still. While certainly not a conventional believer, he deplored the perceived decline in the Anglican Church, respected it as an integral part of the ancient constitution, and recognized the utility of religion as a critical control by which man's passions might be limited. *Sybil* also allowed Disraeli to embark on a serious exploration of poverty, a theme absent from his other novels. And by this he meant not just poverty, but its by-products: urban radicalism and agricultural unrest. Perhaps most of all, *Sybil* was a criticism of the aristocracy. It was an attack on their failure to seriously undertake their duty as social and political leaders.

The central concern of *Sybil* is poverty and working-class misery; the 'condition of England question', most commonly conceived. This an aspect of British society into which Disraeli's pen had never, nor would never again, venture. That said, *Sybil* performs its task with remarkable sympathy and striking imagery. In fact Disraeli undertook a great deal of research for these sections of the novel. His information was taken directly from the government blue books and from his northern tour following his appearance at Manchester Athenaeum. On this trip they were accommodated at the country houses of several Young England sympathizers. They stayed with Lord Egerton at Worsley Hall, and with Monckton-Milnes at Fryston, before sojourning with W.B. Ferrand in Bingley. It was from travelling around the North that Disraeli, 'absorbed much of the detailed knowledge of the

⁶⁰² *Letters of Queen Victoria*, V to King Leopold, 18th of June 1844, vol.2, p.16

⁶⁰³ Hobhouse, *Recollections of a Long Life*, vol.6, p.115

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.115

⁶⁰⁵ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, pp.287-288

⁶⁰⁶ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.81

industrial conditions that informs his portrayal of them in *Sybil*.⁶⁰⁷ At Bingley Disraeli encountered the Ferrand's system of garden allotments to help the condition of factory workers, and attempting other methods by which the separate classes might be brought together. It was also at Bingley that Disraeli delivered a speech on the subject of class divisions, as the one passing societal evil:

'we are asked sometimes what we want. We want in the first place to impress upon society that there is such a thing as duty. We don't do that in any spirit of conceit or arrogance; we don't pretend that we are better than others, but we are anxious to do our duty, and, if so, we think we have a right to call others, whether rich or poor, to do theirs. If that principle of duty had not been lost sight of for the last fifty years, you would never have heard of the classes into which England is divided...It is not so much to the action of laws as to the influence of manners that we must look...But how are manners to influence men if they are divided into classes – if the population of a country becomes a body of sections, a group of hostile garrisons?...We see but little hope for this country so long as the spirit of faction that has been so rampant of late years is fostered and encouraged...Of such a state of society the inevitable result is that public passions are excited for private ends, and popular improvement is lost sight of in particular aggrandizement.'⁶⁰⁸

Here we see an early indication of the ideas that were explored in *Sybil*. But what was perhaps more striking is the Disraeli's conservative outlook on society. For what on the face of it seemed to call for a coming together of classes was emphatically not a plea for amalgamation. Rather this speech is call for class duty, and mutual sympathy and greater cooperation between separate classes. It is this attitude that we see so vividly in *Sybil* and his depictions of contemporary poverty and proletarian squalor.

Sybil deployed a varied, and at times clumsy, mixture of settings. The main force of continuity in this patchwork is, as Ridley has pointed out, 'the narrator's voice...Disraeli is the most important character in the book, though he does not appear'.⁶⁰⁹ *Sybil* is a novel that is bursting with Disraeli's recent experiences of a busy parliamentary session. We see evidence throughout of his reading of government reports, his recent political exploits, and his first-hand experiences of the North of England. This is not to say that the central ideas in *Sybil* are new. They resonate with the same historical nostalgia that pervades the vast bulk of Disraeli's writing and political thought. It is therefore not surprising that, as early as the third chapter of *Sybil*, Disraeli continues to elucidate this 'Tory' interpretation of English history. Disraeli had shown remarkable consistency in his historic, backward-looking understanding of Britain's present political and social ills. Thus in *Sybil* he launches into a polemical dissertation against that Whig school of thought, popularized by Macaulay and Hallam. Disraeli opposed the idea that the great 'Whig' cause of civil and religious liberty – 'the cause for which Hampden had died in the field, and Russell on the scaffold'⁶¹⁰ – had ever been secured through Whig parliamentary success. Thus, the seemingly progressive legislative trend from Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the Reform Act of 1832 was nothing more than a 'hundred years of political mystification, during which a people without power or education, had been induced to believe themselves the freest and most enlightened nation in the world, and had submitted to lavish their blood and treasure, to see their industry crippled and their labour mortgaged, in order to maintain an oligarchy, that had neither ancient memories to soften nor present services to justify their unprecedented usurpation.'⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.239

⁶⁰⁸ M&B, vol.2, pp.247-248

⁶⁰⁹ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.296

⁶¹⁰ *Sybil*, p.12

⁶¹¹ *Ibid*, p.14

Disraeli's understanding of a Tory theory of history began in the reign of Henry VIII. It was during that grim era that the Whig aristocracy who, much like Baldwin Greymount, had accumulated their wealth during the spoliation of the monasteries had 'seized the right moment to get sundry grants of abbey lands'.⁶¹² Yet these lands which had belonged to the Abbeys, and by extension the people. The Church had always been the property of the people and the monasteries had been their protector.⁶¹³ The nature of the acquisition of these lands had given their new proprietors a political interest in the Reformation which they now redecorated with the brush of religious liberty. These same Whig barons, who owed so much of their wealth to the Reformation, were therefore alarmed in 1688 by the 'prevalent impression that King James intended to insist on the restitution of the church estates to their original purposes'. Thus the great Whig aristocracy, appalled by this proposal, and in order to safeguard their augmented wealth and influence, called over 'the Prince of Orange and a Dutch army, to vindicate those popular principles which, somehow or other, the people would never support.'⁶¹⁴ They invited William of Orange under the plea of 'civil and religious liberty' to protect the nation from the Catholic Stuart rule. But, William of Orange's invasion was motivated not by liberation. Rather, 'the real cause of this invasion was financial. With William came a great debt which was the cost of maintaining the Whig Oligarchy, and the interest on this 'Dutch finance', was paid for by mortgaging 'industry in order to protect property'.⁶¹⁵ The great result of this policy of Dutch finance: 'A mortgaged aristocracy, a gambling foreign commerce, a home trade founded on a morbid competition, and a degraded people; these are great evils, but ought perhaps cheerfully to be encountered for the greater blessings of civil and religious liberty'.⁶¹⁶ Thus 1688, was far from the Glorious Revolution of Whig chronicles. James II was one of the greatly misunderstood figures of British history. Had not intended to re-establish the Catholic Church in England, rather he had sought to blend the Anglican and Roman church. If he had succeeded and the coup d'état of 1688 been avoided, 'we might have been saved from the triple blessings of Venetian politics, Dutch finance, and French wars'.⁶¹⁷ The accession of the House of Hanover in 1714 had served to shore up the Venetian constitution created by the Whigs. Their oligarchy was secured and the King reduced to a doge. Thus the mystification was complete and freedom became synonymous with the rule of the Whigs.⁶¹⁸

There were however great Tory statesmen who had opposed the Whig oligarchy: 'three greatest of English statesmen, —Bolingbroke, Shelburne, and lastly the son of Chatham'.⁶¹⁹ These men with the addition of Carteret, who passed on the baton of Toryism to his son-in-law Shelburne, are among the most 'suppressed characters of English history'.⁶²⁰ Bolingbroke, often the Tory hero of Disraeli's historical thought, had originated the true Tory policy: 'a real royalty, in lieu of the chief magistracy; a permanent alliance with France, instead of the Whig scheme of viewing in that power the natural enemy of England; and, above all, a plan of commercial freedom'.⁶²¹ Bolingbroke's genius had been shut out by the Whigs on account of his support for the pretender and his involvement with Jacobitism. Next Disraeli traces this apostolic succession of Toryism to Carteret: 'the spirit' which Bolingbroke, 'had raised at length touched the head of Carteret'.⁶²² It was this talented rival of Walpole who having become sceptical of their Venetian organisation after the Duke of Newcastle's rise to the premiership, had rekindled that Tory spirit in his effort to 'terminate the

⁶¹² *Ibid*, p.11

⁶¹³ *Ibid*, pp.73-74

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.12

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.23

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.24

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.24

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.26

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.25

⁶²⁰ *Ibid*, p.18

⁶²¹ *Ibid*, p.19

⁶²² *Ibid*, p.18

dogeship of George II'.⁶²³ Bolingbroke's spirit was then found in his son-in-law, Lord Shelburne. In Disraeli's eyes he was one of the most undervalued and suppressed statesmen of the eighteenth-century, he had entered politics, 'aloof from the patrician connection'.⁶²⁴ He had played a great part in the ultimately 'unsuccessful efforts to aid the grandson of George the Second in his struggle for political emancipation'.⁶²⁵ Much like his father-in-law, his abilities were impressive. He was a powerful orator whom only Burke could surpass and an efficient administrator. He was 'deep and adroit, he was however brave and firm. His knowledge was extensive and even profound. He was a great linguist; he pursued both literary and scientific investigations'.⁶²⁶ Indeed it was Shelburne who had foreseen the rising power of the middle classes and the role they might play as an ally of the Crown. While Shelburne had been largely frustrated by the Whigs. He was then overlooked, mistakenly in Disraeli's opinion, for the Younger Pitt. However, it was under his continuing sagacious influence that Pitt the Younger returned Britain to the true Tory system of Bolingbroke. Pitt had for a time succeeded in resurrecting the policy of true Toryism: his 'commercial treaties of '87 were struck in the same mint' as the previous policy of Shelburne.⁶²⁷ His famous attempts to undertake parliamentary reform had been frustrated 'first by the Venetian party, and afterwards by the panic of Jacobinism'.⁶²⁸ He had been able to achieve partial success by creating 'a plebeian aristocracy and blended it with the patrician oligarchy. He made peers of second-rate squires and fat graziers. He caught them in the alleys of Lombard Street, and clutched them from the counting-houses of Cornhill'.⁶²⁹ However, Pitt's successes were halted by the French revolution. His reaction to that event was violent, 'but in exact opposition to the very system he was called into political existence to combat; he appealed to the fears, the prejudices, and the passions of a privileged class, revived the old policy of the oligarchy he had extinguished, and plunged into all the ruinous excesses of French war and Dutch finance'.⁶³⁰ Echoing *Coningsby*, which had traced the history Tory party after Pitt. Disraeli explained how from his death until 1825, 'the political history of England is a history of great events and little men. The rise of Mr. Canning, long kept down by the plebeian aristocracy of Mr. Pitt as an adventurer, had shaken parties to their centre'.⁶³¹ After Canning's untimely death, the bright star of Toryism had been eclipsed and the spirit of Bolingbroke increasingly impalpable.

Disraeli's efforts to broaden his understanding of England's political history was important. Lord Blake has argued that 'Disraeli had no real historical sense; he wrote propaganda, not history'.⁶³² This is true in part. Disraeli's history was hardly well researched. At times it was almost totally inaccurate. But the fact remains that he was offering a novel challenge to Whig historians of his period. As Ridley has pointed out, 'his notion of an apostolic succession keeping the Tory idea alive down the ages is merely a Tory version of the Whig idea of liberty broadening to precedent'.⁶³³ His idea that Whig history was mere discombobulation. It was no than propaganda that mystified the truth and served the interests of the ruling classes. This was a novel argument. Moreover, his historical thesis in *Sybil* shows not only continuity with his early *Vindication*, but displays a clear advance on his earlier position. Whig history is not just transposed for Tory purposes. The idea of progress was totally refuted in *Sybil*. This history argued that since the Reformation the history of England has been one of social, and political decline. Throughout the novel, we are treated to this nostalgic and

⁶²³ *Ibid*, p.18

⁶²⁴ *Ibid*, p.19

⁶²⁵ *Ibid*, p.19

⁶²⁶ *Ibid*, pp.19-20

⁶²⁷ *Ibid*, p.21

⁶²⁸ *Ibid*, p.22

⁶²⁹ *Ibid*, p.22

⁶³⁰ *Ibid*, p.22

⁶³¹ *Ibid*, p.25

⁶³² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.273

⁶³³ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.298

contemplative vision of old England. In short, *Sybil* looks to history to cure the ills of the present. It is asking where had England gone wrong? What can be revived? It is therefore highly symbolic that the most famous, and perhaps most crucial scene of the novel is set amongst the impressive ruins of a once glorious abbey. For Disraeli the ruins of Marney Abbey conjured up a rose-tinted vision of England's pre-Reformation history. It was among the overgrown ruins of 'one of the greatest of the great religious houses of the North' that Egremont ponders the questions confronting his own age.

This scene set the tone for the novel. Why had the lot of the poor become worse as civilisation had become more advanced? Disraeli attempted to answer the condition of England question, not through any legislative panacea, but rather through a return to community: by way of greater appreciation and mutual respect between classes. Amongst the ruins of Marney, Disraeli encountered a pair of strangers. The first, who we later find out is Walter Gerrard, lectures Egremont on what had been lost since the dissolution: what had been lost since the monastic orders held sway over the land, and how English society had changed for the worse. Gerrard is a character, who much like Sidonia, has a prophetic way of speaking. This is clear both from his appearance and his 'oracular tone which prevails in many of the character-forming conversations undertaken by Disraeli's heroes'.⁶³⁴ It is he who first introduces Egremont to a society more divided than it has ever been in the past: 'the country was not divided into two classes, masters and slaves; there was some resting-place between luxury and misery.'⁶³⁵ Egremont is introduced to second stranger, his description reflects what the readers should think of: 'He hardly reached the middle height; his form slender, but well proportioned; his pale countenance, slightly marked with the small po[illeg.], was redeemed from absolute ugliness by a highly-intellectual brow, and large dark eyes that indicated deep sensibility and great quickness of apprehension. Though young, he was already a little bald; he was dressed entirely in black'.⁶³⁶ It is in this conversation with the radical Stephen Morley that the book enters its most famous scene:

"Well, society may be in its infancy," said Egremont slightly smiling; "but, say what you like, our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed."

"Which nation?" asked the younger stranger, "for she reigns over two."

The stranger paused; Egremont was silent, but looked inquiringly.

"Yes," resumed the younger stranger after a moment's interval. "Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."

"You speak of---" said Egremont, hesitatingly.

"The Rich and the Poor."

This may be the most famous scene in all of Disraeli's fiction. But it has become perhaps the most problematic. *Sybil* was never intended to argue for the union of rich and poor through Egremont's eventual union to Sybil (not without her true aristocratic lineage being revealed in the process). Indeed, it was never about the amalgamation of the classes. Disraeli believed unshakably in a class-based society. *Sybil* was not seeking for these walls to be broken down. Rather, it was asking for their extremes to be softened, and greater cooperation and sympathy fostered. As Brantlinger has argued, the idea of Two Nations is 'a dangerous illusion'.⁶³⁷ That much is proved by Disraeli. It is Morley, the atheist socialist radical, who informs us of these 'Two Nations'. And in the end his ideas are ultimately disproved and discredited. The idea of 'Two Nations' as O'Kell has recognized, serves to startle

⁶³⁴ Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p.96

⁶³⁵ *Sybil*, pp.71-72

⁶³⁶ *Ibid*, p.73

⁶³⁷ Brantlinger, 'Disraeli and Orientalism', p.104

‘Egremont out of his complacency and edges him towards responsible political thought’.⁶³⁸ Similarly, scenes of poverty and their sharp contrast to the visions of luxury enjoyed by the aristocracy, are displayed to illustrate the country’s most deep-rooted problems. They are certainly not an endorsement of Morley’s ideas. As Brantlinger has shrewdly argued, the poor in *Sybil* were ‘not at all a united nation confronting the rich’. Rather they were ‘congeries of quarreling factions’.⁶³⁹ He also correctly suggests that, ‘Disraeli points to the diversity of the class system as a refutation of the two-nations theory held by his Chartist characters’.⁶⁴⁰ Destitute handloom weaver Warner is a character who is obviously meant to deserve our sympathy, as are the honest workers at Trafford’s factory. But these honest deferential Englishmen have little in common with the ‘Hell-Cats’ and the Hattons of the world.

In a sense, the scenes of working-class misery, while central to the novel, are really a symptom of the problems. Heightened as a result of other failings. They must first be explored in order to form an analysis of the novels sharp, societal, criticisms. We first encounter these scenes of poverty at the rural town of Marney. We are told of its beautiful setting in the Dales of Yorkshire, ‘clear and lively stream, surrounded by meadows and gardens, and backed by lofty hills, undulating and richly wooded’.⁶⁴¹ We admire from a distance for its serene bucolic setting. But the situation, on closer inspection, was dire. Marney consisted of a series of ‘narrow and crowded lanes’ made up of cottages that could ‘scarcely hold together’. Their roofs in such disrepair that they more closely resembled ‘top of a dunghill than a cottage’. While outside these damp and squalid tenements refuse of all descriptions was ‘decomposing into disease... foul pits or spreading into stagnant pools’⁶⁴²

It certainly painted a grim picture of this hub of agricultural labour. This was a place where pestilence, disease, and shadow of death hung heavy in the air. In Marney, that downtrodden class had, in addition to their arduous labour, ‘to endure each morn and even a weary journey before they could reach the scene of their labour, or return to the squalid hovel which profaned the name of home.’⁶⁴³ To add insult to this injury, owing to the competition for labour in Marney and its surrounding area, ‘there were few districts in the kingdom where the rate of wages was more depressed’.⁶⁴⁴ And the reason for this miserable and squalid manner of living? A forbidding and unsympathetic aristocracy. It was these rulers who for ‘the last half century acted on the system of destroying the cottages on their estates, in order to become exempted from the maintenance of the population’.⁶⁴⁵ This systematic policy of eviction had driven the agricultural population to the rural metropolis of Marney where, during the Napoleonic war, they had found work in a munitions factory, one whose ‘wheels had long ceased to disturb the waters of the Mar.’⁶⁴⁶ The closure of this factory had once again forced them to turn to the land for their work, which yielded now a pitiful remuneration from their parsimonious aristocratic rulers.

This subjugated and impoverished peasantry might have taken consolation and inspiration from the Church. However, ‘The eyes of this unhappy race might have been raised to the solitary spire that sprang up in the midst of them, the bearer of present consolation, the harbinger of future equality; but Holy Church at Marney had forgotten her sacred mission. We have introduced the reader to the vicar, an orderly man who deemed he did his duty if he preached each week two sermons, and enforced humility on his congregation and gratitude for the blessings of this life.’⁶⁴⁷ The vicar himself

⁶³⁸ O’Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.258

⁶³⁹ Brantlinger, ‘Disraeli and Orientalism’ p.104

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.104

⁶⁴¹ *Sybil*, p.47

⁶⁴² *Ibid*, pp.47-48

⁶⁴³ *Ibid*, p.49

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.49

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.48

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.50

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.52

was a relatively poor man, drawing his income from the small tithes gathered from the parish. Disraeli vividly contrasted the spiritual situation in Marney with the glory of the ruined abbey and the monks who had once lived there. As Egremont surveys the ruin of Marney Abbey, it was not ‘without emotion could he behold these unrivalled remains of one of the greatest of the great religious houses of the North.’⁶⁴⁸ The monastery which had once controlled the land of Marney had been both a charitable and spiritual order. When introduced to the ruins of this abbey, the footprint of the old unreformed church, we are told of ‘the capacious hospital, a name that did not then denote the dwelling of disease, but a place where all the rights of hospitality were practised; where the traveller from the proud baron to the lonely pilgrim asked the shelter and the succour that never were denied, and at whose gate, called the Portal of the Poor, the peasants on the Abbey lands, if in want, might appeal each morn and night for raiment and for food.’⁶⁴⁹ More: when in conversation with a stranger he encounters at the ruins, Egremont is taught of the benevolent rule of the Abbot’s of Marney: ‘All agree the Monastics were easy landlords; their rents were low; they granted leases in those days. Their tenants too might renew their term before their tenure ran out: so they were men of spirit and property.’⁶⁵⁰ Disraeli makes clearer still that the old monastic orders were not without their faults. But he makes clear that under their charitable and benevolent administration, the land and the prosperity of its peasantry had been secured. Certainly, the meagre tithes collected by the Church of Marney, paled in comparison to ‘the great tithes of Marney, which might be counted by thousands, swelled the vast rental which was drawn from this district by the fortunate earls that bore its name.’⁶⁵¹

Through this one depiction of rural poverty we can see the themes of the novel emerging. The condition of the working classes was in a worrying state. As the old farmer Mr. Bingley tells Egremont, when he comes across a burning rick on the land of the Abbey Farm (land owned by his older brother Lord Marney): ‘It is not so much the fire, sir, but the temper of the people that alarms me... Things is very bad here; I can't make out, for my part, what has become of the country. Tayn't the same land to live in as it was’.⁶⁵² Disraeli’s depiction of both rural poverty and agricultural unrest, while important in their own right, are used to illustrate the causes of these problems: an uncaring and functionless aristocracy, and a Church which had lost its direction as a source of spiritual guidance. However, Disraeli’s criticism was not reserved for these neglected rural districts, which ought have been under the protection of a dutiful landlord. He showed equal measure of attention to detail, and imagination, in his portrayal of the various forms of urban depression, and the working class characters who had fallen foul of them.

The most memorable, and most striking of these scenes occurs in the industrial town of Wodgate. Here Disraeli furnishes one of his most brutal depictions of the unrestrained and unbridled horrors that unchecked industry could bring. First impressions offered to the reader clearly bleak:

‘Wodgate had advantages of its own, and of a kind which touch the fancy of the lawless. It was land without an owner; no one claimed any manorial right over it; they could build cottages without paying rent. It was a district recognized by no parish; so there were no tithes, and no meddling supervision. It abounded in fuel which cost nothing, for though the veins were not worth working as a source of mining profit, the soil of Wodgate was similar in its superficial character to that of the country around. So a population gathered, and rapidly increased, in the ugliest spot in England, to which neither Nature nor art had contributed a single charm; where a tree could not be seen, a flower was unknown, where there was neither

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.53

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.55

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.56

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.50

⁶⁵² *Ibid*, p.54

belfry nor steeple, nor a single sight or sound that could soften the heart or humanise the mind.’⁶⁵³

The problems posed by Wodgate were obvious and immediate. It was a place that had no landlord and thus the influence of ‘property’ was not known. Nor did it have the controlling influence or spiritual guidance of the Church to abate the excesses of its rapid industrial development. Moreover, Wodgate was a place seemingly untouched by culture, and unloved by nature. The name ‘Hell-House Yard’, in this case, was seemingly literal. Wodgate’s size had rapidly increased, not organically, but as a result of the industrial boom. Therefore:

‘that squatters’ seat which soon assumed the form of a large village, and then in turn soon expanded into a town, and at the present moment numbers its population by swarming thousands lodged in the most miserable tenements in the most hideous burgh in the ugliest country in the world...Wodgate had the appearance of a vast squalid suburb. As you advanced, leaving behind you long lines of little dingy tenements, with infants lying about the road you expected every moment to emerge into some streets and encounter buildings bearing some correspondence in their size and comfort to the considerable population swarming and busied around you. Nothing of the kind. There were no public buildings of any sort; no churches, chapels, town-hall, institute, theatre; and the principal streets in the heart of the town in which were situate the coarse and grimy shops, though formed by houses of a greater elevation than the preceding, were equally narrow and if possible more dirty. At every fourth or fifth house, alleys seldom above a yard wide and streaming with filth, opened out of the street. These were crowded with dwellings of various size, while from the principal court often branched out a number of smaller alleys or rather narrow passages, than which nothing can be conceived more close and squalid and obscure. Here during the days of business, the sound of the hammer and the file never ceased, amid gutters of abomination and piles of foulness and stagnant pools of filth; reservoirs of leprosy and plague, whose exhalations were sufficient to taint the atmosphere of the whole kingdom and fill the country with fever and pestilence.’⁶⁵⁴

It was not simply the appearance, or condition of Wodgate that was intended to shock his contemporary readers. It was the very nature of the place. It was a place that did not have the sagacious influence of property: not just aristocracy, but not even the middle-class industrialists like Mr. Trafford. Instead, ‘at Wodgate a factory or large establishment of any kind is unknown. Here Labour reigns supreme. Its division indeed is favoured by their manners, but the interference or influence of mere capital is instantly resisted...These master workmen indeed form a powerful aristocracy, nor is it possible to conceive one apparently more oppressive. They are ruthless tyrants; they habitually inflict upon their subjects punishments more grievous than the slave population of our colonies were ever visited with; not content with beating them with sticks or flogging them with knotted ropes, they are in the habit of felling them with hammers, or cutting their heads open with a file or lock. The most usual punishment however, or rather stimulus to increase exertion, is to pull an apprentice’s ears till they run with blood. These youths too are worked for sixteen and even twenty hours a day’. In this nightmarish town we are not only given the picture of a ruthless ruling class presiding over an overworked and easily punished working youth (it seems that Ashley’s Ten Hour Bill had not made it to Wodgate). We are painted the picture of habitual drunkenness and unstinting dog-fighting, both done with such abandon that, ‘the whole population of Wodgate is drunk; of all

⁶⁵³ *Ibid*, pp.187-188

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp.188-191

stations, ages, and sexes; even babes, who should be at the breast'.⁶⁵⁵ These were scenes certain to prick the Christian sensibilities of many of Disraeli's contemporary readers.

Here in Wodgate, we see Disraeli's hellish vision of unrestrained labour. These squalid depictions of urban poverty were taken straight from the government blue books and brought to life in fictional form. This was an underclass of people to which sympathy had never really been extended. These were not the fallen-on-hard-times English workers like Warner, the hand-loom weaver driven to destitution by industrial progress. These were the real dregs of society. However, this chapter was not simply about the ills of unfettered industrialization. Blake has argued that *Sybil*, in spite its vivid depictions of the extremes of wealth and poverty, attributes all the evil, 'to industry and the aggregation of capital. Landlords are ignored, along with the whole problem of rural poverty'.⁶⁵⁶ But as we have already seen, Disraeli fully depicts the problems of rural poverty and the parsimoniousness and unyielding Landlords. Thus Vincent has rightly insisted that, 'the decayed rural slum of Marney, [was] proof that the absence of industrialism was not the answer'.⁶⁵⁷ In Wodgate, poverty and squalor draws attention to the real issue: the lack of social and spiritual leadership.

Sybil also confronts urban poverty in the burgeoning commercial metropolis of Mowbray, where Devilsdust and Dandy Mick have their fun. Here Disraeli does not descend into the dire straits depicted in other places in the novel. But to be sure, it is far from a wholly positive picture. Yet in contrast to the smaller working-class town of Wodgate, with its grim working conditions and horrific squalor, the city of Mowbray at least appeared to offer up opportunities to the quick-witted in this new capitalist world. Devilsdust, who cuts a quick-witted figure, seems to have achieved his success through his sheer ability to survive. Having been forced to fend for himself so early, he had grown up very quickly. 'By seventeen he combined the experience of manhood, with the divine energy of youth. He was a first-rate workman and received high wages, he had availed himself of the advantages of the factory school; he soon learnt to read and write with facility; and at the moment of our history, was the leading spirit of the Shoddy-Court Literary and Scientific Institute'.⁶⁵⁸ In comparison to his bon viveur friend, Dandy Mick, who 'enjoyed life', Devilsdust 'only endured it'.⁶⁵⁹ Yet while 'Mick was always complaining of the lowness of his wages and the greatness of his toil; Devilsdust never murmured, but read and pondered on the rights of labour, and sighed to vindicate his order'.⁶⁶⁰ In that way these two make quite the pair throughout the novel, with their street smartness and crude capitalist instincts. To be sure, their surroundings are far from pleasant. Though they are also far more enjoyable than the industrial horrors of Wodgate, or the hopeless slum of Marney. As John Vincent has commented, 'if these vignettes had a moral, it was that the best place to be poor was a provincial metropolis like Leeds (Mowbray)'.⁶⁶¹

Poverty, and its sharp contrast with some of the luxury enjoyed by the aristocracy, is the central backdrop to the plot. But one thing stands out. Disraeli's purpose was not to draw sympathy to the poor for sympathy's sake. True, he felt it for their plight. But as Patrick Brantlinger has argued, he was more concerned with 'proving them to be mistaken' about its causes.⁶⁶² The scenes of poverty and working class characters met along Egremont's journey also reflect Disraeli's revulsion of Chartism and its intellectual agitators. As O'Kell has suggested, 'Disraeli fully acknowledges the

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.190

⁶⁵⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.207

⁶⁵⁷ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.96

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.79

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.87

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.86

⁶⁶¹ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.96

⁶⁶² Patrick Brantlinger, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1977) p.100

legitimacy of the people's grievances in his "social" novel, [but] he has no "political" sympathy with their cause whatsoever'.⁶⁶³ His sharp distinction between the squalid existence of the working classes, and the privileged and functionless life-style of their social leaders, periodically served to reinforce his argument. That is that the alleviation of working class misery lay in the hands of a renewed aristocracy and a reinvigorated Church. Things would improve if those two estates restored to their historic position, in line with Disraeli's own interpretation of England's past. As John Vincent astutely recognized, 'The poor were a powerbase in search of direction. They might turn to their intellectual leaders, such as Chartist radicals; they might look to their social leaders, the landowning class. Disraeli's aim was not only, or not mainly, to point out misery, but to point out the opportunities awaiting a redeemed aristocracy'.⁶⁶⁴ The depictions of poverty, both rural and urban, were not only painted to draw sympathy to the plight of honest English labourer, but also to shine light upon the causes of their condition, and the means for their improvement.

Perhaps the most important theme in *Sybil* was Disraeli's criticism of aristocracy. Disraeli, much like Carlyle, saw the economic climate of the 1840s as a symptom, not just of hard times, but of moral collapse. Disraeli saw a revived aristocracy as a powerful force for national renewal. What he meant by this was a force through which England's decline, and the nefarious forces of materialism and Benthamism, might be combated. Still, throughout the novel the aristocracy come under heavy criticism for their failings. In this sense *Sybil* was as much about the contrast between aristocracy's current behavior and the aristocracy as they should act, as it was about the battle between the haves and have nots. As if to illustrate this point, the book opens on the eve of the Derby. Instantly we are plunged into a world of London clubs and aristocratic indifference. Amongst the chatter of horses, betting terminology, and artificially light conversation, we are offered a telling scene at Crockford's club. While Egremont and his friends talk excitedly of Epsom the next day, we are introduced to two patrician youths: Alfred Mountchesney and Eugene De Vere. These young men who had both 'exhausted life in their teens, and all that remained for them was to mourn, amid the ruins of their reminiscences, over the extinction of excitement'.⁶⁶⁵ These were not the youth of England, whom Young England dreamed might revive the aristocracy. Instead they are directionless and listless, mourning over the lack of excitement in their life, exchanging phrases of cutting Wildean wit: "I rather like bad wine," said Mr. Mountchesney; "one gets so bored with good wine."⁶⁶⁶ This first chapter gives us an indication of one of the book's key messages: the aristocracy was a class privileged with rank and wealth, but it was not without duties. The Derby is a symbolic setting. These young aristocrats were gambling away not merely their fortune, but the future of their order. Aristocracy in their present state of luxurious apathy and lethargic indifference would not last long as a ruling elite. As John Vincent has put it, 'they were a functionless class doing themselves out of a job'.⁶⁶⁷

Aside from the otiose young nobility of Crockford's, we encounter perhaps a more menacing and more worrying type of aristocrat. Lord Marney, the older brother of our protagonist Charles Egremont, is also doing his class out of a job, but in a far more aggressive way'.⁶⁶⁸ When we first encounter Lord Marney we are told he was 'cynical, devoid of sentiment, arrogant, literal, hard. He had no imagination, had exhausted his slight native feeling, but he was acute, disputatious, and firm even to obstinacy'.⁶⁶⁹ His outlook had been informed by that famous liberal materialist Helvetius,

⁶⁶³ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.259

⁶⁶⁴ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.93

⁶⁶⁵ *Sybil*, p.3

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.3

⁶⁶⁷ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.93

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.93

⁶⁶⁹ *Sybil*, p.50

who had instilled in him the principles of ‘high prices and low church’.⁶⁷⁰ In politics he was a nominally a Tory but, ‘He eulogized the new poor law, which he declared would be the salvation of the country’⁶⁷¹ Moreover, in his district of Marney, where wages were already depressed, he opposed the scant comforts or alleviations available to them: “‘they get more than that, because there is beer-money allowed, at least to a great extent among us, though I for one do not approve of the practice, and that makes nearly a shilling per week additional; and then some of them have potato grounds, though I am entirely opposed to that system...I have generally found the higher the wages the worse the workman. They only spend their money in the beer-shops. *They* are the curse of this country.’”⁶⁷² His solution for the current condition of the rural working class?: ‘emigration on a great scale’.⁶⁷³ This was a policy that, despite his government’s reluctance to undertake, he had initiated on a local scale: “I will take care that the population of my parishes is not increased. I build no cottages and I destroy all I can; and I am not ashamed or afraid to say so.”⁶⁷⁴ Marney was everything aristocracy should not be. Tight-fisted and unsympathetic to the plight of the working class he made war on them. Much of the suffering in Marney can be attributed to his hard-faced attitude. There was no sign of Eustace Lyle’s ceremonious charity here. The condition in that agricultural slum had been part-created and then worsened by his policy of destroying cottages in order not to pay the maintenance of his tenants. He typified the failure of aristocracy. He was actively harming his order, his parsimonious utilitarian approach drove his labouring class to incendiarism and agricultural unrest. The message here was that if this privileged order was to continue to rule as a political and social elite, it needed to remember its duties as well as its privileges. It could no longer survive as a selfish and exclusive political class, when faced with the cosmopolitan and levelling ideas of the 1840s.

One thing that Disraeli was keen to stress was the historic nature of England’s aristocracy. This idea echoed the thoughts of Mr. Millbank in *Coningsby*. The two noble families that dominate the book, the Marney’s and the De Mowbray’s, both emerged from obscure and humble origins. The Earl’s of Marney, the Egremonts, had been founded by one man: Baldwin Greymount who had been domestic a favorite of Henry VIII. Having been appointed a commissioner for ‘visiting and taking the surrenders of divers religious houses’⁶⁷⁵, the first Greymount went about his duty with zeal and efficiency. This dedication impressed Henry VIII, who first knighted him and then made him a minister. The quiet accumulation of abbey lands, which had infinitely increased in value, saw one Greymount elevated to a peerage and made into Baron Marney. Through the imaginative refashioning of their heraldry, the obscure and plebeian Greymounts then became the Norman and aristocratic Egremonts. They had been cavalier supporters of Charles in 1640, and then among the Whig supporters of William in 1688. Having been denied a Dukedom under the great Whigs family of 1688, they had turned Tory with Burke and gave their support to Pitt.⁶⁷⁶ We see a similar story in the case of the Earls de Mowbray. These great ‘Norman’ peers the Fitz-Warenes could trace their generation back just one generation to a John Warren. Warren, a clever and ambitious St. James club waiter, had risen high in the retinue of the Governor of Madras, had cunningly benefitted from his will at the Court of Chancery. He returned to England a nabob and bought his estate at Mowbray, and entered parliament. Having defied Burke, he became a favorite of George IV, and then an ally and confidant of Pitt. It was under Pitt, when he created his ‘plebian aristocracy’, that Sir John Warren was elevated to an Irish Barony and styled the Earl Fitz-Warene. ‘The new Baron’, we are told, ‘figured in his

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pp.50-56

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.53

⁶⁷² *Sybil*, p.127

⁶⁷³ *Ibid*, p.128

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.128

⁶⁷⁵ *Sybil*, p.10

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp.11-18

patent as Lord Fitz-Warene, his Norman origin and descent from the old barons of this name having been discovered at Herald's college', determined 'that his children should rank still higher in the proud peerage of his country. So he obtained the royal permission to resume the surname and arms of his ancestors, as well as their title'.⁶⁷⁷ This theme is continued in a central, but often overlooked, strand of novel's plot, as the current Earl de Mowbray, with help from Hatton, tries to secure his claim to the ancient Barony of Vallance: a title also claimed by Sybil's father, Walter Gerrard.

The message is clear. The aristocracy in the 19th century had no real history. The ancient aristocracy had been lost in the civil war, overthrown by Glorious revolution, and diluted by Pitt's creation of a new plebian gentry. They had no ancient lineage. In Vincent's words, 'they had no qualities of blood that might excuse their defects'.⁶⁷⁸ This echoes the sentiments of Mr. Millbank in *Coningsby*: "Ancient lineage!" said Mr. Millbank; "I never heard of a peer with an ancient lineage. The real old families of this country are to be found among the peasantry; the gentry, too, may lay some claim to old blood. I can point you out Saxon families in this county who can trace their pedigrees beyond the Conquest; I know of some Norman gentlemen whose fathers undoubtedly came over with the Conqueror. But a peer with an ancient lineage is to me quite a novelty. No, no; the thirty years of the wars of the Roses freed us from those gentlemen. I take it after the Battle of Tewkesbury, a Norman baron was almost as rare a being in England as a wolf is now."⁶⁷⁹ *Sybil* took this idea one step further. If the aristocracy had no claim to ancient lineage, if their achievements were not entwined with England's history, or synonymous with its natural character, as Disraeli had claimed in *Vindication*, then what right did they have to rule?⁶⁸⁰ What we can take from this is that aristocracy was defined not simply by blood or lineage, but rather through a set of privileges, duties, and rule. What *Sybil* shows is that, regardless of political inclination, the aristocracy's claims to genealogical superiority are spurious at best. Therefore, they must learn to play by the rules. As John Vincent has so astutely recognised, 'the art of governing by consent, of uniting all hearts...is a skill not a social position. Egremont, Lord Marney's younger brother, embodies the learning processes.'⁶⁸¹

These criticisms of the current aristocracy were skilfully contrasted by visions of both old and new types of aristocracy, playing by the rules: benevolent, fair, sympathetic and philanthropic – natural leaders who might soften societies harsh divisions. First, and perhaps most prominently, we are introduced by Gerrard to the nostalgic vision of the benevolent rule of the Abbots of Marney. Under their stewardship, the land had profited and the peasantry been contented: 'All agree the Monastics were easy landlords; their rents were low; they granted leases in those days. Their tenants too might renew their term before their tenure ran out: so they were men of spirit and property.'⁶⁸² Moreover, those old monastic guardians had a permanence that had been lost since the Reformation. Not only were they bound by the laws of charity, but 'the monastery too was a proprietor that never died and never wasted. The farmer had a deathless landlord then; not a harsh guardian, or a grinding mortgagee, or a dilatory master in chancery; all was certain'.⁶⁸³ In contrast to the selfish, materialist concerns of Lord Marney, the ancient proprietors of the land had formed a 'true' aristocracy: "'The monks were in short in every district a point of refuge for all who needed succour, counsel, and protection; a body of individuals having no cares of their own, with wisdom to guide the inexperienced, with wealth to relieve the suffering, and often with power to protect the oppressed.'" ⁶⁸⁴ Disraeli's nostalgic longing for this ancient aristocracy, was a pining not for any form

⁶⁷⁷ *Sybil*, pp.89-92

⁶⁷⁸ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.94

⁶⁷⁹ *Coningsby*, p.164

⁶⁸⁰ *Whigs and Whiggism*, p.143

⁶⁸¹ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.94

⁶⁸² *Sybil*, p.71

⁶⁸³ *Ibid*, p.72

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.72

of Catholicism, but for the old Church's powerful social function. It is striking how religion is kept totally separate here. Those monks of Marney had formed a powerful, permanent and benevolent aristocracy: one that fulfilled, rather than shuffled off its social obligation.

At Mr. Trafford's factory we are introduced to a new type of responsible aristocracy. Once again parallels can easily be drawn to Mr. Millbank in *Coningsby* and his model factory village. In *Sybil*, Trafford's factory is a similar vision of feudal responsibility. Before we meet the Traffords we hear of them in metropolitan Mowbray: "those Traffords are kind to their people", we are told, "It's a great thing for a young person to be in their mill...those Traffords had so many schools."⁶⁸⁵ When the novel reaches Trafford's factory, we meet a man who's family, 'had for centuries been planted in the land'.⁶⁸⁶ His factory that he had built was a model of responsible industry and benevolent employment: 'a factory which was now one of the marvels of the district' working conditions which ensured 'the improved health of the people, the security against dangerous accidents for women and youth, and the reduced fatigue' complete with 'the moral advantages resulting from superior inspection and general observation'⁶⁸⁷ Similarly outside of his factory when they finished their daily toil, the workpeople were not forgotten. Trafford understood that 'domestic virtues are dependent on the existence of a home', thus he had built a picturesque village adjoining the factory with neat gardens, clean water a school and public baths.⁶⁸⁸

Thus, as an employer, we can see that Mr. Trafford has all the trappings of a idealised local aristocrat. He creates wealth. He rules over his people, and much like Eustace Lyle argued in *Coningsby*, Trafford make his workers realise that property is their friend and protector: 'the influence of such an employer and such a system of employment on the morals and manners of the employed? Great; infinitely beneficial. The connexion of a labourer with his place of work, whether agricultural or manufacturing, is itself a vast advantage'.⁶⁸⁹ Thus Trafford is presented as a 'model of ecumenical charity'.⁶⁹⁰ Similar to the old monks of Marney, his rule over his factory is a model of that feudal benevolence that Disraeli wished to see restored amongst the ranks of the gentry. Thus nineteenth century factory, in its idealised and romanticised form, sparked his imagination as a modern example of those ancient, feudal principles. Disraeli's argument is elucidated through his contrast between the ancient monastic orders, and the parvenu Earl's of Marney, and his distinction between the low-born Earls De Mowbray's and the generous, industrial, 'Saxon' spirit of Trafford. Aristocracy needed to learn that with privileges come duties. The passage Reform Act had demystified their 'ancient' rights. Their right to rule was not simply a social position. In order to exist after 1832 they had to adapt. Their order needed to become more visible. They had to play by these new rules if power was to be maintained. Yet as often the case with Disraeli, these 'new rules' were not new at all. They were derived from nostalgia, and brought to life through his imaginative understanding of Britain's historical past.

Religion plays a defining part in shaping the narrative in *Sybil*. Disraeli made a conscious effort to address the role of religion and spirituality in an increasingly industrial society. Throughout the novel we observe him lament the current position of the Church in England. Here Disraeli's vaguery is a strength. By admiring the Church of old for its social functions and spiritual leadership – and lamenting its current position according to the same criteria – Disraeli was able to detach himself from the liturgical and doctrinal debates that plagued the Church throughout the nineteenth-century. If Disraeli was a believer, he was certainly not a conventional one. At this time he generally steered

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.103

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.210

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.211

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp.211-212

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.212.

⁶⁹⁰ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.273

clear of parliamentary debates surrounding the hierarchy or doctrine of the Anglican Church. But he understood very clearly the authority and utility of organized religion. Indeed, his characteristic religious tolerance, exemplified in *Sybil*, with relation to Roman Catholics, but to other religions more generally throughout his life, most likely stemmed from his own lack of doctrinal commitment. Certainly, in *Sybil* the discussion of religion was conducted according to Disraeli's most ecumenical instincts. This was certainly not a manifesto for "Young England's" religious outlook, nor a declaration on behalf of Oxfordism. All and any of the overtures made in that direction were derived from his appreciation of history and his own idiosyncratic understanding of the earlier social function of the 'Old' Church, before the reformation.

The consequences flowing from the continuing failure of spiritual leadership are clearly displayed in *Sybil*. The downtrodden agricultural labourers of Marney, dwelling in squalor, should have been alleviated by the charitable benevolence and spiritual guidance of the Church. Instead: 'The eyes of this unhappy race might have been raised to the solitary spire that sprang up in the midst of them, the bearer of present consolation, the harbinger of future equality; but Holy Church at Marney had forgotten her sacred mission.'⁶⁹¹ The Vicar of Marney, a low-churchman, although earnest in his well-meant intentions, he was under the influence of Lord Marney. Thus '[he] was his model of a priest: he left every body alone. Under the influence of Lady Marney, the worthy vicar had once warmed up into some ebullition of very low church zeal; there was some talk of an evening lecture, the schools were to be remodelled, certain tracts were actually distributed. But Lord Marney soon stopped all this. "No priestcraft at Marney," said this gentle proprietor of abbey lands.'⁶⁹² In this relationship, there resonates a metaphor for the position of the Church. Latitudinarianism had decreased the Church's spiritual authority and the decline of the Church's social influence since the Reformation had handed too much power to secular aristocracy. The ultimate irony in this case was that the power and wealth of this particular aristocrat had been gained through the spoliation of the monasteries.

However grim the situation was in rural Marney, the condition of those godless workers of Wodgate was far worse. At least Marney had an aristocracy and a church, however heartless and ineffectual they proved to be respectively. In Wodgate:

'It was land without an owner; no one claimed any manorial right over it; they could build cottages without paying rent. It was a district recognized by no parish; so there were no tithes, and no meddling supervision. No church there has yet raised its spire; and as if the jealous spirit of Woden still haunted this ancient temple, even the conventicle scarcely dares show its humble front in some obscure corner'⁶⁹³

Without the concrete moral guidance of the Church in Wodgate the population that inhabited it had degenerated. As there was no one to 'preach or to control. It is not that the people are immoral, for immorality implies some forethought; or ignorant, for ignorance is relative; but they are animals; unconscious; their minds a blank; and their worst actions only the impulse of a gross or savage instinct.'⁶⁹⁴ In Disraeli's vision of unfettered industrial labour, this was seemingly the natural condition of the population when untouched by remedial and controlling presence of that great twin agency of Church and State. This spiritual condition of England's working classes and the respective position of the Anglican Church in contemporary society was contrasted with the social and religious position of the Church in times gone by, in a supposedly less corrupt and more noble past. It is with these rose-tinted lenses that Disraeli looks back on the great Abbey Church of Marney: 'yet never

⁶⁹¹ *Sybil*, p.49

⁶⁹² *Ibid*, p.43

⁶⁹³ *Ibid*, p.189

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.190

without emotion could he [Egremont] behold these unrivalled remains of one of the greatest of the great religious houses of the North'.⁶⁹⁵ These also the ruins of an organic society whose dual purpose had been to facilitate the worship of God and the provision of charity. Disraeli explains this in more detail as the narrator tells us, 'the capacious hospital, a name that did not denote the dwelling of disease, but a place where all the rights of hospitality were practiced; where the traveler, from the proud baron to the lonely pilgrim, asked the shelter and the succour that were never denied, and at whose gate, called the Portal of the Poor, the peasants on the Abbey lands, if in want might appeal each morn and night for raiment and for food'.⁶⁹⁶ This was Christianity as it should be: made concrete in a devoted and prosperous society living in a grand gothic house, awe inspiring and charitable. It is therefore not surprising that in these circumstances, where Egremont was surrounded by Disraeli's vision of England pure and uncorrupted past, he should consider society's current problems: 'And the People—the millions of Toil, on whose unconscious energies during these changeful centuries all rested—what changes had these centuries brought to them?...Were there any rick-burners in the times of the lord abbots? And if not, why not? And why should the stacks of the Earls of Marney be destroyed, and those of the Abbots of Marney spared?'⁶⁹⁷ It also represented the zenith of the Church's social and religious authority. Among the ruins, Gerrard tells Egremont:

"The Monastics could possess no private property; they could save no money; they could bequeath nothing. They lived, received, and expended in common... The monks were in short in every district a point of refuge for all who needed succour, counsel, and protection; a body of individuals having no cares of their own, with wisdom to guide the inexperienced, with wealth to relieve the suffering, and often with power to protect the oppressed."⁶⁹⁸

It is striking how little religion itself is mentioned. Even Gerrard, the Catholic descendent of the Abbots of Marney (and rightful heir) did not see the spoliation of the monasteries as a religious question: "I am not viewing the question as one of faith," said the stranger. "It is not as a matter of religion, but as a matter of right, that I am considering it: as a matter, I should say, of private right and public happiness."⁶⁹⁹ The position of the Church in that medieval past was admired for its benevolent and charitable social function, its perceived omnipresent moral leadership, far more than it was for any overtly religious advantages.

It was no coincidence that was among the Gothic beauty of Marney's ruins that Egremont comes to question society's ills. The aesthetic power of gothic architecture had a strong hold upon Disraeli. It had been central to much of the medieval revivalist movement of the period. One only need look as far as Augustus Pugin's *Contrasts*, the polemical architectural piece which caught the public imagination in 1836.⁷⁰⁰ *Contrasts* argued for a revival of medieval, Gothic architecture, and with it a return to the faith and the social structures of the Middle Ages. This was the mantra of Young England, and in a different way also Disraeli. His attachment to his imagined past, and his attraction to the awe-inspiring gothic architecture was long-held. With this in mind Disraeli's description of the ruins is not surprising. At the centre of Marney Abbey, that great space which with a 'strength that had defied time, and with a beauty that had at last turned away the wrath of man, still rose if not in perfect, yet admirable, form and state, one of the noblest achievements of Christian art,—the Abbey church.'⁷⁰¹ This appreciation of Christian architecture, and the aesthetic power of

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.66

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.67

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.679-70

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp.72-73

⁶⁹⁹ *Sybil*, p.74

⁷⁰⁰ Augustus Pugin, *Contrasts*, (Leicester : Leicester University Press, 1969)

⁷⁰¹ *Sybil*, p.67

religious structures was also seen when Egremont pays his visit to Mowbray. Unlike Marney Abbey, Mowbray Church had survived the same fate as the monastic house it was attached to. It had once been a beautiful church in a small village where it ‘remained for centuries the wonder of passing peasants, and the glory of county histories. But there is a magic in beautiful buildings which exercises an irresistible influence over the mind of man.’⁷⁰² It now stood amongst the teeming industrial city of Mowbray, but despite the burgeoning population, and its existence for a long time as the only Church, its stalls stood nearly empty as its congregation had dwindled to almost nothing in this magnificent Church where a ‘frigid spell of Erastian self-complacency [had] fatally prevailed’.⁷⁰³ Disraeli goes so far in this passage to suggest that Mowbray had risen to its industrial prominence, “‘because it possessed such a beautiful church.’”, Thus, ‘The lingering genius of the monks of Mowbray hovered round the spot which they had adorned, and sanctified, and loved; and thus they had indirectly become the authors of its present greatness and prosperity.’⁷⁰⁴ Sure, admiration for the powers of architecture, and the aesthetic authority of those great medieval Christian designs was not limited to the pages of *Sybil*. In *Coningsby*, we are introduced to Eustace Lyle’s chapel at St. Genevieve, where the cast of that novel is stunned by the visual beauty of their host’s Catholic shrine: ‘The walls and vaulted roofs entirely painted in encaustic by the first artists of Germany, and representing the principal events of the second Testament, the splendour of the mosaic pavement, the richness of the painted windows, the sumptuousness of the alter, crowned by a masterpiece of Carlo Dolce and surrounded by a silver rail, the tone of rich and solemn light that pervaded all, and blended all the various sources of beauty into one absorbing and harmonious whole; all combined to produce an effect that stilled them into a silence which lasted for some minutes’.⁷⁰⁵

It was not just the beautiful architecture that inspired Disraeli. Perhaps more still was the breathtaking nature of Roman Catholic ritualism. Contarini Fleming, having experienced the incense and awe-inspiring beauty of Catholic high mass, converts to Roman Catholicism.⁷⁰⁶ This conversion was a reflection of Disraeli’s own experience of Catholic ritualism. In 1824, Disraeli wrote to his sister Sarah after he had been to see high mass in Ghent cathedral. He told her that ‘the service was sublime beyond conception and the music, one of Mozart’s grandest masses was played by the full band’.⁷⁰⁷ He also recorded the full impact of that exposure in his diary in which he claimed, ‘clouds of incense...the effect inconceivably grand. The host raised, and I flung myself to the ground’.⁷⁰⁸ Disraeli’s appreciation of these aspects of Roman Catholic worship were surely derived from an aesthetic appreciation of the Old Faith. They were certainly not rooted in any real – religious – attachment to ritualism, or any serious adherence to Oxfordism during his leadership of Young England. Disraeli’s support for the Oxford Movement was historical and aesthetic rather than doctrinal or liturgical. His admiration of Catholic forms and ceremony was perhaps a better indicator of Disraeli’s ignorance of contemporary hostility to such ideas on ritualism and liturgy in Anglican practice, more than anything else. Nonetheless, Disraeli’s admiration of the effect of ritualism in Roman Catholic ceremony tied in closely with his wonderment at the power of its architecture. Both were aesthetic. Both stemmed from his discontent at the fallen position of the Church in society. Both were means by which he hoped the Church might play its part in both inspiring morality and controlling the passions of new, increasingly urban and industrial, working class.

⁷⁰² *Ibid*, p.124

⁷⁰³ *Ibid*, p.125

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.125

⁷⁰⁵ *Coningsby*, pp.150-151

⁷⁰⁶ *Contarini Fleming*, p.78

⁷⁰⁷ *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 2nd August 1824, vol.1, p.12

⁷⁰⁸ *M&B*, vol.1, p.45

It is in Mowbray that we are introduced to Aubrey St. Lys. He is a key character in the religious allegory being played out in *Sybil*. Like many of the novel's 'good' characters, St. Lys has the trait of living a humble life, despite his aristocratic origins: much in the same way as Mr. Trafford, Walter Gerrard and Sybil, and in contrast to Lord Marney and Earl de Mowbray, who had risen to high rank despite their humble origins. St. Lys is of Norman lineage. His name alone indicates that this character is the bearer of a central, positive, message.⁷⁰⁹ As O'Kell has observed he was an emblematic character, he name literally embodies his nobility: 'the lily, of course, having a rich symptomatic value within both Catholic and Anglican liturgies of the Resurrection and Annunciation, as well as heraldic resonance with French royalty and nobility'.⁷¹⁰ In fact, the pronunciation of his name, 'Sin-Liss' marks him out as one of Disraeli's characters who is designed to convey a message, not just one who was fulfilling their role within a realistic social context.⁷¹¹ St. Lys marks a contrast to Lord Marney. He is portrayed as an essentially charitable figure when involved in a debate with Marney over the pauperous wages and the scarcity of relief that they are provided for their burden.⁷¹² We also see evidence of his charitable nature when he visits the house of Warner to offer him spiritual relief from the suffering of his poverty. Here Egremont is told, "The charity of Mr St Lys is known to all."⁷¹³ This established St. Lys' spiritual and charitable credentials, however he is more than a simple emblem of Christian charity. He has a profound role in shaping Egremont's theology. When the two first meet the vicar he begins their conversation "For all that has occurred or may occur, I blame only the Church." By forgetting its sacred duty to the people, from then on, "the church has been in danger and the people degraded."⁷¹⁴ And he informs Egremont, in what is certainly a passage meant to please his Young England colleagues:

"Formerly religion undertook to satisfy the noble wants of human nature, and by its festivals relieved the painful weariness of toil. The day of rest was consecrated, if not always to elevated thought, at least to sweet and noble sentiments. The church convened to its solemnities under its splendid and almost celestial roofs amid the finest monuments of art that human hands have raised, the whole Christian population; for there, in the presence of God, all were brethren. It shared equally among all its prayer, its incense, and its music; its sacred instructions, and the highest enjoyments that the arts could afford."⁷¹⁵

This passage could easily be dismissed as a piece of Tractarian writing. Its sentiments are certainly very similar. Some of it was included because his collaboration with Young England and out of a desire to please those young patrician followers. However, Disraeli's appreciation for many of the ideas St. Lys declares to Egremont were probably doubt genuine. O'Kell has argued that Disraeli was undoubtedly aware of the danger of Tractarian ideas in 1845 (the year Newman departed for Rome) and thus he guards against any direct support for Rome later in the passage.⁷¹⁶ But this argument remains contestable.

Certainly, St. Lys must have deflected much of the tension around the subject of Catholicism in the minds of some of Disraeli's readers. When challenged on forms and ceremonies by Egremont, that the "people of this country associate them with an enthralling superstition and a foreign

⁷⁰⁹ *Sybil*, p.124

⁷¹⁰ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics* p.264

⁷¹¹ *Ibid*, p.264

⁷¹² *Sybil*, 126-127

⁷¹³ *Ibid*, p.144

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.129

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.129

⁷¹⁶ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.265

dominion.]”⁷¹⁷ St. Lys tells him, “forms and ceremonies existed before Rome.”⁷¹⁸ St. Lys also argued that, “The church of Rome is to be respected as the only Hebraeo-Christian church extant.”⁷¹⁹ The other churches of that nature had long disappeared. But Rome had remained, and thus should be respected. He tells Egremont that, “we must never permit the exaggerated position which it assumed in the middle centuries to make us forget its early and apostolical character”⁷²⁰ The vicar of Mowbray reminds Egremont of the apostolic succession from Jesus Christ, from prophets to apostles, and therefore reminds him that the forms and ceremonies that so worry people are not the creation of Rome: “Christianity is completed Judaism, or it is nothing. Christianity is incomprehensible without Judaism, as Judaism is incomplete; without Christianity... The prophets were not Romans; the apostles were not Romans; she, who was blessed above all women, I never heard she was a Roman maiden. No, I should look to a land more distant than Italy, to a city more sacred even than Rome.”⁷²¹ These ideas are clearly the authors own. They tie in with Sidonia’s ideas of the Jewish race, and very clearly anticipate the thoughts in *Tancred*, and his support of Jewish Emancipation in *Lord George Bentinck*.

This robust defence of the Jews by St. Lys must be seen within Disraeli’s own understanding of his Jewish ancestry and within own highly idiosyncratic views on Judaism. But, attempts to fuse Judaism with his conservative understanding of history are very revealing. Both here, and earlier in *Coningsby*, Disraeli refuted the idea that Jews were naturally at home with modernity and instinctively identified with left-wing politics. Sidonia’s monologues suggested, contrary to contemporary stereotypes, that Jews were, ‘essentially Tories.’⁷²² In *Sybil*, Disraeli sought to recognise the Jewish, Hebraic, origins of the Catholic Church, and looked back on the Middle Ages, when the Church dominated society, with an affectionate eye. As David Cesarani has shrewdly recognised: ‘Only someone who did not take Jewish history very seriously or felt little connection with the plight of the Jews in previous eras could hark back to medievalism in the way Disraeli did.’⁷²³ Perhaps Disraeli did not really feel the plight of the Jews as keenly as many others of his race. His Jewishness, if we can really call it that, was an important element of his political character. However, it was sustained largely within Disraeli’s imagined version of history, as a construct of his own political thought, and shaped by contemporary prejudices, rather within a personal attachment or profound understanding of the historical sufferings of the Jewish race.

St. Lys’ ability to break down the barriers between Anglicanism and Protestantism, by returning to the Church’s origins in the East, serves two purposes. First, in this passage he provides the foundation with which to make the union of *Sybil* and *Egremont* theologically coherent. To be sure, it was important that Disraeli revealed her true lineage as the heir of Vallance first. A union between an aristocrat and a working-class girl was still impossible at this time. Secondly, as O’Kell has so astutely observed, by stressing the community of all people under God: “the whole Christian population; for there, in the presence of God, all were brethren.”⁷²⁴ St. Lys proves to be an effective foil for Stephen Morley and his doctrine of the ‘Two-Nations’.⁷²⁵ Morley tells us that, “there is no community in England; there is aggregation”, and that he preferred “association to gregariousness.” By this he meant that “it is a community of purpose that constitutes society”⁷²⁶ St. Lys provides the

⁷¹⁷ *Sybil*, p.130

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.130

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.130

⁷²⁰ *Ibid*, p.130

⁷²¹ *Ibid*, p.131

⁷²² *Coningsby*, p.267

⁷²³ Cesarani, *Disraeli*, p.104

⁷²⁴ *Ibid*, p.129

⁷²⁵ O’Kell, *Romance of Politics* p.265

⁷²⁶ *Sybil*, p.75-76

perfect opposition to these ideas. He stresses that salvation can still be found in the union of Church and state. In *Sybil*, Disraeli was able to discuss religion and his own religious identity in a way that was symbiotic with his idealized vision of the relationship between politics and religion, between the two great powers of Church and State.⁷²⁷

Perhaps the most important theme that runs throughout *Sybil* was the nature of working class politics and the contemporary threat posed by Chartism. While Disraeli was clearly hostile to the Chartist movement and its radical leadership, he expresses not inconsiderable sympathy for the plight of urban workers, and the brutality of industrial capitalism. *Sybil*'s principal mouthpiece for the socialist utopian ideas which sought to reorder British society was Stephen Morley. His egalitarian principles sought to level England's class system through working class insurrection. To Disraeli, his politics pointed to further disruption and division 'in the name of greater diffusion of political power'; Disraeli's, by contrast aimed to bring about the 'restoration of peaceful symbiosis between classes'.⁷²⁸ When we first meet Morley amid the remnants of Marney Abbey, he cuts a persuasive figure who challenges Egremont's view of society. His discussion of association and community is informed by his contempt for modern industrial capitalism where: "men are brought together by the desire of gain. They are not in a state of co-operation, but of isolation, as to the making of fortunes; and for all the rest they are careless of neighbours. Christianity teaches us to love our neighbour as ourself; modern society acknowledges no neighbour."⁷²⁹ Morley introduces Egremont to, and convinces Sybil and Gerrard of, the existence of two rival nations: the rich and the poor, the oppressors and the oppressed.⁷³⁰ This is later proved to be idealistic oversimplification of human nature, Morley's communication of his ideas, combined with his infatuation for Sybil and his influence over her understanding of society are central to both the plot and the message of the novel. Throughout, Morley provides arguments which were actively opposed to the views of the author himself. In response to Egremont's endorsement of Trafford's philanthropic and benevolent industrialism, he replies, "It is not individual influence that can renovate society: it is some new principle that must reconstruct it."⁷³¹ This reordering of society is the very antithesis of Disraeli's own preferences: that individual heroism and great minds could change the spirit of the age and act as a force for national renewal. Morley's failure is therefore a critique of his ideas.

As we have seen earlier, Disraeli was not afraid paint his readers pictures of the brutality and harshness of industrial working class life. In fact, in *Sybil*, Disraeli displayed a great variety and skill in his depictions of severity of urban industrialism: in the barren room of the destitute handloom weaver Warner we see a skilled worker surplus to requirements in rapidly technologically advancing age; in the commercial metropolis, we see the horrifying circumstances of Devildust's childhood where he survives infanticide to grow up upon the streets; In Wodgate he depicts the squalid conditions and brutal atmosphere of a town where labour ruled supreme and unsupervised. In the tommy-shop presided Master Joseph, perhaps the epitome of working-class brutality, an 'ill-favoured cur, with a spirit of vulgar oppression and malicious mischief stamped on his visage'.⁷³² Though a minor character, he is one of the real monsters of the novel. He is cruel, hateful, extortionate and remorseless, very much like Mr. Smallweed of *Bleak House*. As Flavin has commented, in the tommy-shop Disraeli had gone 'beyond depicting an industrial economy as merely exploitative: here it becomes blatantly sadistic'.⁷³³

⁷²⁷ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.266

⁷²⁸ Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p.97

⁷²⁹ *Sybil*, p.76

⁷³⁰ *Ibid*, pp.76-77

⁷³¹ *Ibid*, p.225

⁷³² *Ibid*, pp.183-184

⁷³³ Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p.104

Amidst these cruel surroundings, offering no obvious hope for the improvement of their condition, the temptations of working class radicalism were obvious. Disraeli clearly had sympathy for men like Warner who had lost their livelihood as their profession became increasingly obsolete. Warner was a character undoubtedly taken from Disraeli's experience of the plight of handloom weavers while touring the North.⁷³⁴ He is similarly well-disposed to men like Walter Gerrard, whose native instinct it was to help improve condition of the people, but who had been seduced by Chartism and its leaders, as Sybil commented: "I am anxious about my father. I fear that he is surrounded by men unworthy of his confidence."⁷³⁵ Disraeli's disapprobation was never aimed at men like these. As his later stance on the Chartist petition showed, he only ever had sympathy for deferential working class people. He disapproved of the unmerciful capitalist industrial economy that had contributed to their suffering. But he stood foursquare against the radical leadership, which sought to use these people as a powerbase for a reordering of society.

Sybil demonstrates this lack of trust in the leadership of working-class radical politics. This was quite distinct from the parliamentary radicalism of Bright and Cobden, to whom he was well-disposed. Disraeli's criticism was aimed at the Chartist leadership who saw the people as tool with which to achieve their utopian visions. We see examples of Disraeli's mistrust throughout the novel. Note, for instance, Dandy Mick's torchlit induction into the Trade Unions, where he is asked by the robed and hooded 'SEVEN' to swear upon God that he would 'execute with zeal and alacrity... every task and injunction that the majority of your brethren testified by the mandate of this grand committee, shall impose upon you'.⁷³⁶ This mistrust, building up throughout the novel, come to a head in the final two books. The key-point is reached when Sybil, whose ideas had been influenced by Stephen Morley, comes to question her own convictions:

'But the experience of the last few months had operated a great change in these impressions. She had seen enough to suspect that the world was a more complicated system than she had preconceived. There was not that strong and rude simplicity in its organization she had supposed. The characters were more various, the motives more mixed, the classes more blended, the elements of each more subtle and diversified, than she had imagined.'⁷³⁷

She later tells Egremont that "I was but a dreamer of dreams: I wake from my hallucination as others have done I suppose before me... These scenes of violence alarm me... they can bring us nothing but disaster and disgrace."⁷³⁸ Sybil comes to realise that her understanding of society is flawed. It is far more complex than Morley had taught her. Egremont tells her "The future principle of English politics will not be a levelling principle; not a principle adverse to privileges, but favourable to their extension. It will seek to ensure equality, not by levelling the Few but by elevating the Many."⁷³⁹ Sybil attempts to dissuade her father from taking part in the Chartist gathering. He refuses to listen, but even Walter Gerrard tries to distance himself from the ideas of intellectuals like Morley. When Sybil attempts to dissuade him he tells her, "He [Morley] is a visionary, indulging in impossible dreams, and if possible, little desirable. He knows nothing of the feeling of the country or the character of his countrymen."⁷⁴⁰

She turns to Morley to help dissuade her father, who offers to save him from his fate of being arrested for sedition, but only on the condition that she marry him. Thus Morley shows his true

⁷³⁴ Smith, *The Other Nation*, p.184

⁷³⁵ *Sybil*, p.341

⁷³⁶ *Ibid*, p.257

⁷³⁷ *Ibid*, p.337

⁷³⁸ *Ibid*, p.341

⁷³⁹ *Ibid*, p.342

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.346

colours and Sybil refuses him.⁷⁴¹ This refusal has an allegorical significance. As one critic has commented, ‘Stephen Morely is a socialist, dedicated to moral force and the ideal community of the People...her rejection of him symbolises her repudiation of his ideas.’⁷⁴² On her trip across London to save Gerrard she comes face to face with the evidence that proved her suspicions true. Amongst the sights and smells of east London, with shops displaying entrails and carrion with gutters running gore, she comes across the dog-stealer and the pick-pocket, the burglar and the assassin, and all around could be found, ‘a sympathetic multitude of all ages; comrades for every enterprise; and a market for every booty.’⁷⁴³ Sybil is narrowly saved, first from a thief by a policeman, and later from a brothel by an Irishman who hears her call out the name of the Virgin. This experience proves her previous suspicions. Society was not so simply divided. In each class there were those with both honest and nefarious intentions. Once more, Disraeli asks the reader to consider the question of leadership. These were the horrors that awaited the people ruling themselves.

The last book of *Sybil*, as Ridley has accurately described it, was ‘despairingly anti-democratic’⁷⁴⁴ It relies heavily on the real events of the Plug Plot Riots of 1842: ‘the people of Wodgate...had invaded in great force the surrounding district, stopped all the engines, turned all the potters out of the manufactories...and issued a decree that labour was to cease until the Charter was the law of the land.’⁷⁴⁵ As with the torchlit and robed induction to the trade union, and the with the mutilated and grotesque inhabitants of Wodgate, similarly Sybil’s Dante-esque descent into Hell as she tried to traverse Seven Dials, religious allegory is deployed once more to depict the Satanic nature of this campaign for the Charter.⁷⁴⁶ Bishop Hatton, the master of Wodgate, now styled the ‘Liberator of the People’, led this modern-day ‘Pilgrimage of Grace’ while ‘mounted on a white mule, wall-eyed and of hideous form’.⁷⁴⁷ Here the religious, or indeed hellish, imagery is clear, ‘Bishop brandished a huge hammer with which he had announced he would destroy the enemies of the people’ and ahead of them, ‘like the oriflamme’, was born a silk standard bearing the Charter.⁷⁴⁸ While the Hell-Cats erupt in ‘shrieks of wild passion which announce that men have discarded all the trammels of civilization’ as Master Joseph’s Tommy shop is burned to the ground amid the hellfire and destruction.⁷⁴⁹ The Hell-Cats are stopped from sacking Trafford factory by the timely intervention of Walter Gerrard.⁷⁵⁰ They are finally defeated at Mowbray Castle, but they are only saved by the arrival of Aubrey St.Lys, and the loyal workers of Mowbray led by Warner, who are able to fight back the crowd.⁷⁵¹ The scenes depicted in book six are abound with religious imagery. The hellish scenes of untrammelled passions expose a people who have been allowed to rule themselves. One scholar has suggested that this book revealed that ‘Disraeli’s aristocratic paternalism is driven by fear, sheer terror of the prospect of the People ruling themselves...Disraeli...had developed the instinctive Toryism of an old bear’.⁷⁵² This argument has some merit. Disraeli, like most politicians of the age, dreaded the idea of democracy. And he certainly was no friend of Chartism and its agitators. The lawless and degenerate workers of Wodgate were never the men to whom his sympathy was directed towards. Moreover, these men were never intended to be included in the British polity. The Hell-cats are not successful. They are defeated by Gerrard and St.Lys ably assisted by good-natured and deferential

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.356

⁷⁴² Ridley, *The Young Disraeli*, p.302

⁷⁴³ *Sybil*, p.365

⁷⁴⁴ Ridley, *The Young Disraeli*, p.302

⁷⁴⁵ *Sybil*, pp.434-435

⁷⁴⁶ O’Kell, *Romance of Politics*, pp.271-272, p. 277

⁷⁴⁷ *Sybil*, p.436

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp.436-437

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp.442-443

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp.462-463

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp.477-478

⁷⁵² Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.302

working-class people like Warner, and the workers of Trafford's factory. In that sense, the march for the Charter in the last book of *Sybil* was not an insight into Disraeli's nightmares. Rather it was a warning of what might come to pass should aristocratic and ecclesiastical leadership fail.

As a novel, *Sybil* identifies the causes of England's present problems. This includes a lack of aristocratic leadership, a failure of pure religious spirit, together with the proliferation of materialist and secular instincts born through the industrialisation had degraded the condition of the people. This has driven them towards radical leadership amongst their own class. Still, it has been argued by some scholars that *Sybil* fails to answer the questions that it poses; or if it does attempt to answer these questions, the exact answer is unclear.⁷⁵³ It is true that Disraeli took no cognisance all the legislative remedies that were in fashion during the 1840s: Whether about education, Poor-Law reform, emigration, and reorganisation of Church and State. However, it may be that in Disraeli's vagueness, and in his lack of belief in legislative reform as a panacea for the ills facing the country, we find the novel's real strength. Instead, he found the solution to the problems in the proper leadership of the country. And as one scholar has put 'no-one could legislate for that'.⁷⁵⁴ Disraeli's broader and more pervasive formula for class-peace was that of nurturing greater mutual affection and empathy, achieved through a revived Church and a benevolent aristocracy. As Vincent has suggested, 'it was an attitude, not a programme. That it contained no panacea was its strongest point.'⁷⁵⁵ What is clear from close interpretation of that work, is that it was not a 'Young England' novel. The ideas of that group, occasionally brushed upon, are not central to the argument. The nostalgic appreciation of medieval feudalism and the benevolence of the un-reformed Church were driven much more by Disraeli's own reading of English history. His apparent support for Tractarianism was ephemeral. St.Lys propounds Disraeli's views on race and religion far more strongly than he ever makes the case for Oxfordism. Moreover, Disraeli was at best ambivalent about that movement which inspired Young England. Elements of Young England's outlook of politics appear in the novel. But that is not to say, as O'Kell does, that it was a manifesto written for the group.⁷⁵⁶ Rather it stands as a testament to Disraeli's similarity of vision, and his capacity for political collaboration.

IV: *Tancred; or the New Crusade*

Two years after the publication of *Sybil*, Disraeli published *Tancred; or The New Crusade*. Appearing in 1847 this is the last in his trilogy of the 1840s. *Tancred* has been the least read and most misunderstood. It was Disraeli's favourite of all his novels, a point often mention but quickly dismissed. Moreover some scholars have minimised the message of the trilogy as, 'writing partly to please his Young England friends, partly to assuage his own feelings as a disappointed place-seeker'.⁷⁵⁷ This argument is very difficult seriously to sustain. However, it at least makes sense with regard to *Coningsby* and *Sybil*. The same cannot be said of *Tancred*. If Monypenny and Buckle were correct *Tancred* both 'did its author a disservice. It increased the distrust already existing in many minds', and it also, 'hindered and delayed public recognition of the real seriousness of his political ideas and of the lofty nature of his patriotism.'⁷⁵⁸ If so this was the work of someone trying to curry favour with their party. The shape of British politics had rapidly shifted within a short time. Young England, only months after their triumph at the Athenaeum, had broken up over Peel's proposed increase of the Maynooth Grant. Both Manners and Smythe supported the Government, having been

⁷⁵³ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.199. Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.136

⁷⁵⁴ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.301

⁷⁵⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.96

⁷⁵⁶ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.279

⁷⁵⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.210

⁷⁵⁸ M&B, vol.3, p.50

unwilling to defy the demands of their fathers who, ‘had effectively wrecked Young England’.⁷⁵⁹ The final nail was put in the coffin came when Smythe wrote to Disraeli at the end of 1846 telling Disraeli that he had accepted an offer of office from Aberdeen. This was the decree nisi of a movement that had effectively ended in 1845. Moreover, in the dramatic fall of Robert Peel, Disraeli working in close collaboration with Bentinck had played the leading part. As a result, he was no longer ‘a disappointed place-seeker’. He was sat opposite the treasury bench. That he felt the need to finish *Tancred* at such an important juncture of his career is telling.

Disraeli had begun writing this book back in 1845. But events, principally the feverish debates surrounding Robert Peel’s decision to repeal the Corn Laws and the role Disraeli had played in that, interrupted his writing. That said, Disraeli finished *Tancred* in little under four months. It was clear that the need to complete this literary project was urgent.⁷⁶⁰ It has been suggested that first the long delay, and then the rush in which the novel was finished, contributed to a ‘struggle of character, plot and theme’.⁷⁶¹ Certainly the canvas upon which *Tancred* was drawn was very different from the previous novels in the trilogy. Moreover, it can be seen, and indeed has been by some scholars, as a novel in two distinct parts: The first was an English social satire, the second, an oriental romance.⁷⁶² This is essentially true. However to read it through that separation fails both to understand the historical context that *Tancred* was written in, and to comprehend the true scope of Disraeli’s aim in this novel. There has been a still greater tendency to separate the ideas in *Tancred* from the setting in which the plot unfolds. This has been central to many criticisms of the novel. In O’Kell’s words: ‘a separation of matter and manner’ in which the ideas are considered philosophical or superficial, while the setting, plot, and characters of the novel, the ‘manner’, have often been treated as making the novel captivating or unintelligible.⁷⁶³ It is noteworthy that Monypenny and Buckle, long ago summarizing the criticisms of contemporary commentators suggested that, despite some of the damning judgements, ‘those who penetrated deep into the spirit of the novel found there more of Disraeli’s message to his age than in any other of his writings.’⁷⁶⁴ Yet despite this, many modern scholars have failed to see *Tancred* in the same terms as Disraeli’s original biographers, preferring to conclude that the novel was in one way or another deeply flawed. For Robert Blake, *Tancred’s* conceptions of political rehabilitation, spiritual regeneration, and national renewal were ‘indistinct and cloudy’.⁷⁶⁵ And overall *Tancred* is dismissed as a ‘vehicle for Disraeli’s own highly idiosyncratic views on race and religion, which are also set out in his biography of Lord George Bentinck.’⁷⁶⁶ Paul Smith has reached a similar conclusion, having described it as, ‘no more than a vapid vehicle for his creator’s ideological obsessions... The novel runs downhill to an unsatisfying conclusion’.⁷⁶⁷ Working on a yet another level of separation, he has suggested that with regard to the trilogy, *Tancred* really had ‘little connection with *Sybil* and *Coningsby*’.⁷⁶⁸ Finally, Daniel Schwarz has argued that, ‘*Tancred* does not function as the climatic volume of the political trilogy.’⁷⁶⁹ As we shall see, these conclusions do not stand up when the novel is examined within its proper historical context and as a coherent part of Disraeli’s trilogy of the 1840s.

Tancred also marked the end of his close collaboration with Young England. *Coningsby* and *Sybil* had been a testament Disraeli’s ability to work with his aristocratic followers, they had not been

⁷⁵⁹ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.303; Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.141.

⁷⁶⁰ O’Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.316

⁷⁶¹ Cesarani, *Disraeli*, p.105

⁷⁶² Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.214-215

⁷⁶³ O’Kell, *Romance of Politics*, pp.316-317

⁷⁶⁴ M&B, vol.3, p.50

⁷⁶⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.208

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.194

⁷⁶⁷ Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life*, pp.88-89

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp.88-89

⁷⁶⁹ Schwarz, *Disraeli’s Fiction*, p.99; Blake, *Disraeli*, p.194

novels written for the cause. *Tancred* was very much a novel of that trilogy. But within its pages, it put on record the end of Young England. In *Tancred*, we meet once again the fictionalised heroes of Young England, the protagonists of *Sybil* and *Coningsby* who had failed to live up to the expectations that his previous two novels had set. Harry Coningsby, the fictional embodiment of George Smythe, the glittering and talented hero of Disraeli's first novel Young England novel, failed to live up to his youthful promise in *Tancred*. The hero of *Coningsby* is now portrayed as a complacent and flippant MP, whose prosperity had developed 'a native vein of sauciness'. On the Commons benches he, 'often indulged in quips and cranks that convulsed his neighbouring audience'. His followers would entertain themselves with his, 'gay sarcasms, his airy personalities, and his happy quotations'.⁷⁷⁰ But this was just flippancy. Blake has acknowledged that Coningsby, much like George Smythe, while old for his age at Eton and Cambridge, never matured further; 'he was the spirit of the eternal undergraduate'.⁷⁷¹ Bradford has concurred: 'he was destined to flitter away his talents and to be... "a splendid failure"'.⁷⁷² Charles Egremont, the hero of *Sybil*, the newly Lord Marney in *Tancred*, receives similar treatment. Despite his abilities as a speaker and a parliamentarian, he had shunned his duties. He was a man, 'of fine mind rather than brilliant talents'. Notwithstanding his belief that the 'state of England... was one of impending doom, unless it were timely arrested by those in high places' he 'little dreamed of the responsibility which fortune had in store for him'.⁷⁷³ In a different way, Monckton-Milnes, who had ironically complained about not being included in the first two novels, was satirised as the pompous Vavasour: 'Mr. Vavasour's breakfasts were renowned', anyone was welcomed, 'provided you were celebrated'.⁷⁷⁴ Ridley has summed his character up nicely as, 'a socialite and a snob, pompous greedy and self-important; certainly not the serious political or literary figure he considered himself to be'.⁷⁷⁵

This was Disraeli's assessment of the 'New Generation'. Perhaps not unfairly Disraeli's explanation for the failure of the group was that many of its members never became the serious politicians that their youthful potential promised. Indeed it is only Lord Henry Sidney, the fictional embodiment of Manners, who would fulfill the promise he exhibited in *Coningsby*. His was a name that 'that touched *Tancred*, as it has all the youth of England'.⁷⁷⁶ He had alone had matured into, 'a scholar and a man of the world, learned in history and not inexperienced in human nature, he was sensible that we must look to the constituent principles of society for the causes and the cures of great national disorders'.⁷⁷⁷ Sidney, we are told, possessed all the qualities of a popular leader combined with those traditional gold-standards for political leadership: 'high lineage, an engaging appearance, youth, and a temperament in which the reason had had not been developed to the prejudice of the heart'.⁷⁷⁸ Perhaps this treatment of Manners' fictional representation is not surprising. If he could not surpass the very mercurial talents of Smythe, he was certainly the most serious of the young patricians. Moreover, Disraeli continued to have a close political relationship with Manners long after the dissolution of Young England. From his earlier career it would only be Manners who would later go on to serve in Disraeli's cabinet.⁷⁷⁹

Like the previous two novels in the trilogy *Tancred* follows a young aristocratic protagonist, Tancred Montacute, son of the Duke of Bellamont. In the first section of the novel this young scion

⁷⁷⁰ *Tancred*, p.151

⁷⁷¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.169

⁷⁷² Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.121

⁷⁷³ *Tancred*, pp.142-143

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.146

⁷⁷⁵ Ridley, *Young Disraeli*, p.315

⁷⁷⁶ *Tancred*, .134

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.135

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.136

⁷⁷⁹ M&B, vol.5, p.288

decides to turn down a seat in parliament because of his dissatisfaction with the prevailing state of politics and condition of the Church. Having received counsel and encouragement from Sidonia, who makes a reappearance in the first book, he decides to tread in his ancestor Tancred de Montecute's footsteps and undertake a spiritual crusade, seeking answers to questions that have long troubled him. In the same vein as his crusader ancestor, and against the wishes of his parents, Tancred heads off on his own crusade to Jerusalem to, "lift his voice to heaven, and ask, What is DUTY, and what is Faith? What ought I to do, and what ought I to BELIEVE?"⁷⁸⁰ With these questions in mind he makes for the Holy Land to pray at the Holy Sepulchre where his ancestor had fought a crusade some six hundred years before. Here Tancred believes he will receive answers to his questions about his proper role in a society dominated by materialism, populism, and ideological nihilism. Upon reaching Jerusalem, fresh from his visit to Gethsemane, and while walking through Bethany, he meets the beautiful Jewess Eva who challenges his evangelical views and impresses upon him the importance of the Jewish race, by elucidating its symbiotic relationship with true Christianity. After leaving Eva, Tancred visits a series of shrines, convents and holy places, but with no spiritual consequence. Upon reaching the Sepulchre and having offered prayer and fast, Tancred is still left wanting his moment of spiritual enlightenment: he received solace but not inspiration. 'No voice from heaven had yet sounded'.⁷⁸¹ On his way to Sinai, Tancred and his company are attacked on the road. Having been mistaken for a relative of the Queen of England, Tancred is taken prisoner in an attempt to extort a ransom. It is in this surprisingly hospitable incarceration that he meets Fakredeen, the charismatic and eccentric young Emir, who had first masterminded the conspiracy to capture him. However, upon meeting his new captive, he found Tancred 'exercised over his susceptible temperament that magnetic influence to which he was so strangely subject'.⁷⁸² Finding his friendship with Tancred more important than his current political objectives, he obtains Tancred's freedom and the two form a close relationship. Tancred's pious and high-principled mind offered an element of control to the capricious temperament of the young Emir, whose political dreams and manoeuvres inspired the protagonist.⁷⁸³

In the company of Fakredeen, Tancred finally reaches Sinai. Here, in a cave he has a vision, in which he comes face to face with the 'Angel of Arabia', who gives Tancred a message of 'theocratical equality'.⁷⁸⁴ Having received his revelation, Tancred falls ill and is nursed back to health by Eva who is brought to him by Fakredeen. Subsequent to this divine revelation, Tancred is stirred into action, the angel's message seemingly providing the spark that awakened his sense of purpose. As the book progresses, Tancred become increasingly involved in Fakredeen's intrigues. They embark on a quest to unite the tribes of Lebanon and Syria under one banner and form a new Empire in the East. This is to be an Empire established upon the principles of theocratic equality. But their ambitious schemes and ideas of establishing an empire eventually come to nothing. This is not before the protagonist endures another obstacle, when he is a guest Astarte, the Queen of Ansary, whose people still worshipped the old polytheistic Greek gods. Astarte subsequently falls in love with Tancred, much to the chagrin of Fakredeen, who reveals to Astarte Tancred's love for Eva. This leads the now enraged Queen to order Eva's execution. Fakredeen escapes with Eva having convinced Astarte to allow him to carry out her execution. The story leads to a dramatic denouement, as the pair escape. They share a romantic scene in the beautiful and exotic garden where they first encountered each other. The couple embrace upon Tancred's declaration of his love to Eva. The novel ends on an inconclusive but

⁷⁸⁰ *Tancred*, p.56

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.224

⁷⁸² *Ibid*, p.256

⁷⁸³ *Ibid*, pp.120-133

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.291

suggestive note, with news that Tancred's parents, 'The Duke and Duchess of Bellamont had arrived in Jerusalem'.⁷⁸⁵

Having provided a brief synopsis of the novel it is now necessary to consider the various interpretative approaches that have been taken towards assessing *Tancred*. It has always been treated as a novel apart from the rest of Disraeli's trilogy. It has generally been treated less favourably. The problem lies with the elusiveness of Disraeli's writing, which at times borders on impenetrability. This is true of *Tancred* more than any of his other novels. As Parry has suggested, 'Disraeli loved to philosophise and to toss around big ideas', the question is, 'Can they be made to form a coherent body of thought'.⁷⁸⁶ Here the body of historiographical work has largely expanded in the last twenty years. Scholars, of a more 'cultural' and 'imperial' school have increasingly tried to disentangle the message in *Tancred*. But despite efforts to elevate the novel above Blake's unhelpful criticism, we are generally left with interpretations that employ a selective reading of *Tancred* to provide evidence for Disraeli's idiosyncratic ideas on race, empire and Judaism.⁷⁸⁷

Among the earlier criticisms of *Tancred* was that of the more traditional school of historians, who sought to stress the opportunist tendencies in Disraeli's politics. This reading of *Tancred* has generally stressed the fantastical and exotic nature of the novel, celebrating the political pragmatism embodied by Tancred's companion Fakredeen and generally dismissing any merit the novel may have claimed, when seen as contemporary criticism of English society. These criticisms have relied heavily on the character of Fakredeen, seeing him as the brazen embodiment of Disraeli's political cynicism and lack of political principles. For a long period, when this school dominated the historiography surrounding Disraeli, and over which it still holds much popular sway, *Tancred* was relegated from canon of Disraeli's successful novels and derided as an incoherent fairy tale. Indeed, Leslie Stephen described it as 'mere mystification'.⁷⁸⁸ In the 1927 edition of *Tancred*, editor Philip Guedalla, described it as 'the strangest book ever written on the front bench'.⁷⁸⁹ Perhaps most preeminent, and influential among this school of interpretation was Robert Blake, who in his much vaunted 1966 biography dismissed it as having 'little connexion with the ideas of *Sybil* and *Coningsby*', but instead as, 'a novel which contained many of his [Disraeli's] favourite daydreams', but one that eventually, 'trail[ed] off into a wild oriental phantasmagoria'.⁷⁹⁰ Nor did such scepticism improve over time. Blake later described the novel as, 'an incoherent quasi-mystical oriental farrago of romantic euphoria and dream fulfilment'.⁷⁹¹ Yet despite Blake's aim of putting Disraeli's trilogy on the 1840s in 'their proper perspective', his interpretation fails to do just that.⁷⁹² It relies heavily on an imperfect reading of one character, who is taken at face-value to be a self-portrait of Disraeli. This is, as an unprincipled political schemer. This is done at the expense of large parts of the rest of the novel's characters and plot. Moreover, this interpretation, in its determination to view Disraeli as a political adventurer, have failed to recognise the contemporary situation in which Disraeli was writing.

More recently *Tancred* has been re-assessed by a school of scholars, who have gleaned from its rich descriptions of the East and its powerful oriental imagery, an imperial vision that would later be realised in his crowning second ministry some thirty years later. This school of thought was initially informed by contemporary criticisms of Disraeli's foreign policy in the 1870s. As A.S. Wohl has observed, these attacks, particularly in relation to the Balkan atrocities, stressed the 'Asiatic' and

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.487

⁷⁸⁶ Parry, *Tancred, the East and Religion: Tancred in context*, *EHR*, vol. CXXXII, no.556, (Oxford: OUP, 2017), p.571

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid*, pp.571-572

⁷⁸⁸ *M&B*, vol.3, p.49

⁷⁸⁹ P. Guedalla, 'Note on "Tancred"', in *Tancred*, p.viii.

⁷⁹⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.201, p.215

⁷⁹¹ Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour*, p.123

⁷⁹² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.190.

‘Oriental’ nature of Disraeli’s foreign policy fuelled by deep-rooted anti-Semitic prejudice.⁷⁹³ It was from these critiques on Disraeli’s foreign policy, often supported by quotations from *Tancred* other earlier writings that those literary efforts ‘came back to haunt him’.⁷⁹⁴ As Parry has recognised, by siding with a morally corroded and despotic Ottoman Empire, he was seen by Liberal critics to be acting against not only traditional foreign English policy objectives, but against the principle moral tenets of Mid-Victorian Liberalism.⁷⁹⁵ It is worth pointing out, as Parry does, that there was, ‘a substantial amount of class, racial, and religious snobbery’ behind these judgments made against Disraeli.⁷⁹⁶ For while contemporary reactions to Disraeli’s ‘imperialist’ policy of his second ministry were decidedly prejudiced, it did not stop these views influencing future interpretations of *Tancred*, in which critics saw Disraeli’s ‘Oriental’ and ‘Imperialist’ vision laid out some thirty years before.

Perhaps most influential of these commentators is Edward Said. In his influential *Orientalism*, Said used *Tancred* with, its numerous ‘racial and geographical platitudes’,⁷⁹⁷ as an exemplar of that, ‘reductionism of the Orientalistic...not merely an Oriental lark but [as] an exercise in the astute political management of actual forces on actual territories’.⁷⁹⁸ In Parry’s words, Said was trying: ‘to show Disraeli simplifying and packaging the East for his British readers, so as to accustom them to the idea of dominating and ruling it’.⁷⁹⁹ Said’s influential contribution has certainly had traction with later historiography, particularly with Patrick Brantlinger, who has more recently contended that: ‘Disraeli is an example of orientalist and oriental ‘going native’ to the extent that he constructed both his public and private persona as oriental’,⁸⁰⁰ furthermore, ‘insofar as orientalism is a variety of racism supportive of the western imperialization of Asia, there is no doubt Disraeli was an orientalist’.⁸⁰¹ These comments build upon his earlier assertion that *Tancred* delineated a ‘hardly hidden agenda for the development of British hegemony in the Near East’.⁸⁰² This is echoed by Ivan Kalmar who describes Disraeli as ‘relentlessly imperialist’, and argued that *Tancred* was evidence that, ‘Disraeli was an imperialist who never for a moment doubted England’s right to rule over oriental “natives”’.⁸⁰³ This ‘imperialist’ and ‘oriental’ interpretation of *Tancred* is decidedly problematic. Not only does it fail to connect *Tancred* with the previous two novels in Disraeli’s trilogy of the 1840s, it fails to see the context. Disraeli saw *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred* as a trilogy each answering a different question. This reading of *Tancred* fails to recognise that. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, it divines the meaning of *Tancred* in hindsight. This reading of the novel relies too heavily on Disraeli’s later foreign policy when he was Prime Minister, something that was still quite unthinkable when *Tancred* was published. Moreover by ignoring the historical context in which the novel was written it fails to recognise that *Tancred* was anything but an imperialist vision of British territorial rule in the East.

A third, and highly influential school of thought surrounding Disraeli’s message in *Tancred* has focussed on the racial ideology and Jewish motifs that were both undoubtedly prominent in the novel. While there has been some unavoidable overlap between this interpretation and those scholars who have stressed the oriental themes, there is a definite distinction. This school has divined from

⁷⁹³ A.S. Wohl, ‘“Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi”: Disraeli as Alien’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 34.3 (1995), pp.375-411

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.383

⁷⁹⁵ J.P. Parry, ‘The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880’, *The Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001), pp.171-173

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.171

⁷⁹⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1978), p.102

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.169

⁷⁹⁹ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.572

⁸⁰⁰ Brantlinger, ‘Disraeli and Orientalism’, p.94

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp.100-101

⁸⁰² Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1904*, (Ithica NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.153-156

⁸⁰³ I.D. Kalmar, ‘Benjamin Disraeli, Romantic Orientalist’, *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, 47.2 (2005), p.350, p.366

Disraeli's numerous and voluble extollations of the Jewish race, and his ruminations upon race more generally throughout the 1840s, evidence of an attempt to recognise his own racial identity, and establish his claim to lead the English nation through his racial chosenness. For writers of this leaning, *Tancred* has proved a valuable source, with its remarks surrounding Jewish chosenness and racial and spiritual superiority. Here Tancred's conversations with Eva Besso have proved especially persuasive in convincing commentators, both modern and contemporary, of his identification with the race and creed of his ancestors. Some remarks were deliberately controversial:

Readers were told, "God never spoke except to an Arab."⁸⁰⁴ And that, "Your bishops here know nothing...How can they? A few centuries back they were tattooed savages."⁸⁰⁵ As Parry has asserted it was comments such as these that, 'dominated the reaction to the novel from the outset', and it was, 'Quotations from it [*Tancred*] shaped Victorian anti-Semitic attacks on him'.⁸⁰⁶ These contemporary reactions to *Tancred* have in some ways detracted from the message Disraeli was trying to convey. Those remarks in support of the Jewish race, combined with contemporary anti-Semitic criticisms proved persuasive to scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

However, it was not until the post-war period that modern scholarly interest in Disraeli's Jewishness, and therefore by necessary extension, *Tancred*, truly came to the fore. Philip Rieff, leaning heavily on *Tancred*, argued that Disraeli saw in himself the marriage of the 'Two Jerusalem's', the old and the new: in short the ancient chosenness of the Jewish race, and the new chosenness of the English aristocracy.⁸⁰⁷ Perhaps the most authoritative, and certainly most disseminated, contribution of this period is that of Isaiah Berlin. Once again relying heavily from comments made both in *Tancred* and *Lord George Bentinck*, he argued that Disraeli overcame the obstacle of his Jewish background by transmuting it through his theories on race, into a claim of aristocratic pedigree. He did this, Berlin insisted, 'in order to feel that he was dealing on equal terms with the leaders of his father's adopted country, which he so profoundly venerated'.⁸⁰⁸ These themes of physiological construction or self-fashioning became more prominent in later historiography. Paul Smith, writing in 1987, argued that Disraeli's Jewishness, combined with continental ideas of race and romanticism, gave him the means 'to transcend the limitations and frustrations of his position through the power of romantic imagination...which may have been a translation of the chosenness he felt...as a Jew'.⁸⁰⁹ This idea was often repeated, by other scholars.⁸¹⁰ It was echoed by Todd Endelman, in assessing Disraeli's psychological conversion through his revival and propagation of the myth of Sephardi superiority.⁸¹¹ More recently still, scholars such as O'Kell, Kalmar, and Daniel Schwarz, in analyzing *Tancred*, have been unable to dissimulate Disraeli's Jewishness from the message of the novel.⁸¹² This has led Parry to comment that they have taken 'his Jewishness for granted as an integral part of his identity'.⁸¹³

⁸⁰⁴ *Tancred*, p.,269

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.125

⁸⁰⁶ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.572

⁸⁰⁷ P. Rieff, 'Disraeli: The Chosen of History,' pp.91-98

⁸⁰⁸ Isaiah Berlin, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx and the Search for Identity', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 22.1 (1970), pp.1-20

⁸⁰⁹ Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics', pp.71-72

⁸¹⁰ See Paul Smith, *Disraeli: a brief life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Smith, 'Introduction', *The Self-fashioning of Disraeli*, ed. by Charles Richmond & Paul Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.9-10; Todd Endelman, 'The Emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness', *Ibid*, pp.119-120

⁸¹¹ Todd Endelmann, 'Benjamin Disraeli and the Myth of Sephardi Superiority', in *Disraeli's Jewishness*, ed. by Todd Endelmann & Tony Kusher, (London: Valentine Mikhell, 2002) pp.23-39

⁸¹² Daniel Schwarz, 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin': Jewish Perspectives in Disraeli's Fiction', *Ibid*, pp.40-62, Kalmar, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Romantic Orientalist', pp.350-354, O'Kell, *Disraeli*, pp.316-326, throughout this work he utilises Disraeli's Jewish identity and pride in his Jewish ancestry to stress the psychological romance he argues was being fulfilled in Disraeli's fiction.

⁸¹³ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.573

There is much to commend in this approach. The Jewish motif, framed by Disraeli's theory of race, is an important theme in *Tancred* and should not be simply overlooked. However, most of the evidence comes from just a handful of passages. And the plot as a whole and the message it conveys is somewhat lost when *Tancred* is selectively mined to support ideas surrounding Disraeli's racial chosenness or psychological transformation. Once again, this school of thought, whilst furnishing an influential and thought provoking contribution to our understanding of Disraeli's self-identification, often fails to see *Tancred* within the historical context it was written. Such claims about Disraeli identifying himself as an aristocrat based upon his racial superiority as a Jew and asserting his right to lead the Conservative party really only hold water if we also assume that he knew, when writing *Tancred*, that he would later become Prime Minister. In order properly to understand *Tancred* it must first be analyzed within the context it was written, without the benefit of hindsight, and due consideration must be given to the whole novel, not simply a selected few passages.

Most recently Jonathan Parry has offered a new reading of *Tancred*. This has proved to be a truly original contribution to the discussion of the third novel in Disraeli's most famous trilogy. Parry has persuasively analyzed *Tancred* against the contemporary cultural and social contexts of the late 1840s. Neither *Coningsby* or *Sybil* can be properly understood without appreciating the influence of contemporary intellectual fashions, namely: a common revulsion against the utilitarian spirit of the previous decade, chivalric medievalism, neo-Gothicism and Carlyean anti-materialism.⁸¹⁴ And Parry has also interpreted *Tancred* within the cultural context it was written, that is, against a background of 'contemporary views on Near Eastern themes...when the Near East was the most discussed foreign question of the day'.⁸¹⁵ In addition, he has pointed to the importance of the religious climate in Britain: a period when 'religious controversies at home were at their sharpest'.⁸¹⁶ These were carried on at a time of increasing familiarity with the Near East, the geographical setting of the Bible. And with increased access came greater interest in the region. Through this contextualization of the contemporary attitudes to the East, Parry has decisively rejected the three dominant strains of historiography. Put simply, that *Tancred* was not endorsing 'a lack of principle, a British Near Eastern Empire, or Jewish superiority in political leadership'.⁸¹⁷ Read in this way, it becomes clear that for Disraeli, 'The New Crusade', was one driven by wrong-headed liberal western ideologies that sought to dominate and control the Near East. Thus, *Tancred* should not be viewed as a lamentable example of Britain's misunderstanding of Eastern cultural and religious affairs. Rather, it should be seen as 'a relentless critique of it...an apology for historic monotheism'.⁸¹⁸ Thus, exploring *Tancred* within the context of domestic interest in Eastern foreign policy and religious controversy suggests the possibility of a much more interesting and altogether more cogent reading of the novel.

Following this argument, *Tancred*'s relationship with his counterpart, the charismatic young emir Fakredeen can be seen in an entirely different way. When the two young aristocrats first unite, Fakredeen's lack of political and religious principles is contrasted with *Tancred*'s unwavering adherence to them. When they first converse, *Tancred* was struck by the 'jumble of sublime aspirations and equivocal conduct; such a total disregard of means, such complicated plots, such a fertility of perplexed and tenebrous intrigue!'. Pondering the failure of the emir's efforts at political scheming, *Tancred* comments that, "It appears to me that your system is essentially erroneous. I do not believe that anything great is ever effected by management." In Europe, the effect of centuries of intrigue had resulted in "All faith in God or man, all grandeur of purpose, all nobility of thought, and all beauty of sentiment, withered and shrivelled up." The spirit of the age had changed he tells

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.573

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.573

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.573

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.574

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.574

Fakredeen: “there are popular sympathies, however imperfect, to appeal to; we must recur to the high primeval practice, and address nations now as the heroes, and prophets, and legislators of antiquity.” Fakredeen replies that his grand schemes to unite the East in an Arabian Empire, “are the only ideas for which it is worth while to live.” Tancred replies that:

“The world was never conquered by intrigue: it was conquered by faith. Now, I do not see that you have faith in anything.”

“Faith,” said Fakredeen, musingly, as if his ear had caught the word for the first time, “faith! that is a grand idea. If one could only have faith in something and conquer the world!”⁸¹⁹

This conversation, has often been coupled with Fakredeen’s loose religious principles, best exemplified by his claim that he should receive support from the Turks because he is a “good Mussulman.”⁸²⁰ In the meantime he “wished to assure them in London that I was devoted to their interests; and I meant to offer to let the Protestant missionaries establish themselves in the mountain.”⁸²¹ Eva finds much amusement in the fact that he had sent, “Archbishop Murad to Paris, urging King Louis to support you, because, amongst other reasons, being a Christian prince, you would defend the faith and privileges of the Maronites.”⁸²² He simultaneously ‘attempted to dazzle Besso [Eva’s father] with the prospect of a Hebrew Prince of the Mountains’.⁸²³ Later in the book, he claims also to be a member of the polytheistic tribe of Ansary through his mother’s lineage.⁸²⁴ These apparent contradictions have baffled some scholars. Fakredeen’s unprincipled approach to religion seems confirmed when he tells Tancred that, “the cross, the crescent, the ark, or an old stone, anything would do...but I am debarred from this immense support’ due to the religious pluralism that had been a feature of the region for centuries.⁸²⁵ Those comments have often been taken to be a brazen self-admission of Disraeli’s own lack of faith and political principle. By assuming that the character of Fakredeen was a self-inspired vision of Disraeli as an unprincipled adventurer prince, those scholars have failed to see these declarations within their proper context. For Parry has observed, ‘none of these claims is actually false’.⁸²⁶ Fakredeen could claim Arabian lineage as he is, ‘literally descended from the standard-bearer of the Prophet’.⁸²⁷ He is also a Hebrew as he spent his childhood as a ward growing up in the Besso family. Simultaneously he is also an Ansary as his mother was a ‘lady of Antioch and of one of the old families of the country’.⁸²⁸ He was both Muslim and Christian through the religion of his ancestors, who had been both. It is seemingly useful for Fakredeen: ‘belonging to an old family unless to have the authority of an ancestor ready for any prejudice, religious or political, which your combinations may require?’⁸²⁹ This was certainly an advantage when it came to governing the religiously diverse and politically exigent population of the near East. But for some critics Fakredeen’s attempt to ally himself with Astarte in Ansary, while simultaneously betraying his friend Tancred that seals his fate as the embodiment of political opportunism.⁸³⁰ However, this supposed ultimate betrayal of Tancred towards in the denouement of the novel has been misunderstood. When considered in the wider picture of the story, Fakredeen does not lie. As Parry has suggested his allegation that Tancred was engaged to Eva makes the hero finally realise his love

⁸¹⁹ *Tancred*, pp. 257-260

⁸²⁰ *Ibid*, p.201

⁸²¹ *Ibid*, p.203

⁸²² *Ibid*, p.206

⁸²³ *Ibid*, p.219

⁸²⁴ *Ibid*, p.387

⁸²⁵ *Ibid*, p.259

⁸²⁶ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.577

⁸²⁷ *Tancred*, p.260

⁸²⁸ *Ibid*, p.209

⁸²⁹ *Ibid*, p.202

⁸³⁰ O’Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.330

for her.⁸³¹ Moreover his alliance with Ansary, makes perfect sense. It was not Fakredeen but, “this mad Englishman [Tancred] that came here to preach the doctrines of another creed”.⁸³² The Ansary paganism had been the original religion of the Syrian before the arrival of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It was under this banner, rather than in Tancred’s Arabian inspired, “religious-politico-military adventure”, that Fakredeen might find a better basis for national unity in his crusade to unite Syria.⁸³³

What most commentators have failed to recognise was that *Tancred* was not an idiosyncratic construct. Disraeli placed his characters in a very real geo-political context. Fakredeen was the nephew and heir of Emir Bashir II, a real person: Lebanon’s preeminent landowner, who bent the knee to the nominal rule of first the Ottomans and later Mehmet Ali. His rule, which lasted nearly fifty years, was brought to an end by the British in 1840, owing to his loyalty to Ali.⁸³⁴ His reign over Emirate of Lebanon was noted for its flexible religious practices towards the diverse religious groups surrounding the Mount Lebanon. Born into a family that had adopted Sunni Islam, he converted to Maronite Christianity, but he ‘respected the religious practices of the Mountain whenever he visited Christian, Druze, and Muslim communities’.⁸³⁵ This was reflected in the palace that he built – complete with a church, a mosque, and designated space for Druze worship.⁸³⁶ Given this direct connection to real-life figure, Fakredeen’s religious prevarications seem less un-principled. It could without irony say that his flexible attitude towards religion was a continuation of the policy of his ancestors, as Baroni tells Tancred when he enquires after Fakredeen’s religion: “I have known a good many Shehaabs, and if you will tell me their company, I will tell you their creed.”⁸³⁷ Indeed, it was the historic nature of this religious pluralism that Disraeli was trying to stress. The region had been home to a diverse range of religions long before the reign of the Bashirs. Disraeli’s vision of Lebanon was of a religiously tolerant feudal, society: ‘Among these mountains’, we are told, ‘we find several human races, several forms of government, and several schemes of religion, yet everywhere liberty—a proud, feudal aristocracy, a conventual establishment, which in its ramifications recalls the middle ages, a free and armed peasantry whatever their creed; Emirs on Arabian steeds, bishops worthy of the apostles, the Maronite monk, the horned headgear of the Druses.’⁸³⁸ Hence Fakredeen, when seen as a character within a real, rather than purely fictional, context cannot logically be understood as an embodiment of Disraeli’s own latent political and religious charlatanism. Instead, he must be integrated as an embodiment of the region’s historic socio-political sensitivities that had been maintained through careful management. Those were the same sensitivities that ignorant British foreign policy had failed to understand.

Religious pluralism had deep roots in the Middle East. In Disraeli’s eyes it was attached to a feudal system in which the religious beliefs of landlord or tenant were subordinate to the political harmony of the region. Fakredeen defends this ancient feudal system which had ensured the mutual protection of religious rights for diverse creeds of Mount Lebanon. Disraeli makes it clear that the most important contemporary problems were caused by European intervention and the abuses of Turkish rule in the region.⁸³⁹ This view of the East allowed Disraeli to mount an attack on Robert Peel’s Eastern foreign policy, in a manner which mirrored his attacks on Conservatism and Tory domestic policy in his two previous novels. Disraeli tells us that ‘All Syria, from Gaza to the

⁸³¹ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East, and Religion’, p.599

⁸³² *Tancred*, p.438

⁸³³ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East, and Religion’, p.599

⁸³⁴ *Ibid*, p.577. See also, ‘Bashir Shihan II’, *Britannica*, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bashir-Shihab-II>> [accessed 20/1/2020]

⁸³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.577-578

⁸³⁶ *Ibid*, p.578

⁸³⁷ *Tancred*, p.255

⁸³⁸ *Ibid*, p.338

⁸³⁹ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.579

Euphrates, is feudal.’ It was the ill-considered attempt to destroy this system that had precipitated the revolt against the Egyptians in 1840, and resulted in the deposition of Mehmet Ali. Indeed, every disorder in the country region since Turkish rule was restored could be ‘traced to some officious interposition or hostile encroachment’ of this feudal arrangement. The civil war of 1841 which ‘perplexed and scandalized England’, was the result of Maronite attempts to ‘destroy the feudal privileges of the Druse Mookatadgis’.⁸⁴⁰ The revolt was put down, and the Turks restored to reign amidst the anarchy. Once more, Western ‘diplomacy was obliged to interfere’ to provide a government for Lebanon as, ‘the Porte was resolved not to try another Shehaab, and the great powers were resolved not to trust the Porte’. Western powers once again tried to formulate a system by which both local landowners and Ottoman influence could be assuaged. The result: ‘Downing-street (1842) decided upon the sectarian government of the Lebanon. It was simple, and probably satisfactory—to Exeter Hall; but Downing-street was quite unaware, or had quite forgotten, that the feudal system prevailed throughout Lebanon.’⁸⁴¹ This had a surprising effect. It united, ‘the whole population of Lebanon in one harmonious action, but unfortunately against its own project.’ That failure led Peel to abandon the project of ‘sectarian diplomacy, and announced the adoption of the geographical principle of government’.⁸⁴² This had the effect of appeasing the Druze, but enflaming the Christian population that now found themselves under Druze rule. Under this arrangement, civil war once again broke out in the region by 1845.⁸⁴³ While Turkish ineptitude in governing the region is heavily criticised, Disraeli’s rhetorical fire was ‘aimed at London as much as Constantinople’.⁸⁴⁴ Not only did Peel’s foreign policy fail to understand the careful nuanced, balance of forces that had been cultivated in the region over the previous centuries. It had also yielded to public ignorance at home. As Parry has pointed out Disraeli was critical of the ‘populist evangelicals’ of Exeter Hall who exerted popular influence on behalf of missionary activity and protestant causes.⁸⁴⁵

Ironically, the one positive to arise from Western meddling in the East was the formation of that ‘most remarkable institution...that of “Young Syria.” It flourishes: ‘in every town and village of Lebanon’, supported by, ‘a band of youth who acknowledge the title, and who profess nationality as their object’⁸⁴⁶ Whilst the detail around Young Syria’s aims and objectives are a little hazy, its aims are obviously nationalist. However, it was not a liberal nationalist movement like Mazzini’s ‘Young Italy’ movement.⁸⁴⁷ It was a movement reacting against the forces of European liberal materialism. In essence, it was Young England within in a different and fictional context. Young Syria was fighting to conserve the real embodiment of that same imagined feudal system of government that Young England had dreamed of restoring back home. However, even Fakredeen was not immune to that creeping poison of Western materialism. He dreams of establishing a manufacturing empire in Lebanon, telling Tancred: “We might improve the condition of the people; we might establish manufactures, stimulate agriculture, extend commerce, get an appalto of the silk, buy it all up at sixty piastres per oke and sell it at Marseilles at two hundred, and at the same time advance the interests of true religion as much as you please.”⁸⁴⁸ This is why, at one point, the principled Carlyean anti-materialist Tancred chastises Fakredeen for undertaking a loan to fund his revolt: “I see the poison of modern liberalism has penetrated even the desert. Believe me, national redemption is not an affair of

⁸⁴⁰ *Tancred*, pp.344-346

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp.344-346

⁸⁴² *Ibid*, pp.346-348

⁸⁴³ *Ibid*, p.349

⁸⁴⁴ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.579

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp.579-560

⁸⁴⁶ *Tancred*, p.349

⁸⁴⁷ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.578

⁸⁴⁸ *Tancred*, p.272

usury.”⁸⁴⁹ While one character, points to the lengths British manufacturing will go: “England will never be satisfied till the people of Jerusalem wear calico turbans.”⁸⁵⁰ When looked at in this way, it quickly becomes clear that far from promoting British imperial ambitions in the East, Disraeli was engaged in a comprehensive attack on European liberal materialism, which had already begun to destroy the fabric of these ancient feudal societies. He was also authoring in a damning critique of Britain’s, most prominently Robert Peel’s, failed foreign policy in the region.

Disraeli claimed, in the General Preface of the 1870 collected edition of his works, that *Tancred*, ‘recognizing the Church as a powerful agent in the previous development of England, and possibly the most efficient means of that renovation of the national spirit which was desired; it seemed my duty to ascend to the origin of that great ecclesiastical corporation’.⁸⁵¹ The trilogy had attempted to counter the utilitarian spirit of the age by recognising the imagination as a force not less important than reason. It also trusted to ‘popular sentiment, which rested upon an heroic tradition...on popular sympathies and popular privileges’.⁸⁵² Thus in *Tancred*, Disraeli claimed that he looked upon ‘the Anglican Church as the main machinery by which these results might be realised.’⁸⁵³ The Church was depicted as one of the ‘few great things left in England’. However, however its position in society had been let down by a failure of leadership: ‘the secession of Dr. Newman dealt a blow to the Church from which it still recoils’.⁸⁵⁴ Instead of re-establishing the Anglican Church upon its ancient Semitic foundations within Church of Jerusalem, these seceders from the Oxford Movement had ‘sought refuge in medieval superstitions’.⁸⁵⁵

It has long been claimed that this retrospective preface was responsible much of the misinterpretation of *Tancred*. Indeed, John Vincent specifically argued that the idea that it was ‘Disraeli’s Church novel will not do’. For him, this interpretation was derived from ‘Disraeli’s various prefaces...written when he had been heavily involved in Church politics for a decade.’⁸⁵⁶ Yet that view of *Tancred* is itself somewhat problematic. Disraeli’s later claims might plausibly be dismissed as a retrospective attempt to marry his recent experiences of dealing with the internal politics of Anglicanism (of which he was largely ignorant) with his earlier writings. But the ideas that Disraeli expresses about the Church in *Tancred* cannot be so easily ignored. It is true that, as Vincent has argued that the Church of England does for the most part, ‘remain firmly outside the picture’ in *Tancred*.⁸⁵⁷ However, while ecclesiastical matters were not explicitly discussed in the novel, suggestions and ideas about Christianity play an important part, and can easily be connected to the contemporary position of the Anglican Church. Seen in that light, the preface of 1870, instead of being dismissed as a misleading retroactive commentary, offer us a clue as to why Disraeli did not delve into Anglican affairs too directly: the secession of J H Newman to Rome.

That was a seismic moment for the Church; so much is obvious. But it was also a potentially damaging occasion for Disraeli and his followers. At the time of his secession, Young England (less so Disraeli) had been outspoken supporters of the Oxford Movement. Dealing with the condition of the Church more explicitly in *Tancred* would almost certainly have afforded his critics an opportunity to revisit this fact. Moreover, the arguments that Disraeli makes in *Tancred*, regarding the position of the Church, its Semitic origins in the East, and the apostolic nature of succession from Christ, also its debt to the Hebraic truths the Jewish race, all flew too close to winds of anti-Puseyite sentiment to be

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.252

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.238

⁸⁵¹ General Preface to the 1870 collected edition of Disraeli’s works, printed in *New York Times*, 9th of November 1870, p.2

⁸⁵² *Ibid*, p.2

⁸⁵³ *Ibid*, p.2

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.2

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.2

⁸⁵⁶ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.98

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.97

expressed as open commentary upon the Church of England. Vincent has suggested that when those later prefaces and commentaries by Disraeli are put aside a very different message appears. Perhaps so.⁸⁵⁸ However, when read as a contemporary but semi-allegorical critique of the Anglican Church, by way of a romantic crusade to the birthplace of Christianity, a series of colourful criticisms about the condition of the Church in England emerge. These are, perhaps, more interesting still.

When read against this contemporary backdrop and put in its proper context, *Tancred* offers us a brilliant insight into how Disraeli believed the Church could be revived as the leading social and spiritual body of the nation. As Parry has so shrewdly observed, Disraeli, while not noted for his personal religious beliefs, 'was a political sociologist who saw religious systems as key aspects of the struggle for power and national greatness'.⁸⁵⁹ On this subject, Douglas Hurd has noted that 'we are therefore left with an oddity: a man who believed in nothing nonetheless believed very strongly that the public needed to believe'.⁸⁶⁰ If so, Disraeli was not alone. Indeed, he was in esteemed company when propounding the virtues of religious systems, despite his own lack of personal faith. It has been long accepted that Alexis De Toqueville was himself a non-believer. Yet expressed sentiments very similar to Disraeli.⁸⁶¹

This is what needs to be appreciated when considering Disraeli's thought in these matters. For him, Church was as an instrumental institution through which those twin imposters, liberalism and materialism, might be combatted. Subject to its being restored to its true position of authority, Disraeli also saw the Church as a force that could reestablish the social harmony and class peace that was often missing in the tumultuous 1840s. 'Europe', we are told, 'is not happy. Amid its false excitement, its bustling invention, and its endless toil, a profound melancholy broods over its spirit and gnaws at its heart. In vain they baptise their tumult by the name of progress; the whisper of a demon is ever asking them, 'Progress from whence and to what?''⁸⁶² Writing here in 1846-47, Disraeli seemed here to sense the revolution that would sweep Europe in 1848. When Tancred receives his vision from the Angel of Arabia he is told that, 'Europe is in the throes of a great birth. The multitudes again are brooding; but they are not now in the forest: they are in the cities and in the fertile plains.'⁸⁶³ Having blamed their misery on the very forces that ensured their happiness, the masses have turned their back on religion and the 'God of Sinai and Calvary'. Instead they had begun to worship at the shrine of progress and equality. The Angel tells Tancred that 'The equality of man can only be accomplished by the sovereignty of God. The longing for fraternity can never be satisfied but under the sway of a common father...Cease then to seek in a vain philosophy the solution of the social problem that perplexes you. Announce the sublime and solacing doctrine of theocratic equality.'⁸⁶⁴ This scene has been long ridiculed. But when judged as part of a wider discussion about the role and condition of the Church, it can be seen for what it was: an attempt to revitalise the foundations upon which the Church and, by extension, Western, belief stood. Furthermore, it suggested that the Church had an important role to play in combatting those revolutionary forces that sought to establish secularisation, equality, and the principles of liberal materialism.

Like all his novels of the 1840s, *Tancred* assumed that the condition of England, broadly conceived, needed urgent addressing. The country was then wracked by hunger, agricultural depression, political unrest, also the sharp contrast between the haves and have-nots and the proliferation of industrial wealth and of materialist ideas. Each, in their different ways, had acted to

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp.98-99

⁸⁵⁹ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.581

⁸⁶⁰ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.36

⁸⁶¹ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols, (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835)

⁸⁶² *Tancred*, p.310

⁸⁶³ *Ibid*, p.290

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.291

worsen the condition of the working man. These ideas have already been discussed in relation to *Coningsby* and *Sybil*. Both had stressed the want of Carlyean heroism among England's political and social leadership. *Tancred* takes that argument further. It demonstrates how England's spiritual and religious leadership had lost its grip on the hearts and minds of the nation, having been led astray by those self-same modern principles. In *Tancred*, the influence of latitudinarian and evangelical ideas over the Church come in for particular criticism. As Parry has suggested, Disraeli believed that the former bred indifference, and the latter lacked the historical understanding of the Church's ancient position. He also criticised it for the tawdry influence of money behind the movement.⁸⁶⁵ Thus in the opening books of *Tancred*, and before our hero embarks on his crusade to the East, we are treated to a brilliant satire of English society. Here the foundations of Disraeli's argument are set and the weakness of English religious faith are exposed through sketches of a society that has allowed religion to become contaminated with materialism and, 'in thrall to fashion rather than its historic traditions'.⁸⁶⁶

The character who best embodies this social pathology is Tancred's brief love interest, Lady Bertie and Bellair. She delays his departure from England. She also beguiles the young protagonist. When discussing his proposed visit to the Holy Land, she tells him that "(t)he spiritual can alone satisfy me," indeed, despite her claim that, "Jerusalem has been the dream of my life", thus far she had "never got farther than Paris."⁸⁶⁷ Tancred, perhaps blinded by infatuation with the captivating Lady Bertie believed, "her heart was at Jerusalem. The sacred city was the dream of her life; and, amid the dissipations of May Fair and the distractions of Belgravia, she had in fact all this time only been thinking of Jehosaphat and Sion. Strange coincidence of sentiment".⁸⁶⁸ But it seems likely that their interest in Jerusalem was little more than a vague coincidence. Tancred yearned for the spiritual truths that he hoped he might find at the Holy Sepulchre. Lady Bertie's concern was far more superficial. Her desire to see the city was fuelled by London's current fascination with David Roberts' 'drawings of the Holy Land.'⁸⁶⁹ Disraeli's scornful amusement at the fashionable preoccupation of London's high society salons interest with these blissful visages of the Holy Land was perfectly embodied in Lady Bertie. She gives Tancred a viewing of, 'Mr. Roberts's Syrian drawings, and she alike charmed and astonished him by her familiarity with every locality and each detail'. Yet, despite her acclaimed desperation to undertake a pilgrimage with Tancred, and much to his dismay, she complains of the inconvenience: "if Jerusalem were only a place one could get at, something might be done; if there were a railroad to it for example."⁸⁷⁰

Indeed, notwithstanding her fashionable interest in the East, it might be suggested that Lady Bertie's interest in Tancred stemmed less from his religious fervour, than from his association with Sidonia: "There is no person" she tells Tancred, "I wish to know so much as M. de Sidonia,"⁸⁷¹ Indeed, it is his wealth and stake in Europe's railroads that arouses her real interest. She frequently asks Tancred to introduce her to the powerful financier. It later becomes clear, through a conversation with Sidonia that, "(s)he is the most inveterate female gambler in Europe".⁸⁷² In fact, she had sought Sidonia's acquaintance on several occasions. Moreover, through her recent speculations in Paris, she had lost everything. Thus, the curtain is pulled back on the falsehoods and superficialities of fashionable spiritual interest in the Holy Land. Disraeli in this same section, as Parry has pointed out, also took the opportunity to poke fun at fashionable fascination with early evolutionary thought,

⁸⁶⁵ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.584

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.584

⁸⁶⁷ *Tancred*, p.132

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.151

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.133; Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.584

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.162

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.132

⁸⁷² *Ibid*, p.165

ridiculed through the well-read but intellectual wooden Lady Constance who offers Tancred a book, saying: ‘It explains everything...It shows you exactly how a star is formed; nothing can be so pretty! A cluster of vapour—the cream of the milky way—a sort of celestial cheese—churned into light...we were fishes, and I believe we shall be crows...We had fins—we may have wings.’⁸⁷³ The message is clear: the contemporary fashions and preoccupations of London’s salons were amusing. But they were also wrongheaded, superficial, and were perpetuated by those who did not have the intellectual wherewithal to wholly comprehend the serious nature of their subject.

While the novel acknowledged the undoubted resolution of their religious beliefs, *Tancred* was equally critical of the supporters of contemporary Evangelicalism. Foremost amongst these are Tancred’s parents, the Duke and Duchess of Bellamont and their extended family. The Duchess was ingenuously convinced of the simple righteousness of her religious and moral convictions. She passed on this moral self-assurance to her son, endowing Tancred with her creed and persuading him, ‘that the principles of religious truth, as well as of political justice, required no further investigation.’⁸⁷⁴ The Duchess of Bellamont was raised in Northern Ireland where her family were ‘puritanical, severe, and formal in their manners, their relaxations a Bible Society or a meeting for the conversion of the Jews.’⁸⁷⁵ *Tancred*’s chief criticism of evangelicalism was that it was ignorant of historical tradition and too closely allied with commercial materialism. This alliance between religion and money was most clearly embodied in the way that their conversion missions relied-- and indeed prospered-- on the back of subscriptions from a ‘simpering and guilt-ridden British public, especially the commercial middle classes.’⁸⁷⁶ The Duchess of Bellamont’s family had long and liberally supported these missions to convert Roman Catholics in their native Ulster. As the news spread of the supposed success of these missions, the British public, ‘began to believe that at last the scarlet lady was about to be dethroned; they loosened their purse-strings... [and] began to congratulate each other on the prospect of our at last becoming a united Protestant people...In the blaze and thick of the affair, Irish Protestants jubilant, Irish Papists denouncing the whole movement as fraud and trumpery, John Bull perplexed, but excited, and still subscribing’. It seemed that as long as the public subscribed, and ‘as long as their funds lasted, their missionaries found proselytes.’⁸⁷⁷ The best efforts of these evangelicals to convert Ireland to Protestantism, Blomfield’s prophesied ‘Second Reformation’ actually wrought an unexpected result: the ‘emancipation of the Roman Catholics...the destruction of Protestant bishoprics, the sequestration of Protestant tithes, and the endowment of Maynooth.’⁸⁷⁸ Disraeli scorn bordered on denouncing their crusade as a swindle. Devoid of spiritual understanding and fuelled by the money, the burgeoning middle class was ignorant of the historical position of the Church, and instead caught in the religious fervour of popular evangelicalism.

This critical insight is mirrored in Tancred’s experiences, once he reaches Jerusalem. Among the residents of the British consulate we meet an “English bishop, who is delighted to have an addition to his congregation, which is not too much, consisting of his own family, the English and Prussian consuls, and five Jews, whom they have converted at twenty piastres a-week; but I know they are going to strike for wages.”⁸⁷⁹ To contemporary readers, this would have read as a thinly veiled attack on the attempt to establish the Anglican-German Bishopric of Jerusalem, in 1841. The project was a joint venture between Prussia and Britain to establish a protestant bishopric in Jerusalem and thus further evangelical missionary activity in the region, thereby to spread the influence of

⁸⁷³ *Ibid*, p.110; Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.584

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.71

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.12

⁸⁷⁶ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.585

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.69

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.69

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.70

Protestantism into the Middle East.⁸⁸⁰ It also helped to further Britain's foreign policy goals, by extending her political influence to a region traditionally dominated by Russia and France.⁸⁸¹ There were a number of reasons behind Disraeli's distaste for this scheme. Like most evangelical activity he saw its success tied inextricably with the vulgarity of money: the five Jews who were being paid for their conversion attested to this. Whilst the project had a legitimate, religious, appeal to some sections of the Anglican Church, it was undoubtedly also organised with an eye on renewed and intensified political considerations in the East.⁸⁸² Given *Tancred's* commitment to apostolic succession, it seems likely that Disraeli thought very little of the spiritual virtue of the Anglican alliance with German evangelicals who opposed this doctrine. This was the criticism made by Newman and his Tractarian supporters. They argued that the Bishopric was an unholy alliance between evangelicalism and Lutherans who opposed apostolic succession (in sharp contrast to the Tractarians who supported it revival as an active custom), and served not the interests of the Church but the government's political ambitions in the East.⁸⁸³ Certainly, when recounting the failures of British foreign policy, *Tancred* did not fail to mention the part that popular evangelicalism had to play. Exeter Hall, built in 1831 and mentioned throughout *Tancred*, by the 1840s it had become a key meeting place for local evangelicals and a metonym for evangelical expressions of Christian belief. Thus *Tancred* argued that the evangelical campaigns of Exeter Hall, and the popular cries that they spawned, had directly influenced and misdirected Peel's foreign policy in the region.

Tancred did not stop at exposing the faults of contemporary Anglican doctrine and practice. It also provided a solution by which the religious and spiritual authority of the Church might be restored. It was perhaps not surprising that like so many of Disraeli's proposals, this was not a detailed panacea. It certainly did not involve itself too closely with contemporary debates regarding liturgy and Church hierarchy. Rather, *Tancred's* answer lay in renewed leadership and a more subtly historical understanding of the Church's authority. During his crusade, *Tancred* begins to despair that the spirituality and religious fervour of the English race had irrecoverably declined: 'that he was deficient in that qualification of race which was necessary for the high communion to which he aspired.'⁸⁸⁴ It is at this point, thinking of Bellamont and the duties to his family and class, that Tancred questions his quest for spiritual enlightenment. However, he overcomes this problem by remembering the strong and enduring historic connection the East had with England religious past. In that way, he realises that it was 'these Arabian laws regulated his life.' Thus, far from being an unwelcome race with no connection the Holy Land 'the life and property of England are protected by the laws of Sinai.' Moreover, 'the hard-working people of England are secured in every seven days a day of rest by the laws of Sinai.' The great institutions of Britain, though they might not realise it, were actually embedded in history of the East. The much-vaunted civil liberties of the English, and the hard-won religious freedom of the Scots, had been achieved by, "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon".⁸⁸⁵ The people of England still needed the unifying social force and spiritual alleviation of the Church and the teachings of the old testament. Its laws were still influential in England. As Parry has suggested, 'the psalms of David continued to give solace to the exploited masses...[and] Dissenter had named their modest chapels Sion and Bethel to draw on the life-giving faith of the ancients'.⁸⁸⁶ Despite the malaise that had befallen the Anglican Church in the 1840s, when it found

⁸⁸⁰ J.S. Conway, 'The Jerusalem Bishopric: A Union of Foolscap and Blotting Paper', *Studies in Religion*, 7.3 (1978), pp.305-306.

⁸⁸¹ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.576.

⁸⁸² One traveler in 1844 commented on the absurdity of, 'a paltry, inland, eastern town, without trade or importance of any kind, sit five consuls of the great European powers'. Quoted in, Parry, 'Disraeli the East and Religion', p.576

⁸⁸³ *Ibid*, p.576

⁸⁸⁴ *Tancred*, p.263

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.266

⁸⁸⁶ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.588

itself besieged by the threats and ideas religious dissent, by evangelical Protestantism and German biblical criticism, *Tancred* suggests that solution to its problem was to fight that spirit of modernity by remembering the Church's foundation and the Hebraic laws of the East that the Christianity had enshrined.

Disraeli's trilogy of the 1840s displayed a Carlyean fixation with heroism: specifically about the necessity for charismatic leadership, in order to turn the tide of modern forces, then overwhelming England's great institutions. This was particularly true for the Church. Vincent has even suggested that *Tancred* manages to deride dismiss all wings of the Church and, somehow, to 'be offensive about High Church, Low Church and Broad Church all in the same novel'. He is certainly right to observe that 'the Church of Dr. Pusey, Lord Shaftsbury, and Bishop Blomfield was, to Disraeli, an empty vessel, a Sunday edition of Peelite Conservatism'.⁸⁸⁷ None of these strands of Anglicanism had managed to grasp the nettle. The Oxford Movement perhaps had come closest. As Parry has argued, it was 'the latest sensible rebellion against state interference in religious institutions, but too obsessed with 'monkish foppery' to provide the right leadership'.⁸⁸⁸ The few churchmen who do appear in the *Tancred* confirm this dearth of inspiring, religious, leaders. Perhaps the best example is the unnamed Bishop of London we encounter in volume one, the religious teacher of Tancred and a spiritual guide to the Duchess of Bellamont. He is widely regarded as thinly-veiled lampoon of the then holder of that post: Charles Blomfield. He was not without talents: 'bustling, energetic, versatile, gifted with an indomitable perseverance, and stimulated by an ambition that knew no repose'. However, despite these not inconsiderable abilities, 'he was one of those leaders who are not guides. Having little real knowledge, and not endowed with those high qualities of intellect', he was often, 'enunciating second-hand...some big principle in vogue...[but] he invariably shrank from its subsequent application'. He had been a supporter of the various wings of the Anglican Church, while they were in their zenith: 'furiously evangelical, soberly high and dry, and fervently Puseyite, each phasis of his faith concludes with what the Spaniards term a "transaction."'. He was succinctly summed up as a, 'bustling intermeddler'.⁸⁸⁹ With the Church under the thrall of such latitudinarian, vacillatory, leaders and thus with the Church so lacking direction Tancred's spiritual crusade makes perfect sense.

It is ironic that, given the common supposition that *Tancred* had a close association to Disraeli's theories on race, the novel seems to refute the idea of racial chosenness, when it came to the Church.⁸⁹⁰ During a moment of 'amiable weakness', Tancred begins to question the legitimacy of his spiritual crusade: 'Why was he there? Why was he, the child of a northern isle, in the heart of the Stony Arabia, far from the scene of his birth and of his duties?... Was he then a stranger there? uncalled, unexpected, intrusive, unwelcome?'.⁸⁹¹ His epiphany comes when he realises that he does not need to be of the races of the Arabia to receive spiritual enlightenment. The same laws and tenets had shaped the history and customs of Britain: 'Had he not from his infancy repeated, in the congregation of his people, the laws which, from the awful summit of these surrounding mountains, the Father of all had himself delivered for the government of mankind?...He had a connexion with these regions; they had a hold upon him...for this English youth, words had been uttered and things done, more than thirty centuries ago, in this stony wilderness, which influenced his opinions and regulated his conduct every day of his life'⁸⁹² As Parry has argued, 'the question of to which race God had spoken, so many centuries ago, was of limited relevance. Any Christian holy man could lead the

⁸⁸⁷ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.103

⁸⁸⁸ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.589

⁸⁸⁹ *Tancred*, p.72

⁸⁹⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.208; Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life*, pp.88-89

⁸⁹¹ *Tancred*, p.264

⁸⁹² *Ibid*, p.265

nation if he articulated the right values.⁸⁹³ It was, rather, a question of leadership. This was derived not from racial superiority or breeding, but rather from espousing the correct beliefs. Disraeli had long believed that Church to be the most ‘democratic’ of England institutions. It was therefore logical that leadership of England’s spiritual institution was not a right, assertible on the grounds of race or birth. Instead, the Church should be led by those with the ability to inspire embracing the historic Hebraic principles upon which Christianity had been founded.

Tancred is, in essence, a novel crying out for a priesthood that is capable of the task. The traditional institutions in England were surviving on borrowed time. Meanwhile, the British people had “ceased to be a nation. They are a crowd, and only kept in some rude provisional discipline by the remains of that old system which they are daily destroying.”⁸⁹⁴ As one scholar has put it: ‘the aristocracy, then, existed on sufferance, without spiritual support, presiding over the dissolution of traditional society’.⁸⁹⁵ Britain was in an ‘agitated age, when the principles of all institutions, sacred and secular, have been called in question; when...the doctrine and the discipline of the Church have been impugned, its power assailed, its authority denied, the amount of its revenues investigated, their disposition criticised, and both attacked’. Disraeli argued that the clergy needed consist of men of substance who were “’under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit’”. After all, these men were the, ‘successors of the apostles, for the stewards of the mysteries of Sinai and of Calvary’.⁸⁹⁶ At a time when the Church required direction from its leaders, Tancred found “its opinions conflicting, its decrees contradictory, its conduct inconsistent,”⁸⁹⁷ The leadership had failed. Moreover, the very conception of spiritual leadership degenerated into desuetude: ‘The Church of England, mainly from its deficiency of oriental knowledge, and from a misconception of the priestly character...has fallen of late years into great straits; nor has there ever been a season when it has more needed for its guides men possessing the higher qualities both of intellect and disposition’. It had reached such a low ebb that the ‘notion of clerical capacity did not soar higher than a private tutor who had suckled a young noble into university honours; and his test of priestly celebrity was the decent editorship of a Greek play.’ In short, the bishops, the Church’s chief leaders had sunk to ‘mitred nullities’.⁸⁹⁸ Disraeli’s answer to this malaise within the Church lay in the restoration of apostolic succession. As Sidonia tells Tancred: “this is the advantage which Rome has over you, and which you never can understand. That Church was founded by a Hebrew, and the magnetic influence lingers.”⁸⁹⁹ However, the Anglican Church had betrayed its Episcopalian roots by allowing ‘bishoprics to serve as appanages for the younger sons of great families’.⁹⁰⁰ The claims Disraeli was making were not particularly original. But they struck a chord with a Victorian audience that had seen Newman defect to Rome, only two years before the publication of *Tancred*.⁹⁰¹

It is undeniable that *Tancred* stresses the connection between Judaism and Christianity. Many of the most striking passages have been used as evidence for an argument supporting Disraeli’s ideas on Jewish racial superiority or as part of Disraeli’s intellectual reconciliation with his own identity. But when read in as part of the whole novel, and in when put in contemporary context, they are better seen as principally concerned with Anglicanism as opposed to Judaism. Tancred’s conversations with Eva Besso have long been used to sustain an argument for Disraeli’s belief in Jewish racial

⁸⁹³ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.588.

⁸⁹⁴ *Tancred*, p.51

⁸⁹⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.103

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp.70-74

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.72-73

⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp.71-72

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.125

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.70

⁹⁰¹ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, pp.588-589

superiority. The pair, meeting by chance in a Bethany garden, engage in an intense discussion of the position of the Jews in Christian belief. Eva asks Tancred, “Pray, are you of those Franks who worship a Jewess; or of those other who revile her”. Upon discovering that Eva was of the Jewish faith, and a follower who had both admiration and sympathy for Jesus, he suggests that she should read the bible. She replies, saying that she had read that book: “It is a good one, written, I observe, entirely by Jews.” It is telling that she also suggests that “the Christianity which I draw from your book does not agree with the Christianity which you practise”. Already there is a clear indication that the discussion is not simply grounded on the position of the Jewish race. Undoubtedly, Disraeli was happy to turn contemporary anti-Semitic prejudices on their head: as Eva asks, “We agree that half Christendom worships a Jewess, and the other half a Jew. Now let me ask you one more question. Which do you think should be the superior race; the worshipped or the worshippers?” However, and notwithstanding comments such as these, the underlying message was about the intrinsically Hebraic nature of the Christian Church. After all, as Eva tells Tancred: Jesus, “was born a Jew, lived a Jew, and died a Jew”. She then quizzes Tancred on the persecution of the Jews and the “penal and miraculous” state of her race. Tancred replies with the widely held Evangelical view that the persecution of the Jews throughout Christendom was “the punishment ordained for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah.”

Like other characters in Disraeli’s fiction, Eva is a character important to the education of the novel’s protagonist, in the mould of Aubrey St. Lys, Sidonia, and Walter Gerrard. She runs intellectual rings around the young aristocrat and exposes the hypocritical fallacies in Tancred’s belief. “the human race is saved; and, without the apparent agency of a Hebrew prince, it could not have been saved. Now tell me: suppose the Jews had not prevailed upon the Romans to crucify Jesus, what would have become of the Atonement?” Thus Tancred’s first meeting with Eva leaves him questioning not only the position of the Jewish race, but also questioning both the conviction of the evangelical beliefs that he had inherited from his mother, and the doctrine and practices of the Anglican Church which had strayed from its ancient antecedents. Disraeli’s definition or explanations of the religious truths that might be recovered are vague, even non-existent. As Parry put it, ‘Disraeli was not in the business of defining these [religious] truths’.⁹⁰² However, it was his vagueness that was once again his greatest strength, as *Tancred* provides an understanding of the Anglican Church that was deeply-rooted in history whilst not straying into partisan sectarianism or theological dogmatism. Moreover, whilst his view of the Church did not strictly side with the principles of one particular Anglican faction, this ‘did not mean it was unfashionable’.⁹⁰³ In fact, Disraeli furnishes a view of Anglicanism that challenges most of the Church’s major schools of thought whilst still furnishing a coherent argument for its revival.

In fact, much of the supposed evidence for Jewish superiority appears only when the novel discussing the Hebraic foundations of Christianity. So much so that the preeminent scholar of Anglo-Jewry, has argued that, ‘*Tancred* has nothing whatsoever to do with Jews’.⁹⁰⁴ This IS perhaps too categorical. However, that remark certainly points to Tancred’s paradox. This is that the supposed racial chosenness of the Jewish race rested squarely on its contribution to the foundation of Christianity. Therefore, the argument that *Tancred* was a manifesto in favour of Jewish racial superiority needs to be severely qualified. Ivan Kalmar has suggested that while the relationship between Christianity and Judaism was a central theme in *Tancred*, ‘he [Disraeli] gives no hint that he believes Judaism to be inferior to Christianity’. Rather, the two are distinguished not by Christ’s

⁹⁰² Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.588

⁹⁰³ *Ibid*, p.590

⁹⁰⁴ Cesarani, *Disraeli*, p.113

‘moral or spiritual innovation’, but purely by his, ‘public relation skills’.⁹⁰⁵ This argument is difficult to sustain. Disraeli had great respect and admiration for the religion of his ancestors, and the achievements of the Jews. However, in *Tancred*, Christianity was presented as an undeniable advance from the foundations of Judaism. As Parry puts it, anyone having read *Tancred* one should be left in, ‘no doubt that Disraeli regarded the Christianity that developed from Judaism as an improvement on it’.⁹⁰⁶ *Tancred* certainly stresses Jesus’ Jewish faith and race. He was the, ‘greater successor’ of Moses and the ‘last and greatest’ of the Hebrew prophets.⁹⁰⁷ However, Jesus was more than a great Jewish prophet. His advent, and the emergence of Christianity, brought about so much which Judaism had failed to do. His coming heralded a new, “relation between the Creator and his creatures, more fine, more permanent, and more express.”⁹⁰⁸ It was the coming of Jesus that commanded the “inspired Hebrew mind should mould and govern the world.” And it was Christianity, not Judaism, through which, “God spoke to the Gentiles, and not to the tribes of Israel only.” This was an important distinction between Jesus and the previous Hebrew prophets. It was through Christ that the word of God spread: *Tancred* tell us that “Christianity is Judaism for the multitude”.⁹⁰⁹ It was a moment of Kairos which inspired, in the New Testament, “a completely new series of inspired literature.”⁹¹⁰ These factors combined to achieve what Judaism had been unable to do: that is, deal the “death-blow of the Pagan idolatry.”⁹¹¹ Therefore, although Disraeli was keen to highlight the contribution made by the Jews to Christianity, also the Christian conception of the world, and indeed the very customs and laws of England, he did not argue in favour of Judaism. In fact, he did not even view Judaism as an equal to Christianity. It was Christianity that had completed and improved upon the older Hebrew race. Moreover, as Parry has suggested, while Disraeli was keen to celebrate the ancient achievements of the Jews and historic chosenness of the Jewish race, ‘it did not follow that he thought that Jews could still offer much leadership in the modern world’.⁹¹²

A great deal of scholarly effort in recent times has attempted to claim Disraeli for the Jewish cause. A Judaeo-centric reading of *Tancred* has been pivotal to that enterprise. So much of this thesis rests upon the eventual union of Eva Besso and Tancred at the conclusion of the novel. According to this view, the marriage of Christianity and Judaism heralded the alliance of ‘The Chosen People of the Bible with the Chosen People of the Modern Empire’.⁹¹³ The union of both race and religion was also central to the analysis of both Levine and Cesarani.⁹¹⁴ Valman has even argued that the marriage at the end of the novel symbolised, not only, ‘the union of, ‘different classes and religions’, but to also the rediscovery of, ‘racial purity [and] ‘primeval vigour’’.⁹¹⁵ If read in the same way as *Sybil*, this argument would be logically sound. However, the marriage between Eva and Tancred never takes place, at least not in the pages of *Tancred*. Kalmar’s explanation for its omission is as follows: ‘Disraeli felt that a marriage between a Christian nobleman and an unconverted Jewish woman would still be a bit hard for his public to digest’.⁹¹⁶ That seems flimsy, given Disraeli’s willingness to confront prejudice elsewhere in the novel. The fact is that *Tancred* did not end with the happy union

⁹⁰⁵ Kalmar, ‘Benjamin Disraeli’, p.354

⁹⁰⁶ Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.587

⁹⁰⁷ *Tancred*, p.171, p.428

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.261

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.427

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.260

⁹¹¹ *Ibid*, p.427

⁹¹² Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East and Religion’, p.590

⁹¹³ Kalmar, ‘Benjamin Disraeli’, p.358

⁹¹⁴ Levine, *Benjamin Disraeli*, pp124-124; 127-129; Cesarani, *Disraeli*, p.108

⁹¹⁵ Nadia Valman, ‘Manly Jews’, *Disraeli’s Jewishness*, ed. by Todd Endelmann & Tony Kusher, (London: Valentine Mikhell, 2002) p.92

⁹¹⁶ Kalmar, ‘Benjamin Disraeli’, p.358

for race and religion, but rather with the arrival of Tancred's parents, the Duke and Duchess of Bellamont.

The true ending to *Tancred* has still puzzled historians. Lord Blake described it as a, 'moment of immortal bathos'.⁹¹⁷ This judgement has been echoed elsewhere.⁹¹⁸ However, as one scholar has recently suggested, when *Tancred* is read as a political contribution to contemporary institutional debates, the ending is far more suggestive than it was bathetic. It demonstrates the growing power and influence that the great European powers had begun to wield over the East. The Duke and Duchess of Bellamont, the misguided evangelicals could not understand Tancred's spiritual agitation. They would, "never sanction the departure of Tancred on this crusade." For them, spiritual enlightenment was not to be found in the Holy land but rather in evangelical literature or bible commentaries. In the land of the Bible, the, "climate is certain death" as, "the curse of the Almighty, for more than eighteen centuries, has been on that land."⁹¹⁹ Given this philistine view of Tancred's crusade, their appearance at the end of the novel suggests rather the unwelcome presence of British commercial and political power in the Near East. After all, these two aristocrats had neither understanding nor sympathy for Tancred's mission. Yet they were able to, 'penetrate one of the great cities of the East, travelling in style and comfort, and protected by commercial, banking and consular services'. Their arrival at the end of the novel suggested that the hero could neither, 'escape from, or reform, his people; nor can Jerusalem'.⁹²⁰ The answer to the nation's political challenges and religious turmoil lay in British institutions rather than the East.

Tancred has largely been judged in the same way as an expression of Disraeli's own Jewishness: this heavily influenced by contemporary anti-Semitism, rather than through a careful consideration of its arguments. But while Disraeli may well have been, 'regarded by everyone as a Jew',⁹²¹ this does little to prove that Disraeli identified himself in that way.⁹²² Similarly, *Tancred* was often understood as a novel defined by its own excesses and contemporary reactions. This was a pity. For it challenged the anti-Semitic prejudices of many Christians who still reviled Jews without recognising their historic contribution to Christianity. Thus *Tancred* was misunderstood, and its message over-shadowed, by the predictably violent reactions from the same quarters Disraeli was challenging. By stressing the oriental and Jewish themes in *Tancred*, within a broader argument encompassing the 'continental' stands of for Disraeli's political thought, even serious scholars have erred. For they have abstracted the message from its proper context and presented the novel as a vital affirmation of Disraeli's unique political chosenness, or as the definitive point in his effort of self-fashioning. This has led to a something of a consensus, celebrating Disraeli's exoticism and separation from other contemporary politicians. That has not proved helpful for our understanding of Disraeli's contemporary political situation within politics. He was a leading figure in the new Protectionist ministry, whose new position relied heavily on his ability to assimilate and collaborate with his chiefly English, Anglican, and aristocratic Tory colleagues. *Tancred*, read properly, helps us to understand Disraeli's insightful, but less than unique, appreciation of the East, together with his criticisms of contemporary British foreign policy and his scathing attitude towards some of the most predominant factions of the Anglican Church. These views were all grounded in the culture and politics of the 1840s. Moreover, many of them were not particularly original. The uniqueness of

⁹¹⁷ Blake, p.205

⁹¹⁸ Hurd, Disraeli, p.101; Kirsh, *Benjamin Disraeli*, p.141; P.Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life*, pp.88-89; Weintraub, p.263

⁹¹⁹ *Tancred*, pp.63-64

⁹²⁰ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', ppp.574-575

⁹²¹ Kalmar, 'Benjamin Disraeli', p.354

⁹²² Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician*, This is the argument of David Cesarani who saw Disraeli defined as a Jew much more by contemporary reactions than by his own actions of arguments.

Tancred lay not in Disraeli's supposed journey of self-identification, but rather through the fictional format and the imaginative setting that Disraeli deployed to challenge some of the powerful shibboleths of nineteenth century Britain. As Parry has so astutely observed, when we begin to see Disraeli was a Victorian, the true message in *Tancred* emerges: that Disraeli was, 'not an artist asserting his own identity or uniqueness, but a politician contributing to live issues of the day'.⁹²³

Politically, *Tancred* paints an interesting, though gloomily pessimistic, picture of the state of the world. It is a novel which challenged the canonical principles of nineteenth-century liberalism. It denounced the powerful commercial and economic force of materialism. It was critical of the widely accepted ideas of individualism and progress. It blasted wrong-headed British foreign policy in the East and even challenged the idea of Parliamentary representative government. The novel furnishes the most complete treatment that Disraeli had attempted on contemporary Anglicanism. It attacked sectarianism in Church politics, whilst exposing the fallacious beliefs of some of the English Church's major parties. However, whilst *Tancred*'s quest unearthed the most profound religious truths, and the great Hebraic principles, that might yet restore in the influence of the Church, it did not elucidate how the necessary reforms might be implemented. Nor it did suggest that the stalemate within Anglicanism's current controversies would end any time soon. The evangelicals among the Church still corrupted religion with money, at the same time cutting their sail to the missionary wind. The remaining adherents of the Oxford Movement still flirted with the possibility of following their leader to Rome. Russell's government had reinforced Latitudinarian influence in 1847 when they it to support the election of liberal Dr. Hampden to the diocese of Hereford. *Tancred* was thus notable for its biting political attacks, religious commentary, and social criticisms. But, even by Disraeli's standards, its constructive suggestions were somewhat ethereal. Indeed, Vincent has mordantly suggested that the two concrete proposals in the novel were: first, martyrdom for architects; second that "if anything can save aristocracy in this levelling age, it is the appreciation of the work of men of genius".⁹²⁴ However, as Vincent has also pointed out, in this second instance Disraeli was talking about a chef.⁹²⁵ As with much of his writing, Disraeli's ability to generalise and rise above detailed and involved discussions was very much his strength. In *Tancred* there is a sense that the protagonist and the 'New Generation' are fighting something of a losing battle.

One might go further. When reaching the end of *Tancred*, the reader feels that the protagonist's crusade has been almost entirely in vain. He seems unable to help the East. His ideas fail to gain traction. And on returning to Jerusalem dispirited, he is greeted by the somewhat unwelcome arrival of his parents. Unlike *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, there are no green shoots or rays of hope at the end of this story. In the first novel Sidonia tells Harry Coningsby that "the spirit of the age is the very thing a great man changes."⁹²⁶ As Parry has noted, in *Tancred*, 'the spirit of the age is clearly the winner'.⁹²⁷ In the real world, Young England was dead. Disraeli had buried its literary embodiment in *Tancred*. Yet, while it marked the end of that particular political collaboration, the novel did not mark a significant alteration of Disraeli's ideas about politics and religion. *Tancred* was as much a 'Young England' novel as *Coningsby* and *Sybil* – in the sense that it was not about Young England at all. Disraeli's political collaboration with that patrician group served as an inspiration for novels. The novels also provide a valuable contemporary record of the group's rise and fall. The ideas deployed throughout the three novels, whilst superficially shifting according to contemporary issues, are really

⁹²³ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.602

⁹²⁴ *Tancred*, p.39, p.113

⁹²⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.104

⁹²⁶ *Coningsby*, p.?

⁹²⁷ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East, and Religion', p.603

very consistent. These were Disraeli's evolving political conceptions. All three novels looked to history to restore and revivify Britain's ancient institutions so that new, pernicious political, social and commercial forces might be fought off. All challenged the spirit of the age and the shibboleths of nineteenth-century liberalism. *Tancred* was a far more ambitious project than the previous two novels. It was painted on a much a broader and more diverse canvas. It attempted to resolve far more difficult issues. Moreover, it was written during a more turbulent political period. Its political pessimism was influenced by 1846. Peelite liberal Conservatism had been overthrown, but at what cost? The Corn Laws, a bulwark of the landed society, had still be swept away with the aid of extensive popular agitation by the Anti-Corn Law league. That fact alone left many Tories dreading that this had ushered in a more democratic age of politics in Britain.⁹²⁸ The novel's seemingly abrupt and, to some, bathetic culmination undoubtedly stemmed from the simple fact that the issues with which Disraeli was wrestling could not be tidily solved. It is in fact a quite logical conclusion to the trilogy. *Tancred*, perhaps the most optimistic hero of the three books is beaten at every turn and returns dejected. The novel recognised there were no easy solutions to 'England's tremendously complex and deep-rooted social problems'.⁹²⁹ In fact, by abandoning the illusion that all problems could be solved by neatly, shows Disraeli's reached a more, sophisticated understanding of the "condition of England".⁹³⁰ Therefore, *Tancred* provided an appropriate conclusion to Disraeli's trilogy of the 1840s. When it is examined within its proper historical context, it offered an undeniably astute sociological critique of both society and religious belief, while also utilising Disraeli's imagination and talent for fiction to contribute to an understanding of the major political and institutional issues of the day.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.603-604

⁹²⁹ Jennifer Conary, "'Dreaming over the Unattainable End": Disraeli's *Tancred* and the Failure of Reform', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38.1 (2010), p.85

⁹³⁰ Parry, 'Disraeli, the East and Religion', p.604; quotation: Conary, p.85

Chapter Four: Lord George Bentinck and the Leadership

The repeal of the Corn Laws altered the political map so significantly that the balance in the two-party system was not re-established for nearly thirty years. There has been much scholarly debate surrounding Sir Robert Peel's motivation to undertake, and follow through with, repeal against the vehement protestations of the greater part of his own party. To his most loyal biographers, it was a case of the Prime Minister putting nation above party in order to avert national crisis.⁹³¹ To another, 1846 represented Peel's final unveiling of his secretly, albeit strongly, held opinions about the necessity of free trade which he had been converted to in the early 1820s.⁹³² By contrast, Douglas Irwin has suggested that it was in the 1840s that the theory of political economy espoused by Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and David Ricardo finally convinced Peel of the economic importance and moral necessity of repeal.⁹³³ More recently it has been suggested that Peel, who had seen Wellington strong-armed by popular agitation into passing Catholic Emancipation, was not willing to be similarly coerced by powerful and popular social forces. According to this reading of events Peel's commitment to the Corn Laws in 1846 was an attempt to head off popular unrest and preserve the traditional institutions and aristocratic settlement of the country.⁹³⁴ Most recently Richard Gaunt has attributed it to Peel's ego: put another way, that the man who had salvaged the party from reaction after 1832, who had restored them to majority government less than ten years later, who had conquered all before him, still believed that his brow-beaten backbenchers to whom he had shown so little respect or appreciation would still follow him into a measure that many of them diametrically opposed.⁹³⁵

We shall probably never know what Peel's real reasoning behind his decision to repeal the Corn Laws was. He soon realised that, regardless of the result, they would be his undoing. This may explain that strange apologia of his own conduct over the Corn Laws in which he closed: 'I shall leave a name execrated by every monopolist who, from less honourable motives, clamours for protection because it conduces to his own individual benefit; but it may be that I shall leave a name sometimes remembered with expressions of good will in the abodes of those whose lot it is to labour, and to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, when they shall recruit their exhausted strength with abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because it is no longer leavened by a sense of injustice'.⁹³⁶

Peel basked in this smug sense of moral superiority. For long afterwards, as Hilton has observed Peel 'revelled in his martyrdom' and 'floated on waves of righteous self-esteem'.⁹³⁷ David Eastwood has even suggested that, 'there is little doubt that Peel sought this apotheosis... and cherished a public status which owed nothing to party and everything to national acclamation'.⁹³⁸ What Peel certainly did achieve was to split the Conservative party and to destroy all his own skilful handiwork that Professor Gash has described as essential to the recovery of the party after 1832. The immediate political aftershock is easy to identify: the Tories were ejected from office and

⁹³¹ Norman Gash, *Life of Sir Robert Peel after 1830*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1972). Hurd, Douglas, *Robert Peel: a Biography*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2007)

⁹³² Boyd Hilton, 'Peel: A Reappraisal', *The Historical Journal*, 22.3, (1979) pp.585-614

⁹³³ Douglas Irwin, 'Political Economy and Peel's Repeal of the Corn Laws', *Economics and Politics*, 1.1, (1989) pp.41-59

⁹³⁴ Michael Luzstig, 'Solving Peel's Puzzle: Repeal of the Corn Laws and Intuitional Preservation', *Comparative Politics*, 27.4, (1995) pp.393-408. Eric J. Evans, *Sir Robert Peel: Statesmanship, power and party*, 2nd Edition, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006)

⁹³⁵ Richard A. Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010)

⁹³⁶ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 29th of June 1846, c.1055.

⁹³⁷ Boyd Hilton, 'Robert Peel', in *Biographical Dictionary of British Prime Ministers*, ed. Robert Eccleshall and Graham Walker, (London: Routledge, 1998) p.150.

⁹³⁸ David Eastwood, "'Recasting Our Lot": Peel, the nation, and the politics of interest', in *A Union of Multiple Identities*, ed. David Eastwood and Lawrence Brockliss, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997) p.30.

subsequently co-existed as two separate parties. Those led by Peel left the party and became a separate parliamentary group. The larger rump of the party remained, to be led by Stanley in the Lords and Bentinck in the Commons. To confound matters, most of the politicians of ministerial calibre and experience left with Peel. These included: Gladstone, Cardwell, Dalhousie, Graham, Lincoln, and Sidney Herbert in the Commons. They were supported by Aberdeen, Ellenborough and Canning in the Lords. This exodus of talent proved problematical for the Protectionists. It meant they would have to rely on the squirearchy for votes, and also for oratorical support, in parliament. It was however, a stroke of luck for Disraeli. For the first time in his career he was able to sit upon the front-benches, alongside his friend and ally, Bentinck.

This meant an obvious reshuffling of power within Parliament. The effects of the Tory schism over the Corn Laws also became quite apparent very quickly. In this way 1846 became an indicator, albeit a less obvious indicator of the more imperceptible changes that had gradually taken root after 1832. Professor Gash famously suggested that after 1832, "it would be wrong to assume that the political scene in the succeeding generation [after 1832] differed essentially from that of the preceding one'. Indeed he went so far as to argue that, 'nearly every constituency had some form of corruption peculiar to itself'.⁹³⁹ More recently, E.A. Smith argued that 'as the dust had settled, the political landscape looked much as it did before'.⁹⁴⁰ Neither of these assertions is entirely wrong. The 1832 Reform Act removed some of the most iniquitous of the rotten boroughs. But many of the practices that had been rife under the old unreformed system still continued unabated. What would now be called bribery was still legal and remained so until the 1880s. Elections in many seats were frequently uncontested. Voting was still open. And in reality the power of the landed classes was still predominant after the Reform Act. Certainly, the increased number of voters was not effective in loosening the grip of plutocracy. Indeed, Sir Thomas Erskine May subsequently observed that, 'it was too soon evident, that as more votes had been created, more votes were to be sold'.⁹⁴¹

Yet for all the many continuities to which Gash refers, there were major, albeit often unintended, changes brought about through reform in 1832. As Lord Blake has pointed out, 'all periods in history are periods of transition, but some are more transitional than others'.⁹⁴² Certainly, the period between the first and third reform acts must be ranked in Britain's political history as one period of its greatest evolution. Before 1832 the British political system was constituted of severely limited franchise where the suffrage was only extended to a very small section of society, that was unevenly selected depending upon the election criteria of the given seat. Real power and authority still lay neither with the elected government nor the voters, but with the Crown which mediated and influenced politics. At the same time, control over legislation lay with a small executive of the Prime Minister and his cabinet. MPs were elected almost solely chosen on the basis of local influence. The idea that they were subject to a mandate from the constituents was largely unknown. Moreover there was no notion, not at least by a modern definition, of political parties. Instead politics was effectively organised by several large groups of MPs who, while they congregated under nominal party banners, often interchanged within grand coalitions in order to achieve a majority when the Crown called on a man, not a party, to form a government.

With the passing of the Third Reform Act this picture had changed greatly: the influence of the Crown, which in truth had been waning long before 1832, was almost totally extinguished in

⁹³⁹ Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1953) pp.xi-xii

⁹⁴⁰ E.A. Smith, *Reform or Revolution? A Diary of Reform in England, 1830-32*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1992) p.141

⁹⁴¹ Sir Thomas Erskine May, *The Constitutional History of England Since the Ascension of George III, 1760 to 1860*, vol.1, (London: Longman, 1861) p.253

⁹⁴² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.270

politics. The burden of legislation still rested with the Prime Minister and his cabinet. But this power was borne out from the interests of the wider parties. Real power in politics had moved from the monarchy, which had once presided over politics to the enlarged and even working class electorate on whose votes the ministries now survived or fell. The democratic forces that many feared might be awoken in 1832, had been largely unleashed the end of the long nineteenth century. Those loosely termed political parties that operated before 1832, were replaced political organisations that would seem more familiar to today's readers: these were well organised grass-roots political machines, that managed elections, vetted candidates, and provided on the ground support for their parliamentary party. Moreover MPs now had to represent the views of those who they claimed to represent. In the unreformed system members could afford to be blindly loyal to their leader and their government. Gradually, after 1832, political representatives elected to the Commons had to be conscious of the mandate granted to them by their constituents.

By 1846 much of this still had yet to come to pass. Certainly, the days of a recognisably democratic system were still far in the distance. However, some of these less tangible changes, notably the shift in power between the great organs of state, the changing relationship between the House of Commons and the electorate, and the beginning of party organisation, had begun. Disraeli was in many ways far more well-equipped than Peel to divine and detect these subtle changes in the way Britain had changed, and how its political system had evolved. Peel, throughout his career, had rarely had to face the electorate, not at least on a constituency level. Before 1832 he had represented Cashel City, Westbury and Chippenham. All three were small boroughs of fewer than fifty voters who could be 'influenced'. His only exposure to an open borough was his election to Oxford University. But Oxford was far from a orthodox 'open' seat and his election was largely ensured by the hard-line Protestant stance he had taken in Ireland during his tenure as Chief Secretary.⁹⁴³ Even after 1832, he represented the family, two-member, seat of Tamworth. A seat in which his election was a formality, and which the Peel family represented between 1790 and 1878, occasionally with two Peels sitting at the same time. In short, neither before 1832, nor after did Robert Peel ever have to worry about the views of his constituents. Locally, at least he did not even have to concern himself much about the opinion of the electorate. As a rule he acted upon upon the interests of his party and, increasingly as his career progressed, upon his own convictions.

None of this is to suggest that Peel was simply a political anachronism after the Reform Act. He played an important role in rallying the Tory party thereafter. However, whilst the Tamworth Manifesto has traditionally been viewed as Peel's attempt to reconcile his newly branded Conservatives to the realities of post-1832 politics, there is little in his later actions to suggest that he himself truly understood the far-reaching ramifications of reform. Disraeli, by contrast, knew all too well the importance of his constituents. He had suffered the humiliation of defeat at the polls no fewer than four times before he was finally elected to Maidstone. He understood from a very early point that politics had changed after 1832, and it is very likely that these early setbacks coloured his attitude towards politics and the importance he afforded his 'mandate' from the electorate. Moreover, Disraeli could neither afford to lose his seat, which kept his creditors at bay, nor afford the expense of buying a safe but expensive seat. Therefore to a certain degree he relied upon the support of his constituents whose opinions, where possible, he was therefore careful to represent.

After the 1846 split, there was a reshuffle in the party leadership: the 'Protectionist' were led by the capable Lord Derby in the House of Lords, while the Commons leadership was left with Bentinck. Disraeli, as Bentinck's greatest ally and close friend now took his place among the party leadership. It was the moment which as Lord Blake has noted marked the transformation from the

⁹⁴³ Just as his vultre-face over Catholic emancipation guaranteed his ejection from the seat.

brilliant renegade to the sombre statesman.⁹⁴⁴ When parliament reconvened in January of 1847, there was a reorganisation, not only of the personnel, but also of the seating arrangement. The Protectionists vacated the government benches in favour of the Whigs and joined the Peelites among the opposition. As a result Bentinck and Disraeli, Peel's two great tormentors, sat alongside him upon the opposition front bench.⁹⁴⁵ This was still a difficult period for the Protectionists, Lord Derby undertook a programme of what Sir Humphrey Appleby might have enthusiastically called 'masterly inactivity'.⁹⁴⁶ To borrow a phrase from Robert Stewart, up until the elections of 1847, 'Stanley had done nothing in particular and done it very well'.⁹⁴⁷ He argued that the question of tariff reform needed to be put to the country and until a result was confirmed either way. Before then, he thought it inappropriate to organise a permanent political party in favour of protection. By employing this tactic he managed to keep a leash on Bentinck's excesses in the Commons and left the door open to possible reunion with some of the Peelites, without appearing to U-turn on protection. This gave the appearance- but only the appearance- that Derby was allowing the electorate to govern the position which his party took on the issue.

There has been a scholarly consensus that perhaps the greatest political achievement in Disraeli's life was to hold the party together from the ruins of 1846 and to free the Tories from the grip of protectionism. One historian long ago suggested that it 'was Disraeli that provided the Conservatives with spirit enough to recover from Peelism and dominate a nation more heavily industrialised than any other'.⁹⁴⁸ More recently, and perhaps more justifiably, Boyd Hilton has suggested that Disraeli made his greatest mark on English history 'simply by defying the laws of political gravity, simply by keeping the Conservatives alive during the 1850s and 1860s'.⁹⁴⁹ John Vincent, in typically astute fashion, has argued that his 'hard struggle- some of the hardest work he ever did- [was] to induce the Derbyite Conservatives to abandon protection, and to seek instead financial relief in the form of lower rates and taxes on land'.⁹⁵⁰ This was certainly one of Disraeli's great political achievements. Had they clung to protection there was every chance that the Conservative party would have gradually died out. However this process, which Lord Derby had skilfully prepared for throughout 1846-47 in the run up to the election, could have been much less strenuous, had it not been for the circumstances after their election defeat that convinced both Bentinck and Derby that if the election were held again it would have yielded different results.

Whatever Disraeli's achievements in steering the fortunes of the party after 1846, the financial crisis in 1847 did nothing to help. For the financial situation throughout 1847 convinced many of the importance of protection and regorganised the downtrodden protectionists who had suffered defeat only a few months earlier. Robert Stewart has argued that the crisis was caused by 'two coincident events, a sharp drop in the agricultural prices and the financial crash of the autumn of 1847'.⁹⁵¹ The poor harvests of 1845 and 1846 that had allowed Peel to repeal the Corn Laws naturally contributed to the increased imports of foreign grain. These poor harvests, which had been experienced across much of Western Europe, culminated in hugely inflated grain prices throughout 1847. In this situation corn speculators, to whom Ward-Perkins urges some sympathy,⁹⁵² were extended credit, through which large orders of grain were imported. These credit structures, which

⁹⁴⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.256

⁹⁴⁵ Although it was clearly understood that they would at no point sit next to each other.

⁹⁴⁶ 'Yes Prime Minister', Series 1 Episode 1, BBC 1980.

⁹⁴⁷ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.115

⁹⁴⁸ Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, (Indiana: Gateway editions, 1953) pp.236-237

⁹⁴⁹ Boyd Hilton, 'Disraeli, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit', in *A Union of Multiple Identities*, ed. by Lawrence Brockliss and David Eastwood, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) pp.56-57

⁹⁵⁰ Vincent, p.47

⁹⁵¹ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.115

⁹⁵² C.N. Ward-Perkins, 'The Commercial Crisis of 1847', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 2.1 (1950), p.83

had already been heavily overextended through a whole spectrum of irresponsible lending, were now confronted with the problem that, ‘the real asset that was theoretically the collateral for the money given for the bill might be supporting bills of three or four times the value’.⁹⁵³ This over-trading, and the complications that arose from it, were fully exposed late on in 1847, when increased imports in response to the removal of duties and the suspension of the Navigation Laws (the laws which only allowed imports from British ships or from ships that came from the country of the imports origin) saw imports increase dramatically. From ‘July 1847 to the end of October 1847 weekly wheat imports exceeded 100,000 quarters for 15 weeks in a row, having exceeded this level in only one week during the previous four years’.⁹⁵⁴ These increased levels of imports, combined with a successful British harvest saw corn prices crash from their high of 102 shillings a quarter in June of 1847, the price fell to 45 shillings by the end of August.⁹⁵⁵ This sharp drop in prices precipitated the failure of precisely those corn dealers who had taken credit on the assumption that corn prices would stay high. Moreover, it was not just the dealers but the also the financial houses who had extended the credit. So much so that, ‘like a house of cards the over-strained credit structure collapsed’.⁹⁵⁶

The financial crisis was borne out of the fluctuation of the agricultural prices. But it had been exacerbated by Peel’s Bank Charter Act of 1844. This had set in stone the principles of his 1819 bill: namely, that paper notes should be treated much the same way as metallic currency. This meant that the amount of paper notes in circulation was strictly managed by converting them directly into gold. The circulation of paper currency was supposed to fluctuate with the metallic currency. By restricting the issue of notes to the Bank of England, Peel also aimed to ‘control the flow of gold out of the country and avoid financial panics’.⁹⁵⁷ The 1844 Act meant that the Banks had only limited reserves of notes and coins since they were directly derived of the Bank’s gold reserve. When this supply of currency was exhausted, the bank would have to suspend payment of bills.⁹⁵⁸ As a result of the bad harvests of 1845 and 1846, and the need to import corn, there had been a drain on the Bank’s gold reserves as notes had been exchanged for gold in order to pay foreign bills. Therefore, going into 1847, and before the mercantile crisis caused by the dramatic fluctuation in agricultural prices really hit home, there was already a concern that gold reserves were running dangerously low. Then, between January and April of 1847 the bullion reserve in the Banking Department of the Bank of England steadily fell from £13,400,000 to £9,200,000.⁹⁵⁹ Douglas Hurd has argued that Peel’s act added clarity to the Bank’s dual purpose as a ‘holder of deposits and securities and as an issuer of notes backed by bullion’.⁹⁶⁰ However Gaunt is much more perceptive suggesting that to effectively separate institutions that made up the Bank of England (the Banking Department and the Issues Department) only reinforced ‘the incongruity of the situation’, as it, ‘was well known that the issue department held a large bullion reserve next door to the banking department... However, the issue department was prevented from extending relief from its burdens’.⁹⁶¹ The resulting panic was such that the banking reserve fell to only £2,000,000 by October 1847. Charles Wood, the Chancellor, issued a letter to the Bank effectively suspending the Act and informing that them that ‘The Bank would not be held liable for any infringement of the Bank Charter Act’. This declaration also implied that the Bank would be able to use the reserve of gold held in the Issue Department to meet the needs

⁹⁵³ *Ibid*, p.83

⁹⁵⁴ Gareth Campbell, ‘Government Policy during the British Railway Mania and the 1847 Commercial Crisis, in *British Financial Crises since 1825*, ed. by Nicholas Dimsdale and Anthony Hotson (Oxford: OUP, 2014) p.68

⁹⁵⁵ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.117

⁹⁵⁶ Ward-Perkins, ‘The Commercial Crisis of 1847’, p.78

⁹⁵⁷ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.117

⁹⁵⁸ Campbell, ‘Government Policy during the British Railway Mania’, p.69

⁹⁵⁹ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.117

⁹⁶⁰ Hurd, *Robert Peel*, p.307

⁹⁶¹ Gaunt, *Robert Peel* p.54

of the Banking Department. The impact of this letter was to allow the Bank to extend credit beyond what would be possible with the existing Banking reserve'.⁹⁶² The result was miraculous, and according to the eminent banker Samuel Gurney: 'the effect was immediate. Those who had sent notice for their money in the morning sent us word that they did not want it—that they had only ordered payment by way of precaution'.⁹⁶³ By the beginning of 1848, the Bank's reserve had risen to £11,000,000 while its bullion reserve had returned to £13,000,000 thus signifying that the storm had rolled over.

Politically, 1847 had injected some new energy into protection. Much of the blame for the rise and sharp fall in agricultural prices was laid at the door of free trade. Even Lord John Manners who had previously pleaded with the party leadership to give up protection as a lost cause sensed that the political climate had changed. He wrote to Disraeli: 'It seems clear to me that on the three great fields of inevitable debate we have a clear and ascertained superiority. Ireland, Free Imports, Currency; heretofore we have been assailed...Bright and Villiers and Thompson Smith are not half the men to defend as they are to attack'.⁹⁶⁴ That said, whilst the political tide was turning against Peel's Bank Charter Act and free trade, both of which the Protectionists saw as plainly responsible for the crisis, there was little to suggest there was any political advantage to be gained from attacking the government over these points of contention. Certainly, when it came to debating financial issues, the Protectionists were outgunned by the Whigs and the Peelites who included nearly all the 'men of business' in the House. Disraeli and Bentinck were really were not up to the task themselves. Disraeli was never a man for detail, and had wisely stayed clear of fighting Peel on his own ground, namely, detailed statistics and financial acumen, during the Corn Laws debates. Bentinck, despite his many strengths, had neither the repertoire, nor the calmness, to debate the intricacies of currency issues. Richard Monckton Milnes' father identified the problem quite astutely: 'neither Lord George nor Dizzy can argue it aright, the former so extravagant and unfair in his way of stating it, and Dizzy so unpractical'.⁹⁶⁵ In the end, Derby's decision to maintain his cautious approach for another year was perhaps the best course available to the party, however tempting the short-term gains from attacking the government over the crisis might have been.

The financial crisis certainly played a role in shaping the long-term fortunes of the post-1846 Conservatives. However it was a more long-standing, and emotive, issue that sparked Disraeli's most significant parliamentary contribution. The 1847 general election had seen Disraeli's friend Lionel De Rothschild run alongside Lord John Russell for the staunchly liberal City of London. However, when he was elected, problem arose from De Rothschild, a Jew, having to take his oath on, 'the true faith of a Christian'. The problem was a simple one: the Prime Minister's sitting mate for the City of London was a Jew, and therefore the Liberals would feel bound to introduce a bill removing those restrictions. Tories, and especially those who represented county seats, men who also invariably saw themselves as the defenders of the Anglican Church, were similarly bound to resist. They could not abide the thought of a situation whereby an MP, who actively denied Christ's divinity could still legislate on both the law and the doctrine of the Church. The difficulty for Disraeli was different. He wished both to support his friend and the race of his birth, and also in establish himself as a major figure in Tory politics.

Disraeli delayed his speech in favour of the bill until the 16th of December during the second reading, however, when he did intervene in the debate, the line he took was profoundly unorthodox. He did not argue in favour of Jewish inclusion along orthodox liberal lines of religious toleration

⁹⁶² Campbell, 'Government Policy during the British Railway Mania', p.73

⁹⁶³ D. Morier Evans, *The Commercial Crisis, 1847-1848*, (London: Lets, Son, and Steer, 1849) p.86

⁹⁶⁴ Manners to Disraeli. 8th November 1847, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 106/1, f.89

⁹⁶⁵ Reid, *Milnes*, vol.1, p.52

which he recognised Lord John Russell had ‘touched with the ability of a master’.⁹⁶⁶ Instead, Disraeli sought to blur the lines and highlight the similarities between Judaism and Christianity:

‘For who are these persons professing the Jewish religion? They are persons who acknowledge the same God as the Christian people of this realm. They acknowledge the same divine revelation as yourselves. They are, humanly speaking, the authors of your religion.’⁹⁶⁷

He continued that:

‘Well, then I say that if religion is a security for righteous conduct, you have that security in the instance of the Jews who profess a true religion. It may not be in your more comprehensive form. I do not say it is the true religion; but although they do not profess all that we profess, all that they do profess is true...you have in the religion of the Jews the best sanction in the world except that of our own Christianity.’⁹⁶⁸

He went on to argue that not only should Christianity be aware of its similarities to Judaism, but rather it should be aware of its debts:

‘The very reason for admitting the Jews is because they can show so near an affinity to you... Where is your Christianity, if you do not believe in their Judaism?’

‘Has not the Church of Christ—the Christian Church, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant—made the history of the Jews the most celebrated history in the world? On every sacred day, you read to the people the exploits of heroes, the proofs of Jewish devotion, the brilliant annals of past Jewish magnificence.’

‘If you had not forgotten what you owe to this people—if you were grateful for that literature which for thousands of years has brought so much instruction and so much consolation to the sons of men, you as Christians would be only too ready to seize the first opportunity of meeting the claims of those who profess this religion. But you are influenced by the darkest superstitions of the darkest ages that ever existed in this country.’⁹⁶⁹

He finished his speech by clarifying that it was clearly as a Christian, rather than as a Jew, that he spoke in favour of this bill:

‘I cannot, for one, give a vote which is not in deference to what I believe to be the true principles of religion. Yes, it is as a Christian that I will not take upon me the awful responsibility of excluding from the Legislature those who are of the religion in the bosom of which my Lord and Saviour was born.’

Unsurprisingly the speech was met with a frosty combination of anger and confusion. It was a highly unusual take on the religious tolerance argument. Yet, Disraeli consistently insisted that it was for precisely that reason he was making the speech. Some historians have found this argument hard to accept. Why? Many scholars have made the mistake of drawing too heavily on the superficial similarities between his speech to the House, on the Disabilities of the Jews, and the arguments he

⁹⁶⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons Debates, 16th of December 1847, cc.1324

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, cc.1323

⁹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, cc.1325

⁹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, cc.1325-1328

made in his most *Tancred*. Lord Blake has suggested that in *Tancred*, ‘Disraeli had gone so far as to argue that Christians should be positively grateful to the Jews for having prevailed on the Romans to crucify Christ’. He goes on: ‘he did not quite repeat this claim to the House of Commons’, there was enough of a parallel for members to find it repugnant.⁹⁷⁰ Nadia Valman falls into the same trap. She argued that, ‘the same argument constitutes the narrative of *Tancred*, which was published only a few months before Disraeli’s pro-emancipation speech’.⁹⁷¹ This view is also held by Edgar Feuchtwanger, who insisted that Disraeli was in favour of removing Jewish disabilities and ‘held the view that Christianity was completed Judaism, which he had set out in the trilogy and most recently *Tancred*’.⁹⁷² Most recently David Cesarani has reiterated the view that in 1847 Disraeli was ‘using almost the exact words of Eva’s speech in *Tancred* he rejected the claim that the Jews were unfit to hold elected office because they were responsible of deicide’.⁹⁷³

However this interpretation is deeply problematic. First, throughout the speech, whilst Disraeli makes constant attempts to highlight the apostolic parallels between Christianity and its Hebraic antecedent, he does so only in order to display that much of the prejudice against the Jewish faith is unjust, and thus the lack of toleration is hypocritical. This was highly imaginative take on the time-worn argument for religious tolerance that had been, and always would be, espoused more efficiently by the Whigs. Secondly, the suggestion that Disraeli published *Tancred* in 1847, and invoked it during the Jewish Disabilities debate, in order to collapse the differences between the two religions and to assert himself as a national leader through ‘the racial primacy of the Jews through unmixed blood’,⁹⁷⁴ rests on shaky foundations. As Jonathan Parry has recently contended with typical shrewdness, *Tancred* is not a novel about Jewish racial superiority, nor is it really a novel about returning Christianity to its Hebrew origins. Rather it was a contemporary attack on British foreign policy in the near-East and a lament about the ignorance with which the West had approached these problems coupled with the sorrow at how European nations had corrupted the pure monotheistic tolerance of the Arabian desert.⁹⁷⁵ Disraeli’s argument in defence of British ‘chosenness’ simply distracts from the serious message of the novel. It was simply not a treatise in favour of Jewish superiority in British politics.⁹⁷⁶ Lastly, we extrapolate the ideas printed in Disraeli’s novels and make them fit with a grander scheme of thought within his politics at our peril. It is tempting, due to proximity between the novels publication and his speech on the Jews in the same year, to turn one into the other. However, it remains a fact that Disraeli began *Tancred* in 1845 and did most of the writing in 1846 when he was a backbencher and seemed a long way from the leadership of the party. Moreover, he published *Tancred* early in 1847, before Lionel de Rothschild won his seat in the City. Disraeli was certainly imaginative, but he was not clairvoyant.

That still leaves the question: why did Disraeli take such an unorthodox and inflammatory line on the issue? David Cesarani insists that Disraeli, only supported Jewish issues when it suited him politically. However, his new-found prominence in the party, his high-profile and contentious views on Jewish superiority, and his friendship with the Rothschild’s meant that he, ‘could not keep his head down as he had done in 1837’.⁹⁷⁷ This interpretation is equally troublesome. To be sure in 1837, having been newly elected to Parliament, Disraeli had voted with the majority in defeating a bill

⁹⁷⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.258-259

⁹⁷¹ Nadia Valman, ‘Manly Jews: Disraeli, Jewishness, and Gender’, in *Disraeli’s Jewishness*, ed. by Todd M. Endelman and Tony Kushner (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002) p.79

⁹⁷² Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, p.73

⁹⁷³ Cesarani, p.119

⁹⁷⁴ Paul Smith, *Disraeli*, p.89

⁹⁷⁵ Jonathan Parry, ‘Disraeli, the East, and religion: Tancred in Context’, *The English Historical Review*, vol.32, issue.556, pp.592-594

⁹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.587

⁹⁷⁷ Cesarani, p.115

to remove the obligation to take an oath for those entering municipal office. This held obvious importance for Jews such as David Salomons and Moses Montifore who had been influential political figures in the City, but who had been unable to take up formal municipal positions. He wrote to Sarah: ‘Nobody looked at my and I was not at all uncomfortable but voted in the majority with upmost sangfroid’.⁹⁷⁸ However we should not judge Disraeli too harshly here. Throughout the five campaigns he had fought in order to enter parliament, he had endured serious anti-semitic abuse at the hustings. And politics was a career that he need to succeed if for no other reason than to keep his creditors at bay. He saw himself how easy it could be to blend in. Yet he must have realised that it would not have changed how others saw him. Certainly, his self-loathing over this conduct in this respect becomes apparent in his scathing treatment of Sophonisbe de Laurella in *Tancred*.⁹⁷⁹ Cesarani is certainly right to suggest that Disraeli was motivated by his friendship with the Rothschild family. Bentinck intimated as much to Croker at the start of the debates: ‘Disraeli, of course, will warmly support the Jews, first from hereditary disposition in their favour, and next because he and the Rothschild’s are great allies’.⁹⁸⁰ Thus it doesn’t seem too much of a metaphorical stretch that Disraeli wanted to support his friend Lionel, even though he was of a different political disposition. Certainly there is nothing to suggest he was cornered into it. Still, even if we accept that Disraeli put potential calls of cowardice and social contempt on the scales against incurring the wrath and distrust of the Tory party, and we conclude that his conscience now prevailed, this does not explain why he took such an idiosyncratic line on the question. Recently uncovered evidence that Disraeli helped the Rothschild’s promote the campaign for Jewish Emancipation behind the scenes throughout 1847 and 1848 would suggest that Disraeli believed strongly in the issue.⁹⁸¹ It would seem far more likely that his willingness to support the motion, indeed his rather conspicuous speech on the question, together with his readiness to lend support away from the public gaze, did not represent a lack of conviction, but rather the difficulty of his situation. After all, he was a converted Jew, a novelist, and a latter-day dandy who had come to be an influential cog in the staunchly Anglican post-1846 Tory party. Disraeli’s speech on removing Jewish Disabilities was thus neither an extension of *Tancred* and his views on Jewish superiority, nor was it a politically calculated estimation in which he weighed his standing in the party against his social standing with the Rothschild’s and the public reputation for cowardice. Rather, his support for the removal of Jewish Disabilities was fuelled by a mix of pride in his ancestry and his race, his friendship with the Rothschild’s, and his unorthodox ideas surrounding religious ‘truth’ and theocratic equality.

Amongst his own party Disraeli’s speech was received as badly as might be expected. He was regularly interrupted by by his own backbenchers and sat down to stony silence. Indeed, his views proved so provocative that Charles Newdgate, one of the Tory whips, replied to him the following day that Disraeli, ‘was not content with claiming for the Jewish people the privilege of an entrance into that House; but he turned on those who opposed the claim, and accused them of being actuated by a superstitious feeling—nay, by the darkest superstition of the middle ages’.⁹⁸² Newdgate and Beresford, along with the long-standing Inglis, Spooner, Plumtre, and Sibthorp were among the most violently devout defenders of Anglicanism on the Tory benches. Having failed to keep Parliament Anglican in 1828, and failed to keep in Protestant in 1829, they fought tooth and claw to keep it Christian.⁹⁸³ Disraeli at least had one ally amongst his party in Bentinck. Historians have seen

⁹⁷⁸ *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 5th of December 1837, vol.2 p.683

⁹⁷⁹ *Tancred*, p.395. She was a Jewish society girl, who believed that race one day would not count and therefore tried to conceal it from her society equals.

⁹⁸⁰ Bentinck to Croker, September 1847. Quoted in Blake, pp.248-249.

⁹⁸¹ *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Lionel De Rothschild 26th December 1847, 3rd, 7th, 9th of January 1848, vol.3 pp.278-284

⁹⁸² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons Debates, 17th of December 1847, cc.1365

⁹⁸³ Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics*, p.59, Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.122.

something surprising in Bentinck's decision to come out in favour of removing Jewish Disabilities.⁹⁸⁴ The fact remains that Bentinck still had the Whiggish attitudes to religious and civil liberties, as befitted a family of 1688. Moreover his track record on religious freedom and Jewish Emancipation had been flawlessly in their favour.

This continued, as early as September of 1847, Croker began a correspondence with Bentinck urging him to take the proper Tory line on the issue. He replied to Croker that, as far as he had known, 'he had always voted in favour of the Jews', and while he admitted, 'I could not work myself into caring two straws about the question one way or the other... The Jew matter I look upon as a personal matter'.⁹⁸⁵ Bentinck simply did not see the question of Jewish Emancipation as having serious national questions attached to it. There were a small number of Jews in Britain, and few would run for Parliament, let alone get in. Therefore he approached the question on the individual merits of Lionel de Rothschild. One of Bentinck's two great strengths as a leader were his loyalty and his conviction. He was certainly hazy on the subject, as he admitted to Disraeli, 'I confess I don't know how I have voted myself but I cannot help thinking that Lord Stanley and I both voted in favour of the Jews'.⁹⁸⁶ This was correct. However, whilst his vote in favour of the Jews was consistent with his conduct over the Jewish question for the last twenty years, this was not his strongest motivation. More than anything he was driven out of loyalty to Disraeli. He confessed to Disraeli that, 'Lord Stanley and all the Party are pressing me very hard to surrender my opinions about the Jews'.⁹⁸⁷ He originally had conceded to record a 'silent vote'. However, having seen the abuse Disraeli and Rothschild had received from his party he could not sit by idly. He admitted to Manners that:

'The Jew Question is a terrible annoyance. I never saw anything like the prejudice which exists against them. For my part I don't think it matters two straws whether they are in or out of Parliament... but I don't like letting Disraeli vote by himself apart from the party; otherwise I might give in to the prejudices of the multitude... I am just starting for London, and I feel like a condemned felon going to Botany Bay'.⁹⁸⁸

In the event, his loyalty towards Disraeli was really remarkable. Disraeli records that, 'he was entreated not to vote at all; to stay away... [but] when the hour arrived he rose from his bed of sickness, walked into the House of Commons, and not only voted, but spoke in favour of his convictions'.⁹⁸⁹ On the 17th of December Bentinck rose in the House:

Sir, that I never rose to address the House under such a sense of difficulty as on this occasion. If I consulted my own feelings I should have contented myself, as I have done on all former occasions when Jewish disabilities have been the subject of discussion, with a silent vote; but I feel that I might be supposed to be slinking if I were to do no more than to register my vote upon this Motion. It is with the deepest regret that I feel myself obliged to differ from the majority of those with whom I generally act... I am told that, by the course which I feel it my duty to take on this question, I shall lose my influence and destroy the party with which I am connected. So far as I am myself concerned, the first of these considerations would not weigh with me; but I should indeed feel deep regret if any course which my sense of duty might oblige me to take should even weaken the Protectionist party'.⁹⁹⁰

He ended defiantly:

⁹⁸⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.259, Smith, *Disraeli*, p.105, Cesarani, p.117.

⁹⁸⁵ Jennings, *Croker*, vol.2, pp.171

⁹⁸⁶ Bentinck to Disraeli, 3rd of November 1847, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 106/1, f.127

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, f.27

⁹⁸⁸ Whibley, *Lord John Manners*, vol.2, p.283

⁹⁸⁹ *Lord George Bentinck*, p.112

⁹⁹⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons Debates, 17th of December 1847, cc.1381-1382

‘our blessed Redeemer exclaimed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;" and when in eight days from this time we are to meet at His table, whose precepts we ought to obey, and whose example we ought to imitate, to implore his mediation, I cannot but feel that we should be ill obeying the precepts and ill imitating the example of our Saviour, if we were now, in defiance of his words, to interpose with our vengeance and say, "No, we will not forgive them, for they did know what they were doing’’’.⁹⁹¹

Bentinck’s speech in favour of the Jews, and perhaps more importantly, in favour of Disraeli, cost him the leadership. He indicated during his speech that he knew as much. He was informed by William Beresford that he had lost the support of the Party in the Commons. Being far too proud and disgusted, he did not ‘wait to be cashiered’ and resigned the leadership. Of course it would be too much to suggest that it was over the Jewish question alone that the Protectionists jettisoned Bentinck. Rather it was the straw that had broken the camels back. Despite his many qualities, his temper had been resurfacing. He was infuriated over his failure to repeal Malt Tax and became indignant at Stanley for not supporting it.⁹⁹² Moreover, he proposed a bill to the government to undertake a railway building project in Ireland. Russell had initially shown enthusiasm but withdrew his support before the third reading. The telling sign, and perhaps an indication of waning support for Bentinck’s leadership, was the fact that over one hundred Protectionists had not bothered to turn up to the vote.⁹⁹³ After Bentinck’s resignation, even Disraeli commented to Manners that, ‘The truth is...I doubt that this would have taken place, but for the previous irritating causes, which could no longer be endured by G.B.. Every day something occurred which had disgusted him’.⁹⁹⁴

Even after his resignation, Bentinck’s loyalty towards Disraeli shone through. Once Parliament reconvened in February, he lobbied hard for Disraeli’s instalment as the Leader in the Commons. He wrote to Lord Stanley, claiming that Disraeli was justly disgusted with his treatment, and wildly claimed that he was around £6000-£7000 a year worse off because ‘he was dragged out of retirement and away from his literary occupations by special invitation from the protectionist party in the hour of their greatest need...the reward he has met with...would leave a blot on the fair name of the Country Gentlemen of England’.⁹⁹⁵ His relationship with Stanley, which had been at best strained over the previous few years, was certainly not helped when Bentinck suggested that Stanley had played the part of Pontius Pilate in not distancing himself from the attacks on Disraeli made by Phillips and *The Morning Herald*.⁹⁹⁶ What is clear, is that Disraeli had never received such a robust and personal defence in his political career. His relationship with Bentinck was special and perhaps the one that defined his career. Moreover, it was a personal and political relationship that lets us understand Disraeli and pierce much of the mythology that surrounds him. He may have been a Jew, a novelist, a romantic, a dandy, a heavily indebted gambler. But most importantly we know him as a politician. Whilst all these other things add colour to the portrait, it is the working political and personal relationships with men like Bentinck, Lyndhurst before him, and Derby, Stanley, and Gathorne Hardy after him, that defined both the success, and in many ways the ordinariness of Disraeli’s political life.

The Protectionists still faced the tough job of replacing Bentinck. To many in the party Disraeli, despite his obvious and considerable talents, was not an option worth considering. His recent performance over the Jew Bill had earned him the animosity of some of his colleagues. Moreover,

⁹⁹¹ *Ibid*, cc.1390

⁹⁹² Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, pp.99-101

⁹⁹³ *Ibid*, p.103

⁹⁹⁴ *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Manners, 26th of December 1847, vol.4, pp.319-320

⁹⁹⁵ M&B, vol.4 p.181

⁹⁹⁶ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.190

some even blamed his closeness to Bentinck for Bentinck's own failures in the leadership. Croker certainly claimed as much in his letter to Lord Brougham late in 1847.⁹⁹⁷ The Protectionists were very short of options however and instead tried to install Herries or Granby as leader in the Commons. The farcicality of this move was not lost on many members of the House, including Peel's loyal Home Secretary Graham who smugly noted that, 'We are at a low ebb when Herries reappears in the first-rate part on the stage'.⁹⁹⁸ Despite his scoffing, Graham was not wrong. Herries was approaching seventy and had never been a truly first-rate minister, even in his prime when Chancellor under Goderich. While Granby, the older brother of Lord John Manners, for all his geniality, rank, and aristocratic respectability at least had the common sense to recognise his own mediocrity and unsuitability for the job. This much was not lost on Greville, who of Granby said: 'except his high birth he has not a single qualification for the post... he is heavy, dull and ignorant, without ability or knowledge, destitute of ideas to express and of the art of expressing them if he had any; and yet this great party can find no better man'.⁹⁹⁹

Herries, despite commanding wide respect as one of the Commons' elder statesmen, was ruled out on largely the same grounds as Disraeli: he supported the Jews and had gotten on the wrong side of the bigoted chief whip Beresford.¹⁰⁰⁰ Granby, although he didn't want the job, and was aware of his own shortcomings, at least had the advantage of having kept a low political profile. In his decade in politics he had made very few political enemies and was generally liked for his good nature. To Stanley he also had the major advantage of being acceptable to Bentinck.¹⁰⁰¹ Indeed a meeting was set up by the Duke of Rutland, who invited both Bentinck and Stanley to Belvoir castle to discuss the leadership. While Granby accepted the office, he did so with little enthusiasm. So much so that Manners informed Disraeli that he accepted the post with 'extreme reluctance and dread'.¹⁰⁰² He only lasted a few a matter of weeks before resigning in early March. Thus the Tories continued to hobble through 1848 without a real leader in the Commons.

Paul Smith has suggested that Disraeli's prominence within the party after 1846, 'rendered the much more acute problem of how a parvenu of Jewish antecedents was to operate in a Christian polity. Whatever he said or did, he would be seen as a Jew by the Gentiles'.¹⁰⁰³ This interpretation of the internal politics of the Tory party is problematic to say the least. To boil down the decisions by which Disraeli was overlooked for the leadership, to his Jewishness alone is a dangerous oversimplification. The fact is that in his rise to prominence in the Tory party, he had ruffled some feathers, and many of these feathers proved practical *political* obstructions. The youthful romances of Young England were easily scoffed at by some of his less imaginative colleagues. His novels had rather unfavourably satirised many of the real-life political contemporaries, few more prominent or more noisy than John Wilson Croker who made his opposition to Disraeli well publicised. Moreover his treatment of Peel in the Corn Law debates had been seared into the memory of most Peelites. Thus Disraeli's elevation to the leadership would be, 'the most powerful repellent we could offer to any repentant or hesitating Peelites'.¹⁰⁰⁴ Furthermore the controversial line he took on the Jew Bill, and his support more generally for the Jews, meant that he had incurred the wrath and bigotry of Beresford. This was not just reserved for the 'Jew' Disraeli, but also the widely-respected Herries, and for the talented and aristocratic Lord John Manners, who could not find a seat to stand for in parliament until

⁹⁹⁷ Jennings, *Croker*, vol.2, pp.148-149

⁹⁹⁸ Graham to Peel, 15th of January 1848. Peel Mss, Add. Mss 40452. ff.252-255

⁹⁹⁹ *Greville Memoirs*, vol.6, p.13

¹⁰⁰⁰ Beresford to Stanley, undated. Derby Mss, 149/1

¹⁰⁰¹ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.127

¹⁰⁰² Manners to Disraeli 4th of Feb 1848, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 106/1, f.21

¹⁰⁰³ Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life*, p.92

¹⁰⁰⁴ Stanley to Christopher, 8th of January 1849. Derby MSS, 178/1

1850 on the back of his stance of Jewish emancipation.¹⁰⁰⁵ Indeed it seems largely plausible that opposition to Disraeli leading the party was far less to do with his 'Jewish antecedents', than it was to do with practical political considerations, the personal animosity from Beresford and Croker, and distrust from Derby.¹⁰⁰⁶

In 1848, Protectionists were rocked by the unexpected death of Lord George Bentinck. He died from what is generally accepted to be a heart attack while walking through 'the Dukeries', between Wellbeck Abbey and Thoresby Hall. Bentinck's political importance and the significance of his death have, with a couple of notable exceptions, been large dismissed by historians. Lord Blake, although conceding that Bentinck, 'was the not the mediocrity depicted by his enemies',¹⁰⁰⁷ generally paints the picture of a man whose career in politics had naturally concluded.¹⁰⁰⁸ While the majority of Disraeli's biographers have very little to say about timing of Bentinck's death or political legacy he left, other than it's effect in the .¹⁰⁰⁹ The enduring impression one gets from much of the historiography is no different to Greville's diary entry at the time:

'I have not for the least doubt that, for his own reputation and celebrity, he died at the most opportune period. His fame had probably reached its zenith, and credit was given to him for greater abilities than he possessed, and for a futurity of fame, influence, and power which it is not probable he ever would have realised. As it is, the world will never know anything of those serious blemishes which could not fail to dim the lustre of his character. He will long be remembered and regretted as a very remarkable man, and will occupy a conspicuous place in the history of his own time.'¹⁰¹⁰

From that entry we get the general impression given by many historians, that Bentinck was a man whose importance had been expended and whose political career had largely run its course. Pearson goes so far as to suggest that Bentinck was glad to be relieved of the leadership.¹⁰¹¹

However, this view of Bentinck creates more questions than its answers. Despite the continued references to his 'unexpected' death, most scholars write like it was anything but unexpected. It is easy to suggest that Bentinck's career had naturally come to an end when he died shortly after relinquishing the leadership. Too much has been made of Greville's diary entry. Let us not forget that Greville and Bentinck had quarrelled bitterly, and almost constantly, over a long period, and despite many attempts they could not reconcile. Similarly there has been too much resonance with Stanley's letter to Bentinck saying that if relinquished of the leadership he expected, 'that the "wild bird" once more at liberty will wing his way rather more than of late to Newmarket'.¹⁰¹² The fact was that Bentinck had practically given his racing operation away to pursue the Protectionist cause. Moreover, the suggestion that he had grown weary of politics also doesn't quite ring true. The malaise that had effected him after the Corn Law defeat had passed, and in throughout 1847 he had found renewed energy and interest in parliamentary affairs. He had collaborated with Disraeli throughout 1848 in attacking Russell's government, and the letter he had written to Disraeli before he set off on his 'fatal' walk from Welbeck, was a detailed discussion of the issues likely to be prominent in the next session.¹⁰¹³ Disraeli when writing to Manners, described the letter, 'full of his accustomed

¹⁰⁰⁵ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.135

¹⁰⁰⁶ It took a long time for Derby to trust Disraeli who he still suspected of involvement with his brother's disappearance and later reappearance in 1832.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.263

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp.263-264

¹⁰⁰⁹ Pearson, *Dizzy*, pp.122-123; Hibbert, *Disraeli*, p.190; Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, p.76; Cesarani, *Disraeli*, p.123.

¹⁰¹⁰ *Greville Memoirs*, vol.5, p.204

¹⁰¹¹ Pearson, *Dizzy*, p.120

¹⁰¹² Derby to Bentinck, 26th of December 1847. Derby Mss, 177/2

¹⁰¹³ Bradford, *Disraeli*, pp.190-191

vigour and keen interest in existence'.¹⁰¹⁴ This certainly does not seem to be the actions of a man who had played his part and was ready to 'wing his way' into retirement.

Stewart's claim that Bentinck's death was no loss to the party is not without merit. He, along with Disraeli, did represent the biggest stumbling block to reunion.¹⁰¹⁵ Moreover, Stewart is correct to argue that Bentinck did not possess the oratorical ability, nor perhaps the temperament to control a political party.¹⁰¹⁶ Even his most ardent admirers, Disraeli and Manners, had some reservations.¹⁰¹⁷ However the fact was that after his removal, Stanley flailed around looking for a successor, and this job became no easier after he died. He would have still been the only man who could have commanded the respect of the majority of the squirearchy. Moreover it seems unlikely that his speech in favour of the Jew Bill would have damaged his reputation in the same way that it hurt Disraeli. It certainly became easier for the Tories to jettison protection after the death of Bentinck, however as MacIntyre has shrewdly contended, Bentinckism did not die with Bentinck.¹⁰¹⁸ In 1849, it looked more likely than ever that protection would make a revival, so much so that John Vincent posed the question as to why 'protection was not restored [in 1849] when parliament talked Protection and voted Free Trade'.¹⁰¹⁹ Perhaps if he had lived that long he would have yet played a leading part in the Conservative party. If Bentinck had not died in 1848, it seems more likely that he would have returned to the leadership of the party than retiring back to his world of horse-racing.

What has been more widely recognised was how hard the death of Bentinck hit Disraeli. Blake recognised that Disraeli was 'deeply moved by the loss of his colleague, benefactor, and friend'.¹⁰²⁰ While Sarah Bradford has confirmed that 'it was indeed a severe loss; Bentinck had been a boon a true friend and ally, and Disraeli returned his affection'.¹⁰²¹ The affect of Bentinck's death on Disraeli was not lost on their contemporaries. The Duke of Newcastle wrote a note of condolence to Disraeli in which he said: 'you were his Prime Minister, his fellow labourer and most confidential friend & I know how warmly he felt towards you, how grateful he was and how deeply he felt himself to be indebted to you in all manners of ways'.¹⁰²² 1848 had been a difficult year for Disraeli already, having lost his father Isaac in January. Indeed, perhaps the greatest testimony to Disraeli's relationship with Bentinck lies in a letter sent by his brother Ralph to Mary Anne after Bentinck's death: 'How much poor Diz has suffered: but this is far, far beyond all'.¹⁰²³

Before his death Bentinck had played one last, and very significant, role as Disraeli's patron. He had given Disraeli the money with which to buy Hughenden Manor. Disraeli's landless status was the one major obstacle between him and the party leadership. If Disraeli was to lead the party he needed to represent a county seat. Unlike Bentinck, Disraeli lacked the aristocratic legitimacy to lead the party from a borough seat. In order to stand for a county seat Disraeli needed to be a landowner and Bentinck recognised this. Hughenden had come into the market in 1845, and 9/1 presented the ideal property for Disraeli. It lay a mile north of High Wycombe in the Chiltern foothills and only a couple of miles from his father's house at Bradenham. However cost of the property, at £35,000, far exceeded anything Disraeli could muster.¹⁰²⁴ This is where Bentinck intervened. Before coming to visit the Disraeli's at Bradenham in 1846 he wrote, 'we have got all that Hughenden matter to talk

¹⁰¹⁴ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Manners, 13th of December 1848, vol.5, p.353

¹⁰¹⁵ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.125.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁰¹⁷ Manners to Disraeli, 12th of October 1850. Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 1061, f.67.

¹⁰¹⁸ MacIntyre, 'Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists', p.163

¹⁰¹⁹ John Vincent, *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party*, pp.xiii-xiv

¹⁰²⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.263.

¹⁰²¹ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.190.

¹⁰²² Newcastle to Disraeli, 22nd of October 1848, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 89/2, f.140

¹⁰²³ Ralph Disraeli to Mary Anne Disraeli, Bodl. Dep Hughenden 9/1 f.207

¹⁰²⁴ Blake, p.251.

over'.¹⁰²⁵ The result of this meeting was that Bentinck and his brothers agreed to loan Disraeli the majority of money to buy Hughenden. Realistically they had no intention of recalling the loan or any expectation that it would be repaid. However, the deal was thrown into some confusion by Lord George's untimely death. In the end, Disraeli was able to convince his brothers to honour the agreement without involving their father, the Duke of Portland. Thus, the original spirit of the agreement and Lord George's wishes were kept intact and the deal existed as a political not a business affair.¹⁰²⁶

The move by Bentinck to finance Disraeli's transformation into a country gentleman has very few parallels in British politics, and even less in the 19th century. Lord Blake has acknowledged the role the Bentinck's played as political patrons to Disraeli and how they acted in the interests of their class to secure one the services of one of the most brilliant parliamentarians of the day.¹⁰²⁷ While Blake is not wrong, and is right to recognise it as an almost unique piece of political patronage he misses the personal element. It was more than this to both parties. Bentinck's friendship and camaraderie with Disraeli knew few bounds. This grand gesture of generosity to Disraeli was perhaps the greatest leg-up Disraeli had ever been given in his political career. It gave him the foundations to lead the Tory party, Bentinck certainly recognised Disraeli's brilliance and utility to the Tory cause, but he more than anyone else believed that Disraeli should play a leading part. The Hughenden loan was motivated as much by this desire to have Disraeli, his firmest political ally and parliamentary collaborator, alongside him fighting "the good fight" as much as it was a 'matter of financing a parliamentary genius who seemed to understand the true interests of the aristocracy better than themselves'.¹⁰²⁸

Politically, the death of Bentinck did to borrow a phrase, gave 'the political kaleidoscope another unexpected jolt'.¹⁰²⁹ There were many who believed, or in fact hoped, that Bentinck's death would sever Disraeli's ties to the Tory aristocracy and destroy any chances that he may have had for the leadership.¹⁰³⁰ However, while Disraeli's extreme loyalty to Bentinck had meant he had been happy to serve under him, without his friend he was far freer to pursue his own ambitions for the leadership. Rather than weakening support for Disraeli, Bentinck's death served to solidify and consolidate the substantial existing support he had in the party. Towards the end of 1848 and throughout 1849 George Bankes, R.A. Christopher, 'King' Hudson, Sir John Trollope, and both Miles brothers actively pursued Disraeli candidature.¹⁰³¹ This did not go unnoticed by many members of the party who sensed that the wind had switched into that quarter. Malmesbury noted after Bentinck's death that, 'No one but Disraeli can fill his place Although of perfectly different natures, they pulled together without any difficulty It will leave Disraeli without a rival, and enable him to show the great genius he undoubtedly possesses without any comparisons'.¹⁰³² Along with Malmesbury, other party grandees: Newcastle, Mandeville and Richmond began to urge Stanley to recognise Disraeli's claims. 'To me it appears perfectly clear', Newcastle wrote, 'that we must of necessity choose the cleverest man that we possess'.¹⁰³³ While Richmond wrote to Derby informing him that even Robert Inglis, the staunch High Church leader, had come round to Disraeli.¹⁰³⁴

¹⁰²⁵ Bentinck to Disraeli, 12th of December 1846. Hughenden MSS, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 89/1, f.16.

¹⁰²⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.253.

¹⁰²⁷ *Ibid*, pp.253-254.

¹⁰²⁸ *Ibid*, p.254.

¹⁰²⁹ Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, p.76

¹⁰³⁰ Graham to Peel, 25th of September 1848, Peel MSS, Add. Mss 40452, ff. 278-283; Stanmore, *Herbert*, Sidney Herbert to Lady Herbert, 29th of September 1849, vol.1, p.89.

¹⁰³¹ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.137; M&B, vol.3, pp.120-138

¹⁰³² M&B, vol.3, p.116

¹⁰³³ Newcastle to Stanley, 7th of January 1849, Derby MSS, 147/14

¹⁰³⁴ Richmond to Stanley, 21st of January 1849, *Ibid*, 131/13

Despite this show of support both in the Commons and among the party leadership in the Lords we still get the picture from most histories that Disraeli was distrusted, and would remain so, for the majority of the party.¹⁰³⁵ It would be totally inaccurate to suggest that there was universal trust in Disraeli, but the general picture of wide-spread misgivings is too bleak. Disraeli was not the adventurer that the contemporary press, and later historians had portrayed him to be. While he had earned himself some enemies through his treatment of Peel, his total loyalty to Bentinck had won him many admirers among the backbenchers even in spite of their position on Jewish disabilities. Any opposition to Disraeli lay not in his race, or in his political opportunism, but rather in the scandalous reputation that lingered from his youth.¹⁰³⁶ Even Disraeli's detractors could make little comment on his unswerving commitment to the Tory cause. 'I see nothing in his public conduct to justify the want of confidence so many seem to feel' wrote Newdgate in a letter to Stanley.¹⁰³⁷ Even Stanley, though loathe to admit it, wrote that he 'had not seen of *late years* any reason to distrust him'.¹⁰³⁸ While Beresford, did his best to turn much of the party against their only man of talent. After Disraeli received little support after a speech attacking Whig commercial policy, Lord John Manners would conclude that, 'Beresford's rot has infected many'.¹⁰³⁹ The main impression of wide-spread distrust comes largely from the whispering of these very men who wished to block Disraeli from the leadership. Derby, Nudge, Beresford and Croker were all influential and noisy critics of Disraeli's. It stands to reason that a large number of the Tory squirarchy would have had little personal run-ins with Disraeli, and were even less likely to have read the more romantically outlandish ideas contained in his novels. As Paul Smith pointed out, *Tancred* only sound a few thousand copies and very few of these would have found their way onto the squire's bookshelves.¹⁰⁴⁰

The situation throughout 1848 was, at best, chaotic for the Tories. After Bentinck resigned, shortly followed by Granby, Stanley failed to find anyone to lead the party. The party got through the session with the Commons taking directions from Stanley through his two Whips. This was clearly not working as by the end of the year the party had descended into total disarray. This situation worried Croker who wrote in the *Quarterly Review*:

'The Conservative party, that might have been abundantly capable of counteracting and correcting the disorganising tendencies of the Whigs, is itself so disorganised by apostasies, jealousies, disgusts and the almost despair of good faith, principle or honour in public men, that it- the only solid basis of government in this country- seems rather an addition than an antidote to danger.'¹⁰⁴¹

Croker was correct to suggest that the Tories should have been 'abundantly capable', as in the autumn session of 1848 the Whigs had been scarcely more organised themselves, and whose performance Lord Blake has accurately described as 'lamentably incompetent'.¹⁰⁴² Even the violent backdrop of revolution across Europe and the final great Chartist demonstration in London could account for the Chancellor, Sir Charles Wood's, as yet unmatched fiscal achievement of introducing four new budgets in a little under six months. Yet for Disraeli, this general atmosphere of confusion offered up an opportunity to show his worth to the party. He did this by giving forceful orations and important contributions on all the major issues. Among these speeches there are two that stand out: his reply to Hume over electoral reform, and his speech summing up the session. The former was a brilliant refutation of Hume's advocacy for further reform. The speech was brilliant, however, the content was certainly not new. It contained many of the themes on which Disraeli was well-versed,

¹⁰³⁵ See; Blake, *Disraeli*, p.264. Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.137. Feuchtwanger, *Disraeli*, p.76.

¹⁰³⁶ M&B., vol.3, pp.120-121

¹⁰³⁷ *Ibid*, pp.120-121

¹⁰³⁸ *Ibid*, p.136

¹⁰³⁹ Manners to Disraeli, 21st of February 1849, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 106.1, f.25

¹⁰⁴⁰ Smith, *Disraeli: a Brief Life*, p.105

¹⁰⁴¹ *Quarterly Review*, vol.83 no.165, (London: Murray, June 1848)

¹⁰⁴² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.263

and which had made regular appearances in his early writing, his *Young England Trilogy*, and many of his speeches. Suffrage he argued was not a right, nor was it a trust, ‘that very vague and somewhat canting phrase’.¹⁰⁴³ But Rather it was a privilege. A privilege in law to represent that third estate of the realm, the estate of the Commons.¹⁰⁴⁴ 1832 was not an attempt at general, fair, and broadly rooted reform, but rather at the predominance of a certain class. It’s greatest problem was its narrowness by only using property as the basis of determining suffrage. Hume’s latest model was equally flawed: ‘He has brought forward a project of which property, and property alone, is the basis: he has not come forward with any scheme for an educational suffrage or an industrial suffrage—he has not attempted in any way to increase or vary the elements of suffrage. It is impossible that any plan can be more hard, more commonplace, more literal, more unsatisfactory, or more offensive, as the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham shows it must be, to the great body of the working classes, than one which recognises property, and property alone, as its basis.’¹⁰⁴⁵

Moreover the Radical notions of equality once again were attempting to erase history. Hume’s suggestions for equal electoral districts was an attempt to use science to create electoral equality with no consideration for the weight of hereditary influence. Using his beloved Buckinghamshire as an example, he admitted that Bucks eleven members did not, in terms of property rents, proportionally match up to the twenty-six members from Lancashire with its great industrial towns. However, Disraeli argued that the great county of Hampden, Burke, Pitt, and the Grevilles, a county which had contributed so heavily to English history, should not ‘be deprived of their hereditary weight in that free Parliament of which they were themselves among the first originators, because, if told by the head, they may not be equal to the numbers of some great town born in a day, and destined perhaps to vanish in a day?’¹⁰⁴⁶

Lastly the he saw this new proposal as a middle-class movement, a class for which Disraeli carried so much scorn. Indeed they were dismissed as class who only looked to press forward to aggrandisement of their own kind to the disadvantage of not only the aristocracy, but also of the working classes. After all, he argued, when looking at the legislative history of the middle classes, they were the people who had, ‘emancipated the negroes; but they never proposed a Ten Hours Bill’.¹⁰⁴⁷ In 1832 they destroyed, ‘under the pretence of its corrupt exercise, the old industrial franchise, and they never constructed a new one. So much for the interests of the people in their second great legislative enterprise’.¹⁰⁴⁸ While in their promotion of Free Trade the ‘interests of capital were unblushingly advocated, the displaced labour of the country was offered neither consolation nor compensation; but was told that it must submit to be absorbed in the mass’.¹⁰⁴⁹ In the face of this legislative record, Disraeli reminded parliament that there was:

‘the name once in England of a party who were the foremost to vindicate popular rights—who were the natural leaders of the people, and the champions of everything national and popular; and you must blame yourselves alone if you have allowed the power that has been entrusted to you by the constitution to slip from your hands, to be exercised for other interests than the general good of your country. When Sir William Wyndham was the leader of the country party...He was one of the greatest Gentlemen in the country: he did not run away every night from the House and pair till half-past eleven, and let the country go to the dogs. If it be true that we are on the eve of troublous times—if it indeed be necessary that changes

¹⁰⁴³ *Hansard 3rd Series*, HC Debate, 20th of June 1848, c.950

¹⁰⁴⁴ *Ibid*, cc.950-951

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Ibid*, cc.951-952

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Ibid*, cc.955-956

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Ibid*, c.959

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Ibid*, c.959

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Ibid*, c.959

should take place in this country—let them be effected by those who ought to be the leaders in all political and social changes. Then we shall not find changes carried into effect for the unblushing purpose of securing a middle-class Government, but an English and a national Government, the pride of the people, and in which confidence can be placed.’¹⁰⁵⁰

Many of these themes came as second nature to Disraeli: The fallacy of property alone as a means of suffrage, the falsehoods of utilitarian notions of equality, the importance of history and national character, his own polemic interpretation of Whig middle-class ‘progress’, and his claim that the gentlemen of England were the rightful legislators and the Tory party the truly national organisation. These were the same comments Disraeli had been making for over a decade and a half. So this constancy of opinion should be quite surprising to those who still view Disraeli as an unprincipled adventurer. However as Monypenny and Buckle long ago perceived there was some informing information in this speech. Most notably that Disraeli did not view 1832 with any finality, and that when the time was right it would be for the Conservatives to decide what the new reorganisation would look like.¹⁰⁵¹

If the first speech was a brilliant restatement of some of Disraeli’s most closely held beliefs, and which in hindsight is all too easy to see as a prophetic vision of 1859 and 1867, it was neither, the second, summing up the session, was as Disraeli himself described in conversation Rowton many years later: ‘the speech that made me leader’.¹⁰⁵² It was a highly entertaining speech in which Disraeli satirised and lambasted the lamentable performance of Lord John Russell’s government. Prominent amongst the wide-ranging topics in his speech, Disraeli criticised the general lack of progress with any serious legislation and the government’s attribution of this lack of progress to over-discussion in Common’s debates.¹⁰⁵³ He censured Russell’s management of the Jewish Disabilities Bill, of which Disraeli had been a key supporter.¹⁰⁵⁴ He condemned Russell’s conduct over the Sugar Duties in which the government had withdrawn and reintroduced the bill three times with many of the same errors in present.¹⁰⁵⁵ But perhaps most prominently he attacked the performance of Sir Charles Wood who not only achieved feats of unparalleled budgetary inefficiency, but on whose actions in suspending the Bank Charter Act he memorably compared to liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius: ‘the Chancellor of the Exchequer—I beg pardon—the Archbishop of Tarento announces the liquefaction of St. Januarius’s blood—as the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the issue of a Government letter: in both instances, a wholesome state of currency returned...both cases the remedy is equally efficient and equally a hoax.’¹⁰⁵⁶

In short the speech was a tour de force. Disraeli had not only showed worth to the party but he was beginning to force Derby’s hand. Derby turned his attention to leadership of the Commons in December of 1848. Yet, Disraeli’s performances Derby was not yet willing to offer Disraeli the leadership. He commented to Beresford that in spite of Disraeli’s ‘display of superior ability and power in debate...personal influence must be added to them to enable anyone to hold the post: and in this respect Disraeli labours under disadvantages which I do not think he can overcome’.¹⁰⁵⁷ However, the candidates on offer were far from ideal. It was really a case of choosing the best of a bad bunch: Banks, Miles, Stafford and Henley were all ruled out of a combination of age, impracticality,

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid*, cc.964-965

¹⁰⁵¹ M&B, vol.3, p.102

¹⁰⁵² *Ibid*, p.103

¹⁰⁵³ *Hansard 3rd Series*, House of Commons Debate, 30th of August 1848, cc.669-675

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid*, cc.690-691

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid*, cc.691-698

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Ibid*, c.677

¹⁰⁵⁷ Stanley to Beresford, 2nd of September 1848, Derby MSS 178/1

inconsistency, and popularity.¹⁰⁵⁸ Therefore, Derby wrote two letters. The first he approached the elderly J.C. Herries once again for the leadership. In the second he wrote to Disraeli in which he explained to Disraeli the situation in the House and the effect of Bentinck's death. He continued that:

‘I am doing you bare justice when I say that as a debater there is no one of our party who can pretend to compete with you; and the powers of your mind, your large general information, and the ability you possess to make yourself both heard and felt, must at all times give you a commanding position in the House of Commons, and a preponderating influence in the party to which you are attached. But, behaving also, as I do, that, from whatever cause, your formal establishment in the post of Leader would not meet with a general and cheerful approval on the part of those with whom you are acting, I pay you the much higher compliment of thinking that you have both the clearness of perception to be aware of the truth of what I have just said, and the manliness of character so far to acquiesce in the feeling of the party, as to be willing to waive a claim which your talents might authorise you to put forward, and, satisfied with the real eminence of your position, to give a generous support to a Leader of abilities inferior to your own, who might command a more general feeling in his favour.’¹⁰⁵⁹

Greville was right to call this a ‘flummery letter’. Nevertheless Derby expected Disraeli to accept the proposal. Writing to Newgate he hoped that ‘Disraeli will have the good sense to acquiesce in, and aid, the arrangement. I have never seen of late years any reason to distrust him, and I think he will run straight’.¹⁰⁶⁰ Derby was mistaken. It is hard to contemplate how Derby might have thought that Disraeli would happily concede to such a position, especially given Derby's own description of his talents. Disraeli was well aware of his unpopularity within some sections of the party. But, he also had a group of very active supporters.¹⁰⁶¹ Derby perhaps prejudiced by his dislike of Disraeli, or influenced by the protestations of Beresford was blind to his support. On Boxing Day, Derby was dealt a double blow. Firstly he received a reply from Herries turning down his offer of the leadership on grounds of physical incapability. The second, from Disraeli, was a masterful reply. He responded that:

‘The office of leader of the Conservative party in the House of Commons, at the present day, is to uphold the aristocratic settlement of this country. That is the only question at stake, however manifold may be the forms which it assumes in public discussion, and however various the knowledge and the labor which it requires. It is an office which, in my opinion, would require the devotion, perhaps the sacrifice, of a life, and, however great his qualities for its fulfilment, would not be wisely undertaken by any man, who did not possess, not only the confidence, but even the warm personal regard of those with whom he acted in political connection. If you had been in the House of Commons you could have fulfilled this office, and dark and difficult as I deem our future, I would have acted cordially under your banner, because I am sure it would have led always to honour, if not to triumph. But unhappily you have quitted us. Honour, and personal feelings stronger than any public consideration, attached me to George Bentinck in his able, though hopeless, career, and as long as his course had continued, I would never have quitted him. But I am now free from all personal ties; and I am no longer disposed to sacrifice interesting pursuits, health, and a happy hearth, for a political career, which can bring one little fame, and, even if successful in a vulgar sense, would bear me a reward which I now little appreciate. These are personal considerations. There are, as you well remind me, others, and far superior ones, which should influence all

¹⁰⁵⁸ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.1, p.350

¹⁰⁵⁹ M&B, vol.3, p.122

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.124

¹⁰⁶¹ Blake, p.266. M&B, p.124

men in a responsible position. I am not insensible, especially in this age, to the principle of duty- but in the present distracted state of parties, it is my opinion, however erroneous, that I could do more to uphold the cause to which I am attached, that I should have better opportunities of reviving the spirit, and raising the general tone of feeling among our friends throughout the country, by acting alone and unshackled, than if I fell into the party discipline, which you intimate.’¹⁰⁶²

It was a brilliant reply. Derby was far too experienced not to know that a politician of Disraeli’s ability could prove a loose cannon if left ‘alone and unshackled’ in ‘upholding the cause’. As Blake has suggested, ‘nine times out of ten it meant trouble’.¹⁰⁶³ The fact was that since August and especially after the death of Bentinck the tide was turning towards Disraeli and ‘Stanley’s refusal to endorse Disraeli’s claim was by now running against the current of expectation’.¹⁰⁶⁴ In fact even the Peelite organ, *The Morning Chronicle*, had begun to assume that Disraeli would take over the leadership and offered him grudging praise as ‘an example of what conscious merit and inborn superiority, backed by strong volition and utter insensibility to the ordinary weakness of a sensitive or shrinking nature, may effect’.¹⁰⁶⁵

Derby was now forced to offer Disraeli a major leadership role within the party. However he was not yet willing to give Disraeli the sole leadership. Taking advice from Herries and adapting Richmond’s suggestion of a shadow cabinet, Derby devised a scheme in which Disraeli would share the leadership with Granby and Herries in a triumvirate.¹⁰⁶⁶ Disraeli initially refused to take part in the venture and immediately rejected it. Derby reported to his son that Disraeli told him, ‘I will not acquiesce in a position which will enable the party to use me in debate, and then throw me aside’.¹⁰⁶⁷ Derby tried to reason with Disraeli and explain the situation as a temporary one in which any prejudices or jealousies that may currently have existed could be allowed to disappear. After all Granby was an unambiguous man destined for the House of Lords, while Herries was an ‘old man, not likely to remain long on the political stage’.¹⁰⁶⁸ Despite several refusals, Disraeli was invited to the first meeting of this triumvirate, an invitation he accepted, thenceforward any refusals of taking part in the scheme were forgotten. It was an absurd arrangement, and the reality of the situation was clear for so many to see. Disraeli soared above the other two in ability. While Disraeli would have to wait until the very end of 1851 and Granby’s resignation to take on the sole leadership of the party in the Commons, in effect he was leader long before that. Aberdeen perhaps has summed up the arrangement best when he compared Derby’s triumvirate to the consuls of France after the revolution: ‘Sieyès, Roger Ducos, and Napoleon Bonaparte’.¹⁰⁶⁹

With the question of the leadership at least temporarily settled, the Conservatives could now turn their attention to forming a coherent opposition and making a dent in the side of Russell’s limping administration. After two years of disorganisation, poisoned by prejudice, resentment and anger, despite the best efforts of those who had attempted to play a leading part, the foundations of coherent Tory opposition were beginning to set. The following four years were far more positive for the Conservative Party and indeed also for protection. In this period Douglas Hurd has cynically suggested that, ‘Disraeli began the long process of hypnotising the protectionist Conservatives into

¹⁰⁶² Disraeli to Derby, 26th of December 1848, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 30/3 ff.26-29

¹⁰⁶³ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.207

¹⁰⁶⁴ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.1, p.351

¹⁰⁶⁵ M&B, vol.3, p.120

¹⁰⁶⁶ Richmond to Derby, 21st of January 1849, Derby MSS, 131/13

¹⁰⁶⁷ Vincent (ed.), *Derby, Disraeli, and the Conservative Party*, p.1

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.1-2

¹⁰⁶⁹ M&B, vol.3, p.139

abandoning protection'.¹⁰⁷⁰ Disraeli certainly saw the dangers of a Protectionists ministry, and privately thought protection a 'hopeless question'. Disraeli had been very happy to oppose the repeal of the Corn Laws, they had represented one of the institutions of the country which had protected England's territorial constitution and the economic security of a landed ruling elite. As Jonathan Parry has argued, 'For Disraeli protection was not a class issue about the detail of the corn tariff. It was, practiced flexibly and in moderation, a historic imperial, foreign, and constitutional policy, balancing the defence of important interests with low taxes'.¹⁰⁷¹ However, much like the Reform Act of 1832, 1846 had been a turning point which could not be reversed. A new social contract had been struck between Britain's working classes and its governing elite. With revolution having swept Europe in 1848, many saw obvious dangers in any attempt to reinstate the Corn Laws, and Disraeli was amongst them. He saw no sanctuary in reaction. This was the type of politics of which he had been so scathing in *Coningsby*. The Conservatives needed to devise a more 'Tory' answer to the question which Disraeli saw as laying in alternative forms of relief for the landed interest.¹⁰⁷²

If Disraeli aim over the next four years was to remove the Corn Laws as the sole objective of Conservative efforts, as Stewart has put, 'for the next three years Disraeli's career is the story of his failure to do so'.¹⁰⁷³ There are some powerful reasons for this. First and foremost, Derby, who had seemed so cautious to champion protection after 1846, chose his moment to become a more unwavering protectionist than he ever had been during Bentinck's lifetime.¹⁰⁷⁴ In fact Derby was one of the few major politicians who could not see that a protection as a principle was both dangerous and electorally damaging. This was certainly detected by Peel who wrote of Russell's enfeebled Whig administration: 'the government seems to have little prospect of acquiring strength. Their main source of strength will be the declared resolution of the Protectionists to restore Protection as a principle. If the Government will tie the Protectionists to that stake, and will declare in express, unequivocal terms...that the test of party difference is now Protection or no Protection, they may yet hold their ground'.¹⁰⁷⁵ Second, between 1849 and 1852 Britain experienced its worst agricultural depression for over thirty years. At the start of September 1848 wheat prices averaged at 56s.10d, by the end of December they had fallen to 46s. By September 1849 they had crashed to 38s.9d. and fell further to a rock bottom price of 36s.11d. where it remained until the end of 1851.¹⁰⁷⁶ The coincidence of poor English harvests and good harvests on the continent allowed English prices to nosedive and the virtues of free trade to be called into serious question.

Thus over the next three years Disraeli tried various schemes in order to divert the Conservatives away from pursuing protection as their default goal. In February of 1849 Disraeli gave notice of a motion for relief of the land. The aim of the motion was to lower taxation on mainly real property in order to reduce the financial pressure on the landed interest. His speech on the 8th of March was a well argued oration in which he argued the twin forces of agriculture and industry should be complementary rather than antagonistic, and which prompted one his memorable passages: 'But believe me, I speak not as your enemy when I say that it will be an exception to the principles which seem hitherto to have ruled society, if you can succeed in maintaining the success at which you aim without the possession of that permanence and stability which the territorial principle alone can afford. Although you may for a moment flourish after their destruction—although your ports may be filled with shipping, your factories smoke on every plain, and your forges flame in every city—I see

¹⁰⁷⁰ Hurd, *Robert Peel*, p.376

¹⁰⁷¹ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.711

¹⁰⁷² Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.140

¹⁰⁷³ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁷⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.285

¹⁰⁷⁵ Peel to Graham, 24th of July 1849, cited in Parker, *Peel*, vol.3, p.523

¹⁰⁷⁶ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.142

no reason why you should form an exception to that which the page of history has mournfully recorded; that you, too, should not fade like the Tyrian dye, and moulder like the Venetian palaces. But, united with the land, you will obtain the best and surest foundation upon which to build your enduring welfare'¹⁰⁷⁷

The motion was defeated by 89 votes but Disraeli's performance garnered high praise from both sides of the House. It's admirers including Russell, Palmerston, and Malmesbury who said of 'Stanley, "who never pays compliments, you know that's not his way", said it was one of the best things ever done'.¹⁰⁷⁸ Later that session the Tories were dealt another blow as the repeal of the Navigation Laws, which had passed the Commons by 61 votes, defied all expectation and passed the Lords, despite Derby's best efforts in that chamber. The general explanation was that the Lords passed the bill in order to preserve Russell's government and to deny Derby forming a ministry on principle of restoring the Corn Laws.¹⁰⁷⁹ The fall of Russell's government was a prospect that neither Disraeli nor Derby welcomed with any enthusiasm. Disraeli, though excited by a Protectionist cabinet 'in embryo',¹⁰⁸⁰ realised the danger of defeating the government prematurely. He wrote to Manners expressing his fears that in defeat over the Navigation Laws, Russell might play a trick on Stanley by forcing him to form a government, as their simply were not enough men of ministerial calibre in the Commons.¹⁰⁸¹ They were both right. The result was not a disaster, the Protectionists had put in a good showing in both Houses, Russell's authority was severely damaged, and the Tories were spared the embarrassment of having to try and form a ministry.

Disraeli believed that Tory aims needed to be achieved by different mean. Having been influenced by the ideas eminent high Tory banker Henry Drummond, Disraeli introduced a scheme by which land tax across the country would be equalised at the Bucks rate of 1s.6d which, by Disraeli's estimates would have raised an annual surplus of £5,000,000. This £5,000,000 would be used to establish a sinking fund in order to lower the national debt and secure lower rates of interest on borrowing, thus relieving the farmers burden. Disraeli was convinced that by reducing the of interest on mortgages the financial authority of the territorial aristocracy might be restored.¹⁰⁸² He told Newcastle that he wished to 'build up the country party on two great popular principles- the redistribution of public burthens and the maintenance of public credit'.¹⁰⁸³ He said as much to Derby when he wrote, 'conceive the effect on our shattered and embarrassed aristocracy, of the interest on the debt reduced to 2.5, or 2 per cent. With this, Californian gold, and a fixed duty, they would be stronger than they ever were since the Conquest'.¹⁰⁸⁴ Stanley was not convinced and replied that it might suit Disraeli's beloved Bucks, but 'my friends in Lancashire will not thanks you for raising tax in the first instance from 2d. to 1s.6d in the pound'.¹⁰⁸⁵ The alarm bells rang around the party when Disraeli introduced the idea in a speech at Aylesbury, which he quickly had to retract, before replying to a letter from a farmer with the same remedy, only for the reply to copied and forwarded on to Lord Derby. Derby was not impressed and angrily reprimanded Disraeli's actions which he saw a tantamount to a denial of the principles of protection. Disraeli's sinking fund was sunk and protection continued to be the main Tory policy into the next session.

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Hansard 3rd Series*, House of Commons Debate, 8th of March 1849, c.452

¹⁰⁷⁸ Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 11th of March 1849, *Disraeli's Letters*, vol.5 p.143

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid*, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 24th of April 1849, vol.5, p.171

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid*, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 26th of March 1849, vol.5 p.156

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid*, Disraeli to Manners, 16th of March 1849, vol.5 p.164

¹⁰⁸² Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.147. Blake, *Disraeli*, p.290.

¹⁰⁸³ Disraeli to Newcastle, 16th of October 1849, *Disraeli's Letters*, vol.5 p.302

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Ibid*, Disraeli to Stanley, 12th of June 1849, vol.5 p.187

¹⁰⁸⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.290

Throughout 1850 Disraeli continued to pursue agricultural relief as the central tenet of protectionist politics. It was a much quieter session for Disraeli, neither the position of the parties, nor the balance of politics were particularly altered. The first major question upon which Disraeli had a vocal impact surrounded the condition of labour. In this he was particularly well versed. Many of the ideals which had exhibited in *Sybil* were once again displayed in the House of Commons. Both Disraeli and Manners, who had returned to Parliament through a by-election, were vigorous supporters of Ashely's amendments to his Ten Hours Act. The amendments were intended to close loopholes in the original act. However, Russell's administration commandeered the bill and offered a compromise of ten and half hours a day, which Ashely reluctantly accepted. Disraeli and Manners opposed this compromise in 'the full spirit of Young England', however their protestations were ultimately unsuccessful. It is another example however, of the politics of Young England remaining relevant well after the groups dissipation. The ideas were certainly not, as one historian suggested, 'filed for reference'.¹⁰⁸⁶ He did introduce two more bills for agricultural relief in the following twelve months. In 1849 he had been defeated by 91 votes, having introduced a similar bill in February of 1850 it was defeated by only 21. When Disraeli introduced a bill advocating the alleviation of agricultural distress, which did not advocate protection in February of 1851, it was beaten by only 14 votes.¹⁰⁸⁷ It represented a great turn around in Protectionist fortunes, however as much as Disraeli could try to get around the Corn laws as a default setting for Tory policy, his attempts largely fell on deaf ears.

The major controversy of the session surrounded Palmerston's heavy-handed response to the Don Pacifico affair. Palmerston had used British naval strength to back the claims of a slightly shady Portuguese born British passport holder who claimed his house had been sacked by an anti-Semitic Greek mob, and who was now trying to sue the Greek government for damages.¹⁰⁸⁸ Derby led the charge in the House of Lords, and in combination with Aberdeen successfully passed a motion to censure Palmerston. This was significant as it indicated that Derby was positively trying to topple Russell's government. Aberdeen certainly thought as much and indicated that he believed Stanley thought himself ready to form a ministry.¹⁰⁸⁹ The ministry stood or fell on the Commons vote. Lord Derby pressed the importance of the issue and perhaps felt Disraeli's lack of enthusiasm when he wrote: 'Forgive me if I impress upon you the great importance of, on many accounts, of hitting hard and not sparing. Anything short of a *guerre a l'outrance* would have the effect of reviving, in suspicious minds, old misconceptions, and expose you to misconstruction on the part of those who may look with envy at your present high position'.¹⁰⁹⁰ Disraeli's performance in the heated Don Pacifico debates was underwhelming at best. There are reasons behind this. First that the fall of Russell's government could have triggered a reconciliation with the Peelites, which would have certainly have resulted in Disraeli losing his preeminent position among the Protectionist's in the Commons.¹⁰⁹¹ While this certainly played a part, the more likely reason is that Disraeli was still very reluctant to form a government that was committed to restoring the Corn Laws. The protection issue had not yet been settled and he still had a long way to go convince the party to relinquish the Corn Laws in favour of some over form of relief.

The difficulty of removing protection as a central tenet of Tory politics from 1849 to 1851 was that it was so well entrenched in the Conservative psyche. Moreover there was lots of loud

¹⁰⁸⁶ Pearson, p.96

¹⁰⁸⁷ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.1, p.398

¹⁰⁸⁸ For a more detailed account of the Don Pacifico issue: Hurd, *Choose Your Weapons*, pp.93-95

¹⁰⁸⁹ E. Jones Parry (ed.), *The Correspondence of Aberdeen and Lieven*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1938) vol.2, p.488-9

¹⁰⁹⁰ M&B, vol.3, p.257

¹⁰⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.260

support for it throughout the party despite the obviously problematic and damaging repercussions surrounding any attempt to reinstate the Corn Laws. Malmesbury, a close friend and ally of Derby's, was 'quite sure', in 1848 that 'our principles are gaining favour with thousands who were carried away with the free trade cry in 1846'.¹⁰⁹² By 1849 he was urging Derby to go on the offensive: 'I am sure' he wrote, 'we think too much of parliamentary tactics when we often say it is not our business to suggest remedies. The country likes a man who does so. It takes it as proof that he is ready and fit to success the Government he attacks'.¹⁰⁹³ Even John Manners, rejoiced that 'our prospects...are brighter than ever. We are now on the aggressive, instead of on the offensive'.¹⁰⁹⁴ Although one of the less vehement Protectionists and faithful ally of Disraeli's, even he was not willing to give up the principle of protection: 'as our party organisation is tolerably complete and at work under the symbol of Protection, it seems to me highly inexpedient...to change our flag'.¹⁰⁹⁵ While Derby believed that many members of Russell's government had come to regret the extent to which they had pushed their 'Free Trade vagaries', and now secretly wanted to 'retrace their steps... [if they] knew how to do it'.¹⁰⁹⁶ The vocality of support in the party was further compounded by Whig indecision over Protection. Rumours were circling that the Whigs would have to backtrack over their free trade crusade, and there were certainly very few denials coming from the government.¹⁰⁹⁷ Charles Wood was rumoured to have had second thoughts on the protection and rumours whirled around Tory circles that he intended to reintroduce a small fixed tariff.¹⁰⁹⁸ Disraeli suggested that should the poor harvest continue into 1850 then 'Graham and Co. must give up progress and swallow some moderate reaction'.¹⁰⁹⁹

Given the political hostility, and the situation of weakness that free trade seemed in between 1849 and 1851, it is not surprising that Angus Hawkins has asked 'why did free trade still exist?'¹¹⁰⁰ The answer lays in politics rather than economics. The simple fact is that, while the Whigs may have had some misgivings over the extent to which free trade principles had been carried, support from Peel and his followers would only be forthcoming so long as Russell adhered to the principle upon which Peel had staked his legacy and sacrificed his party. As Hawkins astutely recognised 'After 1846 all Peel's political capital was banked on his pledge to Free Trade. His commitment to the long-term dismantling of domestic Protection was the altar on which he had sacrificed his party. This Peelite covenant kept Russell's government committed to Free Trade in 1849, even though some Whig ministers were privately inclined to compromise'.¹¹⁰¹ This situation in the Commons was problematic after 1846, as none of the three broad parliamentary groups could force a majority, the balance of power lay with Peel and his followers who did not commit to either party.

This situation changed in 1850 when only four days after the division on the Don Pacifico debate Peel was thrown from his horse and incurred injuries which subsequently led to his death a few days later. Peel's legacy is still under debate, whether he was the statesman who put nation over party and governed in the national interest, or if he was the leader who betrayed his own party, and in so doing destroyed the very party he had worked to rebuild from the ruins of reaction. His death was undoubtedly tragic. Blake is mistaken to suggest that he had run his course in politics.¹¹⁰² It seems very likely that had he lived; Peel would have been called upon instead of Aberdeen in 1852.

¹⁰⁹² Malmesbury to Stanley, 3rd of December 1848, Derby MSS, 150/15

¹⁰⁹³ Malmesbury to Stanley, February 1849, *Ibid*, 144/1

¹⁰⁹⁴ Manners to Disraeli, 2nd of February 1849, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 106/1 f.38

¹⁰⁹⁵ Manners to Disraeli, 24th of October 1850, *Ibid*, 106/1 f.68

¹⁰⁹⁶ Derby to Christopher, 14th of April, 1849, Derby MSS, 148/1

¹⁰⁹⁷ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.140

¹⁰⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.140

¹⁰⁹⁹ Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 28th of May 1849, *Disraeli's Letters*, vol.5 p.217

¹¹⁰⁰ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.1, p.356

¹¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.356

¹¹⁰² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.298

Whatever his achievements earlier in his career and as Prime Minister, he had a confusing and disorganizing effect on politics in the last four years of his life. Gladstone described it accurately when he wrote, 'Prime Ministers unattached are dangerous as great rafts would be dangerous floating unmoored in the harbour...the position of Sir Robert Peel in the last four years of his life was a thoroughly false one'.¹¹⁰³ Peel's death restored hope for greater stability in the lower House and occasioned the prospect of a strong government able to command a majority, something that would have been unthinkable while he lived.

On the 29th of September 1850, politics was shaken up once more by a brief from the Papacy which divided Britain into twelve new bishoprics with the intention of restoring the long deposed Catholic hierarchy in England. Stewart has suggested that these proposals sent 'Protestant temperatures soaring to a level they had not reached since the Gordon riots of 1780'.¹¹⁰⁴ Wiseman was created Archbishop of Westminster, and soon sent out a pastoral letter to English Catholics in which he fed oxygen to the fires of anti-Catholic sentiment. It claimed that the people of England who had been separated for so long from the Holy See, were on the point of re-joining, it claimed, 'for the present, and till such a tie as the Holy See shall think it fit otherwise to provide, we shall govern and continue to govern'.¹¹⁰⁵ There was certainly an eruption of no-popery feeling throughout the country, however this work cannot help but feel that Blake was right when argued 'the agitation might have ebbed away without political consequences if Lord John Russell had not decided to put himself at the head of outraged Protestant sentiment'.¹¹⁰⁶ The fact was that his Durham Letter of the 4th of November was little better than an incendiary device. He denounced the 'aggression' of the Papacy as 'insolent and insidious...inconsistent with the Queen's supremacy...and with the spiritual independence of the nation'.¹¹⁰⁷ However he did not just attack Rome but also the more ritualist elements of the Anglican Church when accused Pusey of fostering the 'mummeries of superstition'.¹¹⁰⁸ In short, the letter was needlessly offensive to English Catholics and only served to fuel the already growing fever of anti-Catholicism. As Greville noted, 'On the one hand it has filled with stupid and fanatical enthusiasm all the protestant bigots, and stimulated their rage; and on the other it has irritated to madness all the zealous Catholics, and grieved, shocked, and offended even the most moderate and reasonable'.¹¹⁰⁹

Russell, if he was trying to win popular opinion had badly miscalculated. If as Disraeli suggested he was simply, 'indulging hereditary foible - to wit, having a shy at the Papists', he had forgotten the political implication and had been careless.¹¹¹⁰ If as Stanley suspected, that Russell was trying to be clever and head off any strong Protestant feeling that might well rally around Stanley's flag and 'going to trip up in the same way' as Peel had outfoxed Russell with the Edinburgh letter, then he was 'hoisted by his own petard'.¹¹¹¹ Disraeli reaction to the crisis was understandable. He had long preached religious tolerance more generally, but especially towards English Catholics, like *Sybil's* Eustace Lyle, who had been needlessly marginalised and unnecessarily persecuted. Stanley recorded that: 'D's ideas were moderate and wise. He disliked the movement, would do nothing to increase it, but if it must be dealt with, would try to direct it as much as possible away from the English Catholics, against the Pope and his foreign adherents'.¹¹¹² Lord Blake has astutely recognised

¹¹⁰³ cited in Blake, p.299

¹¹⁰⁴ Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, p.172

¹¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 23rd of October 1850, p.7

¹¹⁰⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.299

¹¹⁰⁷ G.P. Gooch (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of Lord John Russell*, (London: Longmans Green, 1925) vol.1, pp.xxx-xxxi

¹¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.xxxi

¹¹⁰⁹ Grevillie, *Journal*, vol.6, p.375

¹¹¹⁰ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Derby, 18th of November 1850, vol.5, p.377

¹¹¹¹ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.1, p.392

¹¹¹² *Derby Diaries, 1849-1869*, p.34

that this unfortunate brush with the Papacy, displayed to Disraeli the true depths of anti-Catholic feeling both in his party and in the country at large. After 1850 he was more cautious when dealing with Catholicism and the more ritualist elements within the Church of England.¹¹¹³

Russell's misjudgement, the Whig's general inability to decide how to deal with the Papal aggression crisis, coupled with differing responses from the various factions that propped up Russell's limping administration, meant that the strange arrangement that had seen his government struggle on finally collapsed like a house of cards. With no support from the furious Irish MPs, and wavering support from the Peelites, they fared badly during the first month of 1851, and Stanley rallied his troops for a major attack on Wood's budget, they 'had had a long run...after their fox' he said, 'and we're on the point of killing him in the open'.¹¹¹⁴ It then came as a great surprise when Russell resigned that same afternoon. It was a clever move and postponed any Tory attack on the budget thus making Stanley's job of trying to form a ministry all the more difficult.¹¹¹⁵ His calculation paid off as Derby tried in vain to adhere some support from the Peelites. Gladstone, Henry Corry, Ellenborough and Goulborn all refused on the grounds that they would not be associated with an reintroduction of the corn tariff.¹¹¹⁶ The party's leadership met at the Carlton on the 27th of February, and plans were further thrown into disarray with the withdrawal of Robert Inglis, and the refusal of Henley to serve on the Board of Trade. Disraeli later humorously recollected the scene when Derby signalled for him to speak in private:

'This will not do?' he said.

'I am not sanguine - but don't be in a hurry.'

After a few remarks on the extraordinary scene, he returned to the table. There was silence, and he gave his opinion that it was duty to decline the formation of a government...Beresford frantically rushed forward and took Lord Derby aside and said there were several men, he knew, waiting at the Carlton expecting to be sent for, and implored Lord Derby to reconsider his course. Lord Derby enquired impatiently 'Who was at the Carlton?' Beresford said 'Deedes' (the MP for East Kent). 'Pshaw!' exclaimed Lord Derby. 'These are not names I can put before the Queen!'¹¹¹⁷

It was a comical scene, but it once again highlighted that Tory commitment to the reintroduction of protective tariffs on corn still causing serious problems. Too much has been made of Disraeli's role as a repellent to Peelite reunification. He had agreed to work under Gladstone in 1851 if he could have been converted.¹¹¹⁸ The reason for Derby's abject failure to find support to form a government once again lay in the Conservative's unwavering support for the Corn Laws rather than any wide-spread distrust in Disraeli. Certainly, for many dislike and mistrust of Disraeli has been the reason given for the Stanley's failure to persuade any of the Peelite men of talent to join his cabinet in 1850.¹¹¹⁹ The Queen, accepting that Disraeli would play a leading part in Commons of any administration Stanley headed expressed her concern when writing to Stanley: 'Mr. Disraeli must be Leader of the House of Commons; but I do not approve of Mr. Disraeli. I do not approve of his conduct to Sir Robert Peel.'¹¹²⁰ However, the case was that the Peelites had split with the Protectionist over the principle of free trade. Therefore, the very fact that Stanley's party still endorsed the reintroduction of protective tariffs must still have been the greatest obstacle to their reunion. Disraeli thought as much: 'One thing was established – that every public man of experience or influence, however slight, had declined to act under Lord Derby unless the principle of Protection were

¹¹¹³ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.300

¹¹¹⁴ Greville, *Journal*, vol.6, p.397

¹¹¹⁵ Hawkins, p.399

¹¹¹⁶ Vincent ed., *Derby, Disraeli, and the Conservative Party*, p.48

¹¹¹⁷ Disraeli, *Reminiscences*, p.47

¹¹¹⁸ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.1, p.402

¹¹¹⁹ Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician*, p.127; Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.200; Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.300-305

¹¹²⁰ M&B, vol.3, p.290

unequivocally denounced'.¹¹²¹ This is also the conclusion of Hawkins, who observed, 'The lessons Stanley drew from the crisis were patent and painful. While Protective duties remained part of Conservative policy none of the leading Peelites would participate in Stanley's cabinet'.¹¹²² Despite Stanley's underlying dislike of Disraeli, he defended him to the Queen and took responsibility for his conduct.¹¹²³ Moreover, despite the ease at which he could have placed the blame for the failure to form a cabinet with Disraeli, he did not. Disraeli's political alliance with Stanley never mirrored his close friendship with Bentinck. But perhaps that, his ability to collaborate with a man who had been actively prejudiced against him, and form a successful political partnership was a greater indicator of his powers of political collaboration.

Stanley's decision to turn down the Queen's offer of forming a ministry was a bitter blow for Disraeli to take. He had undoubtedly dreamt of taking his place in government. He was frustrated to see that chance slip away because of Derby's caution and the rest of his party's general incompetence. He saw their refusal to form a government as an admission of their party's weakness, a humiliating failure, and 'ludicrous catastrophe'.¹¹²⁴ Derby had attempted to console him when he suggested that 'they had got to the point at which boldness had would have degenerated into rashness'.¹¹²⁵ Of course he was right. As he had told his son: 'I have little to gain by office and everything to lose: they have nothing to lose and much to gain'.¹¹²⁶

Disraeli was not in a position to take such high-minded view of the situation. Edward Stanley visited Disraeli the following day and observed 'there was a fatality about his own career – he had turned out two successive administrations, but it was fated that he should never himself succeed'.¹¹²⁷ So bad was Disraeli's despondency that he gloomily toyed with the idea of abandoning politics to once again focus on literature. As Bradford has observed this was a 'regular refrain of Disraeli's when things were going wrong politically'.¹¹²⁸

Disraeli never did take step away from politics that he had threatened at the end of February. But he did take the chance to focus once again on literature. In the summer of 1851 he retreated to Hughenden to complete his biography of Lord George Bentinck that he had started the previous summer.¹¹²⁹ On the face of it was a book that recored and commemorated his collaboration and relationship with Bentinck. A celebration of his political life. However, it turned out to be something far more interesting and perhaps Disraeli's best book.¹¹³⁰ It was as O'Kell has suggested a work that 'embodies the conventions biography, autobiography, history and fiction in one narrative to a degree that is surely unique'.¹¹³¹ That Disraeli sat down to write this book tells us how sincere his attachment to Bentinck was. But as it has been noted, like so many of Disraeli's other novels the protagonist fails to come to life.¹¹³² Bentinck's abilities and virtues are overstated. He is as Blake says 'too much of a paragon' to really get to grips with his real character.¹¹³³ Bentinck, 'had sate in eight parliaments without having taken part in any great debate, when remarkable events suddenly compelled him to

¹¹²¹ *Ibid*, vol.3, p.296

¹¹²² Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.1, p.404

¹¹²³ M&B, vol.3, pp.290-291: "Mr. Disraeli has to make his own position, and men who make their position will say and do things which are not necessary to be said or done by those for whom position are provided"

¹¹²⁴ *Disraeli's Reminiscences*, p.49

¹¹²⁵ M&B, vol.3, p.295

¹¹²⁶ Vincent, *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.51

¹¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p.50

¹¹²⁸ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.202

¹¹²⁹ Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography*, (London: Colburn, 1852)

¹¹³⁰ St. John, *Disraeli*, p.34

¹¹³¹ O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, p.288

¹¹³² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.230; Kuhn, *Politics of Pleasure*, p.122

¹¹³³ *Ibid*, P.230

advance and occupy not only a considerable, but leading position in our public affairs'.¹¹³⁴ He was a man who possessed 'some of the highest qualities of political life': 'courage', 'lofty-spirit', 'mastery of detail', 'quick apprehension and clear intelligence', 'indomitable firmness', 'perseverance that never failed', 'energy seldom surpassed' and 'a capacity for labour which was perhaps never equalled'.¹¹³⁵ Bentinck was a man with some great qualities, not least his loyalty to Disraeli, but this is a somewhat idealised portrait. In contrast Disraeli's part is very much under-played speaking only in the third-person and appearing as the man who 'friend who sate by Lord George Bentinck'.¹¹³⁶ It certainly does not convince, but it is an undoubtedly generous memorial to his old partner. But in so many ways it is not strictly a biography of Bentinck, rather it becomes not only an account his collaboration with Bentinck, but a sophisticated account history of the tumultuous political events between 1845 and 1848.¹¹³⁷ While some of it, particularly the cabinet crisis of 1845, is historically inaccurate. But it is certainly not a 'very dull book'.¹¹³⁸ Rather it is a vivid dramatization of the most, at least in parliamentary terms, disruptive political periods of the nineteenth-century. The real masterpiece of the book was not Disraeli's portrait of Bentinck, but in fact his assessment of Robert Peel. If he is too generous to Bentinck and too modest of himself, his assessment of Peel is essentially very just and more accurate than many other contemporary judgements. He concluded that 'one cannot say of Sir Robert Peel that he was the greatest minister that this country ever produced' because even with the support of his party and the court, 'he never could maintain himself in power'. Nor was he 'greatest party leader that ever flourished' for he destroyed 'the most compact, powerful, and devoted party that ever followed a British statesman', but he would go down to history as the greatest member of parliament that ever lived.'¹¹³⁹ It is unfortunate given the real quality to his biography of Bentinck that it has largely been discussed because of one chapter. Chapter 24, ostensibly about Bentinck's involvement with the Jewish Question, becomes a dissertation, indeed polemics, on Disraeli's views on race. It was a more political restatement of the same ideas surrounding race and religion that he had expressed in *Coningsby*, *Tancred*, and in his speech on Jewish Emancipation. As Vincent put it, it was 'un-called for', 'overly intellectual' and quite 'un-English'.¹¹⁴⁰ For Cesarani it was 'one of the most curious, paradoxical and damaging things a Jew has ever written about their own people'.¹¹⁴¹ But in essence it was far from the constituting a coherent or even important part of the work. It was seemingly bolted on at the end and only detracts from what is essentially a very good piece of historical narrative. But most important of all is that Disraeli felt the need to record, however rose-tinted it might have, his political partnership with Bentinck in history and in memory.

¹¹³⁴ *Lord George Bentinck*, p.1

¹¹³⁵ *Ibid*, pp.1-2

¹¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p.175

¹¹³⁷ *St. John*, p.34

¹¹³⁸ Kuhn, *Romance of Politics*, p.122

¹¹³⁹ *Lord George Bentinck*, p.319

¹¹⁴⁰ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.42

¹¹⁴¹ Cesarani, *Disraeli*, p.130

Chapter Five: Disraeli in the Age of Equipoise

It has been long suggested that the years after Disraeli secured the Conservative leadership in the House of Commons were politically fallow. This is only part true. To be sure, the Tories enjoyed only just over four years in power between 1846 and 1874 and on those occasions, they were in a minority government. It also must be acknowledged that their only substantial legislative success was in steering through the Reform Act of 1867. The traditional historiography of Disraeli in this period has also tended to stress his opportunist tendencies. Robert Blake's biography led the way in this regard, emphasising Disraeli's cynical political manoeuvring and unprincipled political matchmaking.¹¹⁴² Robert Stewart's invaluable history of Protectionist politics during the era, which charted the Conservative abandonment of Protection, also commented upon Disraeli's political 'Latitudinarianism'.¹¹⁴³ Meanwhile, Maurice Cowling's brilliant history of the Second Reform Act, in destroying the myth of Tory Democracy through highlighting the political and tactical motives behind the measure, further cemented Disraeli's reputation for political calculation.¹¹⁴⁴ Many later historians have concurred with Lord Blake's conclusion that Disraeli's political actions across the 1850s and 1860s were opportunist and unprincipled.¹¹⁴⁵ They are perhaps best typified by Sarah Bradford, who condemns his 'single-minded pursuit of power', which put him in the position of 'a guerrilla leader, seeking issue and allies wherever he could find them', in a period which cemented his reputation of 'a man without principle'.¹¹⁴⁶

However, more recently there has been a concerted effort amongst revisionist historians to establish coherent and consistent political principles underlying Disraeli's actions during this period... Peter Ghosh has examined Disraeli's attitudes towards finance, and Allen Warren has scrutinised Disraeli's evolving policy towards the Anglican Church throughout his career, with particular emphasis on the period between 1852-1867.¹¹⁴⁷ These two contributions have been very useful in creating a fuller and less caricatured picture of Disraeli's politics in the 'fifties and 'sixties. Angus Hawkins's worldly biography of the 14th Earl of Derby has added a further dimension to our understanding of Conservative politics at the time, and has illuminated Disraeli's relationship with Derby, stressing the effect of Derby's cautious sagacity on the party in those years. However, it is still important to re-establish Disraeli as an English politician, truly Conservative thinker, and loyal party operator. To understand Disraeli's political movements, to recognize his effect on Conservative policy, and to further establish his ability as a highly effective political collaborator, the period between 1851 and 1867 needs to be examined within contemporary socio-political contexts.

Britain in the 1850s was far removed from the socio-politically and economically turbulent country of the 1840s. Agricultural unrest, clamour for economic reform, and the looming threat of political revolution at home, had given way to a new decade. This proved to be an era of relative class peace and mutual respect. It also signalled a golden decade of British agriculture and industry. This was the period that W.L. Burn long ago called the 'Age of Equipoise'.¹¹⁴⁸ It is important to appreciate that Burn defined that age of domestic tranquillity and social stability as encompassing 1852-1867. This was the exact period between the first Protectionist Derby government and the passage of the Second Reform Act. It was between those dates that Disraeli and the Conservatives were in almost

¹¹⁴² Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.270-285

¹¹⁴³ Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, p.222

¹¹⁴⁴ Maurice Cowling, *1867: Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution* (London: CUP, 1967)

¹¹⁴⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.?: Richard Davis, *Disraeli*, pp.?: Bradford, *Disraeli*, pp.222-225; Hurd, *Disraeli*, pp.125-127

¹¹⁴⁶ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.222

¹¹⁴⁷ P.R. Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism: A Financial Approach', *The English Historical Review*, vol.99, no.391 (1984), pp.268-296; Allen Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives and the National Church, 1837-1881', *Parliamentary History*, 19, (1999), pp.96-117

¹¹⁴⁸ W.L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964)

unbroken opposition. Moreover, those years represented what Briggs has described as ‘the Great Victorian Peace’.¹¹⁴⁹ That Britain was at war in the Crimea for three years cannot be overlooked. But as Briggs shrewdly observed, the Crimean War left lingering memories ‘of what happened at Westminster rather than what happened at Balaclava’.¹¹⁵⁰ Once the dust had settled on the popular public excitement surrounding the Crimean War, Britain, was politically and socially both a calmer and more self-assured country in the 1850s and 1860s than it had been in previous decades.

Political opportunities in this period were few and far between for Disraeli. True, he was the leader of a major political Party. But the state of that party was not enviable. At the start of the 1850s the Tories were, by and large, still clinging to agricultural protection and sectarian Anglicanism as their principal political tenets. Moreover, they were a party that was fighting hopelessly against political and social progress. As Lady Russell observed at the end of the 1840s: ‘What an unhappy being a real Tory must be, at least in England, battling so vainly against time and tide, doomed to see the idols of his worship crumbled to dust one after another’.¹¹⁵¹ Disraeli’s greatest task, and to some his most impressive achievement, was to galvanise that increasingly anachronistic Tory rump, and transform it into a broader, more moderate and electable, political party.¹¹⁵² The political landscape for the Conservatives throughout the ‘fifties and ‘sixties was not promising. Free Trade had become the defining economic principle of the Victorian age. As Vincent has shrewdly observed, ‘in practical terms Disraeli stood boxed in on every side. In economic and social matters, free trade liberalism reigned supreme’.¹¹⁵³ Moreover, Disraeli and Conservatism were faced with other serious threats throughout the ‘Age of Equipoise’. First, domestic radicalism threatened to further erode the historic, territorial, constitution in its demands for representative and democratic political principles. Secondly, he had to combat the ideological falsehoods of modern liberalism: commercial materialism and ‘Manchester school’ Free Trade economics-- in addition to irresponsible and wrongheaded liberal attitudes to foreign policy.¹¹⁵⁴ Finally, he had to confront the narrowness of his own party.

Above all, Disraeli had to fight long battle to remove Conservative ideological dependence on agricultural Protection. It is generally accepted that the party leadership had come to realize the practical impossibility of restoring Protection, even before 1852.¹¹⁵⁵ However, was a much longer struggle to convince both the bulk of his supporters in the country to give up Protectionism and actively to endorse the broad principles of Free Trade.¹¹⁵⁶ Secondly, Disraeli was encumbered by a large number of ‘hot-headed protestant’ and ‘faddist high churchmen’.¹¹⁵⁷ Of course, the Conservatives needed to represent the interests of the Anglican Church. That was central to Disraeli’s conception of historical Toryism. However, his challenge lay in constructing a moderate and popular ecclesiastical policy. That meant battling fervent sectarian narrowness which plagued the party. The Tories had to become something more than a party of rural and Anglican interests. There were no natural majorities to be had when representing those interests alone. As Vincent has observed, the Conservatives were the defenders of the rural interest in an increasingly urban society, and the defenders of the Anglican Church which represented less than half of all churchgoers: ‘there were, whatever cards one played, more Liberals than Tories.’¹¹⁵⁸

¹¹⁴⁹ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.96

¹¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.96

¹¹⁵¹ MacCarthy and Russell, *Lady John Russell*, p.80

¹¹⁵² Boyd Hilton, ‘Disraeli, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit’, *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, 1750-1850*, p.56-57; Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, p.236-237

¹¹⁵³ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.46

¹¹⁵⁴ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.709

¹¹⁵⁵ R.B. McDowell, *British Conservatism*, p.52; Blake, *The Conservative Party*, p.79, Stewart, *Politics of Protection*, pp.140-141; Ghosh, ‘Disraeli: a Financial Approach’, p.269;

¹¹⁵⁶ Gambles, *Conservative Economic Discourse*, pp.230-239

¹¹⁵⁷ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.709

¹¹⁵⁸ Vincent, *Disraeli*, pp.47-48

This problem was exacerbated by the arithmetic of Parliament. That was not favourable to finding consistent or compatible support. This problem was compounded by the continuing significance of the Peelite 'party' in Parliament. Their initial unwillingness to serve in either Whig or Tory ministries meant that both Russell and Derby had to depend on their unreliable benevolence. Both Protection and memories of 1846 proved an impenetrable barrier to any permanent re-union between the Tories and the Peelites. By the time Derby and Disraeli had openly renounced Protection in favour of Free Trade, the sands had shifted against them. Here the rivalry between Russell and Palmerston proved pivotal to the political landscape in the late 'fifties and 'sixties. Their jealous conflict resulted in the ascendancy of Palmerston. He was the man who managed to be most in tune with the pulse of the age and came to typify the politics of the period. This may seem strange. But, as Briggs has suggested, it was a period which 'suited the politician who left rapid improvement alone...It was not the business of politics to define political issues, but to provide honest leadership and sound administration.'¹¹⁵⁹ Palmerston's seemingly passive attitude towards domestic policy and aggressive-if liberal- attitudes in foreign policy captured public imagination and secured a politically moderate majority in Parliament. Faced with such political astuteness, Disraeli and Derby were left with little room for manoeuvre. Their possible allies outside of this natural majority bloc were the Radicals and the Irish Nationalists. Both of them were unnatural allies of the Tories, and repugnant to many of his own party.

Yet, despite these practical difficulties, the Conservative still found room to try to reassert themselves as a party of government. This was at least in part because, as Hawkins has shown, Derby was determined not to assume government for its own sake. He was conscious that for the Conservative party a humiliating failure in government would do more damage than a period in opposition. That prudence slowed the process of party realignment and Conservative repositioning. Derby's cautious leadership also helped to temper Disraeli's tendency towards political intrigue and forced him explore those avenues of opportunity that lay elsewhere. As Parry has rightly observed, for nearly all of Disraeli's career he was 'engaged in a gallant struggle to preserve England from the false ideas that he had exposed in his first decade in parliament.'¹¹⁶⁰ Disraeli was happy to attack the falsehood of Liberal moral certainty in all areas of politics throughout his leadership of the Party. But during the 1850s and 1860s, this battle was fought in three key areas of domestic policy where the Tories could gain ground. Certainly, it was in relation to the Conservative positions on finance, the Church, and later Parliamentary Reform, that Disraeli was most influential during the 'Age of Equipoise'. To alter the political principles of a party was not easy. Therefore, it is important to recognize Disraeli's ability as a political collaborator. There were some among his own party who did like his leadership of the Commons. Moreover, his relationship with Lord Derby was initially, and for some time after, a fractious one. However, Disraeli managed a series of temporary political partnerships with an unlikely array of allies. His position within the party was certainly interesting. There were few with the ability to replace him. but that did not mean his position was necessarily secure. This required him to build meaningful political relationships with his party's hierarchy, as well to work effectively with a great array of different interests to ensure the future success and relevance of the Conservative party. In understand how Disraeli was able to achieve this requires us to re-examine the traditional narrative of this period.

I: Finance

¹¹⁵⁹ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.97

¹¹⁶⁰ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.709

Of all the challenges Disraeli and the Tories faced between 1850 and the Second Reform Act, domestic finance was perhaps the most difficult to navigate. Finance was the area of policy that emerged most pressingly, the area where the Conservatives had possibly the most to lose, and the ministerial portfolio with which Disraeli was chiefly responsible. Disraeli has not often been associated with high finance. Most of his popular reputation rests upon his achievements in the spheres of Parliamentary Reform and, later Foreign and Imperial policy. But as Ghosh has observed, ‘the only government offices [Disraeli] ever held were those of First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, and on the two occasions he was First Lord he took care to secure a completely obedient man at the Exchequer beneath him’.¹¹⁶¹ One cannot underestimate the difficulty of Disraeli’s position in this respect: Protectionism which was in theory the binding principle of the party. Yet it in practical political terms, it quickly became a lost cause. Disraeli’s ambition may have been dented when Derby chose not to form a ministry in 1851. But the reality was that both knew how difficult forming a respectable Protectionist government would be in that Parliament. His task was made more difficult, as finance was certainly not his strongest suit. The Exchequer was certainly not his natural home in government. Yet it turned out to be a position that, when combined with his leadership of the Commons, has showcased his Disraeli’s not inconsiderable abilities of leadership and political collaboration.

Following the publication of Lord George Bentinck in December of 1851, Disraeli did not have to wait long to once again sense the possibility of forming a Tory administration. At the end of the year, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte successfully staged a coup d’état in Paris. He took control of the government, dismissed the National Assembly and the Council of State, and arrested his suspected opponents.¹¹⁶² Palmerston, subsequent to a conversation with the French ambassador, had welcomed the coup, as indeed did ‘most of the political elite, and many businessmen’.¹¹⁶³ However, this went strictly against the line of neutrality that Russell’s government had chosen to take on the issue. When the news broke that Palmerston had privately given his approval of the coup, the government fell into crisis. Whatever the motives behind Palmerston’s comments, however sincere they may have been, his tacit approval of Napoleon’s coup gave the impression of an inconsistency of policy. Moreover, he once again infuriated the Queen in his nonchalant reply to her reprimand.¹¹⁶⁴ The Queen demanded an explanation from Russell. This was the breaking point in a long string of Palmerston’s actions that had antagonized both the monarch and his party leader. On the 23rd of December Palmerston was officially dismissed. The court was delighted. Victoria told her Uncle Leopold: ‘dearest Uncle I have great pleasure in announcing to you the news...[that] Lord Palmerston is no longer Foreign Secretary!’¹¹⁶⁵ Albert was similarly sanguine when he told his brother that Palmerston, ‘the man who embittered our whole life’, had ‘cut his own throat’.¹¹⁶⁶

Russell however knew full well the risk he was taking in dismissing Palmerston. His former foreign secretary was popular in parliament and in the country and could cause serious trouble for his government. Disraeli understood this just as well. He wrote to Derby observing that following Palmerston’s dismissal, the ‘cabinet was now very sick’.¹¹⁶⁷ Russell’s government did not last long. It was defeated on the 20th of February over an amendment to the militia bill. Russell resigned and Derby was called to form a ministry. Once again, Derby tried to form a ministry that would be able to command the Commons. Disraeli offered to relinquish the leadership of the lower House to

¹¹⁶¹ Ghosh, ‘Disraelian Conservatism’, p.268

¹¹⁶² Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.7; Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.203; Hurd, *Disraeli*, pp.142-143

¹¹⁶³ Parry, ‘Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880’, p.153

¹¹⁶⁴ H.F.C. Bell, *Lord Palmerston*, vol.2, pp.47-49

¹¹⁶⁵ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, V to King Leopold, 23rd of December 1851, vol.2, p.417

¹¹⁶⁶ Bell, *Lord Palmerston*, vol.2, p.52

¹¹⁶⁷ *Disraeli’s Letters*, D to Derby, 3rd of January 1852, vol.? p.? (double check); Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, p.9

Palmerston should he join the ministry.¹¹⁶⁸ Derby replied, thanking him for his offer and told him that, ‘he would never forget his generous self-sacrifice’, and suggesting that, ‘it must ultimately rebound to the credit and advantage of a man who makes it from public motives’.¹¹⁶⁹ However, Palmerston turned down Derby’s offer of a cabinet position. At the same time, he strongly impressed upon Derby his happiness to work alongside Disraeli. His opposition to joining the ministry was justified, ostensibly, on the grounds of its Protectionism. He argued that this was no longer an open question. He had been in favour of a moderate fixed duty in 1846. But he insisted that to question the principle of Free Trade in 1852 was impossible.¹¹⁷⁰ As Hawkins has suggested, it was perfectly possible that, having observed the weakness of both Russell’s Whigs and Derby’s Tories, he was now ‘possibly playing for higher stakes’.¹¹⁷¹

Without the prospect of attracting Palmerston, nor bothering to attempt to convince the Peelites after his bad experience with them in 1850, Derby pressed on, seeking to form a cabinet from within his own party. Disraeli to his own, and indeed many others surprise, was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer. Disraeli had his own doubts about his suitability to the post. His only real experience of high finance involved the huge sums of money he had lost speculating on South American mining, and the subsequent management and servicing of his mountainous personal debts. Needless to say, his doubts were assuaged by Lord Derby who famously told him: ‘You know as much as Canning did. They give you all the figures’.¹¹⁷² Gladstone observed to his wife that ‘Disraeli could not have been worse placed than at the Exchequer’.¹¹⁷³ Lord Ashley, was at least slightly sympathetic to Disraeli plight: ‘alas, poor man, he has in his day insulted and tortured a many: now they will insult and torture him’.¹¹⁷⁴ In fact, Disraeli’s inexperience in, or unsuitability to, the Exchequer was the least of Derby’s problems. His government was wholly inexperienced. There were only three members of the cabinet of had held cabinet position before: Derby, Lonsdale and Herries.¹¹⁷⁵ The majority of its members sat in the Lords. Its ranks had been padded out through the appointments of members of leading aristocratic families. So much so that Disraeli dryly reported to his sister that ‘never was a faction so feasted!’.¹¹⁷⁶ The state of Derby’s cabinet was widely commented on. The Queen privately observed to her Uncle that it was ‘a very sorry Cabinet. I believe however that it is quite necessary they should have a trial’.¹¹⁷⁷ Aberdeen, having waited to see Derby’s cabinet completed, recorded his ‘sincere pity for Lord Derby, whose great talents, and high character, are thrown away in a hopeless undertaking’.¹¹⁷⁸ The inexperience of the cabinet was perhaps best exhibited during their swearing-in as Privy Councillors. This extraordinary scene was immortalized many years by Disraeli in *Endymion*, where seventeen ministers: ‘men without the slightest experience of official life, had to be sworn in as privy-councillors, before even they could receive the seals and insignia of their intended offices... a spectacle never seen before, and which, in all probability, will never be seen again’.¹¹⁷⁹

This was a mass baptism that Blake has likened to the investiture of the Labour Party in 1924. That may be overstating the matter. It is difficult to believe that the ascension of the Tory squirearchy

¹¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, D to Derby, 20th of February 1852, vol.6, p.21

¹¹⁶⁹ Derby to Disraeli, 21st of February 1852, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 109/1 f.48

¹¹⁷⁰ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.13

¹¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.13

¹¹⁷² *Disraeli’s Reminiscences*, p.52

¹¹⁷³ Quoted in Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.206

¹¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.206

¹¹⁷⁵ M&B, vol.3, p.346

¹¹⁷⁶ *Disraeli’s Letters*, D to Sarah Disraeli, vol.6, p.60

¹¹⁷⁷ *Queen Victoria’s Letters*, Victoria to King Leopold, 24th of February 1852, vol.2, p.450

¹¹⁷⁸ Lady Francis Balfour, *Life of George, Fourth Earl of Aberdeen*, vol.2 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923) p.167

¹¹⁷⁹ *Endymion*, p.461

occasioned quite as much of a threat to contemporary order of the world.¹¹⁸⁰ However, the ministry's ill-omened beginning was perhaps best summed up when the old and increasing deaf Duke of Wellington cried out 'Who? Who?' as Derby listed his new cabinet to the House of Lords. Hawkins has correctly identified that with the paucity of talent on the Government's front bench, the survival of the ministry relied heavily on 'his own experience, capability and success as a Prime Minister'.¹¹⁸¹ The fact was the ministry was doomed to fail because of its stance over Free Trade. Neither Palmerston nor and of the Peelites would offer support to his government while this remained an open issue. Moreover, the very vagueness of their stance on this question actually dissuaded some the hard-liner protectionists within the party from offering their support either. Newdgate refused the Vice-Presidency of the Indian Board of Control because of his doubts over the Party leadership's commitment to Protection. This, as Hawkins has observed, when combined with Granby's exclusion, 'had left an Ultra Tory knot of fervent Protectionists outside the constraint of ministerial responsibility'.¹¹⁸² And they were probably right to doubt the commitment of Derby and Disraeli in this respect. At the back end of 1851, Disraeli, by then with Derby's cautious consent, had begun to set the foundations for the abandonment of Protectionism. This was the beginning of a long road to detach the party from one of its old nostrums. For both Disraeli and Derby realized what many of their party did not. This was that Toryism was a lost political cause while it still attached itself to the reintroduction of protective tariffs. With a parliamentary majority arrayed against them, and with free trade now a unifying principle among opposition groups, the Tories could not survive while 'Protection remained the party's defining policy'.¹¹⁸³ However, the principle could not be suddenly abandoned. As Hawkins has observed 'the abandonment of Protection required a careful and dignified retreat. To act precipitously would be to alienate the bulk of his Conservative Commons support'.¹¹⁸⁴ Disraeli had begun this process back in 1850, when he proposed financial reform as a replacement for Protective duties, albeit then to no avail.

On 11th April, Disraeli once again proposed an amendment to Wood's Assessed Taxes Act, to combat 'the extreme distress of the agricultural community'.¹¹⁸⁵ It was defeated by a narrow majority which at least suggested that tax reform could pose a viable and palatable alternative to Protection. Disraeli followed this with a speech at Aylesbury arguing that, 'to uphold a system that exists, and to bring back a system that has been abrogated, are two different things'. Instead of trying to reintroduce Protection 'which can never be brought back unless it is in the interest of all classes', it would be better to seek justice for the agricultural interest, through equal taxation with their industrial counterparts.¹¹⁸⁶ To some worried Protectionists, it appeared that Disraeli was abandoning principle of Protection. But Derby defended Disraeli commenting that, 'Disraeli said nothing more than he said a dozen times before, and I had said myself, that to look for a restoration of Protection in this parliament was idle'.¹¹⁸⁷ Throughout the duration of Derby's first ministry, Disraeli was almost completely occupied, with attempting to maintain a near impossible balancing act. That was not least because he and Derby disagreed over tactics. Disraeli was increasingly keen to jettison the party's support for Protectionism. His Premier wanted to at least keep up the pretence of supporting protection, until the country had voted on the issue.¹¹⁸⁸ Though Derby had privately admitted to Prince Albert that the issue of Protection was dead, he also told the Prince that he could not abandon

¹¹⁸⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.313

¹¹⁸¹ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.16

¹¹⁸² *Ibid*, p.15

¹¹⁸³ *Ibid*, p.3

¹¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.3

¹¹⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 11th of April, 1851, v.116 c.26

¹¹⁸⁶ *The Times*, 18th of September 1851, p.5

¹¹⁸⁷ Derby to Eglington, 27th of November 1851, cited in Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.3

¹¹⁸⁸ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, pp.24-25

the issue with dignity until the futility of the cause had been confirmed by the electorate.¹¹⁸⁹ As Hawkins has observed, Disraeli and Derby differed essentially on the timing of the announcement. Derby wished to wait, while Disraeli did not want to face the electorate waving the banner of a cause which they both privately acknowledged to be lost.¹¹⁹⁰

Delivering his interim budget to the House, Disraeli attempted the force Derby's hand. He did little to bring onside the most fervent of his Protectionist supporters. In fact, he actively enraged them by saying in public what both he and the Prime Minister had long believed privately. He delivered what Greville would call 'a magnificent funeral oration on Peel's policy'.¹¹⁹¹ Disraeli effectively endorsed Free Trade and declared the principles of agricultural Protection dead. He declared that, following a decade of continuous reductions of import duties, it 'would be somewhat presumptuous on my part to suppose that I could induce the present House of Commons to supply that deficiency by the imposition of fresh duties upon imports'.¹¹⁹² As Sarah Bradford has observed, he not only wanted to prove to his opponents that he could handle the Exchequer, but in so doing was 'determined that not even lip-service should be paid to the fallen idol of Protection'.¹¹⁹³ The speech was in some ways successful. Certainly, it was an honest presentation of both Disraeli's and Derby's personal beliefs. Moreover, it impressed many of his own critics. Greville recorded that Disraeli displayed 'his great ability, and showed how neatly he could handle a subject such as finance', and by applying his 'naturally clear, ready and acute' mind he produced 'a financial statement the excellence of which was universally admitted'.¹¹⁹⁴ Sir Charles Wood, Disraeli's predecessor in the role expressed his 'sincere pleasure...[to] have heard this most successful exposition of the first budget which he has brought forward'. He congratulated Disraeli for his clear explanation of not only 'the financial state of the country, but the views which he, on the part of the Government, felt bound to express'.¹¹⁹⁵ The Times, reporting on the Budget, claimed that 'the last rag of Protection was put into a red box, and when the lid was opened a perfect chancellor of the Exchequer appeared, who immediately opened his mouth and made a first rate financial statement'.¹¹⁹⁶ But while he may have gained a new found respect amongst his critics, Derby was furious. He wrote Disraeli a letter, scribbled over fifteen pages, reprimanding Disraeli for delivering 'one of the strongest Free Trade speeches...ever heard', and, 'a eulogy of Peel'.¹¹⁹⁷ Surely, Derby continued, 'the silence of our friends and the rapturous and triumphant cheers with which the opposite side of the House greeted [each point]...must have shown you...that you were making out a triumphant case for the Free Trade Policy which is the mainstay of our Opponents'.¹¹⁹⁸ Derby then did his best, to use Hawkins words, to repair Disraeli's 'contentious clarity, [and] restored a conciliatory ambiguity'.¹¹⁹⁹

The General Election in the Summer of 1852 did very little to help resolve the difficulties in Parliament. The results were inconclusive. No party secured a decisive majority. In many ways, the Tories had very attractive policies to offer to the electorate. This was true even with regard to Free Trade, perhaps their defining position: most people were similarly unclear where they stood.¹²⁰⁰ The election had also been coloured with a strong anti-Catholic tincture. This helped the Tories in some

¹¹⁸⁹ *Queen Victoria's Letters*, 22nd of March 1852, vol.2, p.466

¹¹⁹⁰ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.25

¹¹⁹¹ Greville *Memoirs*, vol.6, p.341

¹¹⁹² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons Debates, 30th of April 1852, v.121 c.12

¹¹⁹³ Bradford, *Disraeli*, pp.206-207

¹¹⁹⁴ *Greville Memoirs*, vol.6, p.342

¹¹⁹⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons Debates, 30th of April 1852, v.121 c.37

¹¹⁹⁶ *The Times*, 1st of May 1852, p.5

¹¹⁹⁷ Derby to Disraeli, 30th of April 1852, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 109/1 f.54

¹¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, f.54

¹¹⁹⁹ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.26

¹²⁰⁰ Bradford, p.208

areas of the country. But Disraeli was concerned that it had ‘alienated moderate opinion elsewhere’.¹²⁰¹ The Whigs who had resorted to fanning the flames of ‘No-Popery’, opportunistically cashing in the febrile mood of the nation. This had backfired spectacularly, as it lost them the support of many Radicals, Liberals, and the Irish Brigade-- all of whom the Whigs had at one point or another leant on for support. Both sides, in effect, botched the election. The result, as Greville put it, was ‘confusion and uncertainty’.¹²⁰² Disraeli was frustrated by the outcome. He told Stanley that ‘we built an opposition on Protection and Protestantism. The first the country has positively pissed upon...the second great principle...[has] worked us harm’.¹²⁰³

The anti-Catholic feeling in the Tory campaign provoked Peelite sensibilities. They agreed to join the Whigs in a Free Trade assault on what was still nominally a Protectionist government. The first real challenge came on the 23rd of November. Charles Villiers tabled a motion: “That it is the opinion of this House, that the improved condition of the Country, and particularly of the Industrious Classes, is mainly the result of recent Commercial Legislation, and especially of the Act of 1846, which established the free admission of Foreign Corn, and that that Act was a wise, just, and beneficial measure.”¹²⁰⁴ Ironically, Disraeli was more than happy to adopt Free Trade. But the wording of the motion was clearly aimed to humiliate the Government. Indeed, Disraeli privately feared that it was not aimed at bringing about a change of ministry, but rather to maintain the Conservative Government in ‘a humiliating tenure’.¹²⁰⁵ The Government was spared this mortification, through an amendment proposed by Palmerston, who privately agreed with Disraeli to introduce a compromise to the original statement. His amendment dropped any mention of the 1846 Free Trade Legislation being wise or just, thus ‘both saving the honour of the government and clearly affirming their acceptance of the policy of Free Trade’.¹²⁰⁶ The debate on Free Trade and 1846 naturally resurrected old memories of those heated debates. Disraeli’s position in this respect was rather vulnerable. Having pursued Peel so vehemently six years before, he now sat on the treasury bench endorsing the very ideas he had fought against in 1846. He seemed aware of this: ‘I appeal to the generous and the young. And I ask them to pause now that they are at last arrived on the threshold of the Senate of their country, and not become the tools and the victims of exhausted factions and obsolete politics.’¹²⁰⁷ That is not to conclude that his behaviour was entirely opportunist. While he was no staunch defender of the Corn Laws themselves, Disraeli believed that the repeal of protective tariffs should not have been made a party question in 1846. Moreover, Peel had offered no financial relief to those agriculturalists affected by repeal. Once the Corn Laws had been repealed, Disraeli saw more clearly than perhaps any other Tory that they could not be reinstated. Financial protection for the landed classes must be achieved some other way.

The debates on Villiers motion had been heated. But the real test was yet to come. On the 3rd of December, Disraeli had to introduce his budget to the Commons. The success or failure of the budget had now taken on increasing importance. If the budget passed, then Derby and Disraeli were hopeful of realigning the Commons and restructuring the party by absorbing Palmerston and leading Peelites.¹²⁰⁸ This was a difficult task for Disraeli. His aim, which had been taking shape for some time as his understanding of the financial needs of the country developed, was to arrive at a broad and fair

¹²⁰¹ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.37

¹²⁰² *Greville Memoirs*, vol.6, p.462

¹²⁰³ *Disraeli's Letters*, D to Stanley, 18th of July 1852, vol.6, p.95

¹²⁰⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd series, 23rd of November 1852, v.123 c.351

¹²⁰⁵ Disraeli to Derby, 19th of November 1852, cited in Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.48

¹²⁰⁶ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, pp.48-49

¹²⁰⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 23rd of November 1852, v.123 c.411

¹²⁰⁸ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.51

settlement between the warring urban and rural interests. In Disraeli's words, to: 'terminate that unhappy quarrel between town and country'.¹²⁰⁹ But as Parry has observed, he also aimed 'to compensate the interests that had benefitted from protection, and in particular to check the damage being done to the unity of the landed interest by the growing tension between landlords and farmers.'¹²¹⁰ These aims, from a Conservative perspective, were both admirable and sensible. Having freed the party from the shackles of Protection, his principal purpose was to deliver a budget that was both acceptable to a majority of the Commons and that offered another form of financial relief to the landed interest in the place of protective tariffs. How this relief might be achieved had been a preoccupation of Disraeli's from as early as 1848. By the time he delivered his budget, he had advanced a number of different schemes which might replace Protection. Disraeli proposed relief of agricultural poor-rates to redress 'the enormous injustice of the landed interest paying in their present state of suffering more than their fair proportion of the poor-rate.'¹²¹¹ He also suggested a repeal or reduction in the malt tax, which was not 'a mere question of finance', but rather an opportunity to 'put the cultivators of the soil on an equality with the other classes of the community...[as] if you choose to establish a system of taxation under which you raise from one class a large amount to which the others do not contribute, you must, by some fiscal arrangement, place those extra contributing classes on the same level of taxation...as the other classes.'¹²¹² Disraeli also supported a differentiation of income tax, which was unfairly borne by the agricultural classes, with a particular burden on tenant farmers who were less able to bear the losses suffered by the removal of Protection. He argued that the current arrangements for income tax 'should be made more equitable' in the case of tenant-farmers and that current provisions were 'not taxation, but confiscation... continue that system—continue it even on a greater scale, as is the tendency of our present legislation—and you are attacking the capital of the country—you are diminishing the capital of the country, and the means for the employment of labour.'¹²¹³ He also briefly floated the idea of the creation of a sinking fund to act as a breakwater against the gradual disappearance of indirect taxation and with the aim, 'that a bona fide sinking fund, by lowering the rate of interest, would relieve the mortgagor and bring capital to improve cultivation'.¹²¹⁴ At one point, and perhaps most radically, he proposed to the younger Stanley a scheme of inflationary currency reform in order to raise agricultural prices.¹²¹⁵ These programmes all had one thing in common: a desire to relieve the landed classes of some of their financial burdens, while simultaneously disavowing the fallen idol of agricultural protection. They were, in Ghosh's words, 'a testimony to his remarkable ingenuity but also to his ignorance of established canons of financial policy.'¹²¹⁶ However, to Disraeli's misfortune, his enthusiasm to involve himself with financial matters, while certainly naive in proposing these largely contrasting measures in such quick succession, was branded as blatant opportunism by contemporary critics and modern historians alike.

Disraeli's budget has perhaps been unfairly criticised. Not only was he learning on the job, but he had to introduce a budget which would receive support from inside as well as outside his own party. Moreover, many of his most generous proposals, and with them the dreams of a popular giveaway budget, were scuppered by an eleventh-hour letter from the Admiralty requesting a £1,000,000 increase to Naval Estimates.¹²¹⁷ Whatever, when Disraeli introduced his budget in

¹²⁰⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of February 1851, v.114 c.414

¹²¹⁰ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.711

¹²¹¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of April 1851, v.116 c.408; see also: 8th of March 1849, v.106 cc.424-453; 19th of February 1850, v.103 cc.1026-45

¹²¹² *Ibid*, House of Commons, 8th of May 1851, vol.116 cc.711-715

¹²¹³ *Ibid*, House of Commons, 2nd of May 1851, v.116, cc.476-84

¹²¹⁴ Disraeli to Stanley, 24th of September 1849, M&B, vol.3, p.217; For more on the Sinking Fund see pp.213-233

¹²¹⁵ *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party*, 3rd of July 1850, pp.23-24; Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.269

¹²¹⁶ Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.269

¹²¹⁷ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.52

December 1852, he had settled on a series of measures that he thought might be acceptable to his own supporters, but also to another portion of the House. With regard to agricultural relief, he chose the route of reduction of the malt tax. The high tax on Malt in 1852 had rendered it less desirable to the consumer and farmer alike. The land had turned to the production of wheat as demand was high and prices lower, since the repeal of Protection in 1846. If a bold approach to Malt Tax reduction were not taken ‘the consumer will not be benefited—the cultivator of the soil will not be benefited—you’ll neither have cheap beer,’ nor will you have a freer cultivation of the land of the country.’¹²¹⁸ Thus Disraeli proposed ‘that we should diminish by one-half the amount of the present duty on malt’.¹²¹⁹ The proposed slashing of the Malt Tax was Disraeli’s flagship policy in offering financial relief to the agricultural interest.¹²²⁰ It was however a surprising one, and ironically the weak point of his budget. As Ghosh has shrewdly recognised, Malt Tax reduction was a relatively obscure cause. Disraeli had much more success pursuing rate relief in the years prior to his budget. Moreover, a decrease in the Malt Tax crossed one of the Peelite financial orthodoxies that regarded Malt Tax reduction as ‘pernicious’ with the effect that it ‘encouraged illicit distillation of spirits’, leading to a diminishing consumption of beer and a subsequently decreasing Malt revenue.¹²²¹ This was one of Disraeli’s key mistakes. Of all the hares to start, rate relief would have been a safer bet and more palatable to the Peelites. His budget also proposed a reduction of the tea duty.¹²²² This was certainly Disraeli’s way of underlining his commitment to the principles of Free Trade by engaging actively in the further reduction of import duties. It was also a tactically sound proposal. By offering continuity in repeal of duties, he was able to appeal to both Liberals and Peelites. By choosing tea as the commodity the exhibit these the party’s new-found Free Trade beliefs, he steered well clear of the agricultural interests and thus did not upset the lingering Protectionist sensibilities in those behind him.

Secondly, Disraeli’s budget attempted to tackle the perceived inequality in direct and indirect taxation that had arisen in the previous decade. The existing income tax arrangements, as set out by the Income Tax Act, unfairly burdened the landed and agricultural classes and had been introduced only as a temporary measure. As Ghosh has argued, ‘under Peel the object of income tax had seemed clear, and its termination always within reach; under the Whigs it was drifting into permanency for no good aim at all.’¹²²³ Disraeli therefore proposed a three-year permanent tax to turn direct income tax into a ‘form not temporary but permanent features of our system of finance’ as he believed that ‘direct taxation should be nearly as universal in its application as indirect taxation’.¹²²⁴ This revision of income tax was designed, as Hawkins has observed, ‘to provide a conciliatory substitute for import tariffs, as a means of restoring the constitutional balance disrupted by Free Trade.’¹²²⁵ Disraeli attempted to achieve this by acknowledging ‘a difference between permanent and precarious incomes’¹²²⁶ That was to be achieved by differentiating between the five separate schedules of income tax. He proposed to lower the rate of taxation on schedules B, D and E which referred farmers, trade and industry and salary earner respectively. This would recognise these as earned, ‘precarious’, incomes and differentiate them from the more ‘permanent’ classes of property under schedules A and C.¹²²⁷ Moreover, he also intended to extend, and in fact double, the recently reintroduced House Tax to find £1,000,000 in further taxation. The requirement for extra taxation had been necessitated by the

¹²¹⁸ *Hansard*, Third Series, House of Commons, 3rd of December 1852, v.123, c.864

¹²¹⁹ *Ibid*, c.865

¹²²⁰ This was in addition to the proposed reduction of Income Tax Schedule B discussed below

¹²²¹ Ghosh, ‘Disraelian Conservatism’, pp.279-280

¹²²² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 3rd of December 1852, v.123 cc.868-72

¹²²³ Ghosh, ‘Disraelian Conservatism’, p.272

¹²²⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 3rd of December 1852, v.123 c.880

¹²²⁵ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.53

¹²²⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 3rd of December 1852, v.123 c.887

¹²²⁷ *Ibid*, cc.888-889; Ghosh ‘Disraelian Conservatism’, pp.272-273

Cabinet's and Derby's refusal to allow Disraeli to long annuities over a further ten years.¹²²⁸ Increasing House Tax was a move which on the face of it may have seemed somewhat heavy-handed in a parliament where the landed interest was in a minority and requiring urban support for the passage of legislation. However, despite its obvious class connotations, it was generally seen as an equitable taxation, and far more equitable than the Window Tax it replaced, as Charles Wood argued in his 1851 budget: 'At present large houses yielding very little rent pay more duty than other houses which have a smaller number of windows, but which are infinitely more valuable', this was 'exceedingly unfair, and a very unsound principle of taxation. This will be quite reversed by the proposed house tax; because each house will pay in exact proportion to its annual value, whatever that may be.'¹²²⁹ That particular part of Wood's budget had generated considerable support from both sides of the House. Thus when Disraeli proposed to raise £1,000,000 through an increase to the House Tax, he committed himself to something not quite so simple as Macaulay's superficial assessment that the budget was merely 'taking money out of the pockets of the people in the towns, and putting it into the pockets of the growers of malt.'¹²³⁰ Oddly, this was a judgement to which Lord Blake also subscribed.¹²³¹ Yet despite its generally moderate and well-meant intentions, to 'reconstruct on juster principles—principles which have always been eulogised in this House—an imperfect law',¹²³² its inclusion was a mistake. In fact, Disraeli had intended to drop the increase and only included the increase to the House Tax at Lord Derby's behest.¹²³³ The reintroduction of House Tax had been a broadly popular piece of legislation when it replaced iniquitous Window Tax. Disraeli's increase to the House Tax was necessitated by increased defence expenditure and Derby's insistence on a large surplus in the budget.¹²³⁴ As Ghosh has argued, this was the one truly expedient element of the budget, and 'it was none of Disraeli's doing'.¹²³⁵

The underlying aim of Disraeli's budget was an attempt to show the ability of the Conservative party to accept the canonical financial principles of the age—free trade and uninhibited competition—while simultaneously finding a new way of providing financial relief for the agricultural classes. In principle, it was a budget that managed this balancing act very skilfully. In its immediate aftermath Disraeli's budget speech was widely applauded. Derby, reporting to the Queen, called it 'a most masterly performance', which 'kept alive the attention of the House' and that he had 'no hesitation in saying that the general first impression was very favourable, and that, as a whole, the Budget seemed to meet with the approval of the House'.¹²³⁶ Greville was much of the same opinion, writing that it had been 'on the whole tolerably well received, and may, I think, be considered a success.'¹²³⁷ However, in the days after his protracted speech introducing the measure, Disraeli's budget came under increasing criticism from the opposition benches. The former Whig Chancellor Sir Charles Wood attacked the whole conception of the budget. He argued that 'the reduction of the malt tax will absolutely give nothing to the agriculturist'.¹²³⁸ These criticisms regarding direct taxation were echoed by the Radical luminary Richard Cobden. He was particularly damning on the increase of House Tax, simply to 'meet the deficiency arising from the reduction of the malt tax'. He claimed that he would not support any other tax up cover the reduction of the malt tax, and 'only in the case of a sufficient surplus' would he 'vote for the reduction or the abolition of the malt tax', which was not

¹²²⁸ Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.275

¹²²⁹ *Ibid.*, House of Commons, 4th of April 1851, v.115, c.1060

¹²³⁰ G.O. Trevelyan (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, (London: Longmans Green, 1903), vol.2, p.338

¹²³¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.333

¹²³² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 3rd of December 1852, v.123 c.902

¹²³³ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.53

¹²³⁴ Derby to Disraeli, 30th of November 1852, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 109/1 f.81

¹²³⁵ Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.279

¹²³⁶ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, vol.2, pp.406-407

¹²³⁷ *Greville Memoirs*, vol.7, p.13

¹²³⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 10th of December 1852, v.123 c.1297

the case.¹²³⁹ Disraeli's proposition to differentiate income tax was predictably abhorrent to the Peel's former Chancellor Henry Goulburn, who insisted that Disraeli's proposals surrounding income tax 'had made the funded property of the country...the most precarious property, for he had made it dependent on the will of a Minister' While the Liberal MP Ralph Bernal Osbourne decried it is a thinly-veiled attack on the Middle classes.¹²⁴⁰

What was evident was that as the debate progressed the early optimism of the Tory leadership looked increasingly misplaced. The tide was turning fast against the Tories and the chances of successfully passing the budget were diminishing. With Palmerston's sudden illness keeping absent from Parliament, there was no possibility of reaching out to him to secure support amongst the Peelites. Thus, on the evening of the 15th of December, in order to secure the safe-passage of his budget, Disraeli appealed, with 'characteristic expediency', first to the Irish Brigade to broker a deal for their support, by offering them reform of Irish tenants' rights.¹²⁴¹ When this scheme failed, he invited John Bright to visit him at Grosvenor Gate. In an effort to induce the Radicals to support the budget, he offered to 'give up House Tax and Malt, and remodel his scheme'.¹²⁴² He was unsuccessful. Bright declined his offer. This conversation, together with Disraeli's inconsistency about a definite course of agricultural relief has been taken as evidence of his striking lack on political principles: trying, in effect, to manufacture a pragmatic alliance between two parties at seemingly opposite ends of the political spectrum¹²⁴³ Some scholars have recognised the 'radical' colour of Disraeli's budget, seeing Income Tax differentiation as a distinctly Radical policy.¹²⁴⁴ Matthew had gone further, and had suggested that the inclusion of differentiation marked the budget as one that appealed for 'a pincer movement against the centre extreme of Westminster politics', confessing only his surprise that Disraeli did not seek out Bright's support earlier.¹²⁴⁵

These conclusions fail to stand up to serious scrutiny. First, we must accept that if Disraeli was not willing to propose measures that would be popular, or at least acceptable, to other sections of the House his Budget was doomed from the start. Secondly, income tax differentiation was not Radical measure in its own right. The Radicals in parliament were far from united in supporting it. In fact, its only advocate among the leading Radicals was Joseph Hume. Disraeli had sat on Hume's committee to look into the viability of differentiating income tax rates. But he did not pursue the policy in order to bounce the Tories into an opportunist political alliance with the Radicals. In fact, income tax differentiation was one of a number of options that Disraeli look into which might have gained cross-party support.¹²⁴⁶ Indeed, even Disraeli's eleventh-hour meeting with Bright has been misconstrued. He proposed to drop Malt Tax reduction and the increase to House Tax for Radical support. These, as we have seen, proved to be the weakest and least palatable sections of his budget. As Ghosh has so shrewdly observed, 'what Disraeli was abandoning here was not his principles but the original, ambitious scope of the scheme.'¹²⁴⁷ Disraeli's had always aimed to offer a moderate budget which provided new protection for the agricultural interest but could appeal to a broadly consisted majority of the House.

Derby, perhaps concerned that Disraeli was conceding to much of the budget in order to get the required votes, wrote to him on the eve of the division and made clear his opposition to gaining

¹²³⁹ *Ibid*, House of Commons, 13th of December, v.123 c.1336

¹²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, House of Commons, 14th of December 1852, v.123, c.1457

¹²⁴¹ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.55; Conacher, *Peelites and the Party System*, p.168

¹²⁴² Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, p.206

¹²⁴³ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.342-343; H.C.G. Matthew, 'Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Politics of Mid-Victorian Budgets', *The Historical Journal*, 22.3 (1979), pp.621-622

¹²⁴⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.330

¹²⁴⁵ Matthew, 'Politics of the Mid-Victorian Budget', pp.621-622

¹²⁴⁶ Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', pp.273-275

¹²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.280

support from unnatural allies. He told Disraeli that ‘we may buy off a hostile vote before Christmas; but how shall one stand afterwards? We have staked our existence on the budget as a whole.’¹²⁴⁸ Disraeli, by this point, was quite resigned to the failure of his first major budget. Nevertheless, he rose to a packed House of Commons, having endured ‘four nights of criticism, conducted by some of the most considerable reputations in this House’, he turned on these most vocal critics.¹²⁴⁹ It was a dazzling oratorical display. Bright recorded in his diary that Disraeli ‘fought for his life, and never man fought more desperately or with more skill or power. This speech was his greatest speech; he was earnest; argument, sarcasm, satire, invective, all were abundant and of the first class’.¹²⁵⁰ Even Gladstone, who was to follow Disraeli and was ultimately became the chief architect of the budgets failure, told his wife, ‘his superlative acting and brilliant oratory from time to time absorbed me and made me quite forget I had to follow him. His speech as a whole was grand; I think the most powerful I have ever heard from him’ He depicted the former Conservative Chancellor Goulburn, as a “weird Sibyl” who ‘gave forth that solemn oracle’.¹²⁵¹ Above all, he attacked his predecessor Sir Charles Wood whom him stung with a series of stinging retorts, finishing: ‘if he has learnt his business, he has still to learn some other things—he has to learn that petulance is not sarcasm, and that insolence is not invective.’¹²⁵² Derby commented on Disraeli’s treatment of Wood: ‘again and again, demolishing him at each onset, and closing with a personal invective which maddened the House with excitement. Never did one parliamentary speaker receive a severer infliction at the hands of another.’¹²⁵³ His speech concluded, with the defiant, but accurate, taunt to the opposition: ‘Yes! I know what I have to face. I have to face a coalition. The combination may be successful. A coalition has before this been successful. But coalitions, although successful, have always found this, that their triumph has been brief. This too I know, that England does not love coalitions.’¹²⁵⁴

Disraeli knew full well that his budget did not have the required support. His speech was a last sally against the coalition of forces determined to see the Conservatives fail. It was Gladstone who would be the final executioner of Derby’s government and Disraeli’s tenure in the Exchequer. Rising to a torrent of abuse from the Tory benches, Gladstone, in response to Disraeli’s summation, delivered one of the most famous and devastating orations which dismantled, piece by piece, the Chancellor’s budget. His speech started as a lecture on Disraeli’s behaviour replete with cheap personal attacks. But in the main he attacked the principles of the budget and defended the memory and principles of Sir Robert Peel. His frequent appeals to Peel’s memory furnished him with the authority to denounce Disraeli’s comparatively lightweight and ill-conceived financial beliefs. He concluded: ‘I vote against the Budget of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, not only because I disapprove upon general grounds of the principles of that Budget, but emphatically and peculiarly because in my conscience...it is my firm conviction that the Budget is one...[of] the most subversive in its tendencies and ultimate effects which I have ever known submitted to this House.’¹²⁵⁵ The government was duly defeated. Derby offered his resignation to the Queen the following day.¹²⁵⁶

Disraeli’s budget, despite Gladstone and other Peelite’s protestations, was a coherent and principled proposition. There can no doubt that Disraeli faced a very difficult task from the outset. The result was in fact a remarkable attempt to reconcile the demands of his own backbenchers with the necessity of securing a moderate and equitable majority within the House. Disraeli knew, and

¹²⁴⁸ Derby to Disraeli, 15th of December 1852, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 109/1 f.83

¹²⁴⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 16th of December 1852, v.123, c.1629

¹²⁵⁰ Trevelyan, *The Life of Bright*, p.207

¹²⁵¹ *Ibid*, c.1660

¹²⁵² *Ibid*, c.1653

¹²⁵³ cited in Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.212

¹²⁵⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 16th of December 1852, v.123 cc.1665-1666

¹²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, c.1691

¹²⁵⁶ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.57

Derby insisted, that this was the only way of maintaining the party's principles and fostering greater public trust in their abilities. As Ghosh has commented 'every one of the major proposals discussed bears this stamp, and the budget fully deserved the economica it received'.¹²⁵⁷ Thus the question remains: why did the budget fail? Put simply, it was defeated by a coalition. The Peelites and the Whigs were able to coalesce during the budget debates. This ultimately proved an insurmountable barrier to any moderate majority Disraeli was seeking to construct. However, there were other forces at work too. In 1852, as in 1859, the threat of war meant that there was a late change to the defence estimates for the following year. In this case, it was worries over Napoleon III's imperial ambitions that made Disraeli's budget less attractive.¹²⁵⁸ In both cases, those considerations sank any chance of a munificent, wide-reaching, budget. We should also not underestimate the influence of Lord Derby in this ministry: 'he commanded his ministry...and was determined to control his cabinet', his abilities, intelligence and the comparative inexperience of his cabinet ensured his position of 'primas inter impares'.¹²⁵⁹ In the case of Disraeli's budget, Derby's unyielding instance on 'doctoring' the surplus and maintaining the increase in Income Tax certainly hurt Disraeli's chances of securing the bill's passage.¹²⁶⁰ These were setbacks which did nothing to help the budget's chances. It was also not without its weaknesses.¹²⁶¹ However, it was an undoubtedly ambitious and broad budget. It aimed to challenge the Peelites' claims to financial supremacy and to re-establish the Conservatives as a party of sound and moderate government. Had Disraeli attempted a more modest budget, ignoring the question of differentiation of income tax, proposed smaller reductions to tea and malt duties, and dropped the increase to house tax, it might even have passed. But he would have failed in achieving his larger objectives. He well realised that 'a little budget that passed would do nothing for the ministry', but also knew that 'a big one that determined the solution to central problems might secure its position for good'.¹²⁶²

Defeat was undoubtedly hurtful to Disraeli. He never had that grounded understanding of canonically accepted financial precedents that Gladstone had inherited from Peel. But his defeat at the hands of Gladstone not only signalled the latter's mastery of financial affairs. It also displayed his and the Peelites ability to 'force their view on the liberal body',¹²⁶³ and to dominate the orthodoxy in financial opinion. However, neither the budget, nor Derby's first ministry, were without significance. They were metaphorical green shoots in a painful political revival. The Conservative party, through Disraeli's and Derby's skill, was freed from the yoke of agricultural Protection and had accepted that financial relief must be found through some other scheme. Moreover, despite their inability to achieve an absolute majority in the House, the Conservatives were by far the biggest single party, now opposed by a patchwork of other political interests. On a personal level, Disraeli's leadership of the Commons looked even more secure. Derby was infuriated that they had joined the Whigs in opposing the government. In his resignation speech, he commented upon the 'character of the combination, and the animus displayed in this settled purpose to overthrow the Government'.¹²⁶⁴ He reported Aberdeen's decision to form a government and expressed his doubt as to how his avowedly Conservative principles 'are to be carried out at present, with such associates and with such support as I apprehend the noble Earl must avail himself of, I confess I entertain some little doubt and

¹²⁵⁷ Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.281

¹²⁵⁸ Parry, 'The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics', p.157

¹²⁵⁹ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.16

¹²⁶⁰ Derby to Disraeli, 30th of November 1852, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 109/2 f.81; Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.53

¹²⁶¹ As discussed above. The choice of Malt Tax cuts to relieve burdened agriculturalists was a divisive choice. Moreover, the inclusion of an uncovered increase to the House Tax proved to be a serious flaw (although this was hardly Disraeli's fault).

¹²⁶² *Ibid*, p.282

¹²⁶³ *Ibid*, p.276

¹²⁶⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Lords, 20th of December 1852, v.123 c.1701

anxiety.¹²⁶⁵ Thus, through the Peelites behaviour throughout the Budget debates and Derby's bitter response, any reunion with the Peelites was now firmly extinguished. As Sarah Bradford has observed 'from now on any threat to Disraeli's leadership would come from within his own party'.¹²⁶⁶

Derby's relationship with Derby still amounted to something less than total trust. But crucially, he was unwilling to sacrifice Disraeli. He had no doubt as to his loyalty to the party and the established constitution. Prince Albert expressed his concerns as to Disraeli's 'democratic tendencies' and feared that he was 'not in his heart favourable to the existing order of things'. Derby stoutly defended Disraeli, arguing that he had 'better reason than anyone to be attached to our constitutional system since he has expressed how easily under it a man may rise'.¹²⁶⁷ Stanley's understanding was that Prince Albert's comments were fuelled by his personal dislike of Disraeli and 'wishing ill to both leaders seeks to disunite them by prejudicing my Father's mind on a point on which it is very susceptible'.¹²⁶⁸ Derby was quick to defend Disraeli. Still, their relationship was by no means perfect. Hawkins has suggested his 'patent ambition and tactical ingenuity prevented Derby from believing in his dependability'.¹²⁶⁹ Yet this understanding of Disraeli's reputation is itself deeply problematic. Assessment of his political career and reputation has often been influenced by the opinions of those who were actively prejudiced against him. Prince Albert and the leading Peelites never trusted him after his comprehensive destruction of Peel. The solid Tory backbenchers, who we are often told never trusted Disraeli, disliked his manners and distrusted his aloofness from the preoccupations of the gentlemanly pursuits of turf and field. While Derby's patrician aloofness from the House of Commons, and his unpopular strategy of 'vigilant inactivity' in opposition, often meant that Disraeli 'acted as a convenient lightning rod for flashes of backbench anger, insulating Derby from the dangerous discharges of discontent'.¹²⁷⁰ The fact remained, that while Derby was perfectly certain of Disraeli's loyalty to the Conservative cause, he was not personally close to Disraeli. While his closeness to his son may have brought back memories of the Henry Stanley affair in 1831.¹²⁷¹

The difference in Derby's and Disraeli's backgrounds, and interests was too great for them ever to foster a warm friendship with one another. Derby's patrician conception of politics determined that he treat public office as an aristocratic duty and grudgingly accept office, also by extension pre-eminence, as an 'obligation of his birth'.¹²⁷² His real passions in life were expressed through the library at Knowsley, in the pages of the Iliad, on the fields of his estate hunting and shooting, or perhaps most prominently around the racetracks of England, in amongst the 'tenants, trainers, jockeys, and bookmakers...[where] he appeared at his most natural'.¹²⁷³ Even their outlook on the world was markedly different. Disraeli had had to make his own way in the world. Derby had perhaps the largest private income of any premier in the Nineteenth Century.¹²⁷⁴ Derby himself acknowledged this difference to Queen Victoria.¹²⁷⁵ Disraeli's Byronic sense of destiny and Romantic mannerisms, coupled with his tendency to switch between bouts of severe despondency and extreme excitement, certainly clashed with Derby's seemingly patrician indifference to events.¹²⁷⁶ Yet despite this they formed a highly successful political partnership, which steered the Conservative party for

¹²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, c.1702

¹²⁶⁶ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.213

¹²⁶⁷ Derby, *Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.90

¹²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.91

¹²⁶⁹ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.65

¹²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.416

¹²⁷¹ Edward Stanley had been elected to Kings Lynn, Bentinck's old seat in 1849, and had quickly become a close ally of Disraeli's and frequent visitor to Grosvenor Gate and Hughenden.

¹²⁷² *Ibid.*, p.64

¹²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.64

¹²⁷⁴ Rubinstein, *Men of Property*, pp.141

¹²⁷⁵ M&B, vol.3, pp.290-291

¹²⁷⁶ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.65

over two decades. It therefore seems a somewhat fanciful notion that Disraeli rose to political pre-eminence leading a party that disfavoured him, under a leader that distrusted him, and answering to a court that actively disliked him.¹²⁷⁷ He was not leader simply on sufferance, as some scholars would like to believe.¹²⁷⁸ Rather, Disraeli's position was one that was achieved through consistent convictions and coherent principles. This paired with heightened political instincts and no lack of collaborative ability which helped overcome the much-noted disadvantages of wealth and birth, and the disparity in background and interests from many of his own party.

It was perhaps the greatest irony that Gladstone, installed as Chancellor in Aberdeen's government, followed in Disraeli's footsteps and passed a similarly generous and wide-reaching budget the following year.¹²⁷⁹ The most striking and successful measure of this piece of legislation was undoubtedly Gladstone's commitment to Income Tax on a sliding scale, with the aim of complete abolition in 1860. This was the coup that maintained the illusion that income tax was 'temporary'. Gladstone's budget, as Matthew has put it, 'simultaneously preserved the income tax, assuaged the differentialists and the direct tax men, and [gave] hope to the abolitionists.'¹²⁸⁰ Gladstone, working from more recent figures than Disraeli the year before, and without the constraints of enforced defence spending, was able to find the necessary funds to secure the success of a truly popular giveaway budget.

It would not be until 1858 that Disraeli would once again take up the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. That is not to say that his preoccupation with finance waned in this period. Certainly, Disraeli's principles of economy were not constrained to opportunist reactions, aimed to relieve the pressures of the Exchequer, as Blake has suggested.¹²⁸¹ Rather they were consistent, developed with experience, and 'based upon on a hard-headed political calculation of continuous validity'.¹²⁸² While Disraeli conformed to the canonical financial principles of the age, we should be careful not to confuse Disraeli's ideas on finance with those of Gladstone. Disraeli did not possess the latter's 'rigid certitude' in financial matters. Moreover, Disraeli's interest in economy was far more political than it was moral. As Ghosh has argued, 'Disraeli did not seek economy for its own sake...nor was economy a preoccupation when taxation was low...[similarly] Disraeli was happy to let expenditure expand freely within the limits imposed by natural growth of the revenue'.¹²⁸³ Thus he had no inclination to chase after Gladstone's cast-iron conception of small spendthrift government. The Crimean War and the financial crisis that followed it confirmed Disraeli's ideas on public finance.¹²⁸⁴ That was: that expenditure should be dictated predominantly by foreign policy. In 1859, he stressed to the Commons that he had 'endeavoured to impress on this House that when you come to public expenditure on a great scale, expenditure depends upon policy'.¹²⁸⁵ This might now seem a painfully obvious observation. But it implied a passive and unassertive attitude to domestic expenditure. This was the idea that in the absence of Britain's involvement in a conflict among the major powers 'no attempt should be made to impose financial controls, and that that economy need not be sought for its own sake in peacetime.'¹²⁸⁶ That was in contrast to a Gladstonian conception of public economy, despite their similarities in outlook with regard to taxation and financial reform.¹²⁸⁷

¹²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.65-67; p.410; pp.415-416

¹²⁷⁸ Cesarani, *Disraeli*, pp.225-235; Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.56; Blake, *Disraeli*, p.?

¹²⁷⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 18th of April 1853, v.125 cc.1350-1426; Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.52

¹²⁸⁰ Matthew, 'Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Politics of Mid-Victorian Budgets', p.631

¹²⁸¹ Blake, p.395

¹²⁸² Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.287

¹²⁸³ *Ibid*, p.287

¹²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.284-285

¹²⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 21st of July 1859, v.155 c.172

¹²⁸⁶ Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.284

¹²⁸⁷ Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp.213-229; pp.233-235; pp.241-243

On the 20th of February 1858, following the resignation of Palmerston, the Queen once again invited Derby to form a government. Derby been unable to form an administration and consequently declined the Queen's invitation in 1855.¹²⁸⁸ Prince Albert noted that 'after what happened in 1851 and 1855, if the Queen made the offer he must accept it, for if he refused, the Conservative party would be broken up for ever.'¹²⁸⁹ Derby knew as well as the Prince Consort that he could not refuse the Queen's invitation once again. Even then he exercised his now trademark wariness. He deliberated before he eventually acquiesced. Disraeli once again took up the seal of the Chancellor the Exchequer. On the 19th of April, he introduced a budget that formed 'an important substantiation of the government's moderate intentions.'¹²⁹⁰ It was a defining moment both for the administration itself and for the continuity of Disraeli's financial policy. Reviewing the state of the country's finances coming off the back of necessary war expenditure and interest incurred on loans raised by the previous Whig chancellor Cornwall Lewis, Disraeli estimated that, 'expenditure and liabilities of the year amount to £67,110,000, and I have estimated our revenue at £63,120,000; there awaits us, therefore, a deficiency to be made up to the amount of £3,990,000.'¹²⁹¹ Despite the engorged liabilities incurred through the Crimean War, Disraeli did not accept that these debts 'constitute sufficiently strong reasons why the country should be prepared to regard the arrangement of 1853, as visionary and fantastic.'¹²⁹² Therefore, in order 'that the arrangement of 1853 should be carried out in spirit',¹²⁹³ Disraeli made a small reduction on the income tax by 7d to 5d. The books were rebalanced by a small increase to stamp duty and the liquidation of existing debts.¹²⁹⁴ Greville recorded that Disraeli's budget 'has been received with favour and excited no opposition in any quarter.'¹²⁹⁵ Derby wrote to congratulate him on 'the signal success of the budget'.¹²⁹⁶ Properly conceived, Disraeli's budget was a Gladstonian proposition with Disraeli's authorship.¹²⁹⁷ Disraeli clearly perceived that the Conservatives must adopt the financial spirit of the age and display their willingness to engage in positive financial reform. As Ralph Earle wrote to Disraeli later in the year, 'a Tory government can only exist by Liberal budgets'¹²⁹⁸ Disraeli's 1858 budget was certainly a success and one that underlined the Conservatives commitment to carrying out moderate government.

The fact was, the 1858 budget offered little in the way of real innovation. It was commendable in its moderate principles. But it was far more an outline of Tory financial intentions than an ambitious effort, as Disraeli had attempted in 1852. Disraeli had a budget prepared to be delivered in 1859. Indeed, he had tipped finance as the area where the Conservatives could win support. Late in 1858 he told Malmesbury that 'the difficulties of the Reform bill [will] not decrease...the revenue flourishes and a popular budget will carry us through'.¹²⁹⁹ At the same time, he informed Mrs. Brydges Willyams that believed 'the state of the country...[to be] as generally prosperous as it ever was at any period in its history. Everything succeeds, foreign and domestic, and the Exchequer is overflowing.'¹³⁰⁰ However, the fall of Derby's government ensured that Disraeli's plans for this budget have received little scholarly attention.¹³⁰¹ Ghosh has addressed this oversight and has suggested that 'it is symptomatic of the neglect which this mid-period enjoys that the mere

¹²⁸⁸ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, pp.106-111

¹²⁸⁹ *Queen Victoria's Letters*, Prince Albert, memorandum, 21st of February 1858, vol.3, p.267

¹²⁹⁰ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.172

¹²⁹¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 19th of April 1858, v.149 c.1276

¹²⁹² *Ibid*, c.1286

¹²⁹³ *Ibid*, c.1287

¹²⁹⁴¹²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, cc.1293-1295

¹²⁹⁵ *Greville Memoirs*, vol.8, p.187

¹²⁹⁶ Derby to Disraeli, 20th of April 1858, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 109/2 f.170

¹²⁹⁷ Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.283; Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.173

¹²⁹⁸ Earle to Disraeli, 15th of July 1858, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 96.2 f.170

¹²⁹⁹ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Malmesbury, 29th of September 1858, vol.7, p.250

¹³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, Disraeli to Mrs. Brydges Willyams, 11th of October 1858, vol.7, p.260

¹³⁰¹ There is no mention of Disraeli's budgetary plans in Blake, *Disraeli*; Bradford, *Disraeli*; Davis, *Disraeli*.

existence of such a project has hardly been hinted at'.¹³⁰² Cesarani noted that Disraeli handled the 1858 budget with 'aplomb', but makes no mention of any plans for 1859, instead directing the energies of his book into dismissing Disraeli's commitment to the Jewish question.¹³⁰³ Hurd mentions that 'his efforts were steadier' in 1858-59, and concedes that the government 'collapsed before the new budget could be brought forward', but gives no indication as to what this might have attempted to achieve.¹³⁰⁴ While it never made it to the House of Commons, this project should not be dismissed so easily. Disraeli, just as he had in 1852, wanted to be the author of a 'brilliant' financial statement. The key features of the 1859 budget would have been repeal of paper duties and also a repeal of the duty placed on tea as an emergency levy during the Crimean war.¹³⁰⁵ Having already committed himself to a further reduction in income tax in 1859 as part of his 1858 budget these cuts in duty have dual significance. First, along with his optimistic outlook on the state of Exchequer, these proposals indicate that Disraeli wished to embark on another 'big' budget. This might have been was a budget that could have challenged the Liberal dominance of economic matters and win him 'the mantle of financial mastery donned by Gladstone in 1853'.¹³⁰⁶ Secondly, much as he did in 1852, these proposals anticipated Gladstone's successful measures of 1860-61. Perhaps most strikingly, Disraeli's proposed repeal of the paper duties came to be a prominent and controversial feature of Gladstone's successful 1860 budget.¹³⁰⁷ But Disraeli's proposed budget for 1859 was once again undermined by Derby and the Cabinet's insistence on increasing defence expenditure.¹³⁰⁸ Disraeli's ambitions were another unfortunate casualty. That the only two Conservative governments of the 1850's coincided with heightened tensions with another major European power was indeed unlucky.

Derby's government collapsed over the failure of its Reform Bill. It was ousted by Hartington's motion of no confidence. Presented by a liberal alliance, the Conservatives had no chance of survival.¹³⁰⁹ Disraeli's commitment to Derby and the Conservative cause in these years was unshakable. He had been instrumental in convincing the younger Stanley to reverse his decision not to join his father's cabinet. He even aided Derby in the attempt to bring Gladstone on board during 1858. Disraeli made a personal appeal to Gladstone when he suggested that 'I have been, at all times, actively prepared to make every sacrifice of self for the public good, which I have ever thought identical with your accepting office in the Conservative Party...Don't you think the time has come when you might deign to be magnanimous?'¹³¹⁰ Gladstone wrote an icy reply to Disraeli, refusing the generous offer. However, Hawkins has suggested that Gladstone was mistaken in that his 'sense of his own worth to Derby...exceeded the premier's estimation of Gladstone's value'.¹³¹¹ He was certainly not willing to sacrifice Disraeli in order to bring Gladstone or other leading Peelites into the ministry.

1859 also saw Disraeli's last attempt at manufacturing a union between Palmerston and the Conservatives. Given his open rift with Russell, and his conservative views on domestic politics, Palmerston seemed a worthwhile target for the Conservatives, in their search for allies. Disraeli, addressing Palmerston 'in our ancient confidence', suggested that if he were to bring with him thirty supporters the Conservatives would have absolute majority. With regard to foreign affairs he would be 'entire master of the situation'. Disraeli offered him the support of the Conservatives should he

¹³⁰² Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.283

¹³⁰³ Cesarani, *Disraeli*, pp.152-155

¹³⁰⁴ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.175

¹³⁰⁵ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Stanley, 28th of October 1858, vol.7, p.269

¹³⁰⁶ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.194

¹³⁰⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 10th of February 1860, v.156 cc.859-868; Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', p.283

¹³⁰⁸ *Letters of Queen Victoria*, Malmesbury to Victoria, 19th of January 1859, vol.3, p.312; Parry, 'The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics', pp.156-157

¹³⁰⁹ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, pp.222-227; Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp.204-206

¹³¹⁰ Disraeli to Gladstone, 25th of May 1858, M&B, v.4, pp.157-158

¹³¹¹ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.180

wish to put forward a measure of parliamentary reform, ‘as conservative as you wish’. At the same time, he insisted that the ‘foreign policy of every government of which you are a member must be yours’. In that way, Disraeli proposed a union of Palmerston with Derby that ‘would establish an enduring government.’¹³¹² Even Graham commented on the suitability of such an alliance as ‘the probable solution of existing difficulties’. After, all, there was not ‘much to choose between Derby and Palmerston: the one was a Whig who became a Tory; the other for half a century has been a Tory at heart and is so still’.¹³¹³ Palmerston politely refused the offer from Disraeli. Any value in pursuing this particular option disappeared the following month as Palmerston and Russell reconciled their personal differences in the famous meeting at the Willis Rooms on the 6th of June 1859.

Disraeli would serve as Chancellor of the Exchequer one more time under Derby, from 1866-1868. This ministry has become far more famous for its legislative achievements in the sphere of Parliamentary Reform. However, that does not mean that Disraeli had lost his interest in finance. This was true even after 1862, when Gladstone reduced income tax to such low levels that financial reform seemingly became an exhausted political issue, and in political terms ‘the economical sword had lost its cutting edge’.¹³¹⁴ It may have been a politically dead issue. But that is not to say that Disraeli had abandoned the principles he had attempted to establish for the party in the 1850s. His budgets in Derby’s third ministry demonstrate a clear continuity with his earlier preoccupations. There was no longer any margin to make gains with regards to tax, but taxation was still kept low and he still sought sound economy. Speaking at Aylesbury, he defended the growth in government expenditure: ‘public expenditure can only be met by availing yourself to the resources of the country...cheap government can only be attained by endangering the country, and by depriving a great body of the people of an expenditure really incurred in order to elevate them and to improve their condition.’¹³¹⁵ This attitude was best displayed in 1866. Immediately after the government assumed office Pakington wanted to undertake a new scheme of naval rearmament. Disraeli firmly insisted that any increase to the naval estimates for that year should be ‘strictly limited by the rise in the revenue – a decision whose significance is enhanced in the light of Gladstone’s having run down defence expenditure to a minimum over the previous four years.’¹³¹⁶

Therefore finance, on closer examination give us a wealth of evidence as to Disraeli’s remarkable consistency of principle. His financial schemes were largely successful in ridding the Conservatives of the monkey of Protection. Indeed, an imaginative, but principled, approach to finance was the only way that agricultural Protection could have been suitably replaced. As Vincent has observed, Disraeli ‘was Chancellor of the Exchequer three times, yet neither as Chancellor nor Prime Minister did his budgets make a mark’.¹³¹⁷ In this, as we have seen, he was unfortunate. Both his failed 1852 budget and his planned measure for 1859 were intended to take the economic initiative away from the liberal parties in Westminster. Both budgets were foiled necessary increases to Naval expenditure. While circumstance would determine that these opportunities never quite fell to Disraeli, these years exhibited his great ability to collaborate with Lord Derby and other Conservatives. Derby was unwilling after 1852 to sacrifice Disraeli in order to secure a union with other parliamentary forces. Disraeli repaid that loyalty by consistently fighting for the Conservative cause in the Commons. That is not to say that Disraeli was always popular. Indeed, very few political leaders can claim to have enjoyed the unwavering support of all sections of their own party. In Disraeli’s case the contrast between himself and the average Tory MP, exacerbated by an opportunistic narrative has

¹³¹² *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Palmerston, 3rd of May 1859, vol.7, p.370

¹³¹³ Graham to Aberdeen, 9th of May 1859, cited in Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.219

¹³¹⁴ Ghosh, ‘Disraelian Conservatism’, pp.286-287

¹³¹⁵ *The Times*, 20th of November 1868, p.5

¹³¹⁶ Ghosh, ‘Disraelian Conservatism’, p.288

¹³¹⁷ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p. 52

unfortunately served to prop up that popular conception that Disraeli's political outlook was always self-serving and unprincipled. The reality was that Disraeli was an effective political collaborator who spent twenty years of his political career working closely with Derby, in a struggle to reverse the fortunes of the Conservative party. He may have sought allies from unconventional places, and some that were odious to many Conservatives. But at the beginning of the 1850s, following the death of Peel, the old political lines between parties were in disarray. It was not so Machiavellian to attempt to redraw these parameters in a way that left the Conservatives with a political majority. After 1859, Disraeli stopped seeking alliances outside of his party, as the old lines of political demarcation were re-established in the Willis Rooms. The Age of Equipoise had reached its zenith. The domestic peace of the late 'fifties and 'sixties and Palmerston's seemingly unshakable hold on the political reigns saw Disraeli's attempts at party realignment foiled until later in the decade.

II: The Church

Disraeli had nearly always taken a supportive line when it came to the constitutional position of the Anglican Church. The maintenance of the Church and vitality of Anglican belief was, in his view, central to the preservation of the territorial constitution. Disraeli did not however, confidently wade into matters of internal Church politics or necessarily possess an unclouded vision of orthodox Anglican doctrine. In fact, the factional in-fighting of conflicting parties within the Anglican clergy was the element of ecclesiastical affairs that most irritated him. As Parry has observed, this factionalism 'only damaged the church's power and popular attractiveness by squabbling among themselves about doctrine and ritual.'¹³¹⁸ And in the internal Anglican controversies of the 'forties and 'fifties, as Hurd has correctly suggested, Disraeli 'simply could not compete with Gladstone's passionate expertise'.¹³¹⁹ But nor did he try. It has generally been acknowledged that Disraeli was incapable of personal religious belief. Disraeli even confided as much in Stanley.¹³²⁰ Some scholars have read so much into this lack religious belief that they have concluded that Disraeli was 'quite incapable of seeing the heated religious controversies of the sixties in anything but political terms'.¹³²¹ It cannot be said that Disraeli was a conventional religious believer, or even a orthodox thinker when it came to Church defence. One thing however is clear. This was that he saw the Anglican Church as being an essential and irreplaceable pillar of the state, and one that propped up the existing socio-political order. Moreover, he never underestimated the power of the Church in informing the hearts and minds of the British people. These were positions from which Disraeli never budged.

It has widely been observed that Disraeli's various attempts to re-establish the Conservative party's traditional position, as the instrument of the defence of the Church only really gained momentum after their defeat in 1859; that is, only after the Conservatives had definitively lost the battle over financial reform, and after the failure of their first attempt at parliamentary reform. Therefore, his decision to pose as a novel champion of the protestant cause in the 1860s has often been met with charges of opportunism.¹³²² At the same time, his relationship with the Church of England, both throughout his career and these years in particular, has been strikingly over-looked by those scholars who have sought to champion the Judaic influences on Disraeli's politics.¹³²³ However, it should not

¹³¹⁸ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.712

¹³¹⁹ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.124

¹³²⁰ *Derby Diaries*, vol.1, p.97

¹³²¹ Bradford, p.254;

¹³²² Bradford, *Disraeli*, pp.254-255; Blake, *Disraeli*, hardly mentions Disraeli's politics with regards to the Church at all.

¹³²³ In fact there is very little mention of the Anglican Church in all chapters of Endelman and Kushner ed., *Disraeli's Jewishness*. Moreover, Weintraub makes very few comments on Disraeli's attachment to Anglicanism save suggesting that

be forgotten that, from the 1840s onwards, Disraeli had become increasingly interested in the Anglican Church. His ideas on the Church contained in his trilogy of that decade attest to that. In the preface to fifth edition of *Coningsby* in 1849, he claimed that the Church was ‘the most efficient means’ of achieving the ‘renovation of the national spirit’.¹³²⁴ Throughout his life he was keen to present himself as a Church goer and Anglican believer. As Vincent has observed, he may not have been a conventional Christian, ‘but he was a practicing one. He went to church. He took Communion... His enemies, had they been able, would not have scrupled to taunt him with agnosticism or religious indifference he gave them no ground.’¹³²⁵ After all, they proved very capable of taunting Disraeli on anti-Semitic grounds. That they did not attack him for any lack of religious belief implies that his façade of Anglican respectability proved sufficiently viable. George Buckle remarked that ‘an absolute reticence as to his personal religion was one of Beaconsfield’s marked characteristics’.¹³²⁶ This was certainly true. His own incapacity for belief seems equally well established. Moreover, whilst his public image as a pious Anglican may have endured, those more intimate with him tended to be more sceptical. In 1861, Stanley questioned ‘how I can reconcile his open ridicule, in private of all religions, with his preaching up of a new church-and-state agitation?’¹³²⁷ Disraeli was undoubtedly not a conventional believer. But his want of personal belief certainly did not translate into a lack of interest in religion and theology. Stanley commented in 1851 that second only to politics Disraeli’s favourite conversational topic was ‘the philosophical discussion of religious questions: I mean the various beliefs that have governed mankind, their changes at different epochs, and those still to come.’¹³²⁸

Thus, it would appear that Disraeli gave a great deal of thought to the religious questions facing the country. But he was determined to keep himself detached from the internecine struggles between Anglican factions, the petty politics of doctrine, ritual and patronage which he so despised. This was not for any pious, partisan, reason. He proved quite capable of satirizing all sections of the Anglican Church in his fiction. Trollope’s portrayal of Ecclesiastical politics in his *Barchester Chronicles* may furnish a more thorough and complete picture of factional manoeuvring within the Church. But Disraeli was anything but apologetic on this count. As Walton has observed, ‘Disraeli never acquired the more ostentatious and intellectual religiosity which would become a Gladstonian hallmark’, one which ‘sustained Gladstone’s reputation as an intellectual heavyweight in the eyes of both historians and contemporaries’. That said,¹³²⁹ Disraeli’s strictly constitutional view of the Church, and his relative neutrality with regard to its internal politics, actually became a position of strength when dealing with Church affairs. However ironically, Disraeli with his ‘ultimately secular attachment to established churches’ would become the more reliable defender of Anglican interests than Gladstone, ‘who had made such a parade of the exact nature of his convictions and of his precise position within the theological spectrum of the Church of England’.¹³³⁰

Put another way: Disraeli’s involvement with Church affairs was certainly not merely an opportunist reaction to parliamentary alignment after 1859. To be sure, Church defence in parliament had become a viable political policy for the first time since the 1830s. First, Gladstone’s decision to join Palmerston’s government, on the face of it a blow to the Conservative cause, was in Disraeli’s eyes a new opportunity. Gladstone had long been considered Westminster’s leading defender of

Disraeli ‘never undervalued religious feeling’ and suggesting that ‘religion itself remained to him little more than a symbol of his heritage’, Weintraub, *Disraeli*, pp.364-365.

¹³²⁴ *Coningsby*, preface to the fifth edition 1849.

¹³²⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.38.

¹³²⁶ M&B, vol.6, pp.560-561

¹³²⁷ *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, 30th of November 1861, p.179

¹³²⁸ *Ibid*, p.31

¹³²⁹ Walton, *Disraeli*, p.25

¹³³⁰ *Ibid*, p.30

the Anglican interest. By joining Palmerston's Liberal government, and therefore allying himself with those interests seemingly hostile to Anglican hegemony, he undermined his own position as the foremost defender of the established faith. Certainly, this move into government did little to appease either side of Anglican interest. As Warren has shrewdly observed, 'Protestant high churchmen had always been suspicious of the 'popish' inclinations of the Peelites, and younger Anglo-Catholics in particular were becoming less certain that Gladstone's political ambitions would continue to coincide with their vision for the Church.'¹³³¹ Secondly, a policy of Church defence was not necessarily one that was doomed to failure in the 1860s. The Religious Census of 1851 may have proved 'shocking to the prophets of progress' and a jolt to 'respectable opinion, tout court – in early Victorian England.'¹³³² Certainly, it did prove shocking reading to contemporaries. But modern revisionist historiography has gone a long way to establishing that the census was not the harbinger of religious decline that many contemporary commentators perceived it to be. Having explored the true extent of the inadequacy of statistical methodology during the nineteenth century, a recurring theme in political analysis, it has reached some interesting conclusions: not least that the 1851 Census did not necessarily prove the correlation between increased 'industrial-urbanism' and 'secularised British society'.¹³³³ Some recent works have even suggested that not only did 1851 fail to prove that the nineteenth-Century was any less religiously committed than the previous century, but that it indicated a very real possibility that 'most urban communities...were no less significantly devout...than their rural counterparts'.¹³³⁴ That said, 1851 did indicate one thing that is nigh on universally agreed upon: that contemporaries could be certain that as of 1851, a shade over half chose the national established Protestant faith.¹³³⁵ On the face of it, this may have seemed to be the writing on the wall for a 'Church party' in Westminster. However, it still represented a majority, and perhaps a decisive rural majority.

By renewing a traditional connection between the Conservative Party and the Church of England, and by emerging as a more vociferous and orthodox defender of the faith, Disraeli attempted to provide a position with which to attract moderate MPs who were potentially worried by 'radical pressures for further ecclesiastical change, pressures that Palmerston and Russell also now recognized'.¹³³⁶ Despite losing office, there were green Conservative shoots visible in 1859. The general election had yielded a small Conservative success in England. They had gained some 34 seats all of which approximately 20 came from English seats.¹³³⁷ The Liberals still held a small majority of English seats. But THIS was not a large as their 1857 landslide. Moreover, the Conservatives sat in a large majority of the counties and had done so since 1835.¹³³⁸

This was not simply a parliamentary matter. The Church, from the 1860s onwards, was increasingly besieged from outside the walls of Westminster. As Parry has recognized, the very foundations of Anglican belief were being attacked by 'German scholars on the one hand and, on the other, the new scientific materialists, whose work was applauded by destructive influences' in British society.¹³³⁹ Moreover, it remains abundantly clear that Disraeli's interest in Anglican defence was not simply an opportunist reaction. Disraeli's interest in the Church and in religion more generally began

¹³³¹ Warren, 'Disraeli and the National Church', p.102

¹³³² S.J.D. Green, 'The City of God and After: Religious Change and Organisational Decline in Great English Towns Since C.1850', *Northern History*, 52:1, p.126

¹³³³ *Ibid*, p.126; Callum Brown, 'Did Urbanization Secularize Britain?', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1988), pp.1-11

¹³³⁴ *Ibid*, p.126; Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, (Oxford: OUP, 1977) p.24; Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996) pp.27-28; Robin Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church*, (London: SPCK, 1993) p.305.

¹³³⁵ Green, 'The City of God and After', p.126

¹³³⁶ Warren 'Disraeli and the National Church', p.102

¹³³⁷ F.W.S. Craig (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results 1832-1885*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1977) p.622

¹³³⁸ Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, p.180

¹³³⁹ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.713

in a serious sense after 1840. As Vincent has suggested, ‘the circles in which he moved in early manhood were not noted for godliness...religious reflection...belongs mainly to Disraeli’s life after 1840’.¹³⁴⁰ We should not read too much into Disraeli’s short-lived and insubstantial association with the Oxford Movement. Some of what the movement stood for appealed to his more nostalgic and romantic sensibilities. But he was by no means devoted to any form of High Church doctrine. It should not be forgotten that Disraeli was the only one among Young England to vote and speak against Peel’s proposed increase to the Maynooth Grant back in 1845.¹³⁴¹ Blake has typically dismissed this speech as ‘not really concerned with the merits of the case. [Disraeli] wished to have another hit at Peel and this opportunity was not to be missed’.¹³⁴² Disraeli may have looked back on the historic social position of the Church with an affectionate eye. He may have even felt some repulsion to the treatment of English Catholics by some of his more rapidly Protestant colleagues. But it is hardly too much to believe that Disraeli saw the trebling of state funding to train a generally hostile Catholic priesthood in Ireland as a singular betrayal of both party and the union of Church and state.

His complex, subtle, attitude was best exhibited during the Papal Aggression of 1850. As Stanley recorded, ‘D’s ideas were moderate and wise. He disliked the movement... if it must be dealt with, would try to direct it as much as possible away from English Catholics, against the Pope and his foreign adherents’.¹³⁴³ His attack on the government was generally confined to criticizing Russell’s management of the crisis. Disraeli saw the Prime Minister’s Durham letter as having fuelled the fire of anti-Catholicism for political advantage.¹³⁴⁴ Blake has stressed Disraeli’s cynicism and has argued that, ‘he did not take the papal “aggression” at all seriously from the religious point of view’.¹³⁴⁵ This is not a helpful conclusion. The fact was Disraeli’s position was a difficult one. As Warren has recognized, Disraeli ‘had a delicate balancing act to perform so as to retain as much protestant feeling on the Conservative side, while seeming to be sympathetic to Irish catholic aspirations’.¹³⁴⁶ Moreover, it was a line that was supported by Derby, who believed that the Conservatives ‘must avoid irritating language to the Roman Catholic laity and abuse of their religion’ and limit themselves to attacking ‘the political power of the priesthood’.¹³⁴⁷ This was a careful calculation that both Disraeli and Derby would spend the greater part of the 1850s attempting to get right. Both wished to defend the power and position of the Established Church, and the Protestant character of the Conservative Party, as its natural defenders. However, both naturally practiced a moderate religious tolerance. Disraeli frequently clashed with his more fervent colleagues in the Commons, whilst Derby ‘consistently distanced himself from the visceral anti-Catholicism of MPs such as Charles Newdgate’.¹³⁴⁸ Both worked to temper the more violently protestant elements of the party, and both distinguished the defence of the Anglican Church from anti-Catholic bigotry.¹³⁴⁹

Throughout 1851 Disraeli had attempted to walk the tightrope between attacking Russell’s handling of Papal Aggression and keeping a short leash on his more zealous Anglican backbenchers. Disraeli had to reconcile a moderate Protestant policy with a staunchly Anglican parliamentary party in order enforce Derby’s wish ‘to avoid sectarian differences becoming the basis of party distinctions’.¹³⁵⁰ In order to ensure that this delicate balance was achieved, Disraeli agreed to an

¹³⁴⁰ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.39

¹³⁴¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of April 1845, v.79 cc.555-569

¹³⁴² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.188

¹³⁴³ *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.34

¹³⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 7th of February 1851, v.114 cc.256-262

¹³⁴⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.300

¹³⁴⁶ Warren, ‘Disraeli and the Established Church’, p.101

¹³⁴⁷ Derby to Eglinton, 29th of November 1850, quoted in Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.5

¹³⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.96

¹³⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.96

¹³⁵⁰ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.96

enquiry into the Maynooth Grant. But did not go so far as to support its outright abolition. He also resisted giving aid to the Irish Church in the question of Irish national schooling. At the same time, in order to keep the high church party onside, he took a non-interventionist stance in the Frome Vicarage case.¹³⁵¹ The question was introduced to the House by Edward Horsman, MP for Cokermonth. He proposed that Mr. Bennett's appointment to Frome by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, despite widespread local disapproval, should be subject to a committee of enquiry. Disraeli argued that if a remedy were to be found it should not be legislative nor for parliament to handle.¹³⁵² In effect, Disraeli declared himself unwilling to interfere against High-Church interests in a case which the Church hierarchy had ample disciplinary powers itself to deal with. He needed to be careful in this respect. The idiosyncratic, and now infamous, twenty-fourth chapter of his life of Bentinck had incurred a great deal of suspicion from the Anglican hierarchy as to his personal beliefs.¹³⁵³ In June, he repeated his commitment to the Church when addressing these same charges, in a letter to the voters of Buckinghamshire he maintained that 'our form of Government is a Protestant monarchy; and it is our belief that the people of this country are resolved to maintain it, not only in form, but in spirit.'¹³⁵⁴

The 1852 election pointed to staunch Protestant success, particularly in the North-West where the Conservatives won both Liverpool seats from sitting Peelite and Liberal members respectively. This result, and particularly the election of the fervently Protestant William Mackenzie, was brought in on a wave of anti-Catholic sentiment, stemming from increasing Irish immigration to the district.¹³⁵⁵ Lennox, writing to Disraeli, called it 'absurd and bigoted'.¹³⁵⁶ Disraeli welcomed the result, much like Derby. But he feared the success in Lancashire may have 'alienated moderate opinion elsewhere'.¹³⁵⁷ Derby disapproved of that bigoted anti-Catholicism in the Party and was perhaps particularly offensive that it occurred in the surrounds of Knowsley where he was such an influential member of society. Thus, at the end of 1853 and throughout 1854 Disraeli emerged as, what Hawkins has described as, 'an unlikely Protestant champion'.¹³⁵⁸ He wrote to Derby commenting that 'The government have no root in the country. Their plan of Reform is an attack on the country, while at the same time, it disgusts the working classes, while from their Puseyism, the cabinet cannot excite any enthusiasm among the middle classes. A clique of doctrinaires, existing, as a government, by Court favour, cannot last in troubled times like these.'¹³⁵⁹ Only a few days later this same argument, with Disraeli clearly the author, appeared as the leader in *The Press*: 'The middle classes of England', it argued, 'are essentially Protestant. They shrink with unconquerable distrust from Puseyite Secretaries of State, from Jesuits in the guise of financiers, and from the impassioned Oratorians in the garb of Secretaries at War... The present ministry resolves itself into a clique of doctrinaires attempting to govern a great country by Court favour.'¹³⁶⁰

His stance was certainly less conciliatory towards some High-Church interests. But nor could he be described as fanning the flames of popular Protestantism. Responding to Spooner's proposed amendment to make the Maynooth Grant subject to an annual renewal by Parliament, Disraeli took the opportunity to praise the Protestant nature of the English constitution. He argued that the Protestant constitution in Britain had proved an effective safeguard of religious liberty throughout

¹³⁵¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 20th of April 1852, v.120 c.897

¹³⁵² *Ibid*, c.918

¹³⁵³ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Rev. William Partridge, 25th of February 1852, v.6, p.23

¹³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, Disraeli to the Electors of Buckinghamshire, 6th of June 1852, v.6, pp.71-75

¹³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.37

¹³⁵⁶ Lennox to Disraeli, 7th of August 1852, *Hughenden MSS*, B/20/102/1 f.8

¹³⁵⁷ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.37

¹³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.96

¹³⁵⁹ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Derby, 19th of December 1853, v.6, p.302

¹³⁶⁰ *The Press*, 24th of December 1853, cited in *Disraeli's Letters*, v.6, p.302

history.¹³⁶¹ He asked the House: 'Have we or have we not a Protestant constitution?...Let every man, whether he be a Protestant or a Roman Catholic, clearly understand what are the rights and privileges which he enjoys under that constitution' Disraeli he concluded by challenging the Government, 'to bring forward such pleasures as will vindicate the Protestant constitution, and prove that the enduring existence of that constitution is not only consistent with civil and religious liberty, but is the only security also, and the guarantee, that we have for these unspeakable blessings.'¹³⁶² This attempt to rally the protestant forces to the Conservative cause was chastised by Derby who, perhaps remembering the previous association with Anti-Catholicism, and still wanting to remain aloof of the party's most fervently protestant elements, told Disraeli that their 'chance at the elections [of 1852] had been ruined by our taking up high Protestant politics...I fear you will burn your fingers with that infernal "Protestantism".'¹³⁶³

Disraeli had been frequently struck by the real depth of feeling in Parliament when it came to issues involving Roman Catholicism. While his attitude to Papal Aggression had not been characterised by the same alarm as other Anglicans, the ferocity of the popular outcry against the Catholic Church had a profound effect on him. Monypenny and Buckle long-ago recognized that 'however much Disraeli may have regarded the agitation with amused contempt, he was deeply impressed by it'.¹³⁶⁴ As he wrote to Bulwer in 1852: 'It is impossible to conceal from myself that the religious feeling in England is in a state which may lead to vast and fatal consequences...The extreme indiscretions of the High Church party in England and the violence of the Roman Catholic priesthood in Ireland have combined to operate a strange and, even five years ago, inconceivable revolution in the public mind'.¹³⁶⁵ Again in 1854, Disraeli was stuck by the force of Protestant feeling in the Commons, which had still not died down since 1850. His speech on Maynooth had for a brief time made him a Protestant hero.¹³⁶⁶ This was not a mantle that sat easily upon him. He was undoubtedly a staunch defender of the Anglican Church. He admired the Church for its powerful social functions and revered the Church's role within the English constitution. But his natural instinct was one of religious tolerance. Roman Catholicism was in the 1850s becoming a stumbling block for the Conservatives. The Anglican Church might certainly serve as a rallying point for the party. But it ceased to be a useful marker if religious feeling ran so high that it alienated the whole of Ireland and large swathes of moderate opinion in England. As Parry has shrewdly observed 'the demise of the old tory church-state verities in the 1830s and 1840s had produced an impasse in Irish policy'.¹³⁶⁷

Throughout the 1860s, Liberal predominance actually created the opportunity for Disraeli and the Conservatives to re-establish the party as the natural defenders of the Anglican Church. It also created the possibility of reconciling this staunch position of Church defence with a coherent strategy regarding Ireland. The 1860's saw secular, liberal, nationalism become increasingly prevalent, internationally. This prevailing climate allowed Disraeli, as Parry has observed, to defend the Church against such threats and while not descending into sectarian Anglican self-interest. He could thus appear as a defender of religion more generally against the new prevailing winds of liberal progress. This policy was perhaps best exhibited in 1861 when he showed no predilection for the widespread enthusiasm surrounding the Italian Risorgimento. Instead, he chose to defend the then threatened historic temporal power of the Pope, as 'an old man on a Semitic throne' fighting off 'the modern

¹³⁶¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 3rd of August 1854, v.135 cc.1263-1273

¹³⁶² *Ibid*, c.1273

¹³⁶³ Stanley to Disraeli, 24th of October 1854, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 111/2 f.87

¹³⁶⁴ M&B, vol.3, p.270

¹³⁶⁵ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Sir Henry Bulwer, early October 1852, v.6, p.161

¹³⁶⁶ M&B, vol.3, p.544; Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, p.97

¹³⁶⁷ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.715

Atilas'.¹³⁶⁸ In this stance he was at least consistent. In 1864, Disraeli was almost alone making the point of not meeting Garibaldi on his triumphal visit to Britain.

Disraeli's renewed interest in Church defence in the 1860s was closely entwined with a renewed familiarity with Samuel Wilberforce. The cerebral bishop would prove a critical partner to Disraeli's political efforts regarding the Church throughout the 1860s. Since their first meeting some ten years earlier, Wilberforce had established a reputation as 'the leading reforming diocesan bishop, and as the most active and potentially influential member of the episcopal bench.'¹³⁶⁹ By 1860, Wilberforce's strategy to involve Disraeli in his own schemes of Church reform nicely coincided with Disraeli's own inclinations as to future Conservative policy. Disraeli's first real foray into the politics of the Anglican Church took place after the 1859 election. He took an increasingly strong stance on matters of the Church and proved a powerful voice in favour of protecting Church rates. In opposition to Trelawny's bill to abolish Church rates Disraeli made two speeches. In the first, he condemned the manner in which the bill had been brought before the House, arguing that not only should a piece of legislation of such import have been brought forward by a Minister.¹³⁷⁰ The following evening he concluded that the matter of Church rates could never be settled in a satisfactory manner while the present 'Ministry is justified in voting for the abolition of church rates, while at the same time it acknowledges that a substitute ought to be supplied, and shrinks from the responsibility of affording the remedy which the country has a right to demand.'¹³⁷¹ Disraeli's efforts against brought him to the attention of Church hierarchy. In February 1860, Archdeacon Hale wrote to Disraeli asking whether the time had arrived when the Commons should consider the question of Church rates 'with just reference to the principles of the English Constitution and National Jurisprudence.'¹³⁷² As Warren has observed, 'the work of Archdeacon Hale of London in organising the archdeacons across the country in the campaign to defend the rates through parochial petitioning seems to have particularly impressed Disraeli.'¹³⁷³ Disraeli remained in close contact with Hale, as well as archdeacons Bickerstaff of Bucks and Denison of Taunton, on the issue of Church rates throughout 1860.¹³⁷⁴

In November, he hosted a visitation by Wilberforce to his house at Hughenden. His collaboration with Wilberforce over matters of Church defence was clear from his letter to the bishop in the days before his visit. Speaking of the other guests at this conference, he observed: 'John Manners will be with us, and, therefore, we may settle our next Church campaign with that chief of "ecclesiastical laymen" – perhaps, we may convert Stanley, who is also here'.¹³⁷⁵ The following month it seems that plans they might have had for further activity were put into action, as Disraeli concluded the year by addressing a meeting of clergy and laity at the rural deanery of Amersham. There he reaffirmed his strong stance on Church rates. *The Times* reported that, viewing the question in a secular sense: 'he shrank from realizing what would be the consequences to the country of the termination of the connexion between Church and State... The parish was one of the strongest securities for local government; and on local government political liberty mainly depended... The fact was, the Church of England was a part of England – a point of view not sufficiently contemplated by those who speculated on changes to its character and position.'¹³⁷⁶

Disraeli's point was simple: how was it that when so much was a stake for the position of the Church, that against an active movement to abolish Church rates there had been 'the want of union

¹³⁶⁸ M&B, vol.4, p.325

¹³⁶⁹ Warren, 'Disraeli and the National Church', p.103

¹³⁷⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 12th of July, v.154 cc.1123-1126

¹³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13th of July 1859, v.154 cc.1175-1179

¹³⁷² Bodl., Dep Hughenden, Hale to Disraeli, 23rd of February 1860, 130/1 f.94

¹³⁷³ Warren, 'Disraeli and the National Church', p.104

¹³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.103 (see footnotes)

¹³⁷⁵ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Samuel Wilberforce, 9th of November 1860, v.8, pp.66-67

¹³⁷⁶ *The Time*, 8th of December 1860, p.10

and organization among Churchmen'? When Churchmen were united, the Church was never endangered. This was shown in the years that elapsed from 1831 to 1841... Why were they not united and organized now?' ...He attributed this want of union and organization to two causes – first to 'the disruption of political parties; secondly, to disputes among the clergy themselves'. In this respect at least, the Commons had an advantage over the Lords in taking the pulse of public opinion. Marlborough's Select Committee looking Church rates, he argued, 'had been precipitate in their course in the matter... they had mistaken public humour for public opinion.' Therefore, having recognised the efforts of Archdeacon Hale and the petitions sent to Parliament, he challenged them to redouble their efforts. They were in a commanding position, he claimed, and argued that 'it was in their power, if they chose it, to close this controversy forever, not by feeble concession, but by a bold assertion of public right.' He concluded by calling on the Clergy, regardless of their political affiliation to 'make these gentlemen understand that... in the union of Church and State depend, in a large measure, the happiness, the greatness, and the liberty of England'.¹³⁷⁷ Disraeli's newly-found prominence in Church affairs during 1860 drew a mixed reviews, particularly from his Chief who was ever cautious when dealing with English Protestantism. But everyone saw the political sense in what Disraeli was trying to achieve.¹³⁷⁸ As Warren has shrewdly observed, 'Disraeli's stance was designed to encourage a popular response and the stimulate the archdeacons and the parochial clergy to redouble their efforts'.¹³⁷⁹

While the debate over Church Rates would rumble on into 1862, by 1861 the battle seemed won. Disraeli certainly thought so. The reality was a parliamentary stalemate, in which numbers over the third reading had been evenly matched and in which there was no clear compromise or obvious way forward. As Warren has observed, many 'leading Conservatives were uneasy about Disraeli's stance. They remembered their own attempts to secure compromise in 1859, and that the recommendations of Marlborough's select committee were still on the table'.¹³⁸⁰ Disraeli's emergence as a stalwart champion of Church Rates at times concerned Derby, especially when his lieutenant 'exceeded his brief'. Disraeli's collaboration with Wilberforce, Hale and Bickerstaff changed his opinion of Church politics. Church Rates as a stand-alone subject offered little to Disraeli politically. However, when seen in the context of mass-petitioning and popular fervour, Disraeli saw the broader possibilities. It could be used to revitalise the Church and unify its clergy and once again strengthen the bond between the Conservative party and a popular national Church.

Disraeli's speech at Amersham was a clear indicator of his developing notion about the Anglican Church. It is unsurprising that the ideas displayed in that speech and later orations on the subject were rooted in his earliest contemplations on the English constitution and English history. The foundations for his speech at Amersham can be found in his *Vindication* of some twenty-five years earlier. His conception of Church defence, developed most clearly in the years after 1860, was centred on his own interpretation of English history. The Church was central to English historical development, an essential cog in England's organic constitution, and a principal feature of England's national character. In Disraeli's idiosyncratic view of English history, the Church had, somewhat paradoxically, served as a protector of national liberty. This was a belief he had expounded both in his *Vindication* and later in *Sybil*. The Church had proved an effective bulwark against an array pervasive forces throughout its history. It was therefore an essential weapon in the battle against modern Liberalism. The parochial organisation of the Church, and by extension apparatus such as church rates, had protected local civil liberties and combatted those nefarious elements that sought to erode

¹³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.10

¹³⁷⁸ Derby to Disraeli, 12th of October 1860, Bodl., Dep Hughenden, 110/1 f.206; Manners to Disraeli, 13th December 1860, *Ibid*, 106/2, f.66; Earle to Disraeli, 28th of December 1860, *Ibid*, 96/3, f.143

¹³⁷⁹ Warren, 'Disraeli and the National Church', p.104

¹³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.106

the powers of local self-government through modernisation and centralisation. In *Vindication* he had condemned the Whigs for precisely these ambitions, and while Disraeli ‘usually deployed [these charges] against the secular state, [they] could be applied no less to the Church’.¹³⁸¹ Lastly, with regard to his position of Church defence, he called for unity between clergy and laity, as well as between the warring Church factions. This was a particularly astute move for Disraeli. When discussing matters of the Church, he was undoubtedly stronger on the big picture, above all, by way of reference to its historical constitutional position and its powerful social function, than he was with regard to Anglicanism’s internal factional political struggles.

Throughout the 1860s Disraeli made numerous speeches that solidified his adherence to these principles. In 1861 he linked the question to the constitutional position of the Church and placed the Church within the social fabric of the nation. He argued that:

‘it is impossible to shut our eyes to the social and political influence of that Church... though the Church of England is connected with the State, it is independent of the Government. It is the boast of England that though our Government is weak our society is strong... The consequence of having a strong society is, that you have local government and public liberty. You have that national character, which is the peculiarity of England..I cannot contemplate without apprehension the consequences to our society if you were to withdraw the influence of the Established Church’¹³⁸² This was a position he returned to the following year: ‘We know that there is no similarity between the status of the Church of England and those merely religious communities and associations to which the hon. Member refers... The Church of England is not a mere depository of doctrine. The Church of England is a part of England—it is a part of our strength, and a part of our liberties, a part of our national character.’ More than that it was, ‘a chief security for that local government... [and] a principal barrier against that centralizing supremacy which has been in all other countries so fatal to liberty.’¹³⁸³ Put another way, religious dissent it seems had little place in Disraeli’s conception of English history. Warren has suggested that Disraeli usual solution was to suggest that ‘their grievances were largely sentimental, and distinguishing old and new dissent’.¹³⁸⁴ This was perhaps more plausible than might at first seem the case. However, his suggestion that ‘old dissent had no place in his explanatory schema of English history’ on the grounds that ‘it was simply outside his experience’ needs careful consideration. We should not forget that Disraeli’s formal education, such as it was, took place at a Unitarian school. It was an unhappy period of his life, and one that we can assume sculpted his views of organised religion. As Vincent has shrewdly observed, after his baptism, ‘Disraeli was moved from a broadly Nonconformist school to a Unitarian one. If anything in his youthful experience propelled Disraeli towards Anglicanism, it was this unhappy brush with dissent.’¹³⁸⁵ Religious dissent was not outside Disraeli’s experience. But rather his experiences had shaped his conception of religion, which conceived it laying outside of his historic interpretation of England’s happy religious past.

In his second Diocesan speech on Church affairs, with Samuel Wilberforce chairing the meeting, Disraeli echoed his earlier beliefs that the Church still served as a protector of local government against centralizing interests. But the centrepiece of this speech was to call for unity among laity and the clergy. He had no time for the factional nature of Anglican politics. As Warren has observed, he was ‘already frustrated by the disputes within his own party, and aware of the tensions stimulated by ritualistic practice and theological liberalism’.¹³⁸⁶ Disraeli took this opportunity

¹³⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.105

¹³⁸² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 27th of April 1860, v.158 cc.291-299

¹³⁸³ *Ibid*, 27th of February 1861, v.161 cc.1039-1045

¹³⁸⁴ Warren, ‘Disraeli and the Established Church’, p.106

¹³⁸⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.39

¹³⁸⁶ Warren, ‘Disraeli and the Established Church’, p.106

to issue a rallying cry to the clergy, calling for unity in the defence of the Church's constitutional and spiritual authority: 'There is no want to churchmen in the diocese of Oxford... which is wanting in the country generally – namely, union among churchmen'. Want of union among churchmen, Disraeli perceived, stemmed from three distinct problems. First, 'parties in the Church which, from their apparently opposite courses, distract and enfeeble the efforts of churchmen'. Second distrust between clergy and laity caused the publication of new biblical criticisms 'founded on philosophical theology of Germany' which he dismissed as 'a second-hand medley of these contradictory and discordant theories' amounting to no more than 'a revival of Pagan Pantheism'. Third, discontent was spawned by the appointment of men who are 'contemplate without alarm the possible disruption of that union' between Church and State. Any severance, Disraeli argued of the union of Church and State would leave the Church in a position of decadence rather than predominance. Instead he called for unity among the clergy, which would precipitate unity among the laity. The Church, he argued, was currently under siege. Domestically, it faced attacks on its authority from the House of Commons which in the previous session had attempted to legislate on Church Rates, burials, changes to the Act of Uniformity; had altered the laws of marriage and divorce, and had debated the integrity of the Book of Common Prayer.¹³⁸⁷

Disraeli had alluded to the popular nature of the Church in his speech at Oxford. He had also suggested that appointments within the high echelons of the Church hierarchy undermined Conservative efforts concerning Church defence. He confided this suspicion to Derby in 1861. 'All, that I am afraid of, are the Bishops, acted on by a coterie, who hate us, & have flattered themselves they have a monopoly on Church championship. Most of these people are now out of Parliament: Roundell Palmer, B. Hope & Co: but they are unceasingly at work. They can do the Church no good... [as they] are more anxious about what they call the Church, than the Church of England.'¹³⁸⁸ As Warren has suggested, 'Disraeli was playing on the fears of the clergy and the educated Anglican laity about a centralizing tendency on the part of episcopal as well as civil authorities'.¹³⁸⁹ He did this in two ways: first, by undermining the influence of any hostile Bishops by inferring that they were colluding with the Government and willing to offer concession as a compromise. Secondly, he made the question of Church rates of significant constitutional importance, rather than 'a narrow ecclesiastical [question] to be settled by prelates'.¹³⁹⁰ This second approach was demonstrated in his speech on Church rates in 1862 where he claimed: 'The question of church rates is not a clerical question—it is a popular question, it is a question of popular rights... You have at stake the principle of an Established Church, the practice of local government, the right of self-taxation, and the hereditary privileges of the great mass of the population.'¹³⁹¹

Once more trying to take the initiative on Church defence, Disraeli's position subtly changed to one that was increasingly involved with Church reform. This was a move that, as Warren has observed, was undoubtedly encouraged by Hale and Wilberforce.¹³⁹² His High Wycombe speech in October of 1862 highlighted this shift to supporting Church renewal. Disraeli sensed that Anglicanism could be a powerful political tool should popular enthusiasm be awoken within the laity. His collaboration with Wilberforce in this respect was clear from the missive he wrote to the Bishop on the eve of their meeting at High Wycombe: 'I hope that we may have a good meeting. It is now or never, with the Laity. If they move, all will be right, but we have troublous times before us.'¹³⁹³ The

¹³⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.106; *The Times*, 15th of November 1861, p.7

¹³⁸⁸ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Derby, 28th of January 1861, v.8, p.92

¹³⁸⁹ Warren, 'Disraeli and the Established Church', p.105

¹³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.105

¹³⁹¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 14th of May 1862, v.166 cc.1721-1726

¹³⁹² Warren, 'Disraeli and the Established Church', p.105

¹³⁹³ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Wilberforce, 28th of October 1862, v.8 p.218

speech reproduced Disraeli's usual rhetoric concerning the Church's important position alongside the state. Once again, he reaffirmed its pivotal position in England's history. The Church's wealth had been robbed some centuries before when it had been despoiled during the Reformation. But rather than being aggregated by the state and redistributed for the greater public good, 'the property of our Church has been granted by despots and tyrants to their minions', thus establishing these great families who through the spoliation of the Church had absorbed 'a great portion of the government of this country, its power, and its patronage'.¹³⁹⁴ Britain, he argued, had augmented its national strength because 'society is now established on the principles of civil and religious liberty'.¹³⁹⁵ While this had strengthen society, it had inadvertently provided the Church with a new threat, as it had 'placed the legislative power in the hands of great bodies of people who are not in communion with [the established] Church'. The last twenty-five years, Disraeli contended, had seen these Dissenters use their new-found legislative power to mount a deliberate attack on the Church's connection with the State. Disraeli offered two solutions to this dilemma: first, to concede to this threat and allow the Church of England to fall by the wayside as other religions outstripped it, like the pagan alters in the reign of Constantine 'paling before the divine splendours of inspired shrines'. Or, instead, to appeal to the native religious fervour of the English national consciousness and bring those indifferent to the Establish religion under the communion of the Anglican Church. 'for deep and fervid feeling there is no race in the world equal to the English... Industry, liberty, religion, form the solemn state. Industry, liberty, religion – that is the history of England.'¹³⁹⁶

Disraeli's plans for increasing public interest in Church defence were put to the test in parliament during the 1863 session. Events, as Warren has observed, 'seemed to confirm Disraeli's strategy, with the defeat of radical Church bills and a growing division between Gladstone and his Church friends.'¹³⁹⁷ This remains a shrewd assessment. During the session, the Conservatives had considerable success in opposing the second reading of Trelawny's Church Rates Abolition Bill. Disraeli did not speak but donated his vote. The Conservative defence of the Church was led most notably on this occasion by John Manners and Gathorne Hardy. Manners offered a strong rallying cry to the Church's supporters, in his insistence that the Church rates debate really came down to one intelligible question: 'was the Church of England to be the Established Church of the country?' Some, he argued, have suggested that 'the movement was simply one to set the Church free from the thralldom of the bonds of the State'. Rather it was just one element in a sustained attack which would leave the Church and here 'present relations with the State in a materially altered and weakened condition.'¹³⁹⁸ Their opposition proved successful and the question church rates was once again suspended.

Throughout 1864, the war over Church protection smouldered on. Now, the battleground moved outside of Westminster, and increasingly became centred on the seat of Oxford University. Here Gladstone had held one of the ancient universities two parliamentary seats since 1847. His stock within Church circles had fallen considerably since he joined Palmerston's cabinet in 1859. Moreover, his position as an MP for Oxford University had been increasingly under threat since he had taken up University reform in the 1850s. Gladstone had played a leading role in piloting through the Oxford Bill of 1854, and while he had offered a passionate, though ultimately unsuccessful, speech against allowing the admission of religious dissenters, his standing at Oxford had looked

¹³⁹⁴ *The Times*, 30th of October 1862, p.5

¹³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.5

¹³⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.5

¹³⁹⁷ Warren, 'Disraeli and the Established Church', p.108

¹³⁹⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 29th of April 1863, v.170 cc.965-971; for Gathorne Hardys speech: *Ibid*, cc.932-951

increasingly uncertain.¹³⁹⁹ As Jenkins has acknowledged, Gladstone was ‘always a controversial member for the University’, having had his election contested in 1847, 1853, and in 1859. This was very unusual for a University seat, and out of character with Oxford which, after 1865, would not be contested again until 1918.¹⁴⁰⁰ In addition, his once close relationship with Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford, had also been left in tatters after Wilberforce had failed to obtain the Archbishopric of York in 1862. He had lashed out at Gladstone when overlooked for promotion to the post and Gladstone had replied that he was ‘an able prelate getting all you can for the Church, asking more, and giving nothing’.¹⁴⁰¹ With Gladstone skating on thin ice with the electors, out of favour with the Bishop, and having drifted from his previous position as the foremost defender of the Church, the opportunity arose to supplant him at Oxford

Disraeli did not play an active part in the campaign. However, he took great interest in it and was kept abreast of developments through his correspondence with Frederick Lygon. Lygon was the younger brother of the 5th Earl of Beauchamp, recently returned as MP for West Worcestershire, and fellow of All Souls College.¹⁴⁰² While he had been a Conservative MP since 1857, politics had always taken a backseat to Church affairs, earning him the soubriquet of the ‘ecclesiastical laymen par excellence’.¹⁴⁰³ In Anglican affairs he was a high-Churchman. He had become a disciple of Tractarianism as an undergraduate at Christ Church, but had resisted efforts to convert him to Rome.¹⁴⁰⁴ After becoming an MP he became friendly with Disraeli and had increasing input into Disraeli’s speeches on the Church. In fact, Jane Mulvagh has suggested that ‘he wrote all Disraeli’s speeches on religious matters’.¹⁴⁰⁵ How far this is true is difficult to ascertain. However, the pair had become increasingly close throughout the 1860s and by April 1864, Disraeli described Lygon as his ‘most brilliant aid-de-camp’.¹⁴⁰⁶ The pair were close collaborators in Church affairs. This was particularly so in the case of Oxford, where Lygon was instrumental in organising the campaign against Gladstone. He wrote to Disraeli on the 1st of November 1864 with suggestions for his upcoming speech at the Sheldonian theatre on the 25th.¹⁴⁰⁷ Lygon even stayed with Disraeli at Hughenden in preparation for his now-famous speech at Oxford.¹⁴⁰⁸ In which he further defended the position of the Anglican Church in English society, its historical significance to the country’s national character, he stressed the inherent ‘religious character of the English people’. While the now iconic concluding centrepiece of this speech was Disraeli refutation of modern science and the theories of evolution: the question is, is man an ape or an angel? (A Laugh) Now, I am on the side of the angels. (Cheers)¹⁴⁰⁹ In Disraeli’s conception of the world, the Church formed an important barrier against the marches of wanton progress and modern secular advancement. It was history, tradition, and divinity fighting off the forces of modernity, materialism and science. The established Church must therefore be protected so that England could be guided safely and coherently in a rapidly changing age. As Bradford has observed, in Disraeli’s mind ‘the defence of the Church was part of an old fight against materialism which he had first undertaken...thirty-six years ago’.¹⁴¹⁰

¹³⁹⁹ Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp.160-163; *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 22nd of June 1854, v.134 cc.543-555

¹⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.163

¹⁴⁰¹ MSS. *Wilberforce*, Gladstone to Wilberforce, 2nd of October 1862, c.13, f.189; See also Warren, ‘Disraeli and the Established Church’, p.107

¹⁴⁰² R.J.Olney, *ODNB: Frederick Lygon*, (Oxford: OUP, 2004) [Accessed online: 18/5/2020]

¹⁴⁰³ Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, v.2, p.365

¹⁴⁰⁴ Olney, *ODNB: Frederick Lygon*

¹⁴⁰⁵ Jane Mulvagh, *Madresfield: One House, One Family, One Thousand Years*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008) p.204

¹⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 16th of April 1864, v.8, p.347

¹⁴⁰⁷ Bodl., Dep Hughenden, Lygon to Disraeli, 1st of November 1864, 101/4 f.29

¹⁴⁰⁸ Warren, ‘Disraeli and the Established Church’, p.109

¹⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.8

¹⁴¹⁰ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.255

Following the success of his Sheldonian oration, Lygon wrote to Disraeli and suggested that his Oxford speech, and ‘your two former speeches should be reproduced in the same pamphlet’.¹⁴¹¹ The edited versions of his speeches on the Church were prepared and rapidly distributed in preparation for the general election of 1865. Disraeli had shown signs of increasing confidence in the Conservatives electoral chances in the years running up to 1865. The Liberals had alienated their Roman Catholic supporters with their endorsement of Italian Unification and there seemed to be little appetite from urban constituencies for further electoral reform. Moreover, through the formation of a Church Party, Disraeli felt that the Conservatives could strike a chord with English, Anglican, sentiment. However, as Warren has observed, Disraeli ‘was being over sanguine...there was little evidence that Church defence was making an impact in the country. Parliamentary by-elections failed to send any clear message, The Church and State Review had few subscribers, and the Church Institution was hardly a mass movement. Furthermore, while the Church rates policy had been a success, radical moves to concentrate on the Church of Ireland did not bode well in electoral terms.’¹⁴¹²

The election at Oxford in 1865 returned a historic result. The two Conservative candidates, Sir William Heathcote and Gathorne Hardy won Oxford’s two seats and ejected Gladstone from the constituency that he had represented for eighteen years. Disraeli wrote to congratulate Lygon on Conservative victory at Oxford: ‘the University Election, that historical event which I believe, to be mainly, if not entirely, owing to your energy & resolution’¹⁴¹³ The defeat had a profound effect on Gladstone, who, upon hearing the result at Oxford recorded in his diary, ‘at night arrived the Telegram announcing my defeat at Oxford as virtually accomplished. A dear dream is dispelled: God’s will be done’.¹⁴¹⁴ Edgar Feuchtwanger has since argued that Gladstone’s defeat at Oxford as an ‘event of national significance’.¹⁴¹⁵ Elsewhere in the country however, the cry of Church defence failed to resonate. The Conservatives did make modest gains in England, but these successes were offset by losses in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, which saw the Conservatives total number of MPs drop to 289.¹⁴¹⁶ There are several factors which contributed to the failure of the Conservative campaign. First, this election saw the real consolidation of the Liberal Party in electoral terms. From the late 1840s, Liberals had emerged as the most populous non-Conservative group in parliament. But Whig and Liberal government had still remained a fissile coalition of Whigs, Liberal, Radicals, Reformers, and Irish Nationalists. If 1859 had seen the emergence of the Liberal Party, the 1865 election revealed far more delineated party distinctions. As Hawkins has observed, ‘in 1865 338 MPs declared themselves Liberals and just 8 as Whigs, 3 as Reformers, and 6 as radicals. This presaged the two-party alignment of parliamentary politics of the later 1860s and 1870s.’¹⁴¹⁷ The nature of Liberal victory also exposed the weakness of the Conservative message. The Liberal majority which had been solidly in place since 1857 forged a more enduring appearance. The worries Derby had expressed about the overconfidence and missing vigour of the Tory campaign was very possibly reflected in the electoral statistics:¹⁴¹⁸ over 40% of English constituencies returned members uncontested, moreover, both Liberal unity and a lack of Conservative robustness saw a sharp decrease of ‘split-voting’ in both counties and borough seats, a drop of nearly 30% in county seats from 1857.¹⁴¹⁹ The increase of ‘straight’ voting in multiple member constituencies, when combined with Liberal dominance,

¹⁴¹¹ Bodl., Dep Hughenden, Lygon to Disraeli, 4th of December 1864, 101/4 f.30

¹⁴¹² Warren, ‘Disraeli and the Established Church’, p.108

¹⁴¹³ *Ibid*, Disraeli to Lygon, 24th of July 1865, v.9, p.27

¹⁴¹⁴ *Gladstone Diaries*, 17th of July 1864, v.6, p.370

¹⁴¹⁵ Feuchtwanger, *Gladstone*, (London: Allen Lane, 1975) p.124

¹⁴¹⁶ Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-2012*, (London: Biteback, 2012) pp.8-9

¹⁴¹⁷ Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, p.104

¹⁴¹⁸ Derby to Disraeli Bodl., Dep Hughenden, 110/2 f.104

¹⁴¹⁹ Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, pp.178-179

suggests that the Conservative campaign failed to resonate with many voters. Where Disraeli had sought to rally the country around Anglican defence, the Liberal party had, in Parry's view, been far more effective 'at reflecting the diversity and maturity of mid-Victorian society. They were the party of aristocratic leadership, business sense, moral integrity and administrative efficiency.'¹⁴²⁰

The result of the election certainly reflected the 'geographical and denominational limits' of Disraeli's political world.¹⁴²¹ His speeches on the Church throughout the 1860s had always insisted upon the national and religious character of England. The other nations of the union were almost entirely ignored. Thus, it is not surprising this is where the Conservatives encountered their heaviest losses. The majority of his orations on Church defence were delivered to the clergy and laity of Buckinghamshire or the stalwartly Anglican members of Oxford University. His belief in the popularity of Church defence had largely been coloured by the reports of Archdeacon's Hale and Bickerstaff and encouraged by Wilberforce. In this echo chamber, Disraeli's bucolic conception of the Anglican Church, where it was inextricably linked to English national consciousness, to the nation's historic character, and to the landed nature of England's territorial constitution, filled with him with false hopes for the upcoming election. Disraeli never really operated on a national platform. His understanding of the country outside of his beloved Bucks was limited. Church defence had yielded some parliamentary success for the Conservatives but in an increasingly urban and industrial society, it could scarcely be a policy that would yield national success, especially outside of England. It was perhaps surprising that, in these circumstances, it would be Palmerston who would become the 'defining political personality of the age'.¹⁴²² At the age of eighty-one, he delivered the Liberals another large majority. But he, more than any other politician, came close 'to realising the principles of parliamentary government implicit in the 1832 act. He steered the ship of state by gently drifting in the water yet keeping a deceptively firm grasp on the tiller and an uncanny sense of prevailing winds.'¹⁴²³ The election of 1865 showed Disraeli that using the Church as a rallying cry would not materially alter the balance of national politics. In 1865, Britain seemed more than ever to be a 'Liberal' country. That was certainly true so long as that liberalism was conceived in a Palmerstonian tradition. As Warren has observed, from a Conservative point of view, 'all that could be hoped for was a reconstruction of parliamentary politics, something that would only be possible after Palmerston's death.'¹⁴²⁴

After 1865, the Liberals turned their attentions away from the English Church and increasingly focused upon the pressing issue of Irish Church reform. This was a battleground on which the Conservatives felt much less secure. By shifting the emphasis of reform onto the Irish Church, the Liberals deliberately entangled an ecclesiastical programme with Irish policy. While franchise reform seemingly dominated in the years after Russell's succession to the premiership, it would be wrong to give the impression that it was to only issue being fought out. As Warren has observed, the key 'political argument and debate, as this new political world emerged, were the interconnected issues of Ireland and the Church'.¹⁴²⁵ This observation, put that way, perhaps understates the real force of feeling surrounding parliamentary reform, at least in the country. However, its interpretative thrust is accurate. Parliamentary reform only really dominated the sessions of 1866 and 1867. Moreover, outside of parliament, the activity of the Reform League should not be minimised. But even this effort was almost exclusively peaceful and only reached its peak when reform legislation was dominating the parliamentary agenda. It would religious issues, dominated by

¹⁴²⁰ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.194

¹⁴²¹ Warren, 'Disraeli and the Established Church', p.110

¹⁴²² Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.194

¹⁴²³ *Ibid*, p.192

¹⁴²⁴ Warren, 'Disraeli and the Established Church', p.110

¹⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, p.110

the position of the Church of Ireland that would become the most agitating political questions of the late 1860s.

From 1864 onwards, there had been a noticeable shift in Liberal political manoeuvring in this respect. It had moved away from Church rates, an issue that had been marginalised-- in part thanks to Disraeli's parliamentary efforts-- and had become ever more focused on the Irish Church¹⁴²⁶ However, Disraeli had not exclusively tied his colours to the mast of narrow sectarian Anglican defence. While he had talked up the language of Church and State, he had been quick to reinforce his own historic vision of the established Church as a defender of religious liberty. As Parry has remarked, 'one great attraction of Disraeli's strategy of the 1860s, the abstract defence of religion internationally against atheism and secular liberalism, was that it allowed him to find an Irish strategy. He could talk the language of denominational reconciliation and social stability, bid for the votes of Irish Catholic MPs, and yet not offend Conservatives.'¹⁴²⁷ With this, he had some success. The Irish MPs had abstained over Church rates in the early 1860s ensuring the defeat of Trelawny's bills. And, following Disraeli's pointed opposition to Garibaldi's state visit, many Irish MP's supported him in condemning Palmerston's foreign policy.¹⁴²⁸

After 1865 Disraeli's activity surrounding the Church did not cease. However, with Ireland increasing looking like the key battleground in Church affairs, that strategy had to be amended to woo Irish Roman Catholic supporters. That was not to say that Disraeli and other leading Conservatives abandoned their strategy of upholding the Anglican settlement. But there was a distinctly more conciliatory attitude towards Ireland. In 1865, off the back of voluble performances on Church affairs, Disraeli had been noticeably silent against Dillwyn's motion on the disestablishment of the Irish Church, instead leaving the defence of the Irish establishment to Gathorne Hardy.¹⁴²⁹ Disraeli was still strong in his opposition to proposed amendments to parliamentary oaths the following month. In a speech where he sketched the history of Roman Catholic emancipation, he showed his concern about the dangers which modern liberalism presented to the temporal and spiritual authority of the Papacy, and expressed his disappointment that Irish Roman Catholic members had shown support for Dillwyn's motion to disestablish the Irish Church 'because it is impossible for us to be perfectly blind to the signs of the times in which we live.'¹⁴³⁰ The principles of this speech were reaffirmed the following year when Disraeli conceded that 'there is no doubt that in the Roman Catholic oath there are some things that are obsolete, and some things that are invidious.' But he also declared that 'in an ancient and historic country, it is impossible that public documents, and oaths above all public documents, should not possess some reference to the past, and even some looking forward to the future. 'He concluded by offering his vote in favour of the motion, showing his friendliness to the Roman Catholic faith.

The Parliamentary balance shifted in 1866, when the unexpected defeat of the Russell administration ushered in a 3rd Derby Government. Throughout 1866 and 1867, Disraeli's main parliamentary efforts were focused upon opposing Gladstone's reform bill and piloting his own, alternative measure, through parliament. That is not to say that the Conservatives lost sight of the importance of the Church and of Ireland. In fact, it remained a preoccupation of the Conservative government. However, with Disraeli's active focus elsewhere, the main bulk of the work with regard to Irish policy was left to Naas, Derby's chief secretary to Ireland. He was highly rated by Disraeli and a man who, as Warren has observed, 'fashioned the ministry's approach to the interconnected

¹⁴²⁶ Warren, 'Disraeli and Ireland: part one', p.60

¹⁴²⁷ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.715

¹⁴²⁸ *Ibid*, p.716

¹⁴²⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 28th of March 1865, v.178 cc.384-455

¹⁴³⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 10th of June 1865, v.180 cc.52-64

issues of Irish university, land and Church.¹⁴³¹ In general, Disraeli was happy to allow Naas to manage the complex negotiations with the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland, only occasionally intervening in the web of negotiations over Irish reforms.¹⁴³² However the Conservative position was not an easy one. Derby's third ministry was once again a minority government, putting the power of legislation at the mercy of their opponents. This necessitated a cautious approach. The Conservative defence of the Irish Church depended, to a considerable extent, on Liberal policy. Therefore, Disraeli was forced to wait, as 'only when the Liberal stance became clear could Disraeli consider how the Irish Church could be defended in tactical terms'.¹⁴³³ This was also not helped by Derby's stubborn reluctance materially to alter the position of the Church in Ireland.¹⁴³⁴ Thus Disraeli was in a position where, 'any concessions to moderate Irish catholic opinion, as suggested by Naas or himself, were likely to be limited by Derby's deep resistance to any change in the position of the Church of Ireland.'¹⁴³⁵ The complex political and ecclesiastical negotiations between the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland and the government in Westminster have been excellently charted elsewhere.¹⁴³⁶

The government was also marked by its more conciliatory line it had taken towards education in Ireland. Derby, at the suggestion of Naas, had settled on proposing a new Catholic university for Ireland, a new commission to investigate Irish land reform, and a cautious approach to the Irish Church.¹⁴³⁷ However, throughout 1867 Derby became increasingly convinced that an acceptable compromise between the Conservative government and the hierarchy could not be reached. Disraeli met Manning at Grosvenor gate on the 10th of December and explained that no scheme for the creation for of a Catholic university in Ireland would be successful if this institution was accompanied by financial endowment, or if its governing body was constituted only by clerics.¹⁴³⁸ Conservative concerns were further aggravated by Gladstone's speech at Southport on the 19th of December, promising a comprehensive settlement of the Irish question, specifically one that encompassed land, education and Church reform.¹⁴³⁹ Against a backdrop of Liberal promises regarding Ireland, Derby became increasingly agitated that the Catholic hierarchy would not accept what the government could actually offer them, declaring to Mayo (formerly Naas, who was elevated to the Earldom of Mayo in 1867) that 'they are bent on having their own hands on the exclusive control over secular education of the country'.¹⁴⁴⁰ With increasing distrust over Catholic good faith and with negotiations becoming increasingly difficult, Manning urged Disraeli to take an ambitious and decisive line on the issue of Irish education.¹⁴⁴¹ As Warren has recognised, Disraeli 'did not rise to the bait. He knew Derby had only accepted the scheme of chartering a catholic university...with greatest reluctance.'¹⁴⁴² The Conservatives' refusal to move on the issue eventually paid off, as Cullen and the Catholic hierarchy accepted the governments offer over the institution of a new Catholic university and launch of a new commission into land reform. However, as Warren has suggested, they may well have accepted these

¹⁴³¹ *Ibid*, p.62

¹⁴³² *Ibid*, pp.62-64; Warren, 'Disraeli and the Established Church', p.111

¹⁴³³ *Ibid*, p.62

¹⁴³⁴ Derby to Disraeli, 10th of March 1865, Bodl., Dep Hughenden, 110/2 f.100

¹⁴³⁵ Warren, 'Disraeli and Ireland: part one', p.62

¹⁴³⁶ For a detailed history of Irish ecclesiastical politics and their dealings with the British government over reform see, Emmet Larkin, *The Consolidation of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1860-1870*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives, and the Government of Ireland: Part 2, 1868-1881', pp.145-167.

¹⁴³⁷ *Ibid*, pp.62-63

¹⁴³⁸ *Disraeli Letters*, Disraeli to Corry, 10th of December 1867, vol.9, p.433; Bodl., Dep Hughenden, Manning to Disraeli, 20th of August 1867, 135/3 f.314

¹⁴³⁹ *The Times*, 20th of December 1867, p.5

¹⁴⁴⁰ Warren, 'Disraeli and Ireland: part one', p.64

¹⁴⁴¹ Bodl., Dep Hughenden, Manning to Disraeli, 135/3 f.122

¹⁴⁴² Warren, 'Disraeli and Ireland: part one', p.64

measures as they recognised that the university issue would soon be ‘overshadowed by the wider debate over the future of the Irish Church’.¹⁴⁴³

When parliament resumed in 1868 with Disraeli installed as the new premier, Ireland, once again loomed large on the political horizon. While Disraeli had proven a staunch defender of the Anglican Church in England, he had a faint grasp for Irish affairs. In this regard especially, Derby had been his shield against Liberal assault. As Hawkins has astutely recognised, ‘Derby had immense authority on Irish matters...his departure opened up opportunities for Liberal initiatives which Disraeli’s lack of command on Irish affairs could not contain’.¹⁴⁴⁴ With the Liberals preparing for their assault on the Irish Church, Gathorne Hardy noted that ‘I foresee storms and doubt if the ship will not founder’.¹⁴⁴⁵ Disraeli’s was given three weeks grace as Prime Minister before Gladstone sounded the beginning of his attack on the Conservative ministry. In a speech on the state of Ireland, Gladstone dismissed the purported positive effects of emigration, bemoaned that twenty years after the potato famine, Ireland was still reliant upon the success of one crop, then attacked the injustice of tenants’ rights, before turning his attention to the Irish Church and declaring that: ‘It was impossible for Ireland to prosper, unless there were a good understanding between the Protestant Government of this country and the Roman Catholic population of Ireland, and how could that good understanding be attained as long as we persisted in maintaining the Church, not of the nation but of the rich.’¹⁴⁴⁶ This was a metaphorical gauntlet being laid down to Disraeli’s government; to deal with the burning injustices facing the Irish population in the interconnected issues of economy, land, education and religion. It also confirmed what many already suspected, namely, that following the fractures over the Second Reform Act, Gladstone would use Irish Church disestablishment to rally the scattered fragments of his majority. Thus Disraeli, having finally reached the zenith of British politics, found himself in the unenviable position of trying to hold together a minority administration in the face of a newly galvanised opposition, fighting an election with a new electorate and in a political environment controlled almost entirely by Irish issues.

From the outset, Disraeli set forth an opposing ecclesiastical policy to Gladstone’s anticipated resolutions on the Irish Church. With regard to the accusation that Irish land laws were exploitative and had their root in the unlawful confiscation of land, Mayo argued that, while he acknowledged a series of historical confiscations of Irish property going back to the Norman Conquest, the notion that English rule had retarded progress in Ireland was patently untrue. With this in mind, he gave, as Warren has observed, ‘chapter and verse on the unexampled increase in general prosperity over the previous 30 years.’¹⁴⁴⁷ Mayo argued that ‘we have been subjected to three great political agitations, to a most terrible famine, and to an enormous emigration. If, then, I can show that, notwithstanding all these adverse circumstances, improvement has been steadily going on, it will be pretty evident that this House, and the institutions of the United Kingdom, cannot be very much to blame for the present state of Ireland.’ However, on examining the state of agriculture, road and rail infrastructure, crime, education, and even alcohol sales, reliable statistics all pointed to a great improvement in the condition of the Irish people over the course of the last generation.¹⁴⁴⁸

With this in mind, and whilst recognising that the session would be dominated by Irish affairs, Mayo laid out Disraeli’s Irish policy. This comprised: first of the firm commitment to law and order in Ireland; secondly, in a promise of a new and comprehensive commission ‘to investigate the operation of the laws that regulate the tenure of land in Ireland, the arrangements and customs that

¹⁴⁴³ *Ibid*, p.64

¹⁴⁴⁴ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.368

¹⁴⁴⁵ *Gathorne Hardy Diary*, p.65

¹⁴⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 16th of March 1868, v.190 cc.1725-1730

¹⁴⁴⁷ Warren, ‘Disraeli and Ireland: part two’, p.145

¹⁴⁴⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 10th of March 1868, v.190 cc.1360-1370

exist between landlord and tenant, the system which prevails for compensation for improvements, the operation of the Incumbered Estates' Court, and the effect emigration has had upon the condition of the agricultural class.¹⁴⁴⁹ That was followed by commitments to introduce a bill to Reform the Irish franchise, following the Second Reform Act the year before, and to bring forward railway legislation as he believed that no 'greater boon can be conferred upon the country than by taking some means to improve the management and increasing the efficiency of the railways in Ireland.'¹⁴⁵⁰ He then addressed the issue of educational reform in Ireland, the centrepiece of which was the promise of a charter for a new Roman Catholic university. This new institution, Mayo hoped, would 'stand in the same relation to the Roman Catholic population as Trinity College does to the Protestant.'¹⁴⁵¹ Lastly, he turned his attention to the Irish Church. Mayo referred to the recent work of the inquiry into Irish Church endowments, launched by the Liberals during the previous session. He charted the inquiry's progress and questioned, given that so much information had been gathered but that the report still awaited, 'whether it is desirable or even possible that, during the present Session, and in the face of such an inquiry, any immediate action should be taken with regard to the Irish Church?'¹⁴⁵² Mayo also observed that, 'The Irish Church is frequently put forward as one of the main causes of Irish discontent.' However, he argued, the threat of Fenianism was of a more nationalist nature; 'If the Irish Church were abolished to-morrow, I do not believe that we should have a single Fenian the less in the country.'¹⁴⁵³ Therefore, with regard to the Irish Church, Mayo counselled caution with regard to the proposed revolutionary reform of its position, concluding that 'if it is desired to make our Churches more equal in position than they are, this result should be secured by elevation and restoration, and not by confiscation and degradation'.¹⁴⁵⁴

Following on from Mayo's speech setting forth Disraeli's Irish strategy, Disraeli himself offered his own defence of the government's position. He once again stressed the fallacious nature of the wild claims about Ireland's supposed crisis, attacking Gladstone openly on this count.¹⁴⁵⁵ In his speech Disraeli also took the chance to restate his government's approach and defend its proposed conduct towards Ireland. However, as Warren has recognised, Disraeli was forced into a position where he 'had to defend the Irish Church itself, given Gladstone's anticipated resolutions, even though he recognised privately that it was an unpopular cause'.¹⁴⁵⁶ He thus took time to restate his belief that the government's position was the best for Ireland and the Irish people. And he argued that if the House was committed to disestablishing the Irish Church, it could not be done without a mandate from the nation: 'I deny your moral competence to do that without an appeal to the nation. I say it is a question upon which the country can alone decide'.¹⁴⁵⁷ On this topic Disraeli continued his attack on Gladstone, attempting to portray him as a would be 'thief in the night', attempting to despoil the Church of Ireland by deception and without mandate.¹⁴⁵⁸ For after all, 'the Liberal party have been in power for more than a quarter of a century. Have they prepared the mind of England upon this question?...not a word was ever uttered for the last twenty-five years...upon this great issue'¹⁴⁵⁹ Disraeli was taunted consistently throughout the debate about his remarks on Irish policy some nearly twenty-five years earlier. Back in 1844, when debating the state of Ireland, he had displayed considerable hostility towards the increasingly coercive policy pursued by Peel in Ireland. As Parry

¹⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, c.1379

¹⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*, c.1380

¹⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, c.1384

¹⁴⁵² *Ibid*, c.1388

¹⁴⁵³ *Ibid*, c.1389

¹⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid*, c.1391

¹⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 16th of March 1868, v.190 cc.1771-1772

¹⁴⁵⁶ Warren, 'Disraeli and Ireland: part two', p.146

¹⁴⁵⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 16th of March 1868, v.190, cc.1785-1786

¹⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 3rd of April 1868, v.191, c.904

¹⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, cc.1785-1786

has shrewdly recognised, ‘he had strongly criticised the puritanical and uncomprehending traditional approach to Irish government based on penal laws and on the rigid imposition of English institutions in inappropriate circumstances.’¹⁴⁶⁰ In his 1844 speech, supported by his own interpretation of Irish history, he had called for a stronger executive for Ireland, and had characterised the Irish problem in stark terms: ‘a starving population, an absentee aristocracy, and an alien Church, and, in addition, the weakest executive in the world.’¹⁴⁶¹ It was these remarks that he addressed in 1868. He attempted to remind that the House that, ‘that speech was made before the famine and the emigration from Ireland...made before the change in locomotion, and the sale of a large portion of the soil of Ireland, which has established a resident proprietary instead of an absentee aristocracy.’ And remained firm that the intervening years had changed the condition of Ireland and the nature of the Irish question, that ‘in my historical conscience the sentiment of that speech was right’.¹⁴⁶² Disraeli invariably turned to history when dealing with politics. In that sense Ireland was no exception. When responding to Lowe’s claims that history should be ignored when dealing with Ireland, Disraeli replied: ‘Irish policy is Irish history, and I have no faith in any Statesman who attempts to remedy the evils of Ireland who is either ignorant of the past or who will not deign to learn from it.’¹⁴⁶³ However, Disraeli’s defence of the Irish Church on historical and constitutional grounds was not simply a disguised exercise in partisan politics nor merely a reaction to the Church’s perceived contemporary unpopularity. Rather, as Warren has observed, Disraeli’s arguments for the Church of Ireland were ‘linked to a wider assumption that a defence of the historic and protestant nature of the Anglican Church would be electorally popular.’¹⁴⁶⁴ Therefore his defence of the Church of Ireland was not so much the putative restoration of a conciliatory Conservative Irish policy, but rather the last act of Disraeli’s ultimately ill-fated attempt to re-align the Tories as the protectors of Church and State.

While the Liberals laid siege to the Church of Ireland, Disraeli’s attempts to defend it shattered his carefully cultivated relationships with leading figures in both Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. Throughout the 1860s Disraeli had tried to forge an alliance with Catholic MPs, on the grounds of Liberalism versus Religion. As he had confided to Stanley, he hoped that the Irish Catholics might join the Conservatives in broad coalition representing coinciding sentiments on faith, social order, and rural political values. This was not an entirely unrealistic hope. It was certainly not a fanciful alliance between two otherwise incompatible factions. If the anti-Catholicism of Disraeli’s most fervently Protestant backbenchers could have been neutralised, Irish Catholic MPs had much in common with the rural and social interests of his own party. By establishing himself as a defender of the faith, he had been partially successful in this strategy. However, the painstaking work of collaborating with Manning, the Irish hierarchy, and Irish MPs, was instantly undermined when Gladstone’s determination to disestablish the Church of Ireland outbid anything Disraeli was able to offer to the Roman Catholic interest. As Parry has recognised, ‘Gladstone’s manoeuvre of 1868 on the Irish Church wooed most Catholics away from him and left him in an awkward position’.¹⁴⁶⁵

Disraeli’s collaboration with Wilberforce suffered a similar fate in the same year. It was shattered, not by disagreements over policy, but by a heated argument over Church patronage. Tensions initially emerged when, in a parliamentary speech, Disraeli suggested that in the movement to disestablish the Church of Ireland, ‘High Church Ritualists and the Irish followers of the Pope have been long in secret combination, and are now in open confederacy’¹⁴⁶⁶ This was a sentiment repeated

¹⁴⁶⁰ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.715

¹⁴⁶¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 16th of February 1844, v.72 cc.1007-1017

¹⁴⁶² *Ibid*, 16th of March 1868, v.190 cc.1790-1791

¹⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, c.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Warren, ‘Disraeli and Ireland: part two’, p.146

¹⁴⁶⁵ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.716

¹⁴⁶⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 3rd of April 1868, v.191 c.924

less than two weeks later in a letter to *The Times* where, although conceding his admiration for the broader High Church party, Disraeli addressed his earlier claims and condemned that ‘extreme faction within the Church...that does not conceal its ambition to destroy the connexion between Church and State...The Liberation Society with its shallow and short-sighted fanaticism, is a mere instrument in the hands of this confederacy.’¹⁴⁶⁷ These existing tensions over High-Church ritualism, which Disraeli had undoubtedly exacerbated, were compounded by Wilberforce’s insistent petitioning for further patronage for his supporters. Cracks emerged over Disraeli’s refusal to prefer Dr. Leighton, Warden of All Souls, to the bishopric of Hereford which had recently become open. He did this despite considerable pressure from Wilberforce as well notable High-Church ecclesiastical laymen Gathorne Hardy (MP for Oxford) and Lord Beauchamp (formerly Frederick Lygon, fellow of All Souls).¹⁴⁶⁸ While Disraeli was able to politely decline Wilberforce’s particular requests, the divisiveness of ritualism within the Anglican Church, had once again thrown suspicion over the High Church faction. And Wilberforce’s constant petitioning of Disraeli for patronage also had alarm bells ringing within low-church circles. One Tory county agent sent Disraeli a letter reporting that ‘Public report says you are completely in the Bishop of Oxford’s hand on these matters – you could not possibly have a more one-sided advisor’.¹⁴⁶⁹ This ill-feeling, both within other parties in the Church and amongst the broader electorate, led Disraeli to promote the popular ‘evangelical canon of Liverpool, Hugh MacNeile’ to the Deanery of Ripon, without any consultation from Wilberforce.¹⁴⁷⁰ The Bishop was furious. But he did not show his immediate disappointment in public. Still, this was somewhat ill-conceived gamble to attract Low-Church support.¹⁴⁷¹ As Hawkins has observed, ‘while gaining support of Orange Toryism in Lancashire, it deeply alarmed moderate Anglicans’, the very same people on whose votes Disraeli was relying.¹⁴⁷² Derby had stressed the importance of political impartiality when dispensing patronage, ensuring all parties were represented. With this in mind, the case of MacNeile was perhaps needlessly inflammatory. However, Disraeli fully recognised the factional issue surrounding the Irish Church and recognised that these ‘theological division within the Anglican Church made clerical appointments ‘critical and complicated’’.¹⁴⁷³

With a general election called for November, Disraeli was fully aware how important the Anglican Church would be in the fortunes of both the Irish Church and the Conservative Party. It required a strong and united response from the Anglican clergy. With this in mind, Disraeli penned this missive to Wilberforce: ‘I can understand that a High Church clergy may not sympathise very strongly with a Calvinistic branch of the Establishment, but I speak my sincere conviction when I say that if they allow this sentiment to neutralise their action on this occasion, they will be taking an unwise course’¹⁴⁷⁴ Disraeli had not yet given up hope, though he was in a minority amongst Conservatives.¹⁴⁷⁵ With the election impending, Disraeli still had confidence that the nation, grateful for the extension of the franchise, would now rally around the Established Church, and still hoped that Gladstone’s resolutions to dismantle the Church of Ireland would be rejected by the new electorate. As Bradford has put it, Disraeli’s twin hopes of a grateful new electorate and ‘a strong appeal to

¹⁴⁶⁷ *The Times*, 14th of April 1868, p.7

¹⁴⁶⁸ Warren, ‘Disraeli and the Established Church’, p.112

¹⁴⁶⁹ Bodl., Dep Hughenden, James Barnes to Disraeli, August 1868, 157/1 f.28

¹⁴⁷⁰ Warren, ‘Disraeli and the Church’, p113

¹⁴⁷¹ Derby described it as a ‘rather hazardous bid for the extreme Low Church’, Derby to Disraeli, 14th of September 1868, Bodl., Dep Hughenden, 110/3 f.289

¹⁴⁷² Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.375

¹⁴⁷³ *Ibid*, p.375

¹⁴⁷⁴ *Life of Samuel Wilberforce*, v.3, p.245

¹⁴⁷⁵ Many of his colleagues however did not share his optimism. For contemporary thoughts on the Conservatives electoral chances see: Stanley to Disraeli, 29th of September 1868 Bodl., Dep Hughenden, 112/3, f.75; *Ibid*, Derby to Disraeli, 14th of November 1868, 110/3, f.311; *Ibid*, Derby to Disraeli, 22nd of November, 110/3, f.317

Protestantism from his electoral platform would win votes proved equally illusory.¹⁴⁷⁶ The result saw the Liberals almost double their majority. Disraeli's appeal to England's innate Protestantism, and his hope that it might rally around the Established Church and protect the sacrosanct connection between Church and State failed to cut through to a new electorate, who were more interested with Liberal social reform than Conservative institutional preservation. Moreover, his relationship with Wilberforce was irreparably shattered. Wilberforce was infuriated by what he saw as Disraeli's injurious distribution of Church patronage. At the same time, Disraeli was disgusted with Wilberforce's commitment to factionalism when the Church was imperilled. As Warren has suggested, when they first met twenty years before, 'their relationship was based on a mutual misreading of each other's character and intentions and was to end in tears'.¹⁴⁷⁷ Disraeli certainly saw Wilberforce as a collaborator in his scheme to pursue a policy of popular Tory Church and State politics, a means by which the nation might rally around the not only the Conservative party, but also the establishment. Wilberforce no doubt saw Disraeli as a useful political ally in his struggle for internecine supremacy. How far he subscribed to Disraeli's broader vision remains unclear. We should perhaps remember Gladstone's stinging rebuke to Wilberforce when his own preferment to the Archbishopric of York had been denied in 1862: 'an able prelate getting all you can for the Church, asking more, and giving nothing'.¹⁴⁷⁸ In the end it was perhaps a description that would prove accurate.

1868 displayed to Disraeli several important things. It showed him that the Church could not easily put factionalism aside. Even over the pressing issue of disestablishment. Warren summed this up nicely when he suggested, 'the failure of the Church to combine in its own political defence, its inability to agree on issues, its factionalism, and above all the divisive impact of the ritualists' all combined to make Disraeli's task impossible.¹⁴⁷⁹ Disraeli overlooked other reasons for his defeat. He often pointed to the fragmented factionalism in the Church. But there is little to suggest that Disraeli really recognised, or did anything to remedy, the factional fractures amongst his own parliamentary party which had been existent well before Disraeli took up Church defence as major political policy. Moreover, as Warren has observed, he greatly underestimated the 'ability of Gladstone to infuse the new and existing electorate with a moral enthusiasm for the reform of the Church establishment in Ireland'.¹⁴⁸⁰ Disraeli recognised the Church as a historical pillar of the establishment and viewed it as a body that, placed within his own historical understanding, could be restored as a popular institution with a powerful social function. In short, he conceived of it as an organisational and doctrinal ally for the Conservatives, by which the spirit of the age might be combatted. These were ideas that suited the age of Equipose, twenty years in which the Conservatives often found themselves swimming against the tide and had little opportunity to turn it. Moreover, they were a development of Disraeli's earliest political sentiments, shaped into policy by a series of astute collaboration. Despite its lack of results his engagement in Church policy remains an underappreciated insight into Disraeli's true understanding of English politics. In his conception of the role of the Established Church might play Disraeli showed deep understanding and intellectual broadness in religious affairs. In his collaboration with leading ecclesiastical figures to achieve this he was able to display his unique ability to form effective working relationships. Disraeli's understanding of both religious and ecclesiastical affairs has traditionally met by dismissal by historians. More recently that has changed. Disraeli's involvement in Church politics during the Age of Equipose is testament not only to his intellectual and historical conception of the mixed nature of the English constitution, but also to his

¹⁴⁷⁶ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.284

¹⁴⁷⁷ Warren, 'Disraeli and the Church', p.101

¹⁴⁷⁸ *MSS. Wilberforce*, Gladstone to Wilberforce, 2nd of October 1862, c.13, f.189

¹⁴⁷⁹ Warren, 'Disraeli and the Church', p.114

¹⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.115

keen ability to collaborate to attempt to revive Toryism in a period when the spirit of the age, the parliamentary arithmetic and political climate of the period were arrayed against them.

III: Parliamentary Reform

Disraeli's name is perhaps most popularly associated with parliamentary reform, principally through his role in steering the Second Reform Act through parliament. This was piece of legislation once considered to be pivotal to the enactment of Disraeli's vision of Tory Democracy. It once secured Disraeli's reputation as a modern and far-seeing Conservative statesman. Through the work of revisionist historiography in the 1960s, and principally through Maurice Cowling's inciteful analysis, this myth was dispelled in scholarly circles.¹⁴⁸¹ However, Cowling's history of the passage of the Second Reform Act, with its stresses on the expediency and opportunism of the 1867 bill and in its wider aim to challenge the Liberal pre-war historiography of the 19th century – which failed 'to understand the conservative character of the politics they were attempting to describe, which saw 'mid-Victorian parliamentary politics as Liberal politics... Liberalism as doctrine rather than a political party, and Radicalism as truth rather than ideology',¹⁴⁸² - had the unintended consequence of forestalling an understanding of events which might demonstrated that Disraeli engaged in Reform in a principled and historically coherent way.

There is some irony that Disraeli's name has been most associated with Conservative success over this issue. As Parry has observed, 'it was one with which he was most intermittently and reluctantly involved'.¹⁴⁸³ That is not to say, however, that Disraeli had not considered the issue of parliamentary reform prior to the 1860s. In fact, he had displayed a strikingly consistent line to parliamentary reform. His reluctance stemmed mainly from pragmatic rather than ideological concerns. First, it was tactically difficult for a minority party, especially a Tory one to engage in such an exercise. Secondly, and contrary to a widely held view, Disraeli did not see reform as a party issue. In fact, he argued that, "it is not for the advantage of the country that Parliamentary Reform should be a question that should decide the fate of a Ministry, that it should not be what is commonly called a party question".¹⁴⁸⁴ His historical conscience, and his unique understanding of English history, had furnished him with the belief that political parties had long been misguided in approaches to parliamentary reform. The Whig magnificoes of the eighteenth-century had been villainised in his *Vindication* for the venality of their borough-mongering and the avarice of their political factionalism and had sought to corrupt the English construction with their vision of a Venetian oligarchy.¹⁴⁸⁵ At the same time, he thought Tory opposition in 1832 odiously exclusive. *Sybil* had condemned Wellington's administration as so exclusive that it, 'precipitated a revolution which might have been delayed for half a century, and never need have occurred in so aggravated a form.'¹⁴⁸⁶ Disraeli was never opposed, in principle, to parliamentary reform. Even in 1832 he informed John Murray that 'It is quite impossible that anything adverse to the general measure of reform can issue from my pen'.¹⁴⁸⁷ Disraeli opposed 1832 itself because it was narrow, imbalanced, and factional. The variety in the interests that were enfranchised was too small.

¹⁴⁸¹ Maurice Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1967)

¹⁴⁸² Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.1

¹⁴⁸³ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.709

¹⁴⁸⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of February 1867, vol.185, c.215

¹⁴⁸⁵ *Whigs and Whiggism*, pp.128-140

¹⁴⁸⁶ *Sybil*, p.10-30. See also *Ibid*, Lady St. Julians reminiscences of 1832: "What with the dear King and the dear Duke, we really had brought ourselves to believe that we lived in the days of Versailles or nearly; and I must admit I think we had become a little too exclusive. Out of the cottage circle, there was really no world, and after all we were lost not by insulting the people, but by snubbing the aristocracy.", p.246

¹⁴⁸⁷ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to John Murray: 30th of March 1832, vol.1, p.251

The shortcomings of the 1832 Reform Act ensured that the fire of Parliamentary Reform was never totally extinguished. The issue of Reform had died down in the years immediately following, but it became quickly clear that the ‘Great Reform Act’ had been too factional, too specific, and too one-dimensional. It had enfranchised only a small section of society and had tied the extension of the vote purely to income. The clamour for further Reform would be accelerated by the events all across Europe in 1848, the year of revolution, where Britain had been seemingly almost alone among major European powers being untouched by revolution. As Parry has shrewdly observed, ‘the ideological ferment of 1848 reopened the question in ways that threatened the Englishness of the Constitution.’¹⁴⁸⁸ Radicals seeking to further democratize the constitution, often paired with the demands of the Chartist movement, turned the public consciousness to the need for further parliamentary reform, to combat the stranglehold of traditional interests over the legislative process. There was much alarm amongst political leadership of the country when the great Chartist petition of 1848 was delivered to parliament. Hobhouse recorded that as he sat down to work in the India office, he almost expected ‘that I shall hear the discharge of musketry or cannon from the other side of the river’.¹⁴⁸⁹ While revolution was avoided, ‘it sparked a debate on why Britain has escaped revolution and how that achievement might be preserved’.¹⁴⁹⁰ In fact, the year of revolutions breathed new life into the radical movement which had been left disunited and exhausted after the successful agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League. Having achieved their great aim in 1846, they had seemingly become becalmed, and splintered into a series of smaller and dissociated pressure-groups. In the immediate aftermath of the 1848 Chartist petition, radicals for the first time in four years began to debate the necessity of electoral reform.¹⁴⁹¹ While Reform was a doomed cause until Russell gave it his public support, the radical activity following on from 1848 gave parliamentary impetus to legislators to question the way in which Britain was governed. In fact, Disraeli hit the nail on the head when he commented that in 1848 that everyone is ‘merged in the mighty theme of, how the devil Europe, or perhaps England, is to be governed’.¹⁴⁹²

Victorian England was habitually devoted to the supposed organicism of the English constitution. A constitution granted by posterity which had evolved through history from one precedent to the next. As Saunders has recognised, ‘Victorian politics was obsessed with the constitution. Leading statesmen wrote treatises, clergy preached sermons on church and state, while historians grew rich on the sales of constitutional histories.’¹⁴⁹³ But 1848 would make Britain once again question the political and social organisation of the country. Thus, as the ‘Age of Equipoise’ was ushered in, the Reform debate was shaped by two opposing ideologies. There were still those that believed in the sanctity of Britain’s historic constitution. They believed that its existing form should be maintained and protected from the destructive meddling of dangerous egalitarian thinkers who sought to reform the constitution and political system along ‘American’ or ‘Continental’ lines. Conversely, there were those that believed that Britain’s willingness to engage in progressive reform throughout history had protected it from the revolutions that had ravaged the continent throughout the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. That sagacious and timely intervention to recognise the spirit of the age, adapting the constitution to allow for contemporary social forces, could ensure the safety of the existing social order and maintain the authentic governing principles which the constitution had

¹⁴⁸⁸ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.710

¹⁴⁸⁹ Hobhouse, *Recollections of a Long Life*, vol.6, p.215

¹⁴⁹⁰ Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) pp.28-29

¹⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.29-32; Is it well beyond the limits of this present work to discuss it in detail, for a far more comprehensive account of Radicalism and the National Reform Association see, N .Edsall, ‘A Failed National Movement: the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, 1848-54’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, (1976) 49

¹⁴⁹² *Disraeli’s Letters*, D to Lord John Manners, 8th of March 1848, vol.5 pp.16-17

¹⁴⁹³But Robert Saunders, “Introduction: ‘Shooting Niagara – and After?’”, *Parliamentary History* (2017) 36.1, p.4

handed down. This was the crux of Thomas Macaulay's famous contribution to the Reform debates of 1831: 'Reform, that you may preserve'¹⁴⁹⁴

It is an over-simplification to assume ideas surrounding parliamentary reform fell strictly along party lines, with Liberals pressing for reform and Conservatives resisting it. Whilst there is an element of truth in this assertion, that element can easily mask the true complexity of the reform issue. Undoubtedly, Radicals, and the popular movements closely associated with the cause of parliamentary reform, Chartism and the Reform League were the most vociferous in their demands to 'democratise' the constitution. And certainly, by 1852, there were still a group of Conservatives in parliament who were adamant in offering an unwavering commitment to stop further reform. However, opinion on reform was not so clearly or cleanly divided. Indeed, many politicians, Disraeli included, did not see the question of parliamentary reform as a party question. Rather, several dominant strands of thought emerged around the Reform question.

The first and most energetic emerged from that classical, radical, tradition. Whilst the Chartist movement had run out of steam by the 'Age of Equipoise', the same emotional political forces which had inspired those calls to democratise, and indeed, radicalise the Nineteenth-Century constitution had not disappeared. As Malcolm Chase skilfully observed, these forces would reappear in the 1860s with some vigour. The Reform League would emerge as a powerful and truly national political movement, and one with a strong continuation from the Chartism that preceded it. Moreover, it was not simply a movement which was constrained to the great urban metropolis's but rather, 'the infusion of this movement into communities hitherto untouched by organised popular politics was widespread.'¹⁴⁹⁵ The Reform League and extra-parliamentary political agitation could claim little credit for the eventual shape of the Conservative Reform Act of 1867, as contemporary radicals and later twentieth-century historians would claim.¹⁴⁹⁶ But their influence should not be easily dismissed. As Maurice Cowling conceded, the Reform League, while beyond the pale of Parliamentary politics, was very much 'stimulated and mediated by professional politicians who felt themselves part of a political system, cast themselves roles in it and sought for support with which to make these roles effective.'¹⁴⁹⁷ As we shall see, that while the Conservative party was little affected by activities of the Reform League, the League had a profound impact on Liberal politics. Under Palmerston, the Liberals had been happy to use Reform as a political football, a tool to gain support of both parliamentary factions and an urban electorate, but which had been treated with apathy and delay in the House. As Beales described it, in this period Reform was 'a plaything of parliamentary politics'.¹⁴⁹⁸ In fact, this contradictory position taken by Liberal MPs between public support for Reform because of its perceived electoral viability and their private reservations combined with legislative apathy resulted in them being forced into a corner by a combination of Conservative manoeuvring and the popular agitation in 1867.¹⁴⁹⁹

The second tradition of reforming ideology was strongly rooted in the progressive, historically minded, Whig Liberal school of thought. This was embodied in the reforming politics of

¹⁴⁹⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 2nd of March 1831, vol.2, cc.1204-1205

¹⁴⁹⁵ Malcolm Chase, 'The Popular Movement for Parliamentary Reform in Provincial Britain during the 1860s', *Parliamentary History* (2017) 36.1, p.14

¹⁴⁹⁶ Principal among these scholars was Royden Harrison, who attribute considerable importance to the London demonstrations of 1866 and 1867 to the eventual passage of a 'radical' Reform bill. See Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, (London: Routledge, 1965) pp.136-140

¹⁴⁹⁷ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.288

¹⁴⁹⁸ Derek Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone 1815-1885*, (London: Sphere Books, 1971) p.192; see also Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp.209-214; K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) pp.239-244

¹⁴⁹⁹ Kirstin Zimmerman, 'Liberal Speech, Palmerstonian Delay, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act', *English Historical Review* (2003) vol. 118 no. 479, pp.1176-1207

Lord John Russell, and later fused with the radical tradition in the ideas of William Gladstone.¹⁵⁰⁰ Russell had been among the architects of the 1832 Reform Act, a constitutional historian of note, and staunch believer in that hereditary Whig reforming tradition. This was an ideology that envisaged the historical position of the Whig party as holding the middle ground between Tory exclusiveness and Radical populism. Patrolling ‘the via media between the Tories and the Radicals, moderating the inertia of one and the iconoclasm of the other’.¹⁵⁰¹ Or as Russell himself saw it, this was the position between the ‘old fortress of Tory prejudice’ and the dangerous politics of extremist radicalism.¹⁵⁰² This high-Whig strand of reforming ideology was in essence to extend to the people as much responsibility as they could handle and by satisfying the popular demands of the nation, the serious grievances which could be occasion by ignoring them, might be averted. As Saunders has astutely recognized, ‘Russell’s reformism was not a slightly less daring form of radicalism, but an attempt to satisfy the grievances that might otherwise fuel it.’¹⁵⁰³ It was an attempt to guide progress and reform from above rather than allow the initiative of change fall into the hands of the people. As Russell, early in his career, would tell the House of Commons, ‘great changes accomplished by the people are dangerous, although sometimes salutary, great changes accomplished by an aristocracy, at the desire of the people, are at once salutary and safe.’¹⁵⁰⁴

The third dimension was most associated with Disraeli. He had always been reluctant to oppose parliamentary reform as matter of principle. Derived from a Tory tradition, it supposed that 1832 was Whig measure which ensured Whig dominance. It posited a broader, more varied, and more national franchise, combined with a more defined redistribution of seats, and certain key restrictions to ensure the open and deferential nature of the constitution, a more ‘Tory’ political system could be ensured through further reform. As Saunders has observed, while some Conservatives might have felt some lingering loyalty to the Reform Act of 1832 and sought to pitch their stakes on that particular electoral perimeter, there was ‘no reason why Disraeli or his fellow ministers should die in a ditch for a Whig settlement’. This was because a more ‘Conservative’ electoral settlement could be envisaged through further electoral reform, in that respect, ‘finality’ was a Whig position, to which their opponents had only a tactical commitment.¹⁵⁰⁵

In high political terms, Russell’s commitment to a Reform Bill in 1852 and further reform was undoubtedly important to the cause. However, a clear consensus on the reasons behind his U-turn on ‘finality’ is yet to emerge. Traditionally, it has been suggested that Russell’s conversion was motivated by short-term partisan advantage. For Smith it was a move to attract radical support.¹⁵⁰⁶ His biographer John Prest insists it was an attempt to re-establish his progressive credentials and to ‘stay ahead of Palmerston’.¹⁵⁰⁷ Angus Hawkins has argued that with his authority waning Russell ‘committed himself to the issue of parliamentary reform as the means of reasserting his diminishing control over liberal opinion’.¹⁵⁰⁸ It is easy to see the attraction of such opportunist interpretations. In 1851 Russell’s ministry was in its death throes. He had been propped up by the Peelites since 1846, his grand legislative plans had been left in tatters, and Lord Palmerston, his foreign secretary, was now at odds with Victoria and Albert. However, it simplifies the complexity of the issue to put Russell’s conversion down to mere political expediency. As Saunders has recognised, Russell not

¹⁵⁰⁰ Saunders, “Shooting Niagara – and After?”, p.6

¹⁵⁰¹ Saunders, ‘Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform, 1848-1867’, *The English Historical Review*, vol.120 no.489, (2005), p.1293

¹⁵⁰² Russell to Bedford, 18th of November 1849, quoted in Saunders, “Shooting Niagara – and after?”, p.6

¹⁵⁰³ *Ibid*, pp.1293-1294

¹⁵⁰⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd series, House of Commons debate, 25th of April 1822, v.7, c.85

¹⁵⁰⁵ Saunders, “Shooting Niagara – and After?”, p.7

¹⁵⁰⁶ Smith, *Making of the Second Reform Bill*, p.29

¹⁵⁰⁷ John Prest, *Lord John Russell*, (London: Macmillan, 1972) p.319

¹⁵⁰⁸ Hawkins, *Parliament, Party and the Art of Politics*, p.19

only had the background for undertaking further reform, but that he ‘had suggested a reform bill in 1849, when the threat of Palmerston was still muted’, that he would have been foolish to undermine the Peelites on whom his government had relied, and that given the shape of his 1852 Reform Bill, if ‘it was an attempt to win radical favour, it was both out of character and strikingly ill-judged’.¹⁵⁰⁹ Russell’s return to the parliamentary reform was fuelled, not by a bid for radical support, but rather by ‘a constitutional ideal that was fundamentally at odds with that of the radicals, and which elicited little enthusiasm from them in consequence.’¹⁵¹⁰ This idealistic view of Russell’s conversion in the 1850s certainly does Russell more credit than more traditionally opportunist views. However, it fails to recognise Russell’s own egocentricity. He had always liked to be seen as the settler of great questions. A more nuanced interpretation of Russell’s motivations is needed. Here Parry comes closest to the mark. He has argued that three imperatives induced Russell to take up the cause of parliamentary reform again: First, ‘the need to rally Liberal forces in and outside of Parliament behind a bold invigorating cause... Second, post-Chartism, was to demonstrate Liberal concern to reassure the respectable working classes about the constitution... Third, to arrest the ugly class division between land and trade’.¹⁵¹¹ Whatever ‘Finality Jack’s’ motives behind his volte face over parliamentary reform, he proved to be a wholly committed champion of a further settlement from 1851 onwards. Moreover, his entry into the fray once again propelled parliamentary reform into the spotlight of respectable front-line legislative politics.

While impetus was given to Reform by a government sanction reform bill, it would be a further fifteen years until a measure was passed. In between Russell’s reform bill of 1852 and the successful Conservative measure of 1867, there was no fewer than five unsuccessful government-initiated reform measures. Six different governments introduced a reform bill, and two fell as a consequence of its defeat. In fact, following Disraeli’s reform bill of 1859 the three major parliamentary groups had agreed that the current political arrangement was inadequate. The question then emerges: if parliament had been so committed to further parliamentary reform, why did it take so many failed attempts before a measure was passed. The answer lies in both in the complexity of the parliamentary reform as a political issue and in the also in the public mood during a period of relative class peace. On the first count, reform was a particularly difficult and multifaceted issue. As Saunders has recognised, ‘reform’ was no more than a slogan, ‘it was something to be inscribed on banners and blazoned across platforms; but it meant nothing more specific than ‘change’.’¹⁵¹² The real contention, and complexity, in the debates surrounding parliamentary reform was what a reformed political mechanism would look like. The history of parliamentary reform was certainly not the linear history charting the irresistible march of progress towards a democratic constitution. All the reform bills of the 1850s and 1860s were aimed at protecting the foundations of the existing political structure. This was, in Maurice Cowling’s words, ‘the situation in which gentry, aristocracy, and the respectable classes continued to be responsible for the conduct of English political life.’¹⁵¹³ Neither the Liberals or the Conservatives wished for that situation to be materially disturbed, but both had different ideas as to how the constitution should be reformed so that old societal balances could be protected, or new ones recognised.

The reform debates were really about making these distinctions: at what arbitrary level the franchise should be set to distinguish between respectable and non-respectable working classes; how a redistribution of seats should be made to recognise any new balance between urban and rural constituencies; whether small boroughs still had merit, and whether they should be protected or

¹⁵⁰⁹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.39

¹⁵¹⁰ Saunders, ‘Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform’, p.1290

¹⁵¹¹ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.175

¹⁵¹² Saunders, “Shooting Niagara”, p.7

¹⁵¹³ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.48

abolished; how property values should be assessed in relation to the franchise, be it through ‘rental’ or ‘rating’ value.¹⁵¹⁴ These distinctions were important. Any reform of the parliamentary franchise would bring in new voters or exclude old ones. Where these new voters were drawn from was the defining characteristic of any reform measure. As Saunders has argued, ‘an electorate drawn disproportionately from one particular cohort, or the admission of large numbers of corrupt or dependent voters, would not necessarily produce a more representative constituency.’¹⁵¹⁵ Differences between urban and rural franchises and distinctions made in boundaries between agricultural and industrial constituencies reflected how Parliament had tried to grapple with the central question in the past: ‘who was deserving on the vote? And which part of society should they be drawn from?’ With such small details determining where the balance of power would lie, opposition to reform was not merely party political or obstructive but was rooted in serious concerns for the effect a prejudiced measure of reform would exact on the balance of power between interest groups in both parliament and society. Thus from 1859, while both principal parties agreed on the necessity of a further measure of parliamentary reform, both were worried that any reform passed by the other would disproportionately favour their traditional power base at the expense of the others.

There lay a paradox for the Liberals. The majority felt themselves committed to further reform more out of obligation to liberal activists and the promises made to their constituents than from any really strong feelings on the subject. As Parry has recognised, ‘popular feeling was weak in 1854, 1860...and in 1866...But since Liberal activists remained interested in borough franchise extension...a moderate gesture was necessary.’¹⁵¹⁶ In the words of Granville in 1857: ‘The game is not an easy one for anyone as regards reform...it is almost impossible to concoct one [a reform bill] which will please everyone. The House of Commons is sure to be apathetic about reform. The country does not care a great deal about it, but would be very angry if it thought that the Government was anti-reforming.’¹⁵¹⁷ *The Times* had been confident of public apathy towards reform when it reported ‘the more Mr. Bright talked of reform the less the country seemed to desire it. He frightened and disgusted the upper classes without conciliating the lower.’¹⁵¹⁸ Outside of the large metropolitan hubs, this was a fair reflection of the public mood. Support for reform remained scarce, and Disraeli was accurate in suggesting as much: ‘the middle classes are against Birmingham – witness their able organ the *Economist*, and the educated classes are against it, as is proved by the articles in the *Saturday Review*. That the opinion of the country is the same is sufficiently proved by the tone of the *Times*.’¹⁵¹⁹

To appreciate the situation the Conservatives were faced with in 1867, it is necessary to briefly chart the failure of previous government Reform bills. The problems legislators faced before 1867 gave shape to those later debates. Moreover, in these unsuccessful attempts by both parties, the genus of a successful measure formed. This was one which Disraeli perhaps most fully embraced: that reform could not succeed except by a truly broad measure which involved an element of concession to their opponents. The first of these Reform bills was introduced by John Russell in the dying months of his first premiership. It proposed a reduction of both the county and borough franchises, to £20 and £5 respectively. This was coupled with a modest scheme of redistribution which proposed borough seats with fewer than 500 electors, those seats that approached ‘the character of those boroughs in which direct nomination formerly prevailed’ Saunders has persuasively demonstrated that Russell was initially opposed to any form of redistribution of seats, something that might upset the balance of the

¹⁵¹⁴ Saunders, “Shooting Niagara”, pp.7-8

¹⁵¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.8

¹⁵¹⁶ Parry, *Rise and Fall*, p.210

¹⁵¹⁷ Fitzmaurice, *Granville*, v.1, pp.227-228: Granville to Canning, 8th of April 1857.

¹⁵¹⁸ *The Times*, 18th of April 1859, p.5

¹⁵¹⁹ FIND REFERENCE

1832 settlement.¹⁵²⁰ Thus, Russell was able to frame his bill as an attempt to provide ‘a supplement to the Reform Bill, and not to provide a substitute for it.’¹⁵²¹ It was a modest bill that would have provided a moderate increase to the franchise but really have retained the existing character of the 1832 settlement. Given his delicate political circumstances when he introduced the bill, it was not one that was going to win support from either the radicals or the more conservative elements of his party. Its failure was confirmed before it had a chance to be debated as it was ‘buried in the general wreck of his government’.¹⁵²²

Despite its defeat Russell, and many other leading Liberals felt ‘bound in honour’ to introduce another measure of parliamentary reform.¹⁵²³ Over the next fifteen years, Russell would propose a series of variations on the dominant themes of his 1852 bill: a small extension of the franchise coupled with a modest redistribution of seats. These proposals varied in their scope but were ultimately aimed at recognising that there were those among the working class deserving of the vote, and to tackle the public odium surrounding the continued existence of small boroughs. In 1854 Russell proposed a £5 franchise for boroughs and a £10 franchise for the counties to remove the influence of the country gentlemen.¹⁵²⁴ Alongside these broad franchise requirements, Russell also proposed ‘fancy franchises’: special qualifications for university graduates, men with savings of £60, those on annual salaries of £100 and over, and those who received stock dividends of £10 or more a year.¹⁵²⁵ The Liberals used these ‘merit’, or ‘fancy’ franchises, to attempt recognised intellect in the electoral pale alongside property and commerce. The bill also proposed to disenfranchise all seats with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, while those seats with less than 10,000 home-dwellers would see the loss of one Member. Along with the disenfranchisement of the disgraced seats of St. Albans and Sudbury this freed up sixty-six seats for redistribution.¹⁵²⁶ In essence, it was another attempt to ensure that intellect was represented alongside land and industry. The bill had much to commend it. However, it faced considerable opposition. This was most prominently so in the figure of Palmerston, who resigned from Aberdeen’s cabinet in opposition to both the level of the franchise and to the proposed redistribution of seats. However, it would be the escalation in the East and the advent of the Crimean War which would really put pay to the 1854 Reform Bill. Introduced as war was looking, Russell was warned that support was evaporating.¹⁵²⁷ Russell’s decision to push ahead was foolish. By April, amid calls for further delay to parliamentary reform legislation, Russell withdrew his bill in a speech which saw him ‘burst into a hysterical fit of crying’ at the dispatch box.¹⁵²⁸

While Russell was the victim of bad luck with regard to events out of his control, his reform bill caused serious anxiety amongst the government’s supporters. When Palmerston resigned over the extent of the bill he was ‘congratulated by Lord Fitzwilliam and other discontented Whigs, who disliked the Peelites as much as they love their pocket boroughs.’¹⁵²⁹ But it was not just these old Whigs who were alarmed by his scheme. As Hawkins has recognised, many of his supporters looked on the bill with increasing unease; they ‘disliked the extensive redistribution proposed by the measure, were alarmed by the lowered borough franchise, and feared that it embodied not an extension, but a departure, from the principles of 1832.’¹⁵³⁰ In fact the scope of the proposal, which according to Stanley ‘seemed to startle the House with its magnitude’, began to provoke pockets of

¹⁵²⁰ Saunders, ‘Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform’, pp.1307-1309

¹⁵²¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 9th of February 1852, v.119 c264; *Ibid*, c.267

¹⁵²² Saunders, ‘Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform’, p.1290

¹⁵²³ Wood to Russell, 25th November 1853, quoted in *Ibid*, p.1290

¹⁵²⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.80

¹⁵²⁵ Parry, *Rise and Fall*, p.213

¹⁵²⁶ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.81, pp.81-85

¹⁵²⁷ Wood to Russell, 25th of December 1853, Hickleton Papers, A4.55, cited in Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.86

¹⁵²⁸ Stanley diary, 11th of April 1853, *Derby Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.124

¹⁵²⁹ Stanley diary, 22nd of December 1853, *Derby Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.114

¹⁵³⁰ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.91

opposition within the Liberal ranks.¹⁵³¹ The opposition was not simply grounded in party self-interest. The fact was that the bill's unfortunate timing served to mask flaws in its details, and a growing groundswell of principled opposition.¹⁵³² More and more Liberals began to question how far reform should go, how far the franchise should be extended, how radical the redistribution of seats should be, and how many of the working class were really deserving of the vote. These concerns were centred on the increasing venality of borough elections and the electoral violence associated with those contests, the growth and increasing militancy of trade unionism and the expanding size of the working class in urban constituencies.¹⁵³³ Electoral violence and the conduct of elections was increasingly in the political consciousness of the nation during the mid-nineteenth century. They had always been expensive affairs and the hustings had been the scene of sporadic and often explosive electoral violence. The real causes of electoral violence- and how far it was a widespread and permanent feature of mid-Victorian British political culture- has been source of debate among scholars.¹⁵³⁴ It seems reasonable to accept that violence was a prominent feature of English politics. Indeed, a study of national and provincial newspapers, has shown that there were no fewer than 191 incidents of electoral violence between 1857 and 1880.¹⁵³⁵ There are many examples but perhaps the most famous was the violence at Kinderminster that saw, Robert Lowe barely escape with his life after a mob 'rained down a perfect storm of bricks and large stones' upon him after his election.¹⁵³⁶ This is an extreme examples of the violence experienced during electoral contests, but they should not lead us to underestimate the systemic nature of the problem.¹⁵³⁷ Certainly, the prospect of electoral violence and the threat of the working class mobs, the majority of whom did not possess the vote, caused many in parliament to question the wisdom of extending the vote to uneducated and unrespectable classes. As Saunders has dryly suggested, 'there was nothing like actually contesting a constituency to cool enthusiasm for reform'.¹⁵³⁸

The continued existence, and perhaps growth, in electoral corruption increased hesitancy in extending the franchise to the working classes. It was accepted that reform was needed. But once again, it was the 'how' that caused division. Moreover, this was a delicate balancing act to undertake. As Lord Grey recognized in 1858, 'A reform is wanted, though not for the same reasons as formerly; instead a reform bill should aim, 'to interest a larger proportion of the people in the Constitution, by investing them with political rights, without disturbing the existing balance of power' and most importantly to tackle the moral threat facing the constitution: 'to discourage bribery at elections, without giving more influence to the arts of demagogues'.¹⁵³⁹ Therein lay the problem. Electoral corruption reached its peak during the 1850s. Between 1832 and 1865 around 20 percent of the elections in contested constituencies were petitioned, with the peak coming in the 1852 election. 1832 saw 17 seats have their result either voided or altered as a result of a successful electoral petition; at

¹⁵³¹ Stanley diary, 20th of February 1854, *Derby Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.120

¹⁵³² *Ibid*, p.88

¹⁵³³ *Ibid*, p.89

¹⁵³⁴ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, pp.145-152, has largely seen violence as clear result of electoral corruption and have discussed it only in relation to electoral venality. Hoppen, 'Grammars of Electoral Violence in 19th-century England and Ireland', *EHR*, vol.109, no.432, (1994) pp.597-620: has followed Gash and Hanham in seeing a close relationship between corrupt electoral practices and electoral violence suggesting that violence decreased from the 1870s onwards as electoral corruption was tackled. Moreover, by comparing the respective electoral disorder experienced in Ireland and England he depreciates the frequency and seriousness of English violence. Justin Wasserman and Edwin Jaggard, 'Electoral violence in mid nineteenth-century England and Wales', *Historical Research*, vol.80 no.207, (2007) pp.124-155 by contrast have argued that violence was a regular, permanent, more independent and far more widespread feature of British political culture than previously supposed.

¹⁵³⁵ Wasserman and Jaggard, 'Electoral Violence', pp.128-130

¹⁵³⁶ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, pp.149-151; *The Times*, 30th of March 1857, p.12; 31st of March 1857, p.9.

¹⁵³⁷ Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, p.163

¹⁵³⁸ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.89

¹⁵³⁹ 3rd Earl Grey, *Parliamentary Government*, (1858) pp.128-129, quoted in Hanham, *Nineteenth Century Constitution*, p.271

the 1835 election there were 12, in 1837 14, 25 in 1841, 18 in 1847 and 13 in 1852.¹⁵⁴⁰ In the ten years before Russell introduced his Reform bill of 1853, two seats had been disenfranchised for the venality of their elections. Sudbury in 1844, and St Albans in 1852 which once again threw a spotlight on the continued existence of electoral corruption. These incidents sparked greater discussion as to the possible consequences corrupt electoral practices in an expanded urban, and most importantly, working class electorate.

For some, the threat of an extended franchise would inevitably lead to greater electoral corruption. The perceived uneducated and venal nature of the working classes seemingly ensured as much. This was a widely spread fear, especially among those opposed to reform, that an extension of the franchise would put the vote into the hands of the those ‘dregs’ of society whose lack of personal morality and self-discipline would open the constitution to further bribery. By extension, it would also put political power even further into the hands of the rich who could afford to purchase their votes.¹⁵⁴¹ But this was not to say electoral corruption was an exclusively working-class problem. The opportunity for bribery ran both ways, and the fear of a new plutocracy would come to shape the debates around reform just as much as the battle between aristocracy and democracy. As the *Edinburgh Review* complained, extensive reform would ‘let loose a torrent of corruption’ and ‘by depriving property of its legitimate weight in the representation’, it practically ensured it would be driven ‘irresistibly to its illegitimate resources’ and that the propertied classes would be compelled ‘to recover their position by acting unduly upon other voters’.¹⁵⁴² The *Economist* believed that, far from removing the power of interests, an extension of the franchise would offer ‘literally no security against plutocracy’. Perhaps the most eloquent Liberal opponent of reform, Robert Lowe, warned parliament that increased bribery, the result of the extension of the vote to the working classes would never favour an aristocracy, but rather, ‘a plutocracy working upon a democracy’. The result would be that ‘rank, wealth, good connections, and gentleman-like demeanour, but...[also] sterling talent and ability for the business of the country’ would be excluded by the crippling expense of fighting an election.¹⁵⁴³

An ill-conceived connection between the rise of trade unionism and parliamentary reform was also easy for contemporaries to make. If men could withhold their labour for greater pay, might it not also stand to reason that they could also withhold their vote for greater reward? As Saunders has observed, ‘Trade unionism breached almost all the canons of orthodox political economy, suggesting that workers were simply incapable of intelligent judgement on such matters’.¹⁵⁴⁴ These fears also became conflated by concerns at the sheer size of the working classes in urban seats. Many contemporaries worried that the any meaningful extension to the borough franchise would ‘swamp’ the influence of property with ‘strikers’ and Irish immigrants.¹⁵⁴⁵ Sir James Graham observed that: ‘the Ten Pounders, the Employers of Labour, themselves now in exclusive possession of political Power, have no great inclination to divide it with the “Striker”’.¹⁵⁴⁶ Even the committed radical Charles Villiers, when writing to Cobden, recognized ‘that there is some apprehension...among the Middle Class in the large towns, at being swamped by...the Irish and the lowest description of workmen.’¹⁵⁴⁷ These fears certainly played into Liberal opposition to Russell’s reform bill. Greville was struck by Russell’s commitment to press on with the measure against a backdrop of ‘nothing by

¹⁵⁴⁰ Craig, *British Parliamentary Electoral Results*, p.631

¹⁵⁴¹ Parry, ‘1867 and the Rule of Wealth’, *Parliamentary History*, (2017) 36.1, p.52

¹⁵⁴² *Edinburgh Review*, vol.98, (1853), pp.597-8

¹⁵⁴³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 31st of May 1866, v.183 cc.1629-30

¹⁵⁴⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.91

¹⁵⁴⁵ Kirstin Zimmerman, ‘Liberal Speech, Palmerstonian Delay, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act’, *EHR*, (2003) vol.118, no.479, pp.1186

¹⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.1186

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.1186

Strikes and deep-rooted discontent.¹⁵⁴⁸ *The Times* best encompassed many respectable concerns surrounding the reform question when recounting the year's events it told readers that despite the prosperity of the working classes, the manufacturing strikes which had plagued 1853 'remind us that our wealth and prosperity...depend on the will of men too ignorant to understand their own interests'¹⁵⁴⁹

Thus, despite Russell's optimism for a successful reform bill in 1853, and his despair at its demise, the reasons for its failure were masked by the outbreak of the Crimean war. Issues with the detail of the bill, especially regarding the borough franchise and the redistribution of seats, were always likely to draw opposition from both sides of the House whichever way they were addressed. However, it was the growing worries of moderate politicians and the respectable classes around the issues of the violent conduct of elections, unfettered electoral corruption and its potential future consequences, and the increasing size of the working class coupled with the growth and growing militancy of trade unionism, that would form a phalanx of principled opposition to reform both inside the House of Commons and 'outdoors'. However, it was not just Liberal politics that were affected by this growing body of concerns. The opposing, and seemingly insurmountable, positions surrounding the Reform question, especially in regard to redistribution of seats, levels of borough and county franchise, the ballot and the necessity for the distinction between the rural and urban electorate shaped attitudes to Reform in both major parties. The emergence of Palmerston as the dominant political force ensured that any reform bill that was floated in the House would need to secure support, read the mood and attract the approval of another section in order to hope to survive. As *The Times* noted in November of 1858: 'the present position of Parliamentary Reform is that of a triangular duel in which the Conservatives, Whigs, and Radical Reformers are the belligerents. There is, however, this novelty in the arrangement, – that the one who has the privilege of the first shot has immediately to receive the fire of both the others.'¹⁵⁵⁰

Having retaken office in 1858, Lord Derby alongside Disraeli had begun preparations to launch a reform bill of their own. Disraeli had been eager to take action on reform since the election of 1857, telling Derby that: 'our party is now a corpse', it would take 'a bold and decided course... [to] put us on our legs'.¹⁵⁵¹ While he later declared to his constituents at Newport Pagnell that with regard to the current position of parliamentary reform he 'had no prejudices in favour of the existing system, which was brought into operation in 1832'. After all, it was a measure that was tainted with the 'spirit of faction'. It was a measure which did not give due weight to 'property and the cultivation of the soil', and it with regard to the organisation of borough boundaries bore all the hallmarks of 'jobbing contrivance, and manoeuvre... [of] a political party so circumstanced at the moment of effecting the change as to be irresponsible'. The main thrust of his speech argued that if population was now 'the popular element of representation', as some more radical thinkers would have it, then it was the rural county electorate rather than the urban borough electorate that was in fact vastly underrepresented. He used examples such as the West Riding of Yorkshire with a population of 1,300,000: here sixteen members represented an urban population of 500,000, while the other 800,000 were represented by just two county members. With this evidence in mind, Disraeli expressed his reluctance to 'disturb the settlement of 1832', but promised should the opportunity arise, to 'vindicate the interests which have for so long been injured'. He warned his constituents that they should never again fall into the 'unfavourable position' of 'opposing abstractly every reform'. And instead he declared himself 'in favour of progress – in favour of the political, social and intellectual progress of

¹⁵⁴⁸ *Greville Memoirs*, 13th of November 1853, vol.6, p.461

¹⁵⁴⁹ *The Times*, 31st of December 1853, p.6

¹⁵⁵⁰ *The Times*, 25th of November 1858, p.6

¹⁵⁵¹ Disraeli to Derby, 21st of April 1857, *Disraeli's Letters*, vol.7, pp.39-40

this country...but I am also...of the opinion that this result can only be obtained by maintaining and deferring to out ancient institutions'.¹⁵⁵²

This was a speech that Stanley believed Derby had prevented from being made in the Commons at the opening of the 1857 session.¹⁵⁵³ But it encapsulated the very essence of Disraeli's attitude towards reform. It attacked the partisan nature of the 1832 settlement. It evidenced his belief that the landed interest were inherently under-represented under the current constitution, and while not showing any ideological commitment to reform for its own sake, should legislation be pursued, called for a more national and representative settlement free from factional intrigue. These were same broad principles he had been advancing since the passage of the previous reform bill. As Parry has observed, 'Disraeli combined an approval of the idea of Reform in 1832 with a criticism of the whig Reformer's unhistorical use of property value alone to define new borough franchise.' The result? A 'lack of variety in the franchise' which threatened to undermine 'popular confidence in the Commons'.¹⁵⁵⁴ Disraeli's principles with regard to Reform, broadly speaking, had proved consistent for some time. The legislative details of how they might be practically affected remained changeable. Meanwhile, Derby had himself been ruminating on the question of reform. From at least 1851 onwards, he had considered lending his support to a modification of the 1832 settlement.¹⁵⁵⁵ Any suggestion that they were taking up 'the now-fashionable cause of Reform' for 'purely opportunist motives' simply does stand up.¹⁵⁵⁶

In 1857, Derby had thought Disraeli's attitude rash and urged caution. But a Conservative reform bill began to take shape in the winter recess of 1858. Given the nature of the government's minority position it was imperative that any reform bill introduced to parliament must moderate and framed in the spirit of compromise in order to achieve the support of a majority of the House while maintaining the support of their own party. Derby had initially framed his bill around a £25 County franchise. However, Disraeli wanted their bill to 'reconstruct the party on a wider basis' by getting away from the Whig measure of 1832, and therefore restore Toryism as a creed founded on a 'broad basis of popular respect'.¹⁵⁵⁷ Having gained cabinet assent, the Conservative reform bill proceeded with Disraeli's proposal for a maintenance of £10 borough qualification, paired with an equalizing reduction of the county franchise bringing down to the same £10 threshold. These had been selected against the backdrop of general opposition approval for Locke King's motion for those same voting qualifications in the previous session. Indeed, at the time Disraeli had been careful not to oppose the motion on principle.¹⁵⁵⁸ However, such a small measure aimed at removing the anomalies of the present system would in fact exacerbate the real fact that 400,000 borough voters returned 330 members, while 500,000 county voters returned only 160. Thus, in order to tackle the real problems surrounding the constitutional settlement a more comprehensive measure dealing with the wider aspects of parliamentary reform would be required.¹⁵⁵⁹

On the face of it, the decision to maintain the current borough franchise was a conservative and restrictive proposal. Derby faced opposition from both spectrums of his cabinet. Pakington informed Derby of his belief that the Commons would not pass a Reform Bill that failed to propose a reduction to the borough threshold. Instead, he preferred a 'real and complete' £8 uniform franchise to

¹⁵⁵² *The Times*, 21st of May 1857, p.9

¹⁵⁵³ Stanley diary, 23rd of May 1857, *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.151

¹⁵⁵⁴ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.710

¹⁵⁵⁵ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.186

¹⁵⁵⁶ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.239

¹⁵⁵⁷ Disraeli to Derby, 13th of August and 20th of December 1858, Derby MSS, 145/5. cited in Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.109

¹⁵⁵⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol.149 c.1819

¹⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*, cc.1819-1824

one based on the ‘long-disputed motion of Locke King’.¹⁵⁶⁰ They also faced opposition from Henley and Walpole who considered the drastic reduction to the county franchise a ‘Radical Reform’ which destroyed the distinction between the character of county and borough seats.¹⁵⁶¹ In this case, Disraeli had convinced his premier that a equalized £10 suffrage across both county and borough seats would provide the best chance of success. After all, opposition had been broadly united over Locke King’s franchise proposals, and in the 1850s even Radicals such as Charles Villiers were becoming apprehensive about making radical changes to the £10 settlement of 1832, doubting ‘the prudence of doing anything more than improving the County franchise, and perhaps correcting some defects in the Borough Franchise.’¹⁵⁶² Moreover, the proposal of a uniform franchise was undoubtedly a simplification of the existing system, and Disraeli understood perhaps better than any of his colleagues that reform in itself was not ‘democratic’ or ‘radical’. He was right in believing that the overall nature of measure was more important than the level franchise. The make-up of ‘Constituency’ could be reworked in other ways than adjusting the qualifications of property.

In order to protect their new measure the Conservatives put forward two key clauses to help soften the blow of a severely lowered County franchise, and to try to ensure that the distinct character of the County and Borough seats was to some degree maintained. First was the addition of ‘merit franchises’. These aimed to broaden the Borough franchise by adding voters to the roll without lowering the franchise and thus throwing the political authority disproportionately into the hands of one class. These ‘merit franchises’ were votes given to those in particular professions or people in possession of other selected qualifications who did not qualify under the existing £10 franchise. Here they took their inspiration from the Liberals. As Hawkin’s has observed, ‘Russell’s public endorsement of ‘merit franchises’ in his 1854 Bill, ‘provided another useful element in future Conservative thinking on Reform.’¹⁵⁶³ This allowed the Conservatives to recognise those ‘responsible’ elements of society who did not qualify as a ‘Ten Pounder: graduates, ex-servicemen, ministers of religion, lawyers, doctors and those with savings.’¹⁵⁶⁴ These franchises aimed to add variety combat the simple weight of numbers. This challenged the misguided principles that had been struck into stone in 1832: that property alone was the qualification by which the vote was conferred. As Parry has shrewdly observed in 1859 Disraeli had ‘broadened the 1832 borough suffrage by the so called ‘fancy franchises’, which aimed to increase electoral variety by the addition of specific interest groups’.¹⁵⁶⁵ Interest groups which were not drawn from the existing suffrage and might therefore add more ‘representiveness’ to the electorate in comparison to the indiscriminate moiety offered by a lowered franchise.

Their second measure, and perhaps the most controversial, was a linchpin of the Bill. It focused on averting the danger of hitherto unrepresented towns springing up in the county electorate by virtue of the lowered franchise. They aimed to make these distinctions clearer cut by revoking the rights of 40 Shilling Borough Freeholders to elect to vote in their respective county rather than in the Borough in which they held property. As Malcolm Chase has recognised, by the 1850s, out of the wreck of Chartism, Radical activism had centred on the Freehold Land Movement, which ‘came close to dominating popular politics.’¹⁵⁶⁶ These Freehold Land associations encouraged the urban working

¹⁵⁶⁰ Pakington to Derby, 28th of November 1858, Derby MSS 141/10, quoted in Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.192

¹⁵⁶¹ Gathorne Hardy Diary, 6th of September 1858, quoted in *Ibid*, p.187

¹⁵⁶² Hatherton to Russell, 13th of October 1851, quoted in Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.91

¹⁵⁶³ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, pp.91-92

¹⁵⁶⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 28th of February 1859, v.152, c.985; *Ibid*, cc.986-987

¹⁵⁶⁵ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.710

¹⁵⁶⁶ Malcolm Chase, ‘Out of Radicalism: the Mid-Victorian Freehold Land Movement’, *EHR*, v.109 n.416 (1991) pp.319-345 (p.319)

class to attain a parliamentary vote through the anachronistic and ancient law, enshrined in the 1832 Reform Act, that those holding a 40-shilling freehold could vote in their nearest county. The activity of Freehold Land Associations, which grouped together to buy parcels of land, and then subsequently subdivide land into pockets which crossed the required 40 Shilling threshold, had meant that nearly one fifth of the County electorate was comprised of borough-dwelling free-holders.¹⁵⁶⁷ The inclusion of this measure was therefore an attempt to ensure that urban voters would not bleed into, and consequently, pollute the surrounding County electorate. It was a proposal which ‘transformed the electoral arithmetic.’¹⁵⁶⁸ Of the estimated 200,000 voters enfranchised under the new proposals, it was thought around 130,000 would hold property at the lower end of the new suffrage.¹⁵⁶⁹ However, as Rose observed to Disraeli, by expelling the freeholders from the counties, it would remove that element of the electorate ‘infected with the radicalism of the large boroughs’.¹⁵⁷⁰ Not only did it protect the landed element of the constitution and help maintain the distinction between urban and rural England, but in a parliamentary terms it made sound tactical sense. By equalizing the suffrages of County and Borough seats it would make it harder to arbitrarily lower the former in the future. Moreover, by adopting the Locke-King’s £10 franchise proposal, it headed off any potential for Liberal opposition in this direction. But more than anything, if successful, it prevented the Liberals passing their own Reform Bill which contained a £10 County franchise devoid of any protections.¹⁵⁷¹

In addition to these measures, the County electorate would be further protected by another raft of proposals by which that ‘disturbing element of the Town Voters’ within the county electorate ‘would be destroyed.’¹⁵⁷² The first of these involved a new boundary commission to remove sprawling urban suburbs from County seats and include them in their respective boroughs. The second involved the complex matter of redistribution. Disraeli have favoured a far more extensive and ambitious scheme of redistribution, but was forced to concede the matter to a contrary Cabinet consensus. The final plan for redistribution involved the disenfranchisement of only fifteen of the most anomalous seats and the creation of new one-member seats at Barnsley, Birkenhead, Croyden, Hartlepool, Stalybridge and West Bromwich. It also proposed the division the two most populous counties: South Lancashire into two constituencies and the West Riding into three.¹⁵⁷³ Disraeli assented to the new measure and helped Derby introduce it to cabinet. But with the cabinet vetoing an extensive redistribution of seats and refusing the countenance Stanley’s proposal for the ballot, Disraeli’s vision of a really ‘progressive’ Reform Bill was stymied. Stanley angrily bemoaned the destiny of a bill that would ‘throw us back into the old track of destruction and resistance.’¹⁵⁷⁴

However, Disraeli, with his aptitude for collaboration, understood better than most the spirit of concession that would be needed to pass a bill acceptable to both their own backbenchers and other elements of the House: ‘I have no abstract wish to save small boroughs, though I do not want to take away their members until I know what we are to do with them.’ He explained his position to Stanley that: ‘I want the Bill, above all, to be a bill which we can carry’ it represented the ‘practical position’: an attempt to ‘accommodate the settlement of a 1832 to the England of 1859’.¹⁵⁷⁵ Both Disraeli’s and Stanley’s preference may have been for a more extensive measure by which they could ‘outflank the

¹⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp.321-325

¹⁵⁶⁸ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.111

¹⁵⁶⁹ It was estimated around 70,000 would occupy houses at £20 and above, leaving 130,000 new voters under a £10 franchise. See *Ibid*, pp.111-112

¹⁵⁷⁰ Rose to Disraeli, 24th of January 1859, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden 43/3 f.127

¹⁵⁷¹ *Ibid*; Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.111

¹⁵⁷² Rose, ‘Memorandum’, 24th of January 1859, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 43/3, p.3

¹⁵⁷⁴ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, pp.204-205; Stanley to Disraeli, 9th/10th of February, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 111/2 f.202

¹⁵⁷⁵ M&B, vol.4, pp.198-199

Whigs and re-position the Tories at the progressive centre'.¹⁵⁷⁶ But Disraeli appreciated the practical difficulties of such a move. He was far-sighted enough to yield to party consensus and introduce a bill which could at least rely on Conservative support. After all, as he told Stanley: 'I am anxious that we should carry our measure, and not get the reputation for being theorists, pursuing an ideal perfection, and in that pursuit throwing away the opportunity of reasonable success.'¹⁵⁷⁷

When the time came for Disraeli to introduce their Reform Bill to the House, his speech sought to aim the bill at the moderate majority that could be formed by the Conservatives, Whigs and moderate propertied Liberals. He also needed to demonstrate that the Conservative party were willing to engage in a serious attempt to settle the question. On the eve of the speech, Derby encouraged this approach: 'avoid depreciating the extent of the measure. Prove that it is Conservative as much as you will, but do not let it be inferred that it is small'.¹⁵⁷⁸ Thus, Disraeli was deliberately conciliatory in the framing of the Bill. It appealed to the House to be 'as impartial a tribunal as is compatible with our popular form of Government.'¹⁵⁷⁹ Disraeli, in contrast to his usual criticism, was quick to stress how the 1832 Reform Act had 'greatly added to the energy and public spirit' of the country.¹⁵⁸⁰ The rapid changes that had since occurred within society which could not have possibly been foreseen in 1832: the explosion in population, huge increase in capital, diffusion of intelligence and development of scientific thought. That meant that 'however distinguished were its authors, and however remarkable their ability, some omissions [in the 1832 Reform Act] have been found that ought to be supplied, and some defects that ought to be remedied.'¹⁵⁸¹ By accepting the enshrined principles of the 'Great' Reform Act, and by praising its authors Disraeli was able to attack Bright and his supporters whose sole 'object of representation is to realize the opinion of the numerical majority of the country.'¹⁵⁸² This argument allowed Disraeli to portray a reduction of the borough suffrage as a betrayal of 1832. After all, it would be ironic, he mused, that in trying to represent the varied interests of the country, 'when we are guarding ourselves against the predominance of a territorial aristocracy and the predominance of a manufacturing and commercial oligarchy, that we should reform Parliament by securing the predominance of a household democracy'¹⁵⁸³

When Disraeli had finished laying out the Conservatives position on Reform and concluded his speech it was met with relief many among the opposition benches who had perhaps been concerned that the Tories would attempt to form an unnatural alliance with the Radical interest and undertake to introduce a more revolutionary Reform Bill, replete with 'wild and fanstatic measures intended to captivate the tastes of the uneducated.'¹⁵⁸⁴ Only the Radicals and Russell offered the Bill any vocal opposition following the first reading. The former argued that the failure to seriously tackle the issue of borough suffrage meant that 'men—working, toiling, serving, paying taxes, and fulfilling all the duties of citizens—will see that as he was left an outcast by the Bill of 1832, so he must remain an outcast still by the Bill of 1859.'¹⁵⁸⁵ Moreover, the proposals to extending the suffrage through 'all these fancy franchises are absurd; they seem ... to be proposed and intended to make it appear that you are giving something, when they really spring from the fear you have lest you should give something.'¹⁵⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Russell slammed the proposal to revoke the voting rights of 40 shilling freeholders, and attacked Disraeli's failure to even reference the claims of the working class. He went

¹⁵⁷⁶ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.112

¹⁵⁷⁷ M&B, *Life of Disraeli*, vol.4, p.199

¹⁵⁷⁸ Derby to Disraeli, 28th of February 1859, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 110/1 f.27

¹⁵⁷⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 28th of February 1859, vol.152 cc.966-1005, c.966

¹⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid*, c.967

¹⁵⁸¹ *Ibid*, c.968

¹⁵⁸² *Ibid*, c.974

¹⁵⁸³ *Ibid*, c.985

¹⁵⁸⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.113

¹⁵⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 28th of February 1859, v.152 c.1023

¹⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*, c.1025

so far as to suggest if any Reform Bill were to bring ‘satisfaction to the country, the great body of the working people, comprising some hundreds of thousands, ought to be admitted to the franchise, and that the constitution will be the stronger by their admission.’¹⁵⁸⁷

Despite these attacks the Bill was generally well received. Some Whigs had grown increasingly alarmed at the line Russell was taking in condemning the measure, having used language ‘smacking of the Bright school’.¹⁵⁸⁸ Many thought the measures moderate, prudent and worth careful consideration. Delane, of *The Times*, promised to Earle he would give the Conservative Bill ‘every support’.¹⁵⁸⁹ Moderate opinion was complimentary across a broad spectrum of the British press. *The Morning Chronicle* thought it ‘pre-eminently a practical measure... wise, prudent, adequate to the occasion, and Conservative in the highest interpretation of the term.’¹⁵⁹⁰ *The Spectator* believed the measure in ‘good faith’ and a ‘sincere endeavour’ on the part of the Government to fairly settle the question of parliamentary representation.¹⁵⁹¹ *The Morning Herald* considered the proposals moderate, fair and ‘in the interests of all classes.’¹⁵⁹² *The Times*, in its editorial following the introduction of the Bill argued that it was undeserving of ‘the condemnation lavished upon it’ by Bright and his fellow Radicals. Their criticism that the Bill did nothing for working classes of the country and was ‘a mere shuffle of cards, leaving power in the existing hands’ was a ‘conclusion suggested only by blind prejudice or wounded vanity’.¹⁵⁹³ Rather, the Bill Disraeli introduced was of ‘substantial and important character’ and was a proposition ‘entitled to be considered on its own grounds’.¹⁵⁹⁴

Outside of the press, the measures suitably impressed those moderate thinkers that Disraeli and Derby had hoped to persuade. Robert Lowe thought the proposals ‘proof of the wish of Ministers to deal with the question, if not on very wide, at any rate on honest and intelligible principles, and to exhibit a suitable deference for the verdict which the House of Commons has pronounced on this subject’.¹⁵⁹⁵ The Whig Grandee, the Earl of Clarendon, believed it was ‘of unspeakable importance to the country that a tolerably moderate bill should be passed this session and that can only be done by the present government’.¹⁵⁹⁶ Even Palmerston and his supporters, who had remained noticeably quiet following the introduction of the Bill, considered the benefits of letting the Conservatives settle the matter. He told Clarendon as much following the previous year: that Liberal unity could not be achieved until the matter of reform had been settled and that he would not oppose Disraeli’s Bill unless its faults were ‘great and manifest’.¹⁵⁹⁷ Argyll had his own suspicions that Palmerston secretly harboured hope that the Conservatives might succeed with ‘a Bill less liberal than we ourselves could have ventured to propose.’¹⁵⁹⁸ Therefore, with the backing of solid and respectable public opinion, with Radical assault only helping to entrench the sympathy felt for their position, and with Palmerston and his followers seemingly ready to support their Bill, there was high hopes that their measure could pass.

Despite initial optimism for the Bill, opposition began to emerge as ‘attention began to shift from the scale of the enfranchisement to the safeguards by which it was protected.’¹⁵⁹⁹ The proposals to exclude freeholders from the counties certainly caused alarm. This was not only because it would

¹⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid*, c.1018

¹⁵⁸⁸ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.206

¹⁵⁸⁹ Earle to Disraeli, 27th of February 1859, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 96/3 f.63

¹⁵⁹⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, 1st of March 1859, issue. 28748, p.5

¹⁵⁹¹ *Spectator*, 5th of March 1859, p.264

¹⁵⁹² *Morning Herald*, 1st of March 1859, p.5

¹⁵⁹³ *Times*, 1st of March 1859, p.8

¹⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.8

¹⁵⁹⁵ *Times*, 28th of February 1859, p.5

¹⁵⁹⁶ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, p.207

¹⁵⁹⁷ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.113

¹⁵⁹⁸ George Douglas, eighth Duke of Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, (London: John Murray, 1906) vol.2, p.134

¹⁵⁹⁹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.114

strengthen the Conservative hold over them, but because Borough Freeholders were easily created. The Radicals had already organised societies to achieve the suffrage through this mechanism because it was the easiest route to the vote. Moreover, these voters by nature of their tenancy, were particularly vulnerable to influence and intimidation of their landlord. Lastly, while Conservatives were concerned at the Freeholders polluting the County electorate with urban radicalism, it took thousands of voters to swamp a county seat, while the complexion of a Borough electorate could be more easily turned by an influx of working-class voters.¹⁶⁰⁰ There was also concern from both Liberals and Tories over the future implications of an equal suffrage between Boroughs and Counties. Principally, this was that an equalization of the franchise would lead to an equalisation of electoral districts. It was a possibility which worried Liberals as much as Tories, and threatened to remove variety from the electorate.¹⁶⁰¹

While both sides worried about electoral districts, complained about the equal franchise, or condemned the effect of moving the votes Freeholders, the real motives behind their opposition seem far simpler. For Conservatives the Bill lowered the County franchise to too great an extent.¹⁶⁰² For Radicals and most Liberals the Bill did not achieve its goal, in that it did not lower the Borough franchise. As Gladstone complained: ‘the lowering of the suffrage in boroughs is the main purpose of having a Reform Bill, and that unless we are to have that lowering of the suffrage, it would be better that we should not waste our time on this subject.’¹⁶⁰³ However, opposition to the movement of Freeholders provided a way to attack the Bill, in all senses a moderate measure, without appearing too factional, too radical, or too reactionary. For Russell, as Saunders has recognised, it offered a means of re-establishing himself as the true champion of Reform, ‘by labelling Ministers dangerous innovators who ignorance threatened consequences beyond their understanding’.¹⁶⁰⁴ With opposition to elements of the Bill seemingly growing, Russell saw the chance once again to take the initiative. He launched two hostile motions at the Government opposing both the changes made to Freehold franchise and the lack of change to the Borough suffrage.¹⁶⁰⁵ There were some among the Liberal ranks that felt angered by Russell’s motions. Edward Horsman argued that if this Bill ‘deserved one-tenth of the condemnation which has been heaped on it, there is no reason why it should not be condemned on the second reading’. Instead, the resolutions proposed by Russell were nothing more than ‘a mere party manoeuvre’ to sink the Reform Bill.¹⁶⁰⁶ Lowe, in *The Times*, vociferously attacked Russell’s conduct, as a transgression of parliamentary protocol and a case of political game-playing when the ‘question [was] too vast, the interests at stake too momentous, to be in any manner trifled with’.¹⁶⁰⁷ It seems most likely that Russell’s real opposition to the Conservative Bill was that he saw it as trespassing on the Liberal territory of parliamentary reform. He told one friend that ‘the Reform bill is my child, I shall not consent to see it hacked at the request of a sham mother’.¹⁶⁰⁸

Faced with this factious opposition to what represented a sincere attempt to find moderate consensus, Disraeli and Derby drew a metaphorical line in the sand and made Russell’s resolutions the ‘Thermopylae of the Reform debate’.¹⁶⁰⁹ They insisted that members either reject the proposals, and vote on the second reading treating the bill on its current merits, or face dissolution. Disraeli rallied round to find supporters amongst the opposition who would be willing to openly oppose

¹⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.114

¹⁶⁰¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 28th of March 1859, v.153, c.973; *Ibid*, 21st of March 1859, v.143, c.394; *Ibid*, 21st of March 1859, v.143, c.394

¹⁶⁰² Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, pp.207-208

¹⁶⁰³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 29th of March 1859, v.153, c.1053

¹⁶⁰⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.115

¹⁶⁰⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 10th of March 1859, v.152, c.1618

¹⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 21st of March, v.153, c.457

¹⁶⁰⁷ *The Times*, 12th of March 1859, pp.8-9

¹⁶⁰⁸ Russell to Dean Elliot, 21st of January 1859, in Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.108

¹⁶⁰⁹ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.209

Russell's resolutions. The Whig member Lord Elcho answered Disraeli's request arguing that the House's present duty 'was to settle this question, and to settle it without delay'.¹⁶¹⁰ As the debate progressed, Conservatives unified in condemning the resolutions and the unholy alliance which supported them: Bulwer Lytton made the most memorable contribution, describing the opposition as 'carefully bridging the gangway with a rope of sand' that they might 'patch up the quarrels of years for the division of a night'.¹⁶¹¹ The Times echoed this mood castigating Russell's shamelessly partisan behaviour.¹⁶¹² Though all hope was victory was dashed when Palmerston announced that he had on 'further consideration' had changed his mind on he previously 'strong opinion that the £10 franchise ought to be maintained'.¹⁶¹³

Disraeli concluded the second reading of his Reform Bill with a deliberately mature and statesmanlike oration devoid of his usual sharp epigrams or sardonic.¹⁶¹⁴ But when the House divided and Russell's resolutions passed 330 to 291. The Conservative had held firm, but only twenty-six amongst the opposition has crossed the floor and voted with the Government. With this defeat, parliament was dissolved and the Conservatives took their chances with the electorate having failed to find a moderate majority in the House of Commons. Palmerston's decision to back Russell's amendments was undoubtedly a cynical one, rather than from any heartfelt conversion to the cause of Reform. As Saunders shrewdly recognised, the division plaguing the Liberal party over Reform seemed to 'have given way to consensus, hostile to equalization and the freehold clauses but favourable to a reduction in the borough qualification. If Russell were permitted to articulate that consensus alone, Palmerston's hold on the party would be at risk'.¹⁶¹⁵ In April they went to polls, and the Conservatives had some hope that the voters might well have sympathy for their plight. They had attempted to undertake a safe, moderate, and principled reform of the country's representation. It had failed chiefly through factious party politics rather than because it did not chime with moderate opinion. The Conservatives were once again disappointed. They made a small gain of 30 seats, but that was not enough to stop Palmerston once again taking office with the question of Reform still unsettled. Disraeli had never seen parliamentary reform as a party question. This reform bill proved it. While not as far-reaching as he would have personally wished, the Reform Bill put before the House was one which sought to gain the support of a majority of parliament, rather than one that would gain the ascent of one disproportionately predominant party. Given the factious nature of the opposition to these principles, it is perhaps not surprising that he would end up abandoning this approach when he got another chance at passing a Reform bill.

With Derby and Disraeli once again defeated at the polls, Lord Palmerston formed another government. Having played a central role in wrecking the Conservative proposals, Russell was once again keen to prove his reforming credentials and took little time in launching another Reform Bill of his own. The Bill he produced was fair less moderate than the settlement proposed by Disraeli the previous year. Russell's Bill 1860 Bill, just like his Bill of 1854, was launched amidst European foreign policy concerns. This time against the backdrop of Napoleon III's expansionist intentions towards the newly unified Italian states. It proposed to reduce both Borough and County franchises to £6 and £10 respectively. This was combined with a modest redistribution of seats: taking twenty-five MPs from each of the smallest two-member seats, with fifteen given to the counties, five to new boroughs, one to London University, and a third MP to Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds and

¹⁶¹⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 28th of March 1859, v.153 cc.936-937

¹⁶¹¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 22nd of March 1859, v.153, c.543

¹⁶¹² *The Times*, 23rd of March 1859, p.9

¹⁶¹³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 25^h of March 1859, v.153, c.877

¹⁶¹⁴ *Ibid*, cc.1231-1244

¹⁶¹⁵ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.116

Manchester.¹⁶¹⁶ Moreover, the Bill proposed to more clearly demark urban and rural electorates. Almost every area of the Bill came in criticism. His £6 Borough franchise was based on the far more generous 'rental' value over the more conservative 'rating'.¹⁶¹⁷ The reduction to the County franchise was accompanied by none of the safeguards that had been present in the Conservative measure the year before. Nearly every element of the Bill was unacceptable to Conservatives.¹⁶¹⁸ Moreover, as Lord Derby expressed to Disraeli, as disastrous as the measure would be for the Tories, it would spell 'political annihilation' for the Whigs.¹⁶¹⁹ It was a Bill that in attempting to please everyone actually resulted in pleasing very few. After it had received very little interest from either side of the House, and had been slowed down with parliamentary delays, the Bill was withdrawn before it even reached a second reading. Following yet another setback in his quest for a second measure of parliamentary reform, Russell seemed to be resigned to his fate.¹⁶²⁰

For the Conservatives it had been a successful session. Disraeli and Derby's cooperation with Palmerston, to support his administration and 'to watch circumstances, and not attempt to create them', had paid dividends.¹⁶²¹ The result? They had killed the chances of a reform bill potentially disastrous to Conservative interests without having to take credit for its failure. Moreover, they had been able to constrain the more radical elements of the Liberal government. In so doing, they had revealed the true extent of the dissent and incompatibility among the component groups of the Liberal administration. This had only served to strengthen their own position as they were certainly not ready to form another minority administration. Therefore, the next best thing was being relied upon to support a premier with whom there was a shared sympathy with regards to reform, patriotism and national defence.¹⁶²² Lastly, the session, and the failure of Russell's reform bill, had the unforeseen consequence of conceding the moral high ground to the Conservatives. Something that would become important in the debates of 1867. After all, the Liberals had ejected the Tories from office in 1859, citing the restrictive nature of their reform bill, and by 1861 Russell had once again failed to supply an acceptable measure and now essentially given up on the cause. Thus by 1861, a real deadlock had been reached by all parties over reform. All agreed that something had to be done, but none could agree on how it should be achieved. Gladstone complained that 'we live in anti-reforming times. All improvements have to be urged in apologetic, almost supplicatory tones.'¹⁶²³ In essence he was correct, they were in the zenith of the Age of Equipoise. Neither parliament nor public opinion could muster the energy or enthusiasm for radical change. With parliament so fractured, with the country seemingly contented, the Conservatives in minority, and only Palmerston able to command a majority of warring Liberal factions, it seemed a total impasse with regard to reform had been reached. However, this all changed in 1865. On the 18th of October when, two days before his eighty-first birthday, Lord Palmerston died.

The End of the Age of Equipoise: Reform (1866-1867)

Palmerston's death marked not merely the end of his long six-decade career in parliament but the passing of a political epoch. His death was also the death knell of the Age of Equipoise. As *The Spectator* recognized it was 'not simply Lord Palmerston who has died [but] a cycle of political

¹⁶¹⁶ Saunders, 'Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform', p.1313

¹⁶¹⁷ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.120

¹⁶¹⁸ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.243

¹⁶¹⁹ Derby to Disraeli, 13th of March 1860, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 110/1, f.?

¹⁶²⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 5th of February 1861, v.155, cc.92-94

¹⁶²¹ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Derby, 27th of May 1860, v.8, pp.36-37

¹⁶²² Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.249

¹⁶²³ Gladstone to Graham, 27th of November 1860, quoted in Morley, *Gladstone*, vol.2, p.37

history which has come to termination.¹⁶²⁴ In truth, Palmerston's political pre-eminence had never been the result of a united parliamentary majority but rather a combination of an intricate web of alliances and his unwavering popularity across the country. In this way, he had acted a roadblock to liberal domestic progress, having adopted a policy of masterly inactivity with regard to domestic policy which rang true with the spirit of the age. However, in his final years, and with his departure from the stage seemingly soon inevitable, politicians of both sides had looked to a new period of politics when their ideas might yet prevail after Palmerston had gone. Thus, as Saunders has recognised, Palmerston's final years were widely perceived as an "interregnum", or a 'political Sabbath' in which normal party warfare had been suspended', and in which 'divisive issues' regarding Ireland, the Established Church, and Reform were put on hold until a new political climate emerged more favourable to aims.¹⁶²⁵ This was the Indian summer of Palmerston's politics and the last season of a fading age. With Palmerston gone, and Russell promptly installed as his successor, there was no chance that politics would remain the same. This was partly because 'to go on with a mere Palmerston administration without Palmerston is notoriously impossible'.¹⁶²⁶ But it was more importantly because that failure to deal with problems facing the country, most pressingly the question of electoral reform, was in danger of eroding public trust in the governing institutions. Liberal members had time and time again pledged support for Reform at the hustings, only for legislation to flounder or be delayed in the House. With the Age of Palmerston at an end, Liberals could take up the issue of Reform with renewed vigour and optimism. As Disraeli recognised: 'the truce of parties is over. I foresee tempestuous times and great vicissitudes in public life'.¹⁶²⁷

At seventy-three years old, Russell took office once again with a new Reform bill firmly in his sights. For both Russell and Gladstone Parliamentary Reform was a key issue, 'a symbol of their anxiety to restore clean-cut party divisions after Palmerston's conjuring tricks'.¹⁶²⁸ Indeed, it was precisely this keenness to re-establish distinct Liberal policy that worried the likes of Lowe, who was concerned that Palmerston had 'left this party without tradition, chart or compass, to drift on a stormy sea on which their only landmark was his personal popularity'.¹⁶²⁹ For while Liberals were virtually unanimous in thinking that the Reform question needed settling after nearly two-decades of failure, it did not follow that they were any closer to agreeing over how it might be achieved. Informed observers were all too aware of how small changes to level of the franchise, the boundaries of constituencies, the valuation of property, or how seats were distributed, could potentially translate into drastic changes to the make-up of the electorate. Such men were worried that if reform were ill-judged that it could well be damaging to the aims of Liberal government.¹⁶³⁰ This was why they were united solely in their 'reservations about Russell's 'fixed line'', instead proposing new franchises that aimed to achieve a more 'selective and balanced constituency'. The fact was that 'their proposals differed as much from one another as did from the Liberal leadership'.¹⁶³¹ It was this variety, indeed this lack of consensus with regards to Reform in the Liberal party that undoubtedly contributed to its failure to pass a Reform Bill in 1866, and perhaps ironically, contributed to Conservative success in 1867.

From the out-set, Russell's administration seemed to be built upon unsound foundations. The Liberals had been held together under Palmerston. But Russell was far less able to command the loyalty of his party. Gladstone quickly recognised the party's weakness in the Commons and invited

¹⁶²⁴ *The Spectator*, 21st of October 1865, p.1163

¹⁶²⁵ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.190

¹⁶²⁶ *The Fortnightly Review*, 1st of November 1865, p.760 quoted in *Ibid*, p.190

¹⁶²⁷ M&B, vol.4, p.424

¹⁶²⁸ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.211

¹⁶²⁹ A. Martin, *The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Robert Lowe*, vol.2, p.243

¹⁶³⁰ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.161

¹⁶³¹ *Ibid*, p.161

the younger Stanley to join Russell's administration. Owing to his friendship with Disraeli and loyalty to his father, he promptly declined.¹⁶³² The fact was that Gladstone, though overstretched in his responsibilities, was now the real power in Russell's government. However, he had grown increasingly tactless and overbearing, and it was soon evident that he was not the man to hold the Commons together.¹⁶³³ As the *Times* reported, he seemed as 'likely to diminish and divide [as he did] to unite and cement his supporters'.¹⁶³⁴ Moreover, the new government also saw a series of younger, less experienced, middle-class radicals appointed to the cabinet over the heads of far more experienced, more moderate, colleagues.¹⁶³⁵ The most eye catching of these was the appointment of Goshen to the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster. He had only been elected to Parliament in 1863 and his quick ascension to the cabinet only served to infuriate and alienate his more senior colleagues.¹⁶³⁶

Russell made a new Reform bill the immediate priority of his administration. He was increasingly frail and did not enjoy the robust health and vigour of his predecessor. It seems likely that he sensed this was his last opportunity to be the 'great settler' of a question which had been the major focus of his political life. For Gladstone, Reform was an equally pressing concern. For him, an effective measure of Reform would reinvigorate the political process, thereby ensuring that the complacency with which parliament had treated Reform in recent decades would not give rise to irresistible radical pressure for a truly democratic reconstruction of the British political system. Gladstone's politics had greatly shifted in the period between Liberal reform bills.¹⁶³⁷ During the course of the last parliament he had also grown closer to Bright and the radicals. His extraordinary speech to the Commons in 1864 he had seemingly endorsed universal male suffrage, and confirmed suspicions that many had long-held.¹⁶³⁸ His rejection from Oxford University and his subsequent election to the large and populace seat of South Lancashire had only realised Palmerston's worries: 'Keep him in Oxford and he is partially muzzled, but send him elsewhere and he will run wild...Gladstone will soon have it all his own way and whenever he gets my place we shall have some strange doings'.¹⁶³⁹ With Russell's leadership a creaking gate, and Gladstone firmly placed as his successor, a successful Reform Bill could 'consolidate a reputation as the coming man of Liberal politics'.¹⁶⁴⁰

Russell's Reform bill of 1866, discussed in the very first cabinet meeting after Palmerston's death, was rapidly tabled for debate. It was a bill that struggled from the outset. Russell eschewed calls for a more varied approach to determining the franchise, and instead predictably opted for his 'fixed line' approach. This, in itself, would prove problematic, but perhaps not quite so divisive as the issue of deciding how and where this fixed line would be drawn. Russell, in an attempt to appease both members of his cabinet and his backbenchers, proposed franchise of £12 for counties and £6 for boroughs, based on rating value. This immediately proved difficult, as rating, while preferable to many Liberals and radicals, was still open to the same longstanding criticisms. This was that the assessment of rates still varied markedly within constituencies and that people who compounded their rates with rent would be excluded from the franchise, both of which affected the stability and permanence of any piece of legislation.¹⁶⁴¹ Therefore, under pressure from Gladstone and against the

¹⁶³² Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.301

¹⁶³³ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.255

¹⁶³⁴ *The Times*, 21st of October 1865, p.8

¹⁶³⁵ While Russell refused to invite Bright into the cabinet, he offered posts to G.J. Goshen, W.E. Forster, and J. Stansfield. All solidly middle-class and firmly radical.

¹⁶³⁶ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.191; Derby, *Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, 24th of January 1866, p.244

¹⁶³⁷ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.212

¹⁶³⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of May 1864, cc.312-327

¹⁶³⁹ Palmerston to Shaftsbury, quoted in Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.257

¹⁶⁴⁰ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.212

¹⁶⁴¹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.193

evidence of admittedly inaccurate statistics, Russell was forced to abandon rating and proceeded with the unhappy compromise of a £7 and £14 franchise, each based on the clearer rental value.¹⁶⁴² These two qualifications were to be bolstered by a £10 lodger qualification and £50 savings franchise in the boroughs. At the same time, the county electorate was to be augmented by extending to copyholders and freeholders the same voting rights as the forty shilling freeholders.¹⁶⁴³ Moreover, in yet another lapse of judgement, it was decided to press ahead without considering the necessary redistribution of seats. This followed a change of position of by Bright and the radicals who suggested it would be 'advantageous' to government 'to proceed in this question step by step'..¹⁶⁴⁴ This was once again an issue that split cabinet opinion. Many favoured a large redistribution, others preferred a small redistribution, if for no other reason than to distance themselves from Bright's position. Then there were those who believed that no attempt to deal with the redistribution was more favourable than a small settlement, as 'taking one MP from as few a thirty boroughs would alienate up to sixty backbenchers' who might lose their seat.¹⁶⁴⁵ Eventually, another uneasy agreement was struck: namely, that they proceed with a Bill that solely considered the question of suffrage.

When Gladstone introduced the bill on the 12th of March 1866 he did so in a long, detailed and unexciting speech in which he asked for the 'kind patience and indulgence' of the House for a question that deserved 'that grave and earnest attention which belongs to a matter undoubtedly of a serious order.'¹⁶⁴⁶ Having stressed the significance of the matter in relation to a full reordering of the electoral system, he outlined how the government's aim was to deal with 'that the branch of the question which stands first in its own importance and in the public estimation that which relates to the enfranchisement of large numbers of our fellow-countrymen now excluded from the electoral suffrage, but qualified, as we believe, to use it.'¹⁶⁴⁷ He argued that the proposed plan was 'a liberal, ... a moderate and a safe plan.' This was because it was one which, in terms of borough seats, greatly altered 'the balance as between the working classes ... and the classes above them' without conceding an 'absolute ... advantage to the working classes'.¹⁶⁴⁸ In conclusion, he urged the House to at Reform as though they 'were conferring a boon that will be felt and reciprocated in grateful attachment ... for the attachment of the people to the Throne, the institutions, and the laws under which they live is, after all, more than gold and silver, or more than fleets and armies, at once the strength, the glory, and the safety of the land.'¹⁶⁴⁹

The Bill was poorly received. As Gathorne Hardy observantly noted from the other side of the House, 'there was no enthusiasm for it and sound reason against it'.¹⁶⁵⁰ This statement could have not been more accurate. It was a Bill that was so narrow in its aims that it could not elicit much enthusiasm from even his own party. Indeed, its deficiencies opened it up to criticism from all sides. For many Liberals, the Bill did nothing to settle the great question of Reform. Matthew Marsh condemned it, arguing that 'The tendency of the proposed Bill was towards universal suffrage ... It was said that that measure would settle this question; but he (Mr. Marsh) maintained that, on the

¹⁶⁴² They had initially included a rental value *above* £7 to supplement and add clarity to the inconsistent and often more penal rating assessment. Under these qualifications they had estimated 144,000 new borough voters would be included. However, the statistics had also included houses with a rental value of £7. This constituted some 40,000 new voters off the estimated 144,000 as it transpired a £7 rental qualification was in fact lower than the £6 rating. Thus making the inclusion of a £6 rating qualification for the boroughs redundant if the supplementary rental value introduced more voters into the franchise. See *Ibid*, pp.192-194.

¹⁶⁴³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 12th of March 1866, c.30

¹⁶⁴⁴ *The Times*, 4th of January 1866, p.9

¹⁶⁴⁵ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.193

¹⁶⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 12th of March 1866, v.182, c.20

¹⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid*, c.27

¹⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid*, c.58

¹⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid*, cc.59-60

¹⁶⁵⁰ Johnson (ed.), *The Diary of Gathorne Hardy*, p.6

contrary it was just such a measure as would keep it unsettled'.¹⁶⁵¹ Marsh was not alone. A powerful group of Whig and Liberal dissidents, who were branded the 'Cave of Adullam', now posed the most dangerous opposition to their own government's Bill. Their name had been coined by Bright, in reference to the biblical Cave of Adullam where David was joined by every one that was in distress...and every one that was discontented'.¹⁶⁵² This group had emerged as a serious obstacle to Liberal reforming ambition in 1859, when they had been united in denouncing Russell's conduct towards Disraeli's Bill. Led nominally by Earl Grosvenor in the Commons, and by Lansdowne in the Lords, the day to day management fell to Lord Elcho, who in 1859 had argued that representation 'should rest, not upon population, not upon property alone, but upon interests' and warned any extension of the vote to a large body of the working class, 'would be practically the disfranchisement of every other class of the community' arguing that 'the difficulty was how to exclude the ignorant mass'. Thus it followed that any proposal that simply lowered the franchise, based merely on property, would be 'opening a door which would let in Heaven knew what in'.¹⁶⁵³ In this argument, he was joined by Edward Horsman, who thought that any approach that involved a simple lowering of the franchise 'had the inevitable result that it was only a steppingstone to universal suffrage'.¹⁶⁵⁴ The most talented and most voluble member of the Cave was undoubtedly Robert Lowe. Having resigned from the cabinet in 1864, he was now 'unmuzzled', and emerged in 1865 as a powerful Liberal opponent of Reform.¹⁶⁵⁵

For the Conservatives, the Bill was an open attack on rural England. The county franchise in itself was not problematic. The Conservatives themselves had supported the lower figure of £10 in their own Bill in 1859. It was the total absence of any safeguards that roused indignant fury on the opposition benches. The Bill initially proposed no accompanying redistribution or boundary commission. This meant that no burgeoning towns would be removed from the county electorate; moreover, with no boundary commission nothing would be done to redraw the lines between urban and rural England. Towns which had grown beyond their 1832 parameters now bled urban voters into the county electorates. By contrast, while the Conservatives had attempted to expel freeholders from the county vote in 1859, this new Bill would swell their ranks with the inclusion of copyholders and leaseholders under the same terms. That was roundly criticized by Conservatives¹⁶⁵⁶ Cranbourne judged the Bill characteristic of Gladstone's 'persistent, undying hatred of the rural interest', and thought it a Bill which would further favour the urban interest which as it currently stood 'almost entirely swamp the rural interest of the county'.¹⁶⁵⁷ What Gladstone perhaps failed to understand was that the Conservatives were hostile not simply to an extension of the franchise, but were against anything which further disrupted the balance between urban and rural interests. As Saunders has recognised, 'what mattered to Tories was the ability of the county seats to represent land, rather than urban or commercial interests'.¹⁶⁵⁸

Disraeli had previously been worried that some among his party would be tempted to support the Bill. Rumours of a £6 rated borough franchise and accompanying £20 county threshold had stimulated speculation that Walpole, Henley 'and some 15 or 20 on our side' would support the government, a move which would 'effectively paralyse Lowe, Elcho, and some 40 or 50 on the Liberal side whose accession to us depends upon our remaining united'.¹⁶⁵⁹ However, the proposals

¹⁶⁵¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 12th of March 1866, v.182, c.60

¹⁶⁵² Samuel 22:1-22:2

¹⁶⁵³ *Ibid*, 28th of March 1859, v.153, cc.942-943

¹⁶⁵⁴ *The Times*, 13th of January 1859, p.9

¹⁶⁵⁵ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.203

¹⁶⁵⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 12th of March 1866, v.182., cc.73-74

¹⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 13th of March 1866, v.182, cc.226-227

¹⁶⁵⁸ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.198

¹⁶⁵⁹ Gordon (ed.), *Political Diaries of the Fourth Earl of Canarvon*, 6th of March 1866, pp.118-119

for both the franchise and the counties taken together ensured the party was united behind him in condemnation of the measure. Indeed, upon learning the proposals of the Bill, and in defiance of Derby's instructions to remain uncommitted on the first reading of the Bill, Disraeli organised a secret meeting with Carnarvon, Heathcote, Cranbourne, Northcote and Walpole to reach out to the Liberal dissidents and 'speak in support of the Liberals who will attack the Bill on Monday'.¹⁶⁶⁰ Here again, we should recognise Disraeli's unusual ability to collaborate effectively both with those in his own party and their opponents, this in order to protect both rural interests and his own understanding of the territorial nature of the English constitution. This was especially remarkable, given that many of them were not personally attached to him, or in some cases actively distrusted him.¹⁶⁶¹ Indeed, it was Disraeli's efforts to actively, albeit clandestinely, support the Cave that ensured the failure of the government's Bill. The genius of this collaboration lay in the Conservatives not committing themselves to any particular measures of their own. They let the Cave pull their own house down while Disraeli facilitated opposition from behind the scenes. As Bradford has noted, when the final vote went against the Government, Gladstone was 'apparently unaware of having been secretly outmanoeuvred by Disraeli'.¹⁶⁶²

The real star of the opposition to Russell's bill was undoubtedly Robert Lowe who, in 1865 and 1866 'set out the most comprehensive case against democracy expressed in the House of Commons in the nineteenth century'.¹⁶⁶³ His speeches were unrivalled in their intellectual capacity and in invoking the terrifying spectre of democracy he brilliantly summed up the fears of the Cave. So much was this so that in 1866 the *Spectator* noted that 'no stranger goes there [the House of Commons] without looking for the white gleam, or rather flash, of his striking head, or listening anxiously for the cold, sardonic ring of his lucid voice, penetrating it with a shiver of half-mocking intelligence'.¹⁶⁶⁴ To Lowe, the doctrinaire utilitarian and free-trader, the constitution and, by extension, the electoral process was a mechanism for good government. On that basis, he challenged reformers to explain their reasons for wishing to remodel a system which had, since 1832, worked quite adequately, arguing that the £10 borough franchise was 'one of the most respectable institutions that any country ever possessed'; after all, 'the seven Houses of Commons that have sat since the Reform Bill, have performed exploits unrivalled, not merely in the six centuries during which Parliament has existed, but in the whole history of representative assemblies'.¹⁶⁶⁵ Any amendment to that franchise, he insisted, would be an interference to educated and scientific government. The electoral system was not a system for 'rewarding, or punishing, or elevating, but a practical matter of business'.¹⁶⁶⁶ No doubt prejudiced by his own experience of electoral violence at the hands of the mob in Kidderminster in 1857, he was wholly resistant to any suggestion the working classes could be trusted with the franchise. Instead, he argued that any reduction in the franchise would open the door to the venal and uneducated underclass and destroy any pretence that the English constitution was a great balance of property and intelligence. He was a dangerous and at times brilliant opponent to the government. But he was just one element of a well-coordinated opposition.

While Lowe's rhetorical brilliance has been long recognized, the history of both the opposition of the Cave and the manoeuvring of Disraeli against the 1866 Bill have been treated

¹⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 9th of March 1866, p.119

¹⁶⁶¹ Lowe expressed his distrust of Disraeli to Carnarvon, see *Ibid*, 9th of March 1866, p.120. Cranbourne had long been an uneasy ally. While Walpole had never been an enthusiastic supporter having quit the cabinet in 1859 when he clashed with Disraeli over the direction of the Conservative Reform Bill of 1859. See Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, pp.193-196

¹⁶⁶² Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.261

¹⁶⁶³ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.248

¹⁶⁶⁴ *The Spectator*, 7th of July 1866

¹⁶⁶⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 3rd of May 1865, v.178 c.1434

¹⁶⁶⁶ Lowe, *Speeches and Letters on Reform*, p.37

harshly by scholars. The Cave has traditionally been condemned along the lines of Bright's biblically inspired description: 'every one that was in distress and everyone that was discontented'.¹⁶⁶⁷ In this understanding, it was a combination of "'unattached" men', 'unrepentant Palmerstonians' and 'members for small boroughs who feared changes in the distribution of seats'.¹⁶⁶⁸ That was to say it was merely a group of malcontents who felt little loyalty to the current administration, feared for their own position, or were disaffected when they had been over-looked for ministerial office. This was certainly true of Robert Peel, Horsman and Laing, all of whom were wounded by exclusion at one time or another.¹⁶⁶⁹ The most prominent of this group, Lowe was similarly determined to avenge himself after his treatment by the previous administration, informing his brother in 1865 that he was busy with 'my plots against Lord John...I will try to turn out the government which if not victory is revenge'.¹⁶⁷⁰

However, despite these particular, personal, motives there is no real doubt as to the more general sincerity of the group's opposition to Reform. Nor were they, as Trevelyan claimed 'the last rally of Whig decadence'.¹⁶⁷¹ There was undoubtedly a strong Whig connection to the group. They needed the support of the great Whig families to shift any wavering moderates to their cause. However, the composition of the Cave is not quite so simply defined. Their ranks certainly included the representatives of great Whig families in both the Commons and the Lords. Indeed, these came to form the majority within the Adullamites.¹⁶⁷² But the group also included independent radicals, such as Horsman, and ex-Peelites like Elcho. In fact, many more of the great Whig families supported Russell's hopes of averting democracy through moderate reform, than sided with Lowe's forceful but incendiary anti-democratic rhetoric. In essence, the Cave was a group of individuals who strongly believed 'that any alteration in the electoral system had to be a comprehensive and well-considered measure if it be a lasting settlement to the question that had been plaguing various administrations for years'.¹⁶⁷³ Moreover, they were men who genuinely believed that the direction and destiny of Liberal politics was at stake. Many of them had been steadfastly loyal to Palmerston and were worried about the direction of the party under the stewardship of Russell and Gladstone. Who now threatened the undo the work of Palmerston.¹⁶⁷⁴ This was a common theme amongst Adullamites, one commenting that 'when he saw the old constitutional Whig party, which had stood by every Liberal Government with desperate fidelity...utterly ignored, and the state policy advised and steered by the advice of [Bright]...they had a right to enter their protest'.¹⁶⁷⁵

From these comments a more general picture emerges. This one that differs from the traditional understanding of the Cave. In contrast to a cabal of self-interested or discontented rebels, the Cave, at least in their own eyes, saw itself as battling for the historic position of the Liberal party against a ministry they believed was in thrall to Bright and the radicals. Therefore, they opposed Russell's government, not because they differed from moderate opinion, but rather because they believed they represented it. But more than that, as Winter shrewdly recognised, 'If the Cave was the last rally of anything, it was of the independent members - men who...were determined to assert their rights and duties as representatives to decide for themselves on matters of conscience. Men from a variety of backgrounds came into the Cave for many reasons. Among them, and most significant for

¹⁶⁶⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 13th of March 1866, v.182, cc.219-220

¹⁶⁶⁸ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.249

¹⁶⁶⁹ James Winter, 'The Cave of Adullam and Parliamentary Reform', *EHR*, (1966) vol.81 no.318, pp.45-46

¹⁶⁷⁰ Quoted in *Ibid*, p.47

¹⁶⁷¹ Trevelyan, *Life of John Bright*, pp.356-357

¹⁶⁷² *Ibid*, p.48

¹⁶⁷³ Douglas F. Sheppard, 'The Cave of Adullam, Household Suffrage, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act', *Parliamentary History* (1995), vol.14 no.2, p.150

¹⁶⁷⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 19th of April 1866, v.182 cc.1677-1678; *Ibid*, 12th of March 1866, v.182, c.107; *Ibid*, 20th of April 1866, v.182 c.1857

¹⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 20th of April 1866, v.182 c.1799

future events, was a genuine desire to find some principle for constitutional reform, some formula which would allow the working classes representation without 'swamping' in the process the minority of wealthy and educated.¹⁶⁷⁶

Disraeli's conduct in collaborating with the Cave and helping to sink Russell's Reform Bill has received similar disapprobation from scholars. Characteristically, Blake has argued that Disraeli's 'attitude to parliamentary reform was throughout these years purely opportunist', and that in 1866 'he must have seen that there was a good chance of bringing the Government down. For this purpose the last thing he wanted to do was to co-operate in a moderate Bill'.¹⁶⁷⁷ Bradford has concurred with this portrait, describing Disraeli's approach to Reform as 'opportunist and purely partisan'.¹⁶⁷⁸ This opportunist interpretation is problematic. It is first necessary to observe that, having spent the last twenty years in opposition, broken only by two short and ill-fated spells in minority government, Disraeli could not afford to be inflexible or doctrinaire to issues. This was particularly true of one with such potentially far-reaching consequences as parliamentary reform. However, that is not to say he could not adhere to broad principles. The most important of these was that any measure of reform that he might be willing to support must not only deal with the question but must not damage the position of the landed interest, or of the Conservative party. In that sense, the Reform Bill of 1866 was by no means a simply 'moderate' measure. Not only was it deeply flawed, riddled with anomalies, and hastily put together, but with regard to the counties, it had the potential to be disastrous for the landed interest. It may have been moderate with relation to the borough franchise, but in extending the rights of forty shilling freeholders to copyholders and leaseholders, in not authorising a boundary commission to recognise the expansion of urban electorate into county seats, and in choosing not to look at the redistribution of seats until the question of the franchise was settled, Russell's bill had the genuine potential to extinguish the Conservative party as a political force.

Disraeli might have long since acknowledged to Stanley that in regard to Reform 'you could not find any point to stop at short of the absolute sovereignty of the people'.¹⁶⁷⁹ But that was not an admission of any secret reactionary agenda. Disraeli was not an inflexible opponent of Reform. In fact, he had consistently defended the right of the Conservative party to undertake Reform legislation of their own. This was not, as Bradford has judged it, merely an exercise in good public relations: 'publicly...in keeping with his plan to present the Conservative party with a progressive image'.¹⁶⁸⁰ He understood that the framing of the Bill could be more important than the level of the franchise. It put any party that successfully engaged with Reform at a distinct advantage. Not only could it control the details of the legislation, but it would also likely have the gratitude of a newly enfranchised electorate. This is reflected in Disraeli's comments to Stanley in April 1866: 'No matter how you modify the Bill it is still theirs, and not ours, and would give them the command of the boroughs'.¹⁶⁸¹ Disraeli's actions in 1866 were far from purely opportunist. While they did involve a great deal of political manoeuvring, his opposition to the Bill was far from cynical. It was a Bill just as partisan as the Reform Act of 1832. It would have henceforth have given the Liberals the predominating influence as it had the Whigs for the period after 1832. But perhaps most importantly, it was widely agreed that it was a proposal that would not settle the question, but rather leave it open to immediate agitation for a lower franchise. With this last point particularly in mind, the actions of the Adullamites and Disraeli require significant revisionist treatment. Neither group opposed the Bill purely from self-interest. Both maintained points of principle on which their arguments rested. The blame for the

¹⁶⁷⁶ James Winter, 'The Cave of Adullam and Parliamentary Reform', *EHR*, (1966) vol.81 no.318, p.49

¹⁶⁷⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.438

¹⁶⁷⁸ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.259

¹⁶⁷⁹ Vincent, *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.113

¹⁶⁸⁰ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.259

¹⁶⁸¹ Vincent, *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, 30th of April 1866, p.250

defeat of the 1866 Bill cannot be pinned squarely upon the notion that it was defeated by the factious opposition of self-interested Liberal dissidents, working with an unscrupulous and cynical Conservative leader. The Bill had inherent flaws both in detail and approach, the timing of its introduction, and the failures of the Liberal leadership were all equally to blame for its failure.

The Bill encountered its first serious challenge when the previously steadfastly loyal Earl Grosvenor broke ranks with the government and tabled a hostile amendment. This amendment had in fact been drafted by Derby. With encouragement from Elcho, Grosvenor had agreed to introduce it as the respectable face of the Adullamite rebellion.¹⁶⁸² The amendment called for a postponement of Russell's Franchise Bill until it was accompanied by proposals for the redistribution of seats. It was a skilful manoeuvre, as elements from all sections outside of the government had expressed concern that dealing with the franchise without redistribution would be unpalatable. Gathorne Hardy described the amendment as 'a shell': explosive and with the potential of sinking both the Bill and the government.¹⁶⁸³ When Gladstone attacked the amendment with what was now becoming characteristic ill temper, he only solidified the common ground on which his opponents were attempting to unite. After the Bill's first reading his old friend, and fellow member for Oxford, Sir William Heathcote, was astonished at 'the apparent loss of power of his mind'.¹⁶⁸⁴ It was a moment which solidified opinions about Gladstone's increasingly radical conversion. As Bouverie put it: 'Tory as he was, High Churchman as he is and revolutionist as he will be... more dangerous and not half so good a fellow as Bright'.¹⁶⁸⁵ Indeed, it seems quite likely that Grosvenor's amendment, far from stalling the legislation, actually solidified Gladstone's move to the left as Grosvenor's motion, and the hostility of dissident Liberals, drove 'the Government to depend more on the radicals than ever'.¹⁶⁸⁶ In short, Gladstone had neither the tact or subtlety required effectively to unify and lead a heterogenous Liberal House of Commons: a trait that Disraeli was more than willing to exploit.

It was against this landscape that the debate over Grosvenor's amendment took place. The Cave initially took the lead by supporting the amendment and attacking the government's short-sightedness in initially introducing legislation without a schedule for redistribution. Disraeli acted as the lynchpin in the collaboration between his own party and the Adullamites. Moreover, he was able to coordinate that opposition, while keeping their collaboration secret from the Government and their supporters. This first ensured that the Liberal party, while quite indifferent to Gladstone's leadership, did not rally around him in indignation at the betrayal by their colleagues, secretly colluding with the Tories. Secondly, it allowed Conservatives to remain uncommitted and thus not be seen to oppose the principle of Reform. The wisdom of these tactics was demonstrated in the first night of the debate on the Bill, where the Conservatives were happy to distance themselves from Lowe's rapidly anti-democratic and anti-working-class rhetoric.¹⁶⁸⁷ Disraeli did not speak until the last evening of the debate on the motion, when he delivered a stinging attack on both the nature of Bill and the Government that had the hubris to put it before the House. It was incomplete, and without the government's proposals for a redistribution of seats or a boundary commission, the far-reaching consequences of their Reform Bill to the balance of interests would be unfathomable.¹⁶⁸⁸ In spite of its timing there was nothing opportunist about Disraeli's speech. In fact, it showed a striking consistency

¹⁶⁸² Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.305

¹⁶⁸³ *Gathorne Hardy Diary*, p.7

¹⁶⁸⁴ Northcote Diary, 16th of March 1866, cited in Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p.304

¹⁶⁸⁵ Bouverie to Ellice, 6th of April 1866, cited in *Ibid*, p.102

¹⁶⁸⁶ Halifax to Earl Grey, 5th of April 1866, cited in Cowling, 'Disraeli, Derby and Fusion, October 1865 to July 1866', *Historical Journal*, (1965) vol.8 issue.1, pp.49-50

¹⁶⁸⁷ Winter, 'Cave of Adullam', p.4; *Hansard 3rd Series*, House of Commons, 13th of March 1866, v.182, cc.141-164: this speech included Lowe's infamous remark: 'If you want venality, if you want ignorance, if you want drunkenness, and facility for being intimidated; or if, on the other hand, you want impulsive, unreflecting, and violent people, where do you look for them in the constituencies? Do you go to the top or to the bottom?' (c.148)

¹⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 27th of April 1866, v.183, c.78-81

with his earlier declarations on reform going back over thirty years. The focus of his speech was to uphold the representation of the landed interest and to protect the principles of the English constitution.

With regard to the existing imbalance between boroughs and counties, Disraeli reminded the House that ‘the comparative claim to representation of the counties and the boroughs. I am sure the House will recollect it. It is in round numbers 9,350,000, the population of the boroughs, against 11,400,000, the population of the counties; 514,000 electors in the boroughs, against 501,000 electors of counties’, yet despite these clear inequities, the ‘boroughs have 334 Members and the counties 162 Members.’¹⁶⁸⁹ Therefore, he argued that the county franchise must remain a county franchise: ‘It must be a suffrage exercised by those who have a natural relation to the chief property and to the chief industry of the county. Those who are to exercise it ought to be members of the same community, and not strangers whose thoughts, feelings, interests, capital, and labour are employed and occupied in another place’.¹⁶⁹⁰ With regard to the provisions for the counties, or lack of them, Disraeli was concerned that the Bill the government proposed would only serve as a means to extinguish the influence of the landed interest.¹⁶⁹¹ It was those very principles that were enshrined in the English constitution. As if reading from his *Vindication*, he concluded that the balance of interests and the variety of the constitution need be preserved, because ‘Those principles are English... It ought to proceed upon the principle that we are the House of Commons, and not the House of the People; and that we represent a great political order in the State, and not an indiscriminate multitude’¹⁶⁹² The speech certainly enraged Gladstone who ‘throwing the language of Bright in the face of the aristocratic House of Commons’,¹⁶⁹³ hit out at his opponents with a self-righteous warning:

‘You cannot fight against the future. Time is on our side. The great social forces which move onwards in their might and majesty, and which the tumult of our debates does not for a moment impede or disturb—those great social forces are against you; they are marshalled on our side; and the banner which we now carry in this fight, though perhaps at some moment it may droop over our sinking heads, yet it soon again will float in the eye of heaven, and it will be borne by the firm hands of the united people of the three kingdoms, perhaps not to an easy, but to a certain and to a not distant victory.’¹⁶⁹⁴

Following Gladstone’s speech the House divided, and the while the Government staved off defeat on Grosvenor’s amendment, their majority was smaller than any of them could have seriously imagined. The amendment was defeated 318 to 313. Upon hearing the result, the Adullamites sitting behind the treasury bench cheered while Lowe stood in his seat ‘flushed, triumphant and avenged’, waving his hat ‘in wide circles over the head of the very man who had just gone into the lobby against him’.¹⁶⁹⁵ In the aftermath of their narrow escape Russell and Gladstone, against the wishes of the majority of the cabinet, decided to push on with their bill. But as Hawkins has recognised, ‘any pretence of Liberal unity over Reform was now shattered...[and] this dogged persistence merely prolonged the Liberal collapse’.¹⁶⁹⁶ On the 30th of April, the first day of debate after their narrow escape, Gladstone announced the introduction of a scheme for the redistribution of seats to appease the dissenters in his own party. This only succeeded in giving more ammunition to those who believed that the Reform Bill was ill-thought through and hastily put together in the first place.

¹⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, cc.87-88

¹⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, c.86

¹⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*, c.93

¹⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, c.111

¹⁶⁹³ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.261

¹⁶⁹⁴ *Hansard* 3rd Series, House of Commons, 27th of April 1866, v.183, c.152

¹⁶⁹⁵ J. Irving, *Annals of our Time 1837-1871*, quoted in F.B. Smith, *Making of the Second Reform Bill*, pp.89-90

¹⁶⁹⁶ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, pp.305-306

Secondly, whilst it had the potential for bringing onside some of their less-ardent opponents, this manoeuvre confirmed the animosity of those members for the small boroughs whose seats would be lost to redistribution. In a bill that ‘had to be botched together without due consideration or inquiry’,¹⁶⁹⁷ The scheme they settled on was an unimaginative and modest which failed to enthuse either Conservatives or radicals, would failed to balance the interest of the country, and was seemingly introduced purely in attempt to quell rebellion amongst their back-benchers.¹⁶⁹⁸

It an attempt doomed to fail. The oponents of the bill, sensing the weakness of the government’s position, went on the attack. As Hawkins has suggested, the behaviour of the government ‘confirmed Derby’s long-held belief that a broad alliance of non-Conservatives was an inherently unstable alignment’.¹⁶⁹⁹ Russell’s government still limped on into June, having repelled no fewer than six hostile opposition amendments in the Commons. However, it was only a matter of time before the opposition found the correct formula to defeat the government. In mid-June the Conservatives and the Cave came up with an amendment which proposed to assess the new £7 borough qualification of rates rather than rental value. A rating qualification was widely accepted as a desirable principle of representation. It rested on the principle of personal responsibility, only giving the vote to those who had an established record of willingness to accept personal and public responsibility. Thus, as its supporters argued, by granting the vote on a ‘principle that demonstrated responsibility, rather than some mythical ‘right’...a downhill slide to universal suffrage would be averted’.¹⁷⁰⁰ Moreover the reality, that a £7 borough and £14 county rating franchise was an estimated twenty percent higher than an equivalent rental value, ensured Conservative support. The amendment added selectiveness and finality to a Bill which had been criticised for precisely those reasons. A franchise based on rating was ‘a barrier, steady and fixed, to the descent to universal suffrage’ and offered a distinction between the ‘honest, industrious and thrifty’ and the ‘idle, intemperate, [and] careless’ among the working classes.¹⁷⁰¹ When the House divided the amendment was passed 315 to 304. Somewhere between thirty-five and forty-two Liberals voted with the Conservatives against their own leadership in a vote that proved to be the death-knell of Russell’s last Reform Bill.

From the Bill’s instigation, it had faced an uphill battle to receive parliamentary assent. Russell’s decision to introduce a Reform Bill immediately after Palmerston’s death guaranteed that the measure was hastily determined and thinly researched. The Liberal party that was largely still loyal to the memory of his predecessor and had been elected to pursue Palmerstonian policies only a year previously. By taking up Reform so quickly Russell’s actions highlighted a clear departure from Palmerstonian politics, with Reform now becoming an important symbol of a new age of Liberal politics. The make-up of the cabinet exposed a lack of debating ability in the Commons. Gladstone, as it proved, was not the right man to hold together a party who were not personally loyal to their Premier. Indeed, tensions within the complicated coalition that had been held together by Palmerston had simmering for a long-time. As the balance of power shifted between different elements of the party, these tensions came to a head. Moreover, their approach to the Reform, in sticking to a ‘fixed line’, based upon rental values, had failed before and ignored ‘almost everything that had been said or written about Reform since 1860’.¹⁷⁰² If their problems were not great enough, this was compounded by their failing initially to introduce a schedule for the redistribution of seats, only to perform a U-turn and provide a series of ill-conceived, half-baked proposals which pleased no one. The Cave and the

¹⁶⁹⁷ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.212

¹⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, cc.494-498

¹⁶⁹⁹ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, p.306

¹⁷⁰⁰ Winter, ‘Cave of Adullam’, p.43

¹⁷⁰¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 18th of June, 1866, v.184, cc.539-546

¹⁷⁰² Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.223

Conservatives, who bore the brunt of the recriminations in the aftermath of the defeat, deserve to be treated more temperately in this respect. The Bill was patently bad, and one which was openly hostile to the landed interest. There was little mere opportunism in their opposition to it. In fact, Disraeli opposed the Bill in line with his party's and his own long-held principles regarding reform. The only vague taint of opportunism that can be attributed to him is in his skill in intriguing with the Adullamites, defeating the Bill, and simultaneously not committing his party against the principles of Reform. However, the Russell and Gladstone's failure to settle the Reform question must be seen in the context of their Bill's irreparable shortcomings rather than in the context of those who opposed it. As Saunders so astutely recognised, 'the wonder is not that the bill failed but that it came so close to success'.¹⁷⁰³

Upon the defeat of the Bill, Russell tendered his resignation to the Queen and Lord Derby was promptly called upon to form a ministry. The Cave may have tried to get rid of Russell, but there is little to suggest that they wanted or expected him to be replaced by Tory administration under Derby. Cowling has noted that after Russell's resignation 'fusion seemed possible', indeed that 'fusion was in the air', but that no broad Whig-Tory-Adullamite coalition emerged to oppose 'Gladstone and Democracy'.¹⁷⁰⁴ Blake has attributed the failure of fusion to 'the personality of Disraeli', whose 'preoccupation throughout this crisis was a personal one'.¹⁷⁰⁵ This interpretation only serves to cast further aspersion over Disraeli's political motives. Certainly, Disraeli was a divisive figure among the opposition, and especially among the senior Whigs. But then, he had been among the staunchest critics of Whiggism for over thirty years. Lowe and Horsman had not trusted Disraeli from the outset: undoubtedly, this was a feeling that was reciprocated. Disraeli's historical and sentimental vision of British politics could not have been further from Lowe's logical, scientific, Benthamite approach to governance.

The 'fusion' failed chiefly, however, because, upon Russell's resignation the Adullamites and Whigs pushed their claims in a way that showed little awareness of their own position. When invited to join Derby's administration Grosvenor replied to Derby, through Lord Wilton, that the Cave: 'After a long conference the opinion expressed was that we could not guarantee Lord Derby the support (in its strict sense) of the Cave; that a Government under a Whig in the House of Lords, such as Lord Clarendon, would be most desirable on all accounts, with Stanley leader in the House of Commons'.¹⁷⁰⁶ Undoubtedly, both Derby and Disraeli hoped to absorb elements of the Cave to form anti-liberal moderate phalanx. However, both thought it unacceptable to be asked to step aside in favour of a coalition under a Whig prime minister. The refusal of the Adullamites to serve in a Derby-Disraeli government was followed by similar action from leading Whigs. Clarendon declined, likely hoping for the leadership himself.¹⁷⁰⁷ Somerset curtly refused any offer of cabinet position. While Shaftsbury who they hoped to bring on board as a 'representative of Palmerstonian sympathies and influences' also politely declined.¹⁷⁰⁸ The ludicrous expectations of the Whigs and the Cave in expecting Derby to stand aside from the premiership and support them in office undermined any possibility of formal coalition. Blake has argued that these claims were by no means 'preposterous' suggesting the position of the Whigs and Adullamites in 1866 was no different to the position of the Peelites in 1852, when they contrived 'to acquire the premiership together with half the seats in the Cabinet'.¹⁷⁰⁹ This comparison does not stand up. Not only did the Peelites count amongst their

¹⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.192

¹⁷⁰⁴ Cowling, 'Disraeli, Derby and Fusion', p.59

¹⁷⁰⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.444-446

¹⁷⁰⁶ Grosvenor to Wilton, 23rd of June 1866, quoted in M&B, v.4, pp.439-440

¹⁷⁰⁷ There is no concrete evidence of this. But it can be strongly inferred. See Cowling, 'Disraeli, Derby and Fusion', p.60 fn.161

¹⁷⁰⁸ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Derby, 27th of June 1866, v.9 p.88-89; see also *The Times*, 10th of July, 1866, p.8

¹⁷⁰⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.444-445

numbers some of the most talented ministerialists of the age, but they were needed to command a patch-work coalition of warring liberal factions. In 1866 the Conservatives were a united, albeit minority, bloc and as it proved they were both willing and able to press ahead without any outside support.

That said, Derby's resolve wavered with no prospect of support from outside his party. Therefore, it fell to Disraeli, with memories of 1855 perhaps still haunting him, to ensure that Derby would not spurn this opportunity. He wrote to his chief, insisting that the claims of the Cave were 'not consistent with the honour of the Conservative party'.¹⁷¹⁰ Two days later he pressed Derby again: 'the question is not Adullamite; it is national. You must take the Government; the honour of your house and the necessity of the country alike require it'. Suspecting that the Whigs hoped that Derby would refuse, thus making way for one of their own to assume the Premiership, Disraeli urged Derby that 'there is only one course with the Queen: to kiss hands... Nothing can prevent your winning, if you grasp the helm'.¹⁷¹¹ All along he had perhaps been doubtful of any formal support from the Adullamites and Whigs for a Conservative administration with a Conservative premier.¹⁷¹² Moreover, Derby and Disraeli's relationship had become ever more interdependent. Disraeli had shown great loyalty to Derby and had proved a reliable lieutenant. Derby acknowledged as much when he wrote General Grey (the Queen's private secretary) that 'he could not throw Mr. Disraeli over in order to get [Lord Clarendon]'.¹⁷¹³

Indeed, as the year wore on and Derby's health began to fail, his reliance on and faith in Disraeli only increased, to extent that Carnarvon complained the Derby never consulted anyone in the Cabinet besides Disraeli.¹⁷¹⁴ Therefore, urged on by Disraeli and provoked by Whig and Adullamite refusals to join him, he pressed ahead with a purely Conservative administration. Blake's has argued that Disraeli was anxious 'to torpedo an anti-reform coalition' through self-interest and it was merely luck that his 'personal interests coincided on this occasion with those of his party'.¹⁷¹⁵ He his right to suggest that it was unlikely there was any 'deep laid plan'. But both Derby and Disraeli understood the opportunity which had been presented to them. They had both worked together for two decades to ensure the survival of the party. They had been completely aligned in their aims (though not always in methods) of rehabilitating the agricultural rump left by the schism of 1846 and of re-establishing the party on a broad, national and popular basis. In short, they agreed on the necessity of re-establishing the Conservatives as a credible party of government. The fiery anti-Reform rhetoric of Lowe and the fervent radicalism of Bright had demonstrated that cracks in the fragile Willis Room agreement, papered over by Palmerston, could no longer be held together.¹⁷¹⁶ In 1866, it seemed that the Derby and Disraeli were at last to get their chance of realising the long-held aims. Having been thrown out through factious opposition in 1859 with a well-supported Reform Bill in the House of Commons, neither was willing to step aside to support Whigs in settling the question of a generation. Derby's position was clear, as Gathorne Hardy recalled, 'He would never hold a subordinate place. He would never be a minister on sufferance again'.¹⁷¹⁷ Though as *The Times* noted upon the Conservatives accepting office: 'few governments have succeeded to a more arduous position or have entered upon office at a more critical time'.¹⁷¹⁸

¹⁷¹⁰ Disraeli to Derby, 23rd of June 1866, quoted in M&B, vol.4, p.440

¹⁷¹¹ Disraeli to Derby, 25th of June 1866, *Ibid*, p.440

¹⁷¹² Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, pp.306-307

¹⁷¹³ General Charles Grey, Memorandum, 29th of June 1866, cited in Blake, *Disraeli*, p.446

¹⁷¹⁴ *Carnarvon Diaries*, 1st of August 1867, p.167

¹⁷¹⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.446

¹⁷¹⁶ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, p.311

¹⁷¹⁷ *Diaries of Gathorne Hardy*, p.II

¹⁷¹⁸ *The Times*, 7th of July 1866, p.8

When the Conservatives took office in July, Derby laid out the aims of his government, with particular reference to the Conservatives attitude to Parliamentary Reform. He held both himself and his Party ‘entirely free and unpledged upon the great and difficult question of Parliamentary Reform’. Having had the ‘experience not only of the dangers incurred by others, but of dangers incurred by ourselves’, Derby told the Lords that he ‘shall consider well and carefully, before I again introduce a Reform Bill’. He agreed with Lord Grey that ‘the representation of the people cannot be amended, except by a mutual understanding between the two great parties in the country’. Therefore, he argued that if there was ‘no reasonable prospect of passing a sound and satisfactory measure’, the Conservatives would not bring one forward. It was of ‘infinite disadvantage to the country that Session after Session should be lost...by continual contests over Reform Bills’.¹⁷¹⁹ However, that was not to say that he either he or his government were against a well-considered and far-reaching measure of Reform. Derby ‘could not deny for a moment that there were theoretical anomalies in our present system’, and ‘that there were classes of persons excluded from the franchise’, who had, ‘a fair claim and title’ to suffrage, and there was also ‘a very large class’ who had been totally excluded by ‘the particular qualifications of the Act of 1832’.¹⁷²⁰ Concluding his speech, he summarised the broad principles of Derby’s Conservative party. These were to ‘pursue the path of safe and steady progress, strengthening, rather than subverting, the institutions of the country, and maintaining that balance between the various parts of our constitutional system... according with the temper and character of the times’.¹⁷²¹ On the whole the speech was well received, with *The Times* commenting on how Derby maintained ‘a wise and becoming reserve’ and that, ‘there could be no doubt that Lord Derby acted wisely in this moderation’.¹⁷²² It also displayed the Conservative’s eagerness to restore their credentials as a legitimate party of government, deliberately contrasting their own careful consideration of the matter with Liberal recklessness and instability. It certainly made clear that Derby was not going to repeat Russell’s mistakes by prematurely introducing an ill-conceived and poorly executed Reform Bill. It must be remembered that neither Derby nor Disraeli actually thought a Reform Bill, for its own sake, strictly desirable. Instead, ‘the two leaders settled down to watch the drift of public opinion’ before making their move.¹⁷²³

By 1867 the opinion of both parliament and the country with regard to reform was greatly changed. In 1865, popular feeling for Reform had been thought to be negligible. The cause had seemingly languished and there had been no tangible popular pressure on Russell to introduce legislation. However, the failed passage of his 1866 Bill inspired public interest in the cause. Even after the introduction of his Bill there was little popular enthusiasm. So little indeed that Bright had described it as, ‘a fraud of the worst character’.¹⁷²⁴ However, the clashes between Gladstone, Bright and Lowe, captivated a British public in an age when the lower middle-classes and skilled artisanal classes took great interest in newspapers reports of parliamentary business. If the cause of Parliamentary Reform had been languishing at the beginning of the new parliament, by the summer of 1866 the working classes had been imbued with popular enthusiasm. Ironically, it was the intellectually powerful and forcefully anti-democratic arguments of Lowe that most advanced the cause of Parliamentary Reform ‘outdoors’. His constant allusions to the ignorance and venality of the working classes as evidence of their unfitness to vote provoked a fierce reaction. Therefore, spurred on by the failure of yet another Reform Bill, and inspired by Lowe’s inflammatory language, Bright

¹⁷¹⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Lords, 9th of July 1866, v.184 cc.739-740

¹⁷²⁰ *Ibid*, c.740

¹⁷²¹ *Ibid*, c.744

¹⁷²² *The Times*, 10th of July 1866, p.8

¹⁷²³ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.225

¹⁷²⁴ Trevelyan, *Life of John Bright*, p.354

traversed the country addressing meetings and encouraging agitation. The result: the largest campaign of mass demonstration in favour of Reform since Chartism.

While much has historically been made of the demonstrations in London in the summer of 1866, the activity and growth of the Reform League was truly national. Indeed, in terms of numbers, many meetings in other metropolises matched or even eclipsed the scale of the London demonstrations.¹⁷²⁵ Monster meetings in Birmingham, Glasgow, Leicester, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Leeds, where it is estimated between 150,000 and 400,000 met on Woodhouse Moor, all furnish powerful evidence the groundswell in enthusiasm for Reform in the urban lower classes. However, as Malcolm Chase has shrewdly recognised, the real revolution of public opinion was not necessarily seen in the ‘metropolitan tens of thousands but in its earnest dozens and hundreds in local halls and market places’.¹⁷²⁶ Throughout the passage of the Second Reform Bill the politics of Reform permeated provincial towns in a way that was unprecedented. By the summer of 1867, at least 430 branches of the Reform League had been constituted all across the country.¹⁷²⁷ Moreover, towns which had hitherto been untouched by political demonstration held their own mass meetings, many of them unrepresented new towns and suburbs that had burgeoned since the decline of Chartism.¹⁷²⁸ There is no doubting that there was a huge expansion in both the scale and geography of popular activity following the defeat of Russell’s Reform Bill. The precise effect of that popular demonstration had on the timing or final result of the Conservative Reform Bill is less easy to ascertain.

The violent demonstrations in London during the summer of 1866 have traditionally been afforded much historical significance in forcing the issue of Reform upon the Conservative government. The demonstration in Trafalgar Square at the end of June saw protesters march upon the Carlton Club and damage the houses of leading politicians opposed to Russell’s Reform Bill. And the infamous Hyde Park ‘riot’ of July saw protestors assert their right to demonstrate in Hyde Park against the direct orders of the Home Secretary, Spencer Walpole. When they found the entrance to the park barred, they clashed with the police, broke down the railings and trampled the flowerbeds to gain access. After three days of occupation, the park was cleared with the assistance of the Household cavalry, but it was a blow to the authority government. Thereafter all demonstrations in the autumn of 1866 and 1867 were peaceful in nature, as if ‘to prove the respectability of its participants’.¹⁷²⁹ As Chase has shown, the demonstrations were impressive and the performative elements such as bands, floats, banners, and other elements of ‘elaborately choreographed processions’, all ‘bore material witness to workers’ skill, education, and their role in creating wealth’.¹⁷³⁰ The displays have led some scholars to attach considerable importance to the effect of the popular demonstrations on the final shape of the Reform Bill. G.M. Trevelyan argued that, as a result of mass demonstration, Conservatives, ‘in their hearts they were afraid, with that wide old English fear of their fellow-countrymen when thoroughly aroused...how much they were afraid they hardly knew themselves’.¹⁷³¹ Royden Harrison, who of all scholars, perhaps assigned most agency to popular agitation for Reform even suggested that in response to Hyde Park demonstration of 1867, ‘Tory statesmen were bowing to a process which it was beyond their power to control’.¹⁷³²

¹⁷²⁵ Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) p.262

¹⁷²⁶ Malcolm Chase, ‘The Popular Movement for Parliamentary Reform in Provincial Britain during the 1860s’, *Parliamentary History*, (2017) 36.1, p.14

¹⁷²⁷ *Ibid*, p.24

¹⁷²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.25-26

¹⁷²⁹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, pp.228-229

¹⁷³⁰ Chase, ‘The Popular Movement for Parliamentary Reform in Provincial Britain’, pp.19-20

¹⁷³¹ Trevelyan, *Life of John Bright*, p.363

¹⁷³² Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies and Labour and Politics, 1861-1881*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1965) p.135

+Such conclusions on further investigation prove problematic when trying to understand how the Reform Act of 1867 came to be shaped. First, if the urgency of the Reform question was made clear to the Conservatives in June, they did not act very urgently. Neither Derby nor Disraeli thought Reform a pressing concern. Only in September did Derby become resigned to the necessity of another Reform Bill.¹⁷³³ Even then, Disraeli did not agree that any measure of Reform was strictly necessary.¹⁷³⁴ Indeed, if the ferocity of the London demonstrations had struck fear into the Conservatives they did not show it at the time. Admittedly, Walpole was shocked by the events, having lost his nerve when the park was entered. But his cabinet colleagues seemed noticeably unaffected in the immediate aftermath. Stanley commented that ‘there was more mischief than malice in the affair and a good deal more larking than either’.¹⁷³⁵ With regard to the violence present in the summer protests, *The Times* put the trouble down to a few ‘roughs’, ‘looser members of the crowd’ and ‘slouching shambling man-boys’, who distracted from otherwise peaceable nature of the demonstrations.¹⁷³⁶ In fact, even by the following spring after sustained agitation there was little worry as to the situation in the country. On the 5th of March Stanley wrote that there was not ‘much excitement or violence of feeling among the people’ about Reform.¹⁷³⁷ Later the same month, Disraeli advised the House of Commons against delaying legislation of Reform as ‘the horizon is not disturbed at the present juncture’.¹⁷³⁸

It also needs to be noted that the agitation was not always unified behind common goals. That is, that public feeling was not totally aligned in one direction or towards one clear objective. The agitation during 1866 and 1867 represented, with minor exceptions, peaceful protest that extolled the skill, education and respectability of the working classes and which also displayed a willingness to compromise in order to achieve some Reform whatever shape it may take. In that sense, there seemed little to fear from popular demonstration, and it certainly did not ‘awe the Conservative party into submission’ as Trevelyan long ago suggested.¹⁷³⁹ After all, the damaged railings and trampled flower beds of Hyde park were no comparison to the danger represented by the Days of May or even the marches for the Charter. Moreover, the main figures behind the Conservative bill, Derby and Disraeli, had both lived through 1832 and the Chartist demonstrations. They understood that the agitation of the Reform League in 1866 and 1867 did not pose the same threat. All that being said, it does not follow that the public agitation played no part in the final shape of the 1867 Reform Act. The actions of the Reform League certainly had an important role in the passage of the Bill, but perhaps not in the way that has traditionally been understood. The conditions by which the Reform Bill took its final shape were undoubtedly parliamentary. But the activities of the Reform League and other groups unwittingly turned those conditions to Conservative advantage.

First, popular demonstration and orchestrated agitation had made it clear beyond doubt that public opinion was in now favour of reform. If there had been apathy before the introduction of Russell’s Reform Bill, its defeat, the manner of its defeat, and the agitation following its defeat had displayed the depth of public feeling in support of parliamentary reform. Disraeli, while certainly not afraid of the mob, was turned as a result of these demonstrations to the necessity of undertaking legislation. Even after Derby had come to the conclusion that Reform was necessary Disraeli did not straightaway agree. In October, Carnarvon reported that Disraeli was in ‘an undecided state of mind’ with regard to Reform and wanted the Conservatives to ‘hold our hand till later when we shall see what is public

¹⁷³³ Derby to Disraeli, 16th of September 1866, cited in M&B, vol.4, p.453

¹⁷³⁴ Disraeli to Derby, 24th of September 1866, *Disraeli’s Letter* v.9, pp.151-152

¹⁷³⁵ Stanley Diary, 24th of September 1866, *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.261

¹⁷³⁶ *The Times*, 24th of July 1866, p.9, 26th of July, p.8

¹⁷³⁷ *Ibid*, 5th of March 1867, p.293

¹⁷³⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 26th of March 1867, v. c.664

¹⁷³⁹ Trevelyan, *Life of John Bright*, p.362

feeling on many points'.¹⁷⁴⁰ Between this meeting and January of 1867 Disraeli, against a backdrop on public agitation, came to the conclusion that public opinion had shifted. He wrote to Derby on the 2nd of January admitting his surprise at 'the unanimity with which all classes in the provinces where I have been desire a Reform Bill'.¹⁷⁴¹ As Buckle concluded, Disraeli, 'would not admit in the autumn that the success of the agitation Bright was conducting showed that the country had determined to obtain Reform; but by January he found the evidence conclusive'.¹⁷⁴² Moreover, after convincing the Conservatives of the swelling tide of demand for further Reform, agitation played an unwitting role in assisting the Conservatives to pass their measure. Of all the groups in parliament, it was, perhaps surprisingly, the Tories who least feared the threats of popular agitation. As Cowling astutely recognised, 'Conservative Backbenchers disliked mass demonstrations', and while they recognised their right of these protestors, 'the intensity of distaste that Conservatives felt for public displays of mob power' prevented them being cowed by the threat masses.¹⁷⁴³ However, the position of the Conservative party at large was that something needed to be done.¹⁷⁴⁴ That said, none of his party would give way to the 'mere riots of a mob'.¹⁷⁴⁵

The advantage the Conservatives had lay in their traditional position of the party of law and order, agricultural interest and the rural wealth. The working classes, or even the lower middle classes, had never formed the traditional powerbase of the party. Indeed, being seen to resist the agitation of an increasingly militant proletarian class would solidify their position as the protectors of the wealth, property and respectability.¹⁷⁴⁶ The coalition of groups held together under the banner of the Liberal party were not in such a certain position. Thus whilst the Conservatives remained relatively immune to the effects of mass demonstration, the Liberals were forced into a corner. For as the Bill progressed towards completion, it became harder for Liberal MPs to oppose it. The question of Reform had bedevilled and frustrated the House for over fifteen years. In that time, Liberal MPs had gone back to the electors time and time again with the promise of Reform, only to act against those promises in Parliament. Indeed, the last time a Conservative bill had been brought into the House the Liberals had torpedoed it and had failed to settle the question in the intervening eight years. As Saunders has observed, as time went on 'it became harder to justify the expulsion of the Conservatives' in 1859 on the grounds that their Bill was too restrictive. Moreover, 'this sense of a Parliament dishonoured entered the collective memory of the Liberal party'.¹⁷⁴⁷ Thus when Gladstone tried to rally the Liberals to oppose Disraeli's Bill in 1867, many of them were not willing to be complicit in defeating another, more extensive, Reform Bill when the public mood was running so high. Seen this way, Bright's campaign of public agitation had a great influence on the passage of the Second Reform Act. But it did not force the Conservatives to concede more than they were willing, nor did it awe them into submitting to popular will. Rather, it proved instrumental in driving frightened Whigs and Liberals into the government lobbies as the memories of past failures to settle the question of Reform on their own terms came back to haunt them.

In order to avoid the pitfalls that surround the history of the Reform Act of 1867, we must be aware of the parliamentary context and the intentions of leaders who had influence over the passage of legislation. First and foremost, we need to remember that the Conservatives were in a minority of around seventy seats in the House of Commons. Therefore, as Briggs observed, 'if all the opposition

¹⁷⁴⁰ *Political Diaries of the Fourth Earl of Carnarvon*, 27th of October 1866, p.132

¹⁷⁴¹ Disraeli to Derby, 13th of January 1867, *Disraeli's Letters*, v.9 p.228

¹⁷⁴² M&B, vol.4, p.487

¹⁷⁴³ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.26

¹⁷⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 26th of March 1867, v.186 c.615

¹⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid*, c.615

¹⁷⁴⁶ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.27

¹⁷⁴⁷ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.130

groups had voted against them, they would have been defeated'.¹⁷⁴⁸ But whilst the Conservative position was obviously weak, it still needs reiterating that if the opposition had been able to unite against it at any point then their bill would have been finished. In this precarious situation, Disraeli was helped by a Liberal party that was still hopelessly disunited after defeat in 1866, moreover now under the leadership of Gladstone who was unlikely to rally them together. Secondly, we must appreciate that because the parliamentary arithmetic was so balanced against the Conservatives no one, including Disraeli, knew what the final Bill would look like when it passed. Put another way the government needed to cut its sail to the prevailing winds in order to steer the bill into the statute book. In this sense, the Reform Bill of 1867 needed to be an exercise in political expediency. However, whilst Disraeli had to prevail upon the support of those outside his party and was obliged to play with the law, there were safeguards that the Conservatives were not willing to jettison.

Partisan mythology surrounding the passage of the Second Reform Act is equally inaccurate. There was no deep-laid plan to educate his party to a future where household suffrage paved way for a new Conservative voting working class electorate. Whilst the working classes turned out to be far more deferential and conservative than politicians of all descriptions could imagine in 1867, Disraeli certainly did not anticipate this. In the same way, the Liberal explanation for Disraeli's actions in 1867, namely that Disraeli extended the vote to a working classes electorate only under pressure from Gladstone and in order to keep hold of office, is equally indefensible. As we shall see, Gladstone wished to restrict the extent of the Conservative Bill. Moreover, any notion that the newly enfranchised electorate thanked Gladstone by voting for him 1868 quickly unravels when it is understood that the majority of the compounders enfranchised by Hodgkinson's amendment did not make it onto the electoral register in time for the vote.¹⁷⁴⁹ In fact, the first election actually fought on the principles of the final 1867 Act yielded a substantial Conservative majority.¹⁷⁵⁰

It is in this context that the idea that 1867 was an 'accidental revolution', whereby over one million new voters were unwittingly granted entry to the suffrage and in which a new age of near-universal urban male suffrage was blindly ushered in, has proved persuasive.¹⁷⁵¹ The final result was, as Parry correctly identified, 'beyond the worst fears of the average propertied Liberal. Neither Russell nor Gladstone had wanted such extensive constitutional change; neither were democrats'.¹⁷⁵² Moreover, the Conservatives would have certainly preferred to pass a smaller measure if the contemporary political conditions had allowed. However, the strength of public feeling in 1867 meant that a more comprehensive measure was required to achieve a majority in parliament and to settle the question in the country. The necessity to do something was a matter on which nearly all groups agreed. The battle to pass the Reform Bill, however tempting, should not be seen as a clash of differing ideologies or even a battle between opportunism and principle. As Cowling shrewdly suggested 'there was so solid a measure of agreement among four-fifths of members who sat in the Parliament of 1865 about the importance of electoral arrangements in maintaining the social and economic structure' that the passage of the Reform Bill 'is unintelligible if its significance is supposed to lie in difference of fundamental opinion or dispute of fundamental principle'.¹⁷⁵³ As we have already seen, the mechanisms and tools of Reform-- fixed line values, rating or rental valuations, the rights of compounders and the rights of freeholders, the inclusion of lodgers in the franchise,

¹⁷⁴⁸ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.279

¹⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.474

¹⁷⁵⁰ Hodgkinson's amendment did not work in practice due to disputes between landlords and local authorities over the payment of rates. The 'spirit' of the 1867 Act was only realized when Goschen passed a bill in 1869 allowing compounders to register for the vote. While it killed any pretense that the vote relied on the person payment of rates, it circumvented the impracticalities of abolishing the compounding of rates.

¹⁷⁵¹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, ch.8, pp.225-263; Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp.215-217

¹⁷⁵² Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.217

¹⁷⁵³ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, pp.2-3

fancy or merit franchises, the movement of boundaries and the redistribution of seats – all had very tangible effects on the complexion of an electorate.¹⁷⁵⁴ In that sense, the battle for Reform was as Cowling saw it, ‘not just to establish the best constitution, but to decide who should establish it’.¹⁷⁵⁵ However, it is necessary to insert an important caveat. Each participant preferred one method over another and every one of them were willing to villainise various mechanisms of enfranchisement as indiscriminate or unbalanced. But all of their claims to such merit rested upon largely inaccurate statistics and vague presumptions over the respectability and responsibility of certain classes of the nation. After all, none of them knew which way a £10 lodger would vote, or whether a £6 rated borough franchise was more appropriate than £5 or £7. Thus, while the balance of power and the representation of various interest groups was at stake, the consequences of debates and actions over minute details, which received contemporary and historical significance, were very hard to accurately ascertain, both then and now.

What is clear was that the Conservative Bill as it was eventually introduced, attempted to achieve four broad aims. First, was an extension of the borough suffrage. Their 1859 Bill had ostensibly been defeated because it failed to lower the borough suffrage and, by extension, to give the vote to any proportion of the working classes. Therefore, it was ‘both logical and necessary’ that the 1867 do just that.¹⁷⁵⁶ They attempted this by nominally taking up household suffrage, which following the defeat and criticism of ‘fixed line’ property valuation, seemed the only proposal acceptable to a majority of the House. Secondly, they sought to qualify the implementation of household suffrage with a series of safeguards to restrict the extent of enfranchisement in the boroughs. They attempted to achieve this establishing the new franchise on the principle of personal payment of rates as a moral test of responsibility.¹⁷⁵⁷ This was coupled with a two-year residency qualification, the return of fancy franchises to add variety to the electorate all of which were combined with the further safeguard of duality of votes.¹⁷⁵⁸ Thirdly, while necessarily reducing it, they aimed to keep the county qualification moderately high, settling on a £15 franchise as the ‘most advantageous and most satisfactory’,¹⁷⁵⁹ and noticeably higher than their £10 proposal in 1859. This was coupled with a new boundary commission to redraw the borough boundaries in order to move suburban voters out of county seats and back into the borough electorate. This was another proposal that had been prominent in the 1859 Bill, but that had been absent from Liberal attempts at legislation. Lastly, Disraeli’s 1867 Bill included proposals for a small redistribution of seats.¹⁷⁶⁰ From these proposals we can ascertain the broad objectives of the Bill. The first was to lower the borough suffrage, but to establish it on a permanent and principled foundation: The personal payment of rates, rather than the arbitrary fixed line based upon the fluctuating valuation of property. This new principle was hedged with other safeguards, in order to broaden the franchise. The Conservatives also aimed maintain a more restrictive franchise in the county seats and, through a boundary commission and a redistribution of seats, to ensure that the distinct characteristics of rural and urban electorates were restored. In effect, they were willing to concede to long-standing claims of the working classes for the vote, so long as the settlement proved permanent and providing the rural interest was protected by a clear-cut agricultural electorate in which the vote was restricted, open and deferential. Even in its radicalised form, the Conservative Reform Act of 1867 achieved these broad aims.

¹⁷⁵⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.266

¹⁷⁵⁵ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.2

¹⁷⁵⁶ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.710

¹⁷⁵⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 18th of March 1867, v.186 c.10

¹⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid*, cc.17-18

¹⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid*, c.21

¹⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid*, cc.21-24

However, this is an oversimplification of the confused process that actually gave birth to the final Bill. As Blake rightly observed, ‘the process whereby the 1867 Reform Bill was launched constitutes one of the oddest histories of confusion, cross-purpose and muddle in British political history’.¹⁷⁶¹ Initially the Conservatives had no intention of presenting a Bill in 1867 at all. While the Queen may have been anxious to see something done about Reform and while Lord Derby had come to the same conclusion, that ‘we cannot escape doing something’, the Tories had no intention of rapidly putting a detailed proposal before the House.¹⁷⁶² Rather than offering a Bill that might serve as a rallying point for the fracture opposition, they had intended to proceed by resolutions followed by a public enquiry. This could be used to gauge the opinion of the House without committing to any points of detail and would not endanger the survival of a ministry which was still trying to find its feet.¹⁷⁶³ While a sensible move in principle which might keep the opposition divided and stave off immediate legislation, it proved an ill-fated strategy. Firstly, the Conservative cabinet could not agree to the content or wording of the resolutions. General Peel threatened resignation if household suffrage was mentioned, with Disraeli telling Derby that ‘you find him very placable except of the phrase “household suffrage”, when his eye lights up with insanity’.¹⁷⁶⁴ Moreover, given the exhaustive nature of Reform debates over the last decade and given the mountains of statistics that had been produced, neither Derby nor Disraeli could think of any solid and worthwhile subject into which an enquiry might be launched.¹⁷⁶⁵ As it became quickly apparent, after years of frustration and debate over Reform, the House of Commons had little appetite for further hypothetical discussion of the borough franchise. When Disraeli announced the introduction of resolutions on the 11th of February for debate a fortnight later, the reception was hostile.¹⁷⁶⁶ Following the announcement the opposition seemed united in opposing the resolutions unless they were followed by the subsequent introduction of legislation.¹⁷⁶⁷ It was becoming clear that both public and parliamentary opinion had shifted, and action was required rather than further delay.

Disraeli, whether by mistake or ‘Machiavellian manoeuvre’ forced the government into taking action.¹⁷⁶⁸ On the 14th of February, in response to question from Lord Robert Montagu, Disraeli promised that if, ‘Resolutions of which we have given notice are passed, we shall be prepared at once to introduce a Bill’.¹⁷⁶⁹ This move was likely prompted by information from Stanley: that the Liberals planned to attack the resolutions if they were not to be followed by immediate legislation.¹⁷⁷⁰ However, it was undoubtedly a decision taken on his own initiative. As Cranbourne noted in a memorandum that ‘no proposition for immediate legislation had even been mentioned in Cabinet’.¹⁷⁷¹ It was a drastic change of gear for the Conservatives, they who had previously thought legislation a far-off and indistinct prospect, now had less than two weeks to piece together and agree a Reform Bill for introduction on the 25th. It had the tactical advantage of heading off any hostility from the opposition and perhaps anticipated Gladstone and Russell bringing in another Reform Bill of their own. However, it required the Conservatives find hasty agreement as to how they were to proceed. Amongst those in the Cabinet, there was general consensus that household suffrage, hedged with restrictions, was the best course to take. In November, Carnarvon had suggested ‘household suffrage

¹⁷⁶¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.456

¹⁷⁶² Derby to Disraeli, 16th of September 1866, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 110/2, ff.179-180

¹⁷⁶³ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.231

¹⁷⁶⁴ Disraeli to Derby, 7th of February 1867, cited in M&B, vol.4, p.492

¹⁷⁶⁵ Disraeli to Derby, 12th of October 1866, Derby Papers, 146/2; Derby to Disraeli, 18th of November 1866, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 110/2, f.206

¹⁷⁶⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of February 1867, v.185 c.244

¹⁷⁶⁷ Russell to Gladstone, 27th of January 1867, cited in Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.233

¹⁷⁶⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.456

¹⁷⁶⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 14th of February 1867, v.185 c.338

¹⁷⁷⁰ Stanley to Disraeli, 14th of February 1867, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 111/3, f.150

¹⁷⁷¹ Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921) vol.1, p.225

accompanied by conservative restrictions and safeguards'.¹⁷⁷² He later told Disraeli of his conviction that 'an arbitrary reduction of £1, £2 or £3 would be fatal' and that they would need to take 'the borough suffrage down to a considerable depth in order to get a ledge on which to rest it'.¹⁷⁷³ Northcote had expressed similar views to Disraeli, arguing that 'we shall find no standpoint short of household suffrage...if we go boldly down to this point we shall have a fair chance of coupling the concession with conditions that make it safe'.¹⁷⁷⁴ Given that there was such a pre-existing consensus, Disraeli sought to gain Cabinet approval for a Reform Bill, based on household suffrage and protected by plural voting and also the personal payment of rates. When it became clear that Peel would not agree to any reduction, the £5 limit, having been included for him, was dropped 'to the extreme surprise' of Cranbourne and Carnarvon.¹⁷⁷⁵

Amongst all of this indecision, Disraeli needed to convince any wavering colleagues of the suitability of the scheme. To do so had to show that any of the proposed counterpoises, such as plural voting and payment of rates, safeguarded the overall scheme and ensured the working classes were not left in an absolute majority. On the 19th, Disraeli promised these statistics, and on the 23rd he presented them to Cabinet. The statistics were compiled by Dudley Baxter, who Disraeli inaccurately described as, 'the ablest statistician of the age'.¹⁷⁷⁶ In between these meetings Cranbourne, who had always disliked Disraeli, expressed his opinion to Carnarvon that he 'has played us false' and was trying to, 'hustle us into his measures'.¹⁷⁷⁷ On the 23rd, no doubt aware of the shortcomings of the statistics, Disraeli and Derby tried to rattle them through the Cabinet without a chance for any serious investigation or discussion. Derby made the excuse 'that he must leave early and business was hurried through'.¹⁷⁷⁸ Already suspicious of Disraeli, Cranbourne spent the evening working through the figures and reached an alarming conclusion. This was that a 'complete revolution would be effected in the boroughs'.¹⁷⁷⁹ Cranbourne, Carnarvon and Peel called for a cabinet meeting to get an explanation for their findings. But Cranbourne's calculations only reached Derby on the morning of the 25th, when Derby was to unveil their Bill to the party, followed by Disraeli introducing the Bill to the House. Cranbourne's letter to Derby explained that Baxter's miscalculation: that he had 'made the calculation in a lump, and has assumed that the effect would be distributed equally over all boroughs...[however] in small boroughs the addition is large and the counterpoise small, in the large boroughs, where we are hopelessly overmatched, the counterpoise is large and the addition small'.¹⁷⁸⁰ Having read this Derby quickly wrote to Disraeli, 'The enclosed just received is utter ruin'. Disraeli replied, 'this is a stabbing in the back!...it seems like treachery'.¹⁷⁸¹ They rapidly attempted to scramble the Cabinet for an emergency meeting before Derby was due to address the party. By 12.30 they managed to get the majority of them together. Following 'a very angry discussion', in which Carnarvon asked for explanation to the figures, the Reform proposals were remodelled in ten minutes before the announcement was meant to be made. Against the threat of a treble resignation, the leaders decided to preserve Cabinet unity. They abandoned household suffrage and duality, in favour of a £6 and £20 rating franchise for the boroughs and counties respectively.¹⁷⁸²

It was a sham measure, certainly no better than Russell's of the previous year. Following Disraeli's speech, characteristic responses reflected the hostility on both sides to such an unpalatable

¹⁷⁷² *Political Diaries of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon*, 8th of November 1867, p.135

¹⁷⁷³ Carnarvon to Disraeli, 2nd of February 1867, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 100/1, f.18

¹⁷⁷⁴ Northcote to Disraeli, 16th of January 1867, *Ibid*, 107/1, ff.1-2

¹⁷⁷⁵ Cecil, *Salisbury*, vol.1, pp.229-230

¹⁷⁷⁶ *Political Diaries of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon*, 23rd of February 1867, p.151

¹⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 21st of February 1867, p.150

¹⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 23rd of February 1867, p.151

¹⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 24th of February 1867, p.151

¹⁷⁸⁰ Cranbourne to Derby, 24th of February 1867, cited in M&B, v.4, p.499

¹⁷⁸¹ Disraeli to Derby, 25th of February 1867, cited in M&B, v.4, p.500

¹⁷⁸² *Political Diaries of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon*, 25th of February 1867, p.153

measure which was neither based on a clear principle nor represented a definitive resting place.¹⁷⁸³ Not a single Tory backbencher rose to defend the proposals. Many had hoped for more ambitious and comprehensive proposals. *The Times* reported the following day that ‘Disraeli spoke for the first time in many years...amid an unsympathetic silence’.¹⁷⁸⁴ The Adullamites, in particular, were mortified by the ‘Ten Minute’ Bill, which contained nearly all the shortcomings of the measure they had help defeat. Laing, acting as spokesman, urged the government to take up ‘a household rating franchise...instead of endeavouring to stop at the half-way-house of a £6 rating franchise.’¹⁷⁸⁵ The following day, Disraeli withdrew the resolutions and set about looking for replacement for ‘Ten Minute’ Bill. Subsequent to the poor showing on the 25th, momentum quickly built within the party for a Bill based upon the principle of household suffrage. Disraeli quickly realised that events were working in the favour of a bolder course of action that both he and Derby wanted to take. In the ‘inner sanctum of Toryism, the smoking room of the Carlton Club’ following the debate, S.R. Graves, MP for Liverpool, forcefully argued that a municipal suffrage was now the only basis of a successful Reform Bill, and in that room, ‘he found a willing audience and immediate support’.¹⁷⁸⁶ The following day, the 26th, Graves led a deputation of Conservative borough to meet with Disraeli and impress upon him the force of feeling that was now in favour of household suffrage.¹⁷⁸⁷ This new opinion in the party was confirmed at a party meeting in the Carlton on the 28th, where overwhelming support for household suffrage was confirmed. Sir Matthew Ridley, who chaired the proceedings, informed Derby that two thirds of Tory MPs present voted in favour of a Bill based upon ‘Rated Residential Suffrage, with three years residence’.¹⁷⁸⁸ Indeed, as Saunders, has observed, Disraeli did a skilful job at turning this situation to his advantage, ‘because MPs had not seen Disraeli’s figures, or been sold the scheme on a mathematically flawed counterpoise ...the dissenting ministers became quite unfairly associated with the £6 policy’.¹⁷⁸⁹ *The Times* echoed the party feeling by condemning the ‘irresolution of colleagues who do not know their own minds’.¹⁷⁹⁰

It was not just on the backbenches, but within the government, that pressure was building in Disraeli’s favour. Malmesbury wrote to Derby urging him to change course for he had no ‘doubt as to which is the best. I always preferred household suffrage (properly counterpoised) to any halfway resting-place, and I believe the whole country is of that opinion.’¹⁷⁹¹ This sentiment was echoed by Buckingham who told Carnarvon that the party ‘could not agree in the present bill’ and urged his resignation.¹⁷⁹² In the same way, Stanley confided to his diary his own belief that they should revert to household suffrage and was encouraged by a ‘great feeling’ of support in the party.¹⁷⁹³ On the 2nd of March, Cabinet reconvened and in ‘a most painful scene’, Derby announced the total impracticality of the ‘Ten Minute’ Bill, and announced a return to household suffrage counterpoised with dual voting, personal payment of rates, and a three year residency qualification. He put this new (or indeed old) scheme to a vote and Cranbourne, Carnarvon and Peel announced they ‘could not accept the plan with the objections as to the small boroughs unanswered’.¹⁷⁹⁴ They were alone in their opposition to the reintroducing household suffrage and tendered their resignations. When the meeting ended, Derby

¹⁷⁸³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 25th of February 1867, v.186, cc.952-966 (Lowe); *Ibid*, cc.966-974 (Bright); *Ibid*, cc.981-989 (Gladstone)

¹⁷⁸⁴ *The Times*, 26th of February 1867, p.9

¹⁷⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 25th of February 1867, v.185 c.980

¹⁷⁸⁶ Cited in M&B, v.4, p.503

¹⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.503

¹⁷⁸⁸ Derby to Disraeli, 28th of February 1867, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 110/3, f.27

¹⁷⁸⁹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.242

¹⁷⁹⁰ *The Times*, 26th of February 1867, p.9

¹⁷⁹¹ Malmesbury to Derby, 1st of March 1867, cited in M&B, vol.4, p.511

¹⁷⁹² *Political Diaries of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon*, 28th of February 1867, p.154

¹⁷⁹³ *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, 27th of February, pp.291-292

¹⁷⁹⁴ *Political Diaries of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon*, 2nd of March 1867, p.154

‘closed his box with a heavy sigh and said, “The Party is ruined”’ to which Disraeli ‘rather cynically’ added, ““Poor Tory Party!””¹⁷⁹⁵

Of course, the Conservative party was not ruined. In five days, the Conservatives dropped household suffrage, introduced a Reform Bill to the House of Commons which they had cobbled together in ten minutes, withdrew it a day later, returned to the original household suffrage measure four days after that, and lost three cabinet ministers to resignation. But, perhaps ironically, it was in the disastrous Cabinet meeting of the 25th and in the derision that met the ‘Ten Minute’ Bill, that the seeds of Tory success were sown. Crucially, Disraeli in Cabinet did nothing to ‘controvert the accuracy’ of the rebels’ case and defend the statistics. Rather, ‘he only said there would be great variance in the boroughs in question and that the influence of land and wealth would be supreme’.¹⁷⁹⁶ He reiterated this to Derby following the failure of the ‘Ten Minute’ Bill, that the figures were unimportant and that it had been ‘always known’ that the working classes of the small boroughs were deferential and ‘under the patronage of the Upper classes, and depend on them for their employment and existence’.¹⁷⁹⁷ This was obviously unacceptable to Cranbourne whose view the working classes was undoubtedly as bleak Lowe’s.¹⁷⁹⁸ However, Disraeli’s decision to abandon the statistics was a wise one. First, given the restraints they were working under, no set of statistics was likely to be comprehensive or accurate. Secondly, if statistics were strictly adhered to, they would not be able to produce a Bill which would attract a majority. This confirmed the Reform measure was a matter of faith as much as it was a matter of science.

Furthermore, the stinging criticism that the revised Bill received from both sides showed the Conservatives that they needed to be bolder, and that only a bill based on household suffrage would be able to gain any traction. As Disraeli commented to Derby following the outpouring of support for restricted household suffrage from the wider party, ‘the thing gets riper every hour, tho’ I don’t think it would have been so ripe, if we had originally proposed it’.¹⁷⁹⁹ Moreover, when they had first given up household suffrage they did it to keep the cabinet together. They were not willing to do it twice. After the three rebels resigned following the reintroduction of household suffrage, Disraeli’s position and the prospects of the Conservative party markedly improved. The day after their resignation Derby met Lady Cranbourne and asked if ‘Robert is still doing his sums?’, she replied ‘Yes, and he has reached rather a curious result: take three from fifteen and nothing remains’.¹⁸⁰⁰ It was witty repartee but a grave miscalculation. As Briggs recognized, ‘the government was strengthened rather than weakened by the loss of three men of rigid principle. Take three from fifteen and anything is possible’.¹⁸⁰¹ Their departure from the cabinet removed all the elements hostile to both Disraeli and Reform. With his chief critics departed and his supporters given a more prominent role, the new composition of cabinet facilitated Disraeli’s skilful management of the Bill and aided the web of collaboration between him and his colleagues. Moreover, the rebels had misread the mood of the party. If they had intended to lead a revolt, then those around them were certainly not willing to follow their lead.

We should certainly not be surprised by Disraeli’s belief that ‘the bolder line is the safer one, and, moreover, that it will be successful’.¹⁸⁰² Derby agreed that there was ‘a strong argument for meeting our fate on the bolder line’.¹⁸⁰³ Disraeli had always shown a strikingly consistency with regard to

¹⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p.154

¹⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 25th of February 1867, p.152

¹⁷⁹⁷ Disraeli to Derby, 25th of February 1867, Derby Papers, 146/3

¹⁷⁹⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 27th of April 1867, v.183 c.18; Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, pp.236-237

¹⁷⁹⁹ *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Derby, 28th of February 1867, vol.9, pp.256-259

¹⁸⁰⁰ Cecil, *Salisbury*, vol.1, p.237

¹⁸⁰¹ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.285

¹⁸⁰² ¹⁸⁰² *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Derby, 27th of February 1867, vol.9, pp.254-255

¹⁸⁰³ Derby to Disraeli, 28th of February 1867, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 110/3 f.116

Parliamentary Reform: certainly, more than is often conceded to him. Longman's published his collected speeches on Reform in January of 1867, in anticipation of a Reform Bill and in order to make this very point. Nominally edited by Monty Corry, the volume was put together as 'a complete and consistent record' of Disraeli's views on the Reform question in order for the country to judge 'with what justness it has been asserted that the Tory party are disqualified from dealing with the most difficult modern political questions'.¹⁸⁰⁴ This was all undoubtedly propaganda. However, the speeches themselves speak for Disraeli's consistency. Not only had Disraeli put forward quite a consistent case for Reform in the House of Commons, but outside it, in an attack on the 'bit by bit' legislation he had stressed his own preference for 'a complete measure', and indicated his belief that only 'a bold and decided course' would settle the question permanently.¹⁸⁰⁵ Moreover, he had always been at pains to recognise past Tory contributions to Reform. He was quick to claim Derby's role in the drafting of the Reform Act for the Tories, and was eager to point out that the Chandos clause, which enfranchised a great portion of the agricultural electorate, had been a Tory amendment. In fact, these ideas can be clearly perceived much earlier in Disraeli's political writing. His interpretation of Britain's political history contained in his *Vindication* had pitted the 'democratic' Tories against the 'oligarchy' of the Whigs. He was never opposed to Reform. The Whig Reform Act had been an imperfect and factious measure. Indeed, in *Spirit of Whiggism*, he declared his belief that, 'the wider the popular suffrage, the more powerful would be the natural aristocracy' so long as the Reform was 'established on a fair, and not a factious basis'.¹⁸⁰⁶ If there was a clear exception to Disraeli's consistent position on Reform, it was ironically his speeches against the 1866 Bill where he took a more traditionally Conservative line against the legislation. However, as we have already discussed, it was a poorly conceived measure with potentially disastrous consequences for the landed interest. Disraeli's line in attacking the Bill was dictated by the situation and adjusted to support his collaboration with the Adullamites.

By taking the bold course, of basing the Bill on the principle of household suffrage, it offered a permanent resting place and an end to agitation that a 'fixed line' could never offer. The principle of personal payment offered discrimination between those deserving artisans who took personal responsibility for the payment of their rates, and the 'residuum' who compounded theirs with their rent. Moreover, the 'fancy franchises' attempted to broaden the suffrage so that more people could attain the vote through various different qualifications. Duality of voting through the fancy franchise qualifications, along with a residency qualification, further safeguarded the permanence of the vote and attempted to ensure the balance of power would not rest solely with one interest. At the same time, the redistribution of seats and the boundary commission sought to redress the inequities between the rural and urban interests which had been caused by the 1832 Reform Act. On the face of it, the whole package offered a comprehensive settlement that free from many of the flaws of previous Reform Bills. However, it does not follow that Disraeli's Bill was devoid of its own anomalies and errors.

One element of the Bill which stood out to its critics was the way in which the Conservatives were either ignorant about, or had wilfully misunderstood the application of, compounding as laid down by the Small Tenants Act. Gladstone in particular became vociferous in his criticism of the Bill on these grounds. He believed that by making personal payment of rates the acid test of civic responsibility, the Bill, rather than drawing a line between the respectable working class and the less respectable and more dependent elements of society, made an almost random distinction between men who were of the same social position but had different arrangements of paying their rates.¹⁸⁰⁷

¹⁸⁰⁴ Montague Corry (ed.), *Parliamentary Reform: A Series of Speeches on that subject delivered in the House of Commons by the Right Hon. B. Disraeli (1848-1866)*, (London: Longmans, 1867), p.vi

¹⁸⁰⁵ *The Times*, 21st of May 1857, p.9

¹⁸⁰⁶ *Whigs and Whiggism*, p.260

¹⁸⁰⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of April 1867, v.186 cc.1514-1516

Certainly, compounders had no choice as to whether they compounded or not. The Small Tenants Act was a permissive measure which allowed local authorities to enforce compounding. He argued that it was ‘preposterous to attempt to use that condition [compounding] as a criterion of character, and as an occasion for creating a distinction between men of the same class.’¹⁸⁰⁸ After all, both the compounder and the personal ratepayer paid their rates to the local parish. One paid directly to the parish and the other paid via his landlord. As Saunders has recognised, ‘the difference was one of mechanism, not principle’.¹⁸⁰⁹ As Gladstone saw it, compounding was not a test of character but rather a happenchance of local government. The Bill would see men living in identical houses, with identical professions and incomes, but one getting the vote and the other not because one house lay in a different parish to the other. As he told the House on the Second Reading: ‘It is a distribution divided by one side of the street from the other.’¹⁸¹⁰

Moreover, compounding, intended by its authors as a convenient instrument of local taxation, would take on inimical political importance. First, the Reform Bill would place great power in the hands of parish officials who could exclude or include great numbers of electors simply by enacting or revoking the operation of the Small Tenants Act.¹⁸¹¹ Secondly, places such as Brighton where compounding was nearly universal, would only see fourteen voters added to the register.¹⁸¹² By contrast, for places where the Small Tenants Act had not been enforced, and compounding was absent, the new Reform Bill would be almost totally indiscriminate, and thus threatened to ‘proceed so fast as to outrun the competence and to disregard the condition of the people’.¹⁸¹³ In rural districts it would let in ‘unskilled labourers’ and the ‘mere peasantry of the country’.¹⁸¹⁴ Interestingly, this was a prospect which, while it horrified Gladstone and many Liberals, did not concern overly Disraeli the majority Conservatives, who believed that deference to property would override any radicalising effects. In the urban seats where compounding was not prevalent, and in which Conservatives had no foothold, the scale of enfranchisement would give the working class an undeniable predominance. Places such as Sheffield would see 28,000 voters added to an existing 10,000, while Stoke-on-Trent would see its electorate jump from 3,500 to nearly 19,000.¹⁸¹⁵ Thus he criticised Disraeli’s proposals as a ‘Bill which utterly excludes all principle of selection, which excludes a vast number of the most skilled and most instructed of our working men, and which, where it admits any of them, admits along with them the poorest, the least instructed, and the most dependent members of the community’.¹⁸¹⁶

Gladstone disliked the framework of the Bill. In this way, he had not come to the conclusion that many in parliament now shared. This was that a ‘fixed line’ franchise could offer no permanent settlement of the Reform question. There had long been a criticism of dealing in Reform in that way. Henley typified the arguments against a ‘fixed line’, when he addressed his constituents in 1865: ‘there is no use in Reform unless it goes downhill and take in a much larger number than at present’, but, I cannot see why a man who rents an £8, a £6, or a £5 house should have the vote’ as those who had been excluded by a ‘fixed line’, ‘will be discontented and consider themselves badly treated’. If there was any Reform, he believed they should revert to ‘our old system of household franchise’.¹⁸¹⁷ Gladstone did not agree. He argued that a ‘fixed line’ set clear criteria by which the vote could be conferred in a way which differentiated between respectable and dependant social positions. The

¹⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid*, c.1516

¹⁸⁰⁹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.244

¹⁸¹⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 25th of March 1867, v.186, c.497

¹⁸¹¹ *Ibid*, c.499

¹⁸¹² *Ibid*, c.498

¹⁸¹³ *Ibid*, 12th of April, v.186, c.1694

¹⁸¹⁴ *Ibid*, 18th of March 1867, v.186, c.39

¹⁸¹⁵ *Ibid*, 25th of March 1867, v.186, c.498-499

¹⁸¹⁶ *Ibid*, 18th of March 1867, v.186, c.45

¹⁸¹⁷ *The Times*, 18th of July 1865, p.7

‘fixed line’ allowed the vote to only those who were in a ‘class and condition of life fit to be invested with a title to the franchise’.¹⁸¹⁸ It came down to a simple matter of investing those who were independent and deserving with the civic responsibility of the vote. For ‘if the condition of the people were such in point of education and independence as would lead of their free and intelligent exercise of the suffrage with a full independence of character’, he would not wish to ‘draw any line at all’.¹⁸¹⁹ However, because that was not the case it seemed logical that they ‘may attain a settlement...by drawing a line between’ the two.¹⁸²⁰ This was in stark contrast to the Conservative proposals which aimed to settle the question, ‘by drawing the line among persons of the same class... the only difference between them...that one lives at the side of a street in which the Small Tenants Act is in operation, and the other on a side where it is not.’¹⁸²¹

Gladstone had wanted to voice these criticisms in opposition to the Second Reading of the Reform Bill. However, he had been unable to carry his party with him. It seems likely that many, as Stanley suggested, were haunted by ‘the policy of 1859, and what it led to’.¹⁸²² If the opposition had been successful in defeating the government on the Second Reading, it would have certainly led to a dissolution of parliament and a general election. This would have been an election in which the Liberals would have had to explain their actions to their electors against a backdrop of high public feeling in favour of Reform. With Gladstone’s support disappearing, Disraeli launched into a brilliant oration, defending the Bill and drove the wedge further between Gladstone and the waverers in his party. His speech reiterated the aims of the Conservative Bill, as one that ‘never considered the numbers’ but instead, ‘looked to the principle’ so that they, ‘might unite competency and fitness with variety of character’.¹⁸²³ This move away from numbers challenged the ‘monopoly of principle to which Gladstone’s and Bright’s mode of utterance lent itself’.¹⁸²⁴ Moreover, in abandoning the numbers of enfranchised voters, and presenting the Bill as chance for any man to attain the vote so long as he fulfilled the criteria, he was able to avoid tedious, detailed, and inevitably inconclusive debates over how many new voters should be enfranchised and where they should come from. Cleverly Disraeli once again invited the House’s cordial cooperation while making clear that they would not be dictated to by Gladstone, who had attacked the Bill with a ‘tone and with the air of a familiar of the Inquisition’. Throughout the speech Disraeli highlighted Gladstone’s own inconsistencies by proving that many provisions that Gladstone was most vociferous in condemning, he had at one point or another supported in earlier Reform Bills.¹⁸²⁵

When Disraeli finished, the Bill passed the Second Reading without division. His speech was widely praised by his allies. Derby was delighted, writing to Disraeli to offer his ‘cordial congratulations on your splendid achievement last night. I hear from all quarters that it was the finest speech you ever made; and you seem to have carried the House bodily with you; in fact, you have won our game for us’.¹⁸²⁶ Hardy thought it ‘a brilliant speech’.¹⁸²⁷ Many observers considered it ‘the speech of the session’.¹⁸²⁸ Perhaps Stanley was the most perceptive when he wrote that Disraeli’s speech has affected ‘a complete change in the position of the Reform question and the ministry’.¹⁸²⁹ The speech had shone a light on the divided nature of the Liberal party which had shown very few

¹⁸¹⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 12th of April 1867, v.186, c.1694

¹⁸¹⁹ *Ibid*, c.1693

¹⁸²⁰ *Ibid*, c.490

¹⁸²¹ *Ibid*, 12th of April 1867, v.186, cc.1694-1695

¹⁸²² 3rd of March 1867, *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.292

¹⁸²³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 26th of March 1867, v.186, c.661

¹⁸²⁴ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.172

¹⁸²⁵ *Ibid*, cc.646-664

¹⁸²⁶ Derby to Disraeli, 27th of March 1867, Bodl. Dep Hughenden, 110/3 f.?

¹⁸²⁷ *Diaries of Gathorne Hardy*, p.35

¹⁸²⁸ Quoted in Blake, *Disraeli*, p.466

¹⁸²⁹ Stanley Diary, 27th of March, *Derby Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.296

signs of healing after the defeat of the 1866 measure. Rightly or wrongly, Disraeli showed Gladstone to be opposing whatever measures the government put forward. Disraeli had succeeded in winning the initial skirmishes and had shaken the foundations of Gladstone's authority. Therefore, with rifts in the party already emerging, Gladstone lost the battle over the Second Reading. However, he was far from giving up on his plans to 'save' the Reform Bill. He was now forced to attack the Bill in committee. The criticisms which he had previously voiced now manifested themselves in his attempt to hijack the Conservative Reform Bill with a new scheme. He proposed an Instruction that removed existing safeguards of personal payment and dual-voting, and replaced them with a £5 rated threshold. This would remove what he thought was an iniquitous distinction between compounders and personal ratepayers and would ensure that the unqualified lower orders of society would not be extended the franchise. He believed this to be a set of proposals that would appeal to every group. It was thought that Conservatives and the Cave would welcome the exclusion of the most dependent and unqualified in society, while the radicals would embrace the enfranchisement of compounders on equal terms with ratepayers. However, he did not receive much support from his own party who expressed considerable opposition when he unveiled the Instruction at a party meeting on the 5th of April. Indeed, three days later a diverse group of around fifty Liberal MPs met in the House of Commons tea room to discuss their combined approach to Gladstone's plans.¹⁸³⁰ This meeting of those fifty members, collectively known to history as the 'Tea Room Revolt', covered a diverse section of the Liberal party from radicals to Adullamites to old Whigs. It is quite possible that Disraeli played some part in orchestrating this revolt through his old friend James Clay, the radical MP for Hull, with whom he had been in increasing correspondence throughout the 1867 session.¹⁸³¹ For various, disparate, reasons the group agreed that they would not be willing to support Gladstone's Instruction.¹⁸³²

With his hands tied by the opposition of his own supporters, Gladstone attempted to oppose the Bill by breaking the Instruction into a series of individual amendments, in order to achieve his goal by more indirect means. Instead of reshaping the Bill in one complete measure, MPs would be asked to vote on the individual clauses: from voting to do away with the requirement of personal payments of rates, to abolish dual voting, to establish a £5 fixed line, and to reduce the residency requirement from two years to just one. Splitting the Instruction into a series of amendments had tactical advantages and as well as drawbacks. In its favour, it allowed MPs to decide on the individual issues without needing to agree on the package as a whole. However, it required members to vote on individual amendments without knowing if others would pass. This meant it would take a leap of faith for members to do away with important restrictions without knowing if new ones would be erected. As Saunders has recognised, this approach required one group to take a risk: 'either Tory dissidents must vote against personal rating or radicals must vote for the £5 fixed line'.¹⁸³³ Gladstone had misjudged his own position. Cranbourne and the Tory dissidents, while in favour of Gladstone's proposal, would only follow him over personal payment if he could guarantee the success of the £5 fixed line. When prominent radicals publicly announced they would not support the measure and, given the revolt he had already suffered at the hands of the Tea Room rebels, Gladstone's command over his party seemed increasingly unsure.¹⁸³⁴ Moreover, because Gladstone could not see past his own perceived

¹⁸³⁰ F.B.Smith, *Making of the Second Reform Bill*, pp.271-272

¹⁸³¹ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, pp.196-197

¹⁸³² Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, pp.247-248

¹⁸³³ *Ibid*, p.248

¹⁸³⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 12th of April 1867, v.186, c.1615: (W.E.Forster) 'There had been much talk about a £5 rating, but a £5 rating was not the question this evening at all. He believed the majority of the House were in favour of a £5 rating. But he thought the time had gone by when a £5 rating would be accepted as a good settlement of the question. That which would have been welcomed as a boon last year, and which would have been admitted, though reluctantly, at the beginning of this, would not be received with much favour now.'; *Ibid*, c.1629: (Locke) 'Members, especially from the North of England, who had spent their lives in advocating household suffrage, he might say to the right hon. Gentlemen on the Treasury Bench that if they would only be firm, staunch, and true to their colours, they might have

illogicalities of personal rating, he underestimated the strength of support for the principle and level of hostility towards compounders on both sides of the House. It seemed to constitute a solid and understandable principle and it allowed the Conservatives to rest their Bill on principle rather than numbers: ‘constitutional principle of the old borough franchise in use for centuries extending back to the Normans and even to the Saxons’,¹⁸³⁵ while championing the ‘popular and rational principle’ of personal payment.¹⁸³⁶

In contrast, Gladstone, who understood the details of rating and compounding far better than his adversary could not hold the attention of the House. When he had tried to make these arguments against personal payment during the first reading, the speech had been so convoluted, that instead of crushing the bill as expected, Horsman described it as ‘a deplorable failure’.¹⁸³⁷ Indeed the general feeling amongst many sections of the House was exhibited by the radical Roebuck, who like many others, underestimated the complicated nature of the Small Tenant Act and accused Gladstone of raising ‘all sorts of little petty objections’ which could be solved, ‘by a few words’ in Committee.¹⁸³⁸ This was of course a dangerous oversimplification of the issues personal rating presented. But it represented a broad section of opinion in the House. Gladstone had to convince the Bill’s supporters that personal payment was not only an imperfect principle, but unsustainable because of the complexities of the compounding legislation. This proved a difficult task, with the Government reassuring any doubters that personal payment was both the central principle and principal safeguard of the new franchise.¹⁸³⁹ Indeed, as Saunders has observed, given that ‘the only visible threat to the rating principle came from Gladstone himself’, it seemed nonsensical to do away with the Bill’s central safeguard only to replace it with a less popular, and increasingly discredited, fixed line restriction.¹⁸⁴⁰ Further difficulties were stirred up by reverting to that strategy. Gladstone failed to comprehend the real force of feeling in Parliament against a fixed line proposal. This feeling which had intensified since 1866. For all his arguments in favour of the ‘fixed line’, he could not claim it offered the permanence of household suffrage, however imperfect. He had argued that the principles of his proposals were permanent but that the ‘fixed line’ between classes only ‘stands in the circumstances of time’.¹⁸⁴¹ This explicitly conceded future concessions, and left the door open for further agitation.

In winding up the debate on the amendment, Disraeli launched another salvo of well-aimed invectives against Gladstone. It was an archetypal Disraelian speech, which displayed his talents in full: simultaneously witty, amusing, sarcastic, scathing and mockingly conciliatory. He claimed the amendment amounted to a ‘declaration of war’ upon the Government’s Bill. He reminded the House that Gladstone ‘seems to forget, what he ought to remember’, that he, ‘has had his innings.’ He attempted to deal the subject of Parliamentary Reform the previous year, and ‘he introduced a measure with the advantage which we have never had, of being supported by a large majority.’ Now, after he had failed, this ‘candidate for power’ insisted on resorting to ‘party attacks’ so that ‘he may

household suffrage yet.’; *Ibid.*, c.1633: (Gilpin) ‘they were not then upon the £5 rental, nor on the question of two years’ residence, but upon the question whether personal rating should be a necessity for a man having a vote. On that ground, and that ground only, the division would be taken, and in joining his friends around him in going into the lobby with the right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Gladstone) he pledged himself to that, and to nothing more.’

¹⁸³⁵ *The Times*, 8th of April 1867, p.9

¹⁸³⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 26th of March 1867, v.186, c.644

¹⁸³⁷ Horsman to Ramsden, 20th of March 1867, cited in Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.246

¹⁸³⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 16th of March 1867, v.186, cc.65-66

¹⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12th of April 1867, v.186, c.1685

¹⁸⁴⁰ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.249

¹⁸⁴¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 12th of April 1867, v.186, c.1694

make to change his position and to cross from one side of the House to the other'.¹⁸⁴² The speech enraged Gladstone and succeeded in further isolating him from his party. When the vote was taken Gladstone was defeated by 310 votes to 289. No fewer than forty-five Liberals voted with the Government or paired off. Liberal unity was totally shattered. Many Liberals were unwilling to turf out a cautiously reforming Tory government, to replace it with a hopelessly divided administration under Whig leadership. Indeed, for the many members of the House who earnestly wanted to see the question of Reform settled for good, the Tories now seemed the safer bet. As Cowling recognised, it 'represented a deliberate rejection of Gladstone's leadership on grounds more general and fundamental than were involved in the question at hand'.¹⁸⁴³

Upon hearing the result, Gladstone withdrew his remaining amendments and admitted that the vote was a 'smash perhaps without example'.¹⁸⁴⁴ Parliament immediately quit for Easter recess after the debate. Disraeli could feel satisfied with the session. As he wrote to Beauchamp, 'there are no doubt breakers ahead, but I feel great hope of overcoming them...and re-establishing Toryism on a national foundation'.¹⁸⁴⁵ The division was an important turning point in passage of the Reform Bill. It established Disraeli's now uncontested command of his party. Moreover, the result had for the time being effectively side-lined Gladstone. Disraeli had so disorganised the opposition and vilified their leader that Gladstone complained that 'I can hardly speak a word in the Commons especially if it any manner oppose or reflect on Disraeli, with any confidence that some man will not rise on the Liberal side and protest against it. It is an almost unparalleled position – a party of great strength is completely paralysed by internal dissension'.¹⁸⁴⁶

After the Easter recess the committee resumed and the radicals snatched the initiative that Gladstone had relinquished. When Parliament came back in May, the Conservatives were hemmed in with flurry of radical amendments which removed many of the Bill's restrictive safeguards. The Conservatives accepted many of these amendments, some of which ostensibly altered drastically the effects of the Bill. Cranbourne, writing shortly after the Bill's passage called this series of events, in an article of the same name in the Quarterly Review, 'The Conservative Surrender'.¹⁸⁴⁷ It was a bitter attack, though hardly surprising given his high-minded and pessimistic views of Reform, and his opposition to his governments Reform plans. However, despite Cranbourne's personal reasons for attacking Disraeli and the government, it is an interpretation that has stuck. It has generally been argued that because the Conservatives were 'lacking a majority that the bill was radically amended under pressure' and through a series of concessions 'was wrought the most unintentional revolution in the history of British politics'.¹⁸⁴⁸ Moreover, it has been widely held that after the recess Disraeli abandoned any clear plan or coherent principles, moving from 'one contingency to the next, without any firm scheme.' It has been further suggested that Disraeli 'was himself forced' into concession, and that it was 'his indifference to detail [and] his detachment from hide-bound principle of Tory honour, which made the bill possible'.¹⁸⁴⁹ As Hawkins has observed, Disraeli 'pressed onwards, compliantly accepting successive amendments that stripped the household borough suffrage of its restrictions. Success had now become an end in itself, any settlement of Reform having become desirable, as long as it was delivered by a Conservative ministry'.¹⁸⁵⁰ Indeed, Briggs long ago suggested that following Gladstone's defeat, Disraeli 'did not very much care what particular Radical

¹⁸⁴² *Ibid*, cc.1683-1684

¹⁸⁴³ *Ibid*, p.201

¹⁸⁴⁴ Cited in Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.294

¹⁸⁴⁵ *Disraeli's Letters*, Disraeli to Beauchamp, 18th of April 1867, vol.9 pp.302-303

¹⁸⁴⁶ Cited in Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.293

¹⁸⁴⁷ Robert Cecil, 'The Conservative Surrender', *The Quarterly Review* (1867)

¹⁸⁴⁸ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp.215-216

¹⁸⁴⁹ Tucker, 'Disraeli and the Natural Aristocracy', p.12

¹⁸⁵⁰ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.347

clauses were passed: what was important was that a Conservative Bill should go through.¹⁸⁵¹ This is not to say that these interpretations are entirely wrong. Their position as a minority administration necessarily ensured that for this government political expediency was valued as highly political principle. Now the Conservative confidence was running high, for the first time in over twenty years, they could not afford to let their momentum falter. Without a willingness to be flexible, the Bill stood no chance of success. That said, there was certainly no ‘surrender’ to the radicals. Moreover, as this work will attempt to show, Disraeli was far more in control than has been generally acknowledged.

First, it needs to be understood that the Conservatives were under no illusions that the Bill would not be significantly altered in committee. From the start Disraeli had couched the Conservative Bill in a willingness to defer, where possible, to the opinion of the House of Commons. During the debate on the Second Reading Disraeli had ridiculed Gladstone’s suggestion the Bill should be opposed, as in its current shape it would not pass a third reading. Disraeli replied that it was unthinkable to ‘the second reading of any Bill...as though it then stood for a third reading’ particularly a Reform Bill¹⁸⁵² Secondly, the amendments that the Conservatives accepted actually strengthened the Bill. They may have taken away many of the safeguards that restricted the borough suffrage, but they also removed many of the increasingly indefensible anomalies present in the Bill. Lastly, and a point which is often overlooked, all of these radical amendments exclusively concerned the borough suffrage. The matter of the county suffrage, the boundary commission and the redistribution of seats had not been discussed until after the ‘Conservative surrender’. This is vital. For while they would eventually concede more than many imagined with regard to the borough electorate, the completed Bill—the Act-- still achieved many of the Conservative’s larger aims.

As soon as Parliament reconvened after the Easter the radicals began moving amendments. The first of these was put forward by Ayrton the radical MP for populous London constituency of Tower Hamlets. He proposed to cut the residential qualification from two years to just one.¹⁸⁵³ The residential qualification had been considered a strong defence against migratory voters, ensuring the relative permanence and representativeness of an electorate. The Conservatives opposed the amendment.¹⁸⁵⁴ However, the two years that had been suggested for the new voters was at odds with the one year qualification demanded of the £10 householder in the 1832 settlement. It therefore seemed anomalous that different residency requirements would now be required, dependant on the manner in which a man was franchised. The government seemed to be expecting defeat over residency. Stanley admitted as much to his diary: suggesting that asking for a longer residential requirement under the £10 franchise would have remained as an obvious point for opposition agitation.¹⁸⁵⁵ Disraeli accepted the amendment which removed an anomalous differential that could have caused future problems.

The next amendment the government accepted came from another Torrens, a Member for Finsbury, who proposed a new lodger franchise for anyone who had occupied rooms for the preceding twelve-months at a fixed rental value. Disraeli accepted this amendment without a vote. A lodger franchise was hardly controversial in itself. As Torrens pointed out, both Disraeli and Gladstone had proposed such a franchise in their 1859 and 1866 Bills respectively. Torrens proposed a rental figure of £10 for an unfurnished portion of a house. He roughly equated this to Disraeli’s own £20 furnished figure.¹⁸⁵⁶ One of the chief charges made against Disraeli’s political integrity has been made in regard to the lodger franchise. The letter Disraeli wrote to Stanley asking him ‘to get up an anti-lodger

¹⁸⁵¹ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.295

¹⁸⁵² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 26th of March 1867, v.186, c.645

¹⁸⁵³ *Ibid*, 2nd of May 1867, v.186, cc.1882-1888

¹⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 2nd of May 1867, c.1889

¹⁸⁵⁵ Stanley Diary, 2nd of May 1867, *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.306

¹⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 6th of May, v.187, c.29

speech or a speech on the subject either way; I think our debates want a little variety'.¹⁸⁵⁷ Briggs took this to mean that Disraeli 'did not very much care what radical amendments passed'.¹⁸⁵⁸ For Harrison this typified Disraeli's lack of control over events, particularly as he requested Stanley, 'to come and speak on the lodger clause, explaining that it made no difference if he spoke for it or against it, so long as he spoke'.¹⁸⁵⁹ If, as both of these interpretations present the matter, this letter had been written during the debate, that might have been significant. However, the letter was sent to Stanley during the Easter recess, weeks before Torrens had moved his amendment. The fact was that Disraeli had agreed with the Cabinet to consider any lodger franchise on which the House of Commons could find general agreement. Therefore, as Cowling has shrewdly recognised, the letter, in these circumstances, was most likely an attempt to sound Stanley out, find out where he stood on the issue and which value he would find acceptable.¹⁸⁶⁰ There had always been considerable Conservative unease about a lodger franchise. This was always true though, as Blake has noted, 'it is hard to see why'.¹⁸⁶¹ The residency was the same as a normal householder and many of the lower professional classes, who were always thought to vote Conservative, lived in lodgings. Disraeli was later assured that when the residential qualification was stiffened from six-month residence to twelve-month occupation, the new franchise would have very little effect.¹⁸⁶² This proved to be the case. In practice, the lodger franchise proved effectively non-functional.¹⁸⁶³ By 1869, only 12,000 people had registered through the lodger franchise nationally, and over 8,000 of these were in Westminster and Marylebone alone.¹⁸⁶⁴

With the Conservatives conceding ground to the radicals over the lodger franchise and the residency qualification, even while both instances were long foreseen by Cabinet, the backbenchers were beginning to grumble at the direction the Bill was taking. Confidence in the government necessitated that the Conservatives take a stand against the amendment from Hibbert, the radical MP for Oldham, which sought to allow compounders to pay the reduced rate, after the landlord had applied any discount, to the local authority in the same way that £10 compounders had been allowed to under the Small Tenants Act. Ironically, this was an amendment that Disraeli had initially been eager to accept. Fearing defeat over Gladstone's proposals, he had tried to force approval of Hibbert's amendment through cabinet in order to get the radicals onside and pull the rug from under Gladstone. However, he had been resisted by Hardy, Walpole and Stanley who threatened to resign over the matter.¹⁸⁶⁵ However, fact remained that Disraeli had been willing to concede over Hibbert's amendment only before the Conservatives successfully defeated Gladstone's proposals. What he had been willing to concede before Easter was not the same as after. This was particularly so, as the debates over Gladstone's amendments had enshrined the principle of personal payment. Of all the amendments that the Government faced, Hibbert's did most to threaten the sanctity of that principle, by allowing compounders to pay a reduced rate. As Cowling noted, before Easter, 'Disraeli would have preferred to accept Hibbert's amendment in the form in which Hibbert proposed it'. The failure of Walpole to control the demonstration in the Park only ensured that Tory backbenchers were 'so hostile to the government's failure to resist the League...that he [Disraeli] could not concede as much as he wanted to'.¹⁸⁶⁶ Indeed, far from being cornered into a 'surrender', as Dr. Harrison has

¹⁸⁵⁷ *Disraeli's Letters* Disraeli to Stanley, 21th of April, , vol.9, p.308

¹⁸⁵⁸ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.295

¹⁸⁵⁹ Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, p.115

¹⁸⁶⁰ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.41

¹⁸⁶¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.470

¹⁸⁶² Lambert to Disraeli, 19th of July 1867, Bodl. Dep. Hughenden, 48/2, f.23

¹⁸⁶³ Seymour, *Electoral Reform in England and Wales*, pp.284-285

¹⁸⁶⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.471

¹⁸⁶⁵ Johnson (ed.), *Diary of Gathorne Hardy*, p.36; *Ibid*, p.36; Vincent (ed.), *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.301

¹⁸⁶⁶ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, pp.42-43

suggested,¹⁸⁶⁷ Disraeli was forced to take a more conservative and reactionary position. This was because ‘Conservative unwillingness to concede’ to the radicals in parliament had been ‘strengthened by a feeling that Walpole had conceded too much in the Park’.¹⁸⁶⁸ The Conservatives therefore made resistance of Hibbert’s amendment a vital point for the progress of the Bill. Had the amendment passed, Derby would have either resigned or, more likely, resolved to quit. So Disraeli once again restated the principles on which the Bill was founded: that the vote ‘should be conferred on those who fulfil public duties. It is not merely contributing to the public funds, but bearing public burdens which cannot be borne without the fulfilment of a public duty, and being placed in a position of life which admits of the performance of the duties of citizenship, which qualify for the exercise of this function.’¹⁸⁶⁹ This stance, and the restatement of the Bill’s founding principles, proved decisive. When the House divided the amendment was smashed by sixty-six votes. The Conservatives’ largest majority yet on a major issue.

The defeat of Hibbert’s amendment marked a vital point for confidence in the government and for solidarity of the Conservative party. However, it did not make the criticism over the treatment of compounders go away. As Saunders has observed, the Bill was founded on the distinction between compounders and personal ratepayers. Yet it there was still no legal definition between the two and the government had no coherent answers to get round the problems posed by Small Tenants Act and create a fair mechanism to allow compounders to get the vote by taking the personal responsibility for the payment of their rates.¹⁸⁷⁰ The fact was that the Conservatives, and the House in general, had little interest in the technicalities of the rating system. Moreover, any attempt to deal with these practical difficulties was fraught with tactical dangers. If Conservatives failed to deal with the issues surrounding compounding, the Bill would likely not pass. However, if they embarked on a radical strategy to clear up these problems, there was every possibility they could concede the centre-ground to Gladstone who could then rally the Whigs, moderate Liberals and Adullamites and attack the move as a final ‘dishonest abandonment of the policy of avoiding household suffrage pure and simple... which the government from the start and by repeated declarations, had pledged itself to pursue’.¹⁸⁷¹ In this difficult situation, Disraeli was now helped by Gladstone. Two days after the defeat of Hibbert’s amendment Gladstone, sharing a stage with Bright for the first time, addressed a deputation of the Reform Union. There he made a speech attacking the actions of the Adullamites and Whigs, praised the Tory dissidents who followed Cranbourne, and hit out at his own party for being ‘inveigled’ into a measure that none really wanted. He also announced that, far from treating the current Bill as a settlement of the question, if returned to office he would continue the fight against the principle of personal payment, ‘by every constitutional means at our disposal’. Moreover, he declared that henceforth he would only be guided by his own principles regardless of whether his followers were ‘of few or of many’.¹⁸⁷²

This speech had important implications for both Liberals and Conservatives. Moreover, it transformed the situation in Parliament. It was dangerous in that it threatened further agitation. This was agitation that Gladstone was apparently now willing to lead. That suggested the possibility that the debate on Reform would rumble on after the Conservative Bill had passed, and therefore that the Reform Bill would not fulfil its central aim: to settle the question indefinitely. But this was not something that Gladstone could guarantee if the country and parliament were not willing to support him. It also created new, and potentially wondrous opportunities for the Conservatives. As Cowling

¹⁸⁶⁷ Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, p.106

¹⁸⁶⁸ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, pp.269-270

¹⁸⁶⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 9th of May 1867, v.187, cc.347-355

¹⁸⁷⁰ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.252

¹⁸⁷¹ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.273

¹⁸⁷² *The Times*, 13th of May 1867, p.6

adroitly observed, ‘as Derby and Disraeli saw it...Gladstone had finally, publicly and unmistakably kicked dissident Whigs and Adullamite’s in the teeth. He had demonstrated beyond possibility of misunderstanding that he proposed to run the Liberal party, and they had very little to hope from him in the future.’¹⁸⁷³ This meant that any notion of Gladstone rallying the more conservative elements in a reactionary attack was now impossible. By making such an oration, in which he publicly appeared alongside Bright, Gladstone sent out the clear signal that he was abandoning the centre-ground, along with any hope of establishing a fixed line. This now opened up the very real possibility that, so long as the Conservatives could carry the Adullamites and other moderate Liberals with them, the Bill could be passed by the end of the session and a more Conservative settlement could be secured. It simultaneously widened Disraeli’s room for manoeuvre with regard to a more radical settlement of the compounding issue, while allowing him to set the Conservatives up as the anti-revolutionary party of stability. Following Gladstone’s speech they could say they now strived for Reform in contrast to those ‘obsolete incendiaries’ and ‘spouters of stale sedition’¹⁸⁷⁴ and stood against ‘the unmitigated democracy advocated by Mr. Bright and...Mr. Gladstone’.¹⁸⁷⁵ This moment, as Saunders has observed, was ‘Disraeli’s apotheosis’.¹⁸⁷⁶ He had isolated Gladstone so successfully that the Liberal leader had lashed out at his own supporters, and given in to the radical instincts that so many had so long suspected him of secretly harbouring.

Whatever Disraeli might have said with regard to excluding the compound householder, it was undeniably a restriction. It was safeguard against total household suffrage that denied many borough occupiers the vote. Disraeli and the Conservatives had consistently, repeatedly and at great length extolled the virtue of the principle of personal payment. With many other safeguards either watered down or entirely done away with, the exclusion of the compounder was the one restriction on the borough electorate which had survived from the original bill in unaltered form. Moreover, it was a proposal, though problematic and riddled with anomalies, on which parliament was well disposed as a method of discrimination between the responsible working class and the ‘residuum’. Therefore, when Grosvenor Hodgkinson, brought forward an amendment which effectively repealed the Small Tenants Act and solved the problem of compounders by ‘annihilating them altogether as compound-householders, and reviving them on their original character of ordinary ratepayers’,¹⁸⁷⁷ it was not expected to receive much support. Gladstone spoke in its favour, conjuring up the horrors of prolonged mass agitation, arguing that the exclusion of compounders amounted to ‘restrictions of a nature most unjust, most vexatious, and most certain to lead to that which we all desire to avoid—prolonged agitation till they are swept away.’ He continued that the amendment was ‘a last hope of peace’ and that its success would ensure ‘the removal of those popular proceedings which I anticipate out of doors’.¹⁸⁷⁸ It was therefore to the universal disbelief of all members sitting in a House that was not even half-full, when Disraeli accepted Hodgkinson’s motion without any debate. At a pinch, and without any apparent assent from the Cabinet, Disraeli agreed to drop the Bill’s strongest safeguard and add a potential half-million new voters to the borough electorate.

It was after this moment, when the borough electorate was trebled and the vote extended to every man who paid rates that ‘Britain had, it appeared, become a democracy’.¹⁸⁷⁹ However, the question still remains: why? In fact, there were clear tactical advantages in accepting the amendment when and in the manner that Disraeli did. The first of which was to remove any resistance from his own

¹⁸⁷³ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, pp.273-274

¹⁸⁷⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 13th of May 1867, v.187, c.403

¹⁸⁷⁵ Derby to Grosvenor, 13th of May 1867, cited in Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.274

¹⁸⁷⁶ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.253

¹⁸⁷⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 17th of May 1867, v.187, c.708

¹⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid*, cc.712-719

¹⁸⁷⁹ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.217

party. By accepting it before many MPs came back from dinner and in an almost empty House, Disraeli pre-empted any major debate on the issue. If the principle had been dragged out into a long and hotly contested debate between his own backbenchers and the opposition, there would have been no chance of Disraeli accepting it, or the amendment passing a division. It also seems likely that Disraeli accepted Hodgkinson's amendment because Cabinet had not got round to discussing it. The whips had been told to whip against it, and if there had been any possibility that the government might suffer defeat then the House and the front bench would have been full. The fact was that back in April he had tried to convince the cabinet to accept Hibbert's amendment and he had been denied. Therefore in the case of Hodgkinson's he did not take that risk, but instead took unilateral action. As Cowling put it, he accepted the amendment; 'the Cabinet had discussed and rejected Hibbert's, and had not discussed Hodgkinson's at all.'¹⁸⁸⁰

Secondly, Disraeli had thus far pursued a successful policy of keeping Gladstone as far away from the legislative process and from taking leadership of his party as possible. While by May it seemed that this policy had served its purpose, Disraeli was not willing to take any chances. Gladstone's speech to the Reform Union and to the House, in favour of Hodgkinson's proposal, allowed Disraeli completely to outmanoeuvre him. His speech on the 11th of May had ensured he would no longer pursue his own restrictions in the place of personal payment, and his speech on the 17th effectively promised the end of agitation both by him in the House and by others out of doors if the amendment was accepted. As Saunders has recognised, with compounding removed there would be nothing to agitate against and not 'even Gladstone could set the country ablaze in support of the Small Tenants Act'.¹⁸⁸¹ Thus by accepting Hodgkinson's rather than debating Hibbert's, Disraeli could scupper the last chance that Gladstone had to rally the party and play a major part in the debates.

All of these reasons undoubtedly constituted part of the calculation that convinced Disraeli of the advantages of accepting Hodgkinson's proposal. We should reject any suggestion that he was unaware of its consequences. He understood how far he had gone with regard to the borough suffrage. His letter to Hardy explaining his actions, and tells us something of this state of mind. He falsely told him, with the government outnumbered by the opposition, Gladstone 'made his meditated coup', and that despite trying 'to get up some debate...it was impossible'. Instead, he chose to accept the amendment as a 'step which would destroy the present agitation and extinguish Gladstone & co.'¹⁸⁸² Much of this was clearly untrue. Gladstone had not meditated a coup: in fact, he claimed he had never 'gone under a stronger emotion of surprise' at hearing the result.¹⁸⁸³ Disraeli did not try to get up a debate, as he accepted the amendment after only three MPs had spoken. While the opposition might have outnumbered him, there was nothing to suggest that they would have been willing vote against the government on any issue that might risk a dissolution or delay the Bill beyond the end of the session.¹⁸⁸⁴

However Disraeli might have justified his actions to his colleagues and the House, the fact was that he needed some way to get around issues that compounding presented to the principle of personal payment. In this case, Hodgkinson's amendment presented an opportunity to enshrine the principles of the Bill and remove the only practical difficulties that still confronted the measure. For if the principle of personal payment really was the best foundation of the new franchise, as so many of its supporters had repeatedly insisted, then the abolition of compounding only served to strengthen that principle. As Disraeli had said when accepting Hodgkinson's proposal, he agreed that 'it would

¹⁸⁸⁰ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.42

¹⁸⁸¹ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.254

¹⁸⁸² Disraeli to Hardy, 17th of May 1867, cited in M&B, v.4, pp.540-541

¹⁸⁸³ Cited in Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p.273

¹⁸⁸⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.255

enforce the policy which we recommend, give strength to the principles which we have been impressing upon the House as those which are the best foundations for the franchise, and give completeness to the measure we have introduced.¹⁸⁸⁵ By removing compounding entirely, the measure gave every borough-dwelling citizen in occupation of a house the equal chance to take personal responsibility for the payment of their rates to their local parish. Because Conservatives had been careful not to portray compounding as a restriction, but rather as evidence that someone was not fit for public responsibility, very few could publicly argue that the repeal of the Small Tenants Act did anything to damage the new franchise. Those who paid their rates would get the vote; those who failed to save their money and pay in full and on time would not.

Only the most despairingly anti-democratic voices in parliament spoke out against it. For Cranbourne this put the preponderance of political power with ‘those who have no other property than the labour of their hands’, adding that, ‘the omnipotence of Parliament is theirs’¹⁸⁸⁶ Beresford-Hope dramatically bid ‘farewell to the old halls rising over the tall trees, and the spacious deer parks, for the peasantry in their ignorance and cupidity would soon be set fancying that these broad acres would best serve their purpose if cut up into freehold allotments.’¹⁸⁸⁷ However, they had both been against Disraeli and any serious measure of Reform from the outset. The majority, though they might not have liked it, thought it consistent with the principles of the Bill. Here Hardy was very much representative, reflecting that it was hard to see ‘how on principle’ anyone could object.¹⁸⁸⁸ Later he reflected that, ‘we had so far stepped in that we could not, on such a point, draw back’.¹⁸⁸⁹ Moreover, there was a steadily growing group of MPs, likely bored and confused by the tedious details of compounding debates, who thoroughly applauded the move. The stubborn old Tory Henley typified that school of thought amongst the conservative benches, when he observed that compounding was ‘a device of Old Nick to oppress the poor’ and expressed his, ‘wish the Act were swept away altogether’¹⁸⁹⁰ Upon the acceptance of Hodgkinson’s amendment he hailed the move as ‘the most Conservative that can be made’, asking the House, ‘is it a more Conservative policy to endeavour to settle the question, or, if I may use the expression, to let the pot go on boiling till it overflows and brings us to a much worse state of things?’¹⁸⁹¹

While it extended the franchise far beyond what many would have thought responsible at the introduction of the Bill, this concession did not constitute a ‘surrender’. In fact, it almost guaranteed a Conservative settlement. Accepting Hodgkinson’s amendment solved the Tories practical difficulties: it rested it on a solid foundation, removed grounds for further agitation, extinguished the fears of corruption that the Small Tenants Act posed to a Bill based on personal payment, and destroyed claims that the unequal distribution of compounding rendered the Bill iniquitous. From now on, all borough-dwelling men would have equal claim to the franchise if they could fulfil the prerequisite public duties. The acceptance of Hodgkinson’s amendment also marked a final tactical victory over Gladstone. Disraeli had outmanoeuvred him to the point that he had thrown his lot in with Bright and the radicals in order to agitate against the Bill. By agreeing to repeal the Small Tenants Act, Disraeli was able stamp out any pretext of agitation while consolidating his moderate majority. Gladstone’s attack on the Whigs and Adullamites, when coupled with Disraeli’s now unchallengeable command of the Conservatives, ensured that Disraeli could rely on a moderate majority for the remainder of the Bill’s passage. For so many historians, the acceptance of Hodgkinson’s amendment proved the

¹⁸⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 17th of May 1867, v.187, c.720

¹⁸⁸⁶ Cited in Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.296

¹⁸⁸⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 20th of May 1867, v.187, cc.812-813

¹⁸⁸⁸ Johnson (ed.), *The Diary of Gathorne Hardy*, p.40

¹⁸⁸⁹ M&B, v.4, p.541

¹⁸⁹⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of April, v.186, c.1565

¹⁸⁹¹ *Ibid*, 20th of May 1867, v.187, cc.800-802

highpoint of Conservative capitulation to events.¹⁸⁹² But that is to mistake the problem. All of Disraeli's concessions to the radicals related exclusively to the borough franchise. The important matters of the county franchise, a boundary commission, and the redistribution of seats, all of which were essential to a Conservative settlement and central to Tory perceptions of Reform, were yet to be discussed. Moreover, because Disraeli had conceded so much with regard to the borough franchise, he could be sure of support for a conservative arrangement for practically every other aspect of the Bill.

The discussion clause 4 of the Bill, which related to the county franchises, began on the 20th of May. The Conservatives were largely able to get things their own way. Admittedly they had been forced to concede over the £10 franchise for Copyholders which Disraeli opposed because he 'thought it unreasonable', but, 'because he wished to interfere as little as possible with the old franchises'¹⁸⁹³ When the government was defeated over the amendment, ten Tories voted in favour and many other abstained.¹⁸⁹⁴ Similarly Vivian Hussey's amendment to extend the same £5 franchise to Leaseholder was accepted. Disraeli accepted the suggestion without division, conceding that 'the decision with regard to copyholders to be conclusive as to [the Leaseholders]'.¹⁸⁹⁵ Following these small concessions, the Conservatives were able to stand firm against a more serious assault on the landed interest. The Conservatives were able to win this series of key divisions on the 23rd and 27th was important. First, it demonstrated that the government was not willing to roll over in order to pass the Bill. Secondly, it ensured the agrarian representation of the counties would be protected. Lastly, it displayed a growing belief that, given the great strides towards household democracy in the boroughs, the 'very large and liberal concession to numbers', no one could expect to 'ignore the claims of property having its fair share of representation'. In effect: to the extent of the borough enfranchisement, the counties must resume that 'old duty' to act as a 'drag-chain' to the constitution, with the ability 'to check anything like rash or hasty legislation'.¹⁸⁹⁶

With regard to the occupation franchise, the Bill had originally proposed a reduction to £15. However, when discussed in committee, Locke-King introduced an amendment to achieve his long held aim of a £10 county qualification. He argued that '£10 was a good, honest, and constitutional figure' and that it was now 'impossible, after having gone so far in the way of democracy in regard to boroughs, to hold back with respect to counties, and not give them the liberal measure which he [Disraeli] proposed in 1859'.¹⁸⁹⁷ Disraeli countered that 'If the hon. Gentleman would accept the conditions on which he proposed the £10 county franchise in 1859, he would agree to his suggestion'.¹⁸⁹⁸ This made explicit the implication that the concessions made in the boroughs now afforded the opportunity for a more restrictive county settlement. To be sure, the proposal was not popular with Conservatives like Newdgate who already thought the current county electorate badly underrepresented and who argued that Locke-Kings proposal aimed 'to give still greater influence to the town population', arguing that if the House 'was going so nearly to equalize the franchise, it ought to be prepared also to do something in the direction of equalizing the representation'.¹⁸⁹⁹ In order to avoid a division and to acknowledge the divided opinion of the House, Disraeli offered a compromise offer of £12.¹⁹⁰⁰ Locke-King readily accepted Disraeli's offer, conceding that he thought 'if he had not moved £10 they would not have been offered £12'.¹⁹⁰¹ While there had been some concession to the

¹⁸⁹² Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.287; Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.216; Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.209; Weintraub, *Disraeli*, p.450

¹⁸⁹³ *Ibid*, 23rd of May 1867, v.187, c.997

¹⁸⁹⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.259

¹⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid*, c.997

¹⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 27th of May 1867, v.187, c.1157

¹⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid*, c.1156

¹⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid*, c.1164

¹⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid*, c.1166

¹⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, c.1164

¹⁹⁰¹ *Ibid*, c.1166

Liberals, Conservatives could be happy with finalized county franchise. It was moderately restrictive, at least more restrictive settlement than they had proposed in 1859. It was undeniably ‘agricultural’ and was a clear attempt to defend the influence of the territorial aristocracy and small gentry.

This settlement was further bolstered by the conclusions of Disraeli’s boundary commission. The aim of the commission was to redraw the boundaries of existing constituencies so that the suburban overspill of great cities and town into the county electorate could be redressed. In principle, its aim was to help restore the distinct characters of borough and county constituencies. More simply put, this meant to remove urban voters from the county electorate and return them to the closest borough where they ‘belonged’. Disraeli was at pains to stress the impartiality of this commission, in order to avoid the result of 1832 which had left ‘a deep impression on the public mind that these boundaries had not been regulated with impartiality’.¹⁹⁰² Moreover, Disraeli made sure to point out that of the five commissioners there was ‘a majority of three Liberals to two Conservatives’ and that all the members were men, ‘whose careers show that they are men of moderate principles and temperate views’.¹⁹⁰³ While the commission was not quite ‘packed with Conservative country gentlemen’, as Blake has asserted,¹⁹⁰⁴ it cannot be contested that all five members, regardless of party affiliation, were either country gentlemen, MPs for counties, or fervent defenders of the territorial aristocracy.¹⁹⁰⁵ The result was predictably favourable to the landed interest. Even after an 1868 select committee had redressed some of the commission’s most egregious recommendations, some 700,000 voters had been transferred from the county electorate into the boroughs.

Owing to the dramatic effect household suffrage would have on smaller borough seats, Disraeli was forced to accept some major changes to the Bill’s proposals for the redistribution. But even then, the new settlement they reached was equally, if not more, favourable to the counties than the one originally proposed. In the past, the Conservatives had been hostile to any significant schemes of disenfranchisement or meaningful redistribution to recognise the claims of large industrial cities. However, as Cowling noted, ‘throughout the session of 1867, Conservatives had pressed, no less than Liberals, for a more extensive redistribution of seats.’¹⁹⁰⁶ Therefore, when Laing moved an amendment to revise the government’s whole scheme of redistribution, it was met with considerable support. The central principle of Laing’s amendment was that the Conservative proposals had not gone far enough and left the door open for more agitation. Therefore, they needed to redress redistribution in order to achieve ‘what they all desired—a solution of the question of Reform’ the scheme of redistribution ‘should be Conservative’ so that ‘it would be likely to be permanent’, but ‘large and liberal enough to satisfy the wants of the age.’¹⁹⁰⁷ The exact wording of the amendment was that: “no Borough which had a less population than ten thousand at the Census of one thousand eight hundred and sixty one shall return more than one Member to serve in Parliament.”¹⁹⁰⁸ This

¹⁹⁰² *Ibid.*, 24th of June 1867, v.188, c.431

¹⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*, cc.434-435

¹⁹⁰⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.473

¹⁹⁰⁵ Lord Eversley, Russell Gurney, Sir. John Duckworth, Sir. Francis Crossley and John Walter of the Times were selected as the commissioners. The chair of the commission, Lord Eversley had been a long-serving and well-respected speaker of the House, a former MP for Hampshire and had a strong background as an agriculturalist. Of the two MPs present on the commission, Russell Gurney, a Conservative who served as Recorder of London, was another well-respected name with strong loyalty to the party. While Sir. Francis Crossley was a Yorkshire industrialist who while he was a Member for the West Riding, was included to avoid claims the commission was obviously unbalanced. Meanwhile of the remaining members, Sir John Duckworth, though he had been a borough member when in parliament had a strong connection with agriculture and the counties. With regard to Walter, Bright said that he had never met a man ‘who has, as I should call it, a more fanatical admiration of what is termed the territorial interest of this country’: *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 21st of June 1867, v.188, cc.285-286

¹⁹⁰⁶ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.76

¹⁹⁰⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 31th of May 1867, v.187, c.1388

¹⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, c.1400

provided the government with a total of forty-five seats, available for redistribution.¹⁹⁰⁹ The new borough franchise meant that small boroughs could no longer be relied upon as a counter-weight to the radicalism of larger cities. The proposals were popular in most corners of the House. Lowe supported the move as he thought that under the new franchise small boroughs would be ‘indefensible and must become dens of corruption of the lowest order’.¹⁹¹⁰ An opinion echoed by extreme opinions such as Newdgate and Gladstone.¹⁹¹¹ This was a proposal that offered some advantages to the Conservatives. It was generally accepted that those boroughs with populations of 8,000-10,000 returned a Liberal majority.¹⁹¹² Therefore, a more extensive disenfranchisement, coupled with a redistribution favouring the historically underrepresented counties, could turn the situation to Tory advantage. Disraeli nominally opposed this amendment while simultaneously, and rather bizarrely, getting Markham Spofforth to whip in favour of the proposals.¹⁹¹³ The result was that amendment passed, 306 votes to 179 with seventy-two Conservatives voting for the amendment and against the government.¹⁹¹⁴ Stanley wrote that he believed the Commons were ‘quite right’ to accept the result, admitting that the government had only offered nominal opposition out of deference to their own members for small boroughs.¹⁹¹⁵ Disraeli accepted the result, one which he most likely supported all along, and presented his new redistribution arrangements to the House on the 13th of June. These ensured that the great cities received further representation at the expense of small boroughs, while of the 45 new seats the counties received the majority while newly recognised borough seats took burgeoning towns out of the county electorate. Despite some concession it certainly favoured the landed classes as far as was practically possible, ensured that the rural character of the counties was retained.¹⁹¹⁶

As the Reform Act of 1867 passed its third reading without division, politicians of all persuasions took this chance to pass their verdict on it. Those who had opposed the Bill took one last chance to note their scorn and mark their gloomy predictions of the future. Cranbourne commented on ‘how enormously the Bill has changed since it passed its second reading. In no sense is it the same Bill. When it passed its second reading it bristled with precautions and guarantees and securities. Now that we have got to the third reading all those precautions, guarantees, and securities have disappeared’. He expressed his ‘enormous astonishment’ that ‘the passing of this Bill is spoken of as a Conservative triumph’. He concluded that in 1852 ‘Lord Derby declared himself the bulwark against the advance of democracy’. Now, just fifteen years later this Reform Bill had been ‘purchased at the cost of a political betrayal which has no parallel in our Parliamentary annals’.¹⁹¹⁷ Beresford Hope echoed Cranbourne’s claims of betrayal. ‘I have reaped my reward’, he exclaimed, ‘I took suit and service under the Conservative Leader because I dreaded the onward march of democracy, and to-night I find myself assisting at the third reading, under Conservative patronage, of the most democratic Reform Bill ever brought in.’¹⁹¹⁸ Lowe painted a similarly pessimistic picture. He argued that the Bill would not settle the question of Reform; rather that they were ‘now closing an era of permanent stability and mutual confidence such as—although it has existed in this country for the last 200 years—has never existed in any country before, and that we are about, on this momentous occasion, to enter upon a new era, when the bag which holds the winds will be untied, and we shall be surrounded by a perpetual

¹⁹⁰⁹ Thirty-eight seats came from the partial disenfranchisement of small boroughs. Seven from the disenfranchisement of Totnes, Reigate, Great Yarmouth and Lancaster for corruption.

¹⁹¹⁰ Lowe to Lady Lady Sailsbury, 3rd of June 1867, cited in Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, p.77

¹⁹¹² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 31st of May 1867, v.187, c.1391; *Ibid*, 8th of April 1867, v.186, c.1279

¹⁹¹³ Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, pp.77-78; F.B.Smith, *Making of the Second Reform Bill*, pp.215-216

¹⁹¹⁴ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.260

¹⁹¹⁵ Vincent (ed.), *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.310

¹⁹¹⁶ *Ibid*, cc.1778-1779

¹⁹¹⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 17th of June 1867, v.188, cc.1527-1550

¹⁹¹⁸ *Ibid*, c.1561

whirl of change, alteration, innovation, and revolution.’ And concluded that in passing the Bill, ‘That England...has now gained a shameful victory over herself’.¹⁹¹⁹

Judgements such as these came as a surprise to few. More generally, the Bill was well received and the governments courage in bringing it forward and conducting its passage was applauded from all corners of the House. The old Liberal member for Newcastle, Joseph Cowen admitted he could not help but ‘rejoice in the passage of a measure conferring household suffrage.’ He praised Disraeli for having the courage ‘to support a measure founded on so sound and just a basis’. He reiterated a widely held view that that ‘fixing the suffrage on a figure—either of rating or rental—or on any hard and fast line, would have only been to defer the question to some future and early day, when it would certainly have been re-opened.’ And he predicted that the 1867 Bill would ‘settle the suffrage question in boroughs’.¹⁹²⁰ Samuel Graves, the Conservative MP for Liverpool, who had served as the unofficial spokesperson for the caucus of urban Tory members, and had been a strong supporter of the Government’s Bill, thought it ‘to be perfectly safe, sound, and constitutional’. He argued that it was the ‘best Bill that could be proposed’, as once the government had abandoned the ‘£10 limit there was no principle at which they could stop until they came, as they had done in this case, to household suffrage guarded by payment of rates’. Therefore he confidently stated his belief that the question had ‘been settled on a sound and safe basis’ and had ‘been settled for many years to come’.¹⁹²¹ Perhaps most striking was the ringing endorsement given by Adullamite leader Lord Elcho. Despite his support for the measure, he told the House that ‘I have not changed the opinions which I have held on this subject since I have had the honour of a seat in this House’. He explained that his position was: ‘if we were to have a Reform Bill it should have some more stable basis than a mere figure, and that I should infinitely prefer a settlement upon some broad basis, such as the present, than upon any temporary expedient of a £6 or £7 franchise.’ Indeed, the critics of the current Bill had ‘failed to point out how the question could more satisfactorily be dealt with—they all failed to show how a safe resting-place could be found between £10 and household suffrage’. Finally, he expressed optimism for the future: ‘Working men’, he believed, were ‘as open to reason as any other class; and if the upper classes will in their sphere do their duty, and exercise their moral influence over the people, they will find them much more reasonable than some suppose them to be’. Therefore he assented to the Bill ‘frankly, and in a kindly spirit towards that class of the people who are about to be enfranchised’.¹⁹²² The Bill passed the Third Reading without division. It was clear the measure had the support of the House. Its opponents could do little to stop it.

The Bill passed through the Lords with little disturbance. Derby returned, despite his crippling gout, to oversee the final passage of the Bill in the Lords, ‘displaying an authority over that body unrivalled since the death of the Duke of Wellington’.¹⁹²³ As the Reform Act passed into law, Derby described it as a ‘Leap in the Dark’.¹⁹²⁴ Conservative philosopher and all-round prophet of doom, Thomas Carlyle pessimistically likened it to ‘Shooting Niagara’ in a barrel, where ahead lay uncertainty, ‘the icy drop, the crash of the waters and the long terrifying plunge into the chaos of democracy’.¹⁹²⁵ This imagery conjuring up an accidental revolution, a determined and premeditated step into the unknown, has been immortalized in scholarly circles by Blake’s metaphor likening the passage of the Reform Bill to ‘a moonlight steeplechase. In negotiating their fences few of them saw where they were going, nor much cared so long as they got there first’.¹⁹²⁶ All of these conclusions

¹⁹¹⁹ *Ibid*, cc.1540-1550

¹⁹²⁰ *Ibid*, cc.1559-1560

¹⁹²¹ *Ibid*, cc.1555-1556

¹⁹²² *Ibid*, cc.1574-1580

¹⁹²³ Blake, Disraeli, p.474

¹⁹²⁴ Cited in Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.306

¹⁹²⁵ Saunders, ‘Introduction: “Shooting Niagara – and After?”’, p.1

¹⁹²⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.477

paint a caricatured picture. Derby had reached the end of his political career. He played a central role in convincing the party to take up Reform and his support for Disraeli was central to keeping the party onside. However, illness had kept him absent from the management of the Bill which he had left wholly in the hands of his ‘resourceful lieutenant’¹⁹²⁷ who had become the ‘directing mind of the ministry’.¹⁹²⁸ His description of the Reform Bill was thus as much a reflection of his own detachment from events as it was of reality. For Carlyle, the Reform Act was the opening of Pandora’s Box. His prophetic visions of doom reflected his despairingly anti-democratic fears of what was to come. Britain would change as a result of the Reform Act in ways that few could have predicted.

However, the Bill did not represent the moment at which Conservatives chose to gamble on democracy. In its final form, the Reform Act represented a stalwart defence of the aristocracy and landed interest. The county qualification was kept moderately high. Through the redistribution of the seats and the boundary commission, the inequalities in representation had been redressed and the distinction between rural and urban polities had been restored. Voting was still open and, so Conservatives hoped, would remain deferential. It was only with regard to the borough suffrage that any serious fears could be harboured. Moreover, the 1867 Reform Act had settled the question for a generation. Disraeli had undoubtedly been forced to concede more than he had wanted, but the Bill was safe so long as his party followed him. Bernal Osbourne famously paid Disraeli the backhanded compliment that ‘he has lugged up that great omnibus full of stupid, heavy country Gentlemen’ and ‘has converted these Conservatives into Radical Reformers.’¹⁹²⁹ This statement that has gained considerable traction. The implication behind it may have been exacerbated by Disraeli’s own retrospective claim to have ‘educated’ his party.¹⁹³⁰ But none of this should give the false impression that 1867 was in anyway a far-sighted or carefully calculated piece of legislation. Its passage was made possible by a frustrated parliament that had failed for fifteen years to come to any conclusion to the matter. The minority position of the Conservatives ensured that the details were often subject to political expediency. Finally, heightened public interest and mass popular agitation contributed to a sense of urgency which had been absent in the past.

The important thing for the Conservatives was that a Bill should pass. This would re-establish the Conservatives as a party of government, capable not just of resisting progress, but also of embracing it. The fact remains that with every decision taken during the passage of the 1867 Reform Act Disraeli was met by the support of the vast majority of his cabinet colleagues and his backbenchers. Even Derby made no complaint of Conservative concessions to ‘ensure that his party retained control of the Reform settlement’.¹⁹³¹ In that they were helped by holding the moral high ground. As one Liberal admitted: ‘In 1858 Lord Derby’s Government again came into office, and by the same clever but unwise tactics [as 1852] they were almost instantly turned out of office. The House might have passed the Reform Bill of that Government which might have been amended in Committee, like the present Bill...the Liberal party were wrong in not having given the Conservatives a fair chance and fair play on both those occasions...when the Conservative Government came in for a third time, he determined that he for one would not be again led into this trick’.¹⁹³² This gave Disraeli the tactical as well as the moral high ground in 1867, as Liberals were not willing to endanger another Reform Bill with the same factious opposition.

Disraeli undoubtedly displayed both political genius and unparalleled parliamentary ability in 1867. His speeches on Reform restored his reputation as the House’s preeminent orator which had

¹⁹²⁷ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.347

¹⁹²⁸ General Grey to Queen Victoria, 7th of May 1867, *Letters of Queen Victoria*, second series, vol. p.220

¹⁹²⁹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 17th of May 1867, v.187, c.747

¹⁹³⁰ *The Times*, 30th of October 1867, p.5

¹⁹³¹ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.347

¹⁹³² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 15th of July 1867, v.188, cc.1572-1573

been waning in the previous years. Before the Bill's second reading, Horsman had predicted to Cranbourne that Disraeli would be dismantled by Gladstone, having 'unbounded confidence in D'Israeli's capacity for failure'.¹⁹³³ In that masterful oration in which he dazzled the House and neutralized Gladstone, Disraeli's confidence was restored. Thereafter, his speeches undoubtedly contributed to the Bills success. He was witty, conciliatory, scathing, sarcastic, and on occasion flippant. These qualities, when juxtaposed with the often tediously dry debates on rating and compounding legislation, made them all the more effective. As Saunders skilfully observed, 'MPs were more inclined to be charmed by Disraeli's wit than instructed by Gladstone's lectures'.¹⁹³⁴ But it was not just Disraeli's mercurial oratorical talent that ensured the successful passage of the Bill. He demonstrated a considerable work ethic and dedication that he had perhaps not displayed since his defining partnership with Bentinck in opposing the repeal of the Corn Laws some two decades before. He hardly left the House of Commons. When not speaking he was ever-present on the Treasury Bench watching, never relaxing, constantly attempting to gage the mood of the House. One doorkeeper of the House of Commons, William White, who was himself a Gladstone supporter, recognised Disraeli's personal skill and effort during the passage of the Bill. 'Alone he did it,... and with that wonderful skill none but those who watched him from night to night can know...with a steady hand, and quick eye, and marvellous skill he took the helm...for tact adroitness and skill the man that conquered all these difficulties has no superior and scarcely an equal in Parliamentary history.'¹⁹³⁵

All of this, when taken along with Bernal Osbournes comments, present us with the opposite danger of suggesting that the Reform Bill was entirely engineered and managed by Disraeli alone. Disraeli's performance throughout 1867 was masterful. But to see the Second Reform Act as a product of Disraeli's personal talents only serves to entrench equally problematic interpretations. This would be to suggest that it was Disraeli who perceived infinitely more clearly than dull wooden squirearchy behind him saw that household suffrage would reveal a Conservative majority among the working classes. Therefore he 'educated' them and 'dragged' the 'omnibus' to pass a Bill which realised his far-sighted objectives of creating a franchise which would recognise new social and political forces. Either that, or it would be to insinuate that Disraeli's political principles were so much more opportunist and flexible than the rest of his party that he skilfully manipulated them to carry a Bill which reflected little more than a personal triumph. This was a triumph that would cement his own predominance within his party and in the House of Commons. Both of these interpretations fall very wide of the mark. The fact was that such a piece of legislation would not have been possible without Disraeli's close collaboration with his colleagues and with the support of his party. The passage of the Reform Act in the shape that it finally took would have been impossible if Disraeli had not had the full confidence of Derby. Illness and his relative isolation in the House of Lords ensured that Derby was removed from the day-to-day management. Despite that, his influence was still heavily felt, and his support reassured any waverers. Moreover, in the Commons debates Disraeli was ably assisted by the talents of Stanley and Gathorne Hardy, who between them took on the majority of the speaking duties. Moreover, the cohesion of the Cabinet after the resignation of the three rebels ensured, for the first time, that the government was ideologically committed and unified behind in the aims of the Bill. Disraeli's talent for collaboration was also thoroughly displayed in his ability to work with those groups outside his party, from the radicals to the Adullamites who, all alike, stood with the government during the Bills third reading and applauded.

¹⁹³³ Horsman to Cranbourne 18th of March 1867, cited in Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.275

¹⁹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.275

¹⁹³⁵ William White, *The Inner Life of the House of Commons*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904) pp.77-78

Blake is certainly correct in observing that Disraeli ‘was never a Tory democrat, and...it was certainly not true that [he] had been planning to enfranchise the artisan householder as a safe Conservative’.¹⁹³⁶ However, it does not follow that the Conservatives could not view the Bill with some sanguinity. Disraeli had long believed the electorates of small boroughs to be deferential.¹⁹³⁷ If he was right, then the Conservatives could rely on ‘beer-barrel’ influence for future success. Moreover, the 1832 settlement had consistently ensured a Whig-Liberal hegemony in the medium-sized boroughs, while the large cities had come under the influence of radicalism. There was no reason for a Conservative to defend either the framework or the settlement of 1832. In that sense, it is perfectly plausible to suggest that the Disraeli might have hoped that a new working-class urban electorate might be more favourable to the Conservatives than the middle-class electorate of 1832. As Briggs long-ago observed ‘in the last resort it was Disraeli, the opportunist, who was the optimist, and Cranbourne and Lowe, the men of principle, who were the cynics’.¹⁹³⁸ With the exception of safeguarding the borough franchise, the Bill had achieved all its major aims. Most importantly, it had protected the future of the landed interest far more than any other Reform bill that had thus far been proposed to the House. As a result of 1867, the agricultural vote strengthened in the counties with broad rural constituencies now assuming a new role as a bulwark to democracy.

The Reform Act of 1867 would prove to be Disraeli’s last encounter with reform. In that sense, he also had the last word on the matter. His ideas regarding Reform can be traced back to the earliest political writing. It can further be argued that the final form the Act took was broadly representative of, and consistent with, Disraeli’s conception of parliamentary reform. The Bill in its final form redressed some of the glaring shortcomings of the 1832 Act. It successfully restored the boundaries between urban and rural political life, as he had attempted in 1859. It settled the question by establishing the borough franchise on a broad, national and understandable principle. Throughout its passage he was quite genuine in his promise to consult with, and defer to, the House of Commons where practicable. He had never thought Reform a matter for party politics. While the politics of party were necessary to ensure its passage, in so many ways 1867 was devoid of the factionalism that had marred, in his mind at least, the 1832 Act. Because of the way the 1867 Bill was passed there were large parts of the settlement that were odious to both sides of the House. Gladstone claimed that secretly ‘probably not one in fifty’ really approved of it.¹⁹³⁹ It is sometimes said that ‘a good compromise is when both parties are dissatisfied’. This could be said of the 1867 Reform Act. No group got exactly what they wanted.

Disraeli’s vision of politics was inherently historical. This conception had been formed in the 1830s and had never really changed. His whole career was in many ways a reaction to what happened in those crucial years. From the time when the debate on parliamentary reform was resumed in 1852, Disraeli had sought to find a Tory solution to the problem. Properly worked, he believed that a more favourable electorate could be discovered. From 1852 onwards, he had stressed the Conservative’s right to deal with the question of Reform. In direct contrast to Russell, Disraeli believed that Reform was not the personal fiefdom of the Whigs. The Tories reputation had suffered ever since their disastrous opposition to Reform in the 1830s, despite a certain rebranding under Peel. Moreover, it was a stain that proved difficult to remove. Just as he had reimagined English political history and turned it to Tory advantage, so he had aimed to do the same with Reform. The passage of the 1832 Reform Act had established a narrative that cast the Tories as the reactionary bulwark against progress. If the Liberals were successful in passing another Reform Bill this would ‘entrench the

¹⁹³⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.476

¹⁹³⁷ Disraeli to Derby, 25th of February 1867, Derby Papers, 146/3

¹⁹³⁸ Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.308

¹⁹³⁹ *The Times*, 13th of May 1867, p.6

dichotomy between Tory reaction and Liberal populism'.¹⁹⁴⁰ If the Conservatives could pass a carry a Reform Bill over the heads of their opponents, they could rewrite this story. Throughout the passage of the Bill and afterward Disraeli had used his imaginative, indeed unique, understanding of political history to spin the narrative of Reform around, revisiting his Tory version of English history to establish to historical precedents on which the Conservatives might legitimately stake their progressive claims.

On a personal level, the passage of the Reform Act cemented Disraeli's reputation as a parliamentarian of almost unrivalled ability and secured his leadership of the party. Moreover, in managing the Bill, his Cabinet colleagues and his backbenchers, it displayed beyond any doubt his ability for effective political collaboration. Rather than dragging the country gentlemen up the hill, he persuaded them to walk themselves. The doom-mongers both inside and outside the House were terrified at what the future might hold. We can say with some certainty that Disraeli did not foresee the wide-reaching consequences of the Second Reform Act and the new age of mass national politics it would usher in. But it can be confidently stated that he did not look into the future with much fear. He had always believed that England was an inherently deferential society. He took it as axiomatic that men of all classes were loyal to the existing social structures and national institutions so long as they were not ignored.

In a strange way Disraeli never saw Reform in terms of democracy versus aristocracy, whether in the numbers of votes it conferred, or on the level of the franchise. These were matters of detail. Disraeli dealt in the grandiose vagaries of principle. As Saunders has shrewdly recognised, to Disraeli, Reform was 'chiefly symbolic', 'the ultimate act of party realignment'.¹⁹⁴¹ Disraeli was never wanting for political principles. In fact, throughout his life he maintained a striking consistency in his guiding political beliefs. The difference between Disraeli and other politicians was his remarkable flexibility towards detail. He never lived or died by one piece of legislation. Similarly, he never believed that the existence and pre-eminence of landed interest relied on mere clauses. The Corn Laws had been an important protection. But once they had been repealed, Disraeli was among the first in the party to canvass for their abandonment. To fight for their reinstatement was reactionary, exclusive and ultimately futile. Similarly, in the case of Reform, he may have preferred a more restrictive, or at least more protected, borough franchise than the Bill eventually delivered. But Conservatives could not afford to fail. The alternative of a triumphant Gladstone was undoubtedly worse. Disraeli never believed that the newly enfranchised working-class of England, once they had the vote, would pose a threat to the longevity of the aristocracy. In 1867, we can thus see the culmination of Disraeli political principles and the fruition of his political activity since 1846. He had taken the Conservatives from the agricultural rump he and Bentinck had been left with in 1846, and twenty years later had led them to historic progressive victory over the Liberals. This vindicated his belief that the Tories were entitled to deal with the great questions facing the country and announced the return of the Conservatives as a credible party of government. Moreover, it realised his Disraeli's dream of 're-establishing Toryism on a national foundation'. Much was still unknown about the future. However, one of the strongest motifs of Disraeli's trilogy of the 1840s was the need for aristocracy to play a leading part in national political life. As the Age of Equipose ended and the Second Reform Act came into law, this belief was put to the test. As Gathorne Hardy commented: 'What an unknown world we are to enter... If the gentry will take their part they will be adopted as leaders. If we are left to demagogues, God help us!'¹⁹⁴²

¹⁹⁴⁰ Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote*, p.271

¹⁹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.278

¹⁹⁴² Diary of Gathorne Hardy? (Check) if not: *Ibid*, p.276

IV: The Greasy Pole

In 1868, the parliamentary balance once again shifted. That February, Derby, now nearing his sixty-ninth birthday and in constant agony from almost chronic gout, made the decision to resign as Prime Minister. As his son commented, 'it was for him a matter of life and death'.¹⁹⁴³ The previous two years of political manoeuvring over parliamentary reform had ensured Disraeli's pre-eminence in the Commons and cemented his position as Derby's successor. Any suggestion of unpopularity amongst his Tory colleagues, still hinted at by some modern scholars, was conspicuously absent in Derby's letter to Queen Victoria, announcing his resignation through ill-health and informing her that only Disraeli 'could command the cordial support, en masse, of his present colleagues'.¹⁹⁴⁴ Upon receiving Derby's letter informing him of his intention to resign, and that he should replace the Earl as premier, Disraeli replied that he had 'never contemplated or desired it. I was entirely content with my position, and all that I aspired to was that, after a Government of tolerable length, and, at least, fair repute, my retirement from public affairs should have accompanied yours.'¹⁹⁴⁵ This was not strictly true, as Bradford has observed. Disraeli had been informed in January that he would be called to succeed Derby when he eventually resigned.¹⁹⁴⁶ Moreover, assuming the premiership was a moment of great pride and personal vindication for Disraeli. However, it also marked the end of a political partnership which had spanned three different decades. To understand their relationship, Disraeli's reply cannot be so easily dismissed as 'grateful but untrue'.¹⁹⁴⁷ Nor it is it helpful to say that he was simply maintaining 'the pose of dutiful loyalty'.¹⁹⁴⁸ Disraeli's political collaboration with Derby had endured for twenty years, a point that both of them recognised. Earlier in February, on hearing that Derby's absence through gout would be prolonged, Disraeli wrote to his premier: 'after twenty years of confidential co-operation, scarcely with a cloud, I need not, I feel convinced, assure you, at this critical moment, that all shall be done on my part which perfect devotion can accomplish to maintain, unimpaired and unsullied, your interests and influence.'¹⁹⁴⁹

In his reply four days later, with his gout having recurred and informing Disraeli of his intention to resign, Derby promised Disraeli 'all the support which, out of office, it is in my power to give'. He further he promised to ensure, that 'our friends extend to you, separately, the same generous confidence which, for twenty years, they have reposed in us jointly'. He concluded by offering his sincere thanks to Disraeli, 'gratefully acknowledging your cordial and loyal cooperation with me, in good times and bad, throughout that long period; nor above all, the courage skill, and judgement with which you triumphantly carried the Government through the difficulties and dangers of last year'.¹⁹⁵⁰ On the eve of kissing hands at Osbourne, Disraeli wrote to Derby, still expressing deference to his chief, saying he would 'always consider myself your deputy' and that he would never 'permit any sentiment of estrangement to arise between us, but to extend to me for ever that complete confidence which has so long subsisted between us; which has been the pride and honour of my life'. This emotional and undoubtedly heartfelt missive was reciprocated the following day when Derby responded that there was 'no danger of any sentiment of estrangement arising between us, who for more than twenty years have worked together with unreserved and unbroken confidence'.¹⁹⁵¹

¹⁹⁴³ Derby, *Disraeli, and the Conservative Party*, 18th of February 1868, p.329

¹⁹⁴⁴ Derby to Queen Victoria, 21st of February 1868, cited in Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.365.

¹⁹⁴⁵ Disraeli to Derby, 20th of February 1868 cited in M&B, v.4, p.585

¹⁹⁴⁶ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.278

¹⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.278

¹⁹⁴⁸ Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, v.2, p.364.

¹⁹⁴⁹ Disraeli to Derby, 14th of February 1868, cited in M&B, vol.4, p.583

¹⁹⁵⁰ Derby to Disraeli, 18th of February 1868, cited in *Ibid*, p.584

¹⁹⁵¹ Disraeli to Derby, 27th of February 1868, *Derby MSS*, 146/4, cited in Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p. 366; Bodl., Dep Hughenden, Derby to Disraeli, 28th of February 1868, 110/2, f.131

These exchanges represented something more than simple ‘social niceties’. To say that ‘this delicacy of feeling glossed over what had, in truth, been an often difficult and strained relationship’, helps our understanding of their relationship little.¹⁹⁵² This was the heartfelt culmination of twenty years of close political collaboration. One would now rise to the position of Prime Minister, the other was exiting public life after nearly forty years as one of the country’s leading political figures. Derby was the first to tell Disraeli that ‘you have fairly and most honourably won your way to the highest round of the political ladder’, and extended that wish that, ‘long may you continue to retain your position’.¹⁹⁵³ Despite the divergence between backgrounds and interests, and notwithstanding Derby’s early suspicions of Disraeli’s character, the two men had kept the Conservative party together for over twenty year following the schism of 1846. It is not naïve to think that at the end of this close working relationship, there would be some genuine warmth felt by one man towards the other, despite their absence of social friendship. While Derby had often been an impediment to many Disraeli’s schemes, frequently applying the handbrake to his more ambitious political projects, Disraeli had invariably relied on Derby. As Buckle long ago recognised, having ‘reached the top of the greasy pole’, no one ‘realized better than he how difficult it would be to maintain himself in that precarious elevation. With the shield of Derby gone, he would have to justify himself afresh to his party; and their opponents, and more particularly their discomfited chief, would be all the more eager to pull him down’.¹⁹⁵⁴

Becoming Prime Minister was undoubtedly the greatest personal achievement of Disraeli’s political career. It marked the crowning moment of a parliamentary career that had spanned thirty years. He must have been struck by the coincidence of fate that saw General Grey, the man who had defeated him in his unsuccessful attempt to stand for High Wycombe back in 1832, deliver the Queen’s summons.¹⁹⁵⁵ After accepting office and kissing hands at Osbourne, the Queen herself remarked on the feat: ‘Mr. Disraeli is Prime Minister! A proud thing for a Man “risen from the people” to have obtained’.¹⁹⁵⁶ It was a proud moment and a fact he celebrated at the end of March with a lavish reception held at the remodelled foreign office. It was attended by Royalty, Dukes and Duchesses, the leading figures of both major political parties and the great and the good of high society.¹⁹⁵⁷ In that moment, Disraeli must have reflected on the twists of fate that had delivered him to the preeminent position in British politics. Hurd has observed that it must have caused general ‘puzzlement’ that a ‘Jew and admitted adventurer had forced his way...to the top of the greasy pole’.¹⁹⁵⁸ It is certainly striking that a man of Disraeli’s relatively humble beginnings, more still the converted Jew, the popular novelist with no formal public education, a man chequered financial and personal past, and the figure who had been so pivotal in overthrowing Peel some twenty years before, should now have risen to the country’s foremost political office. He was finally the leader of the aristocracy of England. If these less respectable elements of Disraeli’s character are overstated then his accession to the leadership of the party can only be understood as the achievements of an unscrupulous opportunist. Some of his critics certainly thought so. For Bright his success was ‘a triumph of intellect & unscrupulousness’.¹⁹⁵⁹ The Whig magnate Lord Clarendon was more scathing, telling Lady Salisbury, ‘The Jew, who is “the most subtle beast in the field”, has...ingratiated himself with the Missus and made her forget that, in the opinion of the Great and the Good, he “has not one

¹⁹⁵² Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p. 366

¹⁹⁵³ Derby to Disraeli, 28th of February 1868, Bodl Dep. Hughenden, 110/2, f.132

¹⁹⁵⁴ M&B, v.4, p.600

¹⁹⁵⁵ Blake, Disraeli, pp.486-487

¹⁹⁵⁶ Queen Victoria to the Crown Princess of Prussia, 26th of February 1868 cited in Blake, p.487

¹⁹⁵⁷ M&B, vol.4, pp.599-600

¹⁹⁵⁸ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.215

¹⁹⁵⁹ Walling (ed.), *The Diaries of John Bright*, p.351

single element of a gentleman in his composition'.¹⁹⁶⁰ Criticism from Whig magnificos like Clarendon would certainly not have bothered Disraeli unduly. He had been an outspoken critic of Whiggism for nearly forty years and in passing the Reform Bill the previous year he had effectively sealed their fate.

We need to see past the observations of his opponents that have proved so influential in colouring the narrative surrounding Disraeli. As this current work has attempted to display, his elevation to the premiership can only be truly understood in relation to his capacity for effective political collaboration. Disraeli's talent was universally recognised. His imaginative understanding of politics differentiated him from nearly all of his contemporaries. But that quality alone has never qualified someone for the office of Prime Minister. He needed to be able to work with and command the support of his party and his colleagues. From his close friendship with Lord George Bentinck to his two-decade long partnership with Lord Derby, Disraeli had been a faithful servant of the landed interest. He did not exist in his position purely on sufferance from the rest of the party. Nor was it true, as Blake has suggested, that 'there was no great enthusiasm for Disraeli'.¹⁹⁶¹ He was certainly not without his critics in the party. But when he first walked into the House of Commons as Prime Minister on the 5th of March he was greeted 'generous and hearty Conservative cheers'. It must have been with some emotion that he addressed that room which had been the centre of his life since his disastrous maiden speech some three decades earlier. In that moment, one imagines Disraeli would have thought of his old friend Bentinck with whom he had collaborated so closely and through whose influence he likely owed his present position.

However, while Disraeli could take momentary pride in his achievements, he understood that the tide was turning fast against the Tories. Even before he became Prime Minister, following the glorious success of the Reform Bill, fortune quickly turned against the Conservatives. With Derby almost entirely removed from political life, Disraeli was left in charge to deal with a series domestic and foreign crises.¹⁹⁶² This was all made worse by a serious deterioration in Mary Anne's health which was most likely the first signs of the cancer that would take her life five years later. Amidst the pressure of his wife's illness and the responsibility of overseeing nearly all facets of government policy, Disraeli himself was stricken with an attack of gout which kept him away from parliament.¹⁹⁶³ Thus, in the new year, when Disraeli took over from Derby as Prime Minister, the government's position was already considerably weaker than it had been immediately following the Reform Act.

In short, the Conservative position was vulnerable. Disraeli may have been Prime Minister, but he had no real power in the House of Commons and was still reliant on the good-will of the opposition. As soon as he entered the Premiership, the Liberals began to marshal their forces in an attack on the Irish Church which effectively ended any hopes that the Conservatives could survive much longer. With the support of the Queen, Disraeli was at least able to avoid immediate dissolution and wait until a new electoral register had been compiled.¹⁹⁶⁴ This ploy-- to avoid an immediate election-- drew some angry criticism from the opposition. None more so than from Bright, whose enraged attack on Disraeli's conduct resulted in an exchange which swiftly ended the 'unconventional but undoubted friendship which had existed between [them]...for twenty years'.¹⁹⁶⁵ Following these bad-tempered debates over the Irish Church, Disraeli's premiership ended comparatively quietly. With the election looming, many predicted the Conservatives were facing electoral defeat. Despite Disraeli's optimism, the election result confirmed these predictions. The election resulted in something of a landslide for the Liberals as they increased their majority to 100 seats. As the Age of

¹⁹⁶⁰ Maxwell, *The Life and Letters of George William Frederick, Fourth Earl of Clarendon*, vol.2, p.342

¹⁹⁶¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.486

¹⁹⁶² *Ibid*, p.485

¹⁹⁶³ Bradford, *Disraeli*, pp.276-277

¹⁹⁶⁴ Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p.285; Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.500-501

¹⁹⁶⁵ M&B, vol.5 p.37; *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 7th of May 1868, v.191 cc.1941-1943, cc.1946-1947.

Equipose ended it, so it seemed that Gladstone's reforming zeal and a liberal approach to Ireland proved more in tune with the new electorate than Disraeli's attempt to rally the country behind the preservation of old institutions. When it became clear that the election would be fought on Irish issues, the Conservatives were instantly put at a disadvantage. The matter of the Irish Church was one of the few issues that unified the Liberal party. This was in contrast to the Conservatives, who were party of the Anglican interest, but divided on the matter of the Irish Church.¹⁹⁶⁶

From 1846, Disraeli had worked almost tirelessly to restore the fortunes of the Conservative party by way of a political realignment. Broadly conceived, his political principles were strikingly consistent. He was arguably far more consistent than Gladstone, who in the same period had transformed himself from a Conservative MP and foremost defender of the Anglican faith, to an increasingly radical Liberal leader. The charges of opportunism levelled against Disraeli's by contemporaries and modern historians alike stem from the apparent inconsistency in his political activity. However, the situation in which the Conservatives were stuck for more than twenty years, that of an opposition party faced with a seemingly impenetrable Liberal Commons majority, necessitated a flexible attitude and tactical freedom in order to attempt to manoeuvre the Tories out of their minority position and to challenge for the centre-ground of British politics. Throughout the Age of Equipose, Disraeli had tried to steer the Conservatives to capture the spirit of that age. In a sense, he signally failed. In the realm of finance, he had failed to effectively challenge Gladstone for Peel's mantle of fiscal authority. With regard to the Church, the 1868 election had shown that the politics of Church and State, and the rallying cry of Church defence, no longer resonated with an increasingly urban electorate. Following 1868, Disraeli had strikingly little to say about the Church and when his time came again he thoroughly distanced himself from any High Church connections. Even the Reform Act, the crowning achievement of both Disraeli and Derby's career, yielded no immediate gratitude from the public. Only a year after the Conservatives extended the vote to so many urban working-class men, they used that vote to return a powerful Liberal majority.

As the Age of Equipose drew to a close, the Conservatives seemed in much the same place as when it started. Therefore, the question naturally arises: in the twenty years between the death of Bentinck and Disraeli's elevation to the Premiership, what did Disraeli actually achieve? Most importantly, he kept the Conservative party together and attempted as best he could to keep them relevant. If the Tories had clung blindly to false idol of Protection and had been unwilling to then there would have been a real danger that they would have slowly drifted into political obsolescence and disappeared. Bentinck's death had thrown Disraeli into closer partnership with Derby. From a Conservative perspective, the Age of Equipose was their age. As Hawkins has recognised, 'the rehabilitation of the Conservatives as a credible moderate party of government after 1846' was their great achievement. After the schism over the Corn Laws, the Tories were 'languishing as an atavistic rump of rural protest.'¹⁹⁶⁷ Derby's three minority governments, in which Disraeli was leader of the Commons, had not only displayed general prudence, but a willingness and ability to undertake progressive legislation. This was crowned with the Reform Act which, for all its expediency, was not a product of Disraeli's opportunism. It was a widely supported Conservative measure that demonstrated Tories were not the simply the representatives of the rural nobility, but a moderate, national and inclusive party. They had weened the party off of Protectionism, challenged the Liberal's authority over finance, reasserted themselves as the undisputed vehicle of both the established faith and the preservation of traditional institutions. Moreover, they had maintained the relevance of the

¹⁹⁶⁶ Warren, 'Disraeli and Ireland: part one', p.60; Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.496-497

¹⁹⁶⁷ Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, p.268

party during the unassailable reign of Palmerston and had come out the other side with the courage to capitalise on the broken Liberal factions, fighting over his legacy to reassert the historic, national and progressive principles of Toryism.

Moreover, Disraeli's attempts to restore the position of the party during this period are testament to the consistency and conviction of his political principles. With regard to finance, the Church and Parliamentary Reform he was consistent with his earliest political effusions. His understanding of history allowed him to denounce the Toryism of the early 19th century as exclusive, reactionary and a corruption of the enlightened Toryism embodied in the 18th century by Bolingbroke and Pitt. By defining 'true' Tory principles in an imaginative understanding of Britain's past, Disraeli was able to stay faithful to the Conservative consciousness while attempting to rid the party of its exclusive and reactionary doctrines, and to adapt them to the realities of a more progressive age. This is not to say that Disraeli perceived the future far more clearly than his counterparts. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest he was less far-sighted than many. It was simply that Disraeli, in much the same way as Derby, understood that the Conservative party could not exist neither as a one issue party nor as a reactionary bloc. Only in adapting to spirit of the age and emerging as a moderate alternative to Liberalism would they secure the party's future. Their approaches differed. Disraeli's imaginative and historical understanding of politics, combined with his proclivity for intrigue often induced him to conjure up fantastic schemes of parliamentary realignment. This sometimes was at odds with Derby's prudent, calculated and, at times, cautious resolve. But together they proved an effective combination. Indeed, if the years of mid-Victorian social harmony tell us anything about Disraeli, they demonstrate his ability as a first-rate collaborator. All too often scholars have sought to highlight Disraeli's single-mindedness and divergence of attitude from his party. In his collaboration with Wilberforce over Church defence, with Stanley and Hardy over the Reform Bill, and most prominently with Derby in resurrecting Conservatism, he proved his ability to cooperate with his colleagues and coordinate his party.

For all his efforts, Disraeli failed to affect any meaningful parliamentary realignment, even after the success of 1867. But they were not completely without hope. There were signs that conservative elements of the country, which had long avoided voting Conservative, having had in Palmerston the perfect alternative, were now returning to their natural representatives. The death of Palmerston in 1865 had begun this process, a process which had been accelerated by Gladstone's departure from the Palmerstonian majority and his emergence as an increasing radical Liberal leader. Indeed, as Hawkins has noted, the 1868 election can be seen as a line in the sand of British political culture, 'a departure point for the 'popular' party-orientated politics of the 1870s'.¹⁹⁶⁸ Politics was changing, adapting to a new polity where erstwhile accusations of 'democracy' began to take on new more positive connotations, when public opinion no longer referred exclusively to the opinions of the educated middle-classes but towards a more representative parliament, and an age when 'society was no longer swayed by the exclusive machinations of select aristocratic coteries'.¹⁹⁶⁹ It was not just politics, but also society that began to change accordingly. The aristocracy, for which had so long been attached to the land, evolved from a purely land-owning agricultural elite to class of the nation which had strong connections to urban society and owed much of its wealth to the wheels of industry.¹⁹⁷⁰ It also coincided with a period in which the great Whig magnates withdrew from politics or at least began to abandon the Liberal party which had become so removed from the great Whig traditions.¹⁹⁷¹

¹⁹⁶⁸ Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, p.269

¹⁹⁶⁹ T.S.H. Escott, 'Political Novels', *Frasers Magazine*, 9, (April, 1974); cited in *Ibid*, p.269

¹⁹⁷⁰ Burn, *Age of Equipoise*, pp.306-308; E.P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, (London: Gollancz, 1963); Rubenstein, *Men of Property*

¹⁹⁷¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.514

Moreover, 1868 restored something more like 'clear-cut' political parties. Gladstone had succeeded, at least for the time being, in uniting the Liberal party that had been at war with itself ever since the death of Palmerston. But far from capitulating after their defeat, the achievement of Derby's third ministry ensured that the Conservatives had rehabilitated their reputation and now stood as a moderate and credible party, while the reforming programme that the Liberals undertook from 1868 onwards helped to cement a new dichotomy between the two parties. As the age of personality faded and the age of parties emerged, the political scene was as open as it had been in decades. In fact, the 1868 election had not included any of the compounders who were enfranchised by Hodgkinson's amendment. So, in a strange way, it was not the best indicator of how a new working-class electorate might vote. Disraeli's showed no sign of comprehending the great changes that were being wrought in British politics. Indeed, of all contemporary politicians he was among the worst at predicting the future. His politics that leant so heavily on history were still firmly rooted to the politics of the past. But while he was almost certainly unaware of the new age of politics they were entering, it did not mean that he could not take advantage of a new socio-political landscape which for a combination of reasons began to turn the tide in favour of the Conservatives. As they moved into the 1870s, new social and intellectual questions began to emerge challenges which tested the country's existing aristocratic leadership. After the 1868 it was left, as Briggs observed, to 'an enlarged electorate...to wrestle with the problems of a complicated world in which ideas and interests clashed and issues loomed larger than men'.¹⁹⁷² For Disraeli, the Age of Equipose marked the real zenith of his political powers. 1867 was its high-water mark. Through skilful collaboration, strength of imagination and keen political instinct, he had secured the future of the Conservative party. After this he was a man whose abilities and health was in decline. Therefore, it is perhaps ironic, that as Disraeli's powers waned he became seen as more integral to the party's success.

¹⁹⁷² Briggs, *Victorian People*, p.308

Chapter Six: Beaconsfieldism and Elysian Fields

In the immediate aftermath of the election, the result had seemingly confirmed the supremacy of Liberalism and cemented the position of the Conservatives as a minority party. Politically, the position seemed bleak from a Conservative perspective. Galvanized by a fresh majority, a new electorate and renewed reforming zeal in public opinion Disraeli had little option but to sit back and watch as the Gladstone's ministry set about reforming so many aspects of public and private life. It was ironic that having now reached a preeminent position in both his party and the country that Disraeli was now more powerless than ever. He understood better than anyone the futility in opposing a united majority. Moreover, the policies which the Liberal government pursued did not offer much opportunity for opposition with hope of success. The Irish Church which Gladstone set about disestablishing in 1869 was an issue that united Liberal and divided Conservatives. The education, civil service, military and Irish land reforms which followed were all fraught with difficulty from a Conservative perspective.¹⁹⁷³ The next four years saw Disraeli take more time away from politics than he had in the last twenty. The Liberals had become more united under Gladstone than had been since the zenith of Palmerstonian politics. However, Disraeli knew that Gladstone had always represented a divisive rather than unifying figure in Liberal politics, therefore it remained to be seen if this unity would last. There was little for Disraeli to do in this situation but to watch and wait. During the Age of Equipoise, when politics had been so much more fluid Disraeli had been kept busy as a change in circumstances or in parliamentary alignment had seemed constantly possible. This was no longer the case when faced with a unified and triumphant majority. Thus, with no tangible opportunity to change the circumstances of his party Disraeli seemingly took a step back from active politics.

In 1869, the news of Derby's death dealt Disraeli a bitter personal blow. He passed away on the 23rd of October 1869 at Knowsley surrounded by his family and his funeral, which attended by no pomp and circumstance and saw him laid to rest in the parish church adjoining his estate, cemented his status as a preeminent patrician and reflected his deep attachment to his Lancashire roots.¹⁹⁷⁴ Following his retirement from politics the previous year, Disraeli had been completely faithful to his promise to Derby that he would not allow any 'sentiment of estrangement to arise between us'¹⁹⁷⁵ and had been in almost constant correspondence with Derby with regard to politics deferentially canvassing his opinion on various subjects. Just as with Bentinck, Disraeli parted from Derby with the friendship unclouded. For Disraeli it was a painful loss. He had lost his firmest ally and Derby's death perhaps reminded him of his own increasing age and made him question his own ability to restore his party's fortunes. The result of the loss of Derby and the political landscape facing him was to once more retreat into fiction as he had in the 1840s. He began secretly writing in 1869 and his new novel *Lothair* was published the following year. It was his first novel since the completion of his trilogy in 1847 and was the first piece of writing of any substance since his biography of Bentinck in 1851. In contrast to some of his earlier work *Lothair* came with great public interest and anticipation. It was the first novel ever penned by a former Prime Minister especially one who was still the leader of a major party. Moreover, it came with great financial reward. Disraeli may have turned down an advance of £10,000, but the book proved a best-seller. In 1870 alone there were eight editions published in England, while in America 80,000 copies were sold in first five months following publication. By 1876 it had earned Disraeli approximately £10,000.¹⁹⁷⁶

¹⁹⁷³ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.516

¹⁹⁷⁴ Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, pp.384-388

¹⁹⁷⁵ Disraeli to Derby, 27th of February 1868, *Derby MSS*, 146/4, cited in Hawkins, *Forgotten Prime Minister*, vol.2, p. 366

¹⁹⁷⁶ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.287

There was come clear continuity in *Lothair* with Disraeli's earlier fiction. Much like his trilogy of the 1840s follows the journey of a young somewhat priggish and naïve aristocratic scion in search of a philosophy to the religious dilemma facing him. Like nearly all of Disraeli's later protagonists Lothair is somewhat vapid. A character in search of an identity. An heir to a great estate who is orphaned as a young child and has an unhappy upbringing in Scotland under the guardianship of two men. One a Calvinist and the other a Catholic Cardinal. The plot was a thriller based loosely on the 1868 society sensation of 1868, when the fabulously rich young Marquess of Bute converted to the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁹⁷⁷ The novel sees the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, and secret nationalist societies try and seduce Lothair for his influence and fortune. Like many of his other novels so key characters appear in the novel drawn straight from life. For the Anglican Church there is 'the Bishop', a thinly disguised version of Wilberforce, while for Rome there is Grandison the cardinal who served as Lothair's guardian and could only have been based on Manning.¹⁹⁷⁸ Two men with whom Disraeli had close dealings with in 1868 and by whom he felt equally betrayed. In his search for religious purpose the young Lothair, much in the same way that Paris must choose from three goddesses, must choose from three women all representing a distinct religious or political creed: an insipid and somewhat unconvincing Anglican Lady Corisande, a Roman Catholic niece of the St. Jerome family Miss Arundell, and Theodora a romantic, mysterious and exciting Italian nationalist. The novel sees Lothair wind his way through high society undecided on his course and eventually converted by Theodora to the nationalist cause, he ends up on the revolutionary battlefields of Italy fighting in Garibaldi's campaign. Theodora is killed at Viterbo and with her last words ensures Lothair promises not to join the Church of Rome who she died fighting against. Therefore, after all this excitement Lothair returns to England to eventually marry the first and most inconspicuous of his potential suitors, Lady Corisande.¹⁹⁷⁹

Lothair is somewhat distinct from his trilogy of the 1840s in that it has no overt political message. That is not to say it does not have one. In many ways it is a direct continuation of the style of his earlier novels, the difference is rather the context in which it was being written. *Coningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred* had all be written during a time of great domestic upheaval when England was facing great and pressing questions. The same could not be said for the late 1860s in which the aristocracy, ignorant of what the future would hold, 'bathed in popularity, ruling by consent with skill and enjoyment'.¹⁹⁸⁰ It was the zenith of the last age of undisturbed aristocratic rule. Britain was more wealthy and more powerful than at any time in history and with the passage of the Reform Act in 1867 the country was at peace with a new seemingly landed and aristocratic settlement. There still was a clear contemporary context to the novel though, as there had been with his earlier trilogy. It was set in 1867 and its writing had started in 1869. It was a novel which grappled with contemporary issues. It was set against the backdrop of the *Risorgimento* and the fight for Italian nationalism in which Rome was quite literally under siege from secular nationalist forces. Moreover, domestically it portrays a contented but purposeless aristocracy, as Froude so long ago recognised the perfect portrayal of patrician society that was 'then in its most brilliant period, like the full bloom of a flower which opens only to fade'.¹⁹⁸¹ Moreover, it has a subtly anti-Catholic motif. Not in any violent protestant sense, because the Anglican church and the Bishop no not come off much better. No doubt inspired by the duplicitous deals of Manning over the Irish Church, Rome and its supporters are shadowy, wily and untrustworthy. Grandison in particular who attempts to mislead Lothair in

¹⁹⁷⁷ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.287

¹⁹⁷⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.517

¹⁹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp.517-518

¹⁹⁸⁰ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.105

¹⁹⁸¹ Froude, *Life of Beaconsfield*, p.231

converting to Rome and attempts to secure his conversion without his consent.¹⁹⁸² The spirit of the revolutionary nationalist seems by far the most attractive doctrine. But in the end, despite the attractiveness and the romance of the revolutionary, they were essentially seductive but dangerous forces. Remember Disraeli had refused to meet Garibaldi, he was a defender of the established social order and despised revolution. As Vincent recognised, at the conclusion of *Lothair*, ‘modernity is firmly rejected...social optimism is firmly tied to traditionalism’.¹⁹⁸³

The publication of *Lothair* and the public interest it attracted did not immediately restore Disraeli’s enthusiasm for politics. In fact, Disraeli’s domestic life would further distract him from politics. Mary Anne’s health had been in constant decline in the first three years of Gladstone’s government. In fact, it had never been the same following her illness back in 1867. She was suffering with terminal stomach cancer, but she endeavoured to keep the seriousness of her illness from her husband. In 1872 she had insisted in accompanying him to Manchester where he delivered his famous speech at the Free Trade Hall. It was as Bradford puts it, ‘their last public triumph’.¹⁹⁸⁴ He she returned from London she once again collapsed. She had attempted to put a brave face on her illness be attempting to attend society function, but her illness was worsening. On the 6th of May she had to leave an evening party at Lady Waldergrave’s ‘almost immediately’ but took delight in boasting that ‘her illness was not found out’.¹⁹⁸⁵ On the advice of her doctor she attended court the following day. It proved ill-advice, as Disraeli told Corry: ‘She was suffering as she went, and was taken so unwell there that we had to retreat precipitately’.¹⁹⁸⁶ This was repeated on the 17th of July when Mary Anne attempted to resume her social life and attended a party at Lady Loudoun’s and once again collapsed.¹⁹⁸⁷ Her illness could no longer be concealed and it was now obvious to all society that she was seriously ill. Indeed, the cancer had become so painful that in August she was not well enough to quit London for the rural seclusion of Hughenden.¹⁹⁸⁸ ‘Her illness’, Disraeli told Hardy, ‘under wh. she has, to some degree, been suffering for many months, is a total inability to take any sustenance’.¹⁹⁸⁹ As her health declined he confided in Corry his own despair: ‘To see her every day weak and weaker is heartrending...to witness this gradual death of one, who has shared so long, and so completely, my life, entirely unmans me.’¹⁹⁹⁰

By the end of September Disraeli reported a ‘decided, and, I hope now, permanent improvement in my wife’s health’.¹⁹⁹¹ It was only a temporary remission in the illness, but it allowed them to travel back to Hughenden where it was hoped the country air might bring about an improvement. In the following months here declined precipitately as the cancer took over which occasionally had Disraeli worrying for the worst. In October he briefly updated Corry that, ‘things here very bad’.¹⁹⁹² While following month in another lapse he told him ‘affairs have been going very badly; so badly that I telegraphed, yesterday, for Leggatt who came immediately’. The doctor’s advice was somewhat unhelpful as he suggested that if Mary Anne would eat her condition would improve. But as a frustrated Disraeli vented to Corry, ‘But how to manage that?’.¹⁹⁹³ By mid-November her illness had abated enough that she was able to take visitors. In that month she was visited by Manners, Rosebery, the Harcourt and Lord Ronald Gower. While all would be struck by

¹⁹⁸² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.518

¹⁹⁸³ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.108

¹⁹⁸⁴ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.296

¹⁹⁸⁵ Disraeli to Corry, 7th of May 1872, cited in M&B, vol.5, p.222

¹⁹⁸⁶ Disraeli to Corry 9th of May 1872, *Ibid*, p.222

¹⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.223

¹⁹⁸⁸ Disraeli to Cairns, 17th of August 1872, *Ibid*, p.224

¹⁹⁸⁹ Disraeli to Hardy, 16th of September 1872, *Ibid*, p.225

¹⁹⁹⁰ Disraeli to Corry, 14th of May 1872, *Ibid*, p.222

¹⁹⁹¹ Disraeli to Cairns, 26th of September 1872, *Ibid*, p.226

¹⁹⁹² Disraeli to Corry, 13th of October 1872, *Ibid*, p.226

¹⁹⁹³ Disraeli to Corry, 8th of November 1872, *Ibid*, pp.226-227

her good spirits in the face of her adversity, Ronald Gower noticed the effect of the illness on both of them. Mary Anne's appearance had changed: 'she poor old soul sadly altered since London in looks. Shrunk & more like an anointed corpse than ever'.¹⁹⁹⁴ While he was perhaps touched by the effect her illness was having on Disraeli, for when she wasn't present, 'his face, generally so emotionless, was filled with a look of suffering and woe that nothing but the sorrow of her whom he so truly loves would cause on that impassive countenance'.¹⁹⁹⁵

In these final months, politics was largely forgotten as Disraeli became increasingly attentive and towards the end he never left her side. That end was reached in December. On the 6th Disraeli, clearly fearing the worst, wrote to Rose: 'Affairs are most dark here— I tremble for the result, and even an immediate one...I entirely trust to your coming to me, if anything happens, *am totally unable to meet the catastrophe*'.¹⁹⁹⁶ Monty Corry rushed down to Hughenden to support Disraeli in his wife's final hours. By now she was suffering from severe delusions. In one moment describing Disraeli as her Jesus Christ, in the next raging violently against him.¹⁹⁹⁷ On Sunday the 15th of December Mary Anne Disraeli, having refused to go to bed, died sat upright in her chair. At the age of eighty she had faced death with courage. On the 20th of December she was buried alongside Disraeli's brother James and his benefactor Mrs. Brydges-Willyams in their family vault at Hughenden's church. Her passing was the heaviest of blows imaginable to Disraeli. After her death tributes and condolences poured in. The Queen expressed her sorrow and wrote that she 'knew and admired as well as appreciated the unbounded devotion and affection which united him to the dear partner of his life, whose only thought was him'.¹⁹⁹⁸ This was followed by a series of letters from various foreign dignities and major political figures. Perhaps the most interesting among them was the undeniably heartfelt message from Gladstone:

'You and I were, as I believe, married in the same year. It has permitted to both of us to enjoy a priceless boon through a third of a century. Spared myself the blow which has fallen on you. I can form some conception of what it must have been and be. I do not presume to offer you the consolation which you will seek from another and higher quarter. I offer only the assurance which all who know you, all who knew Lady Beaconsfield, and especially those among them who like myself enjoyed for a length of time her marked though unmerited regard, may perhaps render without impropriety; the assurance that in this trying hour they feel deeply for you, and with you.'¹⁹⁹⁹

For Disraeli the loss of his wife was something from which he would never truly recover. Their marriage had been odd. She was fifteen years older than him and he had married her for her money. But they had become totally devoted to each other. Moreover, he had not just lost his wife, but he had also lost her income of £5,000 a year and also lost his London home at Grosvenor Gate. Both of which now reverted back to her family.²⁰⁰⁰ It meant that suddenly the financial worries that had plagued most of his life threatened once again to return. Some thought the grief of this loss might see him retire from politics. In fact the death of Mary-Anne would prove to have quite the opposite effect.

II: The Comeback

¹⁹⁹⁴ Cited in Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.298

¹⁹⁹⁵ Cited in M&B, vol.5, p.228

¹⁹⁹⁶ Disraeli to Rose, 6th of December 1872, cited in *Ibid*, p.228

¹⁹⁹⁷ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.299

¹⁹⁹⁸ Queen Victoria to Disraeli, 15th of December 1872, cited in M&B, vol.5, p.229

¹⁹⁹⁹ Gladstone to Disraeli, 19th of January 1873, *Ibid*, p.230

²⁰⁰⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.526

Following the election defeat in 1868 there had been criticism of Disraeli in some quarters of the party. Quiet murmuring had started taking place that perhaps he was no longer the right man to lead the party. His most vocal critics were those rebels that could not forgive him for the supposed 'surrender' of Conservative principles during the passage Reform Bill in 1867. Particularly after their great concessions were not rewarded in tangible electoral gains. Cranbourne, now titled Salisbury following his father's death in 1868, continued his anonymous attacks on Disraeli in *Quarterly Review*. In one particularly savage attack in October of 1869 he denounced Disraeli as a 'mere political gamester' which displayed the undeniable existence of some opposition in Disraeli's leadership amongst the party.²⁰⁰¹ While the most active criticism came from long-standing critics, there was a more widespread disquiet amongst the party. As Blake has observed, this could be because, it is easy to forget Derby's immense prestige and the level of regard in which he was held by the party. Therefore, it is similarly easy to underappreciate the anti-climax which was occasioned by Disraeli's succession.²⁰⁰² This juxtaposition between the pre-eminence of Derby and lesser regard for Disraeli has perhaps been somewhat overstated. The fact was then, as remains now that any politician who leads a party into such a dismal election result was going to inevitably receive some criticism from their followers. Nonetheless any sense of disquiet that did exist in 1868-1869 was somewhat intensified following Disraeli's return to writing and the sensational publication of *Lothair*. Despite the public mania that surrounded its release there were many misgivings in political circles, particularly Conservative ones, concerning the propriety and respectability of a former Prime Minister cashing in on his political pre-eminence. As Monckton Milnes reported 'his wisest friends think that it must be a mistake, and his enemies hope that it will be his ruin'.²⁰⁰³ For many Tories it was yet another symptom of Disraeli's increasing detachment from politics. Over the next two years his own declining health and the distraction of Mary-Anne's terminal decline proved further worry for his supporters.

Moreover, his apathetic opposition to the Liberals was creating more ground for concern. Gladstone's government which had at first burned through the sky like a comet, was in danger of burning out. The much-vaunted reforms of that administration had incurred the enmity of powerful interests. The Licensing Act of 1872, which regulated the production and sale of alcohol simultaneously angered both the Brewery interest who saw it as an attack on their independence and working classes who thought it an infringement of personal liberty. Cardwell's military reforms banning the sale of commissions displeased a predominantly aristocratic military interest. While the disestablishment of the Irish Church which destroyed Anglican hegemony in Ireland, Forster's Education Act which interfered with Church influence over education, and the Universities Tests Act which removed the Anglican monopoly on teaching at universities, all incited the disapprobation of Anglican interest. Moreover, Gladstone's foreign policy was increasingly giving the opposition ammunition with which to bombard the Government. Admittedly Disraeli had scored occasional points against Gladstone in the House. Particularly in condemning his handling of the Franco-Prussian war where he delivered a well-aimed and stinging attack: 'This war' Disraeli argued, 'represents the German Revolution, a greater political event than the French Revolution of last... Not a single principle in the management of our foreign affairs, accepted by all statesmen for guidance up to six months ago, any longer exists.' The result of the Governments policy towards the Franco-Prussian war was that, 'the balance of power has been entirely destroyed, and the country which suffers most, and feels the effects of this great change most, is England.' Through their non-interventionism they had allowed Russia to violate the Treaty of 1856 which had been hard won by the sacrifices of the

²⁰⁰¹ *Quarterly Review*, October 1869

²⁰⁰² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.520

²⁰⁰³ Cited in M&B, vol.5, p.164

Crimean War. Moreover, their failings had meant that Britain had lost all control over European affairs to the point that there ‘is not an engagement between Powers which is not impugned or looked upon with suspicion and without confidence’.²⁰⁰⁴ On on-looker described the attacks: ‘The Premier was like a cat on hot bricks and presented a striking contrast to Disraeli; for Disraeli cuts up a Minister with as much sang-froid as an anatomist cuts up a frog...when Gladstone rose, you could see that every stroke of Disraeli had gone home. He was in a white passion, and almost choked with words’.²⁰⁰⁵

However, these victories were few and far between. Disraeli’s general lack of activity in bringing the government to account had convinced many of his colleagues that it was time for him to step aside. Since Derby’s death and Stanley’s ascension to the Earldom many had mentioned him as the natural successor to Disraeli. In 1869 when the leadership of the Lords had come vacant upon the 14th Earl’s death Disraeli had implored Derby to take up the leadership of the upper House. The other natural figure to fill that role was Salisbury who would have been an impossible candidate given his hatred of Disraeli. Derby was an overwhelming favourite but turned down the position. Fortunately for Disraeli so did Salisbury and the role was filled by the well-respected if ineffective Duke of Richmond. Disraeli knew Derby far better than many in the party. Their relationship went all the way back to the early 1850s. He divined better than most Derby’s natural proclivity for cautious indecision and the inner dichotomy between his Liberal principles and Conservative heritage. He had been pressed to take the leadership on more than one occasion, Disraeli had even offered to step-aside for him, but on each occasion he had refused. In spite of his pedigree he was not a natural leader. Disraeli understood this.

However, whatever his own beliefs about Derby, by 1872 Disraeli’s position as the leader of the Conservative Party was a precarious as ever. On the 1st of February a meeting of leading Conservatives convened at Burghley, the family seat of Lord Exeter, to discuss the leadership of the party. That it was Lord Cairns, a colleague for whom Disraeli had great respect, who first broached the question of the leadership gives us an indication of how far unrest at his leadership had spread. The vast majority it seemed were resolved on Derby taking the lead from Disraeli. Noel the Chief Whip expressed his belief that the name alone would bring them forty to fifty seats and ‘it seemed conceded’ that under present arrangements, ‘the old Government could not, or would not, stand again.’ That said there was still great reserves of loyalty towards Disraeli. While Manners had been alone in professing his ‘ignorance of the feeling in or out of doors’. Hardy expressed his ‘view that Disraeli has been loyal to his friends, and that personally I would not say that I preferred Lord D.’ However, even more loyal members of the group such as Hardy who did hold much enthusiasm for Derby could not help ‘but admit that Disraeli, as far as appears, has not the position in House and country to enable him to do what the others might.’²⁰⁰⁶ The question then remains why did Disraeli go on as leader when almost all were convinced he could not deliver them into government? Firstly, and perhaps most comical reason was that, whether through lack of courage or a last reserve of deference to him, none of those present at the meeting actually informed Disraeli of the conclusions they had reached. Secondly, politics was central to Disraeli existence. He had a tenacity uncommon in the amateur political environment of the nineteenth century. He had endured a series of devastating setbacks and hardships in his career. Despite the result of the 1868 election, he sensed that the Conservatives were closer than they had been at any point since 1846 of re-establishing themselves a national political force. Thirdly, was that Disraeli understood that politics was a landscape that could change quickly. Especially when Gladstone was leader of the government. He thought, much like old

²⁰⁰⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 9th of February 1871, v. cc.71-96

²⁰⁰⁵ M&B, vol.5, pp.135-136

²⁰⁰⁶ Johnson (ed.), *The Diaries of Gathorne Hardy*, p.149

Earl of Derby had, that Gladstone would prove a divisive rather than a unifying figure if left to his own devices. In fact, by 1872 there were already signs that this strain overseeing every department of government was showing as it had with Peel. He was increasingly prone to angry outburst and shortness of temper. Both Malmesbury and Cairns reported that Liberals expected their leader to 'either die or break down' if he continued at his current rate.²⁰⁰⁷

In February of 1872, he received the first tangible indicator that the wind had changed and public opinion was shifting in the Conservatives favour. This change of the weather was remarkably confirmed on the 27th when along with all the other leading statesmen he attended St. Paul's cathedral for the thanksgiving service following the Prince of Wales recovery from typhoid. Sir William Fraser, recalling the event described it as a day which 'no doubt changed Disraeli's destiny'.²⁰⁰⁸ If was generally considered that 'as regards the Premiership, his chances were over', the reaction of the crowd told a different story. On exiting the service the crowd gave a rapturous ovation, in stark contrast to the silence and occasional jeering that met Gladstone. Disraeli was followed by the cheering of the crowds as he travelled through London from St. Paul's to the Carlton Club, so much so that 'the cheers which greeted him from all classes convinced him that, for the day at least, a more popular man did not exist in England'. When Fraser saw him later that morning at the Carlton in conversation with a Tory squire, Fraser noted that he 'never saw him with such a countenance as he had at that moment. I have heard it said by one, who spoke to Napoleon I...that his face was as of one who looks into another world: that is the only description I can give of Disraeli's look at the moment I speak of. He seemed more like a statue than a human being: never before nor since have I seen anything approaching it.' Later that day Fraser took the chance to speak to the same county member to enquire as to his conversation: "'What was Disraeli talking about when I came into the room?'" He replied, "About some County business: I wanted his opinion." I said, "I will tell you what he was thinking about: he was thinking that he will be Prime Minister again"²⁰⁰⁹

This might seem a somewhat fanciful and romanticized retrospective recollection of events written down more than fifteen years after the election victory of 1874. But, as Hurd has argued, it illustrates a truth about the fickle nature of public opinion in the nineteenth century.²⁰¹⁰ It is difficult to truly appreciate the significance that events such as this could have on a Victorian politician's understanding of the public mood. There then existed no modes of political forecasting or accurate opinion polling that are so prevalent today. As we have seen with Disraeli's often wild predictions of election results, the political leaders of the nineteenth century were often guessing how the public would react to their policies. The policy of Church defence had failed in both 1865 and 1868 when Disraeli had predicted it would yield a Conservative majority. Therefore, this outpouring of popular adulation for the Tory leader was not to be so easily dismissed. Moreover, it was further supported by a more national shift in opinion at by-elections where the Liberals lost a total of thirteen seats in 1871 and 1872.²⁰¹¹

Disraeli knew the time had come to launch a counter-offensive and to get on the front foot. In April of 1872 he undertook his first national speaking campaign. The vast majority of Disraeli's public speeches outside of the House had been made to his Buckinghamshire constituents. He had never built up the reputation Gladstone or Bright had in addressing large crowds. He was not, as he called them, a demagogue. Managed by John Gorst, who Disraeli had commissioned to oversee the reconstruction of the Conservative party machine and the foundation of the Conservative Central Office, he went to Manchester to deliver the first of two speeches which reestablished he supremacy

²⁰⁰⁷ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.291; Vincent, *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party*, p.341

²⁰⁰⁸ Sir William Fraser, *Disraeli and His Day*, (London: Keegan Paul, 1891) p.374

²⁰⁰⁹ *Ibid*, pp.374-376

²⁰¹⁰ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.227

²⁰¹¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.528

within his party and vaguely mapped out future Conservative policy. On the 3rd of April Disraeli addressed the gather audience at Free Trade Hall. Disraeli performed well and spoke for three and a quarter hours, sustained by consuming increasingly strong potations of brandy.²⁰¹² The main thrust of the speech was to repudiated the claims of their opponents: ‘that the Conservative party have no political programme’. Disraeli admitted that, ‘If by a programme is meant a plan to despoil churches and plunder landlords, I admit we have no programme. If by a programme is meant a policy which assails or menaces every institution and every interest, every class and every calling in the country, I admit we have no programme.’ Rather, he contended, ‘the programme of the Conservative party is to maintain the Constitution of the country.’²⁰¹³ The vast majority of the speech was an elucidation on this theme. He stirred up the dangers of radical reformers which threatened the Lords, Church and Crown for ‘when the banner of Republicanism is unfurled...the fundamental principles of our institutions are controverted’. And charted the contributions that the great institutions of the state made to national safety and prosperity. This speech like so many of Disraeli’s other orations, was founded on his own understanding of the constitution. Nor was it really new material, for much of the speech he was restating the principles which he had expounded some thirty-five years earlier in *Vindication* and *Spirit of Whiggism*. Admittedly Disraeli tailored it to a contemporary audience. He briefly touched on the condition of the working class and importance of domestic health legislation: ‘Pure air, pure water, the inspection of unhealthy habitations, the adulteration of food, these and many kindred matters may be legitimately dealt with by the Legislature...*Sanitas sanitatum omnia sanitas*’.²⁰¹⁴ In perhaps the most famous passage of the speech he vividly compared the government to ‘one of those marine landscapes not very unusual on the coasts of South America. You behold a range of exhausted volcanoes. Not a flame flickers on a single pallid crest.’²⁰¹⁵ He concluded with a series of blistering attacks on the government’s foreign policy which when entwined with the dangerous military reforms and naval economies had ‘intimated the decay of the power of England and the decline of its resources’. In contrast Disraeli stated his ‘confident conviction that there never was a moment in our history when the power of England was so great and her resources so vast and inexhaustible...[For] it is not merely our fleets and armies, our powerful artillery, our accumulated capital, and our unlimited credit on which I so much depend, as upon that unbroken spirit of her people, which I believe was never prouder of the Imperial country to which they belong.’²⁰¹⁶

This speech was followed up at the end of June by another public oration at London’s Crystal palace. Once more Disraeli returned to another of his well-rehearsed themes: the history of party politics and historical and present character of the two great parties. Paraphrasing an earlier speech, he argued, ‘the Tory party unless it is a national party, is nothing. It is not a confederacy of nobles, it is not a democratic multitude; it is a party formed from all the numerous classes in the realm’. By contrast, the Liberals, like the Whigs before them were ‘influenced in a great degree by the philosophy and the politics of the Continent, they endeavoured to substitute cosmopolitan for national principles.’²⁰¹⁷ This was followed by a repetition of what he had said at Manchester, that the central principle of the Conservative party was ‘to maintain the institutions of the country — not from any sentiment of political superstition, but because we believe that they embody the principles upon which a community like England can alone safely rest.’²⁰¹⁸ Institutions that had been systematically assailed and assaulted by the forces of Liberalism. Once again, he touched upon the domestic health reforms,

²⁰¹² M&B, vol.5, p.187

²⁰¹³ Kebbel, *Speeches*, vol.2, p.491

²⁰¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.511

²⁰¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.516

²⁰¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.522

²⁰¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.524; see also *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 25th of February 1867, v.185 c.937

²⁰¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.525

the ‘policy of sewage’ as his opponents had coined it, but for Disraeli a broad subject that ‘involves the state of the dwellings of the people, the moral consequences of which are not less considerable than the physical. It involves their enjoyment of some of the chief elements of nature—air, light, and water. It involves the regulation of their industry and the inspection of their toil.’ Moreover, it was ‘the policy of the Tory party’ as it was only the ‘hereditary, the traditional policy of the Tory party, that would improve the condition of the people’.²⁰¹⁹ One area where he expanded on Manchester was on his ideas of empire. Here his narrative was largely focused on ‘the attempts of Liberalism to effect the disintegration of the Empire of England.’ He made some predictably vague suggestion for the reordering of the colonies. He conceded the necessity of self-government for the colonies, but argued that it ‘ought to have been conceded as part of a great policy of Imperial consolidation.’ He introduced around ideas of an ‘Imperial tariff’ and ‘military code’ by which the defence of the empire might be regulated. He even suggested a ‘representative council...which would have brought the Colonies into constant and continuous relations with the Home Government.’²⁰²⁰

What is most striking when one reads these speeches is the contrast between on the one hand their popular reputation as the announcement of a new policy of Tory democracy and new imperialism and on the other, what they actually say. In the vast majority, these speeches represented a repetition of the exactly the same arguments that Disraeli had made over the last four decades, made in almost exactly the same manner. With regard to empire Disraeli may have thrown around a few new notions, but he was certainly not pre-empting the imperial policy of Joseph Chamberlain at the end of the century. The constructive suggestions he did make were bandied around casually. In the main his allusions to empire were an attack on Liberal imperial policy and an attempt to reclaim foreign policy as the natural domain of the Conservative party. His ideas in empire, at any rate, remained obscured and somewhat undefined. Disraeli’s vision of foreign policy was not any innovation but rather an extension of Palmerston’s conception. That international prestige was an asset that one could take to the bank. Britain’s role as a major imperial power could only be maintained if she was willing to assert herself internationally. This contrasted greatly with the non-interventionist foreign policies pursued by Gladstone’s government. It seems unlikely, as Morley argued, that Disraeli’s ‘rare faculty of wide and sweeping forecast’ allowed him to ‘read aright the signs and characteristics of the time’.²⁰²¹ However, whether by luck or judgement, his vague ideas of rejuvenated imperial and confident foreign policy, resounded with a country with an increasing national pride and international self-assertiveness. Moreover, with regard to the brief passages on social reform, there were certainly echoes of the sentiments contained in *Sybil*, and the imagery in the speech certainly takes us back to slum dwellings of Marney or Wodgate. But, in essence nothing had changed, these were the same ideals he had expressed in the 1840s. Now they were framed in a more practical manner. They were now a matter for legislation rather than romantic aristocratic paternalism. What that legislation might look like however was still anyone’s guess. Far from being the inception of a new brand of Conservative politics, the public speaking campaign of 1872 was a firm restatement of the same Conservative principles he had contrived in his formative years. The importance of these short passages was only decided later on by true One Nation Conservatives and Tory Democrats who saw in Disraeli’s utterances the germination and historical precedent of their own political creed.

At the end of 1872 Gladstone’s reputation suffered further damage. His handling of both the Collier and Ewelme affairs were ‘widely regarded as showing that exhaustion combined with an imperious nature were leading Gladstone away from judgement and proportion towards a petulant authoritarianism’.²⁰²² Thus, with momentum gathering for the Conservative outdoors, they were still

²⁰¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp.532-533

²⁰²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 529-530

²⁰²¹ Morley, *Gladstone*, vol.2, p.392

²⁰²² Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p.370; M&B, vol.5, p.180

in need of a parliamentary victory to signal the change in their fortunes. This opportunity came in the first session of 1873. Gladstone's Irish University Bill was intended to be the crowning glory of his government's Irish policy which had already dealt with religious and land reform. Moreover, it intended to succeed exactly where Disraeli had failed in 1868: to institute a Roman Catholic university in Dublin by amalgamating the existing Anglican establishment, Trinity College Dublin with the Catholic University of Ireland where J.H. Newman was rector. It was a move which, as Blake astutely noted, 'satisfied neither Catholics nor Protestants'.²⁰²³ Indeed both parliamentary groups most representative of those respective religious interest were openly hostile to it. While Gladstone's 'intensity of feeling' was beginning to exasperate even his own followers. Not only was the Irish University question not a major priority, 'many Liberals did not think it should be a question at all; there was no interest in it in the party, and strong private opposition in many quarters.'²⁰²⁴ When the Bill came to its Second Reading it was roundly criticized by an unusual, though not totally incompatible, alliance of Conservatives and Irish Roman Catholics.²⁰²⁵ Tracing the history of Irish policy, Disraeli declared the policy of concurrent endowment 'dead' arguing that in spite of its faults 'it was at least a policy and the policy of great statesmen. It was the policy of Pitt, of Grey, of Russell, of Peel, and of Palmerston.' In contrast Gladstone had substituted it for 'the policy of confiscation. You have had four years of it. You have despoiled Churches. You have threatened every corporation and endowment in the country. You have examined into everybody's affairs. You have criticized every profession and vexed every trade. No one is certain of his property, and nobody knows what duties he may have to perform tomorrow. This is the policy of confiscation as compared with that of concurrent endowment. The Irish Roman Catholic gentlemen were perfectly satisfied when you were despoiling the Irish Church. They looked not unwillingly upon the plunder of the Irish landlords, and they thought that the time had arrived when the great drama would be fulfilled, and the spirit of confiscation would descend upon the celebrated walls of Trinity College, would level them to the ground, and endow the University of Stephen's Green...I believe that the people of this country have had enough of the policy of confiscation.'²⁰²⁶ Disraeli defiantly concluded by announcing his intention to vote against a Bill which he believe to be 'monstrous in its general conception, pernicious in many of its details, and utterly futile as a measure of practical legislation.'²⁰²⁷ The opposition held firm in the face of government threats of dissolution. When the House divided, they voted 287 to 284 against the Bill.

For Gladstone it was a shocking reverse. His government resolved on resignation. This was eventually offered to Victoria who promptly asked Disraeli to form a new administration. However, sensing the that political tide was turning in his favour and perhaps still bruised from his experiences as Prime Minister in 1868, he was unwilling to once again take office as a minority administration. Especially when the Liberals had such an overwhelming majority in the House. In an audience with the Queen made his position clear, that 'I decline to form a Government in the present Parliament, and I do not ask for a dissolution.'²⁰²⁸ Gladstone was outraged at this move declaring that it was the constitutional right for the opposition to attempt to form a government when that opposition had defeated the current government on a vote that was made an issue of confidence.²⁰²⁹ Disraeli argued that this was not the case when the groups that had allied themselves against the measure, in this case the Conservatives and the Irish Home Rule members, two groups who had nothing in common except

²⁰²³ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.527

²⁰²⁴ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.266-268

²⁰²⁵ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of March 1873, v.214 cc.1741-1868

²⁰²⁶ *Ibid*, cc.1824-1827

²⁰²⁷ *Ibid*, c.1829

²⁰²⁸ Queen Victoria Memorandum, 13th of March 1873, cited in M&B, vol.5, p.209

²⁰²⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.528

for their opposition to the Irish Universities Bill. As for, ‘the Irish lot’, Disraeli could see conceive of no alliance with such a group of whom he admitted to Ponsonby, ‘I detest and disagree with, and who would throw me over whenever it suited their purpose.’²⁰³⁰ When pressed by the Private Secretary on his responsibility to form a government after defeating Gladstone he simple argued, ‘No...we did not defeat the Government. We threw out a stupid, blundering Bill, which Gladstone, in his *tete moniee* way, tried to make a vote of confidence. It was a foolish mistake of his; but he has condoned for it by resigning. He can now resume office with perfect freedom.’²⁰³¹

Gladstone in his typically suspicious way accused Disraeli of some kind of trickery. In this he was likely wrong. Disraeli was under no compulsion to form a government and would have been foolish to attempt to do so in such a Liberal House of Commons. However, that is not to say that there was not some calculation behind Disraeli’s actions. He understood the direction the wind was blowing and realised the mood of the country was shifting, but he did not yet know how strongly or how transformed. As he told Ponsonby, if he was to form a minority government with the intention of dissolution, ‘for two months at least Parliament must continue, while the regular estimates. Mutiny Act, etc., are passed. The Conservatives are gaining favour in the country, but these two months would ruin them. They would be exposed in a hostile House to every insult which the Opposition might choose to fling at them, and the party would be seriously damaged, while the business of the country would suffer.’²⁰³² Instead Disraeli wished to put a disgruntled and increasingly irritable Gladstone back into bat. For, as Hanham argued, ‘by waiting and allowing Liberal divisions to become deeper the Conservative position was immensely strengthened’.²⁰³³ The whole episode was testament to Disraeli’s restraint a decision distinctly at odds with that of the political adventurer. Blake was quick to contrast this ‘masterly restraint’ with his ‘readiness to profit by adventitious Radical alliances’ when Derby was leader.²⁰³⁴ However, the situation was much changed. First, Disraeli, in contrast to some of his colleagues, did not see Toryism and Radicalism as mutually exclusive creeds. The broad agreement over the Second Reform Act had evidenced that. Disraeli saw both as national political forces which represented the interests of the English people. Two different sides of the same coin. The same could certainly not be said of Irish Nationalists whose coincidental agreement with Conservative condemnation of the Irish Universities Bill had brought about Gladstone’s defeat. Second, politics had changed after 1867. It is doubtful that Disraeli clearly perceived this, but perhaps he dimly sensed it. Whereas in the 1850s and 1860s a feasible conservative majority could have been found through a combination of Conservatives and other groups, Disraeli’s exchanges to the Queen showed that by 1873 he realised that a new majority could only be delivered by an election and a new popular mandate. The Age of Equipoise had ended and after the death of Palmerston a more distinct demarcation between political parties and their political principles had been re-established. As party began to supersede personality so elections rather than parliamentary confidence decided the lifespan of a government.

Through this exchange Disraeli’s position had greatly improved. In the opinion of both the Conservative party and the public, the decision not to take office had only enhanced his standing in the country. Delane, editor of *The Times*, that organ of moderate opinion, reported to Disraeli via Lennox was of the opinion that: ‘you now stand in the highest position in which any statesman has stood for many years past; that you had by your decision given proof of the very highest order of statesmanship, both unselfish and patriotic...will earn for you the gratitude of your followers and the respect and admiration of your opponents; and lastly that in this matter you have displayed a judgment

²⁰³⁰ Posonby Memorandum, 13th of March 1873, cited in M&B, p.211

²⁰³¹ *Ibid*, p.211

²⁰³² *Ibid*, p.211

²⁰³³ Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, p.221

²⁰³⁴ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.529

and a spirit of which Gladstone would be utterly incapable.²⁰³⁵ With over two years left in the current parliament Disraeli was now willing to watch and wait as internal Liberal divisions drove public opinion in favour of the Conservatives. He was certainly in no rush for an election. Given the choice in the prevailing political climate it seems likely he would have preferred to wait until 1875 and the end of the parliament before going to the polls.

By contrast, with the Conservatives unwilling to form a minority administration Gladstone was once again forced to take the helm and in a far weaker position than he had been before. As Shannon put it, he ‘was now the leader of a wounded and limping ministry without cause’.²⁰³⁶ Furthermore, it was made worse by his decision to dispense with the services of Lowe as Chancellor following a series of scandals connected with the misallocation of public funds to the telegraph and postal services.²⁰³⁷ He was reshuffled to the Home Office and Gladstone took up the Exchequer himself. This not only increased his workload, but also raised a quite serious legal point. Gladstone has not the Member of a safe seat. His majority in Greenwich was not large and he was not even the senior Member. This brought about the question of Gladstone’s re-election in order to take up ministerial office. As Blake noted, ‘this was no mere academic point’.²⁰³⁸ Gladstone found legal advice that assured him he need not resubmit himself, but this opinion was far from unanimous and gave ammunition to the critics who already accused Gladstone of dictating to his party and bending the rule for his own purposes.²⁰³⁹ Defeat had left the Liberal party directionless, having achieved so much in the first few years of his government, there now seemed to be no great issue on which a majority agreed. Thus, Gladstone’s decision to take the Exchequer upon himself signalled that he was returning to the historically productive and popular hunting ground to bring about Liberal unity. As he told Bright: ‘what we want at present is a *positive* force to carry us onward as a body... I may possibly, I think, be had out of *finance*’.²⁰⁴⁰ He hoped that Liberal popular authority might be restored through the ‘abolition of the Income Tax & Sugar Duties with partial compensation from the Spirits & Death Duties’.²⁰⁴¹ In consultation with Bright, Wolverton and Granville they calculated a required budgetary surplus of £8 million in order to facilitate the proposed tax reductions. Since accurate estimates were not available until the last quarter and the new financial proposals contained in a popular ‘big’ budget needed careful planning the reconvention of parliament was postponed until the 5th of February 1874.²⁰⁴²

It soon became apparent that Gladstone could only find a surplus of around £5 million. Therefore, in order to find the required surplus it would involve substantial austerity measures from both the Admiralty and the War Office. Gladstone, as was his wont, had become ideologically committed to the necessity and political sanctity of these financial proposals. As he mused in his diary: ‘Have the Govt. & party any other mode of giving their friends fair play at the elections, than by such a budget as has been sketched’.²⁰⁴³ Gladstone was destined to be disappointed as both Goschen at the Admiralty and Cardwell at the War Office were forced to admit defeat in finding the required surplus. Thus, Gladstone’s mind turned toward the future and found a chance to invert his thinking. As Shannon shrewdly recognised, he went from ‘a big budget being the means of restoring

²⁰³⁵ M&B, vol.5, p.218

²⁰³⁶ Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics*, p.252

²⁰³⁷ While Lowe was not directly at fault for the scandals, they did somewhat get back to him. Moreover, while Gladstone admired Lowe he remained unconvinced as to his suitability to the exchequer. Whether actually angry at the scandal or simply personally underwhelmed by Lowe’s performance as Chancellor, the issues with telegraph and postal services served as a reason to shuffle him from the exchequer.

²⁰³⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.529

²⁰³⁹ Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics*, p.254

²⁰⁴⁰ Gladstone to Bright, 14th of August 1873, cited in *Ibid*, p.255

²⁰⁴¹ Gladstone to Cardwell, cited in *Ibid*, p.255

²⁰⁴² *Ibid*, pp.255-256

²⁰⁴³ Gladstone Diary, 19th of January 1874, *The Gladstone Diaries*, vol.8, pp.442-444

public authority to the government prior to a dissolution', to dissolution becoming 'the means of providing public authority needed to launch a big budget.'²⁰⁴⁴ With this new realisation, Gladstone moved quickly to snatch the initiative. Indeed, Disraeli was very surprised when having just arrived in his London hotel on Friday the 23rd of January, he awoke the next morning to find *The Times*, announcing an immediate dissolution of parliament in preparation of a general election and that Gladstone had simultaneously launched his campaign with a public statement.²⁰⁴⁵ This came in the form of a public letter to the electors of Greenwich which celebrated the government's achievements in Ireland and formally announced that the next great reforms would be in the realm of finance. He claimed that he did 'not fear to anticipate as the probable balance a surplus exceeding rather than falling short of £5,000,000' and thus with such a surplus great 'boons...will now be in the power of the new Parliament at once to confer'. This would come in the form of the immediate repeal of Income Tax which had historically employed as a 'war tax' but had unintentionally achieved a more permanent status when it was introduced by Sir Robert Peel 'principally to allow of important advances in the direction of Free Trade' and 'the great work of liberation which has been accomplished by its aid'. But now the government was faced 'a great opportunity of affording relief to the community, and an opportunity which ought be turned to the very best account'. That was the opportunity to do away with Income Tax entirely, for 'at the sacrifice for the financial year of something less than £5,500,000, the country may enjoy the advantage and relief of its total repeal'.²⁰⁴⁶ As Buckle saw it, 'Gladstone, in appealing to the electors to give him a new lease of power, had dangled before their eyes a surplus of several millions, and promised therewith to abolish the income tax.'²⁰⁴⁷

It was a bold move by Gladstone and one that looks to modern onlookers to be a really quite opportunist one. It was tantamount to buying votes with the promise of reduced taxation. Though he would have no doubt preferred to have passed the budget before going to the country. Despite promising reforms which pandered to a steadily growing working-class electorate, it was striking that Gladstone's campaign was accompanied by none of the great public speaking displays that had accompanied the great Reform debates or the 1868 election. The 'People's William' was conspicuous by his absence from the circuit of great demagogic orations. Indeed, he spoke in his own constituency of Greenwich three times, but he did not speak outside it. He did not undertake a great national campaign as he had in the past.²⁰⁴⁸ In this sense his campaign directed to his own electors in Greenwich reflected far more closely Disraeli's own understanding of politics. Rarely expressing his opinions to the public outside of his two homes: the county of Buckinghamshire or the House of Commons. Moreover, Gladstone, who was usually so more in touch with the public mood than Disraeli, was on this occasion strangely ignorant of the groundswell of Conservative feeling in the country. In fact, the promise of Income Tax abolition was a strange choice of rallying cry for the country. To be sure, it was an attractive proposal, the abolition of taxes always are. But, since 1842 its existence had seemed increasingly more permanent and its annual approval increasing perfunctory. In stark contrast to his warning in 1866 that 'You cannot fight against the future. Time is on our side...those great social forces are against you; they are marshalled on our side', his attitude in 1874 was distinctly passive.²⁰⁴⁹ As Jenkins put it, his fiscal programme was 'so manifestly the last shot of an old war rather than a harbinger of the future'.²⁰⁵⁰

²⁰⁴⁴ Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics*, p.257

²⁰⁴⁵ M&B, vol.5, p.272

²⁰⁴⁶ *The Times*, 24th of January 1874, p.8

²⁰⁴⁷ M&B, vol.5, p.272

²⁰⁴⁸ Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p.377

²⁰⁴⁹ *Hansard* 3rd Series, House of Commons, 27th of April 1866, v.183, c.152

²⁰⁵⁰ Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p.376

Disraeli's, far from being caught off guard, was stung into action. Gathering all his available colleagues to Edward's hotel to formulate their own manifesto. As Disraeli told Lady Chesterfield, 'I telegraphed to my secretary, Montagu Corry...Ld. Derby, Lord Cairns, Mr. Hardy, and Sir Stafford Northcote. Lord Cairns and Mr. Hardy soon appeared, my secretary at night; and working hard all the next day we got copies prepared for all the Monday morning's papers.'²⁰⁵¹ Disraeli's response addressing the electors of Buckinghamshire he declared Gladstone's manifesto a 'prolix narrative'. It mentioned many of the great questions which confronted the state but contained 'nothing definite as to the policy he would pursue'. Much of the address followed Disraeli's time-honoured attacks on the Liberals. For, while there was reason to believe that Gladstone was not yet 'opposed to our national institutions or to the maintenance of the integrity of our Empire', there were many among his followers who 'assail the Monarchy, other impugn the House of Lords' some supported Home Rule while others wished to pursue a policy of 'disestablishing the Anglican as he has despoiled the Irish Church', while others still wished to remove 'Religion from the place it ought to occupy in National Education'. By far the most significant parts of Disraeli's manifesto were a lengthy attack on the conduct Gladstone's foreign policy regarding the Straits of Malacca and the promise to resist further Parliamentary Reform, for the Tories, having 'proved they are not afraid of popular rights' now wished to uphold the historic differences 'between the franchises in the two divisions of the country'. With regard to domestic policy he believed that 'English people are governed by their customs as much as by their laws'. Therefore, he promised to bring to an end the 'incessant and harassing legislation' of the current government who should have 'put a little more energy into our foreign policy and a little less into our domestic legislation'.²⁰⁵² Disraeli's address was little different from anything he had offered voters in the past. In essence it was the same promise institutional preservation in contrast to dangers anti-constitutional Liberal reforms that had signally failed so many time before. Admittedly he had added the empire to his list of great national institutions but said very little about it. While any indication of grand programme of social legislation was limited to a promise to 'continue to endeavour, to propose or support all measures calculated to improve the conditions of the people'.²⁰⁵³

All of this hardly added up to new political programme. In fact, none of Disraeli's ideas seemed particularly novel. The address was undoubtedly, as Buckle long ago recognised, 'rather of a negative character'.²⁰⁵⁴ Indeed, it was somewhat ironic that having accused Gladstone of offering no clear direction with regard to policy, that he should be equally, if not more, indistinct in his own statement. That was not surprising. Disraeli very rarely dealt in detail, he was a politician who thought in great principles and grandiose visions, not in the minutiae of legislation. He was hardly likely to change that habit in his seventieth year. When the result on the 1874 election began to come clear, it was one that not many predicted. Disraeli who had so often been over-optimistic about Conservative chances was equally wrong in his conservative estimate in 1874. Gorst, just as Spofforth had in 1868, predicted a small Conservative majority: Conservative 328 others 325. A result which would have left Disraeli at the mercy of malcontent backbenchers.²⁰⁵⁵ However, all were proved wrong when the final result saw the Conservative's returned with a majority over the Liberals of 108 and an absolute majority of nearly 50.²⁰⁵⁶ The question that needs some investigation is why, at nearly seventy years old, with apparently no change of political direction, under an even larger electorate than in 1868 and after the introduction of the secret ballot the effects of which most moderate politicians had so long

²⁰⁵¹ Cited in M&B, vol.5, p.273

²⁰⁵² *The Times*, 26th of January 1874, p.8

²⁰⁵³ *Ibid*, p.8

²⁰⁵⁴ M&B, vol.5, p.274

²⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.277

²⁰⁵⁶ Craig, *British Electoral Facts*, p.301

feared, was Disraeli able to secure a landslide victory turning out one of British history's great reforming ministries? There is no simple answer. Rather a multifaceted combination of factors which turned out, for once, to be in Disraeli's favour.

First, Gladstone could not have called for a dissolution at a worse time. While Conservative stock had been rising across the country for some years and some form of swing back to the Tories was to be expected, he called for an election when his party was at its most vulnerable. His own seat in Greenwich was far from safe and having taken on the Exchequer without resorting himself to re-election been the source of criticism, not least from Disraeli.²⁰⁵⁷ Moreover, the party was in a situation where its foreign policy was under fierce attack from the opposition and the cabinet was split over the ways and means for Gladstone's plan to abolish Income Tax. The issues were interconnected. Gladstone's obsession for political economy had seen defence spending plummet to its lowest figure since before the Crimean War, while typically a laudable achievement, it gave his critics ammunition to attack his foreign policy and hound him for enfeebling the nation in the face of a growing German military threat and an increasingly intransigent Russia.²⁰⁵⁸ With regard to Income Tax, Gladstone had done nothing to address the split in the party. Rather, in typically impulsive fashion, instead of seeking a compromise with his colleagues, had appealed over their head to "the people" to get the mandate he needed to hammer his new plan through parliament. While the dissolution took Disraeli and the leading Conservatives by surprise, it came an almost equal surprise to most Liberals who were now divided and unprepared with many moderate figures concerned as to the long-term consequences of Gladstone's actions.²⁰⁵⁹

Second, and perhaps most easily identifiable, was the vast leaps the Conservatives had made in terms of party management. Disraeli, having always looked at politics in terms of great parties, was perhaps ahead of his time when it came to party organisation. He had been working on the reorganisation alongside his friend Philip Rose since the 1850s. But their defeat in 1868 had shown how insufficient the old system was for an age of household suffrage and large popular constituencies.²⁰⁶⁰ Under the direction of Disraeli, John Gorst oversaw a complete overhaul of the Tory party machine. He succeeded Spofforth as the party's principal agent and set up the Conservative Central Office which began to oversee all of the party's electoral management. For the first time candidates were formally chosen in advance of elections and selected by a group of local Conservatives who formed themselves into local associations. Indeed, in 1874 the Tories were able to contest far more elections than they had in the past. While the Liberals conceded nearly 100 seats to Conservatives uncontested, by contrast the Liberals were forced to go to the polls in far more constituencies.²⁰⁶¹ While the Liberal party machine would outstrip the Conservatives' by the end of the century, in 1874 their organisation was far superior and were, despite the unexpected nature of the dissolution, far more prepared for an election than their Liberal counterparts. It was undeniable that Disraeli, in instigating this quiet revolution in the Conservative party's management had contributed to the creation of the 'first great party machine' which helped reap 'the harvest in the victory of 1874.'²⁰⁶²

The third factor, and one that needs greater investigation, was how far the changes to the electoral system made in 1867 and during Gladstone's government contributed to Conservative success in 1874. Of course, the 1868 election had been fought on the 1867 franchise, but the register was yet to include those who had previously compounded their rates. Moreover, by 1869 following

²⁰⁵⁷ *The Times*, 26th of January 1874, p.8

²⁰⁵⁸ Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.269

²⁰⁵⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.535; Parry, *Ibid*, p.272

²⁰⁶⁰ M&B, vol.5, p.184

²⁰⁶¹ Craig, *British Electoral Fact*, p.304

²⁰⁶² M&B, vol.5, p.186

widespread protest, the practice of compounding was reinstated by Goschen who allowed men to compound their rents and rates while maintaining the vote, thereby stripping away the much-vaunted principle of selection: the personal payment of rates.²⁰⁶³ This added even more voters to the register, including all those who Hodgkinson's amendment would have disqualified through default.

Therefore, in 1874 the borough franchise was now pure household suffrage and consequently the borough electorate was far larger than it had been in 1868 increasing by some 200,000 voters.²⁰⁶⁴

There had always been some suggestion during 1866 and 1867 that there might be found among urban working classes, outside of the great metropolises, a strong vein on Conservatism. Indeed, Disraeli had been advised in 1868 that: 'the Conservative feeling is more predominant in the humbler portion of the householders'.²⁰⁶⁵ At the very least Disraeli had never feared the extension of the vote to the borough working classes would seriously damage the influence of the landed interest and propertied classes in smaller boroughs where 'the influence of land and wealth would be supreme', as it was 'always known' that the working classes of the small boroughs were deferential and 'under the patronage of the Upper classes'.²⁰⁶⁶

This faith in the deference of the English working classes was very much put to the test by the removal of open voting and the introduction of the secret ballot. When the bill was first introduced in 1870, Disraeli had argued that the electoral system was still one of virtual representation. In that as they had not yet reached universal suffrage, each voter was representative of those who were not in possession of a vote. In that sense he had never 'looked upon the franchise as a trust', far less a right, rather he had 'always looked upon the franchise as a privilege' one that 'ought to be freely exercised... a matter entirely apart from the merits or demerits of secret voting'.²⁰⁶⁷ Indeed, this contradicted the radical canon that believed the ballot would secure security from intimidation and influence, rather he had 'always thought that the wider the suffrage the less claim there will be for the adoption of the Ballot—that the strength and security of the voters will be proportionately increased... that the larger the constituency the greater will be its moral power, and the less would be the inclination, or the opportunity, to bring improper influence upon the exercise of the franchise by that constituency'.²⁰⁶⁸ However, the first election held under a secret ballot yielded a Conservative landslide. Most remarkably they were able to win a majority of the boroughs where the Liberals had long been predominant. The question remains: why? Perhaps they were right to believe in 1867 that in the English working classes would be found a solid core of Conservative voters. There is little to suggest this was foreseen. Though they had more chance with the settlement of 1867 than the consistently Liberal 'shopkeepers' franchise of 1832. Perhaps, as Bernal Osbourne had argued in 1867, the ballot might check the influence of those radical trade unions and protect 'the position the poor voter was in from the tyranny that might be exercised upon him by his own class'.²⁰⁶⁹ The increased working class electorate and the introduction of the ballot almost certainly contributed to Conservative success, these two electoral changes coincided with a reversal of Conservative fortunes in the boroughs and ended the uninterrupted hegemony of the Whigs and Liberal tracing back to 1832. Even Peel in 1841 had not managed to win the number of borough seats Disraeli did in 1874. However, without further investigation that is beyond the parameters of this present work, it is hard to say how far these electoral changes alone effected Conservative fortunes. Instead, we must be content to include them in web of factors contributing to the Conservative success.

²⁰⁶³ Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, p.274-275

²⁰⁶⁴ Blake, p.546

²⁰⁶⁵ Cited in Blake, *Disraeli*, p.536

²⁰⁶⁶ *Carnarvon Diaries*, 25th of February 1867, p.152; Disraeli to Derby, 25th of February 1867, Derby Papers, 146/3

²⁰⁶⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 27th of July 1870, v.203, c.1037

²⁰⁶⁸ *Ibid*, cc.1037-1038

²⁰⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 12th of July 1867, v.188, c.1445

One prevailing view was that the British people had become so tiresome of Gladstone's meddling and incessant reforming that they removed him from office. Gladstone himself assigned his defeat to the ingratitude of the English people, declaring to his brother that we have been 'drowned in a torrent of gin and beer'.²⁰⁷⁰ There was undoubtedly some truth in this. Gladstone's government had gone about reforming nearly every aspect of British public and private life. Disraeli in his election address had promised to bring to an end the 'incessant and harassing legislation' undertaken by the Liberal government.²⁰⁷¹ Moreover, it is understandable that this should happen and has more modern evidence. The great post-war reforming Labour ministry headed by Clement Attlee which helped to forge so much of the machinery of the modern state was summarily rejected at the following election in favour of the septuagenarian Churchill. However, it was not just the working classes who had been harassed and instructed by Gladstone's legislating, the reforms had given too much influence to fringe groups within the party. As Parry has recognised, 'too many electors believed that vociferous Dissenters, 'Little Englanders' and Irish Catholics had excessive power over the party'.²⁰⁷² In addition, Gladstone's Irish policy especially disestablishment of the Irish Church when combined with his proposed abolition of Income Tax had caused the disaffection of propertied and Anglican interests who sought safety within the ranks of the Conservatives who promised stability and repose. Furthermore, Gladstone had never been a unifying figure within Liberal politics, but the policies of his government had and the manner in which he had forced them through had seen a fracture between him and the moderate Liberal and Whig elements who came to see him as a despot.²⁰⁷³ All of this played a large part in contributing to Conservative success, but it does not totally explain it. Dissatisfaction with one leader or one party rarely causes a landslide for another.

One factor that historians have so often overlooked with regard to the 1874 election, indeed Blake does not mention it in relation to the Conservative victory in 1874, was Disraeli's own newfound popularity. The warmth of feeling for Disraeli had been demonstrated by the public demonstrations of affection at Glasgow where he was elected rector of the university, in London following the service at St. Pauls and later in Manchester where crowds had lined the streets to see him prior to his famous address at Free Trade Hall. Why there was this seemingly sudden change in public feeling for him is difficult to say for sure. Popularity is fickle and hard to define, especially in an age prior to opinion polling. However, in Disraeli's case, he had long been a household name and had achieved a kind of pet status among the public. He was always referred to as 'Dizzy' and was rarely far from a punch cartoon but a nevertheless a fixture at the head of British politics.²⁰⁷⁴ It is not so great a leap to imagine that a British public and newly enfranchised electorate, who had been captivated by Gladstone's force of moral certainty in 1868, could have come to admire his opponent who had patiently and courageously weathered defeats, abuse and continued setbacks in his leadership of the party. This is a somewhat romanticised view of the popularity Disraeli discovered throughout the 1870s. That is not to say it is unrealistic, but it must be tempered by the contrasting fortunes of Gladstone's own popularity. His government's reforming zeal had worn thin with the enthusiasms of the new electorate and his non-interventionist foreign policy had clashed with the emerging spirit of a new age one which brimmed with national pride and sought patriotic prestige. Disraeli's attacks in this quarter when coupled with his attempts to move the Conservative party to the position for so long occupied by Palmerston undoubtedly resonated with the new electorate. Though it seems the British public came to admire him less for what he said or did, than for perhaps for no other reason than for what they perceived him to be: non-typical, celebrity novelist, mysterious genius and familiar face of

²⁰⁷⁰ Cited in Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.304

²⁰⁷¹ *The Times*, 26th of January 1874, p.8

²⁰⁷² Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.272

²⁰⁷³ *Ibid*, pp.271--272

²⁰⁷⁴ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.294

politics. His views were as consistently Conservative as any other in the party. His aims in politics had not materially changed since the 1840s. He expressed them with imaginative flair and romantic flourishes, but nevertheless they boiled down to a vindication and maintenance of the existing socio-political and constitutional arrangements of the country. By contrast, his public image, thanks in much part to the press, was of a man quite unlike any other in England. As Fraser recalled, Disraeli possessed an attraction and charm which ‘his origin, appearance, and manner’ might have belied. As one Tory county member, Mr. Pell once expressed to him, “In spite of it all, damn the fellow! One cannot help loving him!”²⁰⁷⁵ Perhaps Buckle best recognised this shift in popular opinion when he long-ago suggested that in the 1870s, ‘there was now an awakening to the fact that his patience, his courage, his genius, his experience, and his patriotism constituted a character round which popular feeling, disappointed in its idol, might safely rally.’²⁰⁷⁶

While none of this amounts to a psephological analysis of what happened in 1874, it at least shows there were a multitude of factors in play, many of which were not fully understood by the main protagonists, that contributed to the Conservative landslide. The result was an undoubted personal triumph for Disraeli. Any lingering questions surrounding his leadership disappeared. He was now the unrivalled chief of a restored and harmonious Tory party. Twenty-eight years on from the great schism over the Corn Laws, he came to reap the rewards of the collaborations with his two late political partners, the Lords Bentinck and Derby. One might fancy to think that upon kissing hands and ascending to the premiership for the second time his mind might well have drifted back over those early days and the hard work which had been required to transform the agricultural rump left after 1846 into the broad and unified Tory party of 1874. Indeed, following the electoral success, all old feuds were soon forgotten. As Corry reported that his former critics, ‘all the dear “old lot” whom we all know so well – all the *frondeurs* and the cynics, professors, now, of a common faith – cry for “the Chief”, as young hounds bay for the huntsmen the day after the frost is broken up’.²⁰⁷⁷ Indeed the long winters of opposition and minority administration had thawed. Giving way to a bright new spring of Conservative politics.

III: Power and Elysian Fields

Disraeli had achieved his long-held aim, one which many and perhaps even Disraeli himself had thought beyond him: that of re-establishing Toryism on a truly national foundation. In the glowing aftermath of this historic victory, he set about the potentially difficult task of making appointments for a new Cabinet. What was instantly noticeable was the comparatively small size of Disraeli’s Cabinet. It contained only twelve members, which made it the smallest since 1832. A certain symmetry was also struck between peers and commoners, with six Cabinet members representing each House. Whether through practical considerations or representative principle, Disraeli was keen to ensure that departments with major expenditure were represented by members who took their seat in the Commons.²⁰⁷⁸ Many of the choices were obvious. Richmond became Lord President of the Council and maintained his leadership of the House of Lords. Cairns resumed his post as Lord Chancellor. Manners, the only surviving member from the 1852 ministry, took up the position of Postmaster-General. The major departments of state were reserved for Disraeli’s most loyal and most able colleagues. Derby once accepted the Foreign Office, as he had in 1868. Ward-Hunt accepted First-Lord of the Admiralty which made way for Northcote to take up the Exchequer, which would have been Disraeli’s personal preference in 1868. Hardy, among the most able of his close

²⁰⁷⁵ Fraser, *Disraeli and his Day*, pp.478-479

²⁰⁷⁶ M&B, vol.5, p.182

²⁰⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pp.279-280

²⁰⁷⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.538

supporters, moved from his 1868 position at the Home Office, and was entrusted to take on the War Office which was generally considered to be difficult job after the reforms made to the military under Gladstone's government.

If these first eight appointments were rather straightforward, the other three were far more sensational. The first was Disraeli's decision to appoint Richard Cross to the Home Office. The Lancashire lawyer was a middle-class man with a reputation for administrative capability. But nonetheless, it was a move that saw a man with no ministerial experience appointed over the heads of otherwise suitable candidates. Indeed, Disraeli appears to have had very little contact with Cross, having met him once at Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Whether he recognized his ability for administrative detail in that short encounter is doubtful: more likely, this was a nod to Lancashire and its new-found Tory heartlands, or perhaps more to Derby and the influence of the Stanley family in that region and in the party.²⁰⁷⁹ Whatever the reason, it proved to be an inspired move as Cross's efficiency saw a whole raft of domestic legislation flow through the Home Office in the first few years of Disraeli's government. The next two striking appointments saw the return of two of Disraeli's sharpest critics to the Tory front bench. Disraeli had only recently rebuilt his relations with Carnarvon after the latter's resignation in 1867. He took Disraeli's offer of the Colonial Office. Salisbury, 'the most distinguished and powerful, and the most bitter, of the secessionists', was lobbied on Disraeli's behalf by Lady Derby and accepted Disraeli's invitation to meet, admitting that: 'It would certainly be satisfactory to me to hear your views upon some of the subjects which must at present be occupying your attention — the more so that I do not anticipate that they would be materially in disaccord with my own.'²⁰⁸⁰ After this meeting, he accepted Disraeli's offer to re-join the party's front bench in the position of India Secretary. The return to the fold of two of Disraeli's most antagonistic detractors was a major coup. It was testament both to Disraeli's collaborative abilities and to the pre-eminence that he now held in the party. Moreover, it was a move that both harmonized the party and brought on board the troublesome right-wing who now stood solidly behind the chief.

Disraeli's Cabinet in 1874 was in many ways a success. First and foremost, it was a cabinet that represented all of the most important interests, whilst also representing the broad political and religious principles, contained within the party. The peerage and the great families had their representatives, though with men like Smith and Cross it showed that the middle-classes, who as time wore on would become central to Tory success, had their representatives too. The political right was represented by Salisbury and Carnarvon, former enemies now reconciled to the cause. The more liberal elements of the party had their champion in Derby and those of Peel's former followers could discern the image of Peelism in Northcote. Even Young England, by 1874 a distant footnote in the party's history, though immensely important to Disraeli, had a representative in Disraeli's old friend Manners. In religious affairs the cabinet was representative on the party's diverse Anglican beliefs. The High Church was represented by Salisbury and Carnarvon while Evangelicalism had its champion in Disraeli's close ally Cairns.²⁰⁸¹ In all, it was a harmonious cabinet and wholly representative of the now increasingly diverse Tory party that had changed greatly since 1846. Indeed, the array of names and the calibre of ministers was a far cry from the first Cabinet Disraeli sat in twenty-two years prior. Derby's 1852 government, which had been so fittingly monikered the 'Who? Who?' ministry, had been laughably devoid of talent when compared to the ranks of the opposition, which had contained all the greatest ministerialists and parliamentary orators of the day.²⁰⁸² Perhaps

²⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.539

²⁰⁸⁰ M&B, vol.6, pp.284-285

²⁰⁸¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.540

²⁰⁸² *Ibid*, pp.539-541

this was Disraeli's greatest achievement as a politician. As Boyd Hilton put it, Disraeli made his greatest mark on English history 'simply by defying the laws of political gravity, simply by keeping the Conservatives alive during the 1850s and 1860s'.²⁰⁸³ Of course, Disraeli bequeathed a lot more to both history and to his party than that. But it remains all too easy to underestimate the individual hard work and skilful collaboration required to keep the Tories afloat when they were at such an insurmountable disadvantage for so long. As Bradford recognised, Disraeli may have been pivotal in breaking Peel's Conservative party in 1846, but by 1874 'he had successfully reconstructed it, giving it both an organization and an ideology, and attracting to its ranks young men of talent without whom no party could have a future'.²⁰⁸⁴

Having successfully reconstructed his party and having gained power once again, the question inevitably arose: what should he do with it? Bradford is quite right in saying that he gave the party an ideology, but it did not necessarily follow that ideology transferred naturally into a detailed legislative programme. This lack of clear direction immediately struck Richard Cross, the new Home Secretary, who remarked: 'From all his speeches I had quite expected that his mind was full of legislative schemes, but such did not prove to be the case; on the contrary he had to entirely rely on the suggestions of his colleagues'.²⁰⁸⁵ In a way, this was hardly surprising. Disraeli had never really had to worry about constructing a programme of legislation. He had never served in a majority government. Moreover, legislation was a process that required a mind that had a capacity for detail. As Lord Blake, rightly noted, while a broader view of the landscape is important for a great Prime Minister, 'it is impossible to direct affairs without some knowledge of detail as well as broad principles'.²⁰⁸⁶ Disraeli certainly had broad, and even consistent, principles. He was undoubtedly, however, lacking a mind for detail. Cross recognised as much when he commented that 'Disraeli's mind was either above or below (whichever way you like to put it) mere questions of detail'.²⁰⁸⁷ Indeed, in the realm of domestic legislation remained almost totally uninteresting to Disraeli. It was too involved and did not offer the popular scope of finance, nor the prestige and excitement of foreign policy. Carnarvon once bitterly commented that 'he detests details and always looks to the principle or rather the idea of any question. He is in fact unable to deal with detail. He does no work. For many days he has not put pen to paper. M. Corry is in fact Prime Minister'.²⁰⁸⁸ This was undoubtedly a bitter barb, aimed at Disraeli from one who was never in his inner circle of trusted confidants. However, it also contains considerable truth as to the working of Disraeli's mind. He had always dealt in ideas and principles. In his own frontbench career, legislation had been as much a matter of political manoeuvring and broad principle as it had been about drafting detailed legislation. Their minority position had always ensured that. The lack of legislative ideas and the apparent lack of interest in realm of domestic policy is therefore hardly surprising.

When Parliament reconvened on the 19th of March, Disraeli arrived at the House of Commons triumphant. He commanded a powerful majority, a united party, control of both Houses of Parliament, the favour of the Crown and faced an Opposition that was in a state of disarray, with Gladstone retiring from attending the Commons. As Blake recognised, he could have carried 'any legislative programme he wished'.²⁰⁸⁹ Instead, with no clear idea of direction, Disraeli pursued a policy which he hoped might soothe the country whilst a more solid legislative plan could be drawn up. In the first session, the immediate priority was the Northcote's debut budget. Disraeli unsurprisingly took close

²⁰⁸³ Hilton, 'Disraeli, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit', pp.56-57

²⁰⁸⁴ Bradford, p.304

²⁰⁸⁵ Richard Cross, *A Political History*, (London: 1903) p.25

²⁰⁸⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.543

²⁰⁸⁷ Cross, *A Political History*, p.44

²⁰⁸⁸ *Carnarvon Diaries*, 30th of September 1874, p.235

²⁰⁸⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.549

interest in his Chancellor's task, having failed so many times in his own, similar, attempts.²⁰⁹⁰ Northcote discussed it at length and outlined his plans; he pressed ahead with his Chief's approval and introduced his Budget to the House following the Easter recess.²⁰⁹¹ Northcote's budget saw the complete repeal of sugar duties, 1d taken off the income tax, and a substantial reduction in the amount local rates funded the care of lunatics and upkeep of policemen.²⁰⁹² Disraeli believed it would be a budget that would 'satisfy the free-traders and the democracy'.²⁰⁹³ He was largely right. The free-traders were happy with the removal of the sugar duties, the landed gentry along with the working classes were happy with the rate relief which unburdened land as much as towns, while the reduction of income tax was a nod to the middle-classes. Even the opposition had very little to complain about. Lowe expressed his opinion that there were 'many things in his speech which we on this side of the House have heard with great satisfaction'.²⁰⁹⁴ Sir Wilfrid Lawson commented that the 'House appeared to be tolerably satisfied with his financial scheme, and he fancied that the country would not find very much fault with it'.²⁰⁹⁵ Even Gladstone, for so long the tormentor of Disraeli's budgets, could find very little to make serious complaint about. The budget passed easily. Following the success of this measure, the only firm legislative plans the government had for the rest of the session came in the form the Intoxicating Liqueur Act, and a Royal commission into the Master and Servant legislation. The former saw an increase to the drinking hours which pleased both the working classes and the brewing and victualling interests that had been so hostile to Gladstone. The latter began the process of looking once again into Trade Union legislation that had been so badly bungled by the Liberals. Of course, the Government had to see off some hostile legislation from the opposition. This included, most notably, the Second Reading of George Trevelyan's bill to extend the household franchise to the Counties. That engendered some lively debate but the government came off the winner with a majority of 114.²⁰⁹⁶

The downside of such a lack of contentious and meaningful Government legislation was that a vacuum of business naturally occurred. And, as Blake noted, 'Parliament, like Nature, abhors a vacuum'.²⁰⁹⁷ This particular vacuum was filled by the Public Worship Regulation Act. Introduced as a Private Member's Bill by the Archbishop of Canterbury from the House of Lords, it aimed to tackle the growing problem of ritualism within High Church circles and make it easier for the Church to enforce orthodox doctrine and punish recalcitrant clergymen. The legislation did not take Disraeli by surprise. Tait had written to him upon becoming Prime Minister, asking for support with his proposed bill.²⁰⁹⁸ This was followed the next month by a memorandum from the Queen, who already had a prejudice against the High Church party, offering her opinion that 'No measure so important affecting the Established Church should be treated as an open question, but should have the full support of the Government.' She also expressed her 'earnest wish is that Mr. Disraeli should go as far as he can without embarrassment to the Government, in satisfying the Protestant feeling of the country'.²⁰⁹⁹ It was a position that Disraeli never sought and hardly deserved. He knew it was legislation that would necessarily divide his cabinet and if he had had his own way he would have certainly treated it as an open question, leaving the bill's fate to Parliament's own opinions. Religious and ecclesiastical questions in the nineteenth century were always cause for heated debates. The proposed legislation,

²⁰⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.549; Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.313

²⁰⁹¹ Northcote to Disraeli, 4th of April 1874, cited in M&B, v.5, p.306

²⁰⁹² *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 16th of April 1874, v.218, cc.634-679

²⁰⁹³ Cited in Bradford, p.314

²⁰⁹⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, 16th of April 1874, v.218, c.679

²⁰⁹⁵ *Ibid*, cc.693-694

²⁰⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 13th of May 1874, v.219, cc.206-264

²⁰⁹⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.550

²⁰⁹⁸ Tait to Disraeli, 23rd of February 1874, cited in M&B, v.5, pp.315-316

²⁰⁹⁹ Victoria to Disraeli, 20th of March 1874, cited in *Ibid*, p.318

while making it quicker and easier for the Church to punish the excesses of Ritualism, also provided for the possibility of zealous Evangelicals to persecute moderate High Church clergymen and similarly for the High Church to take action against the low.²¹⁰⁰ In short, it was, as a political matter, something that Disraeli wanted very little to do with. *Lothair* had furnished the evidence for his growing antipathy with Papal meddling, while the new preface to the 1870 editions of his novels had described Ritualism as ‘medieval superstitions’, which were only the modern embodiment of ‘pagan ceremonies and creeds’.²¹⁰¹ It would be easy to contrast this view with the position he had taken along with Young England in the 1840s and call it hypocrisy. That would be unfair. First, Disraeli’s attachment to the pre-Reformation Church had not been to its Catholic roots, but to its grandeur and its position in society. This was a lament over the death of organic feudal society rather than the loss of Catholic forms. Low-Church attitudes, which prevailed in the 1840s had, he believed, detracted from the Church’s ability to inspire. Secondly, believing that using ritual and ceremony in Anglican service might restore some of Anglicanism’s lost splendour was not a controversial view at that time. However, Disraeli’s sympathy towards Roman Catholicism had been shaken by Papal Aggression in 1850-1851, further undermined by the duplicitous dealings of Manning in 1868, and further eroded by Roman propaganda being spread in Britain throughout the 1860s and 1870s. The fact was that by 1874 Ritualism and those who practiced it were becoming a serious and growing problem for Church and one that needed dealing with. It did not follow for Disraeli that it was a problem with which he wished to involve himself.

However, since he had been pressured by the Queen into lending his governments support to Tait’s Public Worship Regulation bill Disraeli’s first priority was to ensure the unity of his cabinet in relation to the measure. To that end, he was in regular correspondence with both Salisbury and Cairns, who represented the two extremes within the Cabinet as to how they could find the best way forward. In its original form, the bill was unpalatable to most sections of both Church and Parliament. Therefore, following advice from Cairns, Disraeli worked behind the scenes to aid the Archbishop in reworking the proposals into a more workable piece of legislation.²¹⁰² As Buckle shrewdly noted, he was, however, ‘careful to do so as a layman of influence rather than as Prime Minister’. The bill was introduced to the House of Lords and Disraeli, pulling the wires behind the curtain, worked wonders to ensure that it passed through all three readings without a division. That said, it was always a subject bound to cause controversy. Moreover, it was equally likely that such arguments would not divide the houses strictly down party lines. When it came to the Bill’s Second Reading, Gladstone stormed down from Hawarden, ‘dragged from what I should wish at the present moment to be retirement’, simply because they were ‘told that Ritualism was a great evil, and that we must have a Bill to put it down’.²¹⁰³ He introduced a series of lengthy and typically involved resolutions, effectively defining the position of the Church of England.²¹⁰⁴ Gladstone’s powerful oratory briefly turned the attention of the House, but, as Buckle put it, ‘the spell of the great enchanter’ was eventually broken by his colleague Sir William Harcourt, who launched a withering attack on his leader.²¹⁰⁵ Disraeli had now probably come to the conclusion that the majority of parliament as well as the public shared his views on Ritualism. Therefore, on the resumption of the Second Reading, he came into the open and lent his public support to the Bill. He condemned Gladstone’s resolutions as a challenge the Reformation settlement and condemned the practices of Ritualists. In so doing, he also paid proper respect to Roman Catholic doctrines and ceremonies, so long as they were carried out in a Roman Catholic

²¹⁰⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.550

²¹⁰¹ Preface to 1870 Edition (Find proper reference)

²¹⁰² Cairns to Disraeli, 25th of March 1874, cited in M&B, v.5, p.319

²¹⁰³ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 9th of July 1874, v.220, cc.1373-1376

²¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, cc.1391-1392

²¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, cc.1414-1423

service, announcing that what he really did object to 'is Mass in masquerade.'²¹⁰⁶ The Bill sailed through its Second Reading without a division and Gladstone was forced to withdraw his resolutions.

Following committee, the bill passed comfortably through the Third Reading and was sent back up to the House of Lords. During that consideration, another controversy was initiated when Salisbury suggested that 'Much had been said of the majority in "another place"... There was a great deal of that kind of bluster when any particular course had been taken by the other House of Parliament.' He concluded by observing that he 'utterly repudiated the bugbear of a majority of the House of Commons'²¹⁰⁷ This naturally caused somewhat of a storm. The following day, Sir William Harcourt attacked Salisbury, in an open defence of Disraeli mounted from the opposition benches. He thought the 'situation of grave embarrassment' as it did not 'belong to the office of any private Member to vindicate the independence and dignity of this House.' Moreover, in Disraeli they had a 'Leader of this House who is proud of the House of Commons, and of whom the House of Commons is proud.' For 'Although we differ in political principles, we all recognize that he has ever maintained that dignified decency which contributes so much to the well-regulated conduct of public affairs.' He went on to express his hope that Disraeli would not refrain from vindicating the House against those who dismissed the 'designated the deliberately expressed opinion of the House of Commons as "bluster," and the voice of its majority as a "bugbear," the right hon. Gentleman will not forget that it is by virtue of that blustering majority he is Prime Minister of England.'²¹⁰⁸ Disraeli thanked Harcourt for his kind words and offered a playful reply, dismissing Lord Salisbury as 'a great master of gibes, and flouts, and jeers.'²¹⁰⁹ Some historians have made more of this exchange than is necessary. Salisbury's comments apparently derided the independent wisdom of the Commons. Disraeli's reply played down what could have been a more serious issue. A potential crisis was averted. To avoid any confusion, Disraeli wrote to Salisbury following the speech to ensure no offence was taken. None was.²¹¹⁰ The Public Worship Regulation Act passed into law following some minor amendments. Disraeli could see it, in Parliamentary terms at least, as a great success. It had strengthened his influence with the Queen; the Act, following growing public and religious unrest surrounding the subject legislation had been timely and lastly a potential torpedo to the unity of his Cabinet had been avoided. The Government had no more legislation planned for the rest of session which was rounded off without any major controversy or alarm.

During the recess, Disraeli canvassed all his Cabinet colleagues and asked for their suggestions with regard to legislation for the following session. The order of the day and temper of the times required social improvement rather than the revolutionary change of the previous government. There lay a paradox. On the whole, Gladstone's government, while making revolutionary changes to the nature of the state had done little to touch or improve the lives of working-class people. Only in education, through Forster's comprehensive Education Act, did it make any effort to improve the condition of working people's lives. This is what Disraeli had recognised in 1872 at Manchester. The condition of the people was thus now a question that needed addressing. *Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas* had been his famous phrase at Manchester. In 1875, he would put the ideas of social reform into action. The fact was that by 1875 he possibly had no more idea what the details of the legislation would be than he did back in 1872. But it was also true that the legislative avalanche that landed in 1875 was a product of Disraeli's political perception. He had understood in the late 1860s and early 1870s that, having attained great changes in the system of representation and in the mechanisms of the state, the working classes might wish to attain from themselves a better and

²¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, House of Commons, 15th of July 1874, v.221, cc.74-82

²¹⁰⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Lords, 4th of August 1874, v.221, c.1253

²¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, House of Commons, 5th of August 1874, v.221, cc.1341-1342

²¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, cc.1358-1359

²¹¹⁰ Disraeli to Salisbury, 5th of August 1874, cited in M&B, v.5, pp.327-328; *Carnarvon Diaries*, 5th of August 1874, p.231

healthier quality of life, safer conditions of work, protection from exploitation and a new social contract between employer and workman which no longer criminalized them. Disraeli believed, as he had said at Crystal Palace, that the working classes wanted to attain for themselves the access to light and water and the 'beneficent influences of nature'. This was the belief at the core of his programme of social reform

Following Disraeli's request for suggestions from his colleagues, they reconvened at the November Cabinets, prepared to deal with a host of important social and domestic issues. Carnarvon's notes from these meeting show that they had agreed a committee to prepare a bill on Landlord and Tenant legislation, Cross had promised a bill regarding workman's dwellings, while bills for river pollution and the adulteration of food were to be prepared later.²¹¹¹ By November of 1874 the plans were already set for the year of legislation to come. The year 1875 rightly has gone down as the *annus mirabilis* of nineteenth century social legislation. Blake is correct in suggesting that 'taken together [these measures] constitute the biggest instalment of social reform passed by any one government in the nineteenth century'.²¹¹² The Conservatives dealt with issues ranging from slum clearance to food safety, from savings protection to trade unions. But broadly speaking, they tackled the condition of the working classes in three branches of legislation: housing, health and relationship between employers and workmen. They began with housing, in the form of the Artisan's Dwelling Act. This gave powers to local authorities to clear slum dwellings and replace them with new homes for the purpose of housing workmen. It was far from compulsory but once enacted it empowered local government to intervene in private housing and, while imperfect, proved a significant step in the right direction for the provision of safe and comfortable housing for the working classes. With regard to health, they passed the Public Health Act, which while changing few existing laws, consolidated many other existing ones in one piece of legislation that made sewer maintenance and the supply of fresh clean water a requirement for local authorities. It also requiring them supply street lighting and organise rubbish collection. In that way, it made living conditions in industrial towns and cities safer and cleaner. In the Sale of Food and Drugs Act, the Conservatives established important principles and laid the foundations of modern food law. The Act aimed to prevent the adulteration of food and drugs, making those liable for its sale guilty regardless of intent. They also passed legislation in the form of the Friendly Societies Act to protect workman's savings by regulating Friendly Societies, giving them sets of rules to adhere to ensure good practice and solvency. The Agricultural Holdings Act, the sole piece of legislation that was driven by Disraeli, ensured that departing tenants were to be compensated by the Landlord for any unexhausted improvements that they had made to their agricultural holding during their tenancy. But perhaps the most important pieces of legislation passed during 1875 came in the form of two pieces of legislation relating to trade unions: the Employers and Workmen Act and the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act. The former transformed relations between workers and employers by making them equal before the law and no longer subject to (breach of) contract, referable to the criminal courts. The latter put trade unions on a safer legal foundation by removing the conspiracy laws which had covered normal trade union activity. In effect, the Act legalised peaceful picketing by trade unions. Both changes were a huge jump forward to labour relations and legislation which Disraeli believed to 'have settled the long and vexatious contest between Capital and Labour'.²¹¹³ All of this was later followed by the Rivers Pollution Prevention Act (1876) to ensure the safety of London's water supply and the Factory and Workshop Act (1878) which built upon the Factory Act of 1874, also the Merchant Shipping Act (1876) which attempted to

²¹¹¹ *Carvarvon Diaries*, 12th and 14th of November 1874, pp.238-239

²¹¹² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.553

²¹¹³ Cited in Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.245

ensure a level of safety and limit the amount of cargo a merchant ship could carry.²¹¹⁴ In all, it was a comprehensive legislative effort, designed to try and improve the living and working conditions faced by the working classes.²¹¹⁵

The driving force behind all of this was the Home Secretary, Richard Cross. He was directly responsible for some of the more important legislation and his fingerprints can be detected everywhere else. That is not to say that Disraeli should not receive some of the credit. It was his government that put the programme of legislation to action and it was he who first recognised social reform as a way of appealing to the working-classes. It is hardly surprising that he had little interest in it; one Tory backbencher referred to it as ‘suet pudding legislation; it was flat, insipid, dull, but it was very wise and very wholesome’.²¹¹⁶ As always, for Disraeli, it was about the big picture and it was one that did the Tories much credit. That is not to say that all the legislation was perfect. The Conservatives disliked state intervention much in the same way as the Liberals did. To be sure, the real extremists of the individualist self-help and *laissez faire* schools were on the Liberal side. but the Tories were little less reluctant to interfere with people’s lives.²¹¹⁷ Much of the legislation reflected that, similar sensibility. It was left open-ended; it never forced a change to people’s lives. Rather, it gave people and local authorities the powers to enact legislation as they saw fit. Disraeli used the term ‘permissive legislation’. This was, he argued the ‘characteristic of a free people. It is easy It is easy to adopt compulsory legislation when you have to deal with those who only exist to obey; but in a free country, and especially in a country like England, you must trust to persuasion and example’.²¹¹⁸ There were many examples where this failed: for instance, by 1881 only ten of eighty-seven towns and cities covered by the Artisan’s Dwellings Act had made any attempt to use the powers provided by it.²¹¹⁹ Moreover, the popular reputation of the social legislation of Disraeli’s second government certainly still needs addressing. Lord Blake was certainly correct to insist that it was not ‘the fulfilment of some concept of paternalistic Tory democracy’.²¹²⁰ One might suggest it was the fulfilment of Disraeli’s campaign pledge to address the condition of the working classes. Certainly, many have promised more and delivered less. Disraeli undoubtedly sympathised with the conditions of the working classes. The scenes of working-class misery from *Sybil* tell us as much. By addressing the condition and security of the working classes, he also wished to prove beyond all doubt that the Conservatives were their natural allies. They were the party of progress and a truly national party at that. He told Lady Chesterfield that the domestic reforms would ‘gain and retain for the Conservatives the lasting affection of the working classes.’²¹²¹ On the whole, it can be confidently asserted that the Conservative legislation left the working classes in a better position that they had been before. It was a genuine and full-hearted attempt to tackle some the greater iniquities biggest issues challenging the living conditions, happiness and security of the labouring classes. In that sense, Disraeli and the Conservatives did more in one session to address to condition of the people than any government since the formation of the Liberal party.

It must be conceded that Disraeli he had little real involvement in the drafting of any of the legislation. But he gave it his approval. Moreover, the success of such an ambitious programme of social legislation in such a short time frame demonstrated his true ability for collaboration. As a Prime

²¹¹⁴ The shortcomings of the Plimssole Line are well documented. Shipowners could draw the line wherever they wanted around the ship therefore the legislation never had its desired effect. Nonetheless it represented an attempt to solve a shipping safety issue.

²¹¹⁵ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.553-556; Hurd, *Disraeli*, pp.244-246; Bradford, *Disraeli*, pp.320-321; M&B, *Life*, vol.5, pp.363-369

²¹¹⁶ Cited in Stephen J. Lee, *Aspects of British Political History, 1815-1914*, (London: Routledge, 2013) pp.156-157

²¹¹⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.554

²¹¹⁸ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 28th of June 1875, v.225, c.525

²¹¹⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.554

²¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.553

²¹²¹ Zetland, Disraeli to Lady Chesterfield, 29th of June 1875, vol.1, p.260

Minister, he never tried to oversee all the great offices of state as Gladstone had. Rather, he was content allow his colleagues a high degree of autonomy, in order to get on with their jobs. In Cabinet, he assumed the role of ‘first amongst equals’. Disraeli never dominated discussion and was careful to canvas the opinion of all his colleagues, or reach a compromise so, where possible, all sides could remain happy.²¹²² Despite this, there was never any question of who was in charge. Indeed, during the first years of Disraeli’s government the Conservative Cabinet was perhaps more unified than any in the previous thirty years. But it also seems likely that his own position within the party, and the supremacy of his party in both Houses, left Disraeli somewhat becalmed. For most of his political life he had been used to fighting and manoeuvring against a majority opposition. Now, having achieved his aim of restoring the party’s fortunes, he seemingly ran out of energy. His declining health had no doubt contributed greatly to his lethargy. His increasing age and frail constitution had not affected the sharpness of his mind, but they had drained his enthusiasm. Sir William Heathcote commented to Salisbury that ‘I can hardly imagine how you are to keep the machine going if you are not somehow relieved of the incubus of your present Chief’, as except on questions that appealed to his romantic mind, ‘in the ordinary conduct of business Disraeli shows himself at every turn a quite incompetent to guide the House’.²¹²³ This opinion came from a hostile quarter. But it was not entirely inaccurate.²¹²⁴ For the first time in his life, Disraeli struggled to manage the House of Commons or keep up with the workload his position entailed.

Throughout both 1874 and 1875 he had been crippled by recurring attacks of gout and bronchitis. From as early as 1874 his colleagues had been discussing the consequences of his retirement and what the political map might look like after him.²¹²⁵ His failing health meant that by 1876 he was forced to accept the offer of a peerage and lead the party from the House of Lords, where the strain would be greatly reduced. This was undoubtedly a bittersweet moment for Disraeli. Having been elevated to the Earldom of Beaconsfield and to the upper chamber of Parliament, he now stood alongside the aristocracy whom he had venerated and defended for so long. However, such vindication came also with the realization that his political powers and physical strength were waning. It also meant he had to say farewell to one of his homes and to the centre of his life for the previous forty years: the House of Commons. On the eve of accepting his new title of Earl of Beaconsfield, a fact he kept secret from all but his closest colleagues, Disraeli took part in his last debate in the lower house. On the 11th of August he defended the government’s handling of the Bulgarian atrocities in a speech which rounded out the Third Reading.²¹²⁶ The following day, he met the Queen where he was elevated to a peerage of the realm and the House of Lords as the 1st Earl of Beaconsfield. When the news broke that Disraeli had left the Commons he was inundated with messages from supporters and opponents alike. His chief whip Sir William Hart Dyke wrote: ‘I had no idea, until I heard you make your last speech in the House, how great the change would prove. All the real chivalry and delight of party politics seem to have departed; nothing remains but routine’.²¹²⁷ The Speaker, Sir Henry Brand, wrote a touching letter to Disraeli expressing ‘on my own behalf how much I shall miss you, and how much I regret the cause which has obliged you to leave this House; a sentiment which is universal throughout the House’ that ‘great assembly’ which was ‘the scene of your early struggles and final triumphs.’²¹²⁸ But perhaps Disraeli got most satisfaction from the letter he received from Sir William

²¹²² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.542

²¹²³ Salisbury Papers, Heathcote to Salisbury, 15th of June 1876, quoted in Blake, *Disraeli*, p.564

²¹²⁴ Heathcote had always been an opponent of Disraeli’s. Moreover, when he had been in Parliament he had sat as a High Church Tory MP for Oxford University. This assessment came after the passage of the Public Worship Bill in 1874, which had angered High Churchmen like Heathcote and gained Disraeli the enduring enmity of the High Church sect.

²¹²⁵ *Carnarvon Diaries*, 5th of August 1874, p.231; *Ibid*, 15th of July 1875, p.257; *Ibid*, 3rd of October 1875, p.266

²¹²⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 11th of August 1876, v.231, cc.1139-1147

²¹²⁷ Hart Dyke to Disraeli, 12th of August 1876, cited in M&B, v.5, p.49

²¹²⁸ Brand to Disraeli, 12th of August 1876, cited in *Ibid*, p.497

Harcourt, to whom he had responded to in his final speech: ‘It is impossible for anyone, and least of all for one who has had so large an experience of your kindness, to hear without emotion that you have sat for the last time in the great scene of your fame. You have made the House of Lords much too rich and you have left the House of Commons by far too poor. Henceforth the game will be like a chessboard when the queen is gone — a petty struggle of pawns.’ Furthermore: ‘To the imagination of the younger generation your life will always have a special fascination. For them you have enlarged the horizon of the possibilities of the future.’²¹²⁹ It was clearly a hard decision for Disraeli to make. He was a Parliamentarian of almost unrivalled skill and courage. As Blake noted, ‘for long years he stood alone, trying to answer most of the great orators of the day ranged against him on the opposite benches’.²¹³⁰ Over forty years he won the respect, and with a few obvious exceptions, the love of the members of the House of Commons. His departure was missed as much by his opponents as by his followers. His command over that assembly before he was elevated was hardly rivalled in the nineteenth century. He had considered retiring completely and handing the leadership over to Derby. He declined on grounds that ‘he could never manage H.M., that he did not think he could lead his colleagues on Church questions’ in addition he added that ‘he would not act with anyone else’ apart from Disraeli.²¹³¹ He was therefore forced to continue, though as Buckle recognized, ‘It is difficult to believe that Disraeli did not foresee and desire the issue of the crisis. With his strong ambition, and his keen interest in India and the East, he can hardly...have seriously contemplated...the abandonment to others of that forceful Eastern policy which was taking shape under his immediate direction, but which was as yet only an outline.’²¹³²

From 1875 onwards, and particularly after 1876, foreign policy was Disraeli’s central concern. Indeed, throughout the first two years of his government he had been keen to involve himself in foreign affairs, and to interfere with Derby’s control of the foreign office, in a way that he would not do to other departments. This was likely out of interest more than anything else. Later, he certainly interfered more as he came to realize the depth of Derby’s inadequacy in foreign affairs. But at first it was from his own fascination with foreign policy. This was an area in which Disraeli had long wanted to express himself, but the opportunity for which had never really arisen. His earliest political pamphlet *Gallomania*, attacked Whig foreign policy towards France.²¹³³ One year later in *What is he?* Disraeli feared, ‘the loss of our great colonial empire’.²¹³⁴ After his rejection by Robert Peel in 1841, he sought to establish himself on the back benches as an expert of foreign affairs.²¹³⁵ Indeed, some of his most notable performances during the early 1840s were his interventions against Palmerston regarding Foreign Policy. It had been these speeches that had drawn the attention of Young England. After the defeat of Peel, Palmerston became dominant figure in both British politics and foreign affairs for most of Disraeli’s front bench career. This gave him little scope for intervention. Having always held the post of Chancellor the Exchequer under Derby, he had had no opportunity to involve himself in foreign affairs during those short-lived minority governments. More generally, there had been little chance to undertake any serious study of foreign policy. But as Parry has skilfully acknowledged, ‘Ever since his early travels he had an unshakeable belief that he understood the realities of foreign affairs better than insular middle-class politicians’.²¹³⁶ Published shortly before his death, *Endymion* gives us the best impression of Disraeli’s attraction to foreign

²¹²⁹ Harcourt to Disraeli, 14th of August 1876, cited in *Ibid*, p.498

²¹³⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.567

²¹³¹ Johnson (ed.) *Diaries of Gathorne Hardy*, p.247

²¹³² M&B, vol.5, p.495

²¹³³ Benjamin Disraeli, *A Ministerial Cure for Gallomania*, (1832), (Montana: Kessinger, 2010)

²¹³⁴ *What is He?*, p.6

²¹³⁵ Jonathan Parry, ‘Disraeli, Benjamin, Earl of Beaconsfield (1804-1881), in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) accessed 11th of October, 2016

²¹³⁶ Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’, p.716

policy: 'Look at Lord Roehampton, he is the man. He does not care a rush whether the revenue increases or declines. He is thinking of real politics: foreign affairs; maintaining our power in Europe'.²¹³⁷ As Lord Blake has acknowledged, Disraeli meant what he said, he had, 'always regarded foreign policy as the most important and fascinating task of the statesman'.²¹³⁸

Disraeli's foreign policy has often been dismissed as opportunist. Peter Ghosh, for example, has suggested that Disraeli's patriotic foreign policy only appeared as a response to the failures of Lytton in Afghanistan, Frere in South Africa, and the agitation of Gladstone over the Bulgarian atrocities.²¹³⁹ These arguments are problematic. First, it is hard to plan foreign policy. It is altogether more defined by world events and the reactions to them. Secondly, this characterisation fails to understand Disraeli's unique understanding of English history and how that influenced this political outlook. He revered history, and the foreign policy triumphs of Pitt where trade had linked Britain both to her colonies and to continental Europe. Free trade had damaged this system, making England increasingly isolated from her colonies and lesser power in Europe. Disraeli searched for a foreign policy which attempted to 'reassert England's historic identity as a global force'.²¹⁴⁰ In the 1870s Disraeli had identified foreign affairs and imperial policy as new avenue for the Conservatives to pursue. With Palmerston now long-dead, Liberal foreign policy had become increasingly non-interventionist under Gladstone. Disraeli therefore believed a return to a more assertive foreign policy might restore prestige to Britain on the Continent and re-establish her as a global power as well as chiming with the newfound national pride of the public which had increasingly reappeared after 1867. As Vincent has argued, Disraeli's Europe was different from Palmerston's. the defeat of France had rendered Britain's alliances useless. The French could no longer be relied upon to keep Russia in check. Similarly, because of France's diminished ambitions, Britain's navy was becoming less essential to other nations. In an age of vast European conscript armies, Britain's small professional standing force was no longer able to effectively intervene. In short, Disraeli attempted to increase Britain's international prestige without any real leverage.²¹⁴¹ Such practical considerations would have not worried Disraeli who saw foreign policy less in terms of *realpolitik*, but more as a great game in which principle and romanticism trumped any notion of pragmatic, cautious international policy.

Disraeli may have always dreamed of becoming a great player on the world stage. However, when he came to power in 1874, he had almost no practical experience of it. Indeed, it was not until 1875 that the Eastern question became an important issue. Despite A belief that his early travels had given him a worldliness that endowed him with a natural aptitude for foreign affairs, the reality was that he had hardly left England after 1831. When he did leave, the vast majority of these trips were taken in Paris. He spoke no foreign languages except poor French. Moreover, his understanding of geography was 'curiously ignorant'.²¹⁴² Furthermore, as with much of Disraeli's practical politics, he was simply not interested in the detail. As always, he in dealt in grand principles and historical romanticisms. Carnarvon was given almost total free rein in the colonial office.²¹⁴³ Disraeli had no interest in the actual detail of colonial matters, but rather in wider, more glamorous, foreign affairs.²¹⁴⁴ Disraeli actually had little interest in Britain's self-governing colonies. As Eldridge has put it, 'he was a master of ideas, not detail, and it was the part possession of empire could play in assisting Great

²¹³⁷ *Endymion*, p.249

²¹³⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.570

²¹³⁹ Ghosh, 'Disraelian Conservatism', pp. 290-292

²¹⁴⁰ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', pp.716-717

²¹⁴¹ Vincent, pp.54-55

²¹⁴² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.571

²¹⁴³ *Carnarvon Diaries*, 9th of August 1874,p.233; *Ibid*, p.21

²¹⁴⁴ C. Eldridge, *Disraeli and the Rise of New Imperialism*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996) p.46

Britain's role in world affairs that interested him most'.²¹⁴⁵ He believed Empire could be used to help re-establish Britain as a major player in Europe.

Disraeli's handling of the Eastern Question explains much about his attitudes to foreign affairs. Many dreaded the question; it was one that had caused seemingly insoluble problems for nearly a century. Derby had certainly not wanted to intervene.²¹⁴⁶ Yet Disraeli seemed positively excited at the prospect of settling it.²¹⁴⁷ As Hurd has suggested, it appealed to his romanticism of the great individual. There was no collective process in Disraelian foreign policy. It was a great role for a great individual to act on the world stage. The foreign secretary was merely the parliamentary officer, a man to administer the detail.²¹⁴⁸ From as early as 1833, Disraeli had advanced the idea that a great individual could be destined to 'maintain the glory of the empire, and to secure the happiness of the people'.²¹⁴⁹ Throughout 1875 and 1876, the Ottoman Empire was racked with internal unrest and instability. The Ottomans eventually crushed the rebellion, much to disappointment of Russia, who saw it as an opportunity to gain territories in the Balkan states. After the rebels were defeated, reports soon filtered back to European powers of the terrible atrocities being committed by Turkish irregular troops against the defeated Bulgarian rebels. This gave Russia the opportunity to enter the conflict on the side of the Bulgarian rebels. At this point British interests in the Mediterranean were threatened. The Russian encroachment on Constantinople was the point at which Disraeli decided to intervene in the conflict. Hurd has rightly suggested that Derby believed that 'Britain should wherever possible be a spectator not an actor in the European controversies which so agitated the Continental powers'.²¹⁵⁰ Disraeli on the other hand, dealt purely in prestige, in a sense he was right to, Britain had no great army, it was no longer a military super-power. Prestige was the currency with which Britain dealt internationally. In Hurd's experienced interpretation, 'Disraeli dealt in prestige, to him a solid asset. Prestige conferred authority. The steady accumulation of prestige provided for the security and well-being of the country'.²¹⁵¹

Disraeli's intervention in the Eastern Question served a dual purpose. It allowed Britain to protect its interests in Asia by keeping control of the Dardanelles and therefore the Mediterranean. But it also permitted Disraeli to practice diplomacy, and be a part of the 'great game'. There was nothing far-sighted about Disraeli's foreign policy. As Jenkins has put it, 'he was not the prophet of a new age of imperial expansion...[he was] essentially backward looking...Disraeli's imperial vision had consisted of little more than flamboyant gestures, designed to impress public opinion'.²¹⁵² His achievements may have been the forerunner of new imperialism. But Disraeli's methods were overtly historical. He sought to invoke the foreign policy of Pitt, rather than pre-empt the new imperialism of Chamberlain.²¹⁵³ Salisbury later said of Disraeli that he was 'Exceedingly short sighted though very clear sighted. He neither could loom far ahead, nor attempt to balance remote possibilities; though he rapidly detected the difficulties of the immediate situation and found the easiest if not the best solution for them'.²¹⁵⁴ That was most evident at the Congress of Berlin. Arguably the highpoint of Disraeli's second government, this was Disraeli's first major event on the international stage. He was able to acquit himself quite well at the conference and, bearing in mind the glaring disadvantages with

²¹⁴⁵ C. Eldridge, *England's Mission: The Imperial Idea in the age of Gladstone and Disraeli*, (London: Palgrave, 1973) pp.180-181

²¹⁴⁶ FOOTNOTE HERE

²¹⁴⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.575

²¹⁴⁸ Douglas Hurd, *Choose your Weapons*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2010) p.120

²¹⁴⁹ *What is He?*, p.7

²¹⁵⁰ Hurd, *Choose Your Weapons*, p.124

²¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.124

²¹⁵² T.E. Jenkins, *Disraeli and Victorian Conservatism*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) pp.117,120

²¹⁵³ Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics*, (London: Yale University Press, 1994) pp.406-448

²¹⁵⁴ quoted in, Richard Shannon, *The Age of Disraeli 1868-1881: The Rise of Tory Democracy*, (London: Longman, 1992) p.270

which he worked, the paper gains made in the Treaty of Berlin were much to his credit. However, much of the original hard work was done by Disraeli's new foreign secretary, Salisbury. In Hurd's seasoned opinion, Salisbury's efforts in the run up to Berlin amounted to, 'one of the most energetic and impressive enterprises in British diplomatic history'.²¹⁵⁵ Salisbury set up conference with Bismarck agreeing to both host and arbitrate. The myth of Disraeli's brilliance has somewhat been dispelled in recent years. He did not play the dazzling role that common mythology surrounding Disraeli dictates. After all he was 73 years old, but his spirit for intrigue was still running high. Salisbury reported that Disraeli was, 'not really false; but has such a perfect disregard for facts that is almost impossible for him to run true'.²¹⁵⁶ Indeed, throughout the conference his limited understanding of foreign languages meant that he had only a hazy understanding of what was being said, and constantly suspected conspiracy when there was none.²¹⁵⁷ Richard Shannon has gone perhaps too far in suggesting that Disraeli achieved nothing at Berlin save being, 'the gratified recipient of Bismarck's heavy flattery'.²¹⁵⁸ After all, the outcome of Berlin was positive in terms of British prestige: the gains made by Russia in the Treaty of San Stefano had been massively reduced, British interests had been protected, and Britain had re-joined the European stage as great power after a hiatus of over a decade. Disraeli and Salisbury returned home to a triumphal reception and crowds lined their route through London. Addressing the crowds, Disraeli proudly announced that: 'Lord Salisbury and I have brought you Peace, but Peace with honour'.²¹⁵⁹ After his irreparable split with Derby over the Eastern Question Disraeli worked closely and effectively with Salisbury who only a few years previous had been among his most violent critics. Indeed, Salisbury became a close ally of Disraeli following Berlin. This partnership perhaps more than any other shows just how effective Disraeli's powers of collaboration were to have turned a long-standing enemy into a close ally chief was a real achievement of political mollification.

Disraeli's other foreign policy adventures were also motivated by a desire for international prestige, fuelled by new-found national pride. The purchase of the Suez Canal shares was perhaps the most daring move to increase Britain's standing in near east and protect British interests in the Far East. Disraeli supported the botched wars in South Africa and Afghanistan, at least in principle. But he could not really be held responsible for their embarrassing outcomes. Afghanistan can be put down to, 'Cranbrook's slackness and Lytton's "gaudy vanity"'.²¹⁶⁰ The embarrassment in South Africa, is better attributed to Carnarvon's, 'doctrinaire enthusiasm' for federation, and Frere's poor handling of the Zulu War. However, none of this gets past the point that all of these efforts were carried out for Britain's immediate prestige, the immediate short-term gain that a small war ensued. They were not the policies of a far-sighted imperial statesman. The Congress of Berlin had tethered Britain to the crumbling Ottoman Empire, and 'sick man of Europe'. The Suez Canal was not purchased with any long-term visions of its later importance, and the wars in Afghanistan and South Africa were not part of any strategic military expansion. In short, Disraeli may have read the signs at home, and understood that a prestigious imperial policy would resonate with the British people, even that national pride was an undercurrent waiting to be tapped. Certainly, he looked upon foreign policy to be a useful tool for winning public opinion and providing some distraction from domestic problems.²¹⁶¹ But he was certainly not the Tory prophet of later imperial expansion. In fact, Disraeli's understanding foreign policy while Prime Minister was wholly consistent with his pronouncements on

²¹⁵⁵ Hurd, *Choose Your Weapons*, p.152

²¹⁵⁶ quoted in, *Ibid*, p.155

²¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.155

²¹⁵⁸ Richard Shannon, *The Crisis of Imperialism, 1865-1915*, (London: Paladin, 1976) p.134

²¹⁵⁹ M&B, vol.6, p.346

²¹⁶⁰ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.665

²¹⁶¹ M&B, vol.5, p.132

the subject forty years earlier. All aspects of his politics, whilst possessed of some instinct of the future, remained firmly backward looking. Disraeli saw foreign policy, like he saw all things: in terms of its similarity to the past, as opposed to its importance to the future.

After Disraeli's triumphant return from Berlin, the political tide and fortune both turned fast against his government. The economic situation was bleak. This was the beginning of the long drawn-out 'agricultural depression'. Moreover, the embarrassments in South Africa and Afghanistan took the shine off Disraeli's foreign policy and over-shadowed its many great successes. Because of the nature of the defeats against the Zulus and the response to the disaster in Afghanistan, they became a focus for Liberal criticism. Gladstone, who had been so vociferous against Disraeli during the Bulgarian atrocities, now made another great speaking campaign throughout the autumn of 1879. He addressed mass meeting after mass meeting condemning the immoral foreign policy pursued by Disraeli's government: 'Remember the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan, among the winter snows, is as inviolable in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own' he thundered to one audience.²¹⁶² Disraeli remained immune to all of this, have retired to Hughenden to rest during the recess. But public opinion was shifting and shifting sharply. There was a glimmer of hope given to the Conservatives. Two by-election results in Liverpool and Southwark suggested that public opinion might still be in their favour. In Liverpool, when all expected them to lose the seat, the Conservative candidate managed to hold it by 2,200 votes. In the Liberal stronghold Southwark the single Conservative candidate polled more votes than the two Liberal candidates combined. It was undoubtedly a great and unexpected result. Disraeli reported to the Queen that 'I am greatly rejoiced and the great victory at Southwark. It shows what the feeling of the country is.'²¹⁶³ Unfortunately for Disraeli he was being over-sanguine. The feeling nationally was far less certain. Nonetheless the two by-election results almost certainly convinced the Conservatives of the advantages of an early dissolution. On the 24th of March 1880, Parliament was dissolved in preparation for a general election. Disraeli's manifesto was at best an odd document. Its subject was Irish separatism and made no mention of the great achievements made under the Conservatives. Neither their great foreign policy successes, nor the unprecedented programme of social reform was mentioned. As Blake rightly noted it was a 'singularly uninspiring document'.²¹⁶⁴ This was in contrast to Gladstone's great speaking campaign in Midlothian where 'travelled forty miles and delivered three speeches of forty-five minutes each at Juniper Green, Colinton and Mid-Calder.'²¹⁶⁵ Gladstone, through this series of speeches believed, 'I have hammered with all my might as the fabric of the present Tory power'.²¹⁶⁶

Going in to the 1880 General election, assailed by Gladstone and seemingly too weary to put up a serious fight, it was hardly surprising the Conservatives suffered a reverse. But the magnitude of the defeat shocked the leaders of both parties. The Conservatives lost over one hundred seats and did badly almost everywhere in the country. They lost 23 County seats to the Liberals and did particularly badly in Lancashire, likely due to the conversion of Derby to Liberalism. They lost 12 seats in Scotland wiping out the gains of 1874, and they won only two seats in the whole of Wales. The final numbers were Liberals 353, Conservatives 238, Home Rule 61.²¹⁶⁷ It was effectively a reversal of the 1874 election. Disraeli put the defeat down to 'Hard Times'.²¹⁶⁸ He was not completely wrong. Agricultural and industrial depression had undoubtedly played an important role in the election result. However, it was a simplistic answer to a complicated question. Disraeli always saw the fortunes of the

²¹⁶² Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.302

²¹⁶³ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.702-703

²¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.707

²¹⁶⁵ Morley, *Gladstone*, vol.2, p.609

²¹⁶⁶ Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics*, p.313

²¹⁶⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.711-712

²¹⁶⁸ Disraeli to Salisbury, 2nd of April 1880, cited in Blake, *Disraeli*, p.719

Conservative party and those of agriculture and intrinsically entwined. As Bentley commented, ‘The Premier turned to the Land for his explanation of political behaviour, as naturally as Gladstone turned to drink’.²¹⁶⁹ Agriculture was central to Tory identity but becoming less and less important to its success. If nothing else, Disraeli’s response most likely shows just how little Disraeli understood the changes that had happened to British society in the previous forty years. Britain had gone through a period of unprecedented political, social, economic and to a lesser extent, religious change. Despite that, and in Disraeli’s defence, none of these had change the existing order of things. Despite the great changes to society, the existing status quo had been preserved. The 1880 election was the first indicator that this was changing it represented the writing on the wall for an aristocratic House of Commons and harbinger of a new social order and the territorial settlement that had survived throughout the majority of the nineteenth century began to fade.

In spite the crushing defeat at the polls, Disraeli’s second government was by no means a failure. Important, even unprecedented, domestic legislation had been passed to improve the lot of the working classes. Through an assertive, adventurous, though admittedly expensive, foreign policy Britain had reasserted herself on the world stage and re-established her reputation as a major European power, having lain dormant for nearly a decade. Moreover, through Disraeli’s personal effort and close relationship, the Queen had become more involved in public life and the prestige of the Crown had been considerably restored. These had been the promises he had made before the 1874 election. The administration had also furnished moments of great personal triumph for Disraeli, who at last got the chance to play the part of the dignified statesman, both in Westminster and on the world stage. However, in so many ways his second government should be seen as the anti-climax of his politics rather than their final realization. He was physically frail and mentally exhausted. He was not the same man as he had been in 1867 or during the 1850s. His success in his second premiership and the respect, even reverence, that he commanded within the party were a testament to his abilities as a collaborator. He was unable to do it alone. Throughout the 1874 ministry he had been almost constantly ill or debilitated. He had relied extensively on the help and support of his colleagues. And with the exception of his acrimonious fall out with Derby the Cabinet had remained remarkably unified. The social legislation would have been impossible without Cross. His triumphs in Berlin impossible without Lord Salisbury, who passed from being one of his most sworn critics to one of his closest allies. The management of the party out of the Lords would have been impossible if not for Northcote. It is therefore somewhat ironic that as Disraeli’s abilities diminished his position and reputation within the party greatly enhanced. With his defeat in 1880 Gladstone celebrated the ‘downfall of Beaconsfieldism’, like ‘the vanishing of some vast magnificent castle in an Italian romance’.²¹⁷⁰ In a strange way he was wrong. The election may have been the end of ‘Beaconsfieldism’, if that can be defined. But it also served as the apotheosis of Disraeli.

²¹⁶⁹ Bentley, *Politics without Democracy*, p.229

²¹⁷⁰ Cited in Blake, *Disraeli*, p.712

Conclusion: Death and Legacy

Following his defeat in the 1880 election Disraeli did what he had done after many of his major political set-backs: he once again retreated into the world of fiction. In 1880, he completed what would be his final novel. *Endymion* was a continuation of the genre that Disraeli had made his hallmark throughout his career as a novelist. It was an example of the romantic fiction of his youth, replete with the political trappings of his later career, all drawn together with the autobiographical elements that pervaded nearly every novel from his first literary effort, *Vivian Grey*, some fifty-five years before. It contained all of those somewhat absurd romantic plots, the grand aristocratic trappings, the unlikely political combinations and autobiographical features of his other novels. It follows the young aristocrat Endymion Ferrars who, driven by the ambition of his twin sister Myra, seeks to restore the lost fortunes and political position of their family. It was also the first of his novels set within a really recognizable historical setting. Set between the death of Canning and fall of the Aberdeen coalition, all of the major characters in British political life make an appearance in one guise or another. The plot sees young Endymion, a dull and uninspiring figure, rise under Whig patronage and female influence to become Prime Minister. It is unlike many of Disraeli's other works of political fiction only in that it follows the fortunes of a Whig character rather than a Tory hero. But in a sense that was irrelevant, as we find out very little as to what Endymion thinks or believes. Moreover, the story of the rise of a Tory would have been impossible given the Whig dominance of that period after the Reform Act.²¹⁷¹ Rather, it represented a good-humoured and enchanting retrospective of the world of politics at the outset of Disraeli's career. The portraits of those great figures from that period were almost universally sympathetic. In that sense, it was a rose-tinted and largely unserious look back at the society which had existed during his formative years. It was not a novel concerned with political beliefs. As Blake recognized, it was a book largely concerned with 'ascent'. That said, precisely how Endymion rises through the ranks, and the questions as to what he believes, or why he was a Whig, remain largely unanswered.²¹⁷² Its faults lay in the emptiness of the main character whose has very little going for him, and who is promoted not through ability but by the efforts of others. Further, it is subject to Disraeli's penchant for absurd and fantastically unbelievable romantic storylines.²¹⁷³ Yet, despite all such reservations as to what it might mean about the authors own political beliefs, the book was a success and indeed still reads well. In many ways, it remains among Disraeli's most readable and charming novels simply because it was a story that contained no serious political message. Instead, it serves as playful and light-hearted novel with quasi-historical setting, giving us a retrospective look at Disraeli's early political years.²¹⁷⁴

Perhaps surprisingly, Disraeli stayed on as the leader of the Conservative party. He enjoyed the unrivalled control over the House of Lords, indeed an influence unparalleled in that assembly since the retirement of Lord Derby. Moreover, he still enjoyed a strong influence over the discipline of the party, constantly attempting to act as intermediary between his somewhat second-rate successor Northcote, and the mercurial talents of the Fourth Party.²¹⁷⁵ True, he offered little resistance to Gladstone's attempts to dismantle the achievements of his government. But then how could he claim they should be protected when the country had voted so decisively in condemnation of his policies. In the meantime, he was willing once again to watch and wait.²¹⁷⁶ However, time was against him. Despite his pre-eminence, he was a shadow of the man who had overthrown Peel, defeated Gladstone

²¹⁷¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.737

²¹⁷² *Ibid*, p.738

²¹⁷³ Hurd, *Disraeli*, pp.309-311

²¹⁷⁴ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.380-383; O'Kell, *Romance of Politics*, pp.427-445

²¹⁷⁵ Hurd, *Disraeli*, p.313

²¹⁷⁶ Disraeli to Victoria, 23rd of September 1881, cited in Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.730-732

and out-manoeuvred the Liberals in the Parliamentary Reform debates of 1867. Yet, despite all of this, his command over the party was as strong as ever. In contrast, his health was very poor. He fell ill after a particularly cold night in March of 1881 and his condition declined as he developed bronchitis. Disraeli knew, despite his doctor's best reports that he was dying. He told Philip Rose at the end of March, 'Dear friend, I shall never survive this attack. I feel it is quite impossible...I feel this is the last of it'.²¹⁷⁷ Positive reports began to appear surrounding Disraeli's condition. Hardy recorded the various messages that reached him of Lord Beaconsfield's health, on the 9th of April he wrote of, 'better accounts of Beaconsfield. May more genial breezes come & assist his progresses'.²¹⁷⁸ However the reports were false, and the east wind persisted. On the 19th of April 1881, Benjamin Disraeli died, aged 76. The eulogies for him came pouring in from both his party and the opposition. Hardy mourned the loss of, 'a private friend'.²¹⁷⁹ To Carnarvon he was, 'a large character disappearing off the stage, great qualities, coupled with doubtless great faults, but a man who will be a subject of wonder'.²¹⁸⁰ His long time, but recently estranged ally Lord Derby, wrestled with his recent feelings and concluded that, 'for Ld B. himself longer life was scarcely to be desired: his part was played, his name inscribed in the history of England'.²¹⁸¹ When Gladstone heard the news of his bitter rival's death, his emotions must have been in conflict. He probably could not have felt real remorse, but he wrote that, 'it is a telling, touching event. There is no more extraordinary a man surviving him in England, perhaps none in Europe'.²¹⁸² For all that, Gladstone could not contain his irritation when Disraeli, according to his final wish, turned down the public funeral, in favour of a private burial next to his wife at Hughenden: 'As he lived so he died—all display, without reality of genuineness'.²¹⁸³ Gladstone never fully understood Disraeli and undoubtedly failed to appreciate that away from politics Disraeli enjoyed a simpler life. Of course, he took great enjoyment from spending time in the houses of the great aristocracy. But he felt most at home at Hughenden which had brought him so much happiness. Moreover, his decision to have the funeral of a country gentleman, in many ways like his former chief Derby, represented the attachment he had to his lifelong home of Buckinghamshire which he had taken great pride in representing. Finally, burial in the chapel at Hughenden was the final reminder of the devotion he bore to Mary Anne, which was complete until the end.

Disraeli's funeral took place on the 26th of April. A special train was arranged to carry the various dignitaries down from London to his resting place at Hughenden. It was a funeral that Disraeli would have enjoyed. Friends, and high-born mourners, gathered round his coffin in the tiny confines of Hughenden's church. Those in attendance included three royal princes, six dukes, four ambassadors and a whole host of other top rank aristocracy. Sarah Bradford observes aptly that 'Disraeli's wish to be buried at Hughenden was his last identification with the country gentlemen of England. He died like the hero of one of his novels, rich, full of honours, twice Prime Minister, celebrated throughout Europe, an Earl and a Knight of the garter'.²¹⁸⁴ One might go further: Disraeli's death was a completion of his ambition in life: he had achieved the fame that he desired, and he died as one that great class of England whom he had venerated and later led.

²¹⁷⁷ Disraeli to Rose, 29th of March 1881, M&B, vol.7, p.610

²¹⁷⁸ *Diary of Gathorne Hardy*, p.472-473

²¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.474

²¹⁸⁰ *Carnarvon Diaries*, p.324

²¹⁸¹ *The Diaries of Edward Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby, between 1878-1893*, ed. by John Vincent, (Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, 2003) p.320

²¹⁸² *The Gladstone Diaries*, ed. by M.R.D. Foot and H.C.G. Matthew, (Oxford: OUP and Clarendon Press, 1968-1994), vol. X (OUP, 1990), p.52.

²¹⁸³ Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p.459

²¹⁸⁴ Bradford, p.393

Disraeli's career will always interest historians. How a metropolitan middle-class Jew, romantic novelist and disreputable dandy with crippling financial burdens came to be the revered leader of the Conservative party, twice Prime Minister and Earl of the realm is a question that still fascinates scholars. But they generally appear to have missed one very important point. The fact was that a man with such glaring political disadvantages could never have achieved such pre-eminence without both great political talents and the ability to collaborate. Disraeli's success would not have been possible if he had relied solely on his own, undoubtedly great, powers of oratory and political instinct. If we are to believe Disraeli was an unprincipled political opportunist who was intrinsically and insurmountably different from his colleagues, then his success was unfathomable. He would not have achieved what he did if he had shared neither the same political principles nor social background of his colleagues in the aristocratic world of nineteenth-Century politics. As Vincent put it, 'the idea of Disraeli the miraculous outsider does not quite stand up'.²¹⁸⁵ To make sense of Disraeli's career we must accept that he was a far more consistent political thinker who shared, broadly speaking, the same political principles as his Tory colleagues and moreover that he was a political collaborator of the first order. His rise and longevity within the Conservative party was a result of his ability to form firm political alliances and close personal friendships with influential Conservative politicians. This ability to collaborate was evident from as early as the 1830s, when he was the political protégé of Lyndhurst, from his political forays against the party establishment with Young England, from his life-altering partnership with his great friend and patron Lord George Bentinck who established the foundations of his later political career, from his two-decade partnership with Lord Derby which slowly and cautiously restored the party's fortunes, and from the way he worked with and reconciled the influential members of his party when he became Prime Minister. All of this was evidence that Disraeli, far from being an 'Alien', or an unprincipled solo-operator, was a politician who, politically speaking, had far more in common with his aristocratic Tory colleagues than has often been admitted and that he was effective in forming and maintaining the necessary alliances to ensure his position within the party and its future success.

Disraeli's political principles have long been the subject of discussion for historians. Was he an unprincipled charlatan: a 'Sphinx without a riddle'?²¹⁸⁶ Or was he the far-sighted seer of Tory success in an industrialised democratic age. The fact was undoubtedly neither. A more balanced interpretation of Disraeli's life is needed. To a point, Disraeli was certainly an adventurer. He enjoyed the romance and excitement of politics and took great pleasure from intrigue. His vociferous leadership with Young England and his vicious attacks on Peel have always served to reinforce his reputation as a political adventurer. He was certainly never a 'respectable' politician. He admitted as much to Randolph Churchill in 1880.²¹⁸⁷ However, the lack of respectability in his politics was somewhat exaggerated by the scandals that plagued his youth and early career: the publication of *Vivian Grey*, his role in the failure of *The Representative*, his affair with Henrietta Sykes, the nature of his debts, his potential role in the temporary disappearance of Henry Stanley and even the potentially insincere circumstances of his marriage to Mary-Anne.²¹⁸⁸ All of this served to make Disraeli appear far more disreputable than he actually was: something that in many ways he did nothing to help. As Blake observed, 'few men have given more handles to their enemies from *Vivian Grey* onwards'.²¹⁸⁹

The charge that Disraeli was politically insincere, or that his principles were secondary to political calculation to achieve short-term political advantage is a claim that needs to be challenged. This is not always an easy task, since Disraeli often talked in such generalities and with a certain

²¹⁸⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.117

²¹⁸⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.757

²¹⁸⁷ Winston Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, (London: Odhams Press, 1905) p.131

²¹⁸⁸ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.757

²¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.766

haziness of language. However, this work has shown that Disraeli's consistency about the broad principles far outweighed any minor inconsistencies in his political behaviour. His politics were shaped by the political events of the 1830s and 1840s. It was in this period that so many intellectual and political threats emerged to the world he wished to defend. These challenges essentially arose from the weakness of traditional institutions and their seeming inability to defend themselves against the growing threat of liberal and radical ideas, both at home and abroad. As Parry has so skilfully recognised, it was in these years that Disraeli recognised both the challenges posed by 'the growth of a materialist commercial temperament', and the difficulty of organising a unified Conservative defence because of 'the selfishness of landed MPs, the factionalism in the church, and the breakdown of the two-party system'. Moreover, it was also a period that saw foreign threats emerge to Britain's 'power in Europe and the empire, especially from Russia'.²¹⁹⁰ It was the perceived danger of these socio-political developments in his formative years that shaped Disraeli's political beliefs and guided his later policies. This was not merely, a matter of short-term political calculation. But nor was it the assertion of a long-held vision of Tory-Democracy. Disraeli was a consistent political thinker, and one whose ideas emerged and in many ways were stuck, in the 1830s and 1840s.

The fact was that Disraeli had a remarkable consistency to his political purpose. Even his great rival Gladstone recognised as much while delivering his eulogy to the House of Commons in 1881. There he praised not only Disraeli's 'his extraordinary intellectual powers' and 'strength of will', but also his 'his long-sighted persistency of purpose'.²¹⁹¹ Disraeli's consistency of purpose was indeed quite remarkable. His political thought, which he gradually mapped out in the first decade and a half of his political career, was essentially unchanged at the end of it. He venerated the aristocracy, and he believed whole-heartedly in the territorial nature of the English constitution and the greatness of England. In many ways, these were for him inter-connected. For Disraeli saw the greatness of England as being irrevocably entwined with the fate of the landed classes. Vincent is uncharacteristically wide of the mark when he suggested that 'Disraeli's unrestrained delight in aristocracy was aesthetic, not political'.²¹⁹² Throughout his political career his almost sole objective had been to ensure as far as possible the existing constitutional and societal balances should be protected. That the status quo, as far as possible, should be preserved. He was not a man who believed in equality but rather in hierarchy: the ladder of society should not be broken or laid flat, but rather have its rungs reinforced and be made accessible to people of talent. This, he believed, could only happen if the position of the aristocracy in politics and society was protected. That, in turn, could only be achieved should the 'national' elements of the country oppose those sectarian interests who would have the existing societal arrangement destroyed. Disraeli was by no means a reactionary. But his politics were intrinsically defensive. Disraeli first entered politics in the run up to the Great Reform Act, the result of which made an irrevocable impression on how he understood politics. He had seen where reaction had left the Tories. Disraeli believed in securing the society's natural hierarchy by other, more active, means. In his *Vindication* and *Spirit of Whiggism* and other early political writings, Disraeli provided an intelligent justification of the established political institutions and the rule of the landed aristocracy through the first elucidation of his idiosyncratic and undeniably 'Tory' version of English history. He turned the Whig interpretation on its head. The Whigs were no longer the many but the greedy and ambitious few, propped up by dissenters and Scottish and Irish votes. The stalwart country gentlemen of the Tory party, so far from being the thin blue line of reaction, were the national majority loyal to the traditional interests of the nation. It was an interpretation of English history that he never strayed from, and in fact developed over time.

²¹⁹⁰ Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p.725

²¹⁹¹ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 9th of May 1881, v.261, c.43

²¹⁹² Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.119

The charge of political insincerity and inconsistency has generally been corroborated by the evidence of a series of political U-turns. To be sure, Disraeli initially entered politics as an independent radical, before converting to Toryism. However, this was a far more principled act than has been previously acknowledged. As he wrote to Benjamin Austen, ‘Toryism is worn out, and I cannot condescend to be a Whig’.²¹⁹³ The Tories had ruined themselves in their absolute refusal to consider electoral reform. Hence his stance as a radical, though admittedly as one who stood upon Tory planks, defended the Corn Laws and refused to attack the position of the Anglican Church.²¹⁹⁴ The Whig management of the Reform Bill ensured Disraeli’s lasting enmity. This formed in him the indelible impression that Whiggism was a force of self-interest rather than progress. It seems therefore very unlikely, as Vincent suggested, that ‘had the patronage of Lord Durham in the 1830s or Palmerston in the 1840s come his way...there was no reason why Disraeli should not have become an effective Liberal politician without any liberal illusions.’²¹⁹⁵ Disraeli rejected almost all the central beliefs of nineteenth-century liberalism. Moreover, his view of politics and his defence of Tory principles aligned him with the Conservative party. It has also long been suggested that Disraeli abandoned the principles of Young England after 1846.²¹⁹⁶ However, the ideas of Young England were not forgotten. They were the same broad sentiments that served Disraeli as political principles. Blake describes Disraeli as an ‘impresario and an actor manager’ a master in the ‘art of presentation’. In this, he is correct. But it is strange that he cannot see the how the principles of Young England were repackaged in a more practical manner when Disraeli became leader of the party and had to practical considerations to make.²¹⁹⁷ Blake’s suggestion that Disraeli constructed his own romantic vision of Toryism as a direct challenge to the moderate Conservatism of Peel is also problematic. He certainly contributed more than most, but perhaps not as much as Peel himself, to his leader’s political demise. However, Disraeli quickly realised that ‘when the dust settled [after 1846], it became clear enough that, though Peel had fallen, the party was not going to get anywhere if it continued to repudiate Peelism’.²¹⁹⁸ Disraeli, just as he did in 1881, was not willing to try to oppose or role back legislation that had been approved by the electorate and the Commons. Protection was dead and there was no point in attempting to resurrect it when the spirit of the age was so firmly committed to the principles of free trade. Far from having an ‘actual policy’ that was ‘essentially Peelite’ in contrast to his own romantic philosophy that he ‘never abandoned or denied’ but which ‘had little effect on his actions’, Disraeli spent the greater part of his political life attempting to re-establish Toryism on a popular and moderate foundation, in contrast to the Conservatism of Peel, and true to the landed roots and hereditary traditions of his party. The bulk of his activity in the Age of Equipoise had been attempting to realign both the Tories and parliamentary politics in favour of a new ‘national’ settlement that readjusted the conventional principles of mid-Victorian government. In the case of the Church, he tried to restore Tory fortunes by constructing a new national majority around the time-worn Tory principles of Church defence, in a policy reimagined for the 1860s. In the matter of Parliamentary reform, he challenged the Liberal orthodoxy and attempted to turn the Reform question to Tory advantage, by resting the franchise on the broad principle of household suffrage rather than on a mere arbitrary number or fixed line. Only in the matter of finance, where Disraeli was perhaps least comfortable, did he come close to orthodox Peelism. But even then, he had none of Peel’s or Gladstone’s moral certainty that so coloured their approach to financial questions. As Prime Minister, his domestic legislation and social reform attempted to prove that the Conservatives were the true

²¹⁹³ *Disraeli’s Letters*, Disraeli to Benjamin Austen, 2nd of June 1832, p.198

²¹⁹⁴ Bradford, *Disraeli*, p.57

²¹⁹⁵ Vincent, *Disraeli*, pp.118-119

²¹⁹⁶ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.211, p.214, p.762

²¹⁹⁷ Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.762-764

²¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.758

national party and natural allies of the working classes. This was not an unfathomable leap from the paternalist sentiments of Young England. Moreover, it was less moralistic than Peel's attempts to improve the lot of the working classes, and more comprehensible from a Conservative perspective after 1867 when the floodgates of mass democracy had been opened. In his later years Disraeli certainly did not, as Blake has argued, take a strong stance foreign and imperial policy 'because Gladstone...was hostile to any forward policy' or 'because he thought jingoism might be a vote winner'.²¹⁹⁹ His travels in 1830-31 had given him the impression that he had a far deeper understanding of the world than many of his contemporaries. Disraeli would have likely have tied the Conservatives to a programme of prestigious imperial policy far earlier had he been given the chance and had they not been faced by Palmerston's dominance over foreign affairs during the 1850s and 1860s.

Many of the accusations of insincerity that Disraeli faced both during his career and after his death stemmed from the otherwise unexceptional observation that he broke the mould of Victorian propriety. This was an age that extolled strict morality and firm discipline that believed in the possibility of self-improvement for the human condition had an unshakable faith in the sanctity of progress, and celebrated material prosperity.²²⁰⁰ In short, these were an undeniably serious people. It was therefore an age that demanded grave and serious politicians. Disraeli was neither. In fact he actively repudiated many of the shibboleths of the Victorian Age. Blake described him as 'a very "un-Victorian" figure', and in that he was right.²²⁰¹ Not only did he shun the accepted societal beliefs of the Victorian age, but throughout his career he rejected the consensus politics of the mid-century. He rejected the dominant political force of liberal rationalism and put forward his vision of politics where imagination rather than logic was the force by which the public mind should be engaged. Disraeli thought about politics in terms of it being a 'great game'. This was no doubt a less high-minded view of politics than was normal. But it was not without principle. Disraeli was a natural sceptic who derided the sanctimonious cant that surrounded the utterances of some politicians during his career. Because he did not conform to the Victorian mould of grave, serious and high-minded statesmen, he seems in some strange way more modern than his contemporaries. This is also a mistake. His cynicism, so out of place in his own time, apparently makes him 'less "dated" than any other contemporary politician'.²²⁰² However, the superficial timelessness that Disraeli demonstrates to modern observers is misleading. Disraeli's politics were shaped in the 1830s and 1840s, and by the threats that emerged in that period. As Parry has contended: 'it is arguable that to the end of his career his preoccupations were shaped by the conceptions he developed then; in that sense, he spent his life looking backwards'.²²⁰³

Harold Macmillan, in his foreword to Blake's biography of Disraeli, saw in Blake's depiction: 'the most modern of all Victorian statesmen'. It is certainly fascinating to see how Blake's portrait of Disraeli, with all its emphasis on his cynical and opportunist tendencies, appealed to Macmillan, who saw in that picture a mirror of himself. However, Disraeli was not modern, and it is not without some irony that at the time of his writing, Macmillan had become an anachronism in his own right. Disraeli's politics were not modern. As Parry has argued, Disraeli was not the keen adherent of public opinion that some have portrayed him to be. Not only did he often ignore popular clamour, his policies were often aimed at leading public opinion rather than gauging, and then following it.²²⁰⁴ There is little evidence to suggest he adjusted to mass politics even after the pivotal

²¹⁹⁹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.760

²²⁰⁰ Briggs, *Victorian People*, pp.11-22; Burn, *Age of Equipoise*, pp7-15

²²⁰¹ Blake, *Disraeli*, p.765

²²⁰² Blake, *Disraeli*, p.765

²²⁰³ Parry 'Disraeli and England', p.705

²²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.701.

role he played in 1867. He gave very few great public speeches, and he hardly spoke in public at all in the run up to his three elections as Tory leader. He never built a great oratorical following like some contemporaries. In fact, in the run up to 1880 he criticized Gladstone for ‘spouting all over the country, like an irresponsible demagogue’, which he thought ‘wholly inexcusable in a man who is a statesman’.²²⁰⁵ He spent his whole political life attempting to protect the existing status quo of landed government and aristocratic hierarchy in society. However, though it seems improbable that Disraeli realized it, aristocratic government was itself dying with him. The 1880 general election had seen the first exodus of the country gentlemen from the House of Commons. Disraeli saw that result simply in terms of agricultural depression. But there were wider and more permanent forces at work. It was unlikely that Disraeli understood the true extent of changes that had been wrought in British society during his political career. He still saw the country and politics in reference to land and he had little understanding of manufacturing industry, which had likely outstripped agriculture as the principal sector of the economy as early as the 1850s. He had seen the results of the excesses of irresponsible industrialism and capitalist greed when he toured England to gather material for *Sybil*. But even by 1880, his more general view of society remained unchanged. Britain had ceased to be an agricultural economy or rural society long before Disraeli’s death. However, those changes had been well masked behind commercial prosperity and a general class peace. So much so that by his death, so far from being ‘modern’, Disraeli’s view of the world was becoming increasingly and rapidly anachronistic. In a sense, it was lucky for him that he died when he did. He never had to confront a world-view shattered by the legislation of the 1880s, notably the Third Reform Act which extended household suffrage to the counties and the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act which banned bribery, ‘treating’ and other forms of ‘influence’, together destroying any illusion that aristocratic government could carry on into the future.²²⁰⁶ As Lord Salisbury was famously pessimistic about the future when he later became Prime Minister in the 1890s. Disraeli’s aristocratic world had faded. It was ironic that the man of rigid principle had after 1880 to cooperate ‘as a fallen man must, in a fallen world’.²²⁰⁷ Disraeli was in many ways fortunate that he never lived to see it.

If Disraeli was neither the ruthless opportunist nor the far-sight politician of later Conservative success, but instead an essentially backward-looking politician who spent his life answering the threats to society he identified in the 1840s, then two questions naturally arise: First, why has his legacy become so distorted in popular mythology? Secondly, why has Disraeli become such an important figure to the modern Conservative party? The main reason was that for Conservatives desperately in need of a hero at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth-century, Disraeli seemed to provide all the answers to contemporary issues that he certainly never foresaw. After his death, he took on a much greater importance than when he was alive. The Tory party needed a hero and ‘Disraeli never looked so good as he did in the years just after his death’.²²⁰⁸ Indeed, Disraeli quickly became the patron-saint of a huge popular political movement: the Primrose League. Set up by Randolph Churchill in the years after Disraeli’s death, it celebrated Disraeli’s ‘foundation’ of Tory Democracy. The movement became the largest political organization in the country. Members wore primroses on the day of Disraeli’s death.²²⁰⁹ April the 19th was thereafter known as Primrose Day. Between 1885 and 1887, the League’s membership rose from 11,000 to

²²⁰⁵ Cited in M&B, vol.6, p.524

²²⁰⁶ Hawkins, *Victorian Political Culture*, pp.320-324: The Reform Act increased the county electorate from less than one-million voters in 1883 to more than 2.5 million in 1886. While the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act saw electoral expenses reduce by nearly two-thirds between 1880 and 1886.

²²⁰⁷ Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*, vol.1, p.?

²²⁰⁸ Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*, vol.1, (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), p.387; Vincent, p.49

²²⁰⁹ Supposedly Disraeli’s favourite flower after he had made a comment to Victoria about the primroses, he received from Osborne house. It is not clear that they were his actual favourite flower or whether it was another example of Disraeli’s flattery towards Victoria. Either way the primrose stuck.

over half a million. By 1910, it had over 2 million members.²²¹⁰ It attracted all classes of society, from both genders, and though aristocratic in its leadership, became a great tool of greater coexistence between classes. The league became less significant in the early 20th century, but Disraeli did not. Conservatism in this country has always needed a historical mandate when it has wished to undertake progressive, reforming government. Stanley Baldwin, the great facilitator of class peace and social progression, invoked Disraeli as the founder of One Nation conservatism in order to give legitimacy to his own brand of progressive Conservatism: ‘My party’, he claimed, ‘has no political bible. Possibly you might find our ideals best expressed in one of Disraeli’s novels’.²²¹¹ Later 20th century politician would also find Disraeli a useful ally. Hurd has pointed out that for R.A. Butler, Disraeli’s factory reform and trade union legislation made him a helpful predecessor in the age of the general strike. In a similar vein, Enoch Powell venerated ‘that constellation of acts which made that [second] administration a landmark in the social history of this country.’²²¹² In 1994, in a poll of Conservative MPs asked which books or authors had most influenced their political beliefs, Disraeli came top.²²¹³ David Cameron answered Disraeli to a similar question in 2007.²²¹⁴ As recently as 2012, the Labour Party tried to claim the ‘legacy’ of Disraeli. Ed Miliband in his speech to the Labour Party conference argued that Labour should fight for the ground of One-Nation, for the government to reduce the economic and social inequality that was first expounded by-- Disraeli.²²¹⁵

The fact is that so much of this could not be further from the truth. Disraeli certainly did leave a legacy to his party, but it was not that of progressive Conservatism. So why was Disraeli so preferred? Why did he become such a hero to later Conservatives? There were two main reasons: ambiguity and lack of a better choice. Disraeli was always enveloped by a sense of ambiguity that did not surround other politicians. He was a brilliant wit and his writing and speeches were replete with sparkling, if somewhat intangible, phrases that made him such an interesting, if divisive, figure for both contemporaries and later politicians. It was this intangibility that in so many ways made him such a good patron-saint of progressive Conservatism. Among his novels and his many speeches could always be found the right quotation or the right sentiment. As Blake observed, ‘no Prime Minister had received or deserved more space in the dictionaries of quotations’. Secondly, those searching for a hero at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries had little in the way of choice. Pitt was too far removed in time and not really a true Tory. Wellington, though a military hero, had a political career had been blighted by unpopularity and controversy. There was a danger that to Baldwin, Salisbury would be seen as both too recent and too anti-democratic. Liverpool was generally seen as Disraeli had seen him: an ‘arch-mediocrity’.²²¹⁶ Derby was so anonymous that he was hardly worth considering. In some ways, the obvious choice, Robert Peel could never be thus identified, as he had destroyed his own party.²²¹⁷ So Disraeli became the popular Tory saint of progressive conservatism: the far-sighted seer who envisaged a Britain where social and economic inequality would be a key issue in a democratic society.

Disraeli certainly left a legacy to the Conservative party. But it was not that of progressive Conservatism. Disraeli’s legacy to his party lay in his greatest achievement. This was that by the time of his death in 1881 the party still existed as a major political force and one that had proved itself once more capable of executing the responsibilities of government, after such a long removal from real

²²¹⁰ Hurd, *Disraeli*, pp.8-10

²²¹¹ Stanley Baldwin, *On England*, (London, 1926) p.205

²²¹² Hurd. p12

²²¹³ Paul Smith, *Disraeli: a Brief Life*, p.211

²²¹⁴ Dylan Jones, *Cameron on Cameron*, (London, Fourth Estate, 2008) p.107

²²¹⁵ Roy Hattersley and Kevin Hickson. *The Socialist Way: Social Democracy in Contemporary Britain*, (London:

I.B.Tauris, 2013) p.4

²²¹⁶ *Coningsby*, p.75

²²¹⁷ Vincent, pp.49-50

power. When Disraeli destroyed Peel for the betrayal of Tory principles in 1846, he also very nearly destroyed the Party. Without a doubt, Disraeli's greatest political achievement was that he was able to preserve the Party by transforming his party, out of the ruins both of protection and division, and restore it as a truly national party with a national message. Of course, Disraeli himself represented a major obstacle to a more organic reconciliation between Tories and Peelites. But there was no guarantee that this would have occurred had Disraeli instead been jettisoned after 1846. Indeed, it seems more likely that it would not have happened. Gladstone once described him as 'at once Lord Derby's necessity and his curse'.²²¹⁸ In that he was wrong. Derby and Disraeli collaborated effectively for over twenty years. If Bentinck had been responsible for making Disraeli's political rise possible in the Conservative party, then it was his partnership with Derby that made Conservative survival and later success possible.

In a somewhat overwrought interpretation, Russell Kirk long-ago surmised: 'What was it in the ideas of Disraeli that provided the Conservatives with spirit enough to recover from Peelism and to dominate a nation more heavily industrialized than any other in the world? What allowed enabled the party of the country gentlemen to hold office well into the twentieth century, when they had thought themselves irretrievably ruined in 1845?...His really important achievement as a party leader, was implanting in the public imagination an ideal of Toryism which has been immeasurably valuable in keeping Britain faithful to her constitutional and spiritual traditions.'²²¹⁹ In this, he perhaps goes too far, and overestimates Disraeli's genuine importance. But there is in that statement the germ of Disraeli's real legacy to his party.

He was undoubtedly a political genius, the likes of which politics in this country had rarely seen. He may not have been the moral or intellectual equal of Gladstone. But he was a parliamentarian of unrivalled skill and one who had stood almost alone in the House of Commons for so many years, single-handedly taking on the greatest orators of the day arrayed against him on the government benches. Moreover, he was a politician with almost unequalled courage. There was no hypocrisy or cant when Gladstone praised in his tribute to his former rival that 'great Parliamentary courage, which I, who have been associated in the course of my life with some scores of Ministers, have never seen surpassed.'²²²⁰ In many ways, Disraeli's political record was poor, his long-lasting legislative achievements were few, he had a uniquely bad electoral record among Conservative leaders and often proved a divisive rather than unifying figure. However, had proven them capable of assuming national issues and victory in 1874 armed the Conservatives with a new-found confidence. Disraeli's legacy was to give British Conservatism an imagination that it had always lacked. He left them well equipped to deal with new social forces of the 20th century. Disraeli was not a far-sighted leader, but his instinct as a political thinker and his faith in his own genius occasionally paid off. In 1867, he had not worried about a low urban franchise, because deep down he had always thought the English working-classes to be naturally deferential and instinctively conservative. The political confidence restored by a Tory victory in 1867, would always outweigh any risks taken by a more extensive measure of reform. Again in 1872, with the unveiling of a revitalized imperial policy, Disraeli once again was proved to be in tune with the national conscience. Lord Morley, Gladstone's great biographer, admitted that for once it was Disraeli rather than Gladstone who was successful in divining the shifting sands of British public mind: 'Disraeli's genius, at once brooding over conceptions and penetrating in discernment of fact, had shown him vast Tory reserves had shown vast Tory reserves that his household suffrage of 1867 would rally to his flag. The same genius again scanning the skies read aright the signs and characteristics of the time...National pride...was silently

²²¹⁸ Morley, *Gladstone*, vol.1, p.319

²²¹⁹ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, pp.236-237

²²²⁰ *Hansard*, 3rd Series, House of Commons, 9th of May 1881, v.261, c.43

but deeply stirred... This coming mood the Tory leader... confidently divined, and he found for it the oracle of a party cry about Empire and Social Reform.²²²¹ Morley was of course wrong. Disraeli's powers of prediction and prescience with regard to politics was poor, and he was not the mystic that Morley portrayed him to be.

Even so, from very early in his career he saw the national nature of 'true' Tory politics. His politics were conceived in the decade after 1832. He was right and perhaps even 'modern', to assume that the Great Reform Act had changed everything: popular forces had be awoken, and that parties must adapt. His views on the constitution, the Church, national character, the prestige of Empire, and the condition of the people were all developed and elucidated in the fifteen years between 1832 and the start of his front bench parliamentary career. Disraeli only became the great seer of Tory politics as he seemed to later generations to have grasped the answers to 'Conservative survival in an era of nationalism, imperialism and democracy, which he hardly entered'.²²²² Disraeli was consistent to the age in which he arrived as a political thinker; he was certainly not modern for it. Disraeli's greatest gift to Conservative posterity was his glittering imagination, political courage and his consistency of purpose. His political life was dedicated to the protection of the constitution, aristocratic government and existing social status quo. It was Disraeli's force of character, formidable imagination, and his powers of political collaboration that was able to hold the Tories together in the twenty-eight years between 1846 and 1874 when it was entirely possible that they could have slowly faded from the political landscape. He trusted the loyal nature of English people, when many Conservatives feared them. His interpretation of English history was able to transcend the realities of Conservative minority, and successfully rebrand them as the historical national party, when it could be argued the Liberals had a much greater claim.

Far from being an unprincipled opportunist, a surreptitious tory democrat, or mistrusted outsider of Conservative politics, Disraeli was in many ways far more conventional and far less exotic figure than has previously been suggested. Undoubtedly, his background and his beginnings were far from standard when it came to Victorian premiers. He was born a metropolitan middle-class Jew; he had no formal education at a public school or ancient university; he was a society novelist, controversial polemicist, and debtor racked by financial burdens. Despite all this, he did not inhabit another world. By the time he became Prime Minister he had been a recognized figure in high society for nearly thirty years. He was not the first middle-class man to be become Prime Minister; both Spencer Perceval and Robert Peel, had been middle-class men, though Disraeli came from an admittedly more middle-class background than either of them.²²²³ His rise to political pre-eminence was undoubtedly unlikely and it cannot be properly understood unless we are willing to accept that his success would have been impossible except for a broad agreement and genuine shared purpose with his colleagues and without exceptional powers of political collaboration, utilized together in order to forge and maintain the alliances and working relationships to facilitate his success within a party whose leadership and men of influence came from a different social class and had different backgrounds and interests. The fact remains that despite these obvious differences, Disraeli was an Englishman, who took great pride in his position as a country gentleman, venerated the aristocracy and tried as hard as he could to uphold the existing social and political hierarchy. He was not the mistrusted conjurer of popular myth. This was why he was a man who the aristocracy of the Conservative party effectively worked with and later loyally served. Disraeli will be a figure who will never cease to fascinate later generations who look back upon him. He was a genuinely remarkable

²²²¹ John Morley, *Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, vol. II, (London: Macmillan & co, 1903) p.392

²²²² Paul Smith, *Disraeli: a Brief Life*, p.219

²²²³ Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.117

man and an idiosyncratic political thinker. There is therefore no need to make his political successes and contributions to British political history any more fantastical or wondrous than they already are.

Bibliography

Bibliography

Manuscript Sources,

Derby Mss, Liverpool Record Office

Hughenden Papers, Oxford, Bodleian Library

Portland (Welbeck) Collection, Nottingham University Library

Novels

Disraeli, Benjamin, *A Year at Hartlebury; or The Election*, (London: John Murray, 1983)

—————, *The Young Duke*, Bradenham Edition, vol. II, (London: Peter Davies, 1927)

—————, *Contarini Fleming*, Bradenham Edition, vol.IV, (London: Peter Davies, 1927)

—————, *Alroy*, Bradenham Edition, vol.V, (London: Peter Davies, 1927)

—————, *Coningsby; or The New Generation*, Bradenham edition, vol. XIII, (London: Peter Davies, 1927)

—————, *Sybil; or The Two Nations*, Bradenham edition, vol. IX (London: Peter Davies, 1927)

—————, *Tancred; or The New Crusade*, Bradenham edition, vol.X, (London Peter Davies, 1927)

—————, *Lothair*, Bradenham edition, vol. XI, (London: Peter Davies, 1927)

—————, *Endymion*, Bradenham edition, vol. XII, (London; Peter Davies, 1927)

Other Writing

—————, *England and France; or A Cure for Ministerial Gallomania*, (London: J. Murray, 1832)

—————, ‘What is He?’, in *Whigs and Whiggism*, (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2006)

—————, ‘Peers and People’ , in *Whigs and Whiggism*, (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2006)

—————, ‘Vindication of the English Constitution’, in *Whigs and Whiggism*, (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2006)

—————, ‘Spirit of Whiggism’, in *Whigs and Whiggism*, (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2006)

—————, ‘The Letters of Runnymede’, *Whigs and Whiggism*, (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2006)

—————, *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography*, (London: Longmans, Green, and co., 1872)

—————, *Disraeli’s Reminiscences*, ed. Helen M. Swartz and Marvin Swartz, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975)

—————, *Letters*, ed. by J.A.W. Gunn and M.G. Wiebe, vol.1-10 (London: University of Toronto Press, 1982)

Newspapers and Editorials

The Courier

The Morning Chronicle

The Morning Herald

The Press

Punch

The Times

The Spectator

The Quarterly Review

Other Printed Sources

Cole, G.D.H. and A.W. Filson, *British Working Class Movements: Selected Documents, 1789-1875*, (London: Macmillan, 1967)

Corry, Montague (ed.), *Parliamentary Reform: A Series of Speeches on that subject delivered in the House of Commons by the Right Hon. B. Disraeli (1848-1866)*, (London: Longmans, 1867)

de Tocqueville, Alexis, *Democracy in America*, edited and translated, Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Erskine May, Sir Thomas, *The Constitutional History of England Since the Ascension of George III, 1760 to 1860*, 2 vols, (London: Longman, 1861)

Fraser, Sir, William, *Disraeli and His Day*, (London: Keegan Paul, 1891)

- Gordon, Peter, (ed.), *The Political Diary of the Fourth Earl of Carnarvon*, Camden 5th Series, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- Hanham, H.J., *The Nineteenth Century Constitution*, (London: CUP, 1969)
- Hicks, Geoffrey, John Charmley and Bendor Grosvenor (ed.), *Documents on Conservative Foreign Policy, 1852-1878*, (Cambridge, CUP, 2012)
- Hobhouse, J.C., *Recollections of a Long Life*, 6 vols, (London: John Murray, 1909)
- Jennings, Louis J., *The Croker Papers*, 3. vols, (London: John Murray, 1885)
- Johnson, Nancy, E. (ed.), *The Diary of Gathorne Hardy later Lord Cranbrook, 1866-1892: Political Selections*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981)
- Kebbel, T.E. (ed.), *Selected Speeches of the Late the Right Honourable Earl of Beaconsfield*, (London: Longmans green, 1882)
- Jones Parry, E. (ed.), *The Correspondence of Aberdeen and Lieven*, 2 vols, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1938)
- Martin, A. (ed.), *The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Robert Lowe*, (London: Longmans Green, 1893)
- Matthew, H.C.G. and M.R.D. Foot (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries*, (Oxford: OUP and Clarendon Press, 1968-1994), vol. X (OUP, 1990)
- Monypenny, William Favelle, and George Earle, Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, 7 volumes, (London: Murray, 1910-1920)
- Morier Evans, D., *The Commercial Crisis, 1847-1848*, (London: Lets, Son, and Steer, 1849)
- Douglas, George, eighth Duke of Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, 2 vols, (London: John Murray, 1906)
- Parker, C.S., *Sir Robert Peel from his Private Papers*, 3 volumes (London: John Murraray, 1891-1899)
- Reid T.W., *The Life, Letters, and Friendships of Richard Monckton-Milnes, First Lord Houghton*, 2 vols, (London: Cassell, 1891)
- Swarts, Helen M. and Marvin Swarts (ed.), *Disraeli's Reminiscences*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975)
- St. John-Stevas, Norman, (ed.), *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, vol. 4-8, (London: The Economist, 1965)
- Stephen, Leslie, *Essays on Reform*, (London: Macmillan, 1867)
- Strachey, Lytton and Roger Fulford (ed.), *The Greville Memoirs*, 3 vols, (London: Macmillan, 1938)

Vincent, John, ed., *Derby, Disraeli and the Conservative Party: journals and memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869*, (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1979)

—————, (ed.), *A selection from the diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826-93) : between September 1869 and March 1878*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1994)

—————, (ed.), *The diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826-93) between 1878 and 1893 : a selection*, (Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, 2003)

White, William, *The Inner Life of the House of Commons*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904)

Zetland, Marquis of, (ed.), *Letters of Benjamin Disraeli to Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield*, 2 vols. (London: Benn, 1929)

Secondary Material

Aldous, Richard, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone vs Disraeli*, (London, Pimlico, 2007)

Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt, 1951)

Balfour, Lady Francis, *Life of George, Fourth Earl of Aberdeen*, vol.2 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923)

Beales, Derek, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone 1815-1885*, (London: Sphere Books, 1971)

Bentley, M., *Politics without Democracy, 1815-1914*, (London: Fontana Press, 1984)

Berlin, Isaiah, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx and the Search for Identity', in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society*, vol.22, (1970)

Biagini, Eugenio, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992)

Blake, Robert, *Disraeli*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966)

—————, *Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*, (London: Fontana, 1990)

—————, *Disraeli's Grand Tour: Benjamin Disraeli and the Holy Land, 1830-31*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982).

Borgstede, Simone Beate, *'All is Race': Benjamin Disraeli of Race, Nation and Empire*, (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2011)

Bradford, Sarah, *Disraeli*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1982)

Brantlinger, Patrick, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1977)

—————, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1904*, (Ithica NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1988)

- , 'Disraeli and Orientalism', *The Self Fashioning of Disraeli*, ed. by Charles Richmond and Paul Smith, (Cambridge: CUP, 1998)
- Briggs, Asa, *Victorian People*, (London: Odhams Press, 1954)
- Brockliss, Lawrence and David Eastwood, *A Union of Multiple Identities: the British Isles, 1750-1850*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)
- Brown, Callum, 'Did Urbanization Secularize Britain?', *Urban History Yearbook*, (1988),
- Burn, W.L., *The Age of Equipoise*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964)
- Campbell, Gareth, 'Government Policy during the British Railway Mania and the 1847 Commercial Crisis, in *British Financial Crises since 1825*, ed. by Nicholas Dimsdale and Anthony Hotson (Oxford: OUP, 2014)
- Cesarani, David, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Novel Politician*, (London: Yale University Press, 2016)
- Charmley, Jonathan, *History of Conservative Politics since 1830*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
- Chase, Malcolm, 'Out of Radicalism: The Mid-Victorian Freehold Land Movement', *The English Historical Review*, 106: 419, (1991)
- , *Chartism: a New History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)
- , 'The Popular Movement for Parliamentary Reform in Provincial Britain during the 1860s', *Parliamentary History*, 36.1, (2017)
- , 'What Did Chartism Petition For? Mass Petitions in the British Movement for Democracy', *Social Science History*, 43, (2019)
- Coleman, B, *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1988)
- Conary, Jennifer, "'Dreaming over the Unattainable End": Disraeli's *Tancred* and the Failure of Reform', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38.1 (2010)
- Colley, Linda, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: Tory Party 1714-1760*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Conway, J.S., 'The Jerusalem Bishopric: A Union of Foolscap and Blotting Paper', *Studies in Religion*, 7.3 (1978)
- Conacher, J.B., *Peelites and the Party System*, (London: David Charles, 1972)
- Cowling, Maurice, 'Disraeli, Derby and Fusion, October 1865 to July 1866', *The Historical Journal*, 8.1, (1965)
- , *Disraeli, Gladstone, and Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967)

- Craig, F.W.S., (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results 1832-1885*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1977)
- Davis, Richard, *Disraeli*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976)
- Eastwood, David, “‘Recasting Our Lot’: Peel, the nation, and the politics of interest’, in *A Union of Multiple Identities*, ed. David Eastwood and Lawrence Brockliss, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997)
- Edsall, N., ‘A Failed National Movement: the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, 1848-54’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, (1976)
- Eldridge, C., *England’s Mission: The Imperial Idea in the age of Gladstone and Disraeli*, (London: Palgrave, 1973)
- , *Disraeli and the Rise of New Imperialism*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996)
- Endelman, Todd, “‘Hebrew to the end’: the Emergence of Disraeli’s Jewishness’, *The Self Fashioning of Disraeli*, ed. by Charles Richmond and Paul Smith, (Cambridge: CUP, 1998);
- , ‘Benjamin Disraeli and the Myth of Sephardi Superiority’, in *Disraeli’s Jewishness*, ed. by Todd Endelmann & Tony Kusher, (London: Valentine Mikhell, 2002)
- Evans, Eric J., *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain, 1783-1870*, (London: Pearson, 1983)
- Feuchtwanger, Edgar, *Disraeli*, (London: Arnold, 2000)
- Flavin, Michael, *Benjamin Disraeli: Novel as Political Discourse*, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press 2005)
- Froude, F.A., *The Earl of Beaconsfield*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1891)
- Gambles, Anna, *Protection and Politics: Conservative Economic Discourse 1815-152*, (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1999)
- Gash, Norman, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, (London: Longmans, 1953)
- Gaunt, Richard A., *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010)
- Ghosh, P.R., ‘Disraelian Conservatism: A Financial Approach’, in *The English Historical Review*, vol.99, no. 391, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)
- , ‘Style and Substance in Disraelian Social Reform, c1860-1880’, in *Politics and Social Change in Modern Britain: Essays Presented to AF Thompson*, (1987)
- Green, S.J.D., ‘The City of God and After: Religious Change and Organisational Decline in Great English Towns since c.1850’, *Northern History*, 52:1, (2015)
- Hawkins, Angus, *Parliament, Party and the Art of Politics in Britain, 1855-59*, (London: Macmillan, 1987)

- , *The Forgotten Prime Minister: the 14th Earl of Derby*, 2 volumes, (Oxford: OUP, 2008)
- , *Victorian Political Culture*, (Oxford, OUP, 2015)
- Hewitt, Martin, *An Age of Equipoise: Reassessing Mid-Victorian Britain*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000)
- Hibbert, Christopher, *Disraeli: a Personal History*, (London: Harper Collins, 2004)
- Hicks, Geoffrey, 'Whose Foreign Policy? Britain's 'Inner Cabinet' and the Eastern Crisis, January-March 1878', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 27.3, (2016)
- Hilton, Boyd, 'Peel: a Reappraisal', *The Historical Journal*, 22.3, (1979)
- , 'Disraeli, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit', in *A Union of Multiple Identities*, ed. by Lawrence Brockliss and David Eastwood, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)
- , *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?*, (Oxford: OUP, 2008)
- Hoppen, Theodore K., *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)
- , 'Grammars of Electoral Violence in 19th-century England and Ireland', *EHR*, vol.109, no.432, (1994)
- Hurd, Douglas and Edward Young, *Robert Peel: a Biography*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2007)
- , *Choose Your Weapons: The British Foreign Secretary*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2010)
- , *Disraeli or The Two Lives*, (London: Phoenix, 2013)
- Irwin, Douglas, 'Political Economy and Peel's Repeal of the Corn Laws', *Economics and Politics*, 1.1, (1989)
- Jenkins, Roy, *Gladstone*, (London: Macmillan 1995)
- Jenkins, T.A., *Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996)
- Jupp, Peter, 'Disraeli's interpretation of History', in *The Self-fashioning of Disraeli*, ed. by Charles Richmond & Paul Smith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- Leonard, *The Great Rivalry: Gladstone and Disraeli*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016)
- Longford, Elizabeth, *Wellington: Pillar of State*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1972)
- Kalmar, Ivan Davidson, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Romantic Orientalist', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47.2, (2005)

- Kirk, Russell, *The Conservative Mind*, (Indiana: Gateway Editions, 1978)
- Kirsch, Adam, Benjamin Disraeli, (New York: Schocken Books, 2008)
- Kramnick, Isaac, *Bolingbroke and his circle: the politics of nostalgia in the age of Walpole*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1968)
- Kuhn, William, *The Politics of Pleasure*, (London, Free Press, 2006)
- Lawson-Tancred, Mary, 'The Anti-League and the Corn Law Crisis of 1846', *The Historical Journal*, 3.2, (1960)
- Lee, Stephen J., *Aspects of British Political History, 1815-1914*, (London: Routledge, 2013)
- Levine, Richard, *Benjamin Disraeli*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968)
- Macintyre, Angus, 'Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists: a Lost Cause?', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 39, (1989)
- Matthew, H.C.G., 'Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Politics of the Mid-Victorian Budgets', *The Historical Journal*, 22.3, (1979)
- Middleton, Alex, 'The Second Reform Act and the Politics of Empire', *Parliamentary History*, 36.1, (2017)
- Millman, Richard, *Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-1878*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979)
- Mulvagh, Jane, *Madresfield: One House, One Family, One Thousand Years*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008)
- Mumford, Lewis, *The Condition of Man*, (London: Martin Seckler & Warburg Ltd, 1944)
- O'Kell, Robert, P., *Disraeli and the Romance of Politics*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2013)
- Olney, J.R., *ODNB: Frederick Lygon*, (Oxford: OUP, 2004)
- Parry, Jonathan, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993)
- , 'Disraeli and England', *The Historical Journal*, vol.43, issue 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)
- , 'The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11, (2001)
- , *Benjamin Disraeli*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- , '1867 and the Rule of Wealth', *Parliamentary History*, 36.1, (2017)

- , 'Disraeli, the East and Religion: Tancred in Context', *English Historical Review*, CXXXII, no.556, (2017)
- Pearson, Hesketh, *Dizzy: A Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, (London: Methuen & Co, 1951)
- Powell, David, *Nationhood and Identity: The British State since 1800*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002)
- Prest, John, *Politics in the Age of Cobden*, (London: Macmillan, 1977)
- Rallings, Collin and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts 1832-2012*, (London: Biteback, 2012)
- Reed, Donald, *Peel and the Victorians*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1987)
- Ridley, Jane, *The Young Disraeli: 1804-1846*, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995)
- Rieff, P, 'Disraeli and the Chosen of History', in *Freud, the Mind of a Moralist*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979)
- Rix, Kathryn, 'The Second Reform Act and the Problem of Electoral Corruption', *Parliamentary History*, 36.1, (2017)
- Robinson, Robert and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, (London: Macmillan, 1961)
- Robson, Robert, (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain*, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1967)
- Rubenstein, W.D., *Men of Property*, (London: Croom Helm, 1981)
- , *Britain's Century: A Political and Social History, 1815-1905*, (London: Arnold, 1998)
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1978)
- Salmon, Philip, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local politica and National Parties, 1832-1841*, (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2002)
- Saunders, Robert, 'Lord John Russell and Parliamentary Reform, 1848-67', *The English Historical Review*, 120: 489, (2005)
- , *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867*, (Farnham: Ashgate 2011)
- , 'Introduction: 'Shooting Niagara – and After?', *Parliamentary History*, 36.1, (2017)
- Schwarz, Daniel, R., *Disraeli's Fiction*, (London: Macmillan, 1979)
- , 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin': Jewish Perspectives in Disraeli's Fiction', *Disraeli's Jewishness*, ed. by Todd Endelmann & Tony Kusher, (London: Valentine Mikhell, 2002)
- Schweller, Russell, "'Mosaic Arabs': Jews and Gentlemen in Disraeli's Young England Trilogy", *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 24.2, (2006)

- Seth-Smith, Michael, *Lord Paramount of the Turf: Lord George Bentinck, 1802-1848*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1971)
- Shannon, Richard, *The Crisis of Imperialism, 1865-1915*, (London: Paladin, 1976)
- , *The Age of Disraeli 1868-1881: The Rise of Tory Democracy*, (London: Longman, 1992)
- , *Gladstone: God and Politics*, (London: Hambleton Continuum, 2007)
- Sheppard, Douglas F., ‘The Cave of Adullam, Household Suffrage, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act’, *Parliamentary History*, 14.2, (1995)
- Skjonsberg, Max, ‘Lord Bolingbroke’s Theory of Party and Opposition’, in *Historical Journal*, April 2016, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016)
- Smith, E.A., *Reform or Revolution? A Diary of Reform in England, 1830-32*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1992)
- F.B. Smith, *Making of the Second Reform Bill*, (London: Gregg Revivals, 1993)
- Smith, Paul, *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1967)
- , ‘Disraeli’s Politics’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, vol.37, (1987)
- , *Disraeli: a brief life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- St. John, Ian, *Disraeli and the Art of Victorian Politics*, (London, Anthem, 2005)
- Stedman Jones, Gareth, ‘Pressure from Without’: Karl Marx and 1867’, *Parliamentary History*, 36.1, (2017)
- Stewart, Robert, *The Foundation of the Conservative Party, 1830-67*, (London: Longman, 1978)
- , *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Conservative Party 1841-1852*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971)
- Thompson, E.P., *Making of the English Working Class*, (London: Gollancz, 1963)
- Trevelyan, *The Life of Bright*, (London: Constable, 1913)
- Tucker, Albert, ‘Disraeli and the Natural Aristocracy’, in *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol.28, no.1, (Canadian Economics Association, 1962)
- Valman, Nadia, ‘Manly Jews’, *Disraeli’s Jewishness*, ed. by Todd Endelmann & Tony Kusher, (London: Valentine Mikhell, 2002)
- Vincent, John, *Disraeli*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

- Walton, John K., *Disraeli*, (London: Routledge, 1990)
- Ward-Perkins, C.N., 'The Commercial Crisis of 1847', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 2.1 (1950)
- Warren, Allen, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives, and the Government of Ireland: Part 1, 1837-1868', *Parliamentary History*, 18.1, (1999)
- , 'Disraeli, the Conservatives, and the Government of Ireland: Part 2, 1868-1881', *Parliamentary History*, 18.2, (1999)
- , 'Disraeli, the Conservative and the National Church, 1837-1881', *Parliamentary History*, 19.1, (2000)
- Wasserman, Justin and Edwin Jaggard, 'Electoral Violence in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales', *Historical Research*, 80: 207, (2007)
- Weeks, Roger, 'Disraeli as Political Egotist: A Literary and Historical Investigation', in *Journal of British Studies*, vol.28, no.4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)
- Winter, James, 'The Cave of Adullam and Parliamentary Reform', *The English Historical Review*, 81: 318, (1966)
- Weintraub, Stanley, *Disraeli*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993)
- Whibley, C., *Lord John Manner and His Friends*, 2 vols, (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1925),
- Wohl, Anthony S., "'Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi": Disraeli as Alien', *Journal of British Studies*, 34.3, (1995)
- Zimmerman, Kirstin, 'Liberal Speech, Palmerstonian Delay, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act', *The English Historical Review*, 118: 479, (2003)