

Britain's Greatest Victory

1838-1847

By J. A. Stevenson

ARTICLE II.

Cobden's and Bright's Propaganda

Cobden was always aware of the inherent difficulties of the task which he had undertaken. He never failed to impress upon his colleagues and workers that great political and religious changes had never been accomplished save by a number of men stepping out to give their time, spend their money and agitate the community. It was futile to sit at home and wail over the evils of the system. What was needed was a strenuous and continuous appeal to the national sense of justice and duty. The Free Traders were soon to discover how hard an old class interest dies. They sent forth a band of economic missionaries, and though the latter received a cordial welcome and kindly hearing in Scotland, and in the northern towns of England, there were other districts where the opposition was violent. Rooms were refused them for their lectures, innkeepers refused the lecturers board and lodging; in one place a landlord offered a reward to any one who would throw the free trade lecturer into the river. They were fined for obstruction in thoroughfares by county magistrates whom they had worsted in debate, and at Cambridge their meeting ended in a wild and sanguinary riot engineered by Tory undergraduates, whom the Tory press piously congratulated as "the friends of good government and the upholders of the religious institutions of the country." In the press a long campaign of virulent calumny was entailed against them. They were described in turn as "unprincipled schemers," "commercial and political swindlers," and "self-conceited Socialists." But their investigations and journeys had revealed to them the importance of their cause; they found a woefully low standard of life prevailing in rural districts, what was only equalled by the misery and distress in the manufacturing communities.

Cobden's Maiden Speech

Cobden's maiden speech came early in the session, and it fell upon astonished ears unaccustomed to hear middle

class manufacturers intruding with their new-fashioned doctrines on old-fashioned prejudices. He left behind abstract arguments and proceeded to inform his audience of concrete facts regarding the condition of the nation; he maintained that it was the condition of the whole community and not only class interests or abstract fiscal doctrines that demanded the relief which Parliament alone could bestow; he insisted that the Corn Laws ought to be the first and only subject of debate in that Parliament, and his speech made a profound impression on his hearers of both parties. Peel himself had no definite plan, but it soon became obvious that only the revival of trade could save the situation. Cobden, however, continued his protests and tried to keep the mind of the House fixed on the misery and distress in the manufacturing districts. He was disgusted with the frivolous waste of time in Parliament debates and estimates "for arming and clothing colonial militia, lighthouses in Jamaica, negro education and bishops all over the world, etc.," while people were starving at home. He made one striking speech upon the trade relations between Great Britain and the United States; he showed how beneficial would be the interchange of food and manufactures between England and the United States which would immediately follow repeal. He quoted a petition for the American congress, in which it was stated that if English land owners would only be satisfied with a moderate duty there would be a constant market for wheat in England; the whole of the return would be required in British manufactured goods and as the result there would be a vast impetus to the manufacturing industries in the north. The following passage in his speech could almost be made to apply to the situation existing today in regard to the tariff between Canada and the United States. "Suppose now," Cobden said, "that it were but the Thames instead of the Atlantic which separated the two countries—suppose that the people on one side were me-

chanics and artisans, capable by their industry of producing a vast supply of manufactures and that the people on the other side were agriculturists, producing infinitely more than they could themselves consume of corn, pork and beef—fancy these two separate peoples anxious and willing to exchange with each other the produce of their common industries and fancy a demon rising from the river—for I cannot imagine a human in such a position and performing such an office—fancy a demon rising from the river and holding in his hand an Act of Parliament and saying: "You shall not supply each other's wants," and then in addition to that, let it be supposed that this demon said to his victim with an affected smile: "This is for your benefit; I do it entirely for your protection." Where was the difference between the Thames and the Atlantic?"

Compact with John Bright

Cobden's participation on the debates meant more than a mere fiscal agitation. It was the sign of a new self-assertion on the part of the manufacturing order. The conflict of the next few years was more than a mere economic contest. It was a struggle for political influence and social equality between the feudal aristocracy and the industrial capitalists. Great was the rage and anger of the aristocracy of England when the new class made its first serious attempt to take its place in the community.

In the autumn of 1841 the scene was removed from the House of Commons to the country and in that year Mr. John Bright and Cobden made their solemn contract of friendship. Bright's young wife had just died, and he was in the depths of misery when Cobden called to condole with him. After a time Cobden said to Bright: "There are thousands of houses in England at this moment where wives and mothers and children are dying of hunger; now when the first paroxysm of your grief is past I would advise you to come with me and we will never rest till the Corn Law is repealed." Bright accepted the invi-

tation and they knew no rest till their task was accomplished.

Sliding Scale of Duties

In 1842 it was commonly anticipated that the government would make some alterations in the Corn Laws. Cobden and Bright prosecuted their campaign; the former proceeding to Scotland and the latter to Dublin, while a great conference of the merchants of Derbyshire, Nottingham, Leicester and the neighboring counties was held at Derby. Instructions were issued to collect information as to the state of trade, the rate of wages, the extent of pauperism and other facts bearing upon the food monopoly, as these things affected their local industry. A great bazaar for the benefit of the cause was held in the Royal Theatre in Manchester which realized nearly 10,000 pounds. They still carried on their newspaper which had no lack of able and vivacious contributors. A volunteer at Preston began to issue a little sheet called "The Struggle." It was sold for one cent, and in two years over a million copies had been circulated. When parliament met Peel proceeded to lay the fiscal question before his colleagues in written memoranda and proposed to adjust a sliding scale of duties which would leave the price of wheat about 56 shillings. As a result the Duke of Buckingham resigned from the cabinet, but the rest consented to the proposals on the understanding that the new tariff was to be permanent. The Anti-Corn Law League were in no ways placated by the sliding scale arrangements. They clamoured for total and immediate repeal, but the prime minister declined to receive a large delegation of the league, which included Cobden, O'Connell, Bright, C. P. Villiers and Milner Gibson. In Parliament Peel attempted explanation of the commercial depression. It was due to over investment of borrowed capital and manufactures, to the displacement of the hand loom weaving by steam power, to the monetary crisis in America, to interruption of the China trade and to war scares in Europe.

Heroines Three

By George Hibbard

In Leslie's Magazine

Continued from Last Week

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I was thunderstruck. To be held by the strong arm of the law. To be in peril of I did not know what. I felt that my eyes grew round with amazement and terror. "What do you mean by such nonsense?" demanded Jim impatiently.

"Just what I say," answered the village representative of justice imperturbably. "Sure as my name's Hiram Cherry, I'm going to run you in. I'm going to take you and lock you up."

The horrid, grinning crowd which stood along the edge of the way had drawn nearer. We were surrounded by a close and dense ring of peering faces and curious eyes. Elevated in the front seat of the automobile I felt like a strange animal on exhibition.

"Imprisoned!" I exclaimed clasping my hands.

Visions of subterranean cells at least arose before me. I knew, of course, that there could not be donjon keeps or oubliettes, but chains clanked and I fairly tasted bread and water in shuddering imagination.

"Come—come," said Jim. "You don't want to do anything foolish."

"I got injunctions," said the local captain of the watch, "to stop two young people in a large red automobile goin' full speed—"

"But our number," remonstrated Jim. "I don't know nothing about numbers," argued Hiram Cherry. "This here's a large red automobile. You were going for all you were worth as if you were runnin' away. You are young people. I've got to take you in charge. As, however, you ain't common offenders I shan't put you in the lockup. I'll just take you home an' fix you in a place where you'll be safe until I hear what's to be done with you."

We were to be incarcerated. We were to be held in durance vile. I gazed at Jim in affright.

"There doesn't seem to be getting any sense into the old idiot's head," said Jim coolly. "For the present we'll have to submit—"

Hiram Cherry still stood with his hands on the automobile.

Jim got down and helped me out. How ignominiously I felt as I descended to earth and stood amid the entire gathered population of Eden Center. I think I detected a slight inclination to cheer when we were finally landed. Anyway, a murmur went through the throng. I turned and faced the multitude bravely. I had read of the way in which heroines bore themselves in distress. I thought of Lady Jane Grey going to Tower Hill. I saw Marie Antoinette carried to the Conciergerie. I would not flinch. I proudly took my place

beside Jim and I must say that he looked at me admiringly.

"That's right, little girl," he said, "don't you mind."

With a high head I started upon the line of march as indicated by Mr. Hiram Cherry. Jim and I were in front. Mr. Cherry came a little behind, accompanying us with a critical proprietary air. The free and enlightened inhabitants of Eden Center strung along after us. We formed a perfect procession. There was no one to watch us, however, as I am convinced that every one was in line. How long we were in passing a given point I do not know.

"Oh, I understand," I exclaimed in a sudden enlightenment.

"What is it?" gloomily asked Jim.

"Aunt Matilda Vernon," I replied decidedly. "She is the only one who could do anything so stupid. I am sure she is entirely to blame for all this ridiculous mistake."

"I've no doubt," said Jim.

"Molly will be married—to the wrong man. We can't prevent it now."

"Don't give up," consoled Jim. "The sporting spirit demands that we never say die."

"Die is not at all the word I feel like saying," I replied vindictively.

I could see that we were making for a large white farm house which stood on the outskirts of the village. As I spoke we

arrived at the gate and Hiram Cherry threw it open.

"For the land's sake!" cried an elderly woman appearing on the door-sill wiping her hands on her apron. "What's happened?"

"Don't you fret yourself, mother," said Cherry. "These youngsters have concluded to stay with us a while, but they aren't goin' to give you the least bit of trouble, 'cause they are going to keep quiet and out of the way."

"If you'll just step up these stairs," he continued as we stood in the hall.

As I turned I could see the crowd gathering in the path and spreading over the grass. The shuffle of many feet and the sound of many voices filled the air. Mrs. Cherry's excited exclamations rose over all. I looked at Jim. He looked with almost equal uncertainty at me.

"We'd better do it," he said. "Resistance wouldn't be of any use and might only make matters worse."

Meekly I put my foot on the first step. Abjectly I ascended. I heard Jim following me. Something in the sound made me understand the temper in which he was.

"We'll just fix you first," said Hiram Cherry nodding toward me as we reached the landing.

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