

THE People's Bread

A History of the Anti-Corn Law League



Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell

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ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

'It shall be burnt.' On 22 March 1842 the Revd J.W. Massie was addressing a highly receptive audience in the Manchester Corn Exchange.¹ Flourishing a document in the air, he had narrated a story that his listeners must have known well - the story of Martin Luther's boldly theatrical gesture of contempt for the Catholic Church by burning a Papal Bull in front of the people of Wittenberg. Massie was a staunch Protestant, but on this occasion it was not the Catholic Church that had earned his scorn, and the paper that he was flourishing was not a papal missive; it was a copy of the Corn Bill that Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, had recently introduced into Parliament. 'What then shall *we* do with this *bill*?', he had asked his audience which consisted of members of the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association, the Operative Anti-Corn Law Association and the Young Men's Anti-Monopoly Association. On cue they responded 'Burn it, Burn it.' After a brief discussion with the chairman Massie was allowed to proceed. Reaching out to the gas lights in the hall, he held the paper aloft as it burst into flames. Then, scattering the ashes among the audience which trampled them underfoot, he proclaimed the death of Peel's legislation: 'So perish all the laws that would interfere with the food of the people!'

Massie was in exuberantly fine fettle as a platform performer that evening. The motion to which he was speaking was one that condemned Peel's bill as a measure that 'starves the honest children of industry, to gratify the luxurious cravings of a heartless and pampered oligarchy'. He had skilfully played with the emotions of his listeners by eliciting from them a chorus of 'yes, yes' and 'no, no' as he teasingly led them through a series of questions about his resolution, and he had thrilled them with his portrayal of their struggle for repeal as the latest chapter in a story of English liberty that began in the seventeenth century when two thousand ministers had built the 'altar of liberty' and lit the 'fire of patriotism' by defying Charles II and rejecting the Church of England. As he proudly told his audience, he was a Protestant Dissenter ('a right good one too', someone interjected), and in the name of Christianity he stood forth in opposition to 'all monopolies'.

The *Manchester Times* took great care with its report of this incident, and the detail it provided reveals much, not only about Massie, but about the

League, its self-perception and the way it presented itself as a vehicle of public opinion. Who, Massie had asked his listeners, were the people that called themselves the Anti-Corn Law League? What right had they to spurn the legislation that the Prime Minister was taking through Parliament? These were rhetorical questions for which he had an immediate answer. The League was not, as Peel's supporters had called it, a few Manchester merchants; nor did it comprise merely the League Council and a team of hired lecturers. By 1842 its power base stretched across a national network of affiliated societies consisting of 'men of wealth, of intelligence, enterprise, and influence' who could 'move and regulate the exchange of nations and the trade of the world'. It was the voice of a thinking people who had inundated Parliament with thousands upon thousands of petitions demanding 'freedom of commerce, national justice and the mutual good will of mankind'. It had received the support of 'the wives and daughters of England' who had raised funds, memorialized the Queen and become 'as much the League' as the men. It was blessed by the ministers of religion in England, Wales and Scotland who had thundered forth a sentence of condemnation against the Corn Laws at a series of conferences in Manchester, Caernarfon and Edinburgh.

This was Massie's moment of fame, and he exulted in it, eagerly anticipating that 'thousands and tens of thousands through the country', would learn of his re-enactment of Luther's famous gesture and either approve of it or, as in the case of Sir Robert Peel, stand condemned by it. He was not disappointed. Within a few months a tract was on sale in the League Depot under the title 'Speech by the Revd J.W. Massie on the burning of Peel's Corn Bill',² and the Tories of the *Quarterly Review* (in an article written by J.W. Croker with encouragement from Peel) were attesting to the success of his provocation by condemning the 'very scandalous circumstances' in which he had played upon the emotions of a crowd.³ Massie's action did not stand alone; it took its place in a calendar of events that was setting the League on the way to becoming what *The Times* would soon call it - 'a great fact'.⁴ The 'fact' carried with it a new sense of national identity, one that replaced the generally accepted form of Britishness in which the great mass of the people and their aristocratic leaders were bound together by anti-foreigner sentiments and the shared experiences of war and empire.⁵ In place of this older notion, as Massie made abundantly clear, the League was offering a sense of national identity that would reach out from Manchester, the industrial-capitalist 'shock city' of the age,⁶ not only to embrace the English, Welsh and Scots (other League spokesmen would have been careful to include the Irish), but also to transcend the barriers of class and, with due propriety, of gender. This was a vision that stretched back in time to draw on old Protestant, especially Dissenting, traditions of English religious freedom, but to these it now added the modern and more far-reaching message of a form of liberalism that would be built around the ideals, as Massie expressed them, of 'freedom of commerce, national justice and the mutual good will of mankind'.

It was, one might say, a version of what is nowadays called 'globalization', in the name of which a transformed Britain would lead the nations forward to a new world order.

Running through Massie's speech was a strong sense that he was participating in a new development that future generations would look back to as a great turning-point in world history much as he looked back to the Protestant Reformation. The belief that he was making history led him to become one of the first to write that history. In 1844 in the *Eclectic Review*, he wrote an article tracing the rise of the League.⁷ Over the next forty or so years other Leaguers drew on their own experience and followed his example. The 1850s were an especially fertile decade in this respect with historical accounts by the irascible Alexander Somerville (who in two successive years managed to write both in praise and condemnation of his old colleagues), Henry Dunckley and above all, Archibald Prentice,⁸ but the spate continued until the 1880s with a variety of memoirs and recollections by Henry Ashworth, Andrew Bisset, G.J. Holyoake, and Edward Watkin.⁹ By then, indicative of the interest shown in the League by Liberals in other parts of Europe, there were even three histories in French by C.F. Bastiat, Augustus Mongrédien and Joseph Garnier.¹⁰

Cobden and Bright continued to attract biographers, but the League went into sharp decline after the 1880s as a subject for the historian. Even the great debates at the turn of the century on free trade versus Imperial Preference did not give rise to a new history of the repeal movement. Cobden's name was invoked and his writings were re-published; his daughter coined the influential term 'Hungry Forties'; something like the League machine was brought back into existence with the Free Trade Union sending out a team of 'Missionaries' to combat the new breed of protectionists; old speeches and the Corn Law rhymes of Ebenezer Elliott were re-published, but the League itself had no historians at this time.¹¹ When Bernard Holland's *The Fall of Protection 1840–1850* was published in 1913, it could hardly have been more dismissive of Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws. A veteran of the Colonial Office and an advocate of Imperial Preference, Holland depicted Peel as a man who was so badly marred by diffidence that he could not hold out against those of a more robust mentality: his was 'the more feminine type of mind ... which is impregnated, conceives and brings forth' – a reference to Peel's presumed deference to the more virile mind of Cobden. Echoing Thomas Carlyle, Holland warned his British readers that, if they wished to keep up with the Germans and other nations that had turned aside from Cobdenism, they would have to find statesmen who were more manly than Peel and could rise above the discouraging circumstances of a mass democracy by displaying 'the masculine strength and courage and foresight of the old aristocratic leaders'.¹²

A comparison of the historiographies of Chartism and the League is instructive. It was as if the two movements, bitter rivals while they existed, could not share the historical record. The League, apparently the more

successful of the two, carried all before it in the nineteenth century, and Chartism almost sank from sight for forty years after R.G. Gammage's history (1854). All this changed in the twentieth century. Many of the Leaguers had viewed free trade, the New Poor Law and self-help as an indivisible trinity that would promote a new age of progress and prosperity, but the New Liberals who promoted free trade at the turn of the century were more collectivist in their values. When Samuel Smiles of *Self-Help* fame, himself an old Leaguer, died in 1904, an obituary described him as 'the last cheerful pedagogue in a school of optimism that had faith in the distribution of life's prizes with an automatically unerring hand'.¹³ G.M. Trevelyan, the respected voice of an old-style whiggish liberalism, wrote a biography of Bright in 1913, but, in J.R. Hale's words, its tone called to mind 'the genial instincts of a rural magistrate', and it was one of his least successful books.¹⁴ Increasingly the historiography of the nineteenth century was dominated by historians who created a Labour interpretation - the Webbs, the Hammonds, R.H. Tawney and G.D.H. Cole. Writing for the Conference on British Studies in 1966, R.W. Prouty referred to the tendency of his fellow historians to see the social consequences of industrialism through spectacles supplied by the Webbs and Cole.¹⁵ One sign of this, he noted with a chilly tone of disapprobation, was that 'Chartism continues to attract more sentimental attention than its importance warrants.'¹⁶ He must have been even more disgruntled that year if he read a newly published popular history of the Labour Party in which the authors swept forward from the Chartists and other 'forerunners' to conclude with a photograph of Harold and Mary Wilson standing on the doorstep of 10 Downing Street.¹⁷

By this stage the historiographies of the Chartists and the League invited pitiful comparison. D.G. Barnes's *A History of the English Corn Laws from 1660-1846* (1930), a magisterial survey that was influenced by Harold Laski, R.H. Tawney, J.H. Clapham and Sir William Beveridge, conceded that the free trade movement was a British peculiarity that had led to something like a historical dead-end. 'Nationalism and free trade ... were really mutually incompatible' in most countries, he wrote; 'it was nationalism that triumphed in the fourth quarter of the century', and in his own day the trend towards 'greater armaments and higher tariffs' was unabated. Even in domestic politics Barnes saw the League as at best the beneficiary of an untypical 'brief period' when the incompatibility of manufacturers and consumers did not hold true.¹⁸ Briefly in 1958 the publication of Norman McCord's *The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-1846* seemed to indicate a new approach to the history of the League. Acknowledging it as a skilfully devised study that drew on new materials including the personal papers of George Wilson and J.B. Smith, G.D.H. Cole tersely described McCord's book as the product of a new "'Kitson Clark" school of nineteenth-century historians', the bearers of an interpretation that favoured an 'antagonistic contempt for Chartists' and those early Victorians who associated with them.¹⁹

Surprisingly, however, McCord, stood alone, unlike historians of Chartism, who, following the publication of Briggs's *Chartist Studies* in 1959, went on to produce area studies, biographies, gender and language studies in addition to general accounts. The League was left to rest in peace except for a continuing flow of biographies of Cobden and Bright. It was as if McCord's book had blocked the way to any rival, partly because of its many excellent features, but also, one may surmise, because of its admission that, in the great drama of repeal, the League was essentially an offstage noise in 'the decisive theatre',²⁰ the House of Commons, where the members of the traditional political class played the most important roles. As a consequence much historical research on the repeal of the Corn Laws was devoted to the machinations that took MPs into the division lobbies in 1846.²¹ Even in Patricia Hollis's collection of studies of the 'pressure from without' the League failed to find a place, although she described it as 'the archetypal model'.²² Since 1958, apart from a chapter by W.H. Chaloner,²³ Norman Longmate's *The Breadstealers* (1984) alone has essayed a general treatment of the League's campaign. Deploying his considerable writing skills as a journalist and popular historian, Longmate provided a vivid vignette of the League, but he did not address a range of new concerns explored by recent historians. Begging not a few questions, he portrayed the Leaguers as 'a moderate, reasonable party' beset by extremists, and he used their history to proclaim to the British people of the 1980s what he saw as a timely 'message ... of the remarkable results that a group of dedicated, determined and resourceful men can achieve by making full use of the opportunities a free society provides for publicizing opinions in an orderly way'.²⁴

Thus, as a new century looms, McCord's book still stands alone. To name only three mass movements of the early Victorian era, it is hard to imagine historians of Chartism, temperance and peace agreeing with Anthony Howe's recent statement that a book published in 1958 was 'still fresh in the historiographical tradition'.²⁵ Even at the time of its publication McCord's book received the criticism from G.F.A. Best that, excellent though it was, it hustled the reader past 'many open, inviting doorways' and that there was 'much more to be found out about this seething, angry political-religious world'.²⁶ This criticism remains valid in many respects. Strangely, after decades of 'history from below', the books that have appeared about the repeal of the Corn Laws in recent years have been documentary collections reprinting speeches and written statements by contemporaries that give little account either of the 'cultural baggage' of the agitation or of the experiences of the men and women who participated in it.²⁷ As compilations of materials for a history of the League they suffer from the defect of presenting the Leaguers as an abnormally bookish set of men and women who occasionally ventured forth to provide a passive audience at meetings.

Historians respond to the times in which they live, and, with the upsurge of neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s, it may seem that the time has

come to re-visit the struggles that helped to establish the hegemony of liberalism in the nineteenth century. Writing in 1992, Thomas C. Holt has described how his book, *The Problem of Freedom*, was strongly influenced by his response to the emergence in the 1980s of a new conservatism 'which was but the old liberalism' he had been studying in nineteenth-century British historical sources. Much of the 'energy and passion' together with the 'perspectives and insights' that went into the making of his book were supplied to him by the events of his own day.²⁸ It is surprising that the Anti-Corn Law League has not likewise attracted historians intent on pursuing the similarities between the past and the present. Richard Cobden, the 'Victorian outsider' who started as a clerk in his uncle's warehouse and went on to challenge the traditional political class of his day, seems to resemble Margaret Thatcher who delighted to portray herself as a provincial outsider defying the 'grandees' of the twentieth-century Tory establishment in the name of the 'Victorian Values' she had learned in her father's grocery shop.²⁹ Shirley Letwin's delineation of the Thatcherite 'vigorous virtues' calls to mind the Leaguers as they liked to see themselves: 'upright, self-sufficient, energetic, adventurous, independent-minded, loyal to friends, and robust against enemies'.³⁰ Like Massie, Thatcher has spoken of Martin Luther's defiance of the papacy as an inspiration. Appropriating Luther's famous self-description, she has applied it to her mentor, Sir Keith Joseph: 'there he stood. He could do no other.' Guided by F.A. Hayek, she has also found a place for Cobden and Bright in her pantheon of luminaries who upheld the western tradition of 'liberalism'.³¹ From a different Conservative point of view, Sir Ian Gilmour has gone even further by claiming that Thatcher's 'devotion to Manchester Liberalism is not in doubt'.³²

Certainly the Thatcherites' vision of the free market, their praise of globalization, their attack on the Tory establishment and, above all, their insistence that their creed brooked no alternative, invite comparison with the League's attitudes and aspirations, but there is no easy equation. It would be difficult to sustain the proposition that the Thatcherite version of the new Conservatism 'was but the old liberalism' of the League. The Thatcherites, writes Richard Cockett, 'combined . . . free-market economics with a strong element of traditional Conservative nationalism', unlike Cobden and Bright who 'were opposed to even moderate governmental expenditure on defence and the military, and would not countenance Britain's overseas commitments and involvement in wars'.³³ In these respects the Leaguers take their place in a very different tradition from the one to which the Thatcherites attach themselves; A.J.P. Taylor included Cobden with those whom he called 'The Trouble Makers'. Using the terms 'Dissenters' and 'Nonconformists' in a wide sense, he described their attempts over the centuries to uphold a tradition 'peculiar to English-speaking peoples' of challenging the governments of the day in the name of 'a superiority, moral or intellectual'.³⁴ Frank Parkin has located much of this fervour for dissenting rectitude in a form of middle-class radicalism that

he calls 'expressive' politics, one that is concerned less with the exercise of formal political power than with 'expressing personal values in action'.³⁵ Events after 1846 made it clear that for Cobden and some of the best-known Leaguers it was harder to accept invitations to step into conventional Liberal political life than to team up with Joseph Sturge and the mid-nineteenth-century peace congress movement, which, in the name of 'people diplomacy', challenged the diplomatic and military establishment of the day.³⁶ In this respect they remained loyal to the 'pressure from without'; they were precursors, not of Margaret Thatcher, but of the mid-to-late twentieth-century campaigns for nuclear disarmament that were, as she put it, 'dangerously strong' opponents of her government.³⁷

Thus, although this book is undoubtedly influenced by events of the recent past and the present day (it has been written in Australia during a prolonged debate on proposals to tax food), its authors are guided, above all, by the reflection that the time has come to re-visit the League in its own context. There is a sense in which this book can be seen as a detailed explication of Massie's bill-burning escapade. This is not to say that we have simply endorsed the Leaguers' view of themselves and their place in history, although we have been invited to do so, both by the Leaguers themselves and by a recent historian, Patrick Joyce. As early as 1846 an agenda for future historians was set out in some 'Hints as to a History of the League'. Published in the strongly pro-League *Manchester Times*, these 'Hints' were very much what one would expect from such a source; historians were to set aside the denigration from which the Leaguers had suffered and portray them as a band of disinterested reformers who had emerged from relative obscurity to protect the interests of the people.³⁸

It would be easy to dismiss the author of the 'Hints' with a laugh prompted by his hagiographic zeal - easy, were it not for the knowledge that in a book described by its publisher as a 'post-modernist' precursor of 'a new history of democracy', Joyce has reprimanded historians who have doubted the Leaguers' claims that their cause was 'a question ... only of suffering and hungry humanity'.³⁹ His approach, which might be described as one of replacing the plaster that Norman McCord chipped off,⁴⁰ is not the one favoured by the writers of *The People's Bread*. We have been mindful of the League's presentation of itself and its place in a great national and international narrative, but this is a very different historical discourse from one that would depict the Leaguers as the plaster saints in their own hagiology - men and women whose quest for the public good was unalloyed with self-interest and a concern for their own cultural imperatives. The pages that follow contain many examples of the idealism of Leaguers and their willingness to suffer for it, but these have not crowded out Prouty's salutary reference to 'the many-sided and sometimes discreditable efforts of the League'.⁴¹ Readers will not proceed far without finding evidence that the League's passion for economy could be seen in its attitude to the truth, and that its claims to sanctity co-existed with a ruthless adoption of unscrupulous courses of action. There is something to be said

for Gladstone's objection to Cobden's self-righteous 'imputation of bad & vile motives to honourable men' who dared to disagree with him; there was more than mere adversarial point-scoring in John Almack's condemnation of the 'hypocritical cant' of Dissenting ministers who played politics for the League; and the Chartists had no difficulty in naming League employers who spoke of the well-being of the poor in the future but treated their workers harshly.⁴² Asa Briggs was surely correct when he wrote that the 'League was never the pure-hearted and utterly unselfish crusade' described by its leaders.⁴³

Another reason for eschewing an easy dismissal of the 'Hints' is a methodological one. The author did not merely endorse the high morality of the Leaguers; he wished to point historians towards a historical context that bore a close resemblance to the reality he had experienced. Fearful of the ravages of a 'plague of historians' who would dash off instant histories replete with 'names and dates' and 'random recollection', he offered advice that can be read with profit in our own day. The 'Hints' envisaged a history that would be a widely defined form of research, one that would go beyond the evidence of the official deputations, lecturers and tracts. Admittedly, such a history would display a sound understanding of the men and the business machinery in Newall's Buildings, the League's headquarters, but it would also go out from Manchester to other areas across Britain; and it would descend through the levels of the League's hierarchy to reveal the involvement of the lesser-known activists, who, in many instances, were men and women of humble social status. It would even give prominence to the repealers' tea parties by recognizing that they provided the venues in countless towns and villages where the League strengthened its claims to speak for the nation by drawing on the involvement of whole families. In such ways, albeit in the language of his own day, the writer of the 'Hints' was anticipating some of the great themes and scholarly inquiries of late-twentieth-century historians: class, gender, kinship, the study of rituals and forms of social interaction, national identity, locality and a 'history from below' approach to politics.⁴⁴

It is in these respects, rather than in the way indicated by Joyce, that we have aspired to follow the 'Hints'. By doing so we have also indicated our most important difference from McCord's approach; we have not attempted to rival his narrative account of the origins, development and denouement of the League. Instead, we have entered the doorways that McCord hastened past, and we have lingered inquiringly in the social world of the Leaguers - the famous and the obscure, those from the working as well as the middle class, the women as well as the men, the ministers of religion as well as the laity, the Scots, Irish and Welsh as well as the English of London and the provinces. We have tried to capture their sense of being participants in the confrontational crisis of an age-old class struggle against the aristocracy - the British version, one might say, of the nineteenth-century bourgeois revolution against a long-lingering *ancien régime*. The year 1846 in Britain was not 1848 in Europe, but we hope to have shown why it

seemed to be the decisive turning-point in history when Cobden could dream of seeing a Prime Minister banishing 'the mere representatives of traditions' and 'governing through the *bona fide* representatives of the middle class'.⁴⁵

Although the author of the 'Hints' would certainly disapprove of much in *The People's Bread*, one thing he would surely endorse is the choice of title. The importance of bread in British economic history has recently been highlighted in a monograph by Christian Petersen who describes the period 1770-1870 as 'the age of the wheat loaf'.⁴⁶ Although the League is hardly mentioned by Petersen, bread was an omnipresent theme in its publications and speeches. Leaguers read the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*; over and over again they saw replicas of the three loaves that showed the British to be less well-fed than Poles and Frenchmen; and they sang hymns that condemned the bread-taxers. In our own day it is difficult to understand the importance of bread when it is not only an optional but even a problematic item of diet. In his study of bread riots during the eighteenth century E.P. Thompson has shown how crucial bread was, not only in the national dietary, but in the popular culture of England; the labouring poor, he wrote, 'lived very largely on bread' especially of the wheaten and white varieties that were commonly believed to be necessary for a working man's diet.⁴⁷ The purchase of bread, John Burnett writes, became more difficult for the town dweller in the nineteenth century when 'up to half the earnings of working-class families went on bread alone' and the price 'fluctuated widely within short periods'.⁴⁸

Grim reality was exacerbated by symbolic values. For many labourers, as Thompson points out, 'feelings of status were profoundly involved';⁴⁹ they discriminated between various forms of bread and flour. By 1815, Burnett adds, 'wheat had become the almost universal bread corn of England' and 'the object of every baker was to produce the whitest possible loaf'.⁵⁰ Other forms of bread were seen as evidence of deprivation and exploitation. Even the transported British convicts of New South Wales would not accept maize; their bread had to be wheaten.⁵¹ For some, including many repealers, bread had strong religious associations. League membership cards invoked the Lord's Prayer to demand 'our daily bread', and the bible was described as the bread of life. 'Free religion and cheap bread' was the slogan of *Y Diwygiwr*, a pro-League Welsh periodical.⁵² Thus it is not difficult to see why the Corn Laws entered the radical demonology and, as Leaguers never tired of pointing out, had appeared on the banners at Peterloo. In earlier centuries it had been middlemen such as millers and corn merchants who had borne the brunt of crowd protests and riots when bread and flour prices rose to what were seen as unjustifiable levels; now, as a result of the Corn Laws, landlords took their places as objects of hatred.⁵³ As John Gascoigne points out, the Corn Laws were of symbolic value for the landed interest too; they provided an index of its power, and they were at the heart of the neo-mercantilist system that defended the nation's independence in a world at war. Sir Joseph Banks, an influential figure in

government circles, believed this so strongly, Gascoigne adds, that he dismissively referred to Adam Smith as 'a very monk in a Scottish university' and was prepared to see foreign cereals excluded from Britain 'until disaster stared the country in the face'.⁵⁴ Ideas such as his survived far into the century.

In conditions of post-war economic depression the new Corn Law of 1815 set down what were seen as unacceptably high prices per quarter beneath which no imports of foreign grains could take place: twenty-seven shillings for oats; forty shillings for barley, beer and bigg; fifty-three shillings for rye, peas and beans; and, most hated of all, eighty shillings for wheat.⁵⁵ Across the country there were petitioning campaigns against a measure that was widely regarded as an act of injustice that harmed industry and made the people pay high prices to protect the landlords who dominated parliament. People heard the news not only through the press, writes W.D. Jones; they heard it through street orators, and they 'even heard it sung by ballad minstrels in the streets'. The formidable London mob came into action, rough-handling MPs, smashing windows, attacking the houses of Banks and other prominent supporters of the legislation, and generally arousing so much fear that infantry and cavalry were brought in to surround Parliament while the debates took place.⁵⁶ It was one of the decisive moments in the alienation of public opinion from the traditional ruling class of the 'Old Society'. Nothing the reforming Tories could do by way of amelioration during subsequent decades succeeded in obliterating memories of their actions at this time - not Huskisson's sliding scale of corn duties in 1828 and not, as Massie made clear to Peel, the modified Corn Law of 1842.

Finally, something must be said about this book as a joint enterprise. This is not the first time we have collaborated in writing a work of history, and we have built on our earlier experience.⁵⁷ On that occasion we allocated separate sections of an article to each other in accordance with a jointly devised plan, and then, by a repeated exchange of successive drafts in which each author influenced the subject matter and style of the other, we reached what we believed to be a unified entity. *The People's Bread* is the result of a similar research and writing strategy. We have divided responsibility for the various chapters, but we have worked closely together in the planning and writing. Like the Leaguers, we have made use of the advanced technology of the day, and e-mails have gone to and fro. Throughout the enterprise we have exchanged drafts for comment and re-writing. For this reason we have not provided a list of the chapters for which we initially assumed separate responsibility. Our hope is that the finished work can be read as a genuine achievement of co-authorship.

The book is divided into four sections. Chapter 2 focuses on the political machinery of the League and in so doing attempts to provide a general context for the subsequent discussion. Chapters 3 and 4 offer a comprehensive overview of the national spread of the movement. The following four chapters explore the League's interaction with particular constituencies: from women and ministers of religion to trade unionists and

Members of Parliament. Chapters 9 and 10 employ very different methodologies in an attempt to get to the grass roots of the League – its members and their *mentalité* – through an exploration of its ‘theatres of discussion’ and through a prosopographic analysis of a group of its local leaders. As authors we have been mindful of the daunting task set out by John Easby in 1843: ‘So long as British history is written, the League will never be forgotten. It will form one of the most brilliant pages of the historian’s pen of the nineteenth century.’⁵⁸ The ‘brilliant page’ that he envisaged has not been written. Our aim is to have opened that page: our hope is that others will be encouraged to join us in writing it.

Notes

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2. *Ibid*, 11 June 1842.
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4. *The Times*, 18 November 1843.
5. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven), 1992, p. 5.
6. Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Harmondsworth), 1968, p. 87.
7. ‘The Anti-Corn Law League’, *Eclectic Review*, February 1844. Massie was identified as the author in *The Economist*, 3 February 1844.
8. Alexander Somerville, *Free Trade and the League* (Manchester 1853), 2 vols; *idem*, *Cobdenic Policy: The Internal Enemy of England* (London, 1854); Henry Dunckley, *The Charter of the Nations, or, Free Trade and its Results* (London, 1854); Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1853), 2 vols. Writing under the name ‘Reuben’, Somerville had previously written *A Brief History of the Rise and Progress of the Anti-Corn-Law League, with Personal Sketches of Its Leading Members*, (London, 1845).
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12. B. Holland, *The Fall of Protection 1840–1850* (London, 1913), pp. xvii, 225–6, 354–7.
13. *Athenaeum*, 23 April 1904.

14. J.R. Hale, *The Evolution of British Historiography from Bacon to Namier* (London, 1967), p. 71
15. Roger W. Prouty, 'England and Wales, 1820-1870', in 'Recent Historiography: A Selective Bibliography', in E.C. Furber (ed.), *Changing Views on British History: Essays on Historical Writing since 1939* (Cambridge MA., 1966), p. 240
16. *Ibid.* p. 241.
17. W.T. Rodgers and Bernard Donoughue, *The People into Parliament: An Illustrated History of the Labour Party* (London, 1966).
18. D.G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws from 1660-1846* (1930, repr. New York 1965), pp. 292-3.
19. For Cole's review of McCord, see *English Historical Review*, vol. 74, 1959, pp. 89-90.
20. Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-1846* (London 1958). A second edition appeared in 1968 with 'a few amendments'.
21. For example, W.O. Aydelotte, 'The Country Gentlemen and the Repeal of the Corn Laws', *English Historical Review*, vol. LXXXII, 1967, pp. 47-60.
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31. Margaret Thatcher, *The Keith Joseph Memorial Lecture: Liberty and Limited Government* (London, 1996), pp. 4, 6.
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41. Prouty, 'England and Wales, 1820-1870', in 'Recent Historiography: A Selective Bibliography', pp. 258-9.
42. M.R.D. Foot & H.C.G. Matthew (eds), *The Gladstone Diaries, 1840-1847* (Oxford, 1974), p. 547; John Almack, *Characters, Motives and Proceedings of the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers* (London 1843), p. 60.
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44. Since writing this paragraph we have read the description by Alan Kidd and David Nicholls of the very similar approach they call 'the post-structuralist influenced agenda of the 1990s' in their *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1999), p. 6.
45. Cobden's well-known letter to Peel in 1846 is reproduced in J. Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1879), vol. 1, pp. 390-7.
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52. Ryland Wallace, 'The Anti-Corn Law League in Wales', *Welsh History Review*, June 1986, p. 13.
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56. W.D. Jones, 'Prosperity' Robinson: *The Life Of Viscount Goderich, 1782-1859* (London 1967), pp. 60-3.
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'AN ENGINE OF POLITICAL WARFARE'

The demolition of Newall's Buildings at the lower end of Market Street, Manchester, in 1867 did not elicit a bout of nostalgia or reminiscing from the local populace.¹ Perhaps sentimentality was frowned upon by those who had carried the 'dismal science' of political economy to the four corners of the globe; or perhaps the fact that Newall's was making way for an enlargement of the citadel of Manchester capitalism, the Exchange, was seen as a fitting tribute to the building which had housed what Henry Jephson would later describe as the 'most perfect example which our history affords of ... an engine of political warfare'.² First erected amidst the clamour for reform in the early 1830s, Newall's Buildings had a story to tell in every nook and cranny. On the ground floor were several shops, which the widening of Market Street, completed in 1832, left a step below the level of one of Manchester's busiest thoroughfares. By 1842 these included the grocery operated by William Newall, the owner from whom the building got its name, a saddler, a florist, a tobacconist, and a branch of the Manchester Stamp Office. Above the shops were three floors of meeting rooms and offices including a large gallery. Built at a time when, as one commentator noted, there was a dearth of meeting places in Manchester, Newall's hosted an extraordinary array of meetings over its forty-year history.³ The walls that tumbled unceremoniously in 1867 had echoed with the declarations of the Chartists in the Manchester Political Union who met there in 1838 and the loyal toasts of the Tories who entertained the Churchwardens for dinner to celebrate the marriage of Queen Victoria in 1840.⁴ They had witnessed hard-nosed commercial negotiations conducted by the respectable members of a businessman's club in 1835 and millennial visions of the future expressed during the meetings of the Freeholders Land Society in 1850.⁵ Amidst this cacophony of competing voices, however, Newall's Buildings was best known throughout Britain as the home of the Anti-Corn Law League. In 1839 the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association (ACLA) became the tenant of part of the second floor; by 1843, apart from the ground-floor shops, the League occupied the entire building.

Ever since *The Times* proclaimed that a 'new power has arisen in the state',⁶ it has been the political machinery of the League that has attracted

the fascination, admiration or condemnation of contemporaries and historians alike. Although the responses varied, contemporaries were in broad agreement about what it was they were looking at. Gazing admiringly across St George's Channel, Charles Gavan Duffy attributed the League's victory to the fact that the 'words "bread tax" were rung in our ears *usque ad nauseam*'.⁷ For the young German socialist, Georg Weerth, it was the worst of times:

Hired speakers clamoured in alleys and market places. Respectable members stormed the rostrums of every meeting hall ... Hired drinkers drank to the future of free trade. Hired boxers boxed for the repeal of the Corn Laws. Hired poets dedicated the feeblest of verse to the defeat of the bread tax; and hired shopkeepers wrapped up every pound of butter in a treatise on the necessity of free trade.⁸

The 'engine' of the League could be seen at work, not only employing and innovating, if only by scale, the conventional strategies of the 'pressure from without', but also intervening in elections. Writing in 1927, two years before the most important three-cornered general election this century, one commentator found in the League a 'non-partisan, or really a third-party, policy' that was new and exciting.⁹ Some recent historians have not only given the League's electoral strategies greater emphasis, they have arrived at bold conclusions as to their impact. In 1977 David Hamer, for example, described the League's electoral machinery as 'superb', and Cobden as 'one of the nineteenth century's greatest electoral strategists'.¹⁰ In the same year John Prest pointed to the League's 'definite and measurable mark upon the general election of 1847', and took this approach to its conclusion by suggesting that Peel had given in to the demand for repeal in order to avert 'an effective assault upon the power base of the landowners and the Conservative Party' that was gathering momentum in the shape of the League's 'tremendous engine' of electoral politics.¹¹ Thus it is important for the historian of the League to investigate its political machinery and the extent of its success. This is a quest that extends from the lobbies of the House of Commons in Westminster to the humblest village in Scotland, Ireland or Wales, but its point of origin must be Newall's Buildings, 'the most remarkable sight in Manchester'.¹² Our tour will introduce us briefly to some of the individuals who loom large later in the book, and some features of the 'engine' will only be glanced at in anticipation of later discussion. On other parts of the tour we will linger, not merely to describe but also to analyse, subjecting the claims of the occupants, and those who have written about them, to detailed scrutiny.

Crossing the threshold of Newall's Buildings from Market Street and climbing the broad staircase takes us to the first floor, the location of the League's general office and the Council Room. By 1843 there were between ten and twenty employees in the general office which measured 40–50 feet in length. These 'men and boys' were involved in the routine administrative and auxiliary tasks that form the core of practical politics: folding and addressing newspapers, taking messages, making-up parcels,

registering letters, and organizing meetings.¹³ Among them were some of the League's most loyal and dedicated 'servants', such as George Senior and Theophilus Pattison who worked at Newall's for six years and five years respectively.¹⁴ The relative anonymity of these men is reflected in the fact that the League's longest-serving employee (seven years) is known to history only as Mr Walters, the clerk, for which he received between 25 and 30 shillings a week and a silver platter on his retirement in 1846.¹⁵ Much to the chagrin of some leaders the League was continually pressed by 'influential friends' to provide jobs in its offices, among them wealthy League patrons, such as Joseph Brotherton, MP for Salford, whose son assisted there in September 1845.¹⁶

The inner sanctum of the League, its 'Council Room', was also on the first floor behind a door covered with crimson cloth. The function of the cloth was practical rather than symbolic. It was, recalled one former Council member, 'hung up to mitigate the severity of the draughts of wind'.¹⁷ This cold, narrow room was the setting for the well-known portrait of the League Council painstakingly completed by a new fellow of the Royal Academy, J.R. Herbert in 1846-47 (Illustration 1). Many of the leading Leaguers sat for the artist whose finished canvas was reputed to have been 'faithful to minute details' of the scene before him.¹⁸ It is a remarkable painting. Arranged around Richard Cobden, the most prominent leader of the movement, are fifty-four members of the League Council. Some of them were very wealthy and had earned their place on Herbert's canvas by the depths of their pockets. Membership of the Council reached approximately 500 by 1846, each of whom had donated at least £50 (more than many labourers earned in a year) to the coffers of the movement. League records show that ten men (all from Lancashire) donated more than £1,000, another twenty had contributed £500, and a further forty-nine gave between £200 and £500.¹⁹ Overwhelmingly the men in Herbert's picture are provincial: from Liverpool, Leeds, Bolton, Hyde, Edinburgh, Dundee and Manchester itself. The aristocracy are there in the form of three peers who sit deferentially while Cobden, the man of commerce, addresses the meeting. (Only the portraits of dead Leaguers, themselves industrialists, that hang on the back wall contest Cobden's pre-eminent status.) Cobden's outstretched hand leads the eye unmistakably to a window through which a factory chimney can be seen pointing towards the sky. Given the care with which the League nurtured its public image it is hard to believe that such a detail was included without design or approval. At a time when the debate over the conditions in the 'dark satanic mills' was dividing the nation it was a remarkably polemical statement about the source of power in Britain. Even the choice of artist was, one suspects, calculated rather than serendipitous. Herbert was very much the coming man, so like the Leaguers' image of themselves. Reputed to be a 'zealous free trader' in his own right, Herbert had recently been elected to the Academy. His work had been patronized by Queen Victoria and he had just received the most important commission of his career: the frescoes in the new Houses of Parliament.²⁰



Illustration 1 *The League Council in Session*

An engraving by Samuel Bellin of J.R. Herbert's painting identifies the League leaders in session, while through the window can be seen one of the industrial smokestacks from which many of them derived their wealth. *Reproduced by permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London.*

For all his care and skill, however, Herbert's painting was a distortion. At a typical daily Council meeting the large table at the centre of the picture was, other testimony tells us, strewn with newspapers, books and writing materials.²¹ First and foremost this was a place of work. The crowd itself was a fiction in two senses. On the one hand it is doubtful that Lords Radnor, Kinnaird and Ducie ever set foot in Newall's Buildings and, as we shall see below and in subsequent chapters, Leaguers came from a variety of backgrounds. Secondly, far from the packed assembly depicted by Herbert, the attendance of the League's wealthy patrons at Council meetings was poor. On a typical day we are likely to have found no more than seven or eight at the Council. In 1842 the League boasted that visitors to Newall's Buildings could consult a Council member on any day between midday and one o'clock, but this promise probably fell to the same dedicated few to fulfil.²²

Using this as a starting-point, let us construct our own picture. A few faces catch our eye as we look around the cluttered table at the group of those who attended regularly. First we see a man who, according to one commentator, called to mind a 'laughing-faced schoolboy' rather than a 'giant of commerce'. This was John Brooks. Born in Whalley in north Lancashire in 1786 Brooks had commenced a calico printing business in Manchester in 1809. By 1844 he was a merchant and manufacturer with

global interests and a fortnightly wages bill of 1700 to 1800 pounds. A Tory in 1832, Brooks was steadily radicalized during the 1830s and 1840s, signing the Chartists' National Petition in April 1842 and becoming the inaugural President of the Manchester Complete Suffrage Union in June of the same year. Brooks collected good causes with as much ardour as he cultivated his business empire. As a committed educationalist he was involved in the Manchester Athenaeum and the Society for Promoting National Education. He was also active in the Manchester Town Mission, the Peace movement, the anti-Slavery Society and the British India Society; it was all testimony, according to one expert, to phrenological characteristics that denoted 'benevolence'. Brooks also found time to play a role in the Lancashire Commercial Clerks' Society, several Building and Freeholders' Land Societies, as well as holding elected office in Manchester for several years including a year as Boroughreeve in 1839-40. The secret of Brooks's extraordinary calendar of business, politics and philanthropy, it was reported, was to renounce bed and sleep in his carriage between engagements.²³

Another face to catch our eye might, according to one witness, have easily been mistaken for the well-known Whig politician, Lord Brougham. This was Joseph Hickin, the League's National secretary. Born in 'humble circumstances' Hickin had given up a 'laborious trade' for health reasons - a common occurrence in industrial Britain - and was running a beer shop in Walsall when he was recruited by the League in 1841. His rapid rise in the League administration occurred despite his association with the drink trade and his previous membership of the Chartist National Convention whose politics had 'a little spice of ... socialism'.²⁴ Others who regularly attended Council meetings were Samuel Lees and Archibald Prentice. By November 1846 Lees had attended 862 Council meetings, but he was a long way behind Prentice who attended 1127 meetings over the same period. Editor of the *Manchester Times* with its offices located in nearby Ducie Place, Prentice exercised a disproportionate degree of influence because of his assiduousness. This articulate and obstreperous Scot became the source of regular complaints from the leading Leaguers.²⁵ Great-grandson of a Scottish Covenanter, and proud custodian of a relic that was reputed to be William Wallace's sword, Prentice was capable of physical violence, as well as being verbally combative, a side of his personality that is obscured by his carefully cultivated image as a literary figure.²⁶ Fortunately for the League, Prentice's belligerence was compensated for by the political skills of the man around whom Newall's Buildings revolved, George Wilson, the President of the League. Although he repeatedly refused to draw a salary, Wilson attended Newall's Buildings six days a week. A man of 'imposing appearance', he had cut his political teeth during the bitter struggle with the local Tories over the issue of Manchester's Charter of Incorporation before going on to chair a succession of political organizations of national importance from the Anti-Corn Law League to the National Reform Union in 1864.²⁷

Moving on to the second floor we come to the rooms occupied by the Manchester ACLA which continued a separate existence after the National Anti-Corn Law League was formed in 1839. The inaugural President of the Manchester Association was J.B. Smith, who with Wilson and Cobden, formed the triumvirate that shaped and directed the League's initial campaigns.²⁸ Between 1841 and 1844, however, Smith was mired in a financial scandal which forced his withdrawal from active politics.²⁹ Following his resignation Brooks became President of the Manchester Association which continued to go from strength to strength having 20,000 enrolled members by October 1843.³⁰ The first Secretary of the Manchester Association was John Ballantyne (later editor of the *Anti-Corn Law Circular*) who was succeeded by John Brindle. Keeping the Manchester ACLA in existence after the formation of the League may seem like an unnecessary extravagance, but there was an undoubted advantage beyond the distinction between local and national business; the League's leaders could sincerely deny its responsibility for actions of the Association.³¹ When, for example, Leaguers took Irish O'Connellites into their pay as a strong-arm 'police' force, the transaction was hidden in the Association's ledgers. It was not an isolated occurrence. Correspondence between Cobden and his lieutenant, Edward Watkin, makes clear that a back channel was used by the League's treasurer, William Rawson, to pay debts accrued by the Manchester Operative Association in 1842; in 1846 George Wilson danced on the head of a pin in the face of persistent questions from hostile MPs about the creation of 40-shilling freeholds. League agents, he told the incredulous members of the parliamentary committee that had summoned him, had provided a 'facility for the purchase of votes', but 'no League funds had been used'.³² With the League's cashier, an accountant named Cottam (probably S.E. Cottam, Secretary of the Athenaeum and Mechanics' Institute), tucked away in a separate office on the second floor the geography of Newall's Buildings aided the process of obfuscation when necessary.³³

The rooms set aside for the Manchester Association also fulfilled a social function. Open until 10.00 pm, they offered members a range of provincial and London newspapers, 'important new publications', and the 'standard works on free trade'. The League carefully cultivated its relationship with the press and on the table we might find copies of any number of sympathetic journals from the *Sheffield Iris* and the *Scotsman* to the London *Sun* and the *Economist*. In some cases cash was used to curry editorial favour - surreptitiously in the case of the *Sun*, and more openly in the case of the *Economist*.³⁴ The attraction of the ACLA rooms was more than just cerebral; these rooms also offered refreshments in a convivial atmosphere. '[W]henever my enthusiasm failed,' recalled one Leaguer, 'I always found a visit to Newall's Buildings revive[d] it.'³⁵ 'The moment they are clear of their counting-houses or shops in the evening', recorded Alexander Somerville, members 'hasten here, and find tea and bread and butter on the table'.³⁶ Somerville's further suggestion that they gravitated to

Newall's Buildings in preference to 'home, or coffee house, or hotel', points to a feature that recent historians have detected in the social culture of this era. At a time when the middle class was defined very largely on a basis of 'home' and domestic values, 'social bonds between persons of the same sex' nonetheless continued to be important.³⁷ The impulse which led men to seek each other's company after work at Newall's Buildings was evident in a range of voluntary societies as well as gatherings of a more formal nature. Nevertheless the lure of Newall's Buildings created less domestic conflict than might be imagined as repeal was often a family business with the wives and daughters of many on the Council actively participating in League affairs (see Chapter 6).

League lecturers were also available in the ACLA rooms 'for information'.³⁸ A lecture by Dr John Bowring, a merchant, former MP and polymath, had provided the occasion for the formation of the Manchester ACLA in 1838 and, thereafter, lectures formed the core of the League's campaign, particularly in the early years when it was still seen as a 'new and powerful means of agitating'.³⁹ This statement exaggerated the novelty of the public lecture - in this as in so many other respects the League was appropriating an anti-slavery precedent - but there can be no doubt that the League employed lecturers far more systematically and extensively than any previous public movement and it can legitimately claim to have expanded the bounds of politics in this way. During 1839 the Manchester Association spent £1200 on sending lecturers to 300 of the 'principal towns of the Kingdom'. This was followed by about 800 lectures in 1840 including 33 or 34 counties in England, 40 or 50 places in Scotland, 20 or 30 places in Ireland and 'almost every town and village' in Wales.⁴⁰ Impressive as this effort was, in March 1842 an editorial in the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* promised that League lecturers would visit every parish in Britain and rouse Ireland.⁴¹ In October a new systematic structure was unveiled to carry this pledge into effect. From Newall's Buildings came the announcement that England and Wales were to be divided into twelve districts with a lecturer appointed to each district. Underneath this structure, the League lecturers were encouraged to appoint a person in every village to serve as contact point for the organization.⁴² Even if the results sometimes fell short of the objective, lecturing thus provided the League with an extensive network of agents and an organizational structure that extended from the second floor of Newall's Buildings in Manchester to most parts of England and Wales. Despite changing priorities, as late as 1844 Hickin reported that League lecturers had visited 36 counties.⁴³

At its peak the League's corps of lecturers numbered fourteen or fifteen, not including those who were appointed by ACLAs in various places other than Manchester. Most of the professionals were recruited at Newall's Buildings where they received their instructions and planned their schedules. Their programmes were often punishing. By September 1839, for example, Abraham Paulton, the Manchester ACLA's first professional lecturing appointee, complained that he was exhausted, having lectured for three

hours every night for sixteen days in a row as well as travelling fifteen to twenty miles every day. After a performance in Gloucester Paulton reported that he had never been more tired; by the end of the lecture 'the perspiration absolutely ran off the cuffs of my coat in a stream'.⁴⁴ Paulton kept up this sort of pace until 1843 when he became managing director of the League's London headquarters, and in 1847 he succeeded Prentice as editor of the *Manchester Times*.⁴⁵ Paulton's experience was typical. In the first four months of 1843, James Acland, the League's most successful and hard-working lecturer, completed a Scottish tour that involved 70 lectures.⁴⁶

As its advertisements made clear, the League envisaged the ideal lecturers as 'gentlemen of education and character ... possessing the necessary powers of eloquence',⁴⁷ but the recruitment of Acland suggests another set of selection criteria. A failed actor and newspaper scribe whose pen had landed him in prison for libel on more than one occasion, Acland had come to attention of the League through Joseph Parkes, a political and legal adviser to Richard Cobden. Parkes had spotted Acland in 1838 during the latter's ill-fated tour of Yorkshire and Lancashire lecturing in support of the New Poor Law, the unpopularity of which ensured a trail of broken chairs and bloodied noses. Parkes was no doubt impressed by Acland's courage, doggedness and thick skin, as well as his Promethean capacity to uphold both sides of an argument. A mercenary pure and simple, Acland had previously been engaged to lecture both in support of and against teetotalism.⁴⁸ 'Slippery Jemmy', as he was known to the Chartists, was far more typical of the League's lecturers than the star recruits, George Thompson and W.J. Fox, who thrilled massive crowds at Covent Garden with flights of scintillating eloquence (see Chapter 9).

Men like Acland were at home in a public square, field, pub or church hall; their eloquence was less important than their capacity to deal with a plethora of interruptions coming from the authorities or the Chartists, some of whom resorted to throwing fireworks or stones; they were able to press on even after the gas lights had been turned out, or their notes were stolen; and they were not distracted by heckling, threats or by a large man sitting in the front row with a cudgel.⁴⁹ After returning to Manchester lecturers often gave verbal reports of their tours which were sure to draw bumper crowds. Before the construction of Free Trade Hall in 1843, a large hall on the second floor of Newall's Buildings that had been a picture gallery, was fitted out as a venue for these meetings. First used in October 1842, the gallery was lighted by an 'expansive dome' and capable of holding about 1000 people.⁵⁰ The gallery offered relative security from the attentions of the Chartists in comparison to the Town Hall and other more public venues, and was only abandoned when the crowds wanting to attend League meetings became too great.⁵¹

The second floor of Newall's Buildings also housed a packing and distribution centre. As we glance in here there are several men at work packing an estimated 60 to 70 bales of tracts every week, each weighing in excess of a hundredweight (over 50 kilos), for distribution to all parts of

Britain.⁵² Even Wilson's description of this as a 'gigantic operation' was an understatement. In the League's annual report tabled in September 1843 it was estimated that in excess of 9,000,000 items had been dispatched from Newall's Buildings in the preceding year - one million during a single week in February 1843. In total this was approximately 100 tons (101 tonnes) of literature, which was unprecedented by the standards of the day.⁵³ By this stage the League had given up trying to persuade MPs to repeal the Corn Laws and had embarked on a strategy to replace them with men who would. To this end approximately five million specially printed packets of tracts were targeted at half a million or so electors in 24 counties and 187 boroughs. The story of how they got from Newall's Buildings into the hands of the voters is a testimony to the proficiency of the League machine. Where the post was not used, about 500 distributors were called into action.⁵⁴ These distributors earned the respect of friend and foe alike for their persistence and determination. In Cheshire, for example, just five men distributed 11,000 packets (44 bales, weighing about 3.3 tonnes). Each man distributed between 50 and 100 packets a day walking from door to door.⁵⁵ Sometimes the responsibility for a whole district was taken on by an individual. When the first 'ripple of the agitation' reached Blackwater in Cornwall, young John Passmore Edwards wrote to Manchester and 'three or four days after' came a reply from Wilson followed by a 'bulky parcel of Anti-Corn Law literature, forty times more' than he expected. He distributed this himself, earning the enmity of the Mayor as well as 'more than village fame'.⁵⁶ Even in the shadow of Newall's Buildings the effort involved in distribution should not be underestimated, falling, as it often did, to a handful of hardened activists. The St Michael's Ward Branch of the Manchester Reform Association, for example, numbered about 100 who met every month, sometimes more, and assiduously delivered League tracts and pamphlets in their designated area containing a thousand houses, over a three year period.⁵⁷

Before leaving the distribution centre we can pick up one of the packets of tracts destined for an elector and examine its contents. The external envelope was approximately 15cm x 20cm in size and printed in blue with a globe surrounded by the words 'Free Trade With All The World' (Illustration 2). This simple phrase summarized much of the thinking that went on in the Council Room a floor below: ending protection would open new markets abroad and usher in the millennial age of peace, prosperity and good government. As one commentator observed these were men for whom 'total and immediate repeal' was a principle of political economy that was 'as necessary as the air we breathe'.⁵⁸ A line under the heading 'Presented to' shows that the intention was to personalize each packet, although how much of this was ever done is unclear. Inside the envelope was an entrée card, headed 'You are an Elector!', followed by a message that urged the elector to consider his vote as a privilege. In turn, this was followed by a stark warning of the dire choices that confronted him: 'plenty or scarcity', 'comfort or misery' 'LIFE OR DEATH', 'a bread



Illustration 2 *Free Trade with All the World*

The League used this illustration of the world-wide benefits of free trade as a cover for the packets of tracts that it sent to every voter in the country. *Reproduced by permission of the National Library of Australia.*

taxer' or 'a candidate who will untax the poor man's loaf'. Together with the card the envelope contained eight separate pamphlets to help the elector in his choice. Between four and twelve pages in length and printed on cheap paper, these pamphlets represent a wonderful variety of tone and sentiment. They ranged from 'Facts for Farmers', a series of quotations on the benefits of repeal from the largest landowner in the kingdom (Earl Fitzwilliam), to a letter to the old Tory warhorse, the Duke of Wellington, pointing out the absurdity of Parliament's refusal to regulate wages while insisting on regulating corn prices; from a series of 'Authorities against the Corn Laws' - including some unlikely allies such as the Tory Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, and his Home Secretary, Sir James Graham - to extracts from the work of a long-time opponent of the Corn Laws, Colonel T.P. Thompson (including his well-known 'Catechism Against the Corn Laws'); from a condensed version of the Revd Baptist W. Noel's emotive appeal on behalf of the poor to selections from the evidence given to a

parliamentary inquiry by a former Secretary to the Board of Trade.⁵⁹ Together these materials give a sense of the broad front on which the League sought to campaign; it was hard to believe a defender of the Corn Laws who dismissed the League's '5,000,000 pamphlets' as mere 'waste paper'.⁶⁰

This was merely the tip of the iceberg. Newall's Buildings was the source of a plethora of almanacs, handbooks, essays, poetry, even children's books, as well as the fortnightly *Anti-Corn Law Circular* (1839-41), which was succeeded by the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* (1841-3). Having become a weekly in December 1842 the *Circular* was subsequently replaced by the weekly *League* (1843-6).⁶¹ Originally intended to act as an information exchange between members, the *Circular* never exceeded a circulation of 20,000 (although it claimed a readership of 100,000).⁶² The fact that many copies were simply given away ensured that it made a loss throughout its existence. Advertisers were promised that the circulation extended throughout the United Kingdom - peers, MPs, clergymen, merchants, manufactures and bankers received it; so did club-houses, news-rooms, literary and scientific institutions, colleges and public places - and it even reached the colonies, Europe and the United States.⁶³

A large part of this literature, including the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* and its successors, was printed on the third floor of Newall's Buildings. Entering the print shop we see a 'great number of printers, pressers, folders, stitchers, and others connected with printing' hard at work.⁶⁴ The head of the printing section was John Gadsby. Son of a well-known local Baptist clergyman, he had commenced his printing business in 1834.⁶⁵ Among Gadsby's early customers was the United Dissenters' Committee, then at the height of its struggle against Church Rates, which brought him into contact with many who would go on to play prominent roles in the League. Having printed a pamphlet for Cobden in 1837 he began working for the Manchester ACLA in 1838. Thereafter, as he recalled at his retirement dinner in 1847, '[i]n-doors or out, at home or abroad, early or late, he had ever been at their call'. 'This,' he complained, 'had cost him his health and his other customers.'⁶⁶ Even his efforts did not satisfy the League's voracious appetite for printing. By 1843 it employed a total of twelve master printers in Manchester and other large towns.⁶⁷

Gadsby also ran the depot that was adjacent to the print works on the top floor of Newall's Buildings. In part the function of the depot was storage: according to Edward Watkin the flags and banners that adorned public meetings and were carried in League parades were collected from Newall's before events commenced.⁶⁸ In 'the great League depot', recalled one visitor, 'books, pamphlets, letters, newspapers, speeches, reports, tracts and wafers, were all piled in neat packets of every possible size and appearance, like the packets of muslin and calico, in the great warehouses of Manchester'.⁶⁹ Here, as proof of the League's appeal for the support of working men who were mindful of Peterloo, were reprints of 'Orator' Hunt's speeches; here too were to be found the scriptural commentaries

from which evangelical Leaguers could draw inspiration and guidance.⁷⁰

The depot was also a commercial venture and more than just reading material was to be had, as the reference to wafers makes clear. Bearing such inscriptions as 'Thanks for Cheap Postage - May we soon get cheap bread!', and 'Free communication with all parts of the empire is good: free trade with all parts of the world will be still better', the wafers were small diamond or square pieces of adhesive paper for the predominantly middle-class Leaguers to seal their private correspondence.⁷¹ Gadsby became the leading sticker merchant in Britain, claiming sales of in excess of three million sheets (six stickers per sheet) at about 8*d* per hundred between February 1840 and March 1842. This was despite the fact that, true to the principles of free trade, he faced stiff competition from the Glasgow ACLA which offered wafers at 5000 for 2*s*.⁷² The success of the wafers undoubtedly encouraged vendors of a wide range of Anti-Corn Law pens, paper, seals and sealing wax.⁷³ A selection of Anti-Corn Law flags and bunting was also on sale at the depot (and at a newsagency in Brown Street), as were other overtly political products such as medals (designed in Birmingham), stickers, and a gallery of portraits of League heroes from Cobden to Lord Radnor, together with cheap engravings of the Free Trade Hall and the bazaars.⁷⁴

Other products on sale at the depot carried the thrust of the League's campaign into the wider community and into the routines of domestic life. Following and building upon the precedent of the anti-Slavery movement, Leaguers could take tea in Anti-Corn Law crockery, and could adorn their table with cloths bearing representations of Cobden and Bright.⁷⁵ They could sew with Anti-Corn Law thimbles; use free-trade handkerchiefs and wear Anti-Corn Law scarves and waistcoats. '[N]o free trader who has regard for his personal appearance,' warned the advertisement for an Anti-Corn Law razor, 'should be without it'.⁷⁶ Thus it was not surprising that when Christmas came around the depot offered to supply free-trade Christmas presents in the form of repeal tracts in an engraved envelope.⁷⁷

Our tour of Newall's Buildings is not complete, however, without returning to the second floor and examining the activities taking place in the cluster of committee rooms located there. According to one observer there could be as many as ten or twelve League committees meeting in Newall's Buildings at the one time. 'The rooms were occupied from early in the morning until late at night, by various committees,' recalled Prentice, 'each in their own department of business.'⁷⁸ Many of these committees generated their own sub-committees. J.G. Kohl, a German visitor to Newall's Buildings in the early 1840s, was impressed by the penchant for bureaucracy evident in the League's agitation: 'A talent for public business seems an innate faculty in the English.'⁷⁹ If the Council Room was where the strategies of the League were conceived, it was in these rooms, one floor above, that their implementation began. To understand the League's 'engine of political warfare' properly we must not merely glance into the committee rooms as others have done; we need to linger over the details of the activities and

their results. In some cases this involves going outside Newall's Buildings and tracing the impact of the strategy in the nation at large.

In 1842 Richard Cobden claimed that the struggle against the Corn Laws had been carried on by 'those means by which the middle class usually carries on its movements'. Despite the League's many innovations in the practice of politics Cobden was not being disingenuous. The models that informed the campaign at the outset were provided by the struggle for Catholic Emancipation, the Reform crisis of the early 1830s, and the protracted campaign against slavery. According to the sort of hybrid model that Cobden had in mind, public opinion in the broadest sense must be created and informed in order to pressure Parliament.⁸⁰ The first committee room we enter makes this point well as it was in here that a nationwide petitioning campaign was coordinated. Petitioning - the 'constitutional artillery of public opinion' - was one of the basic tools of 'pressure from without' and repealers employed it with enthusiasm and high hopes. 'The petition is the recipe for all our grievances', wrote the editor of the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* in December 1839, predicting that a 'shower of genuine petitions' was sure to bring quick victory.⁸¹ The shower in fact became a deluge. Between 1839 and 1843 the League was the most persistent petitioner of the House of Commons. Over the five sessions there were 16,351 petitions for repeal tabled in the House (an average of 3270, containing an average total of 1,153,690 signatures, every session).⁸² Petitioning thus brought together Britons - 'from Peer to peasant' - from all over the nation. On one day in February 1842, for example, petitions were tabled from four joiners in the employ of George Brocklehurst of Manchester; 342 inhabitants of the parish of Maentwrog in the county of Merioneth in Wales; 33 members of the Wesleyan Association (male and female) in Glossop near Derby; 5543 residents of Worsley in Lancashire; 548 inhabitants of Whitworth in the parish of Rochdale; and 487 persons who had attended a public meeting in King's Arms Tavern, Mile End Road, in Middlesex.⁸³ Before they ever got to Westminster, however, most of these petitions had passed through the hands of one of ten or twenty clerks in a committee room at Newall's Buildings where they were counted, vetted, and, as evidence before a Parliamentary inquiry would later reveal, sometimes altered.⁸⁴

In other respects the League's political strategies represented innovation by more than simply scale. For example in another committee room Kohl, the German visitor, was particularly impressed by the way correspondence was handled. '[I]mmense numbers of letters were brought in, opened, read, and answered, without a moments delay.' 'These letters, pouring in from all parts of the United Kingdom,' he continued, 'were of the most various contents, some trivial, some important, but all connected with the objects of the party.' One volume of the League's early correspondence containing about 800 letters has survived which, although only a fragment of the total, is sufficient to lend support to Kohl's impression. From all over Britain came requests, complaints, demands, advice, suggestions, rumours and

gossip.⁸⁵ Hickin estimated that approximately 25,000 letters were received in 1844.⁸⁶ More impressive still was the torrent of mail dispatched from Newall's Buildings. League organizers were convinced that 'mechanical invention fights for social right' and were adroit in using new technology and communications in their campaign.⁸⁷ Early in the campaign the League recognized the need to make maximum use of the new Penny Post.⁸⁸ In September 1840 the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* reported that the Council had conceived a plan to rouse the country by sending letters containing tracts and handbills to 'every person whose name is in *Pigott's Directory*'. As many as 7000 of these letters, the report continued, were sent out each day; the postage bill on the day that Alexander Somerville visited Newall's Buildings was £38.⁸⁹ This was only the beginning. In September 1843 the *Circular* was boasting that 'the most extensive correspondence ever contemplated' would be carried on involving 300,000 letters a week. Over 23,000 letters were posted at one Manchester post office in three days, complained its over-burdened manager to a Parliamentary Committee in 1846.⁹⁰ Both the scale and the novelty of this use of 'direct mail' is impressive, even when measured against the magnitude of modern political campaigning. In its day it was breaking new ground for political agitation much as in our day the Referendum Party, a pressure group that has many League-like characteristics, has taken its message to the people through the modern technology of the video cassette.

Thanks again to the persistent questioning by hostile MPs we know that the 23,000 letters which deluged the Manchester Post Office in August 1845 were directly related to an electoral strategy that was not only a departure from the conventional methods of 'pressure from without', but was also an overtly political act for a movement that had staked its reputation on being above politics. The letters were the work of a team of a dozen or more lawyers poring over the electoral registers of boroughs and counties in another Committee Room at Newall's Buildings. Mailed to the electors in seven counties during the last three days when it was legal to do so, these letters took the form of objections to electoral enrolment. Under the provisions of the Act as it then stood electors were required to attend registration court to defend their right to vote if challenged by any party. The League's strategy was aimed at catching out the large number of non-resident voters, many of whom would not have even received their letter before the court was convened. Thousands, including many who had legitimate claims to the vote, were disenfranchised in this way. The League's defence, as its supporters on the Parliamentary committee that examined this strategy were able to bring out, was that the 'protectionists', usually Tories, had also been playing the game, although not on this scale. For George Wilson the strategy required no defence: it was 'war'.⁹¹

How did the League end up immersed in the fine print of the Reform Act and why was the League engine at Newall's Buildings, to use Hickin's words, converted into 'essentially an electoral one'?⁹² Some historians have regarded the shift from declaratory politics to electoral politics as

innovative, even ingenious.⁹³ Although it might well have been the first attempt to create a third force in British electoral politics, it was also a haphazard decision borne of frustration and failure which led, in turn, to successive strategic failures. The fact that the League continued to campaign in other ways has masked this failure, even from some historians.⁹⁴ Cobden knew better, as he later conceded to Prentice: the decision to embark on electoral politics, he wrote in 1853, led to a 'blundering, unsystematic series of campaigns, in which we were partly indebted for victory to the stupidity of our foes, and still more the badness of their cause'.⁹⁵ The first element, frustration, related to the petitions. According to Prentice the disdain with which the House of Commons dismissed Villiers' resolution on the Corn Laws early in 1839, despite the support of a massive number of petitions, was the catalyst for the formation of the League itself and spurred on repealers to greater effort. The redoubled efforts of 1840 were also rebuffed: as the League Council commented sarcastically, the 'signatures of a million and a half petitioners are not numerous enough' to convince the Legislature to repeal the Corn Laws.⁹⁶ By February 1842, following a general election which had seen the situation in the House get worse, Cobden conceded that petitioning the present House of Commons was useless and should be discarded as a strategy. Although petitioning was not finally abandoned until September 1843,⁹⁷ the evolution of a new strategy had begun as early as May 1840.

Following the defeat of Villiers' resolution a delegate meeting in London had resolved to try to return MPs who would vote for it.⁹⁸ As Prentice would soon write in the *Manchester Times*, the 'experience of two years has taught the League that to gain anything from Parliament they must begin at the beginning', which meant 'keep out improper men, and get right men in'.⁹⁹ Back in Newall's Buildings the League Council had issued a warning in September 1840 that they would soon 'commence operations, with a view to effect an electoral movement in opposition to the bread tax in every constituency of the kingdom'. 'The commencement of a new system,' reiterated the *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 'has been forced on the League by the contemptuous manner in which the petitions of the people have been treated by their representatives.'¹⁰⁰

At first the new electoral strategy involved extracting a pledge from one or more of the candidates,¹⁰¹ but this proved to be a short step from putting up candidates in their own right. The Rubicon was crossed in December 1840. In June that year the Council had sent Acland and a 'Council member' to Sudbury in Suffolk to get involved in the by-election caused by the resignation of one of the sitting Tory MPs. Acland harangued the crowd for their previous venality, but he came away empty handed because there was only a single candidate.¹⁰² The pledging strategy proved equally problematic when none of the candidates would acquiesce, as the Council found in December when it sent Acland, Prentice and William Rawson, the Treasurer of the League, to Walsall in Staffordshire. 'Thrice over had the League declared that it would support no candidate for a seat in

Parliament who would not pledge himself for a total repeal of the Corn Law. "Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed", said scoffing unbelievers,' recalled Prentice.¹⁰³ Faced with this situation in what was, ironically, regarded as 'the most obscure borough in the kingdom', the Council sent J.B. Smith to contest the poll.¹⁰⁴

Although the folly of this decision might have seemed clearer with hindsight, at the time many in the League entered the contest at Walsall with high expectations. From Manchester Prentice predicted to Smith that his victory would be the catalyst for repeal itself. Closer to the theatre Joseph Sturge, a prominent moral radical and long-time opponent of the Corn Laws in Birmingham, was no less sanguine, comparing the contest to the Clare by-election in 1828 which had led to Catholic Emancipation.¹⁰⁵ Even Cobden, having rejected Parkes's advice to use 'proper appliances' (bribery) to ensure victory, contented himself with the thought that, win or lose, the contest had been worth a year's lecturing in publicity.¹⁰⁶

An event of notoriety at the time, the Walsall by-election has been studied extensively by previous historians of the League. Notwithstanding Cobden's squeamishness about the potential stain of bribery, under Acland's command the League matched the Walsall Tories for brutality, corruption and electoral violence and was only narrowly defeated at the poll.¹⁰⁷ Hot on the heels of Smith's defeat, the General Election produced a Tory triumph, but, far from curing the League of the taste for electoral politics, these events sharpened their appetite. Two factors were important. Dejection at Peel's victory undoubtedly precipitated a crisis of confidence in the ranks, and Cobden was alive to the 'necessity of *doing something*', as he confessed in a well-known injunction to Wilson.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, amidst the long lists of depressing results at the General Election, Leaguers noted that Walsall had been regained by a liberal: the efforts on Smith's behalf had paid dividends after all.

A strategy of contesting by-elections was pressed on the League during 1842 by the veteran radical Colonel Perronet Thompson and, by the time the policy was formally announced in September 1843, the experiment was already well under way.¹⁰⁹ The announcement reiterated that not only would the League support free-trade candidates, it would put them forward if no local person could be found. The model that had forced Wellington to accept Catholic Emancipation, carried the Reform Bill, and freed the slaves, was now superseded. 'All previous agitations have implied insurrection as their ultimatum', enthused the editor of the *League*; 'Under the plan of the League, this definition breaks down.'¹¹⁰ The results, however, invite closer attention. On the one hand, between 1843 and 1846 the majority of by-elections were not, in fact, contested by free-trade candidates. Of forty-nine by-elections held in 1844-45, for example, nearly 60 per cent were uncontested. On the other hand, when elections were contested the results were indifferent. Between 1841 and 1846 the League contested close to twenty by-elections from Hastings to Kirkcaldy, but managed only half a dozen victories.¹¹¹ In at least two of these cases the

League's involvement was not decisive. Small wonder that by April 1845 Cobden cursed the 'ridiculous' pledge of eighteen months before.¹¹² If some historians have tended to overlook this dismal record, some defenders of the Corn Laws were quick to point to it. One Tory backbencher chortled that the League had been received in Salisbury, Wiltshire, Devizes, Woodstock, Exeter, Christchurch, Launceston, Buckingham, Hastings, Huntingdon 'and, above all, South Lancashire' 'as folks are wont to treat a strange air in the larder'.¹¹³

The shift to electioneering led to two further strategic choices. The first of these was the campaign to revise the electoral register. Defeat was the driving force for this campaign. Having stumbled to a narrow loss at Walsall where the Tories had added a clutch of names to the voters' register shortly before it closed, the League decided to establish a registration society there. It was too little too late. Following the passage of the Reform Bill Peel had put Liberals on notice that, as far as the Tories were concerned, the 'battle for the British constitution would be played out in the registration courts'. 'Register!, Register! Register!' had been the cry of the South Lancashire Reform Association formed by many future Leaguers in March 1835, but the structure remained largely unused. Typical of the tardiness of the Manchester Leaguers on this score, the *Manchester Times* published an exhaustive guide to registration within weeks of the Tory landslide in 1841.¹¹⁴ The story was the same elsewhere. For example the annual meeting of the Sheffield Reform Association in 1839, with an audience containing the leaders of the local Anti-Corn Law campaign, was warned of Tory gains in the Registration Courts, but the torpor was apparently not shaken off.¹¹⁵ The price for indifference was paid in 1841 when the West Riding of Yorkshire was lost to the Tories, a defeat that was neither accident nor surprise.

Finally in February 1842 Cobden urged Wilson to undertake an analysis and classification of 'all the boroughs in the kingdom' as a prelude to the establishment of Electoral Committees in each borough 'to look after the registration'.¹¹⁶ It was at this time that the electoral registers for the whole of Britain were installed in a Committee Room on the second floor of Newall's Building and lawyers were engaged to begin the arduous task. (The operation was later split between Manchester and the London headquarters in the Strand with a network of offices also in Leeds, Preston, Chester and Wolverhampton).¹¹⁷ In April 1844 Cobden conceded that he would be happy to see the League become a Registration Society and by September the following year the League had fourteen lawyers at work giving 'sleepless attention to minute and tiresome details' dictated by the Constitution.¹¹⁸ The League press carried regular updates. During 1844 Registration Committees modelled on the one in Newall's Buildings were established in 160 boroughs (unspecified) and 'gains' were claimed in up to 112.¹¹⁹ In 1845 the same thorough attention was turned to the counties. Readers were told of spectacular and often humorous results. In Middlesex, for example, the 'purification of the register' involved

expunging the names of thirty-eight Anglican clergymen, three knights, three baronets and an Irish peer; whereas in North Lancashire only eight were knocked off, but they included the local MP.¹²⁰

In reality the results were not as impressive as the publicity implied. Originally 30 counties were identified where it was believed that a 'slight' improvement would make a difference but, as Wilson testified before a Parliamentary Committee in 1846, in the event the League concentrated its efforts on 14 constituencies (returning 30 MPs). In a military-like operation over 13,000 objections were lodged. Eight of the fourteen constituencies were managed from a Committee Room – by this time known as the League Registration Office – on the second floor of Newall's Buildings.¹²¹ At first glance the results appear impressive: the Tories' sweep of all but three of the thirty seats in 1841 was reduced by seven at the next General Election in 1847. With a keener eye to psephology, however, the result appears far less spectacular. In fact, for all the effort the result in 1847 was very similar to the result in 1837, and a long way short of the liberal triumph in 1832.¹²² One group who were taken in by the League's publicity, however, were some of its intended victims. 'What the late Sir Robert Peel preached Mr Cobden and his co-partners in mischief have practised', complained the Secretary of the Conservative Registration Association in North Warwickshire in 1850. He need not have worried; no Liberal was elected in North Warwickshire before the redistribution of 1884.¹²³

The conversion of the movement to electoral politics also involved the League in an elaborate scheme to create new voters. If our tour of Newall's Building was taking place later in the 1840s there is every chance that meeting in one of the Committee Rooms would have been the members of the Manchester and Northern Counties Freehold Land Society, which was one in a succession of such societies inspired by the League.¹²⁴ These societies had legitimate objectives reflecting powerful aspirations that are sometimes overlooked (see Chapter 7), but they were also the vehicle for a breathtaking attempt at manipulation of the electoral system. The fine print of the Reform Act included the retention of the 40-shilling freehold franchise in the counties which provided, as Bright enthused, an 'irresistible weapon before which the domination of this hereditary peerage must at length be laid in the dust'.¹²⁵ The origin of the scheme is the subject of some uncertainty, but it was Cobden who seized upon its potential. The plan was eloquent in its simplicity: property was purchased and sub-divided to be sold in lots of sufficient value to enfranchise the new multiple owners. The renamed 'Bright's Buildings' in Hanley in Staffordshire, for example, were sold to a group of fifty men who claimed a vote on the basis of their fiftieth part of the freehold land and building.¹²⁶

From late in 1844 the League set to work towards the ambitious target of facilitating the enfranchisement of one million freeholders in this way.¹²⁷ In 1846 Wilson told a Parliamentary inquiry that about £500,000 had been spent during the previous year 'to get votes'.¹²⁸ Again the results fell short

of the public perception. Writing in the 1870s Cobden's biographer, John Morley, estimated that between 30,000 and 50,000 freeholders were added to the electoral rolls by this scheme although, when scrutinized, this estimate appears entirely fanciful.¹²⁹ From the evidence given by League agents in 1846 it is clear that the League concentrated this scheme on a dozen English county seats (returning 24 MPs) in two clusters around its headquarters in London and Newall's Buildings in Manchester.¹³⁰ The list is by no means exhaustive – Scottish Leaguers, for example, who were unable to take advantage of the scheme in Scotland due to the different franchise there, were encouraged to purchase freeholds in Durham and Northumberland¹³¹ – but it is sufficient to allow a meaningful evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy. A comparison of the size of the electorates in 1841 and 1847 shows that substantial increases were made in four counties (between roughly 1000 and 5000), but there were also decreases in four of the selected counties (between 200 and 300). The total increase across the nine counties was just under 12,000. On the other hand, a simple comparison between the 1841 and 1847 election results suggests that the strategy had paid a handsome dividend with 'liberals' more than tripling their share of the representation (even allowing for the fact that not all these 'liberals' were necessarily free traders) in the targeted seats. However, looked at over the longer term, the results suggest that the ground lost in 1841 had merely been regained.¹³² The expenditure of between £90,000 and £98,000 in the West Riding alone seems a high price to pay to achieve the *status quo ante* that had existed for a decade after Reform.¹³³

The League's electoral strategy was, however, successful in contributing to a theatre of menace that shook the confidence of Tories all over Britain. The young Tory, W.E. Gladstone, speaking on behalf of his brother, the Tory candidate for Walsall, regretted the 'unconstitutional and dangerous character of the proceedings of the League' in interfering in the by-election.¹³⁴ In 1844 a similar point was made by Augustus Stafford O'Brien MP, a member of the Agricultural Protection Society, when he complained of the League's 'impudent interference in elections, an interference whose insulting arrogance, whose impatient presumption, has no precedence in the history of this country'.¹³⁵ The response of other Tory commentators bordered on hysteria. For readers of the oracle of conservatism, *The Times*, the League was a 'combination of Radicalism and Destructiveness' that had become nothing less than a 'Jacobin Club'; to a self-styled 'Poor Man's Friend' writing in 1843: 'The Serpent is here beyond a doubt... Sometimes it calls itself Liberal, then Radical, then Chartist, then Agitator, then Repealer, then Political Dissenter, then ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUER.'¹³⁶ Cobden was correct: Walsall was worth a year's lecturing. The distinction is, however, important: the League's electoral strategies were successful to the extent that they contributed to the effectiveness of the conventional forms of declaratory politics in which it excelled. Nonetheless, even in defeat, the electoral strategies developed at Newall's

Buildings suggested exciting new possibilities to students of agitation. Politics would never be the same again.

Even without the application of the 'proper appliances', the shift from declaratory politics to electioneering greatly increased the need for fund raising which was planned and executed in a highly structured, systematic and successful manner from another of the Committee Rooms on the second floor of Newall's Buildings. Meeting most mornings the League's fund raisers faced enormous demands that escalated rapidly.¹³⁷ Cobden claimed that between 1839 and the end of 1842 the League had spent £25,000 (it was estimated that local ACLAs had spent about three times this amount in total over the same period). Over subsequent years the official total would increase significantly. In 1842-43 the League raised (and spent) £50,000; in each of 1844 and 1845 £100,000 was collected and expended and, late in 1845, the League commenced a £250,000 fund of which only part had been collected when the Corn Laws were repealed.¹³⁸ The editor of a leading Whig newspaper in the metropolis, the *Morning Chronicle*, found the whole thing significant as well as amusing. Commenting on the announcement of the £50,000 fund he wrote:¹³⁹

There is something very English in the fact that money should have so material an influence in a struggle of this nature. In France, the machinery would be likely to be that of musket; and in America that of the ballot-box. Italy would organise a secret society. But here we are all for money.

For Cobden it was no laughing matter. '[Y]ou say the people are ready for anything,' he had asked George Wilson in October 1841, 'are they prepared to pay money? I would not give a rusk for the zeal that won't give money or beg it for us.'¹⁴⁰ For the most part the 'sinews of war' (Cobden's words) came from the pockets of individual donors (although the famous bazaars made important contributions in 1842 and 1845). Overwhelmingly the individual donations flowed in from the League's heartland in the north of England, so much so that it is easy to overlook an impressive national spread of supporters. In February 1846, for example, the *League* published a list of 131 towns and cities where a collector was actively working on the Quarter of a Million fund.¹⁴¹ Each of these collectors and the people they had contact with were directly linked to Newall's Buildings, emphasizing the importance of this modest building at the centre of Manchester's commercial district to the movement at large. From Newall's Buildings the tendrils of repeal reached out to the nation penetrating further, perhaps, than any previous organization had done and forming the basis for a truly national movement.

Notes

1. W.E.A. Axon, *The Annals of Manchester* (Manchester, 1886), p. 309. The discussion in the *Manchester Guardian* was more concerned with the claims for damages caused by the extension of the Exchange. See 14 March 1867.

2. H. Jephson, *The Platform: Its Rise and Progress* (London, 1892), vol. 2, p. 293. See also N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1958), chap. 7.
3. J.T. Slugg, *Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago* (1881, repr. Shannon, 1971), p. 3; B. Love, *The Handbook of Manchester: Being a Second and Enlarged Edition of Manchester As It Is* (Manchester, 1842), p. 235; T. Swindells, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men* (Manchester, 1906–8), Second Series, pp. 249–50, 253, 254; Axon, *Annals*, p. 190.
4. *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 15 September 1838; *Manchester Guardian*, 12 February 1840.
5. *Manchester Times*, 10 January 1835; *Freeholder*, 1 March 1850. In 1848 a petition for the removal of Jewish Disabilities was laid out for signature at Newall's Buildings. See B. Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry 1740–1875* (Manchester, 1979), p. 165.
6. *The Times*, 18 November 1843.
7. *Nation*, 17 Aug 1850.
8. I. & P. Kuczynski (eds), *A Young Revolutionary in Nineteenth-Century England: Selected Writings of Georg Weerth* (Berlin, 1971), pp. 161–2.
9. H.D. Jordan, 'The Political Methods of the Anti-Corn Law League', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 42, 1927, p. 63.
10. D.A. Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure: A Study in the History of Victorian Reform Agitations* (Sussex, 1977), pp. 62, 87.
11. J. Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden* (London, 1977), pp. 97, 102 and *passim*. See also G. Alderman, *Pressure Groups and Government in Great Britain* (New York, 1984), p. 13. This point was made at the time, including by the *Sentinel*, 28 September 1845; 12 October 1845.
12. *League*, 30 November 1844; *Manchester Times*, 19 January 1839.
13. Article from *Morning Chronicle* quoted in J. Almack, *Character, Motives, and Proceedings of the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers, with a Few General Remarks on the Consequences that Would Result from a Free Trade in Corn* (London, 1843), p. 54. This article was also published, with some alterations, as Reuben [Alexander Somerville], *A Brief History of the Rise and Progress of the Anti-Corn Law League, with Personal Sketches of its Leading Members* (London, 1845); 'German Description of the League and Its Members', originally in *Zollvereinsblatt*, no. 14, repr. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 20 June 1843.
14. Senior sold flags and bunting, superintended meetings at Free Trade Hall, and later distributed prospectuses for freehold land societies; Pattisson was Secretary to the Cobden National Tribute Fund collected during 1846. See *Manchester Times*, 31 July 1846; 7 August 1846; 23 October 1846.
15. *Manchester Times*, 7 August 1846; MPL, Wilson Papers, T.N. Roberts to Wilson, 10 January 1846.
16. *Manchester Times*, 20 September 1845; MPL, Wilson Papers, T.N. Roberts to Wilson, 10 January 1846; PP *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors, Reports From Committees*, 1846, vol. 8, p. 223.
17. H. Ashworth, *Recollections of Richard Cobden, M.P. and the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1878), p. 34.
18. *Manchester Times*, 26 December 1846; E.W. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden of Manchester* (London, 1891), p. 101. A key to the painting was included in Watkin facing p. 101.
19. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, p. 217;

- WSRO, Cobden Papers, CP 247: 'Subscribers of Ten Pounds and Upwards to the Anti-Corn Law League in Favour of the Reform Movement' (n.d).
20. See *Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers* (1903-5 edn repr. with revisions by G.C. Williamson, Washington, 1964), vol. 3, pp. 34-5; *League*, 6 June 1846.
 21. Reuben, *A Brief History*, pp. 14-15.
 22. Ashworth, *Recollections*, p. 34; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 3 November 1842.
 23. *Manchester Times*, 14 November 1835; 31 December 1836; 1 August 1840; 7 November 1840; 6 November 1841; 16 July 1842; 29 July 1843; 30 August 1845; *Manchester Guardian*, 6 February 1839; 29 August 1840; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 8 April 1841; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 4 July 1843; *League*, 28 September 1844; *Scotsman*, 27 December 1843; *Manchester Examiner*, 23 October 1847; 3 June 1848; A. Somerville, *Free Trade and the League: A Biographic History of the Pioneers of Freedom of Opinion, Commercial Enterprise and Civilisation in Britain, from the Times of Serfdom to the Age of Free Trade in Manufactures, Food and Navigation* (Manchester, 1853), vol. 2, pp. 426-30; Slugg, *Reminiscences*, p. 29; Axon, *Annals*, pp. 251-2 (see also Appendix 4).
 24. Reuben, *A Brief History*, p. 14; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 11 February 1841; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 19 May 1841; 4 July 1843; Somerville, *Free Trade and the League*, vol. 2, p. 508; MPL, Smith Papers, Election Papers, J. Parkes to Smith, 13 January 1841; J. Hickin to Smith, 13 March 1841. Hickin was active in the freehold movement representing Manchester at National Freehold Land Conferences in 1849-50; see *Northern Star*, 17 November 1849; *Freeholder*, 1 March 1850; 2 December 1850. See also Chapter 7 below.
 25. See, for example, WSRO, Cobden Papers, J. Hickin to R. Cobden, 30 September 1841.
 26. *Scotsman*, 19 September 1846; *Manchester Times*, 10 September 1836; 24 September 1836; *Life of Alexander Reid, a Scottish Covenanter, Written by Himself and Edited by Archibald Prentice, His Great Grandson* (Manchester, 1822), pp. iv-v1; MPL, *Biographical Index*: obituary. A detailed study of Prentice is overdue; a recent, and sympathetic, treatment of his early career is offered by Michael J. Turner, 'The Making of a Middle Class Liberalism in Manchester c.1815-32: A Study of Politics and the Press', D Phil Unpublished dissertation, Oxford University 1991. See also Appendix 4.
 27. Reuben, *A Brief History*, p. 14; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 4 July 1843; *League*, 30 November 1844; *Manchester Times*, 27 January 1838; 22 June 1839; *Manchester Examiner*, 6 March 1847; 29 April 1848; *Manchester Guardian*, 22 June 1839; 9 March 1859; Axon, *Annals*, p. 324; Slugg, *Reminiscences*, pp. 109-10; Swindells, *Manchester Streets*, fifth series, p. 50. D.T. Price, 'George Wilson', in J.O. Baylen and N.J. Gossman (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals* (Sussex, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 548-9. Wilson is another Leaguer whose career warrants extended treatment. See also Appendix 4 below.
 28. MPL, Wilson Papers, S. Smith to Wilson, 25 June 1839. See also McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 36
 29. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 October 1842; *Manchester Times*, 12 November 1842; 12 October 1844; *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 22 October 1842; MPL, Smith Papers, vol. 1, opens with an anonymous statement which, *inter alia*, indicates that Smith withdrew from active politics after the general election in 1841.

30. *Manchester Times*, 28 October 1843.
31. McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 99; J.H. Treble, 'O'Connor, O'Connell and the Attitudes of Irish Immigrants towards Chartism in the North of England', in J. Butt and I.F. Clarke (eds), *The Victorians and Social Protest* (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 55.
32. WSRO, Cobden Papers, E. Watkin to Cobden, 21 April 1842; 22 June 1842; Watkin, *Alderman Cobden*, pp. 91, 93; PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, pp. 213-15.
33. Slugg, *Reminiscences*, p. 270; Love, *Handbook of Manchester*, p. 186; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 175.
34. WSRO, Cobden Papers, J. Hickin to R. Cobden, 30 September 1841; MPL, Wilson Papers, R. Cobden to Wilson, 24 August 1843; C. Mackay, *Forty Years' Recollections of Life, Literature and Public Affairs from 1830 to 1870* (London, 1877), vol. 1, pp. 123-4.
35. MPL, Wilson Papers, C.E. Rawlins to Wilson, 26 June 1846.
36. Reuben, *A Short History*, p. 13; *League*, 30 November 1844.
37. Eve Sedgwick quoted by D.S. Macleod, 'Homosexuality and Middle-Class Identity in Early Victorian Patronage of the Arts', in A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1999), p. 65.
38. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 3 December 1840; Reuben, *A Short History*, p. 13.
39. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 23 July 1838.
40. *Ibid.*, 10 December 1839; 25 February 1841.
41. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 10 February 1842.
42. *Ibid.*, 22 September 1842; 20 October 1842. Ireland was not included either.
43. *Manchester Times*, 25 January 1845.
44. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 11 June 1839; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 4 April 1843; *Manchester Times*, 9 November 1839; 14 February 1846; Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book, A.W. Paulton, Gloucester, 8 May 1839; A.W. Paulton, Dumfries, 25 September 1839.
45. Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book, A.W. Paulton, Cheltenham, 1 May 1839; PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, p. 160; *Manchester Examiner*, 10 July 1847. See also the entry by D.T.W. Price in Baylen and Gossman (eds), *Dictionary of Radicals*, vol. 2, pp. 405-7.
46. *Northern Star*, 6 February 1841; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 9 May 1843.
47. *Defeat of the Anti-Corn Law League in Huntingdonshire: The Speech of Mr George Game Day on that Occasion, at Huntingdon June 17 1843* (London, 1844), p. 18n.
48. *Hull Portfolio, or Memoirs and Correspondence of James Acland Its Proprietor and Editor*, 20 August 1831; 29 October 1831; 12 November 1831; 8 December 1832; 27 April 1832; *Sheffield Iris*, 27 November 1838; 18 December 1838; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 20 October 1842; *Manchester Times*, 31 April 1838; *Northern Star*, 21 April 1838; 5 May 1838; 26 May 1838; 17 November 1838; *Liverpool Politician: A Local Commentary by James Acland*, 14 July 1838; *The Bristolian, or Memoirs and Correspondence of James Acland*, 23 February 1872; 9 March 1872; 10 April 1872; 20 April 1872; 11 May 1872; J. Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* (Bristol, 1887), pp. 118-21, 137-8; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 56-8.
49. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 30 April 1839; 11 June 1839; 19 November 1840; 21 April 1841; Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book, S. Smith, Boston,

- 27 April 1839; A. Bisset, *Notes on the Anti-Corn Law Struggle* (London, 1884), p. 3.
50. *Manchester Times*, 1 October 1842.
 51. Reuben, *A Short History*, pp 13–14.
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 53. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 14 March 1843; *League*, 30 September 1843.
 54. *League*, 30 September 1843.
 55. WSRO, Cobden Papers, J. Christy to Cobden, 2 April 1842; 2 July 1842.
 56. J. Passmore Edwards, *A Few Footprints* (London, 1906), p. 13.
 57. *Manchester Times*, 10 June 1843; 16 September 1843.
 58. D. Bain, *The Egregious and Dangerous Fallacies of the Anti-Corn League, or, the Protection of Agriculture, Not a Question with Landlords, but for the Whole Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1843), p. 59. See also MPL, Wilson Papers, G. Wilson to the Economical Society of Paris, 12 March 1846.
 59. A complete packet is preserved in the collection of the National Library of Australia. See P.A. Pickering, 'Taxing the Poor Man's Loaf', *National Library of Australia News*, vol. 9, no. 7, April 1999, pp. 8–11. See also Ashworth, *Recollections*, pp. 122–30.
 60. 'Author of "Letter to the Ladies of the Anti-Corn Law League"', *Two Letters on the Great Distress that now prevails in the country: one address to the Merchants, manufacturers, master spinners &c &c of this Manufacturing District; the other to the Ladies and Gentlemen of the Anti-Corn Law League, Residents of Rochdale* (Manchester, n.d. [1842]), letter 2.
 61. See, *inter alia*, *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 25 June 1839; 3 December 1840; *Manchester Times*, 11 June 1842; *Manchester Guardian*, 21 January 1843; *National Anti-Corn Law League: Three Prize Essays on Agriculture and the Corn Laws* (Manchester, 1842); Kohl, *England and Wales* (1844, repr. London, 1968), p. 145.
 62. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 14 May 1839; 3 September 1839; 1 October 1839; *Manchester Times*, 25 January 1845; MPL, Smith Papers, Anti-Corn Law League Papers, *The Report of the Council of the Anti-Corn Law League to the Deputies of the Various Associations and Districts Assembled at Manchester This Day*, (4 January 1840).
 63. WSRO, Cobden Papers, J. Gadsby to Cobden, 29 April 1842; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 1 October 1839; *League*, 4 July 1846.
 64. Reuben, *A Brief History*, p. 14.
 65. *Manchester Examiner*, 2 November 1847; Slugg, *Reminiscences*, p. 188.
 66. *Manchester Examiner*, 2 November 1847.
 67. Reuben, *A Brief History*, p. 14.
 68. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden of Manchester*, p. 73.
 69. Kohl, *England and Wales*, p. 145
 70. *Manchester Times*, 11 June 1842.
 71. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 20 February 1840; 21 May 1840.
 72. *Ibid.*, 21 May 1840; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* 10 March 1842.
 73. *League*, 10 August 1844.
 74. *Manchester Times*, 31 December 1841; 21 January 1843; 29 November 1845.
 75. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 5 May 1841; *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 2, p. 7.
 76. *Manchester Times*, 28 January 1843; 27 January 1844; 22 May 1846; *League*, 10 August 1844; *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 2, p. 7.

77. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 28 January 1841; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 17 January 1843.
78. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 4 July 1843; Prentice, *History*, vol. 2, p. 28.
79. J.G. Kohl, *England and Wales*, pp. 143-4.
80. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 8 September 1842. See also Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 75; P. Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from without in Early Victorian England* (London, 1974), p. viii.
81. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 10 December 1839; 6 February 1840.
82. PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1839, vol. 110, pp. 820-5; 1840, vol. 116, pp. 1023-9; 1841, vol. 125, pp. 847-52, vol. 126, p. 36; 1842, vol. 130, p. 728-34; 1843, vol. 135, pp. 1755-61.
83. *Manchester Guardian*, 6 February 1839; PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1842, vol. 130, p. 59.
84. PP, *Report from Select Committee on Corn Laws (Cheltenham Petition)*, *Reports From Committees*, 1846, vol. 8, pp. 13, 25, 29-31.
85. Kohl, *England and Wales*, p. 144; MPL, *Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book*; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 218.
86. *Manchester Times*, 25 January 1845.
87. *Ibid.*, 4 January 1840.
88. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 10 December 1839.
89. *Ibid.*, 24 September 1840; Reuben, *A Short History*, p. 13.
90. *League*, 30 September 1843; PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, p. 82.
91. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, pp. 207-8.
92. *Manchester Times*, 25 January 1845.
93. See N. Longmate, *The Breadstealers: The Fight Against the Corn Laws, 1838-1846* (London, 1984), p. 135; Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, p. 64, 77; C. Schonhardt-Bailey (ed.), *The Rise of Free Trade* (London, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 7-8.
94. See, for example, Longmate, *Breadstealers*, p. 186; Schonhardt-Bailey, *ibid.*; Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, p. 58; Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden*, pp. 95-6.
95. Cobden to Prentice, 13 September 1853, quoted in J. Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-68* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 23. See also P. Adelman, *Victorian Radicalism: The Middle Class Experience 1830-1914* (London, 1984), pp. 23, 26.
96. Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 124; R. Garnett, *The Life of W.J. Fox* (London, 1910), p. 261.
97. MPL, *Wilson Papers*, R. Cobden to Wilson, 27 February 1842; *League*, 30 September 1843.
98. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 July 1840.
99. *Manchester Times*, 9 January 1841. As Hamer has shown Cobden was thinking in terms of an electoral contest as early as 1839; *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, p. 62-3.
100. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 18 June 1840; *Manchester Times*, 19 September 1840.
101. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 July 1840. See also *Manchester Times*, 3 July 1841.
102. F.W.S. Craig (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results 1832-1885* (Dartmouth, 1989), p. 294; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 18 June 1840.

103. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 31 December 1840; Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 175.
104. *Manchester Times*, 2 January 1841.
105. MPL, Smith Papers, Election Papers, A. Prentice to Smith, 2 January 1841; J. Sturge to Smith, 4 January 1841.
106. *Ibid.*, J. Parkes to R. Cobden, 28 January 1841; R. Cobden to Smith, 29 January 1841.
107. PP, *Minutes Of Evidence Taken Before The Walsall Election Committee: Reports from Committees*, 1841, vol. 9; *Manchester Times*, 6 February 1841; *Northern Star*, 6 February 1841; Craig, *Election Results*, p. 317; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 83-90.
108. Wilson Papers, R. Cobden to Wilson, 9 October 1841. See also Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, pp. 64-5. It is not clear from the letter, however, that Cobden had resolved to embrace electoral politics.
109. Quoted by Hamer, *Politics of Electoral Pressure*, p. 67; *League*, 30 September 1843. Although he is keen to re-establish Thompson's role in the campaign against the Corn Laws, Michael Turner does not note the Colonel's crucial contribution in this regard. See M.J. Turner, 'The "Bonaparte of Free Trade" and the Anti-Corn Law League', *Historical Journal*, vol. 41, no. 4, 1998, pp. 1011-34.
110. *League*, 30 September 1843; 3 November 1843.
111. F.W.S. Craig, *Chronology of British Parliamentary By-elections 1833-1987* (Chichester, 1987), pp. 16-21. The 'victories' were Nottingham (Gisborne); Durham (Bright); City of London (Pattison); Kendal (Warburton); Kilmarnock (Bouverie); Greenock (Baine). In Southwark two candidates (Miall and Molesworth) were reputed to be Free Traders (see *Manchester Times*, 30 August 1845), but the victor, Molesworth, did not vote for total and immediate repeal in 1846.
112. MPL, Wilson Papers, R. Cobden to Wilson, 23 April 1845. Contemporary opinion was divided on whether the League's role was decisive in either Durham or London. See MS *Journal of Sidney Smith, Freetrader And Liberal Politician with Related Documents 1792-1882*, 19 July 1845, National Archives of Scotland, RH4/156; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 158-9.
113. *History of the League: The Speech of Augustus Stafford O'Brien Esq., Member for North Northamptonshire, in the House of Commons, Wednesday, 26 June 1844* (London, 1844), pp. 25-6; *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1844, p. 125.
114. *Manchester Times*, 7 March 1835; 9 July 1836; 18 July 1839; 10 July 1841.
115. *Sheffield Iris*, 23 June 1839.
116. Quoted in J. Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1879), vol. 1, p. 228
117. *Manchester Times*, 6 September 1845; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 4 July 1843; *League* 30 September 1845.
118. MPL, Wilson Papers, R. Cobden to Wilson, 2 April 1844; *League*, 21 June 1845; *Manchester Times*, 13 September 1845.
119. *League*, 7 December 1844; 14 December 1844; 25 January 1845; *Manchester Times*, 25 January 1845.
120. *League*, 18 October 1845.
121. *Manchester Times*, 15 November 1845; PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, pp. 192-3. The counties were North Warwickshire, North Staffordshire, South Staffordshire, South Lancashire,

- North Lancashire, North Cheshire, South Cheshire, East Gloucestershire, Buckinghamshire, Westmorland, Cambridgeshire, South Hampshire, East Somerset and Middlesex. This total of objections relates to 11 of the 14.
122. Craig, *Election Results*, pp. 355, 357, 361, 362, 389, 394, 408, 411, 424, 450, 453, 456, 474, 478.
 123. J. H Merridew, *Freehold Land Societies* (Birmingham, 1850), p. 11; Craig, *Election Results*, pp. 474-5.
 124. *Freeholder*, 1 March 1850.
 125. Quoted in Jordan, 'Political Methods', p. 71. The strategy could not be applied in Scotland.
 126. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, p. 309.
 127. *League*, 15 June 1844.
 128. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, p. 213.
 129. Morley, *Life of Cobden*, vol. 1, p. 306.
 130. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, pp. 157, 239, 257, 312; *League*, 7 December 1844. The seats were North Lancashire, South Lancashire, Middlesex, Yorkshire West Riding, North Cheshire, South Staffordshire, North Hampshire, South Hampshire, Sussex East, Sussex West, Essex South, and Essex North.
 131. M. Chase, 'Out of Radicalism: The Mid-Victorian Freehold Land Movement', *English Historical Review*, April 1991, p. 324.
 132. Craig, *Election Results*, pp. 361, 386, 387, 393, 394, 408, 411, 424, 458, 470, 472, 491.
 133. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, p. 312. Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden*, pp. 100,102, identifies 'seventeen clear gains' which he declares are a 'definite and measurable mark on the general election of 1847'. Nine of the 17 gains, however, had been lost in 1841, and a further 5 in 1837. All 17 had been held by 'liberals' in 1832.
 134. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, Election papers, *Walsall Letter Bag*, 28 January 1841.
 135. *History of the League: The Speech of Augustus Stafford O'Brien*, p. 27.
 136. Quoted in *Scotsman*, 22 November 1845; Poor Man's Friend, *A Counter Plea For the Poor: A Refutation of the Assertions of the Anti-Corn Law League, and the Hon. Revd Baptist W. Noel* (London, 1843), p. 31.
 137. *Manchester Times*, 27 December 1845.
 138. A League Balance Sheet was incorporated into the *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, pp. 218-19.
 139. Quoted in *Scotsman*, 29 October 1842.
 140. MPL, Wilson Papers, R. Cobden to Wilson, 1 October 1841.
 141. *League*, 7 February 1846.

CHAPTER 3

A NATION OF REPEALERS: THE LEAGUE IN THE ENGLISH PROVINCES AND SCOTLAND

In 1843 an editorial writer at *The Times*, full of indignation and foreboding about the future ‘unity of the British empire’, lashed the League as Celts ‘thirsting for vengeance on the Saxon’.¹ Notwithstanding the hysteria – real or confected – the editor seemed to have a point. Well might Frederic Bastiat, the French author of a commentary published in 1845, praise the characteristic determination of the Anglo-Saxon race exhibited by the seven founders of the League,² but, as the official journal of the movement, the *League*, pointed out a year later, six of the seven were Scots and the seventh was Irish.³ ‘In looking over the list of the numerous lecturers of the League,’ boasted a correspondent to the *Freeman’s Journal*, a leading Dublin nationalist newspaper, in 1843, ‘it is remarkable that nearly two thirds of those talented gentlemen are Irish.’⁴ For the leading Irish politician of the day, Daniel O’Connell, the League’s progress was Ireland’s opportunity. ‘[S]urely there is no Irishman so stupid as not to see . . . in the present English agitation,’ he wrote in a public letter to his Dublin followers in February 1842, ‘a glimpse of that posture of public affairs which may make the friendship of Ireland valuable, and her deliverance therefore secure.’⁵ In private the ‘Liberator’ was even more sanguine; in the same month as his public letter he speculated to P.V. Fitzpatrick: ‘I am a judge of agitation and I do think I perceive a movement in more than embryo which will compel the aristocracy to yield in England and to leave us in Ireland to ourselves.’⁶

Around the Council table at Newall’s Buildings the accents were not predominantly Celtic, but they were decidedly provincial. The heartland of the League was unquestionably to be found in the industrialized cities and townships of Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire, with Manchester at the apex of the movement. As George Thompson told an appreciative audience in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester was ‘the spring-head of Anti-Corn Law feeling, and principle and energy’. Richard Cobden was even more succinct in his well-known declaration that ‘the League is Manchester’.⁷ Outside Lancashire the domination of the movement by

Manchester was a source of discomfiture for friend and foe alike, especially in the capital. After the League temporarily shifted its headquarters to London in 1844, for example, one of the leaders of the metropolitan campaign, W.J. Fox, moaned that the 'League office is become perfectly horrible since the main body of Goths and Vandals came up from Manchester'.⁸

In an important sense, however, *The Times*, O'Connell and Fox had all missed the point. Notwithstanding his pride in his Scottish heritage, Archibald Prentice, for example, routinely annotated N.B. (North Britain) after the names of Scottish delegates to League meetings, a practice also adopted in the official League newspaper. Nor was repeal of the Legislative Union with Ireland supported by many Leaguers. As another well-known Scottish Leaguer, Alexander Somerville, pointed out in 1843, 'the English and Scotch cannot read the condition of Ireland at the page opened by Mr O'Connell'.⁹ Although some Leaguers such as Sidney Smith, a Scot, joined O'Connell's organization and others dissembled on the question of the repeal of the Union for the sake of O'Connell's support, Prentice outlined the pervasive attitude albeit in blunt language: 'Repeal the Union indeed! REPEAL THE CORN LAWS. That is both the immediate and permanent remedy.'¹⁰ Far from constituting a threat to national unity the campaign against the Corn Laws produced one of the first movements in British history that both deliberately sought and achieved a national presence, and was self-consciously national in its outlook. Overwhelmingly the League stood not for Celtic vengeance, but for an expansive form of 'Britishness' that, coming from the mouths of men with unfamiliar accents, was every bit as menacing for the readers of *The Times*.

'Goths and Vandals'

In 1846 George Wilson boasted to a committee of Parliamentarians that the League was a national association, 'having members in all parts of the country' and 'subscribers in every town of any importance'.¹¹ One of the League's first formal attempts to demonstrate that it represented a form of pan-Britishness, and by implication a purer patriotism, was a national register known as the 'League Doomsday Book' that was commenced in 1842. To explain the title to his readers the editor of the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* borrowed language from Tom Paine. Pointing out that the present day aristocracy were no more than the heirs of William the Conqueror and 'his brother robbers' who had compiled a Doomsday Book to 'secure . . . peaceful possession of their ill-gotten spoils', the editor enthused: 'We will have our Doomsday Book for the enrolment of every friend of justice, of every hater of oppression. It is high time the tables are turned.' In a well-known essay Christopher Hill has argued that after 1832 the notion of the 'Norman Yoke' became largely the rhetorical property of a few Chartists, Spenceans and socialists: the League is not mentioned in his pages.¹² It is a significant omission as the League's Doomsday Book points to a sense of

British history that was important for many Leaguers. Under the League's inspiration the Norman Yoke was even dressed in academic garb by William Cooke-Taylor, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, who wrote extensively in the service of the movement. In a treatise, first published in 1840 and re-issued in 1842 with alterations that had been canvassed with Cobden, Cooke-Taylor summarized the history of Britain since 1066 as a succession of attempts to set industry free.¹³

This sense of historical mission was sometimes tinged with nationalist and even regional pride. It was appropriate, wrote the editor of the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* in 1843, that the struggle for 'commercial freedom' was taking place in England, 'the stage upon which so many of the battles for civil and religious liberty have been fought and won'.¹⁴ For Henry Ashworth it was no accident that the League was strongest in Lancashire; it was a question of eugenics. Contesting *The Times'* right to speak for the Saxons, Ashworth told a meeting of the British Association in 1842 that modern Lancastrians were descended directly from them and had been largely unblemished by intermarriage since the Norman conquest. This, he continued, had bequeathed to them a remarkable 'spirit of enterprise' and 'energy of application' together with a 'plainness and downrightness' redolent of their Saxon ancestors.¹⁵ History was on their side.

More importantly, however, the notion of the past derived from the Norman Yoke was inclusive: commerce knew no boundaries. Registration in the League's Domesday Book was open to all on payment of at least 1d. Not only did this guarantee a place in the ranks of those determined to throw off the Norman Yoke, it also earned the subscriber an engraved membership card. In some cases these cards were coveted as symbols of defiance. One correspondent from Great Torrington, for example, wrote to boast that he had the first card to find 'its way into this remote part of Devonshire'. 'I have shown it to several of the inhabitants of the town,' he continued, 'and all that have seen it have requested me to procure cards for them that they might get them framed and hung up in their houses.'¹⁶ Unfortunately the results of the registration are no longer extant and, at the time, were only sporadically reported in the press. Those that were reported tended to emphasize the strength of the movement in its heartland of the north west of England. In Manchester and Salford 6279 men and women had registered by October 1842; later in the same month a return of 5523, including 1670 electors and 'several hundred ladies', was filed from Liverpool; and by Christmas Stockport had reported that its register numbered 2371.¹⁷ Elsewhere the picture is less clear.

Although the book had failed to provide a detailed picture of the national movement, the League had already gone a long way to creating a nationwide presence through the establishment of an extensive network of ACLAs. By 1844, J.G. Kohl marvelled at the 'national importance' that the League had attained which was based on 'local associations in all parts of the kingdom'.¹⁸ Sensitive to criticism that repeal was a 'mere Manchester question', from the outset League officials were committed to the

establishment of Associations as widely as possible. During the first flush of the agitation in 1839 it all seemed so easy. In December the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* had published a set of model rules in response to 'so many enquiries', and, a month later in January 1840, this was followed by an article entitled: 'How to Establish an Anti-Corn Law Association':

Whenever three persons, who are in favour of untaxed bread, meet together, no matter where - in a private party, at the news-room, at the funeral of a neighbour, or at the church or chapel door . . . let them agree to meet again, and each to bring one or more friends. At their meeting, let them resolve themselves into an Anti-Corn Law Association, and appoint a chairman and a secretary.¹⁹

The 'first and principal labour of every Anti-Corn Law Association', after submitting the names of the office holders to Newall's Buildings, was 'procuring numerous signed petitions to parliament against the corn law'. As outlined in the previous chapter, the reports of the House of Commons Committee on public petitions bear testimony to the efforts of the movement in collecting signatures from the four corners of Britain, even penetrating dark corners of the nation such as Thurgoland in the West Riding of Yorkshire which, as one correspondent to the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* conceded, was 'almost beyond the reach of bell, book or candle'.²⁰

By November 1842, following the disappointments of the General Election and the realization that a long struggle was in prospect, the League Council was vociferously urging the formation of local associations with more onerous duties such as fundraising. 'LOCAL ORGANISATION IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS', proclaimed the editor of the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, a month later.²¹ How widely were the repeated calls responded to? In his plea of November 1842, George Wilson had reiterated the point, made in the model rules published in 1839, that local committees must submit the names of office bearers and committee members to Manchester 'for insertion in a book provided for that purpose'.²² If such a central register of ACLAs was ever compiled, however, it has failed to survive. The fact that, at different times, League officials offered widely divergent claims as to the number and coverage of associations would tend to suggest that no comprehensive list was ever kept.²³ Nevertheless from the detailed columns of the League's official newspaper, supplemented by other sources, a detailed list can be reconstructed (see Illustration 3 and Appendix 1). Although it is obviously far from perfect, this record of locality, county and date of formation (or when this is not clear, the date that an association was first mentioned in the League press), does provide a better understanding of the scope and spread of the movement.

In total 223 ACLAs have been recorded. This was considerably less than the National Charter Association was claiming (50,000 members in 400 localities) but it was nevertheless an impressive showing.²⁴ The total does not include those organizations which partially fulfilled the role of ACLAs in their locality. In Goatacre, for example, it was the Reform Society that

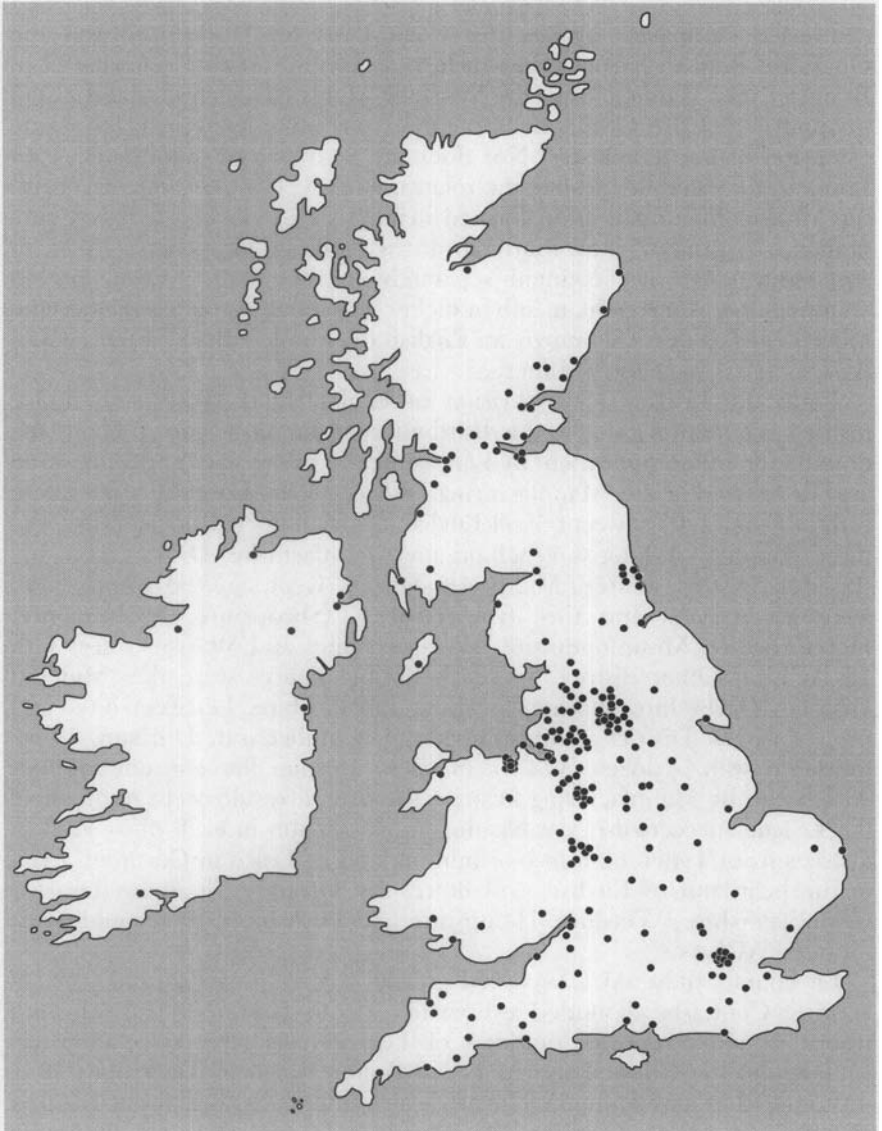


Illustration 3 *Location Map of Anti-Corn Law Associations*

For a complete list of all ACLAs, including the branches of the Metropolitan Association, see Appendix 1. *Map drawn by the Cartography Section, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.*

conducted campaigns against the Corn Laws; in Holbeck it was the Operative Reform Association which took up the cause of repeal; and in Braintree and Woking it was the Working Men's Association that decided to oppose the Corn Laws at the same time as continuing to press for a wide extension of the franchise.²⁵ Nor does the total include sub-branches. In London, for example, despite the relative weakness of the campaign there, the Metropolitan association formed in February 1840 boasted sixty sub-branches organized into fourteen districts (these have been listed in Appendix 1 but not counted separately in the total).²⁶ Even without counting the Metropolitan sub-branches separately it is clear that the movement was overwhelmingly an English one; no less than 74 per cent of ACLAs (165) were located there.

Using the League's own division of England and Wales into twelve districts is a helpful guide to the distribution of the Associations. Firstly the domination of the movement by Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire - the area designated as the 'Manufacturing District' by the League²⁷ - is evident with just under 40 per cent of all English associations (64) located in these three counties. A long way behind the Manufacturing District were the 'London District' (Essex, Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Sussex) where there were 23 ACLAs and the 'Iron District' (Shropshire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire) with 18 ACLAs. Other districts to reach double figures were the 'Midland District' (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire) and the 'Northern District' (Northumberland, Cumberland, Durham, Westmorland) with a dozen ACLAs in each. Despite the concentration of ACLAs in the Manufacturing District, the overall results were impressive: the League succeeded in establishing an association in each of its English districts from Tynemouth in Northumberland to Truro in Cornwall. Even in the heartland of English agriculture, the League's 'Southern District' (Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire), they could boast fourteen ACLAs.²⁸

Of course, these ACLAs varied greatly in size, longevity and level of activity. Contrasts abounded everywhere, from Boston in Lincolnshire where, despite a reported outbreak of 'League fever', the Association was stillborn, to the Gillow Lane ACLA in Bolton which by December 1841 was reputed to have embodied 'nearly every adult individual about that part of town'.²⁹ Associations in the 'Manufacturing District' were not always the strongest. After six month's labour at Doncaster in Yorkshire, for example, only 78 members had been recruited, which was in marked contrast to the story of either Southampton where 1500 were signed up in two weeks or Belper in Derbyshire where 940 joined the ACLA in the first month of its existence.³⁰ At the same time the total number of members was not necessarily a reliable guide to the strength of the local campaign. At Tiverton in Devon, for example, the work load fell on the shoulders of one or two stalwarts despite having 300 on the books of the Association.³¹ Occasionally, as at Mitcham and Bilston, reports in the League press

provide a window which allow a glimpse inside the operation of an ACLA. Formed in March 1840 the ACLA in Mitcham, Surrey, held its meetings at the Nag's Head public house in Upper Mitcham. The secretary of the association described its members as 'respectable', but was careful to add that 'the working men of this neighbourhood are decidedly with us'. In order to publicize this 'spirited association' the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* reprinted its annual statement in April 1841 which detailed how they had expended the £14 6s 6d that they had raised over the previous year on lecturing, postage, stationery and purchasing printed material from the League. In 1840 the Mitcham Association fulfilled its 'first and principal' duty by collecting a petition signed by 313 residents, a feat they repeated many times over a year later.³² In Bilston in Staffordshire the Free Trade Association was made up of 'agents and workmen' at the local ironworks together with members of the 'fair sex'. Numbering 500 and including many Chartists they triumphantly occupied the premises of the 'now defunct' Operative Conservative Association whose president had been the owner of the ironworks and a magistrate.³³

Some sense of the relative strength and longevity of the movement in different parts of the nation can be gained by examining which localities sent representatives to the League's periodic national delegate conferences. Detailed attendance records for eight national conferences (five held in Manchester, three in London) between 1839 and 1843 can be compiled from a range of sources (see Appendix 2). A total of 192 localities (not including London suburbs) sent delegates to at least one of these conferences (including many localities where no ACLA has been recorded). Again these records demonstrate that the tendrils of the movement reached impressively from Aberdeen to Dublin. Only 23 localities, however, were represented at five or more conferences and this smaller list is entirely within the compass of expectations of where the heartland of the movement lay. Three places - Manchester, Liverpool and Bolton - were represented at all eight conferences; three localities - Leeds, Preston and Glasgow - were represented at seven; and a further seven localities were represented at six conferences: Nottingham, Edinburgh, Huddersfield, Leicester, Birmingham, London and Warrington. Of the 23 localities nearly two thirds were in Lancashire, Yorkshire or Cheshire. Apart from London there was no locality south of Birmingham that sent delegates to five or more League conferences. Even taking into account the inherent bias in favour of the north of England - five of the eight conferences were held in Manchester - this is nevertheless a striking confirmation of where the 'Goths and Vandals' made their home. Glasgow and Edinburgh were the only localities outside England to send delegates to four or more conferences which reflects the fact that, next to the north of England, the League was undoubtedly strongest in Scotland.

Scotland

A visitor who entered the Free Trade Hall in Manchester and glanced towards the speakers' platform would have seen two great chairs made of wood that had originally formed part of a house in Scotland. The house had stood in Kirkcaldy, and one of its occupants had been Adam Smith, the author of *The Wealth of Nations*.³⁴ This was only one of the many signs of Scottish influence in the Anti-Corn Law movement. Historians have referred to the important contributions made by Scots to the League in the form of ideas, conference delegates, petitions and donations. It has even been claimed that in the year before the League was founded Glasgow offered as likely a focal point as any place outside London for a general repeal movement.³⁵ As has already been noted, when the movement began in Manchester, six of the seven founders were Scots, all of them members of the Scottish Secession Church whose minister, the Revd William McKerrow took a prominent part in subsequent League activities in the town.³⁶ One of their number, Archibald Prentice, was editor of the pro-League *Manchester Times*. John Ballantyne, the League's first secretary and, for a time, editor of the *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, was another Scot, recruited at the beginning of the campaign³⁷ like Sidney Smith whose lectures were published by the League as a model to be followed by other public speakers. Subsequently Smith became secretary of the League's London operations and editor of a short-lived periodical, the *Free Trader*.³⁸ Alexander Somerville, the League's 'Whistler at the Plough', whose articles have been compared with the writings of Arthur Young and William Cobbett, was also a Scot as was James Wilson, the editor of the *Economist*.³⁹

The prominence of Scots as repealers was not surprising; the campaign against the Corn Laws was an indigenous product of Scotland with a history that long ante-dated the foundation of the Anti-Corn Law League. As far back as 1787 the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce had declared its support for a free trade in grain. Between 1813 and 1815 Anti-Corn Law petitions were sent to Parliament from Scotland, and during the 1820s and 1830s a succession of short-lived Anti-Corn Law societies came into existence in several towns including Glasgow and Edinburgh. William Weir, William Tait, John Wigham, Duncan McLaren and other Scots who went on to play roles of importance for the League acquired an early experience of campaigning for repeal in these societies. As editor of the *Glasgow Argus* Weir contributed useful press support to these early Scottish campaigns for repeal. A man of considerable accomplishments who not only knew several European languages but was also acquainted with science and literature, he was a hard worker with tongue and pen.⁴⁰ As early as 1834 Weir and his associates in Glasgow resolved to agitate 'from session to session till the iniquitous Corn laws were expunged from the statute-book'. They tried to pledge candidates at Parliamentary elections, and in January 1835 they held a Free Trade Banquet to rally supporters and attract publicity.⁴¹ William Tait of Edinburgh was another

repealer who brought powerful press support. *Tait's Edinburgh Journal* included some of the most distinguished writers of the day among its contributors, and it had a national circulation among those of radical liberal opinions. Writing in 1837, Cobden, who published some of his early writings with Tait, described the *Journal* as 'the most valuable of our periodicals'.¹² Meanwhile in 1834 John Wigham, a member of the Edinburgh ACLA, was persuading the local Chamber of Commerce to petition for total repeal. One of his supporters was the Lord Provost, foreshadowing the endorsement that the League would later receive from the civic dignitaries of several Scottish burghs. Indicative of the strong sense of religiosity that Scots helped to impart to the League, some of these early repeal meetings took place in Dissenting chapels.¹³

These activities took place at the local level, and there was nothing that resembled an all-Scotland movement for repeal. Then, as later, the Scottish repealers were willing to rally behind English leadership, and when an ACLA was formed in London in 1836, Tait and Weir joined it.¹⁴ This was ineffectual, and in the meanwhile, especially in Glasgow, repealers kept up the pressure in their own right by forming the Central Anti-Corn Law Association for the West of Scotland in 1837. Looking to earlier examples of 'pressure from without', they invoked the names of Thomas Clarkson and Daniel O'Connell and spoke ambitiously of sending lecturers through the country, but nothing eventuated.¹⁵ Thus, although there was much that pointed the way to the future, the men of Glasgow and Edinburgh lacked the qualities of leadership, organization and perseverance that gave rise to the Anti-Corn Law League. In 1839 the Scots quickly fell into place as contributors to what they called 'the Manchester League'. Accepting Manchester as the centre of the agitation against the Corn Laws in March 1839, Weir admitted that 'Manchester men are the most active agents.'¹⁶ There was always a subaltern quality about the Scottish participation in the League; as one historian puts it, there were repeal lieutenants in Scotland, but there were no generals. Although Weir condemned fitful bursts of energy and called for sustained efforts on behalf of repeal, it was the former, not the latter, that was characteristic of the movement in Scotland both before and after 1839.¹⁷

The influences in Scotland that gave rise to sentiments in favour of the League were broadly similar to those that developed south of the border, and Scottish repealers cooperated so readily with the lead from Manchester that the campaign against the Corn Laws can be seen as an expression of the 'Britishness' that Linda Colley describes as binding Scotland to England and Wales in a shared sense of national identity.¹⁸ As a historian of the Scottish repeal movement has written, 'The free trade movement was a British movement in Scotland.' Nonetheless as the same historian continues, it is important to recognize that it was 'a British movement within a distinct environment north of the Border'.¹⁹ There were many signs of this. The Scottish electoral system was different in important respects - one historian estimates that it cost five times more to create a

vote in Scotland than in England⁵⁰ – and there was little of the emphasis on electoral registration that characterized the League's later years. As Colley readily concedes, there were also significant cultural differences between England and Scotland after 1837.⁵¹ These differences affected the characteristics and timing of the Anti-Corn Law campaign in both countries; the unity of 'Britishness' was unity in diversity.

The early Scottish campaigns revealed some of the divisions that were later to trouble the League. Middle-class radicals could agree with middle-class Whigs in condemning the existing Corn Laws, but they differed from them over the desirability of committing the movement to the policy of total and immediate repeal.⁵² Divergent class attitudes were also important. Some middle-class repealers showed a preference for protesting either through bodies such as the Chambers of Commerce from which working men were excluded or through societies that achieved the same end by such devices as high entrance fees and daytime meetings.⁵³ Although an attempt at a 'union of all classes' in Edinburgh produced a petition with more than 17,000 signatures in 1834, and 60,000 people signed a petition in Glasgow that year,⁵⁴ there was an increasing tendency during the late 1830s for working-class radicals to disagree with middle-class radicals by insisting that priority that should be given to the extension of the suffrage in preference to Corn Law repeal. Underlying the suspicions on both sides was the realization that many of the working men who called for the opening of the ports to foreign grain did not endorse the values of the free market as these were understood by middle-class disciples of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus.

The desire to drum the values of Classical Political Economy – 'Scotch feelosofy' as Cobbett famously called it – into potentially recalcitrant working men had long been evident in Scottish middle-class and Whiggish circles, and it had coloured the thinking of those who had founded the early mechanics' institutes and popular publishing ventures in late-Hanoverian Scotland.⁵⁵ Dr Thomas Murray, a member of the Edinburgh ACLA, was following this approach when he went on tour as a Political Economy lecturer during the late 1830s. Finding that there were working men who were attending his lectures in the hope that he would expound the doctrines of political radicalism, he introduced them to a world that was fast approaching its 'most prosperous state' thanks to the commercial activities of 'a middle class of men'. In Murray's exposition the repeal of the Corn Laws was to take its place in the free market of capitalism alongside the practise of working-class self-help: therefore one of the tasks of Political Economy was to teach all 'the nature of their relative position; and how they may improve that condition, add to their independence and comforts, and rise in the world'. Instead of resisting their employers – this was the time when Glasgow spinners stood trial for their trade union activities – working men should direct their efforts to accumulating capital.⁵⁶ According to his own testimony, Murray received an enthusiastic reception when he delivered this message, and it was noticeable during the next few years

that corn law repeal always enjoyed considerable working-class support. Nonetheless many working men in Scotland turned to Chartism, and some of them attempted to disrupt League meetings.⁵⁷

The process of grafting the League on the previous Scottish efforts for repeal began in 1839 shortly before the first lecture tour by A.W. Paulton and J.H. Shearman. Although it enjoyed little success in achieving its principal aim of raising money, in other respects this tour paved the way for co-operation in the future. Encouraged by Weir, the ACLA in Glasgow affiliated to the League on 1 April 1839 shortly before Paulton and Shearman arrived in the west of Scotland to carry out what the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* described as the 'first missionary incursion of the League into Scotland'.⁵⁸ The strong upsurge of opinion against the Corn Laws in Edinburgh during 1839 likewise ante-dated the arrival of Paulton and Shearman, but it too owed much to the lead given by Manchester. J.R. Reed, a slater, gave lectures to the working class in December 1838, and the *Scotsman*, encouraged by the debate on the Corn Laws in the Manchester Chamber of Commerce that month, denounced the bread tax as 'the master-grievance' and hailed total repeal as a step towards 'the free market of the world'.⁵⁹ In January 1839 Wigham carried a majority of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce in favour of repeal, and, at a public meeting presided over by the Lord Provost, Duncan McLaren's exposition of statistical evidence 'excited intense interest'.⁶⁰ Paulton's arrival in Edinburgh, however, was something of an anti-climax; the *Scotsman* commented on 'the defects of an ardent and somewhat inexperienced mind' and tartly warned him that in Scotland no one would be impressed by oratorical 'ornaments'.⁶¹ The audience was sympathetic enough to overlook these defects, and shortly afterwards an Edinburgh ACLA came into existence that included Wigham and Dr Thomas Murray in its membership.⁶² By the end of the year the efforts of Paulton and Shearman had given rise to ACLAs in all the large Scottish centres of population and many of the smaller ones.⁶³ These were heady days when repeal meetings and petitions in Edinburgh were compared with the great demonstrations that had taken place in favour of the Reform Bill.⁶⁴ It was a time when the *Scotsman* found it necessary to apologize to its readers for writing too much about repeal.⁶⁵ This was a scurrilous campaign in some respects. On the one hand, opponents accused the repealers of scattering 'sheets of dirty paper' over the city to be signed by boys and 'every chance adventurer that could hold a pen or forge a name': on the other, the *Scotsman* hit back by accusing the Tories of entering 'Snooks' names to discredit the petitions which as a consequence had to be purged of false signatures.⁶⁶ More ominously Chartists invaded lectures and other meetings to press for the primacy of their own demands.⁶⁷

Over the next few years a programme of lectures, meetings, banquets and tea parties came into existence similar to those that were organized in England. Glasgow not only had its ACLA, but also its Young Men's Free Trade Association, as well as an Operative ACLA,⁶⁸ and in various places

the women were associated with the movement like their counterparts in England. The Scottish societies produced their own lecturers – Alexander North and Thomas Wighton on Tayside, John Waugh of Edinburgh who travelled through the West of Scotland early in 1841 raising between 50 and 60 petitions and the Revd Alexander Harvey in the Glasgow area.⁶⁹ Some of the lectures were carefully planned to please as well as to instruct. In 1841 when Waugh lectured at the preaching station in Corstorphine near Edinburgh he had the support of professional singers who entertained the audience with songs, glees and duets.⁷⁰ Likewise, when a soirée took place at Kirkliston, a village near Edinburgh, it was addressed by civic dignitaries and other speakers ‘from a distance’ with the help of a band that played airs between the speeches.⁷¹ The seventy lectures by James Acland in 1843 and the whistle-stop tours by League deputations including Bright, Cobden, Ashworth, George Thompson, Colonel Thompson and R.R. Moore attracted considerable attention and excitement. A tour by Cobden in 1843 was almost a triumphal procession with the civic dignitaries of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Kirkcaldy, Dundee, Perth and Stirling conferring ‘the freedom of the burgh’ on him.

These were spasms of energy, and there were lulls in the campaign, but the results were often impressive. In 1841 the Dundee ACLA divided the town into districts and carried out an assessment of employment, unemployment and earnings in the area. Something similar was attempted in Kirkcaldy.⁷² There were large petitions from some places. In Edinburgh, for example, there were 28,500 signatures on a petition that was raised in 1842 in addition to the 34,429 on a separate women’s memorial.⁷³ In 1846 the Leaguers collected 21,980 signatures for another Edinburgh petition.⁷⁴ Large sums of money were raised. In 1843 the Glasgow Association divided the city into districts, distributed tracts to all the electors and obtained £2500. In the same year the Edinburgh Association raised £1100. In 1846 the Glasgow Association excelled itself by an effort that included eight individual contributions of £500.⁷⁵ The pseudonyms used by some of those who contributed to the League Fund in 1844 suggest the high spirits that characterized the campaigning during these years: ‘A Parritch Devourer’, ‘Another nail for the Coffin’, ‘A native of Skye who has one meal a day but would like two’, ‘Liberty’s in every blow’, and ‘This will help to give the rogues a skelp’.⁷⁶ League publications reached some remote areas of Scotland; a distributor referred to his travels through Ross and Cromarty as well as parts of Sutherland distributing pamphlets to electors, a task he understandably found difficult in an area with many remote places.⁷⁷ Even in distant Shetland the League found support for its Covent Garden bazaar in 1845.⁷⁸ When victory was celebrated in 1846 some of the most enthusiastic demonstrations were in small places, very noticeably in Fife. In Ceres church bells were rung and a band paraded through the streets followed by a cheering crowd carrying flags, while, in Pitlessie, there was another band, and flags fluttered in a procession that was headed by a large loaf on a pole. Further north, in Brechin, public buildings were festooned

with flags, flowers and evergreens; business was suspended for the day; a bell rang for four hours; and there was a great procession of the trades, benefit societies and other public bodies.⁷⁹

Who were the Scottish repealers? One historian describes them as a very middle-class group brought together in many instances by shared economic interests. In Glasgow commercial and industrial enterprises as well as individuals subscribed to the League, especially those in the cotton industry, iron industry and mercantile concerns. In Edinburgh the ACLA was supported by members of the distributive trades and the professions, including law.⁸⁰ Wigham described these activists as having considerable influence because of their connections with the incorporated trades, the Merchant Company, the Guildry, the Chamber of Commerce and forty to fifty towns and villages near Edinburgh.⁸¹ One of them, Duncan McLaren, was particularly successful and assiduous in applying his skills as a businessman to the League's fund-raising projects. He described his activities as follows:⁸²

One year I sent a circular by my own clerks to every elector in the city, asking a subscription to be sent me for the League, and got between £1100 and £1200. Another year I sent circulars to every name in the 'Edinburgh Directory,' also addressed by my own clerks, and got above £1800.

McLaren's business experience and dedication doubtless explain the decision by the League Council to charge the Edinburgh committee with the responsibility for arranging the tour by a deputation of the leaders to Scottish towns in the winter of 1843-44.⁸³ He was also a town councillor, and reports of repeal meetings often referred to a sizeable contingent of his colleagues who were supportive of the League.⁸⁴ At the beginning of 1841 the Edinburgh Town Council petitioned Parliament against the Corn Laws.⁸⁵

In the Dundee area, where the League was supported by linen, shipping, marine insurance and banking interests, on 6 January 1842 there was a great meeting of deputies from Anti-Corn Law and Free Trade associations connected with the flax and linen trades. Edward Baxter, a substantial linen manufacturer and President of the Dundee ACLA was in the chair; deputies came from Forfarshire, Fife and other counties with flax and linen industries; and the official report referred to the attendance of most of the merchants, manufacturers, tradesmen and magistrates of Dundee. This 'Demonstration' took place in the Bell Street Chapel, where it also received support from the largest tea party, so it was said, that had ever been held in the town. One third of the 1400 people who were present were women, and there was a contingent of Dissenting ministers.⁸⁶ In smaller towns with textile industries the League also drew on support from economic interests. Forfar, a town with two staple industries - linen and shoe-making - was such a place. When Paulton compiled a list of the forty people who had become subscribers to the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* there, more than half of them were merchants and manufacturers. The contributions to the Covent

Garden bazaar – shawls from Paisley; tartans, shawls and tweeds from Clackmannanshire and Galashiels; Keiller's marmalade from Dundee; and table linen from Dunfermline – attest to the support received by the League from producers of staples in various parts of Scotland.⁸⁷

Leaguers were careful to emphasize that their support was not confined to narrow industrial interests. When John Bright addressed a large repeal soirée in Edinburgh in January 1844 he described his audience as representatives of 'a neutral population' that could give 'a fair and impartial verdict' on matters of free trade, because it had no strongly identifiable industrial interests to defend.⁸⁸ And, although Paulton's list of those who had subscribed to the *Circular* in Forfar shows a preponderance of manufacturers and merchants, it also consisted of a tanner, a shoemaker, a draper, a hosier, a bank agent, a tinsmith, a weaver, a teacher, a baillie, a warper, a leather seller, a writer (to the *Signet*), an ironmonger, a spinner, the town clerk, and the Provost.⁸⁹ At some of its meetings the League included farmers among the speakers and made a strong bid for the support of agriculturalists, especially in East Lothian, an area well known for the practise of scientific farming methods that seemed to offer the promise of a prosperous future for agriculture in a world without tariff protection.⁹⁰ One of the League's prize essays was written by George Hope, an East Lothian farmer.⁹¹

Care must be taken not to exaggerate the sway of economic factors as determinants of opinions that favoured repeal in whole districts and sectors of the economy. One of its Scottish historians has accused the League of exaggerating its appeal to agriculturalists,⁹² and in many places there were vested interests on both sides of the Corn Law agitation. The West India sugar interest in Glasgow was protectionist, for example, and in Leith one repealer despaired of the 'uphill work' of trying to win over the wealthier classes who for a variety of reasons, including the links of some with the corn trade, would have nothing to do with repeal.⁹³ Statements by ministers, even of those denominations most sympathetic to the League, showed that in many places their congregations were divided. As one minister pointed out, it was not only farmers who feared losses as a consequence of repeal; farm labourers in some places were partly paid in grains.⁹⁴ Even among those who opposed the existing Corn Laws, many were prepared to settle for a fixed tariff as a compromise. The League's core supporters in Scotland were a small band of the faithful. Wigham freely admitted this when he described the movement in Edinburgh to Cobden, and Duncan McLaren bleakly predicted that apathy would descend on Edinburgh if twenty people ceased to agitate.⁹⁵ This sort of statement was often made with reference to other reform movements; the week by week burden of keeping a reform movement in existence almost always fell on a small number of zealots. Their ardour, which was often resented by their social peer groups and sometimes harmed their own interests, cannot be neatly confined to economic categories. Many of them had entered this form of public life in pursuit of claims that were deeply

rooted in a culture of religious seriousness and resentment, a culture that for many of the leading Scottish members of the League had been nurtured in the religious history of Scotland during the previous ten years. They played a significant role in imparting this culture to the League.

This was made evident during the League's first major foray into Scotland - the lecture tour by Paulton and Shearman in 1839. The instructions they had received in Manchester were that they should concentrate on fund-raising activities directed especially to businessmen, but the results were extremely disappointing. Shearman found solace by relapsing into an Englishman's stereotypical notion of Scottish parsimony: 'If my religious feelings and opinions had not enabled me to bear and forbear I should have been fit to d—n these Scotch. They are a cold cautious set of wretches.'⁹⁶ In fact, as he admitted elsewhere, other people were successfully raising large sums of money in Scotland, but they were doing so in the name of religion. The same opportunity lay open to the League's representatives who, unlike in England, were allowed to use Dissenting chapels for their earliest meetings - at Greenock, Cowcaddens and Calton, for example. Shearman would have liked to follow this up. As the former secretary of the Birmingham Voluntary Church Society he had quickly made contact with Drs Ralph Wardlaugh and Hugh Heugh, two prominent Scottish Dissenters, and, through the columns of the *Glasgow Argus*, Weir had urged him to send a message that would 'circle like the electric spark along the chain of the churches in Scotland affiliated on the principle of religious liberty and equality'.⁹⁷ The support of every member of the Dissenting clergy in Dundee for a repeal petition in 1840 was indicative of what could have been achieved,⁹⁸ but Shearman's Manchester masters chided him for wasting his time.⁹⁹ His problem was summed up by John Wigham, who warned the League Council that it was running the risk of alienating middle-class opinion by telling its lecturers to emphasize the rationality of free trade. This made them appear alarmingly like Chartists and infidels, a strategy that doomed them to failure in Scotland, where religion counted for much in public life. The lecturers, Wigham insisted, would have to redirect their efforts towards creating a religious constituency of support by appealing to the many ministers and women who were playing a large part in the religious and philanthropic movements of the day. If the League Council really wished to rally public opinion to its side, Wigham advised in a subsequent letter, it should hire George Thompson as a lecturer and make use of the talent he had shown for infusing religious values into the anti-slavery campaign during the 1830s.¹⁰⁰

This was the approach that Cobden and Wilson eventually applied to England in 1841 as a new 'element of agitation',¹⁰¹ but in Scotland it was one of the hallmarks of the League from the beginning. Wigham, for example, was a Quaker, one of several in the Scottish repeal movement. In Edinburgh he was one of a triumvirate of Quaker office-holders in the ACLA together with John Gray and John Howison.¹⁰² In Glasgow William Smeal, the proprietor of the *British Friend*, was another supporter. These

Quakers brought with them considerable experience of other forms of the pressure from without. According to his obituary, Smeal's career was the epitome of Quakerly evolution in public life - from the Bible Society, to the campaigns on slavery, the Corn Laws, temperance, capital punishment, voluntarism, public education, peace, the Stamp Duties and a variety of reforms in municipal and national politics.¹⁰³

There were very few Quakers in Scotland - the 1851 Religious Census recorded morning and afternoon attendances of 196 and 142 for the whole country.¹⁰⁴ The obituary of another prominent Leaguer, William Miller, told a more typical story. A solicitor to the Supreme Court who reached the League by way of religious dissent, Miller was remembered as one who would not trim his principles. He strongly favoured the disestablishment of the state church and served as Secretary of the Central Board of Dissenters; then, seeing repeal of the Corn Laws as a 'righteous' cause, he became one of the earliest members of the Edinburgh ACLA and served as its secretary for a time.¹⁰⁵ Miller's career underlines the importance of Presbyterian dissent as a source of recruitment for the League. In the eyes of many Scots religious and commercial freedom blended imperceptibly into each other - hence the ease with which from the outset many Dissenting ministers made their churches available for repeal lectures, and hence also the support for the League of men such as the Baxter brothers of Dundee who were not only extensive linen manufacturers but also prominent Dissenters.¹⁰⁶ Something similar happened in England, but, as was recognized at the time, the Scottish Dissenters were considerably in advance of their English counterparts in this respect.¹⁰⁷

As in England two Dissenting churches predominated among the supporters of the League, but they were not the same two churches. In Scotland the League drew much of its strength from the United Secession Church and the Relief Church, both of which had seceded from the Church of Scotland during the eighteenth century. In the case of the United Secessionists their original grievance had been against what they saw as defects in the state church, not against the principle of establishment, but by the 1830s their views had changed, and, together with the Relief Church, they accepted the voluntary principle of separating church and state. Beginning with the publication of a sermon in 1829 by the Revd Andrew Marshall, they embarked on a decade of strife that convulsed communities in many parts of Scotland.¹⁰⁸ William Leask, an Englishman who lived in Scotland during the 1830s, remembered the extraordinary bitterness of this Voluntary Controversy:¹⁰⁹

perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that there were few families, over the length and breadth of Scotland, in which it was not the every-day topic of discussion for a long period. That there were numerous personal alienations, separations between friends, fomentations of dislike, heart-burnings, and evil surmisings, in consequence of this famous agitation.

Dr Thomas Guthrie, a Church of Scotland clergyman, took the story further in his vivid recollections of public meetings in churches where the

voluntarists and the defenders of the ecclesiastical establishment, having set the normal rules of debate and decorum aside, sat for hours on end with sticks in hand drumming on the pews, while they hooted, whistled, sang and jeered coarse insults at each other. One of Guthrie's opponents was a Secessionist minister who went on to play a part in the League - Dr John Ritchie, 'the Goliath of Voluntarism [sic]'.¹¹⁰ From Scotland the movement spread into the north of England, assisted by articles written for the *Manchester Times* by William McKerrow. In March 1834 when McKerrow helped to set up a Dissenters' Corresponding Committee in Manchester its meeting place was Newall's Buildings.¹¹¹

The temper and mentality that these voluntarist Dissenters brought to the League can be shown by several examples. The Revd Dr William Anderson of the Relief Church was one of the first ministers in Glasgow to speak out in favour of Corn Law repeal, having made a name for himself as a proponent, not only of voluntarism, but of Catholic Emancipation, temperance and anti-slavery. His biographer recalled his effect on listeners as he flailed his opponents¹¹²

like a man inspired; his eloquence resembling the description so often given of that of Charles James Fox - the whole man being in an extacy of convulsive earnestness, his voice screeching or yelling out his words, his eyes shooting out black fire and horror, his words pursuing each other like a crowd running from a conflagration, and the audience partaking almost to agony in his high wrought excitement, and moving almost to frenzy to his stirring eloquence.

Understandably, this presentation of self did not command universal admiration - some people spoke of him as 'Daft Willie Anderson' - but, for better or worse, it was the one he brought to the League if we may judge from the title of one of his books: *The Corn and Provision Laws Arraigned, Convicted and Denounced, as inflicting Poverty, Disease, and Death; and Promoting Irreligion, Vice and Sedition*.¹¹³

The Revd Adam Thomson of Coldstream had an even more widely known reputation for extreme opinions. Very much the political clergyman - he was the first to welcome Earl Grey of the Reform Bill on his triumphal visit to Scotland in 1834 - Thomson was a vigorous pamphleteer in support of voluntarism, but it was as the leader of what was known as the Free Bible movement that he was best known.¹¹⁴ This was a movement that stood for the gospel of the free market in every sense of that term. As the *Voluntary Church Magazine* made clear in 1838, voluntarists demanded that Christianity should be set free from its historic alliance with the State and exposed to the invigorating blast of free-market forces:¹¹⁵

Everything in trade and legislation, in the church and in the state, must one day come to this, - the best article at the lowest possible price! ... We want the clergy of the establishment brought precisely to the same level with the dissenter. Let them bring their spiritual ware to the same market; its price will be regulated according to its quality; if it be altogether unsaleable, the fault is not ours; it lies not with the customer, the public, but with the spiritual merchant himself.

This was the philosophy that Thomson applied to the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible, which, under royal patents, was confined, in the case of Scotland, to one publishing house and, in the case of England, to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the Queen's publisher. In 1839 Thomson and his supporters successfully campaigned to have the Scottish patent discontinued and then, having created a free market for Bible publishing in Scotland, they turned their attention to England where the patent remained in force. Thomson's proposal was to use the new and cheap technique of stereotype printing to flood the United Kingdom with cheap bibles. He set up a printery in Coldstream, his parish, and, from this strategically situated base on the border with England, he set out to invade the English market and cripple a system that he described as a tax on the Bible.¹¹⁶ As Archibald Prentice explained in the *Manchester Times*, Thomson was so intent on cutting into the profits of the English bible monopolists that he was fully prepared, if he found it necessary, to smuggle an 'immense number of bibles and testaments' across the border.¹¹⁷ Addressing a Manchester meeting in October 1840, William McKerrow eagerly looked forward to the day when the bible-reading people of England would no longer have 'to gild the golden spires of Oxford'.¹¹⁸ For some of the Dissenters who supported the League the Free Bible movement became something like a play within the play, and for several years Thomson, Prentice, McKerrow and other Scottish voluntarists moved easily between the two movements; in both instances they were bringing the 'bread of life' to the people.¹¹⁹

William Tait, Thomas Russell and Duncan McLaren were three of the many laymen who came to the League with a similarly vehement faith in Dissent and voluntarism. Rather than pay the Annuity Tax that was levied in Edinburgh to support the ministers of the Church of Scotland Tait and Russell became 'gaol martyrs'.¹²⁰ McLaren brought a similar mixture of voluntarism, temperance and free trade into his public life.¹²¹ A self-made businessman, he was influenced by religious opinions of such strength that George Combe, the Edinburgh phrenologist, found it difficult to speak to him on some issues.¹²² It was McLaren who presented the League with its biggest public relations triumph in Scotland - the Conference of Ministers and Members of Dissenting Churches that met in Edinburgh in January 1842.

This conference, when it is mentioned at all by historians, is usually described as an echo of the Convocation of ministers at Manchester a few months earlier, but it merits attention in its own right. It was larger than its Manchester forerunner - approximately 800 attended - and, in accordance with the Presbyterian tradition, it allowed lay participation. John Wigham chaired the opening session, and many of the ministers were accompanied by members of their kirk sessions. It was a strictly controlled affair with none of the unseemly disputes that had sullied the Manchester Convocation. The delegates seem to have had no difficulty in agreeing that sessions should open with prayer, and there was no pretence that this

was an inclusive assembly of the Scottish churches. No invitations were sent to the clergy of the Church of Scotland – their dependence on grain prices for the level of their stipends, so it was said, made their attendance unlikely and unwelcome. Some Catholic priests sent in declarations of support for repeal, but they did not attend. Episcopalians neither supported nor attended. Almost three quarters of the participants were members of the United Secession and Relief Churches, and, of the remainder, the only churches with a significant number of representatives were the Independents and the Baptists. Visitors' tickets – they were confined to 'friends' and to those who provided accommodation for the delegates – contained an instruction that the bearer was 'not to take any part in the proceedings'. Speakers were required to confine themselves to 'the immediate abolition of the Corn Laws', and they were given prepared resolutions to which they could only add illustrative material. According to the *Northern Star* twenty policemen stood by to make sure that these precautions were upheld.¹²³ After preparations such as this it is scarcely surprising that all the resolutions condemning the Corn Laws were passed without demur, and that the official report had no compunction in describing the proceedings as the condemnation of the Corn Laws by 'the great body of the Dissenters of Scotland' representing half a million people.¹²⁴ There is no need to suspect that the consciences of those present were troubled by this statement; members of the Secession and the Relief Churches have been described by historians as individualists who 'reflected ... the pattern of a pushing, competitive, bourgeois society'.¹²⁵ Supporting the League and its free market policies was an expression of this mentality.

The endorsement that the League received at this conference confirmed its status as a religious and philanthropic society. Who had given the League their support at the Edinburgh Conference, the *Scotsman* asked?¹²⁶

They are the men who lent their zealous support to the Reform Bill, as far as their sacred duties permitted; the men by whose exertions chiefly the national character was purified from the stain of slavery; the promoters of education on liberal principles; the advocates of unrestricted religious liberty; the founders of Protestant Missions, Bible Societies, and Sunday Schools – the DISSENTING CLERGY.

The soirées that the ACLA organized in Edinburgh at the beginning of 1843 and 1844 took the same elevated tone. Among the 'intelligent and influential' people present at the soirée in the New Music Hall in January 1844 were the Lord Provost, Town Councillors, thirty-four clergymen and a group of ladies.¹²⁷ By this date the presence of women at League gatherings had long been taken for granted, and, as in England, the most active women seem to have been related by blood or marriage to men who were prominent in the movement. For Agnes Renton of Edinburgh, as for so many others of this era, reform was a family business. Her husband was a radical town councillor; her son was a Dissenting minister and political ally of Duncan McLaren, and her daughter became McLaren's second

wife. Mrs Renton seems to have made her home the base for women's meetings in support of the radical interests she pursued in association with her husband: free trade, voluntarism, Parliamentary reform, temperance and the abolition of slavery.¹²⁸ Together with Eliza Wigham she was the principal inspiration behind the Scottish women's contribution to the 1845 League bazaar.¹²⁹

As the *Scotsman* remarked with reference to the Edinburgh soirée in 1844 all this was a grand demonstration by the middle class; working men, writes one historian, were 'noticeably absent from the anti-corn law agitation' in Scotland.¹³⁰ The strained relations between class spokesmen that had been evident before 1839 were even more evident subsequently when Chartists invaded meetings and Leaguers took measures to restrict participation to the middle class. The division along class lines was not complete and final. Repeal of the Corn Laws was such a long-standing radical demand that in 1838–9 the membership of the two movements overlapped in many districts,¹³¹ and the class antagonism that was especially evident between 1839 and 1842 subsequently tapered off as in Glasgow where Leaguers and Chartists learned to co-exist with each other.¹³² An Operative ACLA came into existence in Glasgow, and in 1843 its Secretary, William Mackenzie Young, brought out a short-lived *Anti-Monopolist, or, Free Trade Circular*.¹³³ Relations were more strained in Edinburgh, where, as late as January 1846, an Anti-Corn Law meeting was interrupted by Chartists,¹³⁴ and significantly, the Edinburgh repealers usually held their meetings in the Chamber of Commerce.¹³⁵ A similarly exclusive attitude emerged in Dundee, where, prior to an important Anti-Corn Law meeting, the magistrates issued a public warning that entry had been restricted to 'merchants, manufactures and shipowners', and that 'no person not of the classes so called to meet, is entitled to force himself into the meeting'.¹³⁶ In the large cities working-class cooperation was not sought. Some repeal associations demanded a 5s entrance fee, and when the Edinburgh Association was reorganized in 1843 it gave membership only to those who subscribed 2s 6d either to the Great League Fund or to its own funds. One of the speakers on that occasion hailed the leaders of the League as 'men of capital, who had much to lose' and referred to the Chartists and Socialists as enemies.¹³⁷

The antagonism of working-class Chartists was not the only source of division that affected the League in Scotland. One historian has referred to a tendency of the Glasgow repealers to go beyond formal League policy and agitate for the 'heresies' of complete free trade together with a further measure of Parliamentary reform. There and in other parts of Scotland well-known members of the League came out in support of Joseph Sturge's Complete Suffrage movement.¹³⁸ More important were the divisions between Whigs and the middle-class radicals. In 1839, for example, Weir was dismissed from the *Glasgow Argus* for insisting that Whig electoral candidates should endorse total and immediate repeal if they wished to be supported.¹³⁹ In Edinburgh, as discussed in Chapter 8, this division also

gave rise to bitter disputes. One historian has suggested that the support given by the radical Dissenters to the League was a phase in their ongoing struggle for a form of liberalism that was more thorough-going than the variety offered by 'the whig clique lawyer party' (McLaren's term) that controlled the parliamentary representation of Edinburgh.¹⁴⁰

Deep though these divisions were, they did not prevent the League from boasting that it was the voice of Scotland. The dispersion of ACLAs in Scotland shows that there were 35 in all ranging from Aberdeen in the north to the English border (see Appendix 1). The 588 replies McLaren received from the Dissenting ministers he invited to the 1842 convention provide a further indication of the support across Scotland (at its highest in Lanark and Fife but with small numbers even in Argyle, Caithness and Orkney¹⁴¹), and the lists of places sending in petitions to Parliament between 1839 and 1842 included Shetland, Oban, Stromness, Tain, Wick, South Ronaldsay and the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland.¹⁴² At its Covent Garden bazaar the League made much of the exotic presence of a Shetland stall which sold pamphlets denouncing the Duke of Richmond for 'the oppression of the Corn Laws on the poor fisherman of the Shetland Islands'.¹⁴³ In the Gaelic-speaking areas beyond the Highland line, however, repealers could claim little influence. League publications do not seem to have been translated, and there was no counterpart in Scotland of Walter Griffith, the League's Welsh-speaking lecturer. At a time when the people of the Highlands stood on the brink of potato famine and were suffering the continuance of the Highland Clearances the League had nothing to say to them.

Notes

1. Quoted in *Scotsman*, 2 December 1843.
2. Quoted in A. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (Manchester, 1853), vol. 1, p. 71.
3. *League*, 21 February 1846.
4. *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 28 January 1843. It was an understandable exaggeration: the corps of lecturers included R.R. Moore, Timothy Falvey, John Murray and John Finnigan who were all Irishmen.
5. *Pilot*, 14 February 1842.
6. O'Connell to P.V. Fitzpatrick, 11 February 1842, in M.R. O'Connell (ed.), *The Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin, 1972), vol. VII, p. 134.
7. *League*, 13 January 1844; Cobden quoted in N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1958), p. 80.
8. Quoted in R. Garnett, *The Life of W.J. Fox* (London, 1910), p. 268.
9. *League*, 4 November 1843.
10. *Manchester Times*, 6 June 1840; *Pilot*, 30 November 1842.
11. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on Votes of Electors, Reports from Committees*, 1846, vol. VIII, p. 451.
12. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 19 May 1842; C. Hill, 'The Norman Yoke', *Puritanism and Revolution* (London, 1969), pp. 119-25.

13. WSRO, W. Cooke-Taylor to R. Cobden, n.d.; W. Cooke-Taylor, *The Natural History of Society in the Barbarous and Civilised State: An Essay towards Discovering the Origin and Course of Human Improvement* (London, 1840) 2 vols.
14. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 18 April 1843.
15. H. Ashworth, 'Statistical Illustration of the Past and Present State of Lancashire, and More Particularly the Hundred of Salford', *Journal of the Statistical Society*, vol. 5, 1842, pp. 245-6.
16. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 3 November 1842.
17. *Manchester Times*, 8 October 1842; 22 October 1842; 10 December 1842. By September-October 1843 there were claims of 20,000 registered members in Manchester and 37,000 in London. See *League* 30 September 1843; *Manchester Times*, 28 October 1843.
18. J. G. Kohl, *England and Wales* (1844, repr. London, 1968), p. 144.
19. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 31 December 1839; 23 January 1840.
20. *Ibid.*, 5 March 1840.
21. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 21 October 1841; 17 November 1842; 27 December 1842.
22. *Ibid.*, 17 November 1842.
23. For examples of variations in the estimates of size see *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 11 February 1841 (80 ACLAs); *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 24 January 1843 (180 ACLAs); *League*, 4 July 1846 (100 ACLAs by the end of 1839).
24. See D. Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (London, 1975), p. 71. In the mid-1860s the Reform League claimed 65,000 members in 600 branches. See R. Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881* (London, 1961), p. 139.
25. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 15 October 1839; 24 December 1839; E. Newton, 'The Anti-Corn Law League and the Wiltshire Labourer: Aspects of the Development of Nineteenth-Century Protest', in B.A. Holderness and M. Turner (eds), *Land, Labour and Agriculture 1700-1920* (London, 1991), p. 105.
26. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 17 November 1842. Based in large part on the papers of the perennial London radical, Francis Place, the assessment that the campaign was weak in London is shared by McCord and Longmate. In a passing reference, Howe has recently disagreed sharply with this assessment. Here the use of the term 'relative weakness' is intended to highlight the contrast with Manchester. See McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp 75-8, 140-1; N. Longmate, *The Breadstealers: The Fight against the Corn Laws, 1838-1846* (London, 1984), pp. 48-56; A. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 34-5.
27. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 20 October 1842.
28. The region of England where the League's organization was weakest was East Anglia.
29. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 14 May 1839; 30 December 1841; MPL, Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book, Sidney Smith, Boston, 27 April 1839; C.F. Barker, Boston, 26 March 1840.
30. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 26 November 1839; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 24 February 1842; 12 March 1840; Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book, J.H. Shearman, Doncaster, 13 April 1839.
31. J.C. Buckmaster, *A Village Politician: The Life-Story of John Buckley* (1897, repr. Horsham, 1982), pp. 137, 156.

32. PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1840, vol. 116, p. 417; 1841, vol. 124, p. 134; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 15 July 1841.
33. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 27 December 1842.
34. Alcide Fonteyrand, 'La Ligue Anglaise' [sic], *Revue Britannique*, January 1846, p. 19.
35. K.J. Cameron, 'William Weir and the Origins of the "Manchester League" in Scotland, 1833-39', *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. 58, no. 165, 1979, p. 70.
36. James M. McKerrow, *Memoir Of William McKerrow, D.D., Manchester* (London, 1881), p. 91.
37. WSRO, Cobden Papers 30, Richard Cobden to William Tait, 6 January 1839.
38. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, Anti-Corn Law League Papers, *Recollections of Sidney Smith*, 11 October 1880; *League*, 19 October 1844.
39. A. Somerville, *The Whistler at the Plough*, (1852, repr. London, 1989), viii; W. Bagehot, 'Memoir of the Right Honourable James Wilson', *Economist*, 17 November 1860, Supplement.
40. WSRO, Cobden Papers, CP1, William Weir to Richard Cobden, 7 May 1839.
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42. WSRO, Cobden Papers 30, Richard Cobden to William Tait, 5 May 1837.
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WEST BRITONS: THE LEAGUE IN WALES AND IRELAND

There is no better testimony to the determination of the League to create a nationwide movement than the decision to translate their tracts into Welsh and Irish¹ and dispatch lecturers to face what must have seemed like insurmountable obstacles. In Wales the obvious barriers were language, culture and landscape; in Ireland there was the almost universal belief that the Corn Laws positively benefited the predominantly rural local economy. Overshadowing these, in both cases, was the power of the landlord. In both cases, too, the League had to accept that it took second place to an earlier and more powerful agitation. As rallying points for public opinion religious Dissent in Wales and repeal of the Act of Union in Ireland always commanded more support. Nonetheless the League deserves more credit than it has received for incorporating both countries in its vision of a modern political nation. In her study of the evolution of a British identity up to 1837 Linda Colley has shown how Britishness was defined in part by a shared sense of Protestantism on the part of Englishmen, Scots and the Welsh. The Leaguers went one better; for them all the inhabitants of the British Isles, including the 'West Britons' of Ireland (a term used by Daniel O'Connell), were part of their pan-British vision.²

Wales

Crefydd rydd a bara rhad ('Free religion and cheap bread')

Slogan of *Y Diwygiwr*

'Onward! Onward! Onward!' Newly appointed as the League's lecturer in Wales, Walter Griffith was reporting to the League Council in 1840 at the beginning of an extensive tour of the Principality. Young (he was twenty-one) and, by his own admission, 'fiery', he looked forward to the time when 'the country from one end to another will be in a blaze.' As Griffith was well aware, the task that faced him was a difficult one; he was 'breaking up the Fallow ground' for people who were new to the ways of political pressure groups.³ When his contemporary, Henry Richard, looked back to his boyhood, he remembered how few there were of his father's generation

who knew more about politics than they could learn from 'half a page of the most insipid summary' in the religious press.⁴ By the 1840s conditions were changing rapidly as population growth, economic development and the rise of evangelical Dissent affected most parts of the Principality. It was a time of protest when the 'Scotch Cattle' and 'The Daughters of Rebecca' dressed in animal skins and women's clothing to invoke the violent sanctions of the traditional folk culture; it was also a time of transition when protest could take the newer forms of trade unionism, Chartism and the political pressure group.

Griffith's duties were the same as those of the other lecturers that the League appointed at this time - lecturing, tract distribution, petitioning, forming associations and fund raising. To these he added the indispensable priority of translating. Few of his compatriots could read English well, and, as he told the League Council, he could achieve little without tracts in the Welsh language.⁵ In addition to translating, writing and distributing these tracts, he wrote regularly for sympathetic newspapers. He even originated and edited a Welsh-language newspaper for the League, the *Cylchgrawn Rhyddid*. This four-page monthly, published at Caernarfon between 1 October 1840 and 15 April 1842, had articles on the Corn Laws, translations from repeal publications, news of League activities, and reports of lectures. It attained a circulation of 4350 in its first year and 2600 in its second.⁶ Between 1840 and 1842 Griffith also made two tours through Wales, arousing much interest at a time when lectures were a 'new thing' in many parts of the Principality.⁷ This was the first and better known phase of the League's activities in Wales. During the second phase that began late in 1842 Griffith took responsibility for North Wales while another lecturer, John Jenkins of Swansea, promoted repeal in the south (excluding Monmouthshire).⁸ Jenkins also raised funds, distributed League publications and attended to electoral registration. At the League's annual general meeting in January 1845 it was announced that nearly every Welsh county had received lectures since October 1843.⁹

Nonetheless Wales was undoubtedly a disappointment to the League. In part this was because of Griffith's tragic personal circumstances; his wife, Elen, died of consumption in January 1844, and he died of the same disease two years later. In many respects Jenkins lacked the essential qualifications to take his place. He could not speak Welsh and apparently had little respect for Welsh culture. As a former Unitarian minister, he was also out of place in a country where evangelical Dissent exerted a powerful influence.¹⁰ At every level in Welsh society moreover there were insuperable obstacles in the way of a League lecturer. There were Tory landowners with all power in their hands; the Church of England and its newspapers were hostile,¹¹ and in some rural areas the situation seemed to have changed little from that described above by Henry Richard. Writing to the *Manchester Times* in 1844, a correspondent who called himself 'CYMRU' lamented that, until he started sending newspapers and repeal publications from Manchester, no one in his father's locality had even

heard the name of the League.¹² The problem went beyond rural backwardness. During the aftermath of the Monmouth Rising in 1839 and at the time of the Rebecca Riots employers in industrial areas saw the League as a threat to good order. Walter Griffith despairingly reflected that there were 'no greater serfs in existence than the working men of Wales, for they dare not speak their sentiments, if they happen to be contrary to those of their masters'.¹³ According to the *Welshman*, matters were made worse in some places because of a chapel culture that bred political quiescence:¹⁴

There is no political public either, in Havorfordwest or Carmarthen. The inhabitants *appear* politically dead, we trust they are not so in reality, and a twopenny tea meeting, a squabble about a chapel-rent, tee totalism, Van Amburghism, or, in short, any triviality would *seem* to be the only subjects they think worth bestirring themselves about!

In those parts of the Principality where the Calvinistic Methodists and the Wesleyans were strong the full weight of religious sanctions was thrown against anything that smacked of radicalism.¹⁵ Where it did appear, political zeal often took the form of Chartism, giving rise to hostile incursions at League meetings.¹⁶

Only in Caernarfon, and even there only briefly, did the League enjoy much success. Griffith set up an ACLA with three hundred members who had monthly meetings in 1841-2, and he held lectures that attracted attendances of approximately one thousand. One of their petitions had three thousand signatures. The League's Welsh-language monthly newspaper, *Cylchgrawn Rhyddid*, was produced in Caernarfon, and in December 1841 the Association hosted a conference of Dissenting ministers.¹⁷ Ominously, however, Griffith reported in October 1840 that, although the Welsh would offer prayers, petitions and 'mites', few of them had either the taste or the opportunities for forming Associations.¹⁸

As one follows Griffith's reports of his tours it becomes obvious that such significance as the League attained in Wales arose primarily from the role it played in the evolution of a politicized Dissent. Griffith was the son of an Independent minister,¹⁹ and his letters show that he relied on Dissenting preachers almost everywhere he went. He had been recruited at a time when the League was advertising for lecturers who saw repeal as a religious duty, and he was obviously well suited to the task. He described himself as travelling like 'the Apostle Paul', and it was reported that his lectures had a 'high, moral, and religious feeling'.²⁰ In another report J.B. Smith mistook him for a minister.²¹ Less flatteringly, the *North Wales Chronicle* saw him as a man who had been 'originally designed for the pulpit' but had been taken up by the Anti-Corn Law League which wished to have its lectures in Wales 'dressed up in the most approved Judaic twang'.²²

The sneer barely concealed a truth that the writer obviously found uncomfortable: a 'Judaic twang' carried great power in Wales. Griffith had grown up in scenes similar to those remembered by Henry Richard from his childhood, a time when preachers held vast gatherings enthralled by

'voices of great compass and melody, which by constant use they had learnt so to rule as to express, with the nicest modulation, all the varying moods of an orator's mind'. When this preaching climaxed in 'a kind of wild recitative which had an inexpressible charm to the ear', it could create a 'whirlwind' of passion that swept over a whole congregation and left it swaying, weeping and crying out in an agony of remorse and an ecstasy of hope. Masters of the art of public persuasion, these preachers knew the power of setting and atmosphere. Many of their meetings were held in the open air on sea shores or amid other majestic scenes where the preacher 'found his work already half-done to his hands'.²³ Thus it was not merely the difficulty of obtaining meeting halls that induced Griffith to choose sea shores and other outdoor settings for his lectures; often these were his first choice of venue. He knew his audiences well and shared their traditions. He also knew the power of their mother tongue. Although he sometimes lectured in English, Welsh was the language of religion in the Principality, and the message of repeal could only be strengthened by his use of it.²⁴

As in other parts of Britain, religious Dissent in Wales had been powerfully affected by the ferment of reforming ideas during the 1830s, a time when the political minister became a major force in Welsh life and the denominational periodical press embraced many of the advanced causes of the day. Dissenters (with the exception of those who held strictly to the Wesleyan tradition of eschewing reforming politics), successfully petitioned for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and moved on to religious voluntarism together with a host of cognate reform movements that challenged the established order in church and State.²⁵ Some well-known political ministers appear in Griffith's reports. One of them, Hugh Hughes ('Tegai'), a preacher in a liberal Methodist secession sect, came to Griffith's aid when one of his lectures attracted a large crowd after rumours had spread that opponents would disrupt the meeting. A skilled quarryman, author and poet as well as a preacher, 'Tegai' stood side by side with Griffith on a cart and used his formidable qualities to secure an unquestioning attention for the message of repeal.²⁶ The Revd William Williams ('Caledfryn'), Independent minister of Caernarfon, was another preacher of this type. He too was a poet, writer and reformer, throwing his invaluable influence and energies behind Griffith's attempt to make Caernarfon a League stronghold. 'Caledfryn' helped to organize the minister's Anti-Corn Law conference that took place in the town, and for a time he edited *Cylchgrawn Rhyddid*.²⁷ Preachers such as these had been active in Welsh public life for several years before the League intervened in the Principality. The Revd David Rees, the Independent minister of Llanelli, for example, had acquired a reputation for the 'red-hot Radicalism' of his pronouncements. 'Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!', the cry of *Y Diwygiwr*, his monthly journal, had driven on his campaigns for the redress of Dissenters' grievances, the abolition of slavery and other reforms. 'Crefydd rydd a bara rhad': the demand for 'free religion and cheap bread' easily found a place in this political platform.²⁸ *Seren Gomer*

(Baptist, Carmarthen), *Ystorfa y Bedyddwyr* (Baptist, Cardiff), and *Y Dysgedydd* (Independent, Dolgellau) took a similar, if less 'red hot', stance and allowed Griffith to have access to their columns.²⁹

This pattern of Independent and Baptist support became the most important feature of the League in Wales.³⁰ There were prayer sessions for repeal; supportive statements were issued from the pulpit; and chapels were made available for lectures.³¹ The conference of Dissenting ministers that took place on 1-2 December 1841 in Caernarfon was the outcome of this environment. It was preceded by the Manchester Convocation which was attended by twenty-four Welsh Dissenting ministers (Independent, Baptist and one Calvinistic Methodist³²) and by a meeting in August 1841 of the Independent ministers of Caernarfonshire where ten ministers issued a declaration calling on Christians to work for the repeal of the Corn Laws.³³

The conference created a great stir when it opened in Caernarfon. Over forty ministers, mainly Independents and Baptists, were present, and forty sent messages of support. The streets were bustling with people who wished to see the 'apostles of Reform', and many of them were present during the sessions at the meeting hall where the galleries had been decorated by Scripture verses in Welsh. Unhindered by the difficulties that had appeared at the Convocation in Manchester a few months earlier, the ministers began and ended with a prayer and a hymn. The Revd J.W. Massie and Colonel Thompson attended as a deputation from the League Council. Massie's speech was translated into Welsh, and Thompson made much of his family's association with John Wesley.³⁴

This was the high-point of repeal activities in Wales, and it was followed by further lectures and a flurry of petitions from various parts of the country. Griffith boasted of raising 25,000 signatures for petitions between the conference and September 1842.³⁵ The *Carmarvon Herald* referred to the extent of Nonconformist support for the League at this time - in North Wales all of the ninety-six Independent ministers, and all of the fifty Baptist ministers were repealers.³⁶ Like many Dissenters, Griffith had been attracted to the temperance movement, and he had been the secretary of the first temperance society in Caernarfonshire.³⁷ As a League lecturer he cultivated the support of his old associates so successfully that they distributed his tracts and helped him to obtain meeting places; they were 'the best friends of repeal'.³⁸

In 1843, however, support fell away as the League embarked on the second phase of its activities in which attention was directed less to lectures and more to electoral registration. This course, which took the League away from its power base in the Dissenting ministry, was a difficult one to pursue in Wales where even twenty years later electoral politics could be described as almost 'feudal' in character, so strong was the grasp of the landlords.³⁹ In the name of repeal Griffith had addressed meetings during the 1841 General Election, and *Cylchgrawn Rhyddid* had urged readers to vote for Lord George Paget, but it had been of no avail.⁴⁰ In later years John Jenkins wrote of his disillusionment with the attempt to intervene in Welsh

constituency politics: 'In calculating the probability of the return of a candidate in the Principality, no account needs to be taken of the opinion or feelings of the constituents - that is quite beside the question.'⁴¹ There were only two Welsh by-elections between 1841 and 1846, and the Protectionists were returned unopposed.⁴²

The available evidence suggests that in Wales the League lacked the resources for the sort of campaigns that were waged in England. Griffith's letters show that most of his audiences consisted of working people, and in Llangollen, the first of the Associations to be formed, the League drew most of its support from working men.⁴³ Notwithstanding the fierce loyalty of many workers to Chartism, particularly in the coal fields of south Wales, which resulted in a series of brutal clashes with Corn Law repealers during the winter of 1839-40,⁴⁴ there is not much to be said for Ryland Wallace's belief that the League in Wales was 'essentially a moneyed and middle-class campaign'. His evidence, which is based on 186 people who subscribed to League funds or spoke at meetings, is too slight to bear the weight of such an interpretation. The League's £50,000 Fund received £200 from Wales; its £100,000 Fund received £91; and its £250,000 Fund received £213 (of which £177 came from one place, Holywell).⁴⁵ The most that can be said is that there was a scattering of names that offered the promise of influential support. Griffith Evans, a Merioneth gentleman farmer, lectured on the Corn Laws; there were pro-repeal shopkeepers and tradesmen at Dowlais; there were a surgeon and banker at Wrexham; there was an attorney at Mold; and so it went on.⁴⁶

Richard Cobden's famous description of the League's attributes as 'a middle-class agitation' scarcely applied to Wales:⁴⁷

I do not deny that the working classes generally have attended our lectures and signed our petitions; but I will admit, that so far as the fervour and efficiency of our agitation has gone, it has eminently been a middle-class agitation. We have carried it on by those means by which the middle class usually carries on its movements. We have had our meetings of dissenting ministers; we have obtained the co-operation of the ladies; we have resorted to tea parties, and taken those pacific means for carrying out our views, which mark us rather as a middle-class set of agitators.

Only the references to the working class and the ministers hold true of Wales. Admittedly, there were reports of women attending lectures, and there was a Women's Committee in Wrexham in 1843,⁴⁸ but the scale and types of female involvement that characterized the League's activities in England and Scotland did not develop in the Principality. The one reference in Griffith's reports to a tea party reveals the extent of the difference; during the 1841 election campaign 'Lady Parry, of Madryn, gave a tea party (without any charge) to above 200 females in favour of free trade.'⁴⁹ It would be hard to imagine anything less like a typical League tea party than a treat given by an aristocratic Lady Bountiful to an all-female gathering of her social inferiors. Swansea contributed one stall to the League bazaar in 1845, and there were items from Wrexham, Carmarthen,

and Aberystwyth, but this womanly sphere of activity on behalf of repeal, did not attract much interest in Wales.⁵⁰ The small amount of financial support and the paucity of references to middle-class laymen in Griffith's letters show that middle-class men, like their wives, sisters and daughters, had little of the 'fervour and efficiency' that Cobden expected. Probably it is for this reason as much as the language difficulty that the great men of the League did not visit Wales. On behalf of the anti-slavery movement Thomas Clarkson had lectured in Wales; James Teare of Preston had done the same for teetotalism; and the Revd Thomas Spencer promoted Complete Suffrage in several Welsh towns,⁵¹ but Cobden (who had a Welsh wife and a brother-in-law who was active for repeal in Carmarthen) did not come; neither, apart from the presence of Massie and Thompson at the Caernarfon conference, did any other major League spokesman make the journey. Unlike Scotland which contributed an intellectual tradition, money, petitions, bazaar items, burgh freedoms and the full panoply of League ritual and publicity, Wales had very little to offer.

Ireland

The two repeals once begun can now never cease but with their accomplishment.

Pilot, Dublin, May 1841

The link between the 'two repeals' that caught the eye of the editor of the Dublin nationalist newspaper, the *Pilot*, in 1841 was personified by the leading Irish politician of the day, Daniel O'Connell. In July 1842 O'Connell assured a League national conference in London that 'there was no legal, peaceable, or constitutional act which the Irish people were not prepared to do to assist them', an assurance he reiterated on many occasions.⁵² No public figure outside the ranks of the League leadership was received more warmly at Anti-Corn Law gatherings than the 'Liberator' of Ireland. Alexander Somerville went further: in his estimation O'Connell was given a reception by a League audience at Covent Garden early in 1844 that 'few public men, if any, received before'.⁵³

O'Connell was well known to many supporters of the League. In company with them he was associated with an impressively large number of British reform movements during the 1830s and 1840s including the anti-slavery movement, the Religious Freedom Society, the Aborigines Protection Society, the British India Society and the National Complete Suffrage Union. A description of him on a banner carried in Birmingham to celebrate the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832 attested to the respect in which he was held: it showed oppressed Poles and African slaves looking at O'Connell around whom was woven the text 'Daniel O'Connell, the Genius of Universal Emancipation'.⁵⁴ O'Connell's ambitions for Ireland sometimes did not overlap easily with his wider visions of reform, and his role in British politics was a difficult one. O'Connell's biographers are

sharply divided over whether his pretensions to Benthamism, including a commitment to free trade, were deeply held convictions or were merely a hollow rhetorical flourish.⁵⁵ Although the debate need not detain us here, it is clear that, in purely practical terms, O'Connell saw the League's progress as Ireland's opportunity. As outlined in the previous chapter, in 1842 he urged his Dublin supporters to see in the League 'a glimpse of that posture of public affairs which may make the friendship of Ireland valuable, and her deliverance therefore secure'.⁵⁶

O'Connell undoubtedly brought Irish Catholic support to the League in the north of England where, in many of the larger cities and towns Irish people constituted a sizeable minority of the population. The League's corps of lecturers included several Irishmen - R.R. Moore, J.J. Finnigan, Timothy Falvey and John Murray - as well as officials such as John Kelly, Secretary of the National Operative Anti-Bread Tax Association. As Leon Faucher pointed out, the Manchester Irish were 'so strictly organised' that large numbers could be summoned up 'in the twinkling of an eye',⁵⁷ and, as a consequence, the Revd Daniel Hearne, the leading Catholic priest in Manchester, and O'Connell's local lieutenants could provide the League with the appearance of popular support. They did this most famously on 2 June 1841 when the League overwhelmed Chartist opposition at a meeting in Stevenson Square. On that occasion, Hearne repeated to the large crowd what someone had told him; this was predominantly a meeting of Mr Hearne's friends.⁵⁸ By this time the Chartists, particularly in south Lancashire, had become so used to hearing the Corn Laws denounced in Irish brogue that with a hostile mimicry they often referred to 'the Plague'.

It is surprising therefore that historians have largely ignored the question of the League in Ireland; in McCord's and Longmate's narratives, for example, Ireland is not even in the index. Where Ireland has been referred to in passing, the results have often been misleading. R.D.C. Black, for example, devotes about a paragraph to the Corn Laws which are dismissed with the conclusion: 'when the repeal of the Corn Laws became a question of practical politics in the 1840s the nationalists in Ireland came out strongly against it'.⁵⁹ On the other hand Angus Macintyre, in his study of O'Connell and the Irish Repeal Party, refers to the 'Liberator' carrying 'most of his own supporters' in one division on the Corn Laws - the only one he offers as an example.⁶⁰ This too is wrong.

O'Connell's repeated declarations of support - no less than those of William Sharman Crawford, an influential Ulster landowner and later radical MP for Rochdale in Lancashire⁶¹ - encouraged the editor of the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* to pen an ebullient editorial under the heading '*Erin Go Bragh!*', the title of the rousing song of the United Irishmen.⁶²

The uncompromising tone of these two approved friends of Ireland and of humanity will reverberate through the length and breadth of the land. Millions will echo the honest determination, and corn law repeal will be recognised as not less an Irish than a British question.

Richard Cobden was in two minds about O'Connell's capacity and willingness to deliver Irish support. Writing in 1840, he declared that 'Ireland will be a trump card in our hands'; in 1841, however, he warned Samuel Smiles to beware of the 'artful dodger'. By 1848, with the benefit of hindsight, Cobden told George Combe that he would have 'as soon thought of an alliance with an Ashantee chief'.⁶³ The fact is that the League campaign in Ireland began as a defensive one. 'The bread-taxers have taken the field', the editor of the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* had written in February 1840, 'If we are not enabled to take the field, England will be swamped by Irish petitions.'⁶⁴ During 1839 Ireland had not given Cobden or anybody else grounds for confidence. At a succession of pro-Corn Law meetings held in numerous places from Galway to Belfast the League was denigrated as 'English boors, clod-hoppers, and chaw-bones' by Irish Tory and Liberal alike.⁶⁵ Even supporters of Irish repeal vented their spleen over Corn Law repeal. At the same time as Daniel O'Connell was telling a meeting of Anti-Corn Law delegates in London that he would facilitate the campaign in Ireland, Charles Walker, MP for Wexford, and a loyal member of O'Connell's 'tail' of parliamentary supporters, was telling the *Wexford Independent* that the 'object of the English manufacturers in looking for free trade in corn is to put the difference in the cost of food into their own pockets'.⁶⁶ Among the Irish press only the *Northern Whig* supported repeal with the *Dublin Evening Post* backing a moderate fixed duty. Of the leading nationalist newspapers the *Pilot* declared that repeal would be 'robbery' unless it was 'accompanied by an equitable abatement of the existing liabilities on the land'; whereas the *Freeman's Journal* was, according to its competitor, involved in a 'by-play' of serving up different views for readers of its town and country editions.⁶⁷ During 1839 there were just two petitions supporting repeal of the Corn Laws collected in Ireland (in Newry and in Skibbereen, County Cork) compared with fifty-six against including the Chambers of Commerce in Limerick and Dublin.⁶⁸

For the historian it is easy to understand the support for the Corn Laws in Ireland. In 1784, John Foster, the Irish Chancellor, introduced a Corn Bill which offered substantial bounties for the export of corn and imposed heavy duties on Corn imports. According to one historian Foster's Corn Law 'transformed the face' of Ireland by converting enormous tracts of pasture to tillage.⁶⁹ The process was greatly accelerated following the Union in 1800 when the impetus of war and the passage of the British Corn Laws in 1815 produced, in Cormac Ó Gráda's words, 'hothouse conditions for corn cultivation in Ireland'.⁷⁰ By the time the League was formed approximately 75 per cent of the adult male work force was employed in agriculture and related pursuits and Ireland had become, in the words of one contemporary, 'England's bread basket', supplying nearly 80 per cent of Britain's corn imports.⁷¹ Grain crops were grown principally (but not exclusively) in a triangle linking Wexford, Dundalk and Cork on the eastern seaboard of Ireland where the soil and climate were most suited to tillage.⁷² It is worth emphasizing that very little of the grain grown in Ireland

was consumed there. With eloquent simplicity a British radical newspaper summed up in 1841 what it called the 'great anomaly' facing advocates of Corn Law repeal in Ireland: 'the Irish people are asked to join in reducing the price of the only thing they produce - for the purpose of cheapening the thing of which they never consume a particle'.⁷³

The League campaign in Ireland began in earnest in 1840 when the Council sent John Murray, John Finnigan and James Acland on extensive speaking tours. Despite O'Connell's assurances that 'Ireland was with them heart and soul' the choice of these three men shows that the League Council was taking nothing for granted. Murray had been born in the north of Ireland before settling in Liverpool where he had been a 'working man', a bookseller and had also run a beer shop. Regarded by Edward Watkin as the League's 'best lecturer to working men', Murray was an active moral-force Chartist in Liverpool before he was recruited by the League in April 1840.⁷⁴ Although regarded by Cobden as 'safe and prudent' Murray was well practised in talking to working-class audiences and dealing with interruptions and other difficulties by fair means or foul, skills that would be sorely tested in his native land.

Finnigan's skin was even thicker and his head even harder. He was also an Irish immigrant. A hand-loom weaver by trade, Finnigan lived in Manchester where he was known to the Manchester Chartists as 'prepare-to-meet-your-God' Finnigan because of his willingness to trade blows if words failed. Recruited to the League early in 1840, he remained on the League payroll as a lecturer until 1846. The corollary of Finnigan's rough and ready appeal to working class audiences was a fierce independence. A vehement opponent of the factory system, 'having himself suffered in those hell holes', he was also a supporter of universal suffrage. At a tea party in October 1841 he urged the 'operatives to take the management of their affairs into their own hands'.⁷⁵ Repeal of the Corn Laws was 'but . . . a step,' he told another audience in January 1840, in the 'attainment of that object which they were all endeavouring to attain . . . the natural right of every free-born subject of this land'. Although Finnigan opposed Feargus O'Connor in the early 1840s he always supported the Charter.⁷⁶

The League's most irascible lecturer, James Acland, was the first to ply his talents on an Irish audience when he addressed a large gathering of Dublin's 'working classes' in the Adelphi Theatre in March 1840. His aggressive eloquence proved easily adaptable to an Irish setting. Obviously fine tuning his message to please local ears he told the admiring crowd that '[t]he people of Ireland knew well what monopolies were; they had suffered incalculable evils from them'. The reporter from the *Dublin Pilot* was particularly impressed:⁷⁷

Mr Acland then spoke at some length upon absenteeism, and pointed out its evils in very eloquent terms, and proceeded to say that if the people exercised the great moral power which they possessed, they would soon compel the legislature to yield on the question of cheap bread, as well as on all others in which their rights and interests were concerned.

The immediate upshot of the meeting was the commencement of a petition calling for repeal of the Corn Laws that was signed by 20,400 members of the Dublin trades by the end of the month when it was forwarded to O'Connell for presentation.⁷⁸ Here at least was some evidence for Cobden to base his confident assessment on.

During February 'one of the largest and most influential' public meetings 'ever held' in Drogheda had resolved to commence a similar petition against the Corn Laws. Within the month over 5000 signatures were raised, and when it was completed in March the petition had been signed by nearly 8000 local 'merchants, manufacturers and operatives'.⁷⁹ The strength of local feeling was widely reported and, understandably Murray chose to begin his Irish tour here. After lecturing at Drogheda on 22 April he proceeded to Dundalk (27 April), Newry (29 April) and Banbridge (6 May). At Lurgan and Portadown Murray encountered his first major difficulty when he was unable to hire venues, lecturing outdoors at the latter place. On 10 May Murray lectured in Lisburn, after which he travelled to Armagh (23 May) and Belfast where he gave two lectures on 25 and 26 May.⁸⁰ According to the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* the demand for lectures coming from the other side of St George's Channel was 'so great that Mr Finnigan has been dispatched thither', giving his first lecture in Dublin on 25 May.⁸¹ Over the next two months, while Murray continued to lecture in his native north-east, Finnigan proceeded south.

Their schedules are worth lingering over in detail. Having lectured in Belfast on 1 June, Murray proceeded to Carrickfergus (6 June) and Ballyclare (15 and 16 June). Prevented from lecturing in Antrim, he moved on to Port Stewart, Portrush, Port Balintra, arriving in Coleraine on 26 June.⁸² During the first week of July Murray repeatedly attempted to lecture in Londonderry but was disrupted by enforced changes of venue and interruptions by the authorities and hostile crowds. According to the *Derry Journal*, the lecturer owed his bad treatment to the mayor who was 'responsible for asserting that Murray was a Chartist'.⁸³ Murray had more success in Dungannon (9 July), but again ran into trouble in Enniskillen on 12 July when his lecture clashed with the 'grand anniversary of the Orange triumph'. The first stage of Murray's tour ended on a high note with a successful meeting attended by 2000 'respectable' citizens in Sligo, which was as far west as he ventured, before returning to Manchester in August.⁸⁴ After completing a series of lectures in Dublin during June, Finnigan had proceeded to Cork where he began lecturing on 11 July. Within a few days the patience of the local authorities had worn thin and the mayor ordered the dispersal of one of Finnigan's lectures at Conway's Bazaar. At the same time as Murray was being maligned as a Chartist in Derry, Finnigan was, according to the *Cork Reporter*, accused of using the Corn Laws as a 'pretext for introducing Owenite doctrines into his address'. The mayor's decision to proscribe further lectures was backed by the Lord Lieutenant and Finnigan was given little choice other than to retreat to Manchester.⁸⁵

Although the opening phase of the campaign appeared to have netted

mixed results it is worth pointing out, firstly, that the lecturers were starting from scratch. Unlike in England and Scotland where Corn Law repeal had been part of the traditional programme of post-war radicalism, there was no tradition of opposition to the Corn Laws in Irish popular politics. Secondly, the sort of opposition encountered from self-important local officials or hostile crowds that had been prejudiced with stories that they were bloodthirsty Chartists or Owenite infidels, or both, was not unlike that which they encountered in the agricultural districts in south-west England. The League Council was not prepared to let matters rest. Having only been back in Lancashire for a month Murray was sent to Cork to 'assert the right of public meeting', giving his first lecture there on 17 September.⁸⁶ The mayor obviously had second thoughts about the legality of his earlier actions. Murray was unmolested, and he remained in Cork during early October before moving on to lecture in Kinsale, Bandon, Mallow and Tralee, before finally arriving in Limerick on 6 November.⁸⁷

Here he met his most belligerent opposition to date. At his first attempt the Riot Act was read and the hall cleared so that he had to complete his address to empty benches except for a dozen police with firearms.⁸⁸ During a second attempt the mayor, a magistrate and a complement of armed police stood by, as Murray's meeting was violently broken up by a group of working men headed by Thomas Steele, one of Daniel O'Connell's most loyal and trusted lieutenants.⁸⁹ For all that O'Connell had endeavoured to convince the League of Irish goodwill he had apparently forgotten to tell the man he called 'the Chief Pacificator of Ireland'.⁹⁰ The League Council immediately sent Acland to Cork to support Murray, but his special talents were not needed. As the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* reported, the episode proved to be a great fillip to Murray's efforts: 'thanks to his persecutors! he will not want sympathetic listeners during the remainder of his tour'.⁹¹ Although no direct evidence exists, the interval had undoubtedly also given O'Connell the opportunity to communicate with Steele. Within weeks of his violent ordeal Murray again lectured in Limerick - this time with Steele occupying the Chair rather than brandishing it - after which he proceeded to give lectures in Ennis, Galway, Athlone, Loughrea and Portarlington before returning to England at the end of December.⁹²

As the annual report of the Manchester ACLA boasted, Murray and Finnigan had lectured in close to thirty localities in Ireland during 1840.⁹³ Moreover the League had now gained a lead over the Protectionists in the number of petitions sent to Parliament. During 1840 there were eight Irish petitions calling for repeal bearing 32,983 signatures; although opponents of repeal collected thirty petitions over the same period they contained only 6871 signatures.⁹⁴ Most importantly a rudimentary organisational structure had been created. Six ACLAs were established in Ireland during 1840 (see Appendix 1). Drogheda, where the first of these was organized in April 1840, exemplified the challenge faced by the League in Ireland. Famous for a brutal massacre at Cromwell's hands in 1649, Drogheda lies on the eastern seaboard of Ireland between Dublin and Dundalk. By 1840 leather

tanning and soap manufacture were the principal local industries, the manufacture of textiles having undergone a sharp decline. The heart of the local economy was the port which carried on extensive overseas and cross-channel trade, much of it in grain produce. During 1835, for example, there were shipments of 45,000 bushels of wheat, 37,000 sacks of flour, 2500 barrels of barley and 22,000 barrels of oats – all protected under the existing Corn and Provision Laws.⁹⁵ The threat posed by repeal of the Corn Laws to the local export trade may well have been balanced in the minds of the local merchants by the promise of greater imports. During 1835, for example, a total of 553 ships were cleared inwards at Drogheda while 487 ships carried goods outwards (only a small percentage of this was trade with other Irish ports).⁹⁶ The large public meeting in February 1840 which had attracted national attention was chaired by a merchant and carried resolutions expressing concern at the ‘decline of export of manufactured goods’ and the ‘precarious and dangerous position in which our manufacturing establishments are now placed’. At least some of those present were well versed in the League’s arguments; one speaker quoted from John Bowring’s assessment of the impact of the German Commercial Union on domestic commerce.⁹⁷ At a time when a nascent campaign to revive Irish manufacturing was gathering pace in Ireland the prospect of ‘freedom of trade’ (and increased exports in manufactured goods) appears to be what attracted the Droghedans to the League, rather than simply cheap bread.⁹⁸ For whatever reason ‘merchants’, together with ‘manufacturers’ and ‘operatives’, formed the ACLA which was not only the first but also proved to be one of the most enduring, being still in existence in February 1842.

Other ACLAs in the north of Ireland were formed in the middle of 1840 at Armagh, Carrickfergus, Londonderry and Sligo, but these appear to have been small (24 members in Armagh, 30 in Carrickfergus), and either ineffectual or ephemeral.⁹⁹ None of them ever contributed to League funds or sent delegates to League national conferences, although significant petitions were collected during 1841 in Sligo (3010 signatures) and Armagh (1004 signatures).¹⁰⁰ The Belfast ACLA was formed in July 1840. Although the only sizeable petition relating to the Corn Laws that was ever submitted from Ireland’s second city supported their retention (5167 residents in 1842¹⁰¹) there is evidence of Anti-Corn Law activity there until at least the end of 1842 in the form of subscriptions to League funds and membership cards for the Doomsday Book, and again in 1845 when the Free Trade Association was ‘revived’.¹⁰² Apart from at Drogheda, the strongest campaign, at least in the north, was in Newtownards, a township of approximately 11,000 which lies eight miles east of Belfast in the coastal region of County Down. Brewing and weaving were the main local industries with a large female work force engaged in embroidering muslin sent from Glasgow.¹⁰³ Although no ACLA had been formed in the town, in 1840 a petition signed by 1756 residents was collected there, a feat repeated in 1841. By February 1842, following an Anti-Corn Law demonstration

where the crowd was estimated to have numbered 1000, the editor of the *Weekly Freeman's Journal* described Newtownards as having 'done itself the honour of taking an advanced post among the towns of Ireland'.¹⁰⁴ In December 1842 the League sent membership cards to Newtownards and in April the following year the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* carried a report of a meeting to organize a petition, that was of special interest because it was held on the estate of Lord Londonderry, a local landlord who repeatedly opposed repeal of the Corn Laws in the House of Lords.¹⁰⁵ Enniskillen was another Ulster town to receive League membership cards in 1842 although there are no other details about the progress of the movement there.¹⁰⁶ Although some commentators saw O'Connell's involvement as a potential hindrance to the development of the movement in the north of Ireland – a young Charles Gavan Duffy, editor of the *Belfast Vindicator*, worried that 'honest Protestant voters' in the north-east might see 'Popery in a large loaf'¹⁰⁷ – there is no reason to believe that the movement did less well in the Protestant north than in the remainder of the country.

The only ACLA to be established in the south was at Cork in September 1840. During 1840, however, the only relevant petitions to come from there supported the Corn Laws.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless there is evidence that the ACLA was still active in 1843 when a large Anti-Corn Law petition was collected – 12,797 signatures¹⁰⁹ – which was presented by O'Connell, who had been the local MP since 1841. Although there was apparently no ACLA there a stronger agitation took place in Clonakilty, a sea port and market town in County Cork, 25 miles west of Cork itself.¹¹⁰ Here during 1841 an Anti-Corn Law petition was collected that contained 4080 signatures which is very impressive given that a well-known guide book, published in 1837, showed that the population was only 3807.¹¹¹ The most notable failure in organizational terms was in Dublin where, despite urging from Manchester, no ACLA was ever formed. An Anti-Corn Law meeting in December 1841 in Dublin was regarded as the largest public meeting there for many years¹¹² – no small claim – and the capital contributed the largest number of signatures to Anti-Corn Law petitions. Dublin was the only Irish city to send a representative to any of the League's national conferences and one of only three to contribute funds, although not the largest amount.¹¹³ Nevertheless, the shadow cast by Conciliation Hall, the headquarters of the O'Connell's Irish Repeal Association, was sufficient to prevent any other organization from flourishing in Dublin.

Part of the problem outside Dublin was that the League campaign of 1840 was not followed up. It was December 1841 before another League lecturer – George Thompson – set foot anywhere in Ireland, and he remained in the capital.¹¹⁴ Thompson was followed by John Curtis of Ohio in January 1842, but he too confined his efforts to Dublin. By the beginning of 1842 Cobden was confiding to the League president, George Wilson, of the need to 'start in on Ireland',¹¹⁵ but nothing was done. Without external stimulus the subsequent agitation was patchy. The

dominance over pro-Corn Law petitions that had been established in 1840 was continued in subsequent years with petitions calling for repeal of the Corn Laws reaching a peak during 1842 when eight petitions were collected totalling 68,567 signatures, with the bulk of them (60,000) coming from Dublin itself.¹¹⁶ This total was only disappointing to anyone who had believed O'Connell's boast that Ireland would contribute 500,000 signatures to Anti-Corn Law petitions in 1842.¹¹⁷ A number of towns, not previously mentioned, including Tralee, Roscommon, Dundalk and Limerick,¹¹⁸ contributed Anti-Corn Law petitions between 1840 and 1843, but there is little other evidence of agitation in these places.

Another problem was that, unlike the merchants of Drogheda, the Chambers of Commerce in the larger cities were, to say the least, equivocal about repeal of the Corn Laws. Early in 1842, for example, when Peel's proposal for a modification to the sliding scale on corn was being debated, the Limerick Chamber of Commerce passed a series of resolutions condemning any alteration to the duty on oats and barley.¹¹⁹ In Cork a meeting of merchants supported the Limerick resolution opposing any alteration to the sliding scale, let alone its repeal. Similar meetings were reported at Roscommon and Sligo whereas at the Waterford Chamber of Commerce a fierce debate took place over the merits of modifying the sliding scale, the latter being defeated by two votes.¹²⁰ Whether the narrow majority supported repeal or the status quo is not clear, but the point is there was no consensus. Correspondingly there is evidence from several places, including Armagh, Limerick and Dublin that the cause of Corn Law repeal was supported primarily by operatives and members of trade unions.¹²¹

The terms of the debate in Ireland had less to do with economic theory than with emotion. Given the dependence of the local economy on agriculture the landed interest in Ireland, even more so than their English counterparts, evoked the spectre of penury as a justification for retaining the Corn Laws. As Edward Connolly, the Tory MP for Donegal, told the House of Commons in February 1842, the Irish people 'knew well that the landlord could not be injured without the labourers being wounded in their most essential interests'.¹²² Moderate Irish liberals were also susceptible to this argument. For example, William Smith O'Brien, MP for County Limerick, who was undergoing a transformation in his political attitudes from liberal Tory to nationalist at this time, 'did not see, that any advantage would result from the repeal of the Corn-laws, sufficient to counterbalance the sacrifice of the agricultural interest'. It was not the landlords' pockets that concerned him. 'He was convinced', he told the House of Commons, 'that 100,000 of his countrymen would be thrown out of employment if the Corn-laws were repealed . . . He for one was not prepared to set on foot so great an amount of human misery.'¹²³ As noted, even many of O'Connell's 'tail' of parliamentary supporters, neither shared his enthusiasm for Corn Law repeal nor voted for it (see Chapter 8).¹²⁴

O'Connell was unmoved by the threat of famine: 'It is said that the Corn-laws are a protection to Ireland', he told the House of Commons in 1839,

'[b]ut what has Ireland to lose? It is said that the corn-laws keep up the wages of the Irish labourer but can any wages be less than theirs?'¹²⁵ O'Connell's position was complex, based on a combination of principled and tactical considerations. He certainly shared with Cobden and many of the leading Leaguers a hatred of the aristocracy 'whose venison was moistened with a widow's tears'.¹²⁶ The Corn Laws were a tax 'not for the benefit of the state or any public purpose', he wrote in a pamphlet published in 1842, 'but for the sole profit of a privileged and . . . plundering class'.¹²⁷ As a self-styled disciple of Bentham, O'Connell was well versed in the virtues of 'free trade' although, significantly, he believed that Ireland's economic difficulties meant that the 'normal' rules of political economy did not apply. 'I am taunted with being a no-protection man in England, and being a protection man in Ireland,' he admitted to an audience in Cork, 'my answer is that the state of Ireland is anomalous with that of every other country on the globe.'¹²⁸ Until 1840 O'Connell had clung to the idea that justice for Ireland might be possible under the Union, calling his movement 'Precursors', men who would strive for repeal if justice were not forthcoming from Westminster. Although he eventually denied the prospect of justice in a 'West Britain' as an alternative to legislative independence - he would soon declare that 'no one short of an idiot could be brought to believe it'¹²⁹ - he still referred to the United Kingdom when explaining his stance on the Corn Laws. 'I am a determined opponent of the Corn Laws,' he told the adoring crowd during a speech at Covent Garden in February 1844. 'I am so because from conviction I believe them to be injurious to the people of the United Kingdom, and because I believe that in opposing them I am acting on the side of justice and humanity.'¹³⁰

In December 1845, William Smith O'Brien, by this time a rapidly rising star in the campaign for the repeal of the Union, wrote to O'Connell, whose domination of the Irish political landscape he was beginning to supplant, pleading with the 'Liberator' to modify his support for the total and immediate repeal of the Corn Laws. 'If the question of their immediate abolition were put to the poll in any county in Ireland,' he warned, 'I am convinced that nine out of every ten of the electors would vote against their Repeal.'¹³¹ At one level O'Brien's assessment was wrong: there was more support for repeal of the Corn Laws in Ireland than he gives credit for. At the same time the Anti-Corn Law movement that sparked into life - sometimes significantly - after 1840, never did so independently. In Ireland the 'two repeals' were inextricably linked, but they were not equal partners. Even in Drogheda which produced the most vigorous local campaign there was universal agreement among the ranks of the ACLA that there was 'no hope for Irish prosperity save in the wisdom, integrity and fostering protection of a native Irish parliament'.¹³² Part of the blame for the failure belongs at Newall's Buildings. The foundation laid in 1840 was not followed up in 1841-2 and during 1843, the year designated by O'Connell as the one in which repeal of the Union would be secured, no other campaign was possible. Four months after Smith O'Brien's plea,

O'Connell lashed out at the English reformers and free-trade MPs for failing to aid him in resisting a government Coercion Bill for Ireland and, for the first time, threatened to withdraw his support for repeal of the Corn Laws. The League had no cause for complaint. The League leaders never had any intention of being drawn into distinctively Irish problems; never once in Parliament did Cobden speak or vote on an Irish issue as O'Connell would have desired.¹³³

Notes

1. *Manchester Times*, 18 July 1840; J. Almack, *Character, Motives, and Proceedings of the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers, with a few General Remarks on the Consequences that Would Result from a Free Trade in Corn* (London, 1843), p. 57.
2. L. Colley, *Britons: Forging The Nation 1707–1837*, (New Haven, 1992); *A Series of Letters from Feargus O'Connor Esq. Barrister at Law to Daniel O'Connell, Esq. M.P. containing a Review of Mr O'Connell's Conduct During the Agitation for Catholic Emancipation; Together with an Analysis of His Motives and Actions since He Became a Member of Parliament* (London, 1836), pp. 47, 83; *Sentinel*, 6 May 1843; 28 December 1844; *Scotsman*, 4 November 1843. See also R.B. McDowell, *Public Opinion and Government Policy in Ireland, 1801–1846* (London, 1953), p. 170f.
3. Walter Griffith to John Ballantyne, 28, 30 May 1840; the same to George Wilson, 6 June 1840, repr. in I.G. Jones, 'The Anti-Corn Law Letters of Walter Griffith', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, vol. 28, pt. 1, November 1978, pp. 103, 105, 107. Henceforth cited as Griffith Letters.
4. I.G. Jones, 'Parliament and People in Mid-Nineteenth Century Wales', in T. Herbert and G.E. Jones (eds), *People and Protest: Wales 1815–1880* (Cardiff, 1988), p. 53.
5. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 21 May 1840; Walter Griffith to John Ballantyne, 30 May 1840, Griffith Letters, p.105.
6. R. Wallace, *Organise! Organise! Organise! A Study Of Reform Agitations In Wales, 1840–1886* (Cardiff, 1991), p. 33.
7. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 July, 1840.
8. Griffith Letters, p. 99.
9. *League*, 25 January 1845.
10. Griffith Letters, pp. 99–100.
11. *Ibid.* pp. 121–2.
12. *Manchester Times*, 27 January, 1844.
13. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 3 November 1842.
14. Quoted in *ibid.* 20 October 1842. The *Illustrated London News*, 21 January 1843, refers to Van Amburgh as a lion-tamer and theatrical manager.
15. I.G. Jones, 'Parliament and People in Mid-Nineteenth Century Wales', in Herbert and Jones, *People and Protest*, p. 43.
16. Griffith Letters, pp. 127–8.
17. R. Wallace, 'The Anti-Corn Law League in Wales', *Welsh History Review*, June 1986, p. 9.
18. Griffith Letters, p. 118.
19. *Ibid.* p. 95.

20. Walter Griffith to John Ballantyne, 13 June 1840, Griffith Letters, p. 108; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 13 August 1840.
21. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 25 February 1841.
22. Quoted in *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 July 1840.
23. C.S. Miall, *Henry Richard M.P.: A Biography* (London, 1889), pp. 2-4.
24. I.G. Jones, *Mid-Victorian Wales: The Observers And The Observed* (Cardiff, 1992), p. 69.
25. G.D. Evans, *A History of Wales, 1815-1906* (Cardiff, 1989), pp. 167-9.
26. Walter Griffith to George Wilson, 29 June 1840, Griffith Letters, p. 111.
27. *Ibid.* p. 116; Wallace, *Organise!*, p. 19.
28. J.V. Morgan, *Welsh Political and Educational Leaders in the Victorian Era*, (London, 1908), pp. 583, 605; Evans, *A History of Wales*, p. 170.
29. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 14 January 1841.
30. Walter Griffith to John Ballantyne, 28 May 1840, Griffith Letters, p. 104.
31. A. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (Manchester, 1853), vol. 1, p. 252; Wallace, 'The Anti-Corn Law League in Wales', p. 6; Walter Griffith to John Ballantyne, 28 May 1840, Griffith Letters, p. 104.
32. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 August, 1841.
33. Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 252.
34. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 16 December 1841; *Carnarvon Herald*, quoted in the *Scotsman*, 11 December 1841.
35. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 22 September 1842.
36. Quoted in the *Scotsman*, 11 December 1841.
37. Griffith Letters, p. 96.
38. *Ibid.* p. 121; W.R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales c.1820-c.1895* (Cardiff, 1983), p. 81.
39. R.R. Davies, R.A. Griffiths, I.J. Jones, and K.O. Morgan, *Welsh Society and Nationhood* (Cardiff, 1984), p. 234, quoting Henry Richard.
40. Wallace, *Organise!*, p. 23.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.* p. 24.
43. Griffith Letters, p. 118; Walter Griffith to John Ballantyne, 28 May 1840, *Ibid.* p. 104.
44. D.J.V. Jones, *The Last Rising: The Newport Insurrection of 1839* (Oxford, 1985), p. 215.
45. Wallace, 'The Anti-Corn Law League In Wales', pp. 14-17.
46. Wallace, *Organise!*, p. 15; Griffith Letters, p. 128; Walter Griffith to George Wilson, 18 May 1840, Griffith Letters, p. 101; Walter Griffith to John Ballantyne, 28 May 1840, Griffith Letters, p. 104.
47. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 8 September 1842.
48. *Ibid.*, 3 November 1842; Wallace, *Organise!*, p. 158.
49. Griffith Letters, p. 125.
50. Wallace, *Organise!*, p. 25.
51. *Ibid.* pp. 83, 87; Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety*, p. 63.
52. See *Manchester Times*, 23 March 1839; 24 February 1844; *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 1 January 1842; 30 July 1842; *League*, 7 February 1846.
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55. See J.E. Crimmins, 'Jeremy Bentham and Daniel O'Connell: Their Correspondence and Radical Alliance, 1828-1831', *Historical Journal*, vol. 40, 1997, pp. 362-3.
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THE ORGAN OF VENERATION: THE LEAGUE AND RELIGION

Henceforth we will grapple with the religious feelings of the people – their veneration for God shall be our leverage to upset their reverence for the aristocracy. Once rouse this organ of veneration in Englishmen, & all other appeals are vain.

(Cobden to Villiers, 6 June 1841)¹

‘Why bless me, if you had lived in the middle ages you would have made a capital monk.’² Richard Cobden was one of the many early Victorians who had their heads examined by a phrenologist, in his case by George Combe of Edinburgh whose words he was quoting. The conclusion that he had a highly developed cranial organ of veneration and that as a consequence he was predisposed to ‘the religious sentiment’ was one that Cobden found less surprising than Combe.³ He saw religion as a powerful agent of progress and attributed much of his success in the Anti-Corn Law League to his ability to cooperate with men of a religious mentality. The repeal of the Corn Laws, he told Combe in 1846, had been ‘more indebted to the organ of veneration for its success than is generally known’.⁴

For many repealers the typical League experience was a lecture, meeting or tea party that took place under religious auspices. These gatherings were pervaded by the influence of the religious revival that had taken place at the turn of the century: as we have seen, in scriptural language League banners demanded the bread of life and invoked curses on those who withheld it from the people; specially composed Anti-Corn Law hymns were sung; and those who joined the League received membership cards on which were emblazoned the text ‘Give us this day our daily bread’.⁵ The Corn Laws were ‘The National Sin’, the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* proclaimed, and it lamented that there were ‘soulless utilitarians’ who did not see them in this light.⁶ In the later years, when the repealers held great meetings and rallies in London and the Manchester Free Trade Hall with clergymen on the platform and ladies in the audience, George Wilson had no qualms in claiming for the League the status that contemporary religious societies enjoyed as moral and philanthropic agencies of national regeneration.⁷

From the beginning there were those such as the Revd William

McKerrow of Manchester who saw repeal as a movement for religious, moral and humanitarian reform. Denounced by his opponents as a 'political parson', he was celebrated by his friends as the first clergyman to give his support to repeal.⁸ For some time his was a lonely eminence, as ministers in other parts of England were slow to follow his example. There was some initial reluctance to allow the League's lecturers to use chapel premises (Scottish Dissenters were different in this respect), and, according to Sidney Smith, it was not until November 1839 that the first repeal lecture took place in the chapel of an English denomination, the Haslingden Baptist chapel.⁹ In April 1840 the League Council advertised for lecturers who could argue for repeal as a Christian duty, and in a special appeal to ministers of religion it urged them to join in the 'great struggle', but as late as April 1841 Cobden was still lamenting that, with 'splendid exceptions' such as McKerrow, few of them had responded to the call.¹⁰ Thus the great surge of support from ministers and their congregations that the League was able to report later that year was not achieved easily; it required renewed effort and careful planning.

The League claimed to be a voice of the national conscience, riding high above sectional interests. Thus it boasted of support from all the churches including the Church of England of which 10 per cent of the members of the Manchester ACLA Council were members (see Chapter 10). Cobden was the most important of them, but, although he was regular in his attendance at Anglican worship, he disclaimed any trace of 'enthusiasm' in his religion.¹¹ He saw religious feeling in practical terms as 'the great leverage which has moved mankind to powerful action'; it was an agent of 'liberty and human exaltation'.¹² In its institutional capacity, however, the Church of England bore little resemblance to this ideal. There were liberal Anglicans,¹³ but it was believed with some justification that the clergy opposed nearly all the popular reforms of the day including the repeal of the Corn Laws. Cobden was doomed to share the platform with Dissenters, who, as he told Combe, were showing signs of catching up on the progressive 'spirit of the age'.¹⁴ His fellow Council member and co-religionist, John Brooks, reached a similar conclusion. He told a public meeting that every time he met an Anglican clergyman he attempted to win him over to repeal, but only once had he succeeded and that was with an unbeneficial clergyman.¹⁵ Few of his listeners would have been surprised; they had often been told that, because of its clergymen's dependence on tithes, the Church of England had a vested interest in high agricultural prices.¹⁶

Only one Church of England clergyman took a prominent part in the repeal campaign. This was the Revd Thomas Spencer, Perpetual Curate of Hinton Charterhouse. The League made much of his support, but he was one of the most eccentric figures of the day. During the 1840s he was pursuing a frenetic campaign of pamphleteering and speech-making to promote a programme of reform that would have been breathtaking in any age. He condemned 'the fox-hunting, ball-going and race-frequenting

clergy' and the wide disparities of rank and income that existed in the Church of England. Given his way, he would have instituted a system of elected ministers presided over by elected, fixed-term bishops who would have lived on moderate incomes and ceased to sit in the House of Lords. Instead of tithes and church rates he would have left the clergy to the voluntary support of their parishioners; and he would have revised the liturgy and the Articles of the Church in an ecumenical spirit. In matters of state his programme was even more threatening to traditional ideas. He called for universal suffrage, short Parliaments, the secret ballot, public education, allotments for the poor, a simplified code of laws, emigration, international peace, death duties, the abolition of entail and primogeniture, the dismantling of the poor rate system and the removal of the requirement that newspapers should carry a government stamp. He condemned all forms of official waste and corruption. For example, he believed that the monarchy should relinquish half of the Civil List, and surrender all the royal palaces, lands and revenues except for Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. As a final guarantee of good government he would have required the Queen, MPs and clergy to take the teetotal pledge. The lectures and speeches that Spencer delivered on behalf of the League were of a piece with this programme. All men regardless of their rank should support themselves in a free market: just as working men should no longer look to the Poor Law for support so should landowners cease to rely on the Corn Laws. When he died in 1853 he was described by his brother as one who 'spared neither the state pensioner nor the parish pauper, the man of war nor the hireling priest'.¹⁷

Spencer was a *rara avis* in the Church of England. His Catholic equivalent was the Revd Daniel Hearne of St Patrick's Church in Manchester. By 1841, the first time he addressed a League meeting, Hearne had been in Manchester for sixteen years promoting schools, a convent, an orphanage and temperance societies. His achievements were praised as a 'moral miracle' in the midst of poverty and squalor. Like Daniel O'Connell, to whom he bore a strong physical resemblance, he was a man of the two repeals - repeal of the Act of Union and repeal of the Corn Laws. In Manchester and Salford he was regarded as the 'inspector-general' of the Irish Repeal movement to which he had been drawn, so he told a public meeting, by a boyhood dream of seeing the day when Ireland would again have her own Parliament. Hearne seems to have had little difficulty in reconciling his British with his Irish political affiliations. In one of his speeches he justified his support for the League by developing a precedent from English history: just as Stephen Langton, one of the medieval Catholic Archbishops of Canterbury, had been right to ally with the barons to obtain Magna Carta from an unjust king, so he, as a nineteenth-century Catholic priest, was right to support the claims of the suffering poor against unjust barons.¹⁸

Although there were occasional reports of priests attending meetings,¹⁹ open support for the League by the Catholic clergy seems to have been

exceptional. When observers commented on the large number of clergymen who supported the League from mid-1841, they were thinking above all of the ministers who belonged to two denominations of evangelical Old Dissent – the Independents (or Congregationalists) and the Baptists. There were strong reasons for this; the League was founded shortly after a decisive hardening in the public aspirations of the Dissenters, especially those who lived in the provinces. Earlier in the century evangelical Dissenters had been more passive. During the long years of war with France ‘Church and King’ had been a national rallying cry and Dissent had carried overtones of disloyalty. Dissenting ministers were usually content to take a second place to Anglican lay and clerical dignitaries in the great societies that were set up to promote religion, reform manners and pursue humanitarian reform. Looking back to the 1820s, a Dissenting periodical, the *Eclectic Review*, remembered this time with shame:²⁰

The platforms of public meetings have frequently exhibited the disgraceful spectacle of dissenters pandering to the pride of priestism, magnifying the excellencies of men who condescended to associate with them in supplying the perishing with the bread of life – dilating in inflated terms on virtues which had no existence, to their own disgrace, and the disgust of all intelligent hearers.

After 1828 matters were never the same; as the tone of the *Eclectic Review* indicates, many Dissenters were no longer prepared to accept the second-class citizenship of mere toleration. In that year the Dissenters campaigned successfully for the repeal of the discriminatory Test and Corporation Acts, and during the following years many of them went on to participate actively in the constitutional revolution that achieved Catholic Emancipation, the Parliamentary Reform Act and the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. Their successes encouraged them to look for further reform in matters that particularly affected their own rights such as university education, marriages, burials and the compulsory payment of tithes and church rates. Likewise, as the development of the anti-slavery, temperance and peace societies showed during the 1830s and 1840s, they were no longer prepared to defer to the leadership of establishment figures offering compromise policies on the great public issues of the day. They produced their own leaders and followed them in support of policies that required ‘total and immediate’ implementation. This was a time when a generational and regional split took place in Dissent. Many of the leading London Dissenters and their provincial supporters wished to carry through piecemeal reforms in alliance with the Whig parliamentarians, but a new generation of Dissenters in the provinces was less respectful of this strategy of politely lobbying the Parliamentary élite. They applied the language of anti-slavery to their own status, likening themselves to slaves who were denied full civil rights. Their programme of reform, one that they called voluntarism, required the separation of church and state and an ecclesiastical polity in which all denominations would be accorded equal status.²¹

These young, active, 'restive' provincial Dissenters refused, in the words of one of their historians, to remain in 'the state of mesmeric sleep so much desired by the moderates in London'; in their turn the older leaders of Dissent dreaded their frequent confrontations with articulate and well-organized 'Reverend Radicals' from the provinces.²² The Society for Promoting Ecclesiastical Knowledge (1829); the British Voluntary Church Society (1834); the Church Rate Abolition Society (1836); the Religious Freedom Society (1839); the British Anti-State Church Association (1844); the Liberation Society (1853)²³ - the names of their organizations changed, but their 'combative Dissent', as it has been called, became a fixture in the religious life and politics of the early Victorian era.²⁴ They spoke with a sense of power. During their participation in the anti-slavery campaigns they had learned the techniques of a newer and stronger version of the 'pressure from without' in which great petitioning campaigns were driven forward by the nationwide activities of 'agents' (lecturers) and brought to bear on the establishment by national conventions of delegates, Parliamentary debates and intervention in elections. With this 'battering ram of public opinion' they were prepared to challenge all the politicians - Whig as well as Tory - who fell short of the mark of voluntarism.²⁵ At a General Convention in 1834 several hundreds of their delegates thundered out demands for the separation of church and state.²⁶ The bolder spirits among them had a strategy on which to fall back, when, as they knew would happen, the politicians swept their demands aside or watered them down: God's law was a higher law, and, if necessary, they would break the law of the land. During the 1830s and 1840s there were local campaigns by groups of Dissenters who used violent means to swamp vestry meetings at which attempts were made to impose church rates. As a last resort some of the bolder spirits were willing to earn fame and notoriety as 'martyrs' who submitted to imprisonment rather than pay these imposts.²⁷ By the late 1830s it was evident that this new generation of provincial Dissenters was looking for a crusading creed that was more radical than Whiggism. Many of them found it in the campaign for repeal of the Corn Laws. In the most literal sense religious voluntarists and Corn Law repealers could speak the same language: the Church of England, like the Corn Laws, was an inefficient, corrupt and discriminatory monopoly; both were upheld by the same politicians; and the same remedy should be applied to both - competition in a free market.

Overwhelmingly the ministers who supported the League in England came from two denominations - the Independents and the Baptists. When, for example, Richard Cobden asked for the names of some important London Dissenting clergymen with whom he could discuss strategy he was handed a list that contained the names of six Independents, four Baptists, one Presbyterian and one Wesleyan Associationist.²⁸ The Baptists were even prepared to give the League their official institutional endorsement. In June 1841 the West Bromwich annual meeting of the Midland Baptist Association unanimously adopted a petition for Corn Law repeal, and in

April 1843 at its annual session the Baptist Union, representing more than eight hundred congregations in Britain and Ireland, went further by issuing a resolution deploring the extent of poverty, and ascribing it 'principally' to the laws restraining commerce, agriculture and industry. As a consequence Baptists across the country were urged to seek 'by every constitutional means, the repeal of such laws'.²⁹

Declarations of support at denominational meetings such as these were important for the League, but they were overshadowed by the national conferences of ministers that took place in Manchester, Caernarfon and Edinburgh between August 1841 and January 1842 as part of the re-appraisal of strategy that the League leaders carried out during the first half of 1841. At a time when Lord Melbourne's Whig government was collapsing in the face of its own internal weakness and the strength of Sir Robert Peel's resurgent Conservative Party the League embarked on a search for the sort of following from the chapels that the anti-slavery movement had enjoyed during the previous decade. In April 1841, the month when Cobden lamented to see how few ministers had come forward as active repealers, the campaign for their support was stepped up. The *Anti-Corn Law Circular* was re-named the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* to make it clear that the League saw its concerns as 'not so much a question of political economy as of justice and humanity' - a question that it would henceforth address to 'the understandings and feelings of every man and woman in the kingdom as well as to the sympathies of all Christians and philanthropists'.³⁰ A month later a tea party was held in Manchester at which, in addition to a large number of women, many ministers were present including William McKerrow who was 'rapturously cheered' and J.W. Massie who spoke with 'powerful and burning eloquence'. One of the intentions of the organizers seems to have been to secure the services of George Thompson who was also present on that occasion, but for the moment this failed.³¹ Cobden's letters to Villiers in mid-1841 show his strong support for this new 'element of agitation' at a time when he envisaged the future under a Tory Government. Villiers' task in the future, according to Cobden, would be to rally a corps of free trade MPs in the Commons while the League brought the rest of the MPs under 'the whip & spur' of the pressure from without. George Thompson, Cobden was now able to tell Villiers, had eventually been prevailed upon to take service with the League and he had been given as his first important duty the task of co-operating with the ministers of Manchester in organizing a national ministerial convention. With this one bold gesture Cobden believed that the League would enhance its moral status and widen its appeal to public opinion throughout the nation: 'We shall be able to get up such a demonstration as will establish us in the ranks of the religious bodies - give us access to their chapels & associations, & sanction the public co-operation of the women.'³²

This project undoubtedly enjoyed a large measure of success. Pointing to the anti-slavery conventions as precedents, Thompson, McKerrow, Massie and other members of the Manchester organizing committee

invited the clergy of all the Christian denominations in Britain to attend a 'National Convocation',³³ a name they cheekily appropriated from the Church of England as a gesture of contemptuous rebuke much as the League on previous occasions had summoned delegates to serve in 'quasi Parliaments' that contrasted with the unrepresentative legislature in Westminster. A delighted Thomas Spencer saw this gathering as one that vindicated his ideas of church government. In the past, he informed the delegates, 'Convocation' had been the name for a gathering of the clergy of the established church to discuss how much it should pay to the crown in taxation, but this body had become defunct except for one meeting at the beginning of each reign when an anthem was sung and a Latin speech was delivered. Now the word was being used to denote a representative and business-like gathering of religious ministers who were concerned for the well-being of the nation.³⁴ The long list of denominations represented at the Convocation gave some substance to his claim: the Church of England, the Baptists, Independents, several of the Methodist sects, Roman Catholics, Unitarians, English and Evangelical Presbyterians, Swedenborgians, Nazarenes, the Christian Church, the Welsh Baptists, the Irish Presbyterians and members of several Scottish churches including the Church of Scotland, Scottish Secessionists, the Scottish Relief Church, the Inghamites and the Scotch Baptists. Some of them travelled hundreds of miles to attend. The outcome was the passing of a string of resolutions condemning the effects of the Corn Laws on the physical, moral and spiritual well-being of the nation.³⁵

Impressive though the Convocation was, it lacked the representative status to which it laid claim. Of the 644 ministers listed by the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* there were only two Church of England clergymen, twelve Catholic priests and one minister from Ireland. The Wesleyan Methodists' response would have been disappointing, if it had not been expected. Still mindful of their founder's concern for the well-being of the Church of England, they were firmly ruled at this time by 'Pope' Jabez Bunting who repudiated anything that smacked of radicalism.³⁶ Five hundred copies of the invitation were sent to preachers attending the Wesleyan Conference, but only one reply was received.³⁷ In its institutional capacity Conference refused the invitation on the grounds that the Corn Laws were 'a question of political economy',³⁸ and only two Wesleyan Methodists attended, although there was a better representation from some of the smaller Methodist sects. The outcome was that the Convocation was dominated by the two denominations that, because of their participation in the voluntary church movement, were most pre-disposed to support the League: there were 273 Independents and 179 Baptists, amounting to more than two thirds of those listed.³⁹

The *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* was unabashed by this lop-sided denominational representation: it hailed an event that had 'no parallel in importance since the time of those great ecclesiastical councils which determined the faith of the early Christian world'.⁴⁰ Skilled as ever in

arranging its rituals and ceremonies to create moral tableaux, the League choreographed what the official report called a scene of 'the most inspiring and enthusiastic appearance'. A French journalist was reminded of the opera *Les Huguenots*.⁴¹ Admittedly, the Convocation could not provide the full panoply of colourful stage settings that the League usually preferred for its ceremonial gatherings. Pink and white draperies and 'festoons of crimson cloth' provided a background for an assemblage that for the most part was bleak and bare in its black-coated solemnity. Facing out to the majority of the ministers in the body of the hall and overtopped by a gallery for spectators who included many ladies, the principal ministers and speakers sat on seven long benches of tiered seats.⁴² The ministers had been invited to bring statements and statistics of the social distress in their areas, and speakers made much of these tales of suffering. At intervals deputations of workers were brought before the Convocation to add their stories of hardship, the most poignant being one that was delivered, so it was said, on behalf of seven thousand hand loom weavers. Presenting an address for which the chairman requested 'solemn silence', they spoke of sufferings 'beyond description',⁴³ reducing, so it was subsequently claimed, one half of the audience to 'tears, while the rest were thrilled with an enthusiasm perfectly irrepressible'.⁴⁴ In his farewell speech George Thompson congratulated the ministers for participating in scenes such as these: they had rescued the subject of corn law repeal 'from the hands of cold-hearted political economists, or of selfish merchants' and dedicated it to a purer form of 'patriotism' that was concerned with the health of the nation, the self-respect of the poor, international peace and Christian missions. This had been a 'sanctified parliament'.⁴⁵

In fact, it had been nothing of the kind; the Convocation satisfied few of the criteria that would normally be expected of Parliamentary procedure or of sanctity for that matter. The official fiction was that this was a 'free and friendly conference' of ministers who could control their own deliberations, but Thompson's committee kept a firm control of the arrangements, assisted by the League's 'clerks, messengers, door-keepers, assistants of all kinds'.⁴⁶ These were declaratory politics, and the sessions were essentially a form of public theatre. There were no real debates or exchanges of views on the importance of the Corn Laws. Resolutions that had been carefully prepared by the Committee were introduced and supported by speakers whose arguments shared the same tendentious qualities. Well-known clergymen from different denominations were rostered to preside over the daily sessions, and firm chairmanship denied the floor to anyone who expressed a dissident point of view. One speaker who introduced references to the Poor Law was silenced; another speaker who ventured to ask if employers' profits were suffering to the same extent as workers' earnings was told to keep to the question; and William Hill, the editor of the Chartist *Northern Star*, who attended in his capacity as a Swedenborgian minister, was denied permission to speak on the causes of the prevalent social hardships.⁴⁷ Henry Solly, a Unitarian, had been drawn to the

Conference under the misapprehension that the 'causes and remedies' of the 'general suffering of the country' would be open to consideration, and, backed by subscriptions from Chartists and 'liberals' in Yeovil and Tavistock, he attended with high hopes of putting the case for Parliamentary reform. His persistence got him further than others, but it was not until late on the final day 'when the members were tired, and not half of them present' that he was called on to speak.⁴⁸ Earlier Cobden and members of the League Council had arrived to make the layman's case for repeal of the Corn Laws, but when Dr Sleight, the representative of the 'Society established in London for the protection of Agriculture in Great Britain and Ireland', requested permission to attend and make the contrary case his letter was not even communicated to the ministers.⁴⁹

Considerable thought also seems to have been given to the hand loom weavers' address to the ministers; there was a danger, as had happened elsewhere, that it might lead on to a condemnation of the factory machinery that many weavers blamed for their sufferings. One safeguard was to stack the hand loom weavers' delegation so that it included a League lecturer, John Joseph Finnigan.⁵⁰ There was no doubt, one of the delegation assured the ministers, that, if the Corn Laws were repealed, machinery would have less effect on the well-being of the hand loom weavers. As another safeguard this delegation was balanced by one that came from the other end of the technological spectrum - a large engineering workshop whose workers, so a spokesman said, were comparatively well off and had come along merely to express sympathy for their less-fortunate fellow townsmen. Leaving nothing to chance, the organizers even sent in a deputation from the Operative ACLA that included Edward Watkin, who was the son of a local businessman, and (once again) J.J. Finnigan.⁵¹ The care that was employed to control the speeches was extended to the written word; the sub-committees that took charge of the business of the Convocation included a sub-committee through which written statements were submitted to the meeting. Indicative of the League's thoroughly modern sense of managing public opinion, there was even a sub-committee to communicate with the press, and reporters were allocated a special front bench and writing desk.⁵²

Surprisingly, these rigorous controls were not enough to guarantee order. The statement by one recent historian that good generalship ensured that the Convocation 'from the first ran smoothly along the intended lines' shows how easy it is to fall victim to the League's official summary which reassuringly concluded that a 'dignified and high moral bearing characterised the proceedings throughout'.⁵³ *The Times*, the *New Moral World*, the *Northern Star* and other newspapers - hostile sources to be sure - reported scenes of bigotry and disorder that revealed a less-edifying vision of the League and the Dissenters who formed the core of its religious constituency. Showing how far they were from following the injunction in their letters of invitation that they should drop sectarian considerations and concentrate on the plight of the poor, the ministers

spent part of the first day wrangling over the vexed issues of incorporating public prayers in the sessions and deciding who should conduct them. Quickly the old prejudices appeared. The Revd Dr Halley (Independent) bluntly refused to join in prayer with Unitarian ministers and asked, presumably with tongue in cheek, why the Catholic priests who were present should participate in Protestant prayers unless in fairness they were allowed to conduct a high mass, a prospect that provoked cries of 'Horrible, horrible, cheers, and confusion', followed by the shouting down of a Catholic priest who attempted to speak. The matter was only resolved when the ministers agreed that they would not pray together, a decision that understandably provoked derisory comments on the quality of their Christianity.⁵⁴

A second dispute was less easily settled. The organizers had invited all the ministers of religion in the United Kingdom to attend the Convocation. This avoided an obvious question: what were the criteria for deciding who was a minister of religion? The question arose when Arthur O'Neill and other preachers of the Christian Chartist Church, together with three 'Rational Religionists', claimed the right to attend. The Christian Chartists were sincere Christians - they accepted orthodox beliefs such as the fall of man, Christ's atonement, the light of the Gospel and the 'full efficiency of Christianity' as the standard of all human pursuits⁵⁵ - but they were out of step with the majority of the ministers at the Convocation because of their advocacy of the People's Charter, and they would have challenged the priority that the organizers gave to the repeal of the Corn Laws. When O'Neill and other Christian Chartists had been asked to support the Leeds Household Suffragists a few months earlier they had held fast to 'that only safe conductor of the lightening storm "The People's Charter"',⁵⁶ Although some of the Rational Religionists had legal status as religious ministers, they were even less acceptable to the organizing committee; as Owenite Socialists they denied most of the basic tenets of orthodox Christianity as well as the structures of early-Victorian capitalism and society. Samuel Smiles, who had seen them in action, believed that their 'principal business was to preach against religion, and to cut up the parsons'.⁵⁷ Not surprisingly, the Christian Chartists and the Rational Religionists were excluded from the Convocation, first by a committee that had been appointed to issue tickets of admission, and then by a select committee that deliberated behind closed doors. One of the Rational Religionists indignantly claimed that as a compromise he was offered a ticket if he would agree in writing neither to oppose the proceedings nor to participate actively in them. Led by Lloyd Jones, who described himself as the minister of a legally licensed congregation, the Rational Religionists attempted to force an entry but were prevented from doing so by the police. Next day, to the obvious embarrassment of the magistrate, Jones and Massie appeared in court where they made accusations and counter-accusations. After a second unsuccessful attempt to obtain entry the Rational Religionists had to fall back on a meeting of protest in the Hall of

Science which passed resolutions against the pretensions of the Convocation's organizers.⁵⁸

The Convocation survived the protests of the Rational Religionists, and it entered the annals of the League as one of its greatest triumphs. Its usefulness long outlasted its sessions. Four thousand copies of the official report were sold in October at a cost of two shillings, and one was sent to the Queen.⁵⁹ More importantly, at a stroke the League acquired a national network of supporters that it could use to influence local communities in many parts of the country. Cobden told Sturge that he never travelled without a copy of the list of ministers who supported the Convocation, 'for then I am never at a loss in any town as to whom to write, or on whom to call, upon anti corn law matters'.⁶⁰ Massie, McKerrow and Fletcher, the Manchester secretaries, seem to have envisaged the development of the Convocation as an affiliated movement under their direction, but when Wilson set up a standing committee he carefully ensured that the 'League would really hold the power in its own hands, and the services of these three Gents be made practically available'.⁶¹ This standing committee kept up the momentum for several months. Its public announcements expected much from those who had attended the Convocation: ministers were to get their congregations to petition the House of Commons, and they were to persuade the women who attended their ministry to memorialize the Queen. If possible they were to send in the names of laymen who were willing to participate in the general activities of the League. Above all, they were to keep the Council informed of what they were doing in their localities so that the League could make sure that their example had a 'valuable effect' on others.⁶² The outcome was highly satisfactory with enough ministers reporting back to their people after the Convocation to enable the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* to publish a whole page of reports from congregational meetings,⁶³ and when a day of humiliation was proclaimed for 6 September, there were reports of special services in some chapels.⁶⁴ The League estimated that out of the three to four hundred letters received during one week in November 1842 fifty were from ministers.⁶⁵

Although the Rational Religionists were right to rebuke the Convocation for overstating its representative character, the number of ministers attending the Convocation provided an under-estimation of the League's attractiveness to the religious public; it did not measure support from the laity. The women repealers are discussed elsewhere, and reference has been made to Anglican laymen, but more can be said. Wesleyans defied their leaders in Huddersfield where they set up their own ACLA; in Leicester 6000 of them signed a petition in favour of repeal; and at the Walsall by-election the League claimed that ninety-two of them refused to follow official exhortations that they should support John Gladstone against J.B. Smith.⁶⁶ Catholics who sympathized with the League found themselves in a similar situation to the Wesleyans. Priests were forbidden to indulge in any political activities,⁶⁷ and, shrewdly surmising that those who attended the Convocation were over-stepping the instructions of their

superiors, *The Times* pointedly wondered if any action would be taken against them.⁶⁸ It was. The Revd Daniel Hearne was reprimanded, and, according to his own testimony, he had to endure a campaign of 'teasing and annoyance which would have broken the heart of almost any other priest', until eventually his bishop decided to remove him 'for the good of the religion and the salvation of souls'.⁶⁹ Laymen enjoyed more freedom. For example, A.W. Paulton, the League's first lecturer, was a Catholic, as was Daniel O'Connell who brought with him the prospect, if not the reality, of a massive infusion of Catholic support from Ireland for the repeal of the Corn Laws.

The best example of a denomination whose support for the League was not measured by membership of the Convocation was the Society of Friends. Quakers used the term 'minister' for men and women whose preaching had been found acceptable to their Monthly Meeting, but they did not recognize a clergy in the usual sense,⁷⁰ and no Quakers were listed as members of the Convocation. They were to be found hard at work in every other sphere of the League's activities, however, including the ACLA Council where they amounted to nearly 15 per cent of the membership (see Chapter 10). Their zeal for public life would have surprised their eighteenth-century forebears for whom the Society of Friends had been a small, quietist, rule-bound denomination that was intent on cultivating its 'peculiarities' in such matters as plain clothing, plain speech, the refusal to support wars and the rejection of a 'hireling priesthood'.⁷¹ The early nineteenth century had been a period of transition in Quaker attitudes to public life, when many Friends participated in interdenominational associations such as the anti-slavery and Bible societies, bringing back with them new influences from the evangelical revival of that era. These evangelical Quakers believed that they had a responsibility to permeate the nation and the world with their vital Christianity. The new influences were to be found most notably in the writings of J.J. Gurney, a banker turned theologian, for whom 'consistent Quakerism on an evangelical foundation' was the 'perfection of religion'.⁷² When Gurney declared for the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1843, the League hailed his adherence as a triumph.⁷³ The new influences could also be seen in the writings of Jonathan Dymond, a Quaker writer who was well respected in his own day, not least by Richard Cobden whose private letters contain several favourable references. Dymond appears in a recent history of nineteenth-century Quakerism as an exponent of the peace movement,⁷⁴ but his concerns were much wider. When the *Anti-Monopolist or Free Trade Circular* advised its readers to do some further study on a whole host of 'Questions For The Times', it directed them to Dymond's 'Essays on the Private and Political Rights and Obligations of Mankind'. The 'Questions' were concerned with slavery, drink, church establishments, capital punishments, standing armies and the Corn Laws.⁷⁵

The extent of Quaker involvement in the League must not be exaggerated; there was never any prospect that the Society of Friends in

its institutional capacity would declare for repeal. The situation was similar in many ways to what was happening in the evangelical Dissenting churches where a new generation was challenging the position of traditional leaders who held to the old ways. The 'weighty Friends', as they were called,⁷⁶ exercised a disproportionate influence for conservatism in the Yearly Meeting, the highest body in the Quaker polity, where they used their position to reiterate the traditional advice against over-involvement in worldly affairs. To support the radical reform movements of the day was to take a position in opposition to them. Matters came to a climax in 1843, when, in an unmistakable reference to the political activities of John Bright and Joseph Sturge, the Yearly Meeting Epistle urged Friends to remain 'quiet in the land' and beware of 'objects of a popular nature'.⁷⁷ Refusing to be silenced, Bright, Sturge and other Quakers who shared their opinions formed a loose grouping known as the 'liberal party in the Yearly Meeting' and succeeded over the years in bringing a reforming spirit to the Society.⁷⁸

Quakers were to be found at work throughout the League's structure and calendar of events - in the Council, on the committees of ACLAs in various parts of the country, as speakers at League meetings and as financial contributors. John Bright, the best known, was not only one of the League's greatest orators but also a frequent writer for the *Circular* and a tireless member of the deputations that travelled throughout the nation.⁷⁹ Joseph Sturge, who eventually seceded from the League to form the National Complete Suffrage Union, was another important supporter in the early days. The firm of Joseph and Charles Sturge was one of the largest grain importers in Britain, and Sturge had condemned the Corn Laws long before the formation of the League. As early as January 1831 *Sturge's Corn Circular*, the trade journal produced by his company, was arguing that the Corn Laws must be replaced by a new system. Sturge brought to the repeal movement an insider's knowledge of the working of the grain trade. At a time when the League was often struggling to pay its way he made substantial financial contributions, and he was largely responsible for launching the movement in the Midlands in 1839 by arranging A.W. Paulton's first lecture tour there. He also contributed his reputation as an anti-slavery leader.⁸⁰ In a telling indication of how much store he set by Sturge's influence Cobden expressed the hope that he would go to Walsall during the 1841 by-election, even if only for an hour, so that his name could be used to strengthen the League's campaign: 'He would have influence with Quakers, philanthropists, teetotallers and the like. There is moral force in his very name.'⁸¹ Henry Ashworth, an extensive cotton manufacturer, was another Quaker on whom Cobden relied heavily. His biographer estimates that throughout the campaign for repeal, Ashworth spent at least a quarter of his time on behalf of the League, and that his business company donated £2000 to the campaign. He won Liverpool merchants over to repeal, and at Cobden's urging he used his influence on London Quakers who were wealthy traders and financiers.⁸² 'They have a good deal of influence over the City moneyed interest which has the ear of

the government', Cobden wrote to him in 1842. 'Persecute ... the Lombard Street People', he wrote later.⁸³ The Quakers were a small and declining denomination, but they were closely linked through intermarriage and business as well as religious belief, and the League leaders found this national network invaluable in their quest for an outreach beyond Manchester. In their own areas the wealth and energy of such men as Edward Smith of Sheffield and George Thomas of Bristol was indispensable.⁸⁴ Possibly the most unusual demonstration of support by a wealthy Quaker came from Abraham Darby, the famous Coalbrookdale ironmaster; not content with chairing a free trade festival in January 1844, six months later he launched an iron barque called the *Richard Cobden*.⁸⁵

Quakers were famous, not only for their wealth but also for their stubbornness⁸⁶ - they had to be stubborn to retain their 'peculiarities'. This characteristic was evident in the labours of a Quaker whose activities were included in a set of 'Hints As to A History of the League' that the *Manchester Times* published in June 1846.⁸⁷ The writer did not name this 'Nadgett of benevolence' who travelled round large areas of the country wearing a 'broad brimmed hat, bag and long deep-pocketed coat', but it is probable that he was Joseph Christy, whom Cobden called an old Quaker of Stockport.⁸⁸ In a series of remarkable journeys between 1841 and 1843 Christy travelled through whole districts of rural and small-town England, going from door to door conversing with people about the Corn Laws, collecting signatures for petitions and delivering League tracts, almanacs and other publications. One of his duties was to visit places where Anti-Corn Law lectures were to be given, so that, as he disarmingly put it, the lecturers would receive an 'affectionate reception'. His letters present fleeting but fascinating references to the small towns of England as seen through the eyes of a man who combined a traditional Quakerly opposition to a 'hireling' church establishment with a contemporary zeal for free trade and a wish to lighten the burdens of the poor. Exeter, as he saw it, was 'a City that swarms with priests' who were contentedly living in the midst of a desperately poor population; Gloucester presented a similar picture; and in Wells the miserable cottages of the poor contrasted with the splendours of the cathedral.

Nothing could deter Christy from what he saw as his duty to work for a better world than the one these priests were offering - not the rigours of the winter of 1841-42, not his arrest in Newark for distributing seditious papers, and not even the good pelting that he received from 'the enlightened rabble' in Much Wenlock. When a constable ordered him to burn his literature, he refused and insisted on his right to distribute 'papers that were not contrary to Christianity or good government'. He plodded on, even making a very brave detour to distribute literature in every house of a village where a hostile protectionist MP lived. Despite his pelting and his arrest, for the most part he was well received by people for whom this form of publicity was obviously very new. In Oxford the almanacs were 'much prized'; in Petersfield market place the League publications were 'a great

novelty'; at Hemel Hempstead and Two Waters the League's objects were well endorsed in a district where there were many impoverished straw plaiters; and in East Grinstead people gathered in groups to discuss the literature he had distributed. Nearly everywhere he went he met hardly a coarse word but on the contrary 'many benedictions, and kind messages to the League'. His reports show the importance that religious Dissent played in attracting people to the League in small towns and rural areas where landed wealth and the authority of the established church were ranged against repeal. At Kidlington and Midhurst Baptist ministers helped him with his deliveries; at Christchurch the Dissenters were powerful and sympathetic enough to ensure that in any future Parliamentary election 'a Free-trade candidate wd be likely to prevail with moderate exertion'; and in Newark the Dissenters were thriving so well that the Parliamentary representation was likely to alter next time.⁸⁹ With good reason Cobden was delighted with his services: 'our good friend Christy's peregrinations' were showing the way, he told Wilson, and the League should concentrate its lecturing on the rural districts.⁹⁰

Like the Quakers, the Unitarians were much more supportive of the League than the evidence of their attendance at the Convocation would suggest: twenty-six Unitarians and one Unitarian Baptist.⁹¹ Unitarians were associated with many of the advanced liberal causes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and, as a recent historian of their Manchester congregations points out, they provided 'a startling number of MPs as well as important figures in the town council, in the Anti-Corn Law League and numerous other political campaigns and cultural agencies'.⁹² Nonetheless, there were divisions in their ranks. The line between Whigs and radicals that ran through all the denominations of Old Dissent can also be seen in the attitude of Manchester Unitarians to the League. Thus, although they provided fifteen members of the ACLA Council, a larger proportion (over 30 per cent of those whose religious affiliation is known) than any other denomination (see Chapter 10), there were strong currents of Whiggish opinion amongst them. As Cobden and other League leaders frequently lamented, one sign of this was the editorial policy of John Edward Taylor, the Unitarian editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, who was a member of the ACLA Council, but wrote articles that maintained a critical distance from the League and were sometimes openly antagonistic to League policies. Thus, the *Guardian* accepted a moderate fixed duty on corn as a preliminary step to free trade, and with an eye to the future Parliamentary representation of Manchester, it attacked the League for driving the Whig candidate out of the Walsall by-election.⁹³ Cobden saw it as 'the bitter and malignant foe to our out-and-out agitation in Manchester'.⁹⁴ Even when the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, the *Guardian* opposed the idea of holding a public holiday in Manchester.⁹⁵

Leeds was another example of a northern town where Unitarians exasperated Cobden, although for different reasons. Some important members of the Mill Hill Unitarian chapel were repealers including James

Garth Marshall, one of the wealthiest millowners in Britain,⁹⁶ and Samuel Smiles, the editor of the *Leeds Times*. In later life Smiles boasted of his close links with Cobden,⁹⁷ but his memory was selective, and his circle of Unitarians participated only spasmodically on behalf of the League; they easily turned aside to support movements in favour of suffrage reform. Their best-known venture was a great convention that they held in Marshall's Holbeck Mill in 1841 as part of their household suffrage campaign. Although Cobden deplored the diversion of their energies and resources,⁹⁸ unrepentantly Smiles went on to support the National Complete Suffrage Union, a further distraction from repeal.⁹⁹

Nonetheless in several individual cases Unitarians did make a significant contribution to the League. J.B. Smith, the most important of them, was an obsessive repealer, who, starting in 1825, denounced the Corn Laws so vehemently over the years that he earned the title 'Corn Law Smith'. *The Wealth of Nations* had always been one of his favourite books, he recorded in his *Reminiscences*: 'I used when a boy to pore over this book with more pleasure than any other. I was captivated with its simplicity, sound sense and convincing arguments.'¹⁰⁰ Smith stands out in the history of the League, not only because he was the President of the Manchester ACLA with an influence that rivalled Cobden's during the early years (playing, so it was said, his Clarkson to Cobden's Wilberforce),¹⁰¹ but because he launched the League's first lecturing campaign, wrote many of the early articles for the *Circular* and stood as the candidate in the League's first Parliamentary contest, the Walsall by-election in January 1841.

Smith's participation in this by-election reveals the dangerous currents of religious opinion through which the League always had to navigate, for his opinions were well enough known to make the Walsall by-election almost as much of a contest over religion as over economics and politics. As he admitted in a private letter, to be associated with 'the cloven foot' of Unitarianism was a deep disadvantage for anyone who appealed for public support: 'Such is the ignorance and prejudice of people that the fact of a man being a Socinian is enough to destroy the effect of every thing he says on any other subject.'¹⁰² John Gladstone, who contested Walsall for the Tories with the support of his famous brother, William Ewart Gladstone, took advantage of the situation,¹⁰³ supported by the Church of England clergy and the Wesleyan Methodist *Watchman* which published a letter calling on those of its readers who were voters in Walsall to support Gladstone, the Christian candidate. The League's strategy was to fight fire with fire; it declared that it was contesting the by-election on the religious and moral case for repeal. Taking the fight to Gladstone, on nomination day Smith stood in the snow quoting scripture against his opponents, and the first article in his election news-sheet, the *Walsall Letter-Bag*, invited the electors to join the battle against 'the whippers of negro women and the starvers of white slaves'.¹⁰⁴ The reference was to the previous generation of the Gladstone family which had owned plantations in the Caribbean and received compensation from the Government for the loss of its slaves when

the 1833 Emancipation Act was passed. Smith and his supporters darkly hinted that some of this tainted money was being used to finance the Tory campaign in Walsall.¹⁰⁵ More boldly still, Cobden called on William Ewart Gladstone 'as a statesman whose name has been associated with the cause of religion' to oppose him in a public debate on the League's proposition that the Corn Laws should be condemned on Christian principles, an invitation that Gladstone spurned on the traditional patrician grounds that Cobden was not known to him and that the League was a band of 'strangers' who had gate-crashed the election to pursue their 'unconstitutional' agitation.¹⁰⁶ Smith lost the election, but this was his moment of glory in the repeal campaign. Later that year he travelled in Europe, partly, so he said, because of his marriage, and partly because of ill health, but also, though he did not say this, because of his involvement in the collapse of the Bank of Manchester of which he had been the Managing Director from 1836 until 1841. His brother, who defended him against the charge of dishonesty but agreed that he had been neglectful of his duties, argued in mitigation that he had allowed his mind to become 'very much occupied by subjects of deep interest to this community', a reference to Smith's zeal for the League that understandably failed to impress some of the shareholders including J.C. Dyer, a fellow member of the Council of the Manchester ACLA, who claimed to have lost nearly £40,000.¹⁰⁷

The belief that Unitarianism had a 'cloven foot' was one that received some support even within the ranks of the League. Dr Halley's refusal to pray with Unitarian ministers at the Convocation was one sign of this; more ominous still was the presence on the ACLA Council of George Hadfield. A zealous Independent, Hadfield was the protagonist against the Unitarians during years of litigation that threatened to deprive them of properties and trusts, most notably the Lady Hewley Trust, that they had inherited from the Presbyterians during the previous century. Ironically, it was legislation by Peel's Government that saved the Unitarians in Manchester and elsewhere from Hadfield and his allies.¹⁰⁸ It is remarkable that the League leaders managed to prevent this dispute, and Smith's role in the collapse of the Bank of Manchester, from causing open dissension in the ranks.

Smith returned to participate in the later years of the campaign when the League was at the height of its power and influence, but by that time the name of the repealer who most readily came to mind as a Unitarian was William Johnson Fox. Norman McCord has described Fox as mercenary, pretentious, 'sanctimonious and glib, far surpassing even the sentimentality typical of the time', but this misses too much.¹⁰⁹ Another historian, F.B. Smith, refers to his 'compelling, beautiful voice and great personal authority'.¹¹⁰ Fox's religious status was ambivalent at the time of his association with the League. He had been deprived of his rank as a Unitarian minister in 1834 because of the failure of his marriage, but, though relinquishing the title Reverend, he continued to preach (lecture was the term he preferred) until 1852 at the South Place Chapel in London, where he attracted a congregation that included members of the

liberal intelligentsia who relished his championship of the advanced radical causes of the day.¹¹¹ In 1831 he had bought the *Monthly Repository* from the Unitarians, and for a few years, with the support of a coterie of distinguished writers including John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau and Mary Leman Gillies, he made it one of the liveliest, but never financially rewarding, liberal journals of the day.¹¹²

By the late 1830s Fox was becoming heavily involved in public life as a speaker and journalist, for which he expected, not unreasonably for a man in precarious financial circumstances, to be paid for his labours. Cobden and other League Council members who respected his abilities as a writer had him head-hunted to write 'a blister to the aristocracy and the House of Commons' in the form of a national address which would be ready for publication when, as was expected, Parliament rejected Villiers' repeal motion in 1840.¹¹³ In 1843 he became one of the paid staff of the League as a writer and speaker. He was a valuable acquisition. The fifty-eight 'Letters on the Corn Laws' that he wrote under the pseudonym of 'A Norwich Weaver-Boy' between October 1844 and March 1846 can still be read as models of the polemicist's forensic skill, as in the fourteenth letter which pungently spelled out for Peel the 'helpless and pitiable condition' to which he had condemned himself. The Prime Minister, Fox wrote, was a man who had violated his own convictions and forfeited all prospect of a 'career of useful statesmanship' by defending the Corn Laws on behalf of the landowning class whose Parliamentary representatives distrusted him and were incessantly scheming against him: 'You will rise in the house with the vindictive monopolist in your rear, the whig partisan in your front, and that magnetic telegraph at work between them which ensures co-operation without coalition.'¹¹⁴ But it was as an orator that he excelled most. At Drury Lane and Covent Garden, the theatres that he knew so well as the drama critic of the *Morning Chronicle*, he roused audiences by the emotional power of speeches (the words are Prentice's) 'abounding with neatly-pointed epigram, cutting sarcasm, withering denunciation, and argument condensed and urged with laconic force'. His platform performances were favourably compared with those of his actor friend, W.C. Macready.¹¹⁵

As a member of a small denomination and later as an independent preacher or lecturer Fox was similar to some other well-known members and supporters of the League. They belonged to that most important category of nineteenth-century radicals, the strong-minded individual who had broken from the restraints imposed by membership of the orthodox churches and found a congenial place in a small, often idiosyncratic, religious sect that nurtured reformist attitudes towards an unrighteous world.¹¹⁶ Joseph Brotherton, the MP for Salford and a speaker at many of the League's functions, was a reformer of this type. 'Religion,' he wrote in his *Commonplace Book*, 'is the Science of making man happy',¹¹⁷ and he combined his Parliamentary duties with his responsibilities as a minister in the small sect known as the Cowherdites or Bible Christians (not to be confused with the Methodist denomination of the same name) which had

originated as a secession from the Swedenborgian New Church.¹¹⁸ J.B. Smith saw Brotherton as a man suffering from 'disadvantages of no common character' in public life, not only because of his religious affiliations but because he lived in a cottage and practised vegetarianism as well as teetotalism. Nonetheless Smith did not deny that Brotherton was 'an intelligent man, a thorough reformer and Free Trader and a warm supporter of the abolition of slavery'.¹¹⁹

Isaac Pitman, a member of the Swedenborgian New Church who was making a name for himself in the 1840s as the inventor and promoter of phonetic writing systems, was another example of the reformer who found a congenial home in a small sect. Pitman's headquarters were in Bath, but Manchester was the city where his ideas found most support.¹²⁰ His name appears as a contributor of his own literature to the League bazaars, a form of generosity that also offered opportunities for advertising his products.¹²¹ The case of Dr John Epps was also similar in many ways. Epps's convictions developed over a lifetime's pilgrimage through several of the smaller sects of the early nineteenth century - the followers of William Huntington SS ('Sinner Saved'), the Irvingites, the Plymouth Brethren, the Scotch Baptists, Swedenborgianism, and the Working Man's Church. Best known for his attacks on the orthodox medical theory and practice of the day, Epps delivered lectures for the League and was on close terms with the leaders; George Wilson was a patient.¹²² The contribution of Joseph Livesey to the League was better known. Livesey's strong evangelical Dissenting opinions had led him into the Scotch Baptists, but, unable to endure the constraining forms of a church, even one that had virtually abolished the pastoral office, he had quarrelled with his associates there and withdrawn from formal denominational connections, though retaining a belief in what his biographer called primitive Christianity.¹²³ The voluntary societies of which he became a member, especially those that promoted teetotalism, became something like a surrogate church for him. Livesey was particularly important for the League because of the part played by his periodical, the *Struggle*, in the League's attempt to win working-class support. The *Economist*, a publication that appealed to a more sophisticated readership, admitted the League's indebtedness to him: his wood-cuts were 'rough but expressive', and they had often 'started an idea, or excited a train of reflection'.¹²⁴

Livesey's case throws into prominence one of the most important characteristics of the League. As Cobden explained to Villiers, the new form of agitation that the League embarked on during 1841 was intended to give it access not only to the churches but to their voluntary 'associations'.¹²⁵ The first half of the nineteenth century was 'the age of societies', and, as Sir James Stephen, the originator of the term, noted, the marked tendency of British people to organize themselves in this way was deeply rooted in the evangelical revival.¹²⁶ Many of the League's members had been brought up from childhood to participate in activities such as those of the Bible Society, the Sunday school movement, the mission

societies and the great humanitarian crusades of the age, most notably the anti-slavery movement. Thus, it was shrewd but not surprising for Cobden to point to the benefits the League would obtain if it inserted itself into these closely meshed networks of activists. Men such as Sturge, Ashworth and Livesey brought with them a reputation for Christian philanthropy and opened up the possibility of cooperating with religious-based movements that were tried and tested in the ways of the pressure from without. 'I wish you would tell the Anti Slavery Reporter people to exchange with the Anti-Corn Law Circular - we can help one another', Cobden wrote to Sturge in October 1840.¹²⁷ On another occasion he urged Sturge to see the repeal of the Corn Laws as a means of creating a new trade between Britain and the United States that would challenge the importance of the slave-owning cotton planters. By placing arguments such as these in the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* Cobden offered to ensure that it would 'henceforth be an anti slavery paper'.¹²⁸ The 'white slavery' inflicted on the British people by the Corn Laws became one of the dominant images of League public statements.¹²⁹

The League also sought a close relationship with a number of other reform movements, most notably the British India Society, the peace movement and the teetotal movement. Cheaper food and new commercial opportunities, so the argument went, would strengthen the voluntary societies that were working for moral reform and, by bringing mankind into close association through commerce, would provide a strong barrier against war and colonial oppression. The strong libertarian tendency in the League's rhetoric also predisposed the supporters of these reform movements towards it. The League's enemies were their enemies in the form of the landowning class, the Church of England, the standing army, the imperial establishment and a host of vested interests that were protected by government regardless of the general interest. In the case of Dr Epps and others who were drawn to homeopathy, hydropathy, teetotalism, phrenology and the associated forms of alternative medicine that were called 'Physical Puritanism', their advocacy of repeal was of a piece with their opposition to a medical establishment that resembled the landowning aristocracy in the ruthlessness of its quest for monopoly. Epps's stance earned him the praise of Edward Miall and other Dissenters who saw him as a kindred spirit attacking the Colleges of Medicine with the same fervour as they attacked state churches.¹³⁰ Henry Ashworth would have gone even further and made the League the spearhead of a coalition of religious-based reform movements: he wished to see the peace, anti-slavery, Aborigines Protection and other societies 'embodied in one general organisation of enlightened Philanthropy - having reference to "Free Trade" as an acknowledged means'.¹³¹

A newspaper jocularly called people of this mentality the 'anti-everythingarians',¹³² but this was a cheap jibe that missed their point. These supporters of the League were not random collectors of single issues, and the oppositional element in their cast of mind must not be

exaggerated. They had a positive vision of the future. Running through many of the reform movements taken up by repealers was a strain of the millennial thought that was so strong in this era. They were post-millennialists, believers that Christ's second coming would follow the millennium, which was seen therefore as a development of man's history, the highest point of human progress. For them the millennium was a blessed condition of peace and good government that had to be made by human endeavour - by the churches, by the voluntary societies and by the progressive secular activities of commerce and 'science', a term that they defined very loosely.¹³³ The League had a place in this optimistic vision. Artificial restraints such as the Corn Laws would have to be removed, if, as was often suggested, that favourite text 'many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased' meant that international trade would usher in the millennium of peace.¹³⁴ This was no mere rhetorical flourish; it was a gospel of work that required the post-millennialists to be ever active on behalf of their aspirations. The League drew strength from this mentality during the long drawn-out struggle for victory.

Thus, when Cobden was thinking of the benefits that the League obtained from its supporters' 'organ of veneration', it is likely that he had this network of dedicated long-term workers in mind. They brought with them many practical assets for a campaign that wished to deploy the 'pressure from without'. They endorsed the League's claims from the pulpit; they gave its lecturers the use of chapels and temperance halls; they sent petitions to Parliament in support of repeal; and their periodical press provided important support and news coverage. Thus Quaker periodicals which normally excluded politics from their columns made an exception for the League on the grounds that repeal was a philanthropic question, a stance that was taken by J.J. Gurney who declared that, although he 'cordially hated politics', he was endorsing the League because it was above mere party machinations.¹³⁵ The League's appeals for female support would have been much more difficult, if not impossible, if they had been made outside this context. Religion and philanthropy constituted the one sphere of public activity that respectable women were allowed to enter, and it was crucial that there were denominational leaders who were prepared to give the League the status of a crusade for righteousness.

This carefully cultivated reputation as a religious and moral movement stood the repealers in good stead at several difficult junctures. When, for example, there were suggestions that the League should fall back on less extreme policies such as the Whig proposal of a fixed tariff, spokesmen insisted that 'total and immediate repeal' was 'the only principle which secures the support of Christian Ministers, and the women of England': there could be no question of asking those who entered public life in the name of religion and morality to behave like politicians who compromised high principle for short-term gain.¹³⁶ A similar argument was used to defend the League against charges of seditious behaviour such as those laid by Sir Robert Peel when, after the assassination of his private secretary in

1843, he accused Cobden of preaching doctrines that justified such crimes. On that occasion the League summoned its supporters to an extraordinary general meeting and used their respectability to turn the attack back on the Government. Peel's accusation, Wilson claimed, was a base attack, not only on Cobden, but on all who were associated with him. Then, working his way through a carefully constructed list of supporters, he brought his audience to its feet in a deafening outbreak of cheers and waving of hats by pointing to the groups whose good name Peel had besmirched: the ladies, the working men, the gentlemen who appeared on League platforms, the men of commerce and industry throughout the nation, the MPs, the mayors, the other public dignitaries and the two thousand ministers of religion who at one time or another had endorsed repeal. As he built up to his climax the audience presented what the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* described as 'a most extraordinary scene of excitement'.¹³⁷ The League was never more impressive than when it presented itself as a moral engine.

On balance there is no doubt that Cobden was correct when he told Combe about the importance of the League's religious affiliations, but perhaps Combe should have the last word. There was a strong and understandable element of alarm in his surprise at finding evidence of Cobden's religiosity; having endured hostility and discrimination from clergymen because of his own beliefs, Combe believed that the spirit of contemporary religion was one of narrowness and bigotry that blocked the way to progress.¹³⁸ It was certainly true that Cobden's rose-tinted picture overlooked the times when an *odium theologicum* had engulfed the campaign against the Corn Laws. For example, in a pamphlet that was often used by opponents of repeal, John Almack, a Yorkshire 'gentleman' who campaigned in support of the Agricultural Protection Society, saw the League's association with Dissenting ministers as one of its most heinous faults; they were 'the scum of all creeds, and the sweepings of all sects'.¹³⁹ The *Manchester Courier* likewise saw the Convocation of ministers as a prime specimen from 'an age of humbug'. It was 'a crowd of religious (how! religious!) quacks and adventurers ... the milk of human kindness springing out of the bitterness of dissent'.¹⁴⁰

Almack and the *Courier* spoke for the establishment and could be rebutted in much the same way as League spokesmen treated the Gladstone brothers during the Walsall by-election; there was more to be feared from the strong element of sectarian bitterness that sometimes threatened to turn repealers against each other. The dispute over public prayers at the Convocation was one such occasion. In 1845 the public outcry against the Peel Government's decision to increase the state grant to the Catholic seminary at Maynooth was another. Once again the Revd Massie showed his colours, on this occasion by insisting that repealers who were MPs should vote against the grant on the grounds that government subsidies to churches rested on the same principle as the tariffs that shored up the landowners.¹⁴¹ Subsequently what was meant to be a relaxed holiday in Europe did

nothing to calm him down: a book reviewer in the *League* regretted that Massie's travel memoir, *A Summer Ramble in Germany, Belgium and Switzerland*, contained 'tirades against the Church of Rome'.¹⁴² A spirit of bitterness also seeped into the League's relationship with the anti-slavery movement, the most important of the religious 'associations' whose support Cobden coveted. Earlier in the century anti-slavery spokesmen had often made much of the argument that free labour was more efficient than slavery, and that the favourable tariffs enjoyed by colonial sugar producers were devices to protect the vested interests of the slave owners.¹⁴³ This argument was dropped by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society which was set up by Joseph Sturge in 1839. The free-labour sugar of Jamaica and other British Caribbean colonies, it now transpired, could not compete on the free market with the slave plantations of Brazil, and as a consequence the Society set out to persuade public opinion and government policy-makers that protective tariffs should be retained to exclude slave-produced sugar, a policy that Cobden, Bright and other members of the Anti-Corn Law League determinedly opposed as an imperial version of the Corn Laws.¹⁴⁴ There were few less-edifying moments in the history of the League and the anti-slavery movement than those when Cobden and some of his supporters presented themselves as delegates at the 1843 General Anti-Slavery Convention and confronted Sturge in an angry debate over this form of imperial protection.¹⁴⁵ When strong-minded individuals took a stance on high principle in the Victorian world of reform, the organ of veneration was often less evident than another organ to which the phrenologists drew attention - the organ of combativeness.

Notes

1. Richard Cobden to Charles Villiers, 6 June 1841, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43662.
2. Richard Cobden to James Simpson, 4 July 1846, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43660. There is another version of Combe's statement in John Morley *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1876), vol. 1, p. 201.
3. In his *Constitution of Man* (1828, repr. New York, 1835), p. 9, Combe described the faculty of veneration as a 'Tendency to worship, adore, venerate, or respect whatever is great and good'.
4. Richard Cobden to George Combe, 1 August 1846, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43660.
5. The membership card of John Bailey, Manchester, WSRO, Cobden Papers, C-U 1155.
6. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 7 April 1842.
7. *League*, 22 February 1845.
8. J.M. McKerrow, *Memoir of William McKerrow, D.D., Manchester* (London, 1881), pp. 63, 91.
9. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 12 November 1839. But see H. Sefton's reference to engaging an Association Methodist chapel in Stockton to deliver a repeal address, Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book, MPL, 16 February 1839.

10. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 9 April 1840, 25 February 1841, 21 April 1841; *Manchester Guardian*, 20 February 1841.
11. N. Edsall, *Richard Cobden, Independent Radical* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), p. 315. The claim by R.G. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent: The Religious Aspects of Liberal and Humanitarian Reform Movements from 1815 to 1848* (London, 1959), p. 131 that Cobden was 'Evangelical' in his sympathies is based on his misreading of Morley's *Life of Richard Cobden*.
12. Morley, *Life of Cobden*, vol. 1, p. 201
13. R. Brent, *Liberal Anglican Politics: Whiggery, Religion and Reform, 1830-1841* (Oxford, 1987), analyses their role in Whig politics.
14. Richard Cobden to George Combe, 1 August 1846, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43660.
15. *League*, 25 January 1845.
16. Cobden suggested to Bright that the contrast between the Nonconformist clergy and the Anglican parsons who had a vested interest in high bread prices would make a good article for the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, Richard Cobden to John Bright, 12 May 1842, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43649. The *Manchester Times*, 2 January 1841, denounced the Anglican clergy as 'zealous bread-taxers'.
17. *National Temperance Chronicle*, March 1853. His ideas were set out in pamphlets too numerous to list here.
18. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 June 1841, 17 June 1846; T. Swindells, *Manchester Streets And Manchester Men* (Manchester, 1908), pp. 175-80; G.P. Connolly, 'Little Brother Be At Peace: The Priest as Holy Man in the Nineteenth-Century Ghetto' in W.J. Sheils, *The Church And Healing* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 191-206.
19. *Manchester Times*, 24 April 1841.
20. *Eclectic Review*, July-December 1844.
21. For the rise of Voluntarism see G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832-1868* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 99-111.
22. J. Waddington, *Congregational History: Continuation to 1850* (London, 1878), pp. 546-51.
23. R.W. Dale, *A History of English Congregationalism* (London, 1907), pp. 633-9; H.S. Skeats and C.S. Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England 1688-1891* (London, 1891), p. 484; *Reformer*, 28 May 1835; *Voluntary Church Magazine*, June 1834.
24. Machin, *Politics and the Churches*, p. 416, referring to B.J. Mason, 'The Rise of Combative Dissent, 1832-59', Southampton University, M.A., 1958.
25. For the 'battering ram of public opinion' see A. Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 1987), chap. 7.
26. H.S. Skeats, *A History of the Free Churches of England* (London, 1868), pp. 592-3.
27. Archibald Prentice dedicated his *History of the Anti-Corn Law League* to John Childs, one of the best known of these 'martyrs'.
28. Joseph Belcher to George Wilson, 4 March 1843, MPL, Wilson Papers, 20/6.
29. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 9 May 1843.
30. *Ibid.* 21 April 1841.
31. *Ibid.* 26 May 1841.
32. Richard Cobden to Charles Villiers, July 1841, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43662.

33. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 August 1841.
34. *Ibid.* 21 August 1841.
35. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 August 1841.
36. I. Sellers, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity* (London, 1997), p. 6.
37. *Manchester Times*, 7 August 1841.
38. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 August 1841.
39. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 August 1841. Statistics of those who supported the conference were sometimes swollen by adding the number of those who were unable to attend but had expressed their support.
40. *Ibid.* 12 August 1841.
41. *Report of the Conference of Ministers of All Denominations on the Corn Laws, Held in Manchester, August 17, 18, And 20, 1841. With Digest of the Documents Contributed During the Conference* (Manchester, 1841), p. iii; A. Fonteyrand, 'La Ligue Anglaise (1)', *Revue Britannique*, January 1846.
42. *Manchester Guardian*, 18 August 1841.
43. *Ibid.* 21 August 1841.
44. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 9 September 1841.
45. *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1841.
46. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 15 July 1841, Waddington, *Congregational History*, p. 563.
47. *The Times*, 21 August 1841; *New Moral World*, 4 September 1841.
48. H. Solly, *These Eighty Years, or, The Story of an Unfinished Life* (London, 1893), vol. 1, pp. 370-2.
49. *Northern Star*, 28 August 1841.
50. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 August 1841.
51. *Manchester Times*, 21 August 1841.
52. *Manchester Guardian*, 21 August 1841.
53. N. Longmate, *The Breadstealers: The Fight against the Corn Laws* (London, 1984), p. 124; *Report of the Conference of Ministers*, p. iv.
54. *The Times*, 19, 23 August 1841.
55. 'Report Of The Birmingham Christian Chartist Church For 1841', *National Association Gazette*, 12 February 1842.
56. *Leeds Times*, 20 March 1841.
57. T. Mackay (ed.), *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles, L.L.D.* (London, 1905), p. 107; B. Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1903), pp. 202, 210-11.
58. This description of the exclusion of the Christian Chartists and the Rational Religionists is based on *New Moral World*, 28 August, 4 September 1841; *Northern Star*, 21 August 1841.
59. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 7 October, 4 November 1841.
60. Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge, 11 December 1841, BL, Sturge Papers, Add. MSS 50131.
61. George Wilson to Richard Cobden, 24 September 1841, WSRO, Cobden Papers 25.
62. *Circular from the Standing Committee to Ministers of Religion, Manchester, 24 November, 1841*, WSRO, Cobden Papers, C-U 1025; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 2 December 1841.
63. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 9 September 1841.
64. *Ibid.*, 9 September 1841.
65. *Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1842.

66. M.R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, (Oxford, 1995), vol. 2, p. 527; *Walsall Letter-Bag*, 29 January 1841.
67. Connolly, 'The Priest as Holy Man in the Ghetto', p. 202.
68. *The Times*, 23 August 1841.
69. *Manchester Guardian*, 17 June 1846; *Manchester Examiner*, 27 June, 4 July, 1 August, 31 October 1846. Connolly, 'The priest as holy man in the ghetto', p. 193, describes Hearne's clash with his bishop as 'the ecclesiastical bout of the decade'.
70. E. Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (London, 1970), pp. 94-9.
71. See, for example, *The Queries* [administered to its Members by the Society of Friends] as settled by the Yearly Meeting, 1791 (n.p., n.d.).
72. B. Seebohm (ed.), *Memoirs of William Forster* (London, 1865), vol. 2, p. 80; *Christian Advocate*, 16 April 1832.
73. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 11 April 1843.
74. Isichei, *Quakers*, p. 219.
75. *The Anti-Monopolist, or, Free Trade Circular*, June 1843.
76. W.R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England 1790-1850* (London, 1972), p. 69; O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London, 1966), pt 1, pp. 428-9.
77. '1843 Yearly Meeting Epistle' in *Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends* (London, 1858), vol. 2, p. 314.
78. M. Taylor, *Memorials of Samuel Bowley* (Gloucester, 1884), pp. 35-6; G.E. Bryant (ed.), *A Quaker Journal Being the Diary and Reminiscences of William Lucas of Hitchin (1804-1861), A Member of the Society of Friends* (London, 1934), pp. 517, 537.
79. See, for example, K. Robbins, *John Bright* (London, 1979), pp. 31-62.
80. Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party*, pp. 94-5.
81. Richard Cobden to J.B. Smith, 1 January 1841, MPL, J.B. Smith Papers.
82. R. Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise: The Rise and Fall of a Family Firm 1818-1880* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 202, 205.
83. Richard Cobden to Henry Ashworth, 12 April, 3 August 1842, WSRO, Cobden Papers 30.
84. Isichei, *Quakers*, p. 246
85. *League*, 27 January, 27 July 1844.
86. T. Clarkson, *A Portraiture of the Christian Profession and Practice of the Society of Friends* (Glasgow, 1869), p. 283.
87. *Manchester Times*, 5 June 1846.
88. Richard Cobden to Charles Villiers, 15 January 1842, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43667.
89. The above description of Christy's activities is based on Joseph Christy to J.B. Smith, MPL, Smith Papers, 3 January 1844; Richard Cobden to Charles Villiers, 15 January 1842, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. Mss. 43667; Joseph Christy to Richard Cobden, 2 April 1842, WSRO, Cobden Papers 1; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 21 April 1841.
90. Richard Cobden to George Wilson, August 1842, MPL, Wilson Papers, M20/5.
91. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 August 1841.
92. J. Seed, 'Unitarianism, political economy and the antinomies of liberal culture in Manchester, 1830-50', *Social History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1982, p. 6.
93. *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January 1840; 16 January 1841. See also *League*, 27 December 1845.

94. Smiles, *Autobiography*, p. 112.
95. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1846.
96. Marshall joined the League Council and was shown in the collective portrait that J.R. Herbert RA painted to commemorate its moment of triumph in 1846.
97. See, for example, his boast of being in 'constant communication' with Cobden at this time, quoted by H. Ausubel, *In Hard Times* (New York, 1960), p. 212.
98. Smiles, *Autobiography*, pp. 111-12.
99. A. Tyrrell, 'Class Consciousness in Early Victorian Britain: Samuel Smiles, Leeds Politics, and the Self-Help Creed', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, May 1970, pp. 102-14.
100. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, Anti-Corn Law League Papers, vol. 2; MPL, J.B. Smith papers, *Reminiscences*, typescript, August 1913.
101. James Chapman to J.B. Smith, January 1848, MPL, Smith Papers, *Anti-Corn Law League Papers*, vol. 2.
102. J.B. Smith to Sidney Smith, 3 July 1839, MPL, Smith Papers, *Anti-Corn Law League Papers*, vol. 3. According to J.C. Buckmaster, *A Village Politician: The Life-Story of John Buckley* (1897, repr. Horsham, 1982), p. 192, Sidney Smith was a Unitarian.
103. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 28 January 1841.
104. *Ibid.* 11 February 1841; *Walsall Letter-Bag*, 9 January 1841.
105. John Shuttleworth to J.B. Smith, 11 January 1841; MPL, Smith Papers, Blackburn, Dundee and Walsall Elections. S.G. Checkland, *The Gladstones: A Family Biography 1764-1851* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 320-1 estimates that the compensation money amounted to £93,526 for 2,039 slaves.
106. *Walsall Letter-Bag*, 28 January 1841.
107. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 October 1842.
108. *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 8, p. 876; Seed, 'Liberal culture in Manchester, 1830-50', p. 10.
109. N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838-46* (London, 1958), pp. 184-5.
110. F.B. Smith, *Radical Artisan: William James Linton, 1812-97* (Manchester, 1973), p. 11.
111. R. Garnett, *The Life Of W.J. Fox* (London, 1910), chaps, V, VII.
112. F.E. Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838* (New York, 1972), chap. 6; K. Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (London, 1995), chap. 2.
113. Garnett, *Life of Fox*, pp. 258-9.
114. Prentice, *History*, vol. 2, p. 265.
115. *Ibid.* p. 59.
116. This aspect of radicalism is discussed by P.A. Pickering and A. Tyrrell, "'In the Thickest of the Fight": The Reverend James Scholefield (1790-1855) and the Bible Christians of Manchester and Salford', *Albion*, vol. 26, no. 3, autumn 1994, pp.461-6.
117. MPL, J. Brotherton, MS. *Commonplace Book*, 1809.
118. For the Cowherdites see Pickering and Tyrrell, "'In the Thickest of the Fight"
119. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, *Reminiscences*.

120. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1844.
121. *League*, 26 April 1845.
122. J. Epps (ed.) *Diary of the Late John Epps, M.D. Edin.* (London, n.d.), pp. 44, 120, 201, 206, 209, 214-15, 221, 244, 332.
123. J. Pearce, *The Life and Teachings of Joseph Livesey* (London, 1885), pp. xi-xxv, liv; James Bennett, *The History of Dissenters, during the Last Thirty Years, (from 1808 To 1838)* (London, 1839), pp. 2-3, refers to the 'endless discussion and minute division' of the Scotch Baptists.
124. *Economist*, 18 November 1843.
125. Richard Cobden to Charles Villiers, July 1841, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43662.
126. I. Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London, 1986), p. 135.
127. Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge, 31 October 1840, BL, Correspondence of Joseph Sturge, Add. MSS 50131.
128. Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge 20 February 1841, BL, Correspondence of Joseph Sturge, Add. MSS 50131.
129. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 25 March 1841.
130. Epps, *Diary*, p. 474.
131. Henry Ashworth to Richard Cobden, 14 April 1842, BL, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43653.
132. H.M. Wigham, *A Christian Philanthropist of Dublin: A Memoir of Richard Allen* (London, 1886), pp. 13-14.
133. The variants of millennialism in this era are described by W.H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* (Auckland, 1978), and J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London, 1979).
134. A. Tyrrell, 'Making the Millennium: The Mid-Nineteenth Century Peace Movement', *Historical Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1978, pp. 75-95.
135. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 11 April 1843.
136. Richard Cobden to John Bright, 20 January 1842, WSRO, Cobden Papers 44.
137. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 28 February 1843.
138. C. Gibbon, *The Life of George Combe* (London, 1878), vol. 2, p. 2.
139. J. Almack, *Characters, Motives, And Proceedings of the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers* (London, 1843), p. 60.
140. *Manchester Courier*, 14 August 1841.
141. *Manchester Guardian*, 23 April 1845.
142. *League*, 14 March 1846.
143. James Cropper, 28 October 1835, *To the Friends of the Abolition Of Slavery*, Institute of Jamaica MST 32/n.
144. Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party*, p. 140.
145. D. Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery* (London, 1991), p. 128.

‘THE PETTICOAT POLITICIANS OF
MANCHESTER’:
WOMEN AND THE LEAGUE

In February 1843 as the respectable middle-class ladies of Manchester went about their shopping they could have stopped to purchase a penny pamphlet that had been addressed to them by ‘A Fellow Townsman’. It was entitled *A Letter Intended for The Manchester Guardian, Now Respectfully Recommended to the Perusal of the Ladies of the Anti-Corn Law League*. Writing to them frankly as ‘a Christian and a friend’, the author complained that the ladies had disappointed him. Hitherto they had been ‘the grace and ornament of society, a public blessing to their husbands, their children, their friends, their neighbours, and best of all, a blessing to the poor’, but now they were casting themselves adrift on ‘waters as black as Styx, and full of filth and all abominations’. Changing his metaphor, he warned the ladies that they were teetering on the brink of a pit at the bottom of which was ‘RUIN, RUIN, RUIN to their honour, their happiness, their religion, their property and their lives’. The pit, he went on, had been dug for them by Richard Cobden and other ‘revolutionaries’ of the Anti-Corn Law League, who were in alliance with the Chartists and would not hesitate to lead the women into immoral assemblies like those of the Socialists where Sunday had been transformed into a time for ‘singing all sorts of songs, using bad language, calling bad names, selling pop, oranges etc. etc. just as if it were a common fair’. The reason for this plunge into moral depravity was unmistakable: ‘Ladies,’ he wailed, ‘you have assumed the character of politicians.’ In other words, the women of Manchester had been invited to attend one of the League’s meetings, and there was every indication that many of them would accept.¹

The ‘Fellow Townsman’ did not stand alone; not only did the *Quarterly Review* (which named some of the women to shame them the more) and the *Leeds Intelligencer* voice similar ideas, but a year earlier no less a newspaper than *The Times* had delivered a withering attack on the League, sneering at its female supporters as ‘the petticoat politicians of Manchester’ who had fallen from the high standards set by ‘retiring ladies who prefer their nurseries and prayer books to the pleasures and wages of political

libertinism!’ There was a clear conclusion to be drawn, *The Times* insisted: to ‘make a woman a politician is to make her a monster’.² The language was hysterical, but the charge was one that could have done the League great harm. If it was encouraging women to become political activists, it was violating one of the most influential social conventions of contemporary middle-class culture, a set of beliefs that historians have called ‘the doctrine of separate spheres’. God and nature, so it was devoutly asserted, had decreed that men and women were suited to different tasks in life. With her special domestic and moral qualities, ‘woman’ (the use of the singular blocked the possibility of diversity and choice) was expected to find her role within the home which was sometimes depicted as an enclosed garden over which she ought to preside as an ‘angel’. Her refined sensibilities could have no place in the public sphere amidst the harsh realities of business, administration and government, which should therefore be left to men.³

This ‘doctrine of separate spheres’ formed part of a very recent shift in expectations with respect to middle-class gender roles. Home and workplace had often been identical or in close proximity, and it had been commonplace for men and women to share an environment where active parenting had been a domestic commitment appropriate to both sexes.⁴ During the early nineteenth century all this was changing as paid work was increasingly separated from the home, and the women of the wealthier middle classes passed their lives in suburbs that were often well distanced from the commercial and industrial areas to which their menfolk now commuted.⁵ One aspect of the change was that many of these suburban wives were expected to become part of what one historian has called a ‘paraphernalia of gentility’. Transformed into ‘ladies’ and subjected to a restrictive etiquette of respectability, they were given a place alongside other status symbols of conspicuous consumption such as expensive housing, servants and carriages.⁶ Another aspect of the change, according to John R. Gillis, was that motherhood was ‘fully sacralized’ as the one truly feminine role, reinforcing the belief that ‘the only work fit for a man was outside the home; the only work proper to a woman was within it’.⁷ The *Eclectic Review*, a Dissenting periodical which did not approve of this attitude, summarized the outcome more bluntly: a woman was ‘valued not so much for what she does as for what she cannot do’.⁸

The segregation of gender roles had many implications for public life that went far beyond the well-known exclusion of women from the parliamentary franchise. S.C. Hall remembered women having to disguise themselves ‘in male attire’ to obtain entry to the Strangers’ Gallery in the House of Commons during the 1820s, a time when their only alternative was to clamber up to ‘the ventilator in the roof, from where, through crevices, they might see and hear what was going on in the House’.⁹ The policy of exclusion was upheld by a vote of MPs in 1837.¹⁰ A similar attitude affected the public business of voluntary societies and reform movements until well into the century. Three years before the ‘Fellow

Townsmen' delivered his outburst there had been a heated controversy over this 'woman question'. In 1840 the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society organized a World's Convention in London and invited the attendance of delegates from other countries. To the dismay of the organizers, a group of women abolitionists arrived from the United States insisting on full rights as active participants. Their demands gave rise to an uproar among the male delegates, and the question was settled only when the American women were banished to the obscurity of a gallery as mere spectators. British custom, it was ruled, did not allow women to speak and vote alongside men in public meetings.¹¹

Exactly what British custom did allow women to do was less easy to say, for, paradoxically, the very ideas that 'sacralized' women within the home had also been invoked to give them an opening into public life. In the name of values (religion, morality and love) that were regarded as peculiarly feminine, women were frequently exhorted by their clergymen to go outside the home and assist the needy. For example, in a chapter entitled 'Woman's Mission', the Revd J.A. James of Birmingham, one of the best-known Dissenting ministers of the day, insisted that it was the duty of women to support voluntary societies that were labouring 'for the relief of suffering humanity, the instruction of ignorance, and the spread of religion'.¹² These were terms that admitted of a very broad definition, for in this 'age of societies' there was a tendency for women to be drawn into a proliferating variety of religious and philanthropic activities that took them into an ever-widening sphere of public life - from bible and missionary societies, to private agencies for poor relief and on to the anti-slavery movement. In other words the 'doctrine of separate spheres' was not being abandoned; some parts of public life were being feminized.

But how could the Anti-Corn Law League benefit from precedents that rested on religious and moral imperatives? How could it ask highly respectable women to involve themselves in a businessman's pressure group that conducted an overtly political campaign against government economic policy? Surely the 'Fellow Townsman' and other hostile commentators were correct to insist that, if ever anything belonged to the public sphere of masculinity, this was it? In fact, the flank of this argument had been turned by two developments before the League was founded. The first of these was the involvement of women in what has been called a 'battle of ideas' that was waged by the advocates of economic liberalism against socialists and popular radicals who were seeking to reconstruct the economy, society and polity of Britain in ways that ran counter to the theories of Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo. Taking the 'dismal science' of free-market economic theory from the scholar's study, three women writers had shown considerable flair in transforming it into a homespun philosophy that could be set before the masses. Margracia Loudon, Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau were, in the words of the *Morning Chronicle*, among 'the ablest and most efficient expositors in our popular literature' at a time when more interest was being taken in

commercial matters.¹³ Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-4) was the classic of the genre, but Jane Marcet's *John Hopkins's Notions of Political Economy* (1833) and Margracia Loudon's *Philanthropic Economy* (1835) were also well known. The League made good use of these women. Their writings were offered for sale at the great Anti-Corn Law bazaars; and a collection of excerpts from Mrs Loudon's book was included in the packet of tracts that the League distributed to every elector's house in the country. Harriet Martineau even donated the manuscript of a novel (*Dawn Island*) to the League in which she showed the civilizing effects of free trade on a Pacific Island. These were useful precedents for further extensions of the public role of women. As W.J. Fox told a large gathering of women in 1845, they need have no fears for their reputations if they campaigned for the repeal of the Corn Laws; they were following the example of 'gifted members of your own sex' in teaching the truths of political economy to the world.¹⁴

The second development that helped the League to build up a constituency of female supporters was a feature that it shared with many of the reform movements of this era: it was something like a family business where the same surnames appeared again and again. In the world of reform, however, there was one important difference from the contemporary world of business - women made an appearance. In the anti-slavery movement from which the League drew so many of its precedents women sometimes acted as unofficial secretaries for their kinsmen; they boycotted slave products when they went shopping; and they used such artefacts as anti-slavery crockery and writing paper. Through their anti-slavery auxiliary societies they performed useful tasks such as fund-raising and door-to-door canvassing.¹⁵ Brought up in this environment, girls as well as boys often seem to have taken it for granted that they would assist and possibly inherit these commitments of their parents.

Surprisingly, however, in the early years of the League the leaders showed very little interest in courting the support of women. Writing from Edinburgh in 1839 John Wigham demanded to know why the League was missing the opportunity to learn from the British India Society which had enrolled women in its campaign for imperial reform: 'Is the India question less political than the food question - or is there a more oppressive or unjust law in existence in that distant country than is the Bread Tax?'¹⁶ Wigham's advice to include women in the movement was more easily given than followed. Women attended Anti-Corn Law lectures in the early days, but they did so at great risk to their reputations and even to their personal safety, for, at this stage in its evolution, the League was a body of dubious respectability. Its supporters took part in violent confrontations; they used the language of class hatred against the aristocracy; and they were associated with activities that were often described as seditious. Shearman's reports of his travels in England during 1839 described a world from which any respectable Victorian lady would recoil. Arriving in Huntingdon, for example, he was disturbed to learn that he had been preceded by rumours

that 'dark looking violent fellows were going about the country lecturing against the Corn Laws, and advising the people to arise'. At Stamford some Tory and Whig gentlemen came out against him 'like wild beasts', and at Kidderminster a riotous crowd broke up the furniture in the hall that he had booked for a lecture. Elsewhere Chartists invaded his meetings. In the market place at Louth where he did succeed in attracting some ladies to his lecture, their safety was jeopardized when opponents threw fireworks into the crowd.¹⁷ Other lecturers told similar tales of disorder.

Hopelessly inappropriate though Wigham's advice must have seemed, attempts were made to follow it, especially in Scotland where from the beginning some Dissenting ministers made their chapels available to the League. English Dissenters began to follow this example, and it became easier for women to attend lectures, but it was not until the League held its 'Great Banquet' in Manchester in January 1840 that the pattern of the future began to emerge. On that occasion three thousand men including delegates from many parts of Britain sat down to what was described as an old English meal. There had been never been a gathering of such a size in the north of England, the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* boasted, and a special pavilion was constructed for the occasion. At first the intention was to hold a separate function for women, but this idea was set aside and they were allowed to attend in a special gallery that was erected for the occasion. This was an important (and well reported) step towards associating women with the League, and it was accompanied by the launching of a campaign to obtain the signatures of the 'wives and mothers of England' for a petition to the Queen.¹⁸ Soon afterwards when the League Council recruited additional lecturers, it gave preference to those who saw total and immediate repeal as a moral and religious duty.¹⁹

In October 1840 the new direction appeared more clearly at an Anti-Corn Law tea party that was held in Manchester, so the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* reported, to open 'a new era in the history of the corn law agitation'. At the banquet women had merely been a minority, relegated to the role of spectators; now at the tea party they were principals with seventy of them choosing the guest list and assuming responsibility for provisioning the tables.²⁰ A second tea party in Manchester in May 1841 took the same themes further. On that occasion, in the presence of ministers of religion, George Thompson spoke to an audience that contained many women and told them that the struggle against the Corn Laws was an extension of the anti-slavery movement in which they had recently participated; it was part of a general crusade for freedom and justice.²¹ Significantly, this was the time when the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* adopted a new name, the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*. The change, it was announced, showed that the League was concerned with 'justice and humanity', not merely with political economy, and that it wished to reach beyond political issues to influence 'the understanding and feelings of every man and woman in the kingdom'.²²

The parliamentary politics of 1841 set the seal on these arrangements. As long as Lord Melbourne's weak and dithering Whig Government was in

office there were grounds for believing that repeal (or a fixed import tax that approximated to it) would be conceded, but in mid-1841 the Whig ministry collapsed, and the triumph of the Tories in the subsequent General Election seemed to guarantee that there would be a strong protectionist majority in Parliament until the next General Election came round in seven years. It was a time when even the most zealous of repealers could speak of the need for new policies, new leaders and a new focus of agitation. By the end of the year Joseph Sturge, hitherto one of the most generous financial contributors to the League, was advising its members to support a new venture called Complete Suffrage. By conferring the franchise on all adult males Sturge proposed to alter the class basis of Parliament and open the way to an array of reforms including the repeal of the Corn Laws.²³ Until well into 1842 this alternative approach to reform threatened to take support away from the League (see Chapters 8 and 10).

As a result of the shrewd realism of its leaders, most notably Cobden and Wilson, the League survived this challenge and emerged with a renewed sense of resolution. Like the anti-slavery leaders earlier in the century, they accepted the need for a long campaign – one that would be based on a strong constituency of active supporters across the country. During the dark and difficult years that lay ahead these supporters would have to be given a programme of useful tasks that would provide short-term aims and achievements to keep up their morale and ensure their loyalty. A beginning was made in June 1841 when the League announced an agreement with the British India Society which set George Thompson free for the task of rallying ‘all the really Christian and philanthropic minds in the empire’ to the cause of repeal.²⁴ When, a month later, Cobden wrote to Charles Villiers describing the forthcoming Convocation of Ministers as a new ‘element of agitation’ in the campaign, ‘the public cooperation of women’ was one of the benefits he anticipated.²⁵ Cobden’s hopes were abundantly fulfilled when the Convocation took place in August 1841. Addressing the ministers Thompson urged them to proceed to the deployment of ‘another element of society, the purest and best’ by calling on women to petition the Queen for repeal.²⁶

Contemporaries saw the accession of large numbers of women supporters from this time onwards as a defining moment in the history of the campaign for repeal. In 1843 when *The Times* delivered its much-quoted judgement that the League had become ‘a great fact’, part of its evidence was the large number of ‘maids and matrons’ who were attending meetings.²⁷ As the same newspaper had shown by its earlier attack on the League for encouraging ‘political prostitution’, this was an achievement that entailed great risks. The ‘doctrine of separate spheres’ was less easily circumvented than a recent historian would have us believe; the evidence of the League’s attempt to enlist the support of women lends support to her summary of the counter-argument that ‘the ideology of separate spheres had a profound hold on the imagination of the Victorian bourgeoisie and negotiating this ideology was a central middle-class concern’.²⁸ Much

careful preparation went into the League's approach to its 'fair philanthropists'. Thus Thompson followed up his carefully grounded appeal to the ministers by delivering two specially prepared lectures urging the women of Manchester to set an example that would be followed across the country. The invitations were sent in the first place to ministers of religion with the request that they would exhort the women in their congregations to attend: they could be sure, Thompson hastened to add, that the message would be set forth 'on unexceptionable grounds'.²⁹ And so it happened: 'Think not I would have you throw off the woman', Thompson told the audience at his first lecture: 'No, I would have you put it on.' To emphasize the point that he was building on anti-slavery precedents he opened his second lecture by introducing an American 'gentleman of colour' and asking him to address the audience in favour of 'UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION' with reference to trade and slavery.³⁰ As the *Eclectic Review* admiringly noted, there was never any doubt that, when the League appealed for the support of women, it knew how to do so with 'admirable tact'.³¹

The extent to which the League was being feminized was shown in many ways. In 1842, for example, women were encouraged to register as members in the League's 'Doomsday Book' of 'every friend of justice' (see Chapter 3). From the patchy returns that were reported (mainly from Lancashire) it is clear that 'several hundred ladies' in Liverpool signed up, as did nearly a third of the total Salford registration of 300.³² Moreover, women signed repeal petitions in greater numbers than has been recognized previously. Among a sample of over 1000 petitions scrutinized by the House of Commons Select Committee during the first week of February 1842, only a dozen or so were explicitly from women or groups of women, but the vast majority of the rest were noticeably couched in non-gendered language - 'inhabitants', 'persons', 'people', 'members'.³³ Above all, as the newspaper reports frequently emphasized, the support of women was shown by their attendance at meetings. One of the *Scotsman's* correspondents wrote that he had never seen a meeting to compare with the one that the League organized in Manchester in January 1843. Of the four thousand people who attended, one thousand were women, their light-coloured head-wear and dresses contrasting vividly with the sombre clothing of the men; it was a scene like 'the fairy tales of early years'. When the audience was caught up by the rhetoric of the speakers, he continued, 'the effect was quite electrical' with the men cheering and the women waving handkerchiefs.³⁴ On these occasions when women were in the audience some speakers were at their best - none more so than George Thompson. In the words of a French historian of the League his 'peculiarly impassioned language and thrilling accents secured him great favour from female audiences'.³⁵

The League's 'admirable tact' could be seen in the way it organised the seating arrangements for women who attended these meetings. This was a matter of some delicacy, for contemporary notions of propriety might be threatened if men and women were seated indiscriminately in public halls.

Had not the Revd J.A. James warned that even a gathering of Sunday School teachers could go badly astray if care were not taken?³⁶ Newspaper reports showed how carefully the League attended to this matter by following the precedents of religious and philanthropic meetings. In the Manchester Exchange a central area was railed off where four hundred women could be seated together in conditions of inviolable respectability,³⁷ and at the weekly meetings in Newall's Buildings the women who attended were seated in front of the platform.³⁸ Later, when the League built its Free Trade Hall, the galleries were occupied 'to a great extent' by ladies.³⁹ The same pattern was followed at meetings across the country, as in Huddersfield where the ladies were seated at the back of the orchestra,⁴⁰ and in Glasgow where the West Gallery of the City Hall was set aside for them.⁴¹ In time, success seems to have emboldened the League to liberalize its conduct of public meetings. At a meeting in the Free Trade Hall late in 1843 the galleries were reserved for the ladies, but in practice there was considerable intermingling.⁴²

Segregating a lecture audience was a relatively easy task; convivial social gatherings presented greater problems. Public dinners earlier in the century had acquired an especially bad reputation as scenes of drunkenness and coarse behaviour, and they were usually confined to men. Absalom Watkin has left a record of the annual dinner of the Manchester Commercial Clerks Society in 1822 where the entertainment consisted of ribald songs interspersed with a succession of toasts including a particularly obscene one that was proposed by the chairman.⁴³ Once again the League was equal to the challenge. In some instances custom allowed women to attend dinners as spectators in segregated galleries, and when, after some hesitation, the Council invited women to its 'great banquet' in 1840, it followed this precedent very circumspectly. The pavilion that was specially built for the occasion included a ladies' gallery that was provided with its own entrance from an adjacent hotel that had been rented for the occasion. There was no direct communication with the area where the men were seated, and the women did not dine with them. They viewed the banquet, listened to the speeches and received refreshments secure in their vantage point.⁴⁴ Once again success seems to have emboldened the League to press further than precedent; at a banquet early in 1843 the Council decided to 'depart from their usual rule of separating the ladies from the gentlemen'.⁴⁵

Although the repealers held important public dinners and banquets, their preferred form of social gathering was the *soirée* or tea party, one of their many borrowings from the middle-class culture of the day. Popular in the Dissenting and teetotal circles from which so many of the League's supporters came, this form of public entertainment provided an opportunity for men and women to socialise more reassuringly and freely with each other than at functions where alcoholic beverages were consumed. A letter describing a League meeting could take it for granted that 'the nature of the entertainment (Wine, Cake and Fruit) excluded the Ladies'.⁴⁶ A tea party on the other hand, wrote Joseph Livesey,⁴⁷

is provided at less expense than any other – accommodates a greater number – is more congenial to the free and reciprocal communication of good feeling – necessarily embodies the influence and companionship of females – is productive of more softness and refinement of manners – and followed by less physical pain and deterioration of character.

Thus the repealers of Brighton were typical of many when they held a tea party specifically so that women could be present; as the *League* commented, this was ‘one of the best means of bringing together a mixed and respectable audience for the advancement of Free-Trade sentiments’.⁴⁸ There was no place for the more robust forms of masculine behaviour at these gatherings which ministers of religion often attended and where even the most fastidious could feel at ease.

The women did more than attend lectures and tea parties. The *Manchester Times* urged future historians to see women as ‘amongst the most zealous workers for Free Trade’.⁴⁹ This was not a rhetorical flourish; these women worked very hard indeed. In addition to carrying out much of the organization and catering for the tea parties, they distributed tracts, collected signatures for petitions and raised large sums of money. The dedication of the women of Manchester in raising a petition during the harsh winter of 1841–42 entered League folklore. Inspired by George Thompson’s oratory, they divided the city into districts, allocated fifty ladies to take responsibility for each, and obtained more than 100,000 signatures from women of all classes by means of dwelling-to-dwelling visits.⁵⁰ During the following year women in other parts of the country followed their example. The women of Liverpool started off by approaching their friends, and then in groups they canvassed every hearth in the various wards of the city. Similar results were reported by the women of Coventry, Sheffield and other places.⁵¹ By the time the memorials were laid at the feet of the Queen cumulatively there were more than a quarter of a million signatures.⁵² George Thompson seemed to be everywhere at this time – at first in Manchester from where he despatched the women to their duties as canvassers and then at a succession of meetings where he brought a similar message to women across the country. Anticipating the sort of objections offered by the ‘Fellow Townsman’, he reassured his audiences that there was no suggestion that the League would ask any lady to transgress the bounds of femininity by becoming a political partisan: raising signatures for the repeal of the Corn Laws was a crusade that had ‘peculiar claims’ on the sympathies of women, because it gave them an opportunity to lift the curses of poverty, degradation and crime that fell upon the women and children of the working class.⁵³

A report of a meeting in Stockport gives a good idea of the notions of femininity to which the League appealed at this time. George Thompson was unable to attend as promised, but his place was amply filled by R.R. Moore, another of the League’s lecturers. Entry was carefully controlled by tickets, and the Mayor took the chair. Lifting the minds of the ladies above politics and parties, Moore directed their attention to the claims of justice.

He told them of the example set by the women of Manchester who had been heart-broken by the scenes of poverty they had witnessed as they went from door to door canvassing for signatures for the memorial to the Queen. In the dwellings of those they visited three-quarters of the people were unemployed and bordering on starvation. He was heard in almost complete silence by the ladies: 'the starting tear and suppressed sob, in some of the more pathetic and thrilling portions of the worthy lecturer's address - when speaking of the squalid wretchedness and misery endured by the poor - were highly characteristic of the exquisite susceptibility of the female character'. Concluding the meeting, the mayor urged the women of England to emulate their Manchester sisters. They must go out from their homes and light 'a spark of heavenly fire'.⁵⁴

The well-established precedents of female philanthropy to which Moore was appealing brought an important corollary. Earlier in the century women had acquired so much experience of raising funds for churches and charities that it was only to be expected that the League would appropriate this important part of middle-class feminine culture to its own purposes,⁵⁵ and soon women were to be found playing a major part in the fund-raising campaigns that became one of the greatest features of the repealers' year by year activity. In 1842-43 a committee of women helped to raise the 'Great Fund',⁵⁶ and, more importantly, women played a leading role in the two League bazaars at the Manchester Theatre Royal in February 1842 and the Covent Garden Theatre in London during May 1845. Handsome revenues were raised at these bazaars, and the number of women involved was also impressive. The Manchester ladies' committee for the 1842 bazaar comprised 82 members not including the executive,⁵⁷ and the number of Manchester women assisting the Covent Garden bazaar was even more impressive. By February 1845 George Wilson could boast that with 500 members its committee constituted 'the largest bazaar committee ever formed'.⁵⁸

The first public reference to a League bazaar seems to have been in a letter to the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* from 'Walsall', a pseudonymous correspondent who suggested that the Manchester leaders should adopt the model of the religious and charitable societies.⁵⁹ A month later the *Circular* announced that a bazaar would be held in 1842: it would be an opportunity for the women who had attended tea parties and the ministers' Convocation to find 'the most direct and gratifying medium through which they can contribute their influence and cooperation, in favour of an object which has so extensively engaged their sympathies'.⁶⁰ Spokesmen for the League often referred to how instinctively the 'fair philanthropists' sprang to its financial assistance on this occasion, but this was to gild the lily. In John Bright's words, the Anti-Corn Law bazaars were the 'pet object' of George Wilson, the League's President,⁶¹ and their planning seems to have owed nearly everything to him. During the second half of 1841 the correspondence between Cobden and Wilson shows their anxiety over the League's financial indebtedness and the need to devise activities that

would give supporters a sense of purpose and hold them together in the aftermath of the Tory electoral victory.⁶² A bazaar could solve both of these problems, and Wilson told Cobden that his plans were on an unprecedented scale: it would have 'a degree of importance never enjoyed by anything of this description previously'.⁶³

Wilson's notion of a bazaar eventually encompassed something like an industrial exhibition with various districts of Britain providing stalls to display their staple products, but, first and foremost, as he well knew, charity bazaars were sales of ladies' handwork, and of necessity the one he had in mind would entail a massive recruitment of female supporters. Beginning with what seems to have been a list of male sympathizers, during the winter of 1841-42 Wilson sent out large numbers of letters (the recent creation of the Penny Post was of great assistance) asking for their backing and the assistance of their wives as patronesses and committee members. This was something of a shot in the dark, and it produced some embarrassing moments when letters went to bachelors or widowers,⁶⁴ but the greatest problem facing Wilson was the possibility that the women and their kinsmen would flinch from the idea of helping the League to appropriate a form of fund-raising that was firmly associated with religion and philanthropy. 'If the object were to build a new Church,' Thomas Milner Gibson wrote when he was approached, 'or to propagate the Gospel in Foreign parts I should have no fear of getting the ladies in shoals to assist us but what the "distinguished" matrons will say when we talk of an anti-corn-law Bazaar, I can't say till I try.'⁶⁵ In the event, with the exception of one letter from Lady Kinnaird who was appalled by the idea of a woman taking 'a prominent part in politics',⁶⁶ these misgivings were quickly dispelled, and, although the response was patchy across the nation, committees of women worked hard to produce and obtain items for sale. Surveying the scene at the headquarters in Manchester, an admiring Richard Cobden was impressed by the strenuous efficiency of Wilson and his team of 'fair coadjutors',⁶⁷ and when the bazaar opened women wearing League rosettes were present to take charge of their own stalls.⁶⁸

The Covent Garden bazaar was even more impressive; for the *Morning Chronicle* it was the most decisive event in the history of free trade.⁶⁹ In many parts of the country women's committees came into existence to raise funds and prepare items for sale. Manchester excelled itself again after the League's women supporters divided the town into districts and canvassed for contributions.⁷⁰ There and in a number of other cities the goods were exhibited before they were sent to London,⁷¹ and when large amounts remained unsold they were returned to Manchester for a follow-up bazaar.⁷² Wilson's early hopes for the League funds were far exceeded by the success of the bazaars. At the outset he had expected £5000,⁷³ but the 1842 bazaar raised nearly £10,000 of which £2400 went in expenses, leaving a fund, it was estimated, that would be sufficient for a year or two of agitation.⁷⁴ The 1845 bazaar raised £25,000.⁷⁵ Much of the money seems to have been used to support the lecturers and pay for the

nationwide distribution of literature, although, if Feargus O'Connor is to be believed, some of it went into a slush fund to pay for the Irish strong-arm men whom the League sent out to do battle with the Chartists in Manchester.⁷⁶

The money raised by the bazaars was of great significance for an organization that spent so much on publicity, but the League went to great pains to emphasize that the help it received from its women supporters far exceeded their fund-raising capabilities. To understand this it is necessary to explore the conventions of early Victorian public life and to penetrate beyond the language in which gender behaviour was often described. As the frequent linking of references to women and ministers of religion made clear, respectable middle-class women of this era had a status that was similar to that of a priesthood,⁷⁷ and consequently there were great benefits for any pressure group that could convincingly present itself as a 'woman's mission'. Thus, although the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* welcomed 'the great pecuniary aid' given by the women who promoted the first of the repeal bazaars in Manchester, it saw this as less important than⁷⁸

the mighty impulse that will be given to the corn-law agitation, when the women of Britain take up our question, and rescue it from the baneful taint of party. Sanctioned by the ministers of religion, and the wives and mothers of the kingdom, no mere political party will dare to array itself against us.

In other words the support of women could transform debatable policy proposals into religious and moral imperatives that allowed no legitimate counter-argument. This was powerful rhetoric, for, at a time when hostile traditional interests were entrenched in political life, much of the League's strength had to come from the mobilization of extra-Parliamentary pressure. The religious public was well worth courting because of its recent history of intervening in affairs of state on high moral grounds.

Much of what nowadays seems to be a patronizing attitude on the part of the League towards its women supporters may be traced to these contemporary notions of gendered morality. For example, in the course of a speech to the ladies of Bolton, Thomas Thomasson told them he did not expect them to 'master all the sage arguments' for repeal; it was enough for them to ask if the laws were just.⁷⁹ The report of a meeting that set up an Anti-Corn Law Bazaar Committee in Preston likewise says much about gender relationships in the League. After the ladies and gentlemen present had spent some time 'in the best of enjoyment and fellowship, the gentlemen present assembled round a platform, for the transaction of the more immediate business of the evening'. They then passed a series of resolutions about the organizing of work for the bazaar (to be done mostly by the women).⁸⁰ This was not meant to be insulting; at a time when a respectable woman (except the Queen) could not assume a position of leadership in public there was no realistic alternative to such behaviour and especially to the way in which it was reported. Excluded from public dinners or segregated at them, given special seating at lectures and public

meetings, and welcomed above all at tea parties, the women of the League had to be feminine by conventional standards if they were to retain their reputation for religion and morality. Thus, although the *Manchester Times* referred to several women speaking at a meeting of the Manchester Ladies Bazaar Committee, and it even mentioned two of them by name (Mrs Woolley and Mrs Massie), few reports allowed the voices of women to be heard.⁸¹ Not surprisingly the petitions and memorials that the women signed seem to have been drawn up for them by men. 'After I got home,' Absalom Watkin recorded in his diary, 'I wrote a petition from the female inhabitants of M[ancheste]r to the Queen praying for the repeal of the Corn Laws.'⁸²

This carefully nurtured attempt to give itself the status of a philanthropic movement that was supported by highly respectable women stood the League in good stead. When Cobden was accused of complicity in the Plug Plot Riots that swept over the industrial districts in 1842, he could defend himself in a speech where he referred to the support the League had received from 'ministers of religion, those ladies, and that numerous body of the moral and religious portion of the middle classes of this country who have lent us their assistance'.⁸³ Two years later George Wilson went even further by publicly planning the League's London bazaar as an offshoot of the meetings of religious societies that annually took place in the month of May.⁸⁴ Without the women he could not have made this claim. As we have seen, the women's support was also a useful weapon for League leaders to use in response to the calls that were sometimes made by supporters who wished to dilute official policy by adopting the Whig offer of a fixed tariff on corn imports. There could be no compromise with error and injustice, Cobden insisted: the total and immediate repeal of the Corn Laws was 'the only principle which secures the support of Christian Ministers, & the women of England'.⁸⁵

Greatly daring, the League extended this argument to claim the support of the woman who was becoming the role model of respectable femininity during these years. When Richard Cobden formally disbanded the League and expressed his gratitude to those who had played a part in its triumph he began with Queen Victoria: 'it is well known that her Majesty's predilections are strongly in favour of the cause we have been agitating'.⁸⁶ The assertion would not have survived close scrutiny, but Cobden's wish to make the claim is less surprising than it might seem, for it is a mistake to assume, as many historians have done, that the provincial middle classes were hostile to monarchy as an institution and opposed to its surviving powers. Spokesmen for the repeal of the Corn Laws were warmly royalist and offered no objection to the Royal Prerogative provided it was exercised in their favour. Historians have not noticed the frequency with which liberal and radical reform movements of this era called for an interventionist monarchy in the petitions that formed so great a part of their 'pressure from without'. One form of Anti-Corn Law petition was addressed to Parliament and received short shrift from the majority of MPs who formed what the

League saw as a protectionist alliance of Whig and Tory aristocrats. A different form of petition, however, one addressed directly to the Queen, offered the possibility of circumventing the opposition of the politicians, even though it had to be transmitted to the Court by Cabinet Ministers. This was called a memorial, and the form of wording used by the League merits attention. Typically it asked the Queen to use her Prerogative power, 'as far as it may be constitutionally rendered', to bring about the repeal of the Corn Laws and relieve the suffering of her people.⁸⁷

Typically also, the League ensured that many of its memorials were sent to the Queen in the name of its female supporters, addressing her as woman to woman on what was described as a matter of vital importance for the material and spiritual well-being of the poor. She and they, so it was implied, could transcend the squalid factional ambitions of male politicians and think of the nation. The women of Britain, George Thompson proclaimed, should 'stand before the patriot queen' and ask for the abrogation of the Corn Laws.⁸⁸ A League broadsheet shows Victoria as the figure of justice standing over the slain dragon of monopoly and holding the scales of justice which are weighed down by the claims of the poor for cheap bread against the vested interests of land, law and church.⁸⁹ This was very reminiscent of the 'woman power' that Linda Colley has described as emerging during George III's reign when 'female Britons' had taken up a distinctive national role 'whose function it was to inspire their menfolk to proper political actions'.⁹⁰ Now there was a significant addition. In calling forth the public spirit of the women of Britain the League was placing a queen regnant at their head.

The constitutional theory underlying this belief was similar to the one described by David Cannadine as the 'pre-Bagehot monarchy', a term that refers to the idealistic notions held by Victoria and Albert that would have allowed the Queen to function above party political considerations as 'a sovereign who governed as well as reigned'.⁹¹ The Bedchamber Crisis in 1839, when Victoria had blocked Sir Robert Peel's attempt to form a government, provided a recent reminder, if one were needed, that she had the right, the power and the determination to follow her own course in high matters of state. During a crucial Parliamentary debate when the Corn Laws were being repealed in 1846 Prince Albert's attendance as a transparent gesture of support for Sir Robert Peel suggested that the League's confidence in the monarchy was not misplaced.⁹² In the meanwhile the women's memorials to the Queen served another useful function; they deftly warded off the accusation that the League was violating the 'doctrine of separate spheres'. It was difficult for *The Times* and other opponents to sustain the accusation that the League was indulging in 'political prostitution' when a memorial signed by more than a quarter of a million 'sisters of mercy' was set before the Queen at a levee.⁹³

Who then, apart from the Queen, were the women whose support the League cherished so dearly? The point has already been made that, in a social and political culture where reform was a family business, many of

them were related by blood and marriage to prominent male repealers. Thus, from the lists of women who sat on the bazaar committees, collected petitions and memorials, and hosted tables at League tea parties, the wives of 29 Manchester ACLA Councillors can be identified as participants in this form of familial public life.⁹⁴ Likewise the patronesses and committee members for the 1842 bazaar included Mrs Cobden, Lady Potter, Mrs Callender and Mrs Armitage. The same phenomenon was true in other parts of the country. In 1843 the Ladies Committee of the Great Fund had two Miss Brights, Mrs Bowring, Miss Pease of Darlington and Mrs Spencer of Hinton Parsonage.⁹⁵ The public prints tell us a little about those who assisted the League. For example, two Liverpool women who each donated £100 were members of a wider family group, the Mathers, who contributed £700 in all.⁹⁶ Likewise, Sophia Southall of Newington Common, a Quaker, sent items to the League bazaar, because, 'though but young in years I feel like my dear father, an *interest* in the *great cause*'. Elizabeth Tuck of Frome wrote to say that she and a team of canvassers had set out to raise £50 for the 1845 bazaar but had gone on to raise £125 with the help of an exhibition of the contributions they received, one of which was a chair with upholstery showing children in a corn field and a ship called the 'Cobden' under full sail for free trade. Mary Anne Oliver from Mutterhole in Devon sent £90 in addition to various articles and referred to a universal feeling in favour of free trade 'in this valley'.⁹⁷ These are fleeting references, and it is difficult to say more during an era, when, as the historians Davidoff and Hall point out, the esteem that women were believed to enjoy 'in the eyes of Heaven', did little to rescue the great majority of them from obscurity on earth.⁹⁸

In some cases, however, it is evident that women supported the League as one phase in a lifetime of participation in societies for religion and reform. Mrs Lawrence Rostron, a member of the 1845 Bazaar Committee, was the sister of a well-known educational lecturer and reformer, James Simpson. In her own right she was an active supporter of vegetarianism and teetotalism.⁹⁹ Mary Evans was another example. Her late nineteenth-century obituary notice refers to her support of 'advanced liberalism' and to her participation in 'the long struggle for Free Trade' alongside her husband who was a member of the Manchester ACLA Council.¹⁰⁰ Well schooled by their upbringing and their experience of churches and charities, large numbers of women seem to have fitted easily into the role assigned to them by the League. Mrs Elizabeth Woolley, who headed the team of women who helped George Wilson to arrange the Manchester bazaar and to make the Manchester contribution to the London bazaar, seems to have been a woman of this sort, promising her unceasing exertions 'however limited my sphere of usefulness may be'.¹⁰¹ Her zeal was matched by Miss Gifford of London who went to Manchester late in 1841 with the intention of going from house to house asking ladies to send memorials and petitions to the Queen.¹⁰²

In the almost complete absence of recorded comment from the women themselves it is difficult to be precise about how they saw their involvement

in the League. To fall back, as some historians have done, on uncritical quotations from statements by men does little to advance our knowledge about the women who participated in the reform movements of this era;¹⁰³ all too often the male participants in the 'pressure from without' were mindful of the gendered conventions of the day and ensured that their speeches and writings were clogged with patronizing gallantry when they referred to their women fellow campaigners. Even in a private letter to the wife of the League's President, a male Leaguer felt obliged to write, not only an introduction in which he hoped that a discussion of political economy would not be 'altogether uncongenial' to her feminine feelings, but also a conclusion in which he apologized for addressing her as if he were writing to her husband. The substance of the letter spoke a different language, however, one that assumed a high degree of knowledge and commitment on Mrs Wilson's part. Having complied with the rituals of recognizing her femininity, the Leaguer embarked on a long and uncompromisingly technical discussion replete with references to Dugald Stewart, Adam Smith, the French economists, Dean Tucker and the freight charges from Hamburg and Danzig.¹⁰⁴ The point is worth lingering over, because some of the League's women supporters undoubtedly commanded respect by their intellect and education. Discovering evidence of the mental accomplishments of women in this era is a notoriously difficult task, but it is unlikely that Jemima Durning, who married J.B. Smith, was the only woman of her sort in League circles. As a Unitarian she belonged to a denomination that was well known for encouraging the intellectual development of its women members. She was described as a woman of 'strong intellect which she had carefully cultivated & which enabled her to take part in conversation upon almost any subject. She had also great breadth of intellect & a peculiar facility of entering into the interests of others.'¹⁰⁵

More can be said about another woman of this type, partly because of press reports at the time but even more so because of the happy accident that her daughter was one of the most prolific writers of the next generation. Lawrencina Heyworth appears in the report of a speech given by her father, Lawrence Heyworth of Liverpool, who told a story of family involvement that must have been well known to many of his listeners. He had made Corn Law repeal, so he told a public meeting,¹⁰⁶

the general topic of his conversation and never ceased to talk of it; there was not a domestic in his household who did not do the same; and he had an only daughter, (Applause) who took an equal interest in the question, and whose greatest delight was to distribute tracts on the subject among the poor, by whom she was received with open arms. (Applause).

Heyworth often spoke on religious and moral themes for the League, especially at meetings where women were present,¹⁰⁷ and the reports suggest that his daughter often travelled with him. She was well known to audiences; Alexander Somerville described her at a tea party in Bolton as a

woman in her early twenties, who enjoyed a reputation in the League for fund-raising and propagandizing activities that took her into 'the richest man's mansion and the poorest man's cellar'.¹⁰⁸ This was the saintly legend of womanly love that the League delighted to bestow on its female supporters; the reality in her case was much more interesting, the more so because it briefly lifts the veil on what may have been happening in at least some of the households where reformers looked to their wives, daughters and sisters for support. Lawrencina Heyworth was a woman of strong religious opinions, but she was guided by much more than the warm-hearted enthusiasm of evangelicalism. In the description given by her daughter, Beatrice Webb, to whom we are indebted for much of our information about her, she emerges as the son that Lawrence Heyworth never had. He bore testimony to his own reforming creed by giving her a formidably wide education that fitted her for a relentless pursuit of the life of the mind. Languages fascinated her, and Michel Chevalier, the French economist whose essays she translated, deferred to her exceptional knowledge of ancient Greek. Herbert Spencer, Lawrencina's friend and intellectual associate, described her as 'somewhat of a notability', and was impressed by her independence of mind and 'singularity of character'. Her daughter referred to her as 'an ardent student of Adam Smith, Malthus and particularly of Nassau Senior' from whom she imbibed the tenets of 'the strictest sect of Utilitarian economists'.¹⁰⁹ Miss Heyworth was present at the meeting when Thomas Thomasson informed the ladies that he did not expect them to trouble their minds with 'all the sage arguments for repeal'.¹¹⁰ Her thoughts on that occasion were not recorded, but they may be imagined.

At a less rarified level reports of what was done by the League's women supporters could reveal more robust attitudes than conventional notions of womanhood would lead one to expect. In 1841, when J.B. Smith contested the Walsall by-election against the Protectionist candidate, John Gladstone, it was said that most of the women in the town took his side more heartily than the men and exhibited flags and favours in his support. Creating a female ACLA, they went from house to house soliciting subscriptions in the same way as missionary societies.¹¹¹ They held tea parties which seem to have been particularly lively affairs with speeches, refreshments, music and dancing.¹¹² Smith lost the by-election, but the women kept up the pressure. Defiantly, they gave Gladstone an Anti-Corn Law petition to take with him to Parliament,¹¹³ and, according to Smith, during the General Election campaign a few months later they took 'a great part' in the League victory by setting up what was virtually a picket outside the business premises of shopkeepers who had voted for Gladstone: 'they walked up and down opposite those shops ... & would let no one go in to purchase from them'.¹¹⁴

In some rural areas the arrival of a League lecturer seems to have breached the walls of deference with respect to gender as well as social hierarchy. There were references to half a dozen women who acted as a bodyguard for James Acland by standing in front of him when he lectured

to rowdy crowds at Clare in Suffolk.¹¹⁵ At a lecture in Beaminster, when farmers told Sidney Smith that their labourers did not eat barley bread, some women ran home to their own pantries and came back with proof to the contrary. They broke into the debate to complain that they and their families subsisted on the poorest food, an opinion that was endorsed by several servants who stood up in front of their masters to say that they were half-fed.¹¹⁶ Soon afterwards in Somerset a lecturer who spoke in favour of the Corn Laws had his meeting broken up by the men in his audience and fell into the hands of women who chanted 'no starvation laws' while they battered his hat to pieces.¹¹⁷

Not surprisingly, there is little evidence of working-class women's involvement in a movement that was so steeped in middle-class feminine culture. Nonetheless there are some indications that they supported the cause. For example, most of the signatures on the well-known Memorial to Queen Victoria belonged to working-class women of Manchester and Salford. Elsewhere it was reported that the 'wives and sisters' of members of the Wolverhampton trades were collecting their own repeal petition. Better than most they understood that this was a campaign for cheap bread. Female Radical Associations, such as those in Salford and Sheffield, complained about the Corn Laws, alongside the New Poor Law, as immediate threats to their domestic economy.¹¹⁸ At a dinner for operative supporters in Manchester many women, 'most of them without bonnets', followed the middle-class example and viewed the proceedings from a gallery. When the mills in Newton were stopped for a lecture in 1839 many 'ladies and other females' attended. A year later nine hundred female hand loom weavers in south-east Lancashire signed a petition against the Corn Laws.¹¹⁹

For prudential reasons League leaders always played down anything that seemed to be unfeminine in the behaviour of their women supporters, but behind the circumspect references to a 'new path of female beneficence' there were many signs of a widening world for women. Even in the case of women whose ideas were conventional, many of them must have acquired some sort of political experience, education and commitment as a result of the public activities and home discussions that arose from their involvement in the League. A lecture in Peckham by Sidney Smith suggests what was happening. Introducing Smith to an audience that contained many ladies, the chairman urged them to acquire as thorough a knowledge of political economy as of domestic economy. Smith then gave them an account of the workings of the tariff and the sliding scale followed by a description of the system of electoral registration that the League was using as part of its preparations for the next General Election.¹²⁰ The *Eclectic Review's* summary of what this experience conferred on League activists applied to women as well as men: they were attending 'a normal school' that was training them for 'a position and influence in public life'.¹²¹ Building on the experience of the anti-slavery movement, the League was making it clear that in the greatest controversies of the day women could

practise what it called the 'politics of humanity' and the 'politics of the bible',¹²² terms that implied restrictions but were difficult to define with any degree of precision. To modern eyes these roles and the language that was used to describe them are maudlin and patronizing, but they must be related to the prevalent ideas, techniques and institutions of reform, that were passing through an important phase in their evolution between 1832 and 1867. Patricia Hollis has referred to the League and other reform movements of this era as contributors to the 'pressure from without' which she defines as those¹²³

more or less radical and mainly middle class pressure groups, pursuing specified goals and working for legislative change by putting pressure on parliament and on government; possessing a sophisticated organisation over a defined period of time; and invoking a moral language, by claiming to speak for the People, the Nation or the Country.

Earlier in the century groups such as these had been accused of usurping a role that properly belonged to parliamentarians: by mid-century they were well on the way to being legitimized as useful adjuncts of a governmental system that was imperfectly attuned to public opinion. An important part of this transition was the redefinition of the doctrine of separate gender spheres to incorporate a 'Woman's Mission' in matters that were undoubtedly political, allowing the women to step onto the national scene as an acknowledged source of public opinion. Their example was not lost for advocates of women's rights later in the century. Writing in 1878 Millicent Garrett saw the removal of the barrier to higher education for women as a 'phase of the free trade argument',¹²⁴ and Priscilla McLaren was only one of several later feminists who were influenced by their experience of the League.¹²⁵ All this was for the future. When the news that the Corn Laws had been repealed reached Denby Dale in 1846 the reports of the celebration exemplified a more conventionally gendered tale. In what was described as a triumph of 'women's art and skill' a gigantic pie seven feet ten inches in diameter and ten inches in depth was baked, placed on a wagon and drawn through the town amidst the cheers of thousands and the music of three bands.¹²⁶

Notes

1. 'A Fellow Townsman', *A Letter Intended for the Manchester Guardian, Now Respectfully Recommended to the Earnest Perusal of the Ladies of the Anti-Corn Law League* (Manchester, 1843), pp. 3-8.
2. *Quarterly Review*, vol. 71, December 1842-March 1843, pp. 262-3; *The Times*, 1 January 1842; M. I. Thomis and J. Grimmett, *Women in Protest 1800-1850* (London, 1982), pp. 135-6.
3. L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987).
4. J.R. Gillis, *A World Of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual and the Quest for Family Values* (New York, 1996), pp. 186-7.

5. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 360, 364–9.
6. J.A. Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (Liverpool, 1964), p. 12.
7. Gillis, *Family Values*, pp. 166, 187.
8. *Eclectic Review*, November 1842.
9. S.C. Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life: From 1815 to 1883* (London, 1883), vol. 1, p. 21.
10. *True Sun*, June 1837. This newspaper believed that the admission of women would be a step toward a higher quality of parliamentary behaviour and would promote fairer legislation for them.
11. A. Tyrrell, 'Woman's Mission and Pressure Group Politics in Britain (1825–60)', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library University of Manchester*, vol. 63, no. 1, Autumn 1980, pp. 194–8.
12. J.A. James, *The Works of John Angell James* (London, 1860), vol. IV, pp. 77, 135.
13. *Morning Chronicle*, quoted in the *League*, 12 April 1845.
14. *League*, 5 April 1845.
15. C. Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1992).
16. Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book, MPL, J. Wigham, 15 July 1839.
17. *Ibid.*, J.H. Shearman, 2, 10 May 1839; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 30 April 1839.
18. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 10, 24, 31 December 1839, 16 January 1840. See also Chapter 8 below.
19. *Ibid.* 9 April 1840.
20. *Ibid.* 22 October, 5 November 1840. In his manuscript history of the League J.B. Smith also saw this as a turning-point in the history of the women's connection with the League, MPL, Smith Anti-Corn Law Papers, vol. 1.
21. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 May 1841.
22. *Ibid.* 21 April 1841.
23. A. Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party* (London, 1987), pp. 119–31.
24. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 16 June 1841; WSRO, Cobden Papers, C-U 1025, undated newscutting. The British India Society retained its connection with Thompson but donated his services gratuitously to the League together with those of William Adams, the editor of the *British India Advocate*.
25. BM, Add. MSS 43662, Richard Cobden to Charles Villiers, July 1841.
26. G. Thompson, *Corn Laws: Address of George Thompson, Esq. before the Conference of Ministers* (Manchester, 1841), p. 19.
27. Quoted in A. Mongrédien, *History of the Free Trade Movement in England* (London, 1881), pp. 101–2.
28. A. Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1993), pp. 399–400.
29. WSRO, Cobden Papers, C-U 1025, G. Thompson, *Printed Circular Addressed to Ministers on 'The Nature of the Corn Laws and the Propriety and Duty of Memorialising the Queen in Favour of their Abolition*.
30. G. Thompson, *Corn Laws: Lectures Delivered before the Ladies of Manchester and its Vicinity, on the Subject of a Memorial to the Queen* (Manchester, 1841), pp. 22, 25–6.

31. *Eclectic Review*, February 1844.
32. *Manchester Times*, 8 October 1842.
33. PP, *House of Commons Select Committee on Public Petitions*, vol. 130, 1842, pp. 4–37.
34. *Scotsman*, 4 February 1843.
35. Mongrédien, *History of the Free Trade Movement in England*, p. 56.
36. James, *Works*, iv, 149.
37. A. Somerville, *Free Trade and the League*, (Manchester, 1853), vol. 2, p. 523.
38. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 1 December 1842.
39. *League*, 8 March, 1845.
40. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 1 December 1842.
41. *Ibid.* 17 January 1843.
42. *Ibid.* 16 December 1843.
43. *Extracts from Absalom's Diaries, 1811–24*, vol. 1, 4 October 1822 (private manuscript in the possession of Mrs Magdalene Goffin).
44. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 January 1840.
45. *Manchester Guardian*, 21 January 1843.
46. J. McCallum to Mrs George Wilson, 16 January 1843, MPL, Wilson Papers, M20.
47. *Livesey's Moral Reformer*, 13 January 1838.
48. *League*, 28 September 1844.
49. *Manchester Times*, 1 May 1846.
50. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 16 December 1841.
51. *Manchester Times*, 18 December 1841; *Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1842.
52. *Scotsman*, 21 May 1842.
53. WSRO, Cobden Papers, C-U 1025, 'Memorial to the Queen, from the Women of Great Britain, for the Total and Immediate Repeal of the Corn Laws – at a Tea Party given by the Operatives' Anti-Corn Law Association to the Delegates present in Manchester, November 17, 1841.'
54. WSRO, Cobden Papers, C-U 1025, *The Corn-Laws: Meeting of the Ladies of Stockport*.
55. F.K. Prochaska, 'Women In English Philanthropy, 1790–1830', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 19, 1974, pp. 426–45.
56. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 24 January 1843.
57. *Ibid.* 18 November 1841.
58. *League*, 22 February 1845.
59. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 August 1841.
60. *Ibid.* 23 September 1841.
61. John Bright to Richard Cobden, 21 October 1841, BL, Add. MSS 43383.
62. MPL, Wilson Papers, M20/4, Richard Cobden to George Wilson, 9 October 1841.
63. WSRO, Cobden Papers 25, George Wilson to Richard Cobden, 18 September 1841.
64. See, for example, MPL, M20/4, Wilson Papers, C.M. Robberds to George Wilson, 23 October 1841.
65. *Ibid.* Thomas Milner Gibson to George Wilson, 29 October 1841.
66. MPL, Wilson Papers, Lady Kinnaid to George Wilson, 1 October 1841.
67. WSRO, Cobden Papers 411, has the certificate presented to Mrs Cobden for her assistance at the 1842 bazaar. The Manchester Public Library has Miss

- Brotherton's copy of the certificate of appreciation presented by the League Council to the ladies who assisted the 1845 bazaar.
68. *Bazaar Gazette*, 31 January 1842.
 69. Quoted by the *League*, 31 May 1845.
 70. *League*, 15 March 1845.
 71. For example, at the Music Hall, Leeds, *League*, 3 May 1845.
 72. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 October 1845.
 73. WSRO, Cobden Papers 25, George Wilson to Richard Cobden, 18 September 1841.
 74. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, Corn Laws, vol. 3, J. Shuttleworth to J.B. Smith, 19 February 1842.
 75. *League*, 21 June 1845.
 76. *Northern Star*, 12 March 1842.
 77. Harriet and John Stuart Mill disapprovingly noted this in their article, 'The Enfranchisement of Women', *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, April-July 1851.
 78. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 2 December 1841.
 79. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 14 January 1841.
 80. *Preston Guardian*, 15 February 1845.
 81. *Manchester Times*, 4 December 1841
 82. *Extracts From Absalom's Diaries*, vol. 5, 1837-56, 27 February 1840.
 83. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 8 September 1842.
 84. *League*, 22 February 1845.
 85. Richard Cobden to John Bright, 20 January 1842, B.L, Cobden Papers, Add. MSS 43678.
 86. J. Bright and J.E. Rogers (eds), *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P.* (London, 1878), p. 200.
 87. Thompson, *Corn Laws: Lectures Delivered before the Ladies of Manchester*, p. 50.
 88. *Manchester Guardian*, 1 December 1841.
 89. J. Gardiner, *Queen Victoria* (London, 1997), p. 65.
 90. L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London, 1992), p. 277.
 91. D. Cannadine, 'The Last Hanoverian Sovereign? The Victorian Monarchy in Historical Perspective, 1688-1988' in A.L. Beier et al. (eds), *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 139-40.
 92. *Ibid.* p.143.
 93. *Scotsman*, 21 May 1842.
 94. See Thompson, *Corn Laws: Lectures Delivered before the Ladies of Manchester*, p. 50; *National Anti-Corn-Law Bazaar, To Be Held in the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden* (London, 1845); *Manchester Times*, 15 March 1845; A. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1853), vol. 1, p. 170.
 95. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 18 November 1841, 24 January 1843.
 96. *League*, 27 December 1845.
 97. *Ibid.*, 3 May 1845.
 98. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 18.
 99. See B. Harrison, 'The British Prohibitionists: A Biographical Analysis', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 15, 1970, no. 59.
 100. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 November 1896.
 101. *Manchester Times*, 15 March 1845; WSRO, Cobden Papers, CP1, Elizabeth Woolley to Richard Cobden, 4 June 1842.

102. *Manchester Guardian*, 20 November 1841.
103. Examples of this methodology are discussed by A. Tyrrell, 'A House Divided Against Itself: The British Abolitionists Revisited', *Journal of Caribbean History*, vol. 22, 1988, pp. 57-63.
104. J. McCallum to Mrs George Wilson, 16 January 1843. MPL, Wilson Papers, M20/6
105. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, Anti-Corn Law League Papers, vol. 1.
106. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 19 May 1842.
107. Richard Cobden to J.B. Smith, [January 1841], MPL, J.B. Smith Papers
108. A. Somerville, *The Whistler at the Plough* (1852, repr. London, 1989), p. 164.
109. B. Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, (1926, repr. Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 36-48; H. Spencer, *An Autobiography*, (London, 1904), vol. 1, p. 260.
110. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 14 January 1841.
111. *Ibid.* 11 February 1841.
112. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 February 1841.
113. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, David Stanley to J.B. Smith, 11 February 1841.
114. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, Anti-Corn Law League Papers, vol. 1.
115. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 2 July 1840.
116. *Ibid.* 16 July 1840.
117. *Ibid.* 30 July 1840.
118. *Sheffield Iris*, 18 June 1839; *Northern Star*, 27 July 1839; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 12 March 1840. See also D. Thompson, *The Chartists* (London, 1984), pp. 120-1.
119. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1840; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 26 November 1839; 12 March 1840.
120. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 3 November 1842.
121. *Eclectic Review*, February, 1844.
122. *Manchester Guardian*, 1 December 1841.
123. P. Hollis, (ed.), *Pressure from without in Early Victorian England*, (London, 1974), p. viii.
124. Quoted by B. Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 102-3.
125. P. Levine, *Victorian Feminism* (London, 1987), p. 21.
126. *Manchester Times*, 11 September 1846.

'THE PEOPLE'S GRAIN': THE LEAGUE AND THE WORKING CLASS

Flushed with the euphoria of victory in June 1846, the editor of the *League* told his readers of the 'sound hearted' working men who had stood behind the cause, signed the League's petitions, and formed the 'great portion of our public meetings'.¹ It was in many ways a contentious claim. Only a month previously in a set of 'hints' to future historians the *Manchester Times* had characterized the 'movement' for free trade as a 'middle class' one: '[t]he idea of simultaneous action among the masses [was] hopeless'. The editor of another sympathetic journal, the *Sheffield Iris*, had struck a similar note in 1843: the League, commented the editor, had 'lamentably failed' in its 'attempts to enlist the people'.² In 1841 the League Council itself had blamed the lack of working-class cooperation for the failure of the early campaigns to achieve repeal, and opponents had often made the same point. In the House of Commons, W.B. Ferrand, the favourite of the Tory back-bench, taunted the free-trade lobby that the League was 'held in hatred and contempt by the working classes',³ and the Central Agricultural Society dared the League to admit the truth that few of its members were '*bona fide* operatives'.⁴

In its early days the League's hopes of building a class alliance had seemed much brighter. Repeal of the Corn Laws had long been part of the programme of working-class radicals. In 1815 they had bitterly opposed the new regulations, and they had denounced the bread tax as the cause of much of their suffering during the years of economic depression that followed the French Wars. For William Cobbett whose writings enjoyed pride of place on the shelves of many radical working men, the Corn Laws provided one of the most blatant examples of the system of 'Old Corruption' that buttressed the economic and political power of the landowners. They increased the price of bread for the poor, and, like the sinecures and pensions that an unrepresentative Parliament provided for its 'friends', they placed the burden of a parasitic and heartless aristocracy on the backs of the people. In the late 1830s there were still many who remembered the time twenty years earlier 'when banners ... bearing the inscriptions "No Corn Laws" and "Down With Monopolies" were as numerous as those bearing "Universal Suffrage" and "Hunt and

Liberty”'.⁵ General Sir Charles Napier, who commanded the army in the north of England during the Chartist crisis of 1839-40, predicted in 1841 that the 'corn law question would ere long form a rallying point' for 'Chartists, Republicans and shopkeepers', who, together with 'leaders of great riches' would 'form a league not easy to deal with'.⁶ Napier spoke from experience; he had mingled in disguise with the crowds at Chartist meetings like the one depicted in an engraving where a banner flaunted the well-known Anti-Corn Law motif of a large French loaf alongside its miserable English counterpart.⁷ It 'would be difficult to find any man, uninfluenced by selfish interests, and in possession of a sane mind', wrote the editor of the *Charter*, 'who would stand up for a continuance of the Corn Law atrocity'.⁸ In many places, particularly those that were distant from the major urban centres, Leaguers reported promising signs of a popular alliance of some sort with the Chartists. In Bath Henry Vincent facilitated a union between the repealers and the Chartists; in Preston the Chartists were reputed to be keen supporters of the Anti-Corn Law movement; at Newchurch all the local Chartists signed the petition for repeal; and, when the Exeter Chartist Association collapsed, its secretary offered to help the League build up its strength in 'the agricultural capital of all England'. The offer of help that John Buckmaster received from the Chartists in nearby Tiverton took a more practical form. When he arrived to debate with the local champion of the pro-Corn Law party, the secretary of the Chartist branch offered to intervene on his behalf if the protectionist began to get the better of the argument: 'hold up your thumb and we can break up the meeting'.⁹

Outside England the evidence of support for repeal among working people is more consistent. In Ireland the agitation did best among urban workers, and even grander claims were made in Scotland. According to one member of the Edinburgh ACLA, in Scotland 'there is no party or class of men . . . that dare publicly advocate the bread tax'; although 'they often tack their favourite five points to the tail of our anti-corn law petitions', the 'Chartist leaders join the other classes in condemning the corn law'. Other evidence suggests that many Scottish Chartists were prepared to go to considerable lengths to support repeal even without a Chartist addendum. At Dysart, for example, it was the Chartists who organized the petition against the Corn Laws in support of Villiers' resolution of February 1840, and in Stirling the same task was performed by the Working Men's Association.¹⁰ A number of prominent individuals in Scotland endorsed Corn Law repeal as well as Chartism. The Revd Patrick Brewster, who acquired fame and notoriety as one of the few Church of Scotland clergymen of this era to become a radical agitator, drew attention to the plight of the large numbers of the unemployed in his Paisley parish, not only by endorsing the People's Charter (an action for which he is best known), but also by attending a Chartist Conference and a League banquet in successive weeks during January 1842.¹¹ Alexander Purdie, secretary of the Glasgow Chartists, was another Scot who attracted criticism from

English Chartists because of his close relationship with the League. The most convincing evidence came in 1842 when a significant section of the Scottish Chartists refused to sign the second great Chartist National Petition because it did not include a specific reference to repeal of the Corn Laws.¹²

For many working people, however, there was no question of a close relationship with the League. Among agricultural labourers, the League had to combat not only the widely held view that repeal would reduce incomes but also the fear that it would increase rents, and cause massive unemployment by forcing millions of acres out of production.¹³ For the most part, however, the problem was not the programme of Corn Law repeal; it was the widespread perception of the League as an employers’ pressure group. In 1846 George Wilson, the president of the League, boasted to a Parliamentary Committee that ‘there is no employer of labour in this country who gives employment to 5,000 people and upwards who is not a member of the council of the League’.¹⁴ In Edinburgh the ACLA was said to be dominated by ‘men of capital’; in Liverpool it was ‘merchants and the elite of the commercial classes’; in Burnley it was all the town’s master cotton spinners; in Carlisle it was ‘middle class men and their dependents’.¹⁵ The list goes on. In 1843 at a time when hand loom weavers and other working men saw the new technology of the age as a threat to their skills, Feargus O’Connor bluntly told his fellow Chartists that the League was ‘composed of the owners of machinery’.¹⁶ Leaguers dismissed jibes such as this with an impatience that was born of pride in their entrepreneurial modernity and the benefits it conferred on the nation, but O’Connor was pointing to an uncomfortable reality; on many occasions employers and employees stood on opposing sides during industrial and political disputes. Cobden’s friends indignantly pointed to the evidence that showed him to be a caring employer, but there were persistent rumours that the employees at his calico works in Sabden were treated badly.¹⁷ Thomas Ashton, a cotton magnate in the Irwell Valley who was regarded as ‘one of the best friends of the League’, was one of several Leaguers who were frequently on bad terms with their employees, and the Chartists accused him of engaging in truck.¹⁸ Sheffield provided evidence of another difficulty that could arise from the close connection between business and repeal. Offlay Shore, the inaugural chairman of the Free Trade Society, was a member of a family that had operated the major local bank since the 1790s. In November 1843 when the Bank collapsed under the weight of estimated debts of £391,404 many small businesses and their employees were plunged into severe hardship.¹⁹

The division between Leaguers and working men sometimes took a political form with Leaguers being seen as the enemies of radical reform. At Stockport the Mayor and the local MP, both of them leading members of the ACLA, had distinguished themselves in overseeing measures against the threat of Chartist insurgency in 1839.²⁰ Luke Palfreyman, a prominent Sheffield Leaguer, provided a similar example. To the local Chartists he was the ‘Whig attorney’ who had prosecuted their comrades in 1839 and

1840, as a consequence of which they had smashed his windows and badly beaten him.²¹ Not surprisingly some working people even went so far as to blur the distinction between the leaders of the League and the Whig government. As a 'Corn Law Repealer and Chartist' observed sardonically in 1839, '[i]t is passing strange that those persons who profess so great an anxiety to benefit the people by a repeal of the Corn Laws, invariably support the government, in their attacks on the few remaining liberties the people have left'.²² In Manchester Abel Heywood, a veteran radical and prominent Chartist who strongly supported repeal, noted in 1842 that a 'feeling pervaded among the working classes that the middle classes and the government were leagued together for the destruction of the former'.²³ The perception was widespread. A *Northern Star* correspondent reported that in Glasgow meetings on the Corn Laws were patronized by 'the Whigs *alias* the Corn Law Repealers'; similarly in Carlisle there was a 'Whig anti-Corn law party'; the Leaguers in Leeds were Whigs; and so the list went on. As the League's lecturer, John Shearman, reported privately from Pontefract: 'we all pass for Whigs'. In Stockport, Cobden himself was dismissed as 'a regular Whig, a hypocrite and a l__r'.²⁴

Some Chartists even suspected that the entire Anti-Corn Law campaign was a deliberate diversion sanctioned in Westminster. The agitation was 'a God-send for ... the government and the legislature', editorialized the *Charter* in February 1839, a means of ignoring 'questions of greater importance'. A fortnight later the Corn Laws were the subject of the first major debate at the Chartist General Convention in February 1839 where the delegates unanimously agreed with James Bronterre O'Brien that the present Anti-Corn Law agitation was intended primarily to divert the working classes from their quest for political reform.²⁵

In more general terms the leaders of the League had difficulty in undoing the damage caused by public statements at the beginning of the campaign that cheaper bread would allow employers to reduce their costs by cutting wages.²⁶ One League supporter in 1842 thought that this impolitic admission could only be convincingly disavowed by a guarantee that the League leaders would support the maintenance of wages at 1835 levels as part of the arrangements for repeal.²⁷ To make matters worse, many of the leading Leaguers were prominent supporters of the New Poor Law, and, as their opponents often pointed out, they condemned the legislation that was passed at this time to reform and regulate the labour of children in factories. In the words of one critic, it was impossible to distinguish between the 'Cob-ling Whigs' of Manchester and the 'Little Russell Whigs', the 'Melbourne Whigs' and the other 'mean, dirty, truckling, shuffling, false treacherous, Malthusian, Poor Law Whigs'.²⁸ Cobden's stance on these questions was more subtle than his detractors implied - he was prepared to see child labour regulated as a matter of public health and he opposed the New Poor Law for tactical reasons in 1842 - but undoubtedly there were repealers who wished to have Britain governed in conformity with the most stringent requirements of *laissez-faire*

political economy. C.P. Villiers was one. As a young man he had studied economics under the tuition of Thomas Malthus and he regarded the New Poor Law and the repeal of the Corn Laws as two sides of the same coin.²⁹ So strong were the opinions on factory reform of another prominent Leaguer, Henry Ashworth, that he deliberately flouted the law by operating his factories for eleven hours a day after the passage of the Ten Hours Act. In Lancashire he and other 'Midnight Robbers', as they were called, had a special place in popular demonology.³⁰ It was only too evident that divergent versions of economic theory were dividing 'men of capital' such as him from many of the working people who favoured repeal of the Corn Laws. Something like a battle of ideas was taking place between the 'political economy' of the free market and the 'moral economy' of a social order that sanctioned state intervention on behalf of the poor.³¹

For many working people the only way to ensure that repeal would be a 'benefit and not a curse' (the words are from a member of the Chartist National Executive, John Campbell) was to ensure that it was implemented by a parliament elected by the people. '[W]hat security had [the working classes]', a delegate from Leicester asked a League Conference in July 1842, that the 'middle classes' would not 'desert the poor';³² universal suffrage would provide the means to repeal not only the Corn Laws, but 'every other bad law' such as the New Poor Law. As the self-styled 'Corn Law Repealer and Chartist' warned: 'The same parties who enacted the Corn Laws, might, if repealed, pass them again; and without a voice, you would be unable to record your protest against them.'³³ Many Leaguers took the point and supported substantial Parliamentary reform. By 1842, on the eve of Joseph Sturge's bold attempt to shift the agenda of middle-class radicalism to suffrage reform, John Brooks estimated that 19 out every 20 of the 700 delegates at a League national conference in London favoured universal suffrage.³⁴ Before this, however, prominent Leaguers had equivocated with piecemeal schemes for household and educational suffrage³⁵ which had further soured the ground upon which common cause might have been concluded. Moreover, in 1842 official League policy remained firm; individual members were free to support other reforms, but the League must confine itself to the policy of total and immediate repeal of the Corn Laws.

To this end the League Council had set out to create what Cobden called a 'working class party of repealers'.³⁶ There was no intention of bringing working people into its inner sanctum – as sympathetic workers in Liverpool, Salford and Glasgow indignantly pointed out, the Council was only open to those who could afford an annual subscription of £50 – but a great deal of effort was expended on involving working people in other ways.³⁷ There were tactical and ideological reasons for this. Firstly, as the Reform Bill agitation had made clear, the working class could provide what the *Manchester Examiner* called a 'salutary terrorism . . . that convinces spiritual and temporal Lords that concession is much more safe and more salutary than repression'.³⁸ League spokesmen often warned the Parliamentarians

that, if they were obstinate in opposing repeal of the Corn Laws, a desperate people would turn against the existing constitution and force the enactment of the People's Charter.³⁹ A second and more important reason for courting working-class support was that, without it, Leaguers would lack credibility for their claim to be the voice of the nation; they would be revealed as being little more than a manufacturers' pressure group. In its attempts to create this 'working class party of repealers' the League acted principally through the agency of its Operative ACLAs and, to a lesser extent, it also sponsored an attempt to 'draw out the trades'. At a less formal level the League was involved in attempts to secure working-class support through the press and petitioning, although some of the most impressive results owed little to them directly and others occurred despite their involvement. The most spontaneous popular initiative of the early 1840s - the Daily Bread Society - attracted some working class support, but was spurned by the League Council. The most successful formula for cooperation between working people and the League - Freehold Building Societies - did not occur until 1845 and it presaged a future era and formed an important aspect of the League's legacy.

Between April 1839 and June 1843 Operative Associations were established in 23 places with a coordinating body, the National Operative Anti-Bread Tax Association, formed in Manchester in December 1841 (see Appendix 1).⁴⁰ In March 1840 the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* enthused that Operative Associations were being formed 'everywhere',⁴¹ but the truth was more sober; of those that have been identified more than 65 per cent were located in the League's 'Manufacturing District' (Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire). Moreover some of these were ephemeral despite their early promise. At Huddersfield, for example, 400 members were recruited in five weeks early in 1841, but the enthusiasm quickly dissipated, and the town was not represented at an aggregate conference late that year.⁴² At nearby Halifax there were 700 on the Operative ACLAs books, but, according to a hostile Chartist, less than 20 regularly attended meetings. The Glasgow Operative Association was also short-lived, although it briefly produced its own newspaper.⁴³ Even in Leicester, where in July 1840 the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* offered the local Operative Association as a model, the story was not entirely reassuring. Branches were established in six surrounding villages and plans were announced for visits to fifty other places by the end of summer, but, when Thomas Cooper arrived there later in the year, he found the working men divided. The majority, he recalled, were Chartists; the others, including, no doubt, those who had caught the attention of the *Circular*, 'believed in the justice of the demands made by the Chartists, but held that the repeal of the Corn Laws would benefit them - and these supported the manufacturers at public meetings'.⁴⁴

The history of the Liverpool Operative Association that was formed in September 1840 contains several pointers to the influences that Leaguers could exert on working men. According to one historian, its 'numerous and zealous recruits' came from among the predominantly unskilled Irish

dockside workers, but the sort of patronage that they received was indicated by their meeting places - the Quaker Rooms in Duncan Street and later a Temperance Hall in Houghton Road.⁴⁵ Having begun their own library as further evidence that repeal was a creed for respectable, self-improving working men, in December they published an address that defended the League against the charge that it was a clique of employers who wished to push wages down after the Corn Laws were repealed, and a month later they distributed 3000 copies among Liverpool workers.⁴⁶ The address was suffused with religious sentiments appropriate to their meeting places: repeal of the Corn Laws was a cause sanctioned by 'the God of the poor'.⁴⁷ The message attracted a favourable response. During 1841 in Liverpool the names of 'operatives' were among the 53,000 signatures on a petition for repeal and, in June, a public meeting in Clayton Square was estimated to have drawn a crowd in excess of 10,000.⁴⁸ There were periods of apparent inactivity, but as evidence of a continuing commitment the Association claimed that it distributed 500 editions of the *Struggle* every week during 1843. Over the years there were undoubtedly working-class signatures on other large petitions.⁴⁹

The activities of William Duffy, an operative repealer who briefly played a part in the Liverpool agitation, exemplify three very important points about the sort of working man who was attracted to repeal: first, that working-class political culture did not consist of discrete movements hermetically sealed off from one another; second, that the loyalties of class were powerful even across ethnic divisions; and third that loyalties to the League, if not to the policy of repeal, were always fragile. A 'son of Ireland' who 'hated the Tories with a Holy hatred', Duffy had been a journeyman tailor in London before moving to Liverpool where he became a prominent figure in the campaign for the 'two repeals' against the Corn Laws and the Irish Union. Early in 1842 he moved to Manchester where he quickly established a reputation as a 'ringleader of the Plague' - a term that bore testimony to the Irish accent of the bludgeon-men who provided protection at some of the League's mass meetings (see Chapter 4). Duffy clashed violently with the local Chartists and criticized Feargus O'Connor, but he accepted the six points of the People's Charter and attacked 'class legislation'. In August 1842 during the massive industrial unrest that convulsed large parts of the north of England, he was in the eye of the storm representing the tailors in the Conference of Trade Unions that directed the strike from Manchester. By this stage he was disillusioned with the League, many of whose members, he believed, had used militant language in the aftermath of the 1841 election, but, 'having conjured up the public mind to the highest possible pitch' had subsequently flinched from the consequences of their actions and volunteered to 'carry staves as special constables': 'If these men think . . . they can turn round and say "we are corn law leaguers to-day, and, presto, we are magistrates to-morrow" . . . they were much mistaken.'⁵⁰

The first, and best known, of the Operative Associations was established in the shadow of Newall's Buildings in Manchester. Formed early in 1839,

the Manchester Operative ACLA accomplished little of note for most of its first year of existence beyond a series of small lectures and modest public meetings. By October the organization had fostered a branch in the suburb of New Islington and taken rooms in Carpenters' Hall, the hub of working-class political activity.⁵¹ Frederick Warren, the inaugural president of the Association, had worked in 'the ranks of the operatives' in a silk factory, and since the late 1820s he had been active in many reform movements, including the campaign for a free press, peace, anti-slavery, republicanism, repeal of the Irish Union and the New Poor Law, and reform of the parliamentary franchise. He remained president of the Operative Association until 1842 when he resigned to devote his energies to the National Complete Suffrage Union.⁵² As an Englishman Warren was in a minority of the members of the Association, most of whom were Irish.⁵³ In addition to John Joseph Finnigan (see Chapter 4 and Conclusion) other prominent Irish members included John Kelly, an Irish-born printer in New Cross who became Secretary of the National Anti-Bread Tax Association in 1841;⁵⁴ and Michael MacDonough, an 'uneducated common labourer' of 'humble parents'. Known as 'Big Mick', MacDonough was officially a 'collector' for the Operative Association, although his primary duties appear to have involved protecting League meetings from Chartist interruptions and invoking what Cobden called the 'lex talionis' by carrying the fight into Chartist gatherings.⁵⁵ In an arrangement sanctioned by Cobden and O'Connell MacDonough and many of his colleagues had been recruited as a group from the ranks of those in Manchester who favoured the repeal of the Act of Union with Ireland. League gold was an important factor in enrolling them in the struggle for cheap bread, but for those who had been active in radical politics in Manchester there may have been some element of personal commitment to repeal of the Corn Laws; as one of them protested in response to the accusation that he and his comrades had been 'hired' by Cobden, they 'had been advocates for the repeal of the Corn Laws in the days of Henry Hunt, and before Mr Cobden and the League took up the cause'.⁵⁶

One of the best-known actions of the Manchester Operative Association was its sponsorship of a meeting and a banquet in January 1840. Held in a temporary pavilion that the League had erected on St Peter's Fields, this gathering had many resonances for working men and their wives - it was on the site of the Massacre of Peterloo in 1819 - and it was attended by an estimated 5,000 'operatives', but the arrangements spoke volumes about the place of working people in the League hierarchy. The League had held another banquet for its more distinguished and affluent guests the previous evening (see Chapter 9), and the sense of social differentiation was reinforced by rumours that the meal consisted of 'leftovers' from that occasion. The rumours were hotly denied, but there was no disputing the absence of working men from the list of those who gave addresses that evening. The contrast was made evident at the public meeting that took place in association with the banquet: a Chartist was elected to the chair; the

motion for repeal was amended to call for universal suffrage; and a remonstrance was sent from the 'slave class of Manchester' to 'both houses of incurables'. The remonstrance made difficult reading for the Leaguers who had organized the meeting. Although it repudiated the 'cursed and abominable Corn Laws' and lamented the existence of 'sinecures and pensions', a 'political state church', a 'standing army', and a 'ponderous debt', to all of which many Leaguers were equally opposed, it also made much of Parliament's failure to 'secure the good results promised to the people at the passing of the reform bill' and singled out the 'new poor law' for special condemnation.⁵⁷ Forty new members joined the Association at its first meeting after the banquet, but by March it had effectively collapsed and was promising to assist the Chartists to obtain political reform. It remained dormant for several months, only emerging to hold a public dinner which attracted a mere forty including seventeen who were described as prospective members.⁵⁸

Around this time Edward Watkin, the son of a wealthy Leaguer, was charged by Cobden with the task of resurrection. By June 1841 he had overseen the formation of a network of eight Manchester branches, and the recruitment of 'Big Mick' and his friends to the paramilitary body that was euphemistically known as the Anti-Corn Law Police. In the six months from September 1841 to March 1842 the Operative Association sponsored 38 lectures, two tea parties and five large public meetings with an aggregate attendance of 18,000, but the news was not all good. The published report of their activities admitted to debts amounting to £20, and privately Watkin complained to Cobden that the Association owed double that amount largely because it had 'not received a farthing in subscription or donation' for some months.⁵⁹ Soon afterwards the Operative Association disappeared from the pages of the local press. Its final demise only seemed to confirm the impression that had dogged its chequered history: that it had been confected; its banners paid for with League gold; its muscle supplied by members of O'Connell's Irish Repeal Party; and those genuinely attracted to its banner easily seduced by Chartists who offered them common cause on a broad radical agenda. Watkin recognized as much. Surveying the massive crowd at an Anti-Corn Law demonstration in Stevenson's Square in June 1841, he described them as 'Chartists to a man'.⁶⁰

Evidence of a spontaneous campaign for repeal among working people was stronger in Sheffield than in Liverpool or Manchester. The Sheffield Mechanics' ACLA was formed in November 1839, several months before a body made up of 'merchants and manufacturers' began a halting presence in the town. Although the Mechanics' Committee would have an ephemeral existence, the tradition upon which it drew was strongly entrenched,⁶¹ for Sheffield was the home town of Ebenezer Elliott, whose *Corn Law Rhymes* had been widely circulated since their publication in 1830. In January 1839 a Chartist amendment to a repeal resolution was soundly defeated at a large public meeting in Sheffield's Paradise Square after Elliott told the audience in a passionate speech that he was for the

Charter, but not for starving first. In May he publicly resigned from the local Working Men's Association because it was associated with the Chartist Convention's denunciation of the repeal campaign; the Chartists, he complained, were 'fighting the battle of the aristocracy under the people's colours'.⁶² His stance attracted considerable support; in the same month Sheffield's delegate to the Chartist Convention regretfully reported 'little success' in the town because the 'anti-corn law party, at the head of which was Mr Elliott, who was very influential, had gained the ascendancy'.⁶³ Although the repeal movement in Sheffield was never formally endorsed by the local trade unions, it enjoyed the support of some prominent individual trade unionists. When George Julian Harney, a leading metropolitan Chartist, arrived in South Yorkshire to take up his duties as a regional Chartist correspondent for the *Northern Star*, he quickly learned that the trades (in particular their 'committee men and secretaries') 'were supporters of corn law repeal'.⁶⁴ In September 1839 the committee of the Sheffield Combined Trades' Committee, about which Harney complained, had resolved by twenty votes to twelve not to give formal support to the campaign for the People's Charter, because 'it would be impolitic to join any political body', a conventional stance in an age when Trade Unions were still subjected to frequent legal persecution.⁶⁵ Two months later, however, some of those who urged the rejection of the Chartists' embrace took the lead in advocating that the Trades' Committee should join the Anti-Corn Law agitation. The leading proponents of this arrangement were John Wardle and Joseph Kirk. Secretary of the Trades' Union Committee, Wardle was a veteran radical of nearly thirty years who became Assistant Secretary of ACLA, one of its few obvious working-class members.⁶⁶ Kirk was a journeyman file maker, an active member of the Working Men's Association and a veteran of the campaign to liberate the Dorchester Labourers who had been transported for trade union activities in 1834.⁶⁷ Despite their prominence, Wardle and Kirk were unable to carry the debate, and they were attacked for their inconsistency in attempting to obtain official endorsement for repeal after the Committee had rejected an endorsement of Chartism as 'impolitic'. The delegates agreed 'to a man' that the Corn Laws were 'an evil of the worst kind', but they would go no further. The best that the repealers could do was to establish a working man's Anti-Corn Law committee that was 'entirely separate and distinct from the Trades' Union Committee'.⁶⁸

Although it effectively ended in failure, this well-publicized attempt to make the Sheffield Trades' Union Committee the engine to recruit working-class supporters for the League's campaign may have encouraged the Manchester Leaguers to attempt to win the cooperation of trades unions, not only locally, but also nationally. The League Council took the first step in June 1841 when Richard Cobden and John Brooks attended a general meeting of the Manchester trades in Carpenters' Hall.⁶⁹ Although resolutions in favour of repeal were carried, no further strategy was accepted. Nonetheless, the significance of this gesture is worth lingering

over. Following the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1825 trade unionism was a lawful activity, although the strict limits of this status were demonstrated during the subsequent decade and a half by successful prosecutions of the Dorchester Labourers (1834) and the Glasgow Cotton Spinners (1837). Trades unions were anathema to many Leaguers, offending a basic tenet of their ideology of free enterprise and, in practical terms, providing them with bitter antagonists in their roles as employers. In Manchester, where class values were particularly abrasive, 'the gulf between master and operative', as Cobden wrote to Samuel Smiles in October 1841, had appeared to be 'impassable'.⁷⁰ It is a measure of how desperate the times were considered to be at Newall's Buildings in the aftermath of the 1841 General Election that they were prepared to countenance an alliance with the trades.⁷¹

Following the Carpenters' Hall meeting in June the League held separate 'conferences' with a number of trades 'at their own lodges', well away from the glare of publicity, and, according to Cobden's private report to Smiles, they 'found ready listeners and many secret allies, even amongst the Chartists'.⁷² He ought not to have been surprised by the reception he received among the trades: in 1839 twenty-six separate Manchester trades had collected petitions against the Corn Laws that totalled nearly 17,000 signatures. Four thousand hand loom weavers headed the list, but there were also impressive contributions from the fustian cutters (2304), cordwainers (1368), tailors (1320) and cotton spinners (1276).⁷³ The fact that these trades were also the most consistent supporters of the Charter emphasizes the persistent yearning for repeal in the radical vision.⁷⁴

As the strongest supporters of repeal among the Manchester trades, the hand loom weavers warrant special attention. They had suffered more hardship and decline over the preceding half century than any other occupation. Between 1829 and 1846, for example, the number of hand looms in use in Manchester fell from 300,000 to 60,000.⁷⁵ As early as 1812 (and again in 1826) the seething discontent of this once proud trade had precipitated riots, machine-breaking and conspiracy in south-east Lancashire.⁷⁶ More than most they knew that repeal was a campaign for cheap bread, a conviction that existed before the formation of the Manchester ACLA. As H.S. Chapman, a government investigator, reported in 1838, at open hearings attended by hundreds of weavers '[n]early every witness ... considered the corn-laws as exercising a pernicious influence on the condition of the labouring population'.⁷⁷ The weavers were the only union with which the League developed an effective public relationship, largely through the agency of Edward Curran. Yet another Irish-born supporter of repeal and Secretary of the weavers' union, Curran was a veteran of Peterloo in 1819 and the National Union of the Working Classes in 1831, for which he was imprisoned for 12 months in 1832. After his release he went on to an active role in the campaign to assist the Dorchester Labourers and subsequently the Glasgow Cotton Spinners when they were prosecuted for their trade union activities in 1837. An opponent of the

New Poor Law, he was also active in the Manchester Radical Association and a prominent Chartist. Curran's long-standing support for repeal, such as leading the delegation of working men that addressed the League's conference of ministers of religion in 1841, earned him the sobriquet of 'hired Whig' in some Chartist circles.⁷⁸

Following the League's private initiative, the Manchester Operative Association publicly explored the idea of involving the trades in the movement during the second half of 1841 culminating in their decision to convene a national conference of 'trades', 'mills' and 'associations' on New Year's Day 1842 in Newall's Buildings.⁷⁹ Over fifty delegates attended, representing just over twenty localities. To some extent the list of delegates provides a snapshot of the location of League activity among working people. As with the Operative Associations, the bulk of them were from towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire, although there were also delegates from Birmingham, Nottingham, Coventry and Great Torrington in Devon.⁸⁰ Equally significant was the absence of any representatives from London and only a solitary delegate from Scotland who had travelled 400 miles from Forfar. Moreover, upon closer scrutiny the list says more about the League's weaknesses among working people than its strength. From Macclesfield, for example, the delegates were a pawnbroker and Timothy Falvey, originally a weaver, but by this time on the brink of a full-time career as a League official. The case of John Finnigan was similar; by this stage he was a League lecturer, but he was listed as a 'weaver'. Samuel Bamford, the well known radical poet, was there too, although he had long since given up the loom and was busily completing his memoir, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, a book to which Leaguers would often appeal for confirmation of their claim that repeal of the Corn Laws had been one of the principal demands of the people on the fateful day of Peterloo.⁸¹ There were some real workers, including the largest of the delegations, one from Bolton headed by Henry Rothwell, Secretary of the Cotton Spinners Union, but there is little evidence that organized working-class support for repeal in that town extended far beyond this section of the spinners.⁸²

The Conference ended inconclusively. Within weeks, however, Cobden had written to Watkin urging him to attempt to 'draw out the trades' on the Corn Law question and following this letter two further meetings were held in March (with only Manchester delegates present), but the second of these dropped repeal and closed with a resolution that 'all trades be recommended to join the National Charter Association forthwith'.⁸³ A similar meeting occurred in Birmingham as part of a nationwide effort to collate evidence of working-class distress that could be presented to the new Tory administration. Here the Anti-Corn Law Society called together representatives of the trades and factories in January 1842 to assess the state of the local economy amidst increasing economic distress, but, when the meeting took place, the League committee was lectured by a succession of delegates on the need to lay 'the democratic axe . . . to the root of the tree of monopoly before any good results could accrue to the sons of industry'.⁸⁴

Indicative of the weakness of his position, when the secretary of the ACLA organized another public meeting a week later, he arranged for written reports from the factories to be read out.⁸⁵

Support for repeal among trades unionists - expressed in petitions to the House of Commons - was evident in a number of other places from Limerick to Linlithgow,⁸⁶ although the levels varied from area to area and trade to trade and it is questionable how much credit the League deserves for generating it. The most concerted petitioning campaign by trade unions in support of Corn Law repeal occurred in Bristol over the course of three Parliamentary sessions. One of the leading commercial centres in the west country of England, Bristol in the early 1840s had a richly diverse commercial and industrial formation.⁸⁷ The breadth of the local economy was fully reflected in the occupation-based petitions tabled in the House of Commons. In 1840 sixty-seven separate Bristol trades petitioned for repeal of the Corn Laws, totalling 5,201 signatures.⁸⁸ The largest contribution came from 364 'Operative Smiths'; the smallest from two 'Operative Mathematical Instrument Makers' (the average petition had 77 signatures). Two years later the Instrument Makers did not petition, but 48 other trades from confectioners to coal miners did, including the largest contribution from the 'Operative Cabinet Makers' (237) towards a total of 4408 (an average of 91 signatures on each petition). During the next session 43 Bristol trades petitioned for repeal. Totalling 3307, on this occasion the cabinet makers were eclipsed by the carpenters as the major contributor (444), with each petition containing the same average number of signatures to that of 1840 (77).⁸⁹ Over the three sessions a total of 72 separate occupations petitioned, 61 per cent on more than one occasion, and 38 per cent on all three. The latter group included the most active of the Bristol trades: eleven of them, including the cabinet makers, carpenters and smiths, petitioned for the release of the Chartist prisoners Frost, Williams and Jones, in 1846.⁹⁰

The League's attempts to tap into the reservoir of support for repeal among trades unionists cost it dearly during 1842. Although the experiment had effectively foundered by Easter, the League was accused of fomenting the widespread strike that paralysed large parts of Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire and the Potteries during August. There is no more evidence that the 'Plug Plot' strike was a League conspiracy than a Chartist one; indeed some erstwhile working-class supporters of the League, such as William Duffy, were disappointed at how quickly Leaguers signed on as Special Constables.⁹¹ While the League went through a period of what nowadays we would call 'damage control' in the aftermath of the strike, Cobden had already changed tack. Late in 1841 he and Watkin had contemplated the possibility of establishing a universal suffrage newspaper that would serve the League's interests by condemning the 'insane course of those who oppose the Corn Law Repealers'.⁹² As early as 1839 the League had attempted to improve its appeal to working people by recruiting Bronterre O'Brien, the Chartist 'schoolmaster', to write for the sympathetic *Bolton*

Free Press (owned by Henry Ashworth). Despite his previous strident opposition to the League, the obstacle that prevented Bronterre from subsequently fulfilling his commitment was not principle but his trial and imprisonment.⁹³ Cobden's broader suggestion was taken up at the end of 1842 by the editor of a London journal, the *Bread Basket*. There were early days of promise when the editor felt hopeful enough to boast that the London Chartists, 'now as weak and as insignificant as the followers of Johanna Southcote [sic.], were showing 'signs of repentance' on the question of Corn Laws. The joy did not last long as the paper failed after just nine issues.⁹⁴

The *Bread Basket* was one of several attempts to bring the message of repeal to working-class newspaper readers. The *Bread Eaters' Advocate* was another.⁹⁵ Published in Manchester the *Advocate* only survived for two issues and, unfortunately, there appears to be no copy extant. One small extract reprinted in the *English Chartist Circular* contemplated a march on London reminiscent of the ill-fated Blanketeers march of 1817,⁹⁶ a suggestion that would have been unlikely to satisfy Cobden's call for a sane policy. The *Advocate* was important only because of its association with the Daily Bread Society, the working-class repeal movement that nearly took off without the League.

At a time when Watkin's efforts to revive the Manchester Operative Association during 1841 had stalled, a new organization emerged; it was hailed as the 'best mode of obtaining the repeal of the food taxes as the road to the PEOPLE'S CHARTER or something better'.⁹⁷ Although it was formed in Manchester, the society had been conceived in Leeds early in 1841 by James Hill. Nothing is known about Hill's background (or his subsequent career) and, not surprisingly, the Daily Bread Society has been overlooked by previous historians of the League. Nevertheless the brief history of the scheme is instructive as an essay on the League's inability to respond to independence among working-class supporters of repeal. In a pamphlet entitled *Daily Bread, or Taxation Without Representation*, Hill argued that both the League and the Chartists had failed. To replace them he offered the model of the Boston Tea Party. A Daily Bread Society would be set up to collect tens of thousands of penny subscriptions which would buy a ship-load of grain in either Germany or Poland. As the ship carrying the 'people's grain' approached a northern port public awareness would be raised by men chalking the motto 'Give us this day our Daily Bread' on walls; women inscribing it on banners and flags; boys writing it in copy books and girls working it into samplers. Once the ship arrived meetings would be held all over the country, and the Queen would be memorialized to abolish the Corn Laws by order in Council. In the event of her refusal, ten or twenty thousand subscribers to the Daily Bread Society would board the ship and forcefully attempt to import the 'people's grain' in individual sample bags. If the authorities attempted to prevent this, the grain would be thrown into the sea in a symbolic gesture of defiance.⁹⁸

The League Council rejected the scheme, and the Daily Bread Society

as a consequence was always a peripheral venture that could easily have been disavowed if it went too far. It was, however, given cautious welcome by the *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, the *Leeds Times* and the *Manchester Times*, as well as being enthusiastically adopted by the New Year's Day Conference of Trades, Mills and Associations in Newall's Buildings.⁹⁹ The Society was formed in Manchester in November 1841, with a committee that included the leading members of the Operative Association, Watkin, Warren and Finnigan. Despite the derision of the *Northern Star* which condemned it as a 'palpable ruse', the nascent organization also had tentative Chartist links: Hill's pamphlet was sold at Chartist booksellers and the *Bread Eaters' Advocate*, was published by Abel Heywood, the treasurer of the National Charter Association. The organization was, however, no more successful than the Operative Association. Its well-advertised first public meeting attracted a mere 150, and at the second equally well-publicized meeting the 'doors did not open'.¹⁰⁰ It was an opportunity lost.

The story of the *Struggle* was very different. Printed, published and edited by Joseph Livesey of Preston, it was one of the League's strongest assets in the bid to obtain working-class support for repeal. With a peak circulation that was estimated to approach 15,000 per week, sufficient, it was said, to offer distributors a 'good living', the *Struggle* was also one of the longest-lived of the pro-League publications, lasting from 1842 to 1846.¹⁰¹ At four pages it was a good halfpennyworth (two shillings and six pence a hundred). Printed without a date - because it was not meant to go out of date - and illustrated by wood-cuts, it presented an uncomplicated and uncompromising view of the world. Livesey had chosen the title, he informed his readers, because he believed that 'Good and evil, truth and error, are constantly struggling with each other', and, for the moment, the struggle was 'betwixt *Free Trade* and *Monopoly*'.¹⁰² For five years he conducted readers through this battle with cartoons, stories, poems and songs, reports of meetings, tit-bit commentaries on the passing scene, and homilies about free trade. Number 49, for example, presented readers with an illustration showing a flamboyantly successful League banquet at Liverpool together with articles entitled 'To The Working Classes' (on the fallacies of the case against free trade); 'The Chief Business of MPs in Parliament'; 'Queen's Speech'; 'Electoral Agitation in the Boroughs'; 'Petition, Petition, Petition'; 'The Great Anti-Corn Law Banquets And Meetings at Manchester'; 'Varieties'; and an advert for 'Livesey's Free Trade Letter Linings' (re-usable printed messages about the Corn Laws). The article on petitions exemplified the appearance of homeliness to which the League attached so much importance in its self-presentation; the Livesey family's petition with eleven signatures was included as a facsimile.¹⁰³

The credibility of Livesey's preaching would have lost nothing from the many signs that he retained his independence. Readers were told that, although 'Cheap Bread' would be the focal point of the *Struggle*, he reserved the right to 'step aside to contend with other evils'. These included

smoking, war and the pollution of the air. Inevitably, the great crusade of his life, teetotalism, made many appearances, and he seems to have had no hesitation in reprimanding the League for holding a banquet in Manchester that, in his opinion, would have been ruined by the use of port, sherry, hock, claret and madeira, had not 200 bottles and a sixty gallon cask of lemonade provided a counter-attraction.¹⁰⁴ Teetotalers were among the strongest supporters of the League (they hailed the prospect of abundant supplies of grain in the form of bread as preferable to the waste of grains on alcoholic beverages), and the *Struggle* was distributed with the help of such teetotal stalwarts as Thomas Cook of Leicester. Livesey's independence would have been the more attractive to working-class readers because of his personal history and involvement in popular radical causes.¹⁰⁵ He was the archetypal working-class autodidact, having taught himself to read and write while hunched over a loom.¹⁰⁶ He seems always to have been mindful of the harshness of poverty, and, unlike many Leaguers, he opposed the New Poor Law. He was also proof that it was possible to support universal suffrage as well as repeal of the Corn Laws; when Joseph Sturge launched the Complete Suffrage Movement Livesey published a declaration of support.¹⁰⁷ Livesey's personal philosophy was best summarized in perhaps the best illustration contained in the *Struggle*. Appearing in issue 23, 'Storming the Castle of Monopoly' depicted public opinion as a battering ram, suspended on a frame made of the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* and the *Struggle* itself, from which it is smashing in the doors of Parliament. The frame is erected on the ruins of the Old Corn Law and already posted on the walls of the ruined castle are flags indicating earlier popular victories - Reform and Catholic Emancipation - as well as a forlorn flag of truce offering a tariff. Not only does Livesey's illustration present the League as an assured victor but it also leaves readers in no doubt that further triumphs will soon follow: immediately behind the Leaguers the Chartists are preparing to enter the castle while the temperance army masses on a nearby hill to prepare its advance.

Despite his independence the League lavished praise on Livesey. According to the editor of the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, he had done more to enlighten the working classes than any other man; for the *Economist*, as noted, the League owed Livesey a debt for his 'rough but expressive' woodcuts that had often 'started an idea, or excited a train of reflection'.¹⁰⁸ For the most part, however, the treatment of Livesey was the exception that proves the rule. The League's inability to integrate working people into the movement as equals meant that, in many ways, it failed to fulfil its potential as a mass movement. There is no doubt that the potential existed. The League's petitioning campaigns had revealed a huge reservoir of opposition to the Corn Laws among working people all over the British Isles, from the workers at Timothy's work shop in Failsworth and the cotton spinners who drank at the White Hat, Castle Street, to the journeymen weavers working at Prince's factory in Paisley and the workmen in the employ of William Orr, linen manufacturer, near Belfast.¹⁰⁹ The Manchester ACLA's annual report

in 1843 detailed nearly 3000 petitions from 'trading establishments' in the Manchester district alone containing over 75,000 signatures in 1842-3.¹¹⁰

The pattern was common. In one week at the beginning of February 1842, for example, there were over a thousand repeal petitions containing over a quarter of a million signatures that had been scrutinized by the House Committee. The sample provides a detailed cross-section of the constituency of the League from religious congregations and Sunday School teachers to customers of a tobacconist in Finsbury and passers-by on Blackfriars Bridge. Of the 1033 petitions 231 were specifically identified as emanating from 'workmen', 'working people' - possibly to reflect female signatures - and 'operatives'. A further eight were from trades unions, making a total of slightly less than one quarter (23.1 per cent).¹¹¹ In some cases we are offered a perspective from street level. On 7 February 1842, for example, John Dennistoun, MP for Glasgow, presented sixteen separate petitions from hand loom weavers and their families in Bridgeton, Lanarkshire. In all but one case these families lived in Brown Street, two thirds of them between number 10 and number 21.¹¹²

In some cases informal cooperation was evident when the employees of prominent Leaguers campaigned alongside their employers. Elkanah Armitage's employees in Pendleton petitioned on several occasions, and four hundred workers at John Bright's Fieldhouse Mills in Rochdale spent their Saturday nights in 1843 'not in the tap room but, in distributing the *Struggle* and other useful publications' as well as collecting subscriptions for the League.¹¹³ Inevitably such reports gave rise to claims of coercion, but there is little direct evidence of this.¹¹⁴ For the most part the factory petitions point to broad working-class support, including those collected from Chartists like the workers employed in small workshops run by leading Manchester Chartists, James Wheeler, Abel Heywood and Thomas Dickinson.¹¹⁵

The League's potential for a mass base of support was evident in the role that working men played as part of the army of voluntary and paid workers for the cause. There were 'working men' at Stockport who collected the 'League Rent'; in many places others donated exhibits to the League's bazaars or attended them as part of a 'workers' outing'.¹¹⁶ Some well-known Leaguers were working men. Joseph Hickin, the League Secretary was 'born in humble circumstances'.¹¹⁷ Timothy Falvey, the son of an impoverished Kerry farmer, had lived from hand to mouth as a hand loom weaver in Macclesfield until Cobden recruited him as a full-time League lecturer in March 1842.¹¹⁸ Nathan Davenport, an 'uneducated' silk throwster of Leeds, signed more than 1000 objections to Tories on the electoral roll,¹¹⁹ and Joseph Benson, a Sheffield file hardener, was one of the 'speakers in fustian coats' at the League's working-class meetings.¹²⁰ For the most part, however, the League's army of workers are known to us only as statistics or as fleeting references like the 'respectable shoemaker' in St Albans in Hertfordshire, who helped Joseph Christy to distribute two trusses of tracts in July 1844.¹²¹

The League finally came up with an appropriate means of converting the mass support for repeal into a mass movement in 1845. Initiated less than a year before repeal, the Freehold Land Societies flourished after the adjournment of the League, and their characteristics are best studied then. To some extent the Freehold Land Societies can be seen as one of the many forms of working-class thrift, respectability and upward mobility in the early Victorian era – the editor of the *Freeholder* would later refer to a ‘self-relying, self-reforming spirit’ among working people¹²² – but, as J.E. Ritchie, the first historian of freehold societies, enthused in 1853, the movement was concerned not only with ‘independence [and] wealth’ but with ‘political power’.¹²³ Notwithstanding exaggerated claims, a considerable number of new names were added to the electoral roll as a result of these schemes; the majority were working men. For those who had grown up in the tradition of working-class radicalism that stretched back to Peterloo and beyond this was more than a scheme to manipulate the electoral roll; it was a step, albeit a limited one, towards the implementation of manhood suffrage. ‘Working Men of Manchester and the Northern Counties!’, appealed the promoters of one scheme, ‘[t]o many of you we say with confidence – Your enfranchisement is within the compass of your own exertions.’¹²⁴

The first of the societies inspired by the League, the Freeholders’ Building Society, was established at the Manchester Mechanics’ Institute in August 1845 with the object of assisting ‘the middle and industrious classes to obtain freehold dwelling houses of their own, and more especially to create a spirit of independence in the latter’.¹²⁵ By November more than 2200 shares had been taken up (paid at 10s per month). At a meeting in March 1846 it was reported that this had grown to 5731 and eight branches of the society had been established as far afield as Wigan.¹²⁶ The Chairman of this pioneering Society was John Brooks who, as a prominent Leaguer, set a pattern for subsequent societies. The Great Northern Building Society (October 1846), the Ducie Building Society (October 1846), the Working Men’s Benefit Building Society (October 1847), the League Building Society (June 1848), the Second Freeholders’ Building Society (June 1848), and the Manchester and Northern Counties Freehold Land Society (March 1850), were all dominated by Leaguers as patrons, trustees and committee members.¹²⁷ Initially ‘sceptical’, Archibald Prentice became a strident advocate of the schemes, pointing out in December 1846 that a labourer paying annual rent of £7 10s could, for an extra 9d a week, own his own cottage in about nine years.¹²⁸ The Working Men’s Benefit Building Society arose from a concern about how affordable the schemes were. With Brooks, Wilson, and William Morris, a veteran of the Salford Operative ACLA,¹²⁹ as trustees, this association set its subscription ‘within the reach of operatives of almost every class’.¹³⁰ It was always more than a quest for votes; it was a heady mixture of self-improvement, political regeneration and property ownership. In March 1846 subscribers to the first freehold society were shown models of houses as the promise of things to come; and

early in 1851 members of the Manchester and Northern Counties Society named their first fourteen-acre estate at Salemoor in North Cheshire 'Freetown'.¹³¹ In June 1851 about 120 travelled by train to take 'formal possession of the estate'. Following a speech from George Wilson, this band of ex-Leaguers, Complete Suffragists, and Chartists emulated the ancient ritual of 'beating the bounds' by marching around their estate, each 'alottee quitting the procession in turn to stand upon his own allotment'.¹³²

Contemporaries and historians disagree about how many freehold land societies were formed between 1845 and 1853.¹³³ Those inspired by the League were, like the Operative Associations, concentrated in Lancashire and Yorkshire - further evidence of the weakness of the League's efforts to establish a formal 'working class party of repealers' beyond its northern heartland.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, they brought together Leaguers, Complete Suffragists and Chartists in an alliance that had eluded them for the best part of a decade. By 1850 free trade had a central place on the working-class agenda and at 'Freetown' we can see the mid-Victorian consensus in microcosm. The new spirit could also extend to the hustings. As the Liberal candidates at Derby, F. Leveson Gower and David Ricardo, found during the 1847 election, the emerging consensus brought them welcome assistance from working men, 'enthusiastic for free trade', who threatened to boycott unsympathetic publicans and shopkeepers.¹³⁵ During the decades that followed free trade became entrenched as a working-class cause, so that by the 1880s Joseph Arch and other 'Lib-Lab' candidates for Parliament automatically included free trade for all foodstuffs in their electoral programmes.¹³⁶ In Arch's case the connection with the campaign for repeal was a strong one; he remembered his 'sober, industrious' father, an agricultural labourer, becoming a 'staunch Repealer' and refusing 'to sign a petition in favour of the Corn Laws . . . to his cost and ours'.¹³⁷ For all that the League failed to convert the mass support for repeal into a mass movement of the people, the conversion of the broader demand for 'free trade' into a people's cause was one of its most important legacies.

Notes

1. *League*, 6 June 1846.
2. *Manchester Times*, 8 May 1846; *Sheffield Iris*, 17 June 1843. See also *Sentinel*, 23 March 1844.
3. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 May 1841; *Manchester Times*, 29 June 1844.
4. Humanitas, *Free Trade, with Reference to its Effects upon the Operative Classes, Briefly Considered* (London, 1844), p. 14.
5. *Manchester Times*, 7 March 1840; 15 May 1841.
6. W. Napier, *The Life and Opinions of General Sir Charles Napier* (London, 1857), vol. 2, pp. 153-4. See also L. Brown, 'The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League', in A. Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959), pp. 343-5.
7. J. Cannon, *The Chartists in Bristol* (Bristol, 1964) facing p. 7.
8. *Charter*, 3 February 1839. See also *English Chartist Circular*, 25 April 1841.

9. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 5 March 1840; 19 March 1840; *Manchester Times*, 24 December 1841; 12 October 1844; J.C. Buckmaster, *A Village Politician: The Life-Story of John Buckley* (1897, repr. Horsham, 1982), pp. 144–5.
10. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 5 March 1840; 24 September 1840; PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions* (1837–8), vol. 104, p. 310.
11. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 27 August 1840; *Manchester Times*, 22 January 1842; A. Wilson, *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (Manchester, 1970), pp. 32, 60, 118, 140.
12. *Northern Star*, 22 January 1842; Wilson, *Chartist Movement in Scotland*, p. 152.
13. J. Gladstone, *The Repeal of the Corn Laws, with its Probable Consequences Briefly Examined and Considered* (London, 1839), pp. 11–13; A. Moore, *Agriculture and the Corn Law: Prize Essays Showing the Injurious Effects of the Corn Law upon Tenant Farmers* (Manchester, 1842), p. 15.
14. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors, Reports from Committees*, vol. 8, 1846, p. 225.
15. *Scotsman*, 11 March 1843; *Manchester Times*, 10 January 1846; *Northern Star*, 1 February 1840; MPL Anti-Corn Law League [ACLL] Letter Book, Anon., Burnley, 7 March 1839.
16. F. O'Connor (ed.) *The Trial of Feargus O'Connor Esq and Fifty-eight Others on a Charge of Sedition, Conspiracy, Tumult and Riot* (1843, repr. New York, 1970), p. vi. See also P.A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 87–8.
17. See *The Poor Man's Friend, A Counter Plea for the Poor: A Refutation of the Assertions of the Anti-Corn Law League, and the Hon. and Revd Baptist W. Noel* (London, 1843), pp. 16–17; J. White, *England and Her Interests: The 'Times' and the Government and the Anti-Corn Law League Considered* (London, 1843), pp. 27–8.
18. *League*, 30 August 1845; *Northern Star*, 23 March 1839; 24 August 1839; *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 22 May 1841; P.A. Pickering and S. Roberts, 'Pills, Pamphlets and Politics: The Career of Peter Murray McDouall (1814–54)', *Manchester Region History Review*, vol. 11, 1997, p. 35.
19. *Sheffield Iris*, 31 December 1842; 28 January 1843; 11 February 1843; 15 April 1843.
20. *North Cheshire Reformer*, 25 July 1839.
21. *Northern Star*, 26 February 1842; *Sheffield Iris*, 9 April 1839; 25 June 1839; 17 September 1839; 14 January 1840; 22 January 1842; *Select Committee on Votes of Electors*, p. 308.
22. Anon., *A Letter to the Radicals and Chartists of Manchester and Lancashire on the Position of Chartists and the Corn Law Repealers by a Corn Law Repealer and a Chartist* (Manchester, 1840), pp. 6–7. For a similar complaint in Yorkshire see *Sheffield Iris*, 17 June 1843.
23. *Manchester Times*, 18 June 1842.
24. *Northern Star*, 4 January 1840; 1 February 1840; *Manchester Times*, 26 June 1841; MPL, ACLL Letter Book, J.H. Shearman, Doncaster, 13 April 1839.
25. *Charter*, 10 February 1839; 17 February 1839.
26. *Northern Star*, 24 March 1838; Anon. *To Artisans and Labourers* (London, n.d.), pp. 1, 3; Baptist W. Noel, *A Plea for the Poor, Showing How the*

- Proposed Repeal of the Corn Laws Will Affect the Interests of the Working Classes* (London, 1841), p. 8; *Poor Man's Friend, A Counter Plea*, p. 22.
27. *Manchester Times*, 27 August 1842.
 28. Radical poster from 1839 repr. in A. Redford, *History of Local Government in Manchester* (London, 1950), vol. 2, facing p. 16.
 29. For Cobden see *Manchester Times*, 25 January 1845; *Manchester Examiner*, 27 June 1846; N.C. Edsall, *Richard Cobden: Independent Radical* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), pp. 103-4. For Villiers see 'A Member of the Cobden Club' (ed) *The Free Trade Speeches of the Right Hon. Charles Pelham Villiers MP, with a Political Memoir* (London, 1883), vol. 1, pp. xiii, xvi, lxxxii. For Malthus and the general development of political economy see D. Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain 1750-1834* (Cambridge, 1996). We are grateful to Dr Owen Ashton for bringing this to our attention.
 30. For Ashworth see J. Campbell, *An Examination of the Corn and Provision Laws from their First Enactment to the Present Period* (Manchester, 1841), pp. 28-9, and the entry by K. Fielden in J.O. Baylen and N.J. Gossman (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of Modern English Radicals* (Sussex, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 22-3.
 31. E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Commons* (London, 1991), p. 333f. Michael Turner has pointed out that some Manchester businessmen, including future Leaguers, were not unqualified supporters of *laissez-faire*, but the distinctions were almost certainly lost on the working-class radicals. See M.J. Turner, 'Before the Manchester School: Economic Theory in Early Nineteenth-Century Manchester', *History*, vol. 79, no. 256, June 1994, pp. 216-41.
 32. *Manchester Times*, 9 July 1842.
 33. *A Letter to the Radicals*, p. 7.
 34. *Manchester Times*, 16 July 1842. See also *Manchester Times*, 13 April 1839; 5 December 1840; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 21 July 1842.
 35. In his *Organic Changes Necessary to Complete the System of Representation Partially Amended by the Reform Bill* (Manchester, 1839), Prentice advocated a form of educational suffrage. In Leeds many of the most prominent Leaguers, including J.G. Marshall, Thomas Plint, Hamer Stansfeld and Samuel Smiles, were the leading promoters of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association which advocated Household Suffrage. See T. Mackay (ed.), *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles LLD* (London, 1905), pp. 91-7.
 36. MPL, Wilson Papers, R. Cobden to Wilson, 16 October 1841.
 37. PP, *Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, p. 217; *Manchester Times*, 8 December 1838; 17 April 1841; 22 October 1842; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 July 1840; F.A. Montgomery, 'Glasgow and the Movement for Corn Law Repeal', *History*, vol. 64, no. 212, 1979, p. 366.
 38. *Manchester Examiner*, 18 March 1848.
 39. See for example *Manchester Times*, 12 February 1842; *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 19 March 1842; *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 26 June 1841; *Northern Star*, 9 July 1842. Cobden's well-known private preference for a force behind the League's respectable façade that would 'frighten the aristocracy' was expressed to J.B. Smith. See MPL, J.B. Smith Anti-Corn Law League Papers, R. Cobden to Smith, 4 December 1841. Villiers also believed that 'the brickbat argument is the only one that our nobles heed', see Brown, 'Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League', p. 348.
 40. Some ACLAs, such as the one in Kirkcaldy, were almost exclusively working

- class in composition. See ACLL Letter Book, David Forrester, Kirkcaldy, 19 March 1840.
41. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 5 March 1840.
 42. *Ibid.*, 28 January 1840; *Manchester Times*, 8 January 1842.
 43. *Northern Star*, 2 October 1841; *The Anti-Monopolist, or, Free Trade Circular*, June–July 1843.
 44. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 July 1840; T. Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper* (1872, repr. Leicester, 1971), p. 144; PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1841, vol. 126, p. 36. See also J.F.C. Harrison, 'Chartism in Leicester', in Briggs, *Chartist Studies*, p. 137; A.T. Patterson, *Radical Leicester: A History of Leicester 1780–1850* (Leicester, 1954), pp. 313, 327. Patterson's account is very brief, noting merely the formation of the Association in March 1840 and its merger into the Complete Suffrage Union in 1842.
 45. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 24 September 1840; 8 October 1840; K. Moore, 'This Whig and Tory Ridden Town': Popular Politics in Liverpool in the Chartist Era', in J. Belchem (ed.), *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790–1940* (Liverpool, 1992), p. 63.
 46. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 8 October 1840; *Pilot*, 22 January 1841.
 47. Reprinted in *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 31 December 1840.
 48. PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1841, vol. 126, pp. 314, 713.
 49. *Ibid.*, 1842, vol. 130, p. 10; 1843, vol. 135, pp. 94, 848; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 18 April 1843.
 50. See *Manchester Times*, 22 May 1841; 26 February 1842; 20 August 1842; 3 September 1842; *Northern Star*, 12 March 1842; 13 August 1842; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 14 February 1843; *Trial of Feargus O'Connor*, p. 168; F.C. Mather 'The General Strike of 1842: A Study in Leadership, Organisation and the Threat of Revolution during the Plug Plot Disturbances', in J. Stevenson and R. Quinault (eds), *Popular Protest and Public Order* (New York, 1975), pp. 139–40n.
 51. *Manchester Times*, 27 April 1839; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 30 April 1839; 14 May 1839; 11 June 1839; 23 July 1839; 1 October 1839; 15 October 1839.
 52. *Manchester Times*, 25 September 1841; 12 February 1842; 21 January 1843; *Pilot*, 25 May 1842; *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 16 December 1843; *Northern Star*, 19 March 1842; Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists*, pp. 97–8.
 53. *Manchester Times*, 3 September 1842.
 54. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 2 December 1841; *Manchester Times*, 31 July 1841; 8 January 1842.
 55. *Manchester Times*, 31 July 1841; 3 September 1841; *Manchester Examiner*, 27 June 1846.
 56. *Manchester Times*, 27 April 1844.
 57. *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 14 January 1840; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 January 1840; *Manchester Times*, 18 January 1840; 1 February 1840.
 58. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 6 February 1840; *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 14 March 1840; 11 April 1840; *Manchester Times*, 10 October 1840; Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists*, pp. 98–100.
 59. *Manchester Times*, 16 April 1842; WSRO Cobden Papers, E.W. Watkin to Cobden, 21 April 1842.

60. *Manchester Times*, 12 June 1841.
61. See, for example, *Sheffield Iris*, 11 September 1838; 18 June 1839; 31 December 1839; 2 August 1842. See also S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield* (Liverpool, 1959), p. 42; Brown, 'Chartists and the League', pp. 343-4.
62. *Sheffield Iris*, 29 January 1839; 7 May 1839.
63. *Ibid.*, 7 May 1839.
64. *Trial of Feargus O'Connor*, p. 236
65. *Sheffield Iris*, 10 September 1839.
66. *Ibid.*, 23 January 1838; 3 September 1839; 12 November 1839; 3 March 1840; 18 August 1840; 25 August 1840; 15 February 1842.
67. *Manchester Times*, 21 December 1839; *Sheffield Iris*, 13 February 1838; 6 March 1838; 18 September 1838; 10 December 1842; 27 May 1843.
68. *Sheffield Iris*, 12 November 1839; 3 December 1839.
69. *Manchester Times*, 26 June 1841.
70. Cobden to Smiles, 21 October 1841, repr. in Mackay, *Autobiography of Samuel Smiles*, p. 112.
71. See R.A. Sykes, 'Popular Politics and Trade Unionism in South-east Lancashire, 1829-42', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1982, vol. 2, pp. 474-5.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
73. *Manchester Times*, 23 February 1839; PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1839, vol. 110, pp. 25, 26, 155. Despite allegations of forged signatures published in the *Northern Star* this was an impressive showing. See *Northern Star*, 30 March 1839.
74. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists*, chap. 3. Fustian cutters petitioned again in 1840; see PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1840, vol. 116, p. 421.
75. A.F. Coulson (ed.), *Manual of Cotton Spinning* (Manchester, 1954), vol. 1, pp. 11-12.
76. A. Prentice, *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester* (1851, repr. London, 1970), pp. 40, 52, 53, 54, 77-8; D. Bythell, *The Hand-Loom Weavers: A Study in the English Cotton Industry during the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 203, 208-11.
77. PP, *Hand Loom Weavers: Reports from Commissioners*, vol. 23, 1840, p. 576.
78. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists*, pp. 191-2.
79. *Manchester Times*, 16 October 1841; 30 October 1841; 6 November 1841; *Nonconformist*, 10 November 1841.
80. *Manchester Times*, 8 January 1842; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 13 January 1842.
81. Anon. *In Memoriam: Timothy Falvey* (Southampton, 1889), pp. 3-4; *Manchester Times*, 26 March 1842; Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1844, repr. Oxford, 1984), dated his text July 1842.
82. *Manchester Times*, 8 January 1842; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 10 December 1839; *Northern Star*, 8 December 1839. Peter Taylor presents little evidence to support his recent claim that working-class support for the League in Bolton has been 'unduly discounted'. P. Taylor, *Popular Politics in Early Industrial Britain: Bolton 1825-1850* (Keele, 1995), pp. 117-18, 221. See also R.A. Sykes, 'Popular Politics and Trade Unionism', vol. 2, pp. 473-4.
83. R. Cobden to Watkin, 19 January 1842, repr. in Watkin, *Alderman Cobden*,

- pp. 86-7; *Northern Star*, 5 March 1842 [3rd edn]; 19 March 1842 [2nd edn]; *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 12 March 1842; 19 March 1842.
84. *Northern Star*, 22 January 1842.
 85. *Birmingham Journal*, 22 January 1842; 29 January 1842. A similar regional conference in Glasgow brought together numerous delegates, but not from the trades.
 86. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 21 October 1841; PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1840, vol. 116, pp. 339, 515; 1842, vol. 130, pp. 9, 12, 30, 31, 35, and 219.
 87. *The Parliamentary Gazetteer of England and Wales* (London, 1843), vol. 1, pp. 280-5.
 88. PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1840, vol. 116, pp. 334-5, 400.
 89. *Ibid.*, 1842, vol. 130, pp. 83-5; 1843, vol. 135, pp. 829-30.
 90. *Ibid.*, 1846, vol. 158, p. 146. The 1839 Chartist petition attracted 8,160 signatures in Bristol. See D. Thompson, *The Chartists* (London, 1984), p. 344.
 91. See Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 289-90; *idem.*, 'Who Were "the People" in 1842?', in M. Chase and I. Dyck (eds), *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 124.
 92. R. Cobden to Watkin, 9 October 1841, repr. in E.W. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden of Manchester* (London, 1891), pp. 86-7.
 93. See J.B. O'Brien to T. Allsop, 17 June 1840, *Allsop Collection*, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, Coll. Misc. 0525/1, letter 2.
 94. *Bread Basket*, 31 December 1842; 18 February 1843. See also *Sentinel*, 21 January 1843.
 95. Others included the *Anti-Monopolist*, published by the Glasgow Operative Association, and, to a lesser extent, the *Sentinel*, a London newspaper that carried extensive reports of League, Complete Suffrage and Temperance activities.
 96. *English Chartist Circular*, 3 October 1841.
 97. *Northern Star*, 23 October 1841; 30 October 1841.
 98. *Daily Bread, or, Taxation Without Representation Resisted: Being a Plan for the Abolition of the Bread Tax* (London, 1841), pp. 22-6; *Northern Star*, 3 April 1841; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 18 November 1841.
 99. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 2 December 1841; *Manchester Times*, 16 October 1841; 23 October 1841; *Manchester Guardian*, 5 January 1842; H. Ashworth, *Recollections of Richard Cobden and the Anti-Corn-Law League* (London, 1878), p. 118.
 100. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 26 August 1841; 18 November 1841; *Northern Star*, 3 April 1841; 23 October 1841; 30 October 1841; 6 November 1841.
 101. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 27 January 1842; 17 November 1842; *Autobiography of Joseph Livesey* (London, 1885), p. 22; Brown 'Chartists and the League', p. 354n.
 102. *Struggle*, no. 1.
 103. *Ibid.*, no. 49.
 104. *Ibid.*, no. 59.
 105. *Staunch Teetotaller*, April 1868; *Autobiography of Joseph Livesey*, pp. 22-3, 45-6.

106. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7; N. Longmate, *The Waterdrinkers* (London, 1968), pp. 38-40.
107. *Struggle*, no. 10; *Autobiography of Joseph Livesey*, pp. 5, 40.
108. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 27 January 1842; 17 November 1842; *Economist*, 18 November 1843.
109. PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1840, vol. 116, pp. 177, 271, 632, 834.
110. *Manchester Times*, 28 October 1843.
111. PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1842, vol. 130, pp. 4-37.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
113. *Manchester Times*, 28 October 1843; 2 December 1843; PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1840, vol. 116, p. 401; 1843, vol. 135, pp. 924, 925.
114. See *inter alia* *Northern Star*, 24 February 1839; 25 March 1840; 22 January 1842.
115. PP, *Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1840, vol. 116, pp. 315, 1842, vol. 130, p. 148; 1843, vol. 135, p. 866.
116. See *League*, 25 October 1845; *Manchester Guardian*, 22 October 1845; *Manchester Times*, 7 October 1843.
117. MPL, Smith Papers, Election Papers, J. Hickin to Smith, 13 March 1841.
118. *In Memoriam: Timothy Falvey*, p. 3; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 31 December 1839; *Manchester Times*, 26 March 1842.
119. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors*, 1846, pp. 65-7.
120. *Sheffield Iris*, 12 November 1839; 18 February 1840; BL Add. MSS 50131, fol. 506 Cobden to Sturge, 4 March 1839. See also P.A. Pickering, 'Class Without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement', *Past and Present*, no. 112, August, 1986, pp. 144-62.
121. MPL, Smith Papers, League Papers, J. Christy to Smith, 3 January 1844.
122. *Freeholder*, 1 January 1850. The best discussion of the movement is M. Chase, 'Out of Radicalism: The Mid-Victorian Freehold Land Movement', *English Historical Review*, April 1991, pp. 319-45.
123. J.E. Ritchie, *Freehold Land Societies: Their History, Present Position and Claims* (London [1853]), p. 3. For Ritchie (p. 5) the fact that women were also allowed to become members was a practical admission of women's rights.
124. *Freeholder*, 1 March 1850.
125. *Manchester Times*, 30 August 1845; 8 November 1845.
126. *Ibid.*, 6 December 1845; 20 December 1845; 10 January 1846.
127. See *Ibid.*, 23 October 1846; 4 December 1846; *Manchester Examiner*, 23 October 1847; 3 June 1848; *Freeholder*, 1 March 1850.
128. *Manchester Times*, 4 December 1846. Prentice had soon introduced his other favourite causes, telling a national conference of freehold societies in January 1850 that £30 million spent annually by the working class on drink would 'win all the English and Welsh counties in one year' if invested in forty-shilling freeholds *Freeholder*, 1 January 1850.
129. In addition to his involvement in Freehold Societies, Morris had chaired the inaugural meeting of the Salford Operative ACLA in 1841 and was later active in the Complete Suffrage Movement, the campaign for public parks and local government in Salford. See *Manchester Times*, 24 July 1841;

- 11 November 1843; 13 July 1844; 3 August 1844; 4 December 1846; *Freeholder*, 1 March 1850.
130. *Manchester Examiner*, 23 October 1850. The *Northern Star* was bemused by Cobden's central role in promoting freehold societies pointing to his record of attacking the Chartist Land Plan to resettle urban workers on rural estates. Many Chartists were involved in Freehold Societies. See *Northern Star*, 7 April 1849; 12 May 1849.
131. *Manchester Times*, 7 March 1846; *Freeholder*, 1 January 1851.
132. *Freeholder*, 2 June 1851.
133. Compare E.J. Cleary, *The Building Society Movement* (London, 1965), p. 51 and Chase, 'Out of Radicalism', p. 319.
134. This comment does not apply to Scotland where there was no 40-shilling franchise, a fact that J.B. Smith sought to rectify after he entered Parliament as MP for Stirling. See *Freeholder*, 1 May 1851.
135. *Bygone Years: Recollections by the Hon. F. Leveson Gower* (London, 1905), p. 237.
136. J. Arch, *From Plowtail to Parliament: An Autobiography* (1898 repr. London, 1986), p. 355; N. Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (London, 1985), p. 154; A. Howe, 'Towards the "Hungry Forties": Free Trade in Britain, c.1880-1906', in E.F. Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 194f.
137. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

‘A GUERRILLA WARFARE’: THE LEAGUE AND PARLIAMENT

We must back those Free Traders who so truly and energetically spoke for us in Parliament. ‘A Guerilla Warfare’ it has been called. It could be nothing else.

Anti-Bread-Tax Circular, 7 October 1841

Writing in the late 1950s, Norman McCord entitled the concluding chapter in his history of the League ‘The Decisive Theatre’; it described the Parliamentary machinations that culminated in repeal in 1846.¹ As Anthony Howe has recently pointed out, implicit in McCord’s thesis was a harsh verdict on the League: in the ‘decisive theatre’ of Parliament the League was irrelevant, its principal achievement was merely to bring about an earlier and grudging conversion of the Whigs to repeal.² In coming to this conclusion McCord was turning his back on the movement’s first historian, Archibald Prentice, whose two-volume history faithfully reiterated the paeans of triumph that were expressed in the columns of the contemporary press. For Abraham Paulton, editor of *Manchester Examiner* and a former League lecturer, there was no question as to the success of the League in 1846; the ‘victory of the League is a great gain by and for a great people’.³ Other former Leaguers, however, helped to sow the seeds that would consign their campaign to irrelevance. Writing an entry on the League for an American encyclopedia in 1874 George Jacob Holyoake, for example, revealed that ‘Mr Cobden told me one night at the House of Commons that, despite all the expenditure on public instruction, the League would have not carried the repeal of the Corn Laws when they did, if it had not been for the Irish famine and the circumstance that we had a Minister who thought more of the lives of the people than his own continuance in power.’⁴ For most recent commentators Peel has eclipsed Cobden as the object of interest. Historians have debated Peel’s motives, and those of a significant section of his party who followed him to repeal; as have political scientists, statisticians and econometricians.⁵ These arguments will not be rehearsed here. What has been largely overlooked in the extensive literature is a consideration of the activities of the League and its supporters in Parliament, not in 1846, but during the long years of ‘guerilla

warfare' when they were spurned by both major parties. Important questions have received little or no attention. Who voted for repeal and where did they come from? And what does this tell us about the League's extra-Parliamentary organization, and its expectations of how Parliament ought to respond?

Many Leaguers looked at Parliament with a combination of scepticism and contempt. We have referred in an earlier chapter to the fact that the rejection of the torrent of Anti-Corn Law petitions early in 1839 was, in part, the catalyst for the formation of the League itself. Like many Chartists at this time,⁶ Leaguers were often unimpressed by MPs when they encountered them in the flesh. From the gallery during one debate on the Corn Laws, Prentice recalled the 'Babel-like confusion' that prevailed as C.P. Villiers attempted to speak. 'He was assailed from his outset with a volley of sounds, such as could have been heard in no other deliberative assembly in the world' which only abated when the time arrived for the '*fruges consumere nati*' to eat. Before long, however, the 'gentlemen born to dine' returned 'heated with wine and hatred' yelling 'Divide, divide' in order to bring the debate to a precipitate close. Similarly, after his first visit Absalom Watkin recorded in his diary: 'I left the House of Commons with a very contemptuous opinion of all those whom I had heard.'⁷ So concerned was Joseph Parkes about how Richard Cobden would fare amidst the 'whores and fornicators' of Westminster that he pleaded with him to think again before contesting Stockport: 'You will have a hundred times more power of good *out* of the House than *in*.'⁸ Few members of the political class impressed the provincial outsiders who lobbied in Westminster on behalf of good causes. A veteran of Anti-Corn Law deputations to successive governments, Henry Ashworth invariably found cabinet ministers ill-tempered, unfeeling and poorly informed.⁹

Long before they embarked on an electoral strategy designed to change the composition of the House rather than the minds of its existing members, the League was setting itself up as a rival institution similar in many respects to those described by historians of the anti-slavery and Chartist movements. Early in 1839, at the same time as the Chartists were meeting elsewhere in the capital as the General Convention of the Industrious Classes, the League convened the first in a succession of national conferences in London and Manchester which, as the *Eclectic Review* perceptively noted in 1844, were tantamount to '*quasi-Parliaments*'.¹⁰ For the *Review*, as for many supporters, the contrasts with the noisy turbulence at Westminster were stark:

A moral dignity, a benevolent aspect, a national character, and the grandeur of noble and generous enterprise have been impressed on the combinations of the League by these annual convocations of the best, the most industrious and most useful members of the community.

In some senses this was a practical form of democracy: 'delegates,' the *Review* continued, 'have had direct appointment from the people, the

immediate instruction of their constituents, and generally have had their expenses defrayed'.¹¹ If the reality often failed to live up to the expectation,¹² the ideal was clear. How different it was in the House of Commons. The defeat of Villiers' motion in 1842, recalled Prentice, was 'proof of the mockery of representation'. '[W]as it matter for wonder that many, in the despair of ever overturning selfish legislation while the house was so constituted, should begin to think that representative reform must precede all other reforms?'¹³

Certainly the League could point to a national constituency that far exceeded the Parliamentary one. In every session between 1839 and 1843 the number of signatures on petitions demanding repeal far out-numbered the entire electorate of Britain and Ireland. Over the same period the League held nine national conferences (five in Manchester and four in London), the largest of which, in London in February 1842, numbered nearly 700 delegates.¹⁴ It is worth examining the 1842 assembly, and the events surrounding it, in detail to see how it measured up to the *Eclectic Review's* claim. For practical reasons the League's London conferences were timed to coincide with the sitting of Parliament where Villiers would move his annual resolution on the Corn Laws. In previous years these motions had, with slight variations, merely called on the government to establish an inquiry into the effect of the Corn Laws: for the first time in 1842 Villiers' motion would call for total and immediate repeal. The interest surrounding the opening of the Parliamentary session in 1842 was further heightened by anticipation that the new Tory Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel, would announce a modification of the Corn Laws.

On Wednesday 10 February, the day Peel was scheduled to address the House, the League delegates had emphasized their presence in the capital by indulging in a very pointed piece of theatre. One week after the formal state procession to mark the opening of Parliament they employed what even the Chartists regarded as a 'dangerous innovation'. Having gathered in the great hall of the Crown and Anchor where they had spent the day deliberating the moral basis of the Corn Laws, a debate that was reported in Hansard-style by the newspapers, they marched arm in arm along the Strand and down Parliament Street, timing the conclusion of their counter-procession to coincide with the arrival of the MPs at the House of Commons. 'The line was a splendid one,' commented the sympathetic *Morning Advertiser*, 'comprising many hundreds of delegates assembled from all parts of England, Scotland, Wales and some districts of Ireland, and was calculated to produce a great moral impression on the minds of the populace.'¹⁵ In one sentence the journalist had described the League as it wished to be seen on that occasion; it was the moral voice of the entire British nation.

At the House the League delegates were confronted, as they must have known they would be, by the agents of a State that addressed the nation with a very different voice. "'Out truncheons - close the gates," was the command given to a strong corps of police,' reported the *Nonconformist*,

'and with felicitous propriety those who represented the nation's wants were denied access to the vestibule of the house in which the nation's demands were about to be resisted.'¹⁶ Later Archibald Prentice also described the stand-off as 'a striking sight' with 'the real representatives of the productive classes from every part of the kingdom, country and town, waiting outside what ought to have been the people's house imploring justice for the suffering millions'.¹⁷ Many of the delegates contented themselves with yelling what the Tory *Standard* described as a 'considerable expenditure of ammunition in the shape of abusive epithets' at the Members as they arrived. Others headed back up Parliament Street in an attempt to intercept the carriage bringing Peel to the debate. Encountering him near his residence in Privy Council Gardens they assailed Peel with 'angry shouts of "No Corn Law"; "Down with the monopoly"; "Give us bread and labour"'.¹⁸ According to the *Advertiser*, at first 'the Right Honourable Baronet' mistook the hostile crowd for well-wishers: 'the vain and illusive hope was soon dispelled', however, and he 'shrunk from the public gaze into a corner of his carriage'. Peel would win the debate in the House, but the Leaguers were determined to make him begin with a symbolic defeat that they could trumpet around the country.¹⁹

By the time Peel got to his feet at about 5.00 pm to announce his government's plans some of the League delegates had been admitted to the Strangers' Gallery. Peel spoke for more than three hours and was listened to with 'breathless attention' until he announced the figures in the new sliding scale. 'From that moment until the termination of the speech,' noted one reporter, among the MPs 'all was noise and confusion in the house.'²⁰ 'Just one moment was given to draw a long breath of relieved expectation, another to interchange looks and comments of astonishment, dissatisfaction, or otherwise,' recalled John O'Connell, MP for Kilkenny, before 'members scurried away to our small library, to the writing-room in the new lobby, to the smoking and nearest committee rooms, the vote office, waiting-room, and even the crowded *old* lobby, seizing on and occupying every square inch of surface that would give support to even half a sheet of paper, as they scribbled to friends, constituents, and others, the chief points of the new *thimble-rig* attempted with the Corn Laws'.²¹ After the conclusion of Peel's oration the League delegates hastily reconvened at Brown's Hotel in Palace Yard, within sight of the House of Commons, and 'on behalf of their constituents', unanimously recorded their 'emphatic condemnation' of the government proposal and reiterated their demand for total and immediate repeal.²² 'The battle has fairly commenced between the country and a class', proclaimed the *Nonconformist*.²³

Who were these 'real representatives of the productive classes'? From the detailed list of 684 delegates published in the *Sun*, a sympathetic London daily newspaper, it is clear that just over 60 per cent of the delegates (413) represented ACLAs from many different parts of the country.²⁴ A further group of fifteen delegates were described as representing towns rather than ACLAs, and there were 17 individuals

whose constituency was not clear. Among the delegates were also 16 Members of the House of Commons (4 representing ACLAs), including C.P. Villiers and Daniel O'Connell, but not Cobden, the newly elected Member for Stockport. There was also a small number of delegates (5) who represented other organizations such as the Brentford Reform Association and the British and Foreign Sailors' Society. In addition to its self-image as a gathering of the 'productive classes', the Conference might also have claimed to represent the soul of the nation: the second largest group of delegates comprised 134 Ministers of Religion and 88 individuals representing religious congregations. Admittedly, like the national conference of ministers held in Manchester the previous August, the list of ministers and congregations was dominated by Baptists and Congregationalists, together with a small number of other Dissenting denominations (see Chapter 5).

From reports of what happened that day it is possible to pick out a few faces in the crowd. At the head of the procession was the chairman of the conference, Duncan McLaren of Edinburgh. The Conference gave McLaren a brief moment of fame and introduced him to his future brother-in-law, John Bright, who was representing the Rochdale ACLA.²⁵ From a chapel in Kensington came the Revd Robert Vaughan D.D., an Independent clergyman who, the following year, would pen a well-known treatise, *The Age of Great Cities*, which was one of the first serious attempts to reflect upon the transformation of Britain from a predominantly rural to an urban society.²⁶ Representing the Metropolitan ACLA was James Wilson, another man who would enjoy a literary reputation. The Scottish-born brother of George Wilson, the League's president, James Wilson had been residing in the capital since 1824 where he had carried on the business of an indigo merchant with mixed success. Within two years of his march down Parliament Street, with some help from the League Wilson would become the founding editor of the *Economist*, a journal that would strongly lend its support to free trade.²⁷ Other delegates had more humble attributes. Marching in Wilson's footsteps, for example, was John Buckmaster, from Leighton Buzzard near the Buckinghamshire-Bedford border. A self-styled 'village politician', Buckmaster was about twenty years old at the time of the march, having undergone minimal schooling before living from hand to mouth as an agricultural labourer, being exploited as an apprentice, and going 'on tramp'.²⁸

The deputation from Sheffield, including William Ibbotson and the Revd R.S. Bayley, represented both of the well-known public faces of the League: the wealthy, and some would say, hypocritical businessman and the radical Dissenter. A file manufacturer and veteran of the Sheffield Reform Association, Ibbotson would later boast in a meeting with Peel that he would employ an additional 500 workers on the day the Corn Laws were repealed. In the eyes of the South Yorkshire radicals, however, he was guilty of surreptitiously employing workhouse labour at cheap rates. Nor were those already in his employ contented; the fender makers of the

Sheffield district hated him so intensely that on at least one occasion they had fire-bombed his factory.²⁹ If Ibbotson's relationship with his work force, and with the Sheffield Chartists, was poor, the same could not be said for Bayley. An Independent clergyman, Bayley had attended the League's Convocation of Ministers in Manchester in August 1841 on the strength of a subscription from local working men.³⁰ Bayley was a critic of the Sheffield Chartists, and especially their leader, George Julian Harney, whose revolutionary aspirations gave rise to the sobriquet 'England's Marat', but he shared many of their principles. An avid Complete Suffragist who declared that democracy was an 'eternal principle' consistent with Christianity, Bayley was also a stringent critic of aristocracy and monarchy, regarding them as being characterized by 'viciousness and imbecility'.³¹ He was joined by representatives from Edinburgh including John Dunlop and James Aytoun, both lawyers who were respectively president and vice-president of the Edinburgh Complete Suffrage Union, as well as being active supporters of religious voluntarism.³² Representing 'several parishes in Merionethshire' was Griffith Evans, a 'gentleman farmer' from Talyllyn, who would go on to be a stalwart of the Complete Suffrage and anti-State church campaigns in Wales.³³ Representing Bethnal Green in London were John Wilson - no relation of the more famous League Wilsons - who was Secretary of the local United Temperance Association, and George W.M. Reynolds. An aspiring novelist and editor of a recently defunct newspaper, the *Teetotaller*, Reynolds would later be one of the last national leaders of the Chartists. He became owner and editor of *Reynolds' Newspaper*, a radical journal which enjoyed a mass weekly circulation of over 350,000 by 1872.³⁴ From Liverpool came another Complete Suffragist and veteran teetotaller, Lawrence Heyworth. A wealthy woollen manufacturer and merchant, Heyworth would soon become the object of a special loathing by the Chartists when he objected not to their programme, but to their leaders, at the Complete Suffrage Conference in Birmingham in December 1842.³⁵ The delegation from Leeds was headed by Hamer Stansfeld, a businessman and Leeds Town Councillor who, according to his friend Samuel Smiles, believed that the way to repeal the Corn Laws was 'to infuse some new blood into Parliament by the extension of the franchise' to householders. In 1840 Stansfeld had declined the Leeds mayoralty in order to concentrate his efforts on the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association that he had helped to found.³⁶ A commitment to Parliamentary reform was a common feature among the delegates.

For all their contempt for Parliament the Leaguers recognized the symbiotic relationship between Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary action. An editorial in the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* in September 1841 could not have been clearer: 'the great movement going on out of doors . . . must find an echo in the House of Commons or it will be deprived of its legitimate influence on the legislature'.³⁷ In private other Leaguers were even blunter. In the same month as the *Circular* editorial, Prentice urged Cobden to obstruct the business of Parliament until the people's grievances

are addressed: 'boldness within adds wonderfully to the intensity of the outward pressure ... For God's sake strangle the monsters with their own ropes.'³⁸ A month after his confrontation at St Stephens early in 1842, McLaren wrote to Cobden to urge the new MP to lead 'a sort of Guerilla warfare' in the House.³⁹ The *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* outlined its ideas about the duties of League MPs in a detailed editorial in July 1841. Firstly, it was their duty to ensure that the House was never counted out when repeal was being discussed. As the sympathetic London journal, the *Sentinel*, commented, 'Parliamentary Burking', as it was called, was a common method of 'suppressing the speeches of Liberal members'.⁴⁰ The *Circular* demand was based on the calculation that there were about forty to fifty MPs in the new House who had 'secured their returns by identifying themselves with the principles of the Anti-Corn-Law League', sufficient under the standing orders to make a quorum.⁴¹ Secondly, to ensure that they would 'act in harmonious concert' the MPs were urged to form a sort of repeal caucus, 'to which all are invited to take a part, from which no-one has reserved any information'. Hitherto leadership of the Parliamentary repeal campaign had fallen almost exclusively on Villiers, who owed that role to a coterie of London liberals that met at the home of Sir William Molesworth.⁴² Villiers was certainly not answerable to the League. Given that the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* rarely displayed editorial independence from the League Council, this call for a parliamentary caucus may represent a tentative attempt to assert leadership of the movement inside the House. In the event, however, pro-repeal MPs never submitted to a formal caucus. Nonetheless the tail of the editorial did contain a sting: 'Every vote any of our representatives gives in our favour shall be chronicled to his honour, every opportunity he lets go by of thus asserting our cause every vote calculated to prejudice the cause, will, with stern justice, be registered against him.' Here was a thinly veiled threat for the next election. MPs 'who have secured their returns by identifying themselves with the principles of the Anti-Corn Law League' will be held accountable: 'Though loath to blame, we will not shrink from that disagreeable duty.'⁴³

The *Circular* editorial left no doubt that the most important task facing League MPs was to 'study' the 'peculiar temper of the House of Commons, and of its forms of transacting business' with a view to 'forcing the house to listen to them'. In October a follow-up editorial called for a 'guerilla warfare' which reflected the fact that supporters in the provinces were impatient for action.⁴⁴ The difficulty for pro-repeal MPs, in a situation where they constituted a permanent minority, was that the tactical options were limited. 'Forcing the house to listen' would prove difficult. By July 1842, under strong pressure, Cobden and Wilson started to discuss the idea of attempting to block supply. While Cobden's letter to Wilson was in the post the Manchester ACLA increased the stakes by adopting a plan to pressure MPs to obstruct supply which was announced in the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* the following week.⁴⁵ In the end this came to nothing. The

idea was, however, taken up by William Sharman Crawford, the radical MP for Rochdale, who was the leading Parliamentary spokesman for the Complete Suffrage campaign. In an attempt to delay the passage of the 1843 budget he moved amendments to every clause, but he was only supported by a handful of MPs and, despite his appeals, received no help from the League.⁴⁶

Cobden admitted to Henry Ashworth that such a scheme could only be pulled off by a 'corps of desperadoes', but he was no desperado.⁴⁷ An examination of the Parliamentary record shows that, in fact, he and other League MPs took well to Parliament. Far from being single-issue agitators, they were conscientious contributors to debates. In 1842 Cobden is recorded as speaking forty-seven times, only ten of which concerned the Corn Laws; during the same session Villiers made forty-two contributions, only nine of which dealt with the issue of repeal.⁴⁸ During the 1844 session Cobden spoke on six occasions, three in relation to the Corn Laws, whereas Villiers only used six of his eleven contributions to discuss repeal that year. The same pattern was even more vividly exemplified in the case of one of the most vociferous League MPs. The Member for Bolton, Dr John Bowring, had given the Anti-Corn Law address in 1838 which precipitated the formation of the Manchester ACLA, but during 1844, although he spoke on fifty-seven occasions, only one of them was directly concerned with repeal. The other fifty-six speeches canvassed an impressive array of subjects from the Army Estimates to criminal justice in the Levant.⁴⁹ This might appear unsurprising of men who were part of a bigger world of reform if it were not in such marked contrast to the tenacity with which these same men (Cobden especially) sought to keep the extra-Parliamentary movement separate from other agitations.

It would have been difficult for the League's MPs to do anything other than pull back from the brink, given Villiers' discomfiture with the zeal of his northern allies, and Cobden's squeamishness about a strategy for obstructing Parliament which 'savours of brute force'.⁵⁰ It was not until the 1870s and 1880s that a 'corps of desperadoes' emerged with Joseph Biggar, Charles Stewart Parnell and other Irish members demonstrating that the guerrilla strategy of disrupting Parliament could be successfully pursued by a determined minority.⁵¹ In effect the League campaign in Parliament was confined to Villiers' annual resolution. Occupying the House for four and five nights in a row, these debates were major events that were certain to command national attention. At a time when Parliamentary proceedings were widely reported in the press their audience was not just the members on the opposing benches, it was the nation at large. After four nights' debate in 1839, for example, William Smith O'Brien, MP for Limerick County, made this clear when it appeared that the debate was going to be concluded before all those who wanted to speak had been given the opportunity. 'He was anxious', he told the House amidst a scene of the 'greatest confusion', 'of letting it be understood in Ireland that many of the Representatives of that country had, like him, been attending in their seats

in that House during the four nights' debate, with a view to express their opinions, but in vain'.⁵² During Cobden's first year in Westminster Wilson sought to convince him on more than one occasion that his Parliamentary contributions had an impact in the country.⁵³ One of the League's most talented lecturers, Sidney Smith, would later remember that Parliamentary speeches by sympathetic MPs were like lectures 'to the whole world ... printed in every journal throughout the Empire'. Even Peel agreed. At the conclusion of the debate in 1845, in a reference to the great rallies currently being conducted by the League, the Prime Minister commented that the repeal MPs' 'performance of tonight had been for the benefit of the company which usually performed at Covent Garden'.⁵⁴

Contemporaries paid just as much heed to deeds as to words. Sympathetic and hostile journals alike routinely carried extensive analysis of the Parliamentary division lists which, in many ways, make more interesting reading than the debates themselves.⁵⁵ Although scholarly interest has focussed on why 101 Tories joined their leader in voting for gradual repeal in March 1846, there has been little attention given to those who supported repeal during the long years of struggle when the cause was repudiated by both major parties. Including an amendment to Peel's repeal bill, between 1842 and 1846 the House of Commons divided five times on the basic question of total and immediate repeal. Who voted for it? Between 1842 and 1846 there was a total of 220 members of the House of Commons who voted (or were paired in favour) of total and immediate repeal on at least one occasion (see Appendix 3). The highest tally achieved in any one division was 146 in 1845, a mere 22 per cent of the House. Even this figure was inflated by the likes of Lord John Russell and other Whig grandees who had only recently been converted to repeal and were casting their first and only vote in support of a Villiers' resolution. Of more interest here were those hard-core supporters who literally stood up to be counted year in and year out. An analysis of the five divisions shows that thirty-five members supported all five and a further thirty-nine supported four out of the five, making a core group of seventy-four. It is not a perfect sample - for example it arbitrarily excludes MPs such as John Bright who, despite having a 100 per cent voting record on repeal, did not have an opportunity to vote for repeal until 1844. Despite these shortcomings it is worth examining this core group of seventy-four in some detail.

The seventy-four members represented sixty-five constituencies made up of sixty boroughs and only five counties, including three in Ireland. This evidence of weakness in the counties only confirmed what the League had been told as early as 1839. At that time several newspapers, including the *Manchester Times*, had published a detailed analysis of the most recent division on the Corn Laws. Completed by one of the League's most astute political advisers, Joseph Parkes, this analysis highlighted that while Villiers had attracted the support of just under 40 per cent of borough MPs, his motion was spurned by all but eight per cent of county MPs.⁵⁶ Of the seventy-four core supporters, fifty-six (over 75 per cent) represented

electorates located in England; twelve (just over 16 per cent) were in Scotland, with Ireland and Wales making only the most modest contributions. In proportional terms, however, the League did best in Scotland where its dozen core supporters constituted over 22 per cent of all Scottish MPs, double the proportion achieved in England (11 per cent) and several times greater than the ratio in Ireland and Wales. Leaguers were aware of their relative Scottish strength, although in some cases their expectations were wildly optimistic. Looking at the election returns in July 1841, for example, the *Sheffield Iris* boasted that '[n]early all of the agricultural counties [in Scotland] have returned advocates of Free trade principles'.⁵⁷ Subsequent events, however, would show that they received meagre support from these members.

Despite the evidence other myths have survived. A glance at the list of core supporters, for example, shows the relative weakness of the campaigns in Wales and Ireland. Although it is unlikely that the League ever expected to get many votes in Wales, where the landlords reigned supreme, in Ireland it was another story. As noted earlier, Daniel O'Connell's repeated declarations of support for repeal of the Corn Laws encouraged some Leaguers to expect great things from Ireland. In Ireland too the facts were not allowed to get in the way of a good story. Anti-Corn Law meetings in Drogheda, for example, often ended with three cheers for the local MP, Sir William Somerville, although it is hard to work out what he had done to deserve their approbation. An examination of the division lists confirms that Somerville missed all but one of the votes for total and immediate repeal.⁵⁸ Displaying either a remarkable capacity for self-delusion or deliberately attempting to mislead its readers, the *Pilot*, a leading Dublin newspaper, commented in 1842 that the Irish Liberal Party 'through its representatives in Parliament' had displayed a 'singular and, indeed ... Christian generosity' on the question of Corn Law repeal.⁵⁹ This was completely fanciful. In 1842, for example, nearly half of all Irish MPs joined Somerville in missing the division, including two thirds of O'Connell's 'tail' of Parliamentary supporters. Of those that did vote in 1842, only nine supported Villiers' motion while forty-five voted against it (including seventeen Whigs and liberals). Not even O'Connell's own vote could be counted on. For all his protestations the 'Liberator' only voted for Villiers' resolution twice between 1842 and 1846 (missing the other divisions). Not every one was fooled. The leading Chartist newspaper, the *Northern Star*, for example, lampooned O'Connell for missing the division on Villiers' motion in 1838 - 'so much for this practical fill-belly ... patriot' - and rebuked him for failing to use his influence with his 'tail' after he had committed himself to repeal.⁶⁰

Despite the fact that Irish MPs had a reputation for poor attendance at the House of Commons - the *Dundalk Democrat* went so far as to suggest that Irish members were only adept at representing the nation in London's 'hells and casinos'⁶¹ - it is surprising that the widespread belief that the Corn Laws were beneficial to Ireland's predominantly rural economy did

not cause Irish MPs to be more assiduous in opposing repeal. As John O'Connell recalled, his campaign to win Youghal in County Cork in 1835 had nearly been derailed when Feargus O'Connor maladroitly raised the issue of the Corn Laws in front of an audience made up of many who were 'engaged in, or dependent on, the Irish corn-trade'.⁶²

In general terms, however, economics does not serve as a good indicator of either support or opposition to repeal, even in Ireland. In two recent articles Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey has employed econometrics in an attempt to find an economic basis for the repeal majority in 1846. Using what she calls a modified 'public choice' theory Schonhardt-Bailey argues that changes in the 'electoral and economic composition of constituencies occurring during the 1830s and early 1840s raised the political cost of maintaining a protectionist policy'.⁶³ The economic changes she has in mind are a 'geographical concentration of the primary export industry (textiles) in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the greater spread (or geographical deconcentration) of the export sector as a whole'; the electoral change was simply the broadening of the electorate in 1832.⁶⁴ Although there is not scope to rehearse the arguments here in full, the use of public choice methodology in this way has provoked a range of critical responses. 'Had constituency interests really changed sufficiently between 1842 and 1846' asks Anthony Howe, 'to make protection rational in 1841 and free trade so five years later?'⁶⁵

Without forcing it to bear the weight that Schonhardt-Bailey intends, the question is, nonetheless, relevant: what were the economic characteristics of the constituencies that produced consistent support for repeal from their local MP? Based on the broad descriptions in a contemporary electoral guide, it is evident that, in general terms, the most common characteristic of the sixty-five core repeal constituencies was the pursuit of manufacturing (33) followed by those based on a port or other maritime industry (11), with only half a dozen (including three in Ireland) that were predominantly agricultural in their economic activity.⁶⁶ Using the League's own division of England and Wales into districts as a guide, it is evident that total and immediate repeal received just under 32 per cent of its core support from MPs who represented constituencies in the 'Manufacturing District' (Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cheshire) as well as over 12 per cent from the 'Iron District' (Shropshire, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Worcestershire, and Warwickshire).

A far more important feature of the 65 core constituencies than their predominant economic activity was their size, both in terms of population and electorate. On average every member of the reformed House of Commons represented 36,519 persons including 1235 electors; the average size of the League's core constituencies was nearly 60 per cent larger in terms of people (59,879), and approximately 52 per cent greater in the number of electors (2373).⁶⁷ Six of the core seats had populations (using 1832 figures) of over 200,000 and a further nine of more than 100,000. In total, thirty of the core constituencies had populations above the national

average. Similarly thirty-two of the constituencies had a larger number of voters than the national average, with ten electorates having more than 5000 names on the register. Rejecting the prevailing view, some recent historians have stressed the 'powerfully politicizing impact of the Great Reform Act' that was manifested in the widespread development of 'modern' political partisanship after 1832.⁶⁸ In an age when the boundaries of participatory politics were rapidly widening – a process to which the League was a major contributor – it is not unreasonable to expect that the pressure for a more direct form of representation built up more quickly in larger seats.⁶⁹ It is not surprising therefore that, as Gary Cox has shown, MPs representing larger constituencies were far more likely to participate in debates.⁷⁰ Occasionally even in small seats opposition to the Corn Laws could provide the basis for a challenge to the power of the patron. At Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, for example, a majority of the 300 'honest and independent' voters defied the wishes of the local aristocratic Whig, Lord Carrington, to elect Ralph Bernal, a radical supporter of repeal, in 1841.⁷¹

The full list of repeal votes contains some evidence of the importance of particular constituency expectation. In some seats that changed hands the voters, for whatever reason (their own wishes or those of their patron) were insistent that the new MP must be a repealer. For example it was no coincidence that the first Parliamentary leader of the repeal agitation, C.P. Villiers, should represent Wolverhampton which, according to one commentator, had always returned opponents of the Corn Laws.⁷² The same was true of a number of other places such as Greenock, Kilmarnock, Kendal and the city of Cork (see Appendix 3). George Wood and Harry Warburton, who represented Kendal between 1842 and 1846 (the latter taking over in a by-election following Wood's death in 1843) had a 100 per cent record of voting for total and immediate repeal. The same was true in Kilmarnock where Alex Johnstone and his successor, Edward Bouverie, had a 100 per cent record in support of Villiers between them.⁷³

It was perhaps no accident that in Cork, Kilmarnock and Kendal there were ACLAs, the latter being one of the strongest in the country. In fact in no less than forty-six (or 70 per cent) of the sixty-five core constituencies there was an active ACLA, making it the single most common feature among them. The geographic correlation between the League's Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary support is remarkable. Firstly, in national terms the distribution of Parliamentary votes between England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales is almost identical to the distribution of ACLAs across the United Kingdom. Just over 74 per cent of ACLAs were located in England which is also where just under 76 per cent of the League's core MPs had their seats. In Scotland, the corresponding figures are about 15 per cent for the national share of ACLAs and just over 16 per cent of core supporters of total and immediate repeal in the House.

Obviously the factors that led MPs to support repeal were complex and often inscrutable. Some appear to have voted from principle. Thomas Milner Gibson, for example, was a Suffolk squire who held the local seat of

Ipswich as a Tory until his resignation in July 1839 to recontest the seat as a liberal supporter of Corn Law repeal. Narrowly defeated at the by-election, Gibson by his principled stand in favour of free trade had attracted the attention of the doyen of Manchester liberalism, Sir Thomas Potter, who ensured his adoption by the Manchester reformers in 1841.⁷⁴ Other MPs probably voted as economists. John Lewis Ricardo, the member for Stoke in Staffordshire, for example, was a nephew of the renowned economist, David Ricardo, and a member of the Political Economy Club in London. A financier and railway developer, Ricardo consistently supported total and immediate repeal although he hardly ever appeared on a League platform.⁷⁵ By no means all academic opinion was on the side of the League however. A total of twenty-eight 'economists' have been identified as members of the 1841-47 House of Commons, less than half of whom supported repeal on a consistent basis.⁷⁶ Other MPs, such as John Fielden and Thomas Duncombe, voted for repeal despite their tempestuous relationships with the League. Fielden's widely read tract, *The Curse of the Factory System*, first published in 1836, had scarcely endeared him to his fellow northern businessmen, who regarded his subsequent support for factory reform and the Chartists, as well as his opposition to the New Poor Law, as anathema. Even after his personal commitment to the Charter began to wane Fielden refused to join the League⁷⁷ and, as he wrote in a perfunctory reply to an invitation from George Wilson in January 1843, he did not believe the Corn Laws to be the sole cause of the current economic distress and thus their repeal would not alleviate it.⁷⁸ Duncombe, the radical member for Finsbury and leading Parliamentary defender of the Chartists, was even further beyond the pale, especially given his practice of excoriating League MPs for what he regarded as their hypocrisy over shorter working hours.⁷⁹ Evidence exists to show that the votes of other MPs were scarcely their own. Grantley Berkeley, for example, was one of clutch of Berkeley MPs in Gloucestershire - all brothers - who gave solid support to repeal. According to Prentice, in Bristol the 'name of Berkeley', in this case he meant F.H. Berkeley, the Member for Bristol, 'is as a talisman, before which the enemies of free trade quail'.⁸⁰ Grantley, however, who won Gloucestershire West with the assistance of his elder brother and patron, Lord Segrave, recalled that in 'Parliament I was a good deal fettered by the urgent requests of Lord Segrave as to my not taking on any political line without consulting him'.⁸¹

Other MPs were coerced. George William Wood, for example, the Whig Member for Kendal, not only had to satisfy the local Anti-Corn Law movement which was a strong one, comprising both a middle-class and an operative association, but he was also under the intense scrutiny of the Manchester Leaguers due to his presidency of their Chamber of Commerce. Wood's complicity in stalling the discussion of repeal in the Chamber was a source of considerable irritation to the leaders of the nascent Manchester ACLA, and his speeches in Parliament also did little to endear him to them.⁸² Early in 1839 the leading members of the ACLA

combined to depose him from the presidency, and thereafter his Parliamentary voting record on repeal dramatically improved. Following Wood's death in 1843 the League demonstrated its influence in Kendal by defeating the candidate of the local landlord at the by-election.⁸³ In some cases the pressure misfired. In 1843 the Finsbury Leaguers, for example, called a public meeting to reprimand Duncombe for not taking a more prominent role in the campaign for repeal. Their attempt went badly wrong: after Duncombe, who attended the meeting, pointed to his voting record on repeal, his constituents, repealers though they were, rebuffed the Leaguers and passed a motion of confidence in his behaviour.⁸⁴ At about the same time Cobden had been forced to apologize in the House to J.A. Roebuck, the radical member for Bath. According to Roebuck Cobden had implied that his future as Bath's representative in the House was under a cloud because of an attack on the League.⁸⁵ Cobden backed down but, in the end, Roebuck's less than impressive record on the Corn Laws – only voting for Villiers' motion on two occasions – was one of the principal charges laid against him when he was defeated in 1847.⁸⁶

The best-documented case of what John Bright would later describe as goading on shufflers⁸⁷ involved the erudite Member for Edinburgh, Thomas Babington Macaulay and, to a lesser extent, his partner after 1841, William Gibson-Craig. Macaulay had become the Member for Edinburgh at a by-election in May 1839. Despite the fact that he was re-entering Parliament to join the failing Whig administration which still maintained its official opposition to repeal, from the hustings Macaulay had promised to do all in his power to get rid of the Corn Laws, which was music to the ears of Duncan McLaren and his coterie of Edinburgh Leaguers. At a dinner to the new MP in January 1840, McLaren had emphasized their expectations by moving a toast to 'Freedom of trade'.⁸⁸ The relationship soon ran into difficulties. During 1840–41, the two men disagreed over several issues from local government elections to the vexed question of educational voluntarism, which reflected the fact that McLaren subscribed to a liberal creed that was far more radical than Macaulay did. By 1842, when McLaren led the march down Parliament Street in London, the stage was set for a major confrontation. The split was provoked by Macaulay who spoke against Villiers' motion and missed the subsequent division, declaring his support for the Whig policy of a moderate fixed duty. McLaren's first response was to seek to persuade Macaulay to change his views in a private correspondence. Only Macaulay's answers have survived, but these are sufficient to indicate that he was irritated by McLaren's persistence. In March 1843 he told McLaren that the seat of Edinburgh 'is not the least value to me unless I can hold it with honour and independence', and McLaren thereafter terminated their private correspondence.⁸⁹ By May 1843, however, it was clear, as Bright triumphantly reported, that the pressure had paid dividends when Macaulay voted for Villiers' motion.⁹⁰ As McLaren's nineteenth-century biographer recorded, Macaulay had 'yielded ungracefully', complaining bitterly of McLaren's

activities. 'The M.P.s begin to fear us greatly', Bright confided from Westminster, and 'Macaulay hates us cordially.'⁹¹

By voting for Villiers' resolution in 1843 Macaulay had swallowed what Bright called the 'constituency pill', but he continued to support a fixed duty in his public statements. With the scent of blood in their nostrils McLaren and his supporters among the Edinburgh Leaguers were determined to press their case further. At a meeting of the ACLA in April 1844 a resolution was carried that they would support only candidates who favoured free trade.⁹² The decision was not unanimously supported by Edinburgh's repealers and, following a hostile editorial in the *Scotsman*, a subsequent ACLA meeting degenerated into a 'disorderly, rude, unreasoning assemblage' when supporters of Macaulay and Craig sought to overturn it. They failed. McLaren could not have been blunter: 'Members of the old Whig party,' he warned, 'can have no prospect of getting into office, or even into Parliament, except by either adopting League principles or joining the Tories.'⁹³ Macaulay was thus confronted with an even more direct challenge to his independence than the previous year and he responded with a rebuke that also attacked McLaren personally. 'If you wish to be so represented,' he told John Wigham, the secretary of the ACLA, 'you can have no difficulty in finding an intriguing sycophant every way qualified for this purpose'.⁹⁴ Two months after the ACLA declaration, all eyes were on how Macaulay would respond to Villiers' annual resolution when it was brought on in June 1844. According to Bright, by no means a disinterested commentator, 'Macaulay came into the House on the second night of the debate and lay down on the bench up in the gallery, and slept or appeared to sleep there I believe for hours.'⁹⁵ When the debate was concluded, however, Macaulay supported the motion.

Ironically Macaulay's grudging capitulation was to prove insufficient. On 11 July 1846, one week after it had carried reports of celebrations for the passing of repeal, the *Scotsman* carried a report of rowdy electors' meetings in Edinburgh at which candidates were accepted in opposition to Macaulay and Gibson-Craig.⁹⁶ In 1847, the year after repeal was achieved, McLaren and his allies triumphantly swept on to what they saw as their most obvious next move, the unseating of Macaulay.⁹⁷ By this time the grievances against Macaulay were numerous - his opponent was a staunch voluntarist - but his earlier equivocation on the Corn Laws was undoubtedly a major factor.⁹⁸ The Whigs were outraged at the treatment of their esteemed colleague, a grievance which still burned a quarter of a century later when Macaulay's nephew, George Trevelyan, himself a member of the House of Commons, composed his uncle's biography. Speaking for a whole generation of Whigs, Trevelyan claimed that some of Macaulay's constituents had sought a 'tyranny which no man of right feeling would desire to exercise, and no man of honour could be expected to endure'.⁹⁹ Trevelyan still clung to the notion of representation outlined famously by a leading Whig parliamentarian, Edmund Burke, in 1774. '[Y]our representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement,' Burke told his

constituents in Bristol, 'and he betrays instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.'¹⁰⁰ Significantly, at the time he took his stance for Parliamentary independence from electoral pressure Macaulay was writing a review of Burke's life and works.¹⁰¹

Whigs were not the only victims of constituency pressure over the Corn Laws. After nineteen Irish MPs voted for Villiers' motion in 1839, for example, a public meeting in Roscommon recommended to 'the constituency of Ireland to require their representatives in Parliament to oppose any change in the present Corn Laws'.¹⁰² Burke's well-known notion of representation had apparently few subscribers in at least one part of the land of his birth. In a similar vein George Wilson boasted to a Parliamentary committee in 1846 that a precondition for any person to represent Manchester in the House of Commons was membership of the League.¹⁰³ Taken together this evidence suggests that times had changed to an extent not recognized by historians. Following the work of Moisei Ostrogorski, first published in 1902, many political historians identify 1867 as the Rubicon between the politics of interest and the politics of electoral pressure.¹⁰⁴ Although politics was undoubtedly more complex than either Macaulay, Wilson or the Roscommon farmers would allow, the symbiotic relationship between the League's parliamentary and extra-parliamentary support suggests that the age of constituency pressure, at least for some MPs, might have dawned long before 1867.

The House of Commons was only part of the 'decisive theatre' that was Parliament. In one of his replies Macaulay had pointed out to McLaren that he had overlooked the House of Lords as a major obstacle to total and immediate repeal.¹⁰⁵ In fact the Lords were the source of considerable ambivalence for the League. On the one hand the aristocracy was at the heart of the League's attacks on the Corn Laws. Moreover, the strong belief of many Leaguers in independence from aristocratic paternalism was an important part of their self-image. 'True nobility,' proclaimed a banner on display at a League banquet in 1840, 'consists not in empty titles, but in the practice of justice and virtue.'¹⁰⁶ In its farewell address, the *League*, boasted that the movement had been unique in British history in that it 'sought no aristocratic leader, and submitted to no titled guidance'.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, as early as December 1838 Parkes had warned Cobden that 'in this aristocratic bestridden country' they could not 'do without Lords'.¹⁰⁸ For at least part of the time Cobden appeared to accept this advice. Musing over the imminent change of government, Cobden speculated to Samuel Smiles in 1841 that it would increase the League's chances of securing support among the Whig peers: 'Unhappily we are not fit to run alone without the guidance of the latter.'¹⁰⁹ Despite their bluster about leading the way to a new age when the values of the middle class would triumph, Cobden and his friends all too easily could fall back into old ways.

One way to reconcile the contradiction was to divide the aristocracy into productive and idle segments. The tendency of some Leaguers to see the world as a financial balance sheet was evident when Smiles speculated in

the *Leeds Times* that the motives of the 'strenuous opponents' of repeal among the aristocracy would be revealed if 'the fact of how deeply [their] estates ... are mortgaged could be obtained'.¹¹⁰ In the *Manchester Times* Prentice was prepared to speculate on the basis of rumour: those Lords who had embraced the cause of free trade were the most successful entrepreneurs 'while the most determined opponents in the upper house are those who are notoriously up to the lips in debt'.¹¹¹ 'He was himself a practical farmer,' Lord Kinnaird told a League gathering at Covent Garden in 1844, 'and from his own experience had come to the conclusion that nothing could be more injurious to the farmer than the existing Corn Laws.'¹¹² A Scottish landowner, George William Fox, ninth Baron Kinnaird, was probably the first peer to join the League, signing up at Dundee in December 1839,¹¹³ but he was never its most prominent supporter among the aristocracy.

Apart from Kinnaird, who were the Lords on the League's 'noble roll of real noblemen'?¹¹⁴ At the outset the most prominent advocate of repeal in the Lords was Henry Peter Brougham. The erratic brilliance recorded by Lord Brougham's biographers was never more evident than over the question of the Corn Laws. A supporter of their introduction in 1815, by 1830 he demanded a modification.¹¹⁵ In 1839 Brougham moved the equivalent of Villiers' resolution in the House of Lords with a celebrated speech that was subsequently published and widely distributed as a tract.¹¹⁶ Again in 1840 Brougham voted for repeal and, in April 1842, he moved an amendment to Peel's modification of the sliding scale that called for the abolition of all duty on imported corn, effectively leading a group of only five peers who would vote for total repeal.¹¹⁷ The League was aware, however, that in Brougham they had an unpredictable champion. According to Parkes, who told Cobden that he had put Brougham up to it in 1839, the venerable Lord was 'an insane man, tho' I never knew him in a more sane or democratic humour than just now'.¹¹⁸ It did not last. Early in 1843 Brougham savagely attacked the League, blaming Cobden and the Revd Bayley of Sheffield, for inciting the assassination of Peel's private secretary. Despite his ongoing feud with the League Brougham later claimed that he remained a supporter of free trade. The Lords did not divide on repeal again until Peel's bill reached them in 1846 so there is little independent evidence to evaluate this claim. What Brougham made clear at that time, however, was that if he thought the League had any role in Peel's measure he would have opposed it.¹¹⁹

Far more consistent support was provided by Brougham's long-time friend, the third Earl of Radnor. Known as the 'aristocracy's Adam Smith', by 1840 Radnor had been a leading radical Whig for over forty years.¹²⁰ Radnor provided the League with his vote, with financial backing, and with that most valuable commodity: his name. As Cobden enthused to Villiers, himself an aristocratic younger son, 'you have no idea (not being with the people) how much more respectable we shall become after being patronised by the Earl of Radnor'.¹²¹ For his part, however, Radnor was

uncomfortable with the League's methods and with 'men of commerce' in general.¹²² Eventually he overcame his doubts, chairing some of the League's Covent Garden meetings in 1844-45.¹²³ Despite Cobden's enthusiasm, some of Radnor's well-known views and actions made his accession something of a double-edged sword, at least to the extent that they inhibited the League's efforts to build a constituency among working people. First, Radnor was an outspoken supporter of the New Poor Law which he justified as an application of laissez-faire economic theory. Secondly, the Chartist *Northern Star* delighted in reporting alleged failings in Radnor's conduct as a landlord and local magistrate which working-class readers might hold against the League. For example, the iniquity of Radnor's interference with the ancient right of gleaning on his Wiltshire estates, reported the *Star*, was compounded by the fact that he sat in judgment of his own case.¹²⁴

The same was true of another prominent supporter of Corn Law repeal among the aristocracy, Earl Fitzwilliam. Reputed to be the largest landowner in England, Fitzwilliam was less fulsome in his support for repeal - his preference was for a moderate fixed duty - than for reform causes in general. During the early 1830s he had waged what one commentator called 'a system of desultory warfare' to persuade the House of Lords to alter the Corn Laws. Cobden claimed Fitzwilliam as one of 'the best of the aristocracy' who are 'with us';¹²⁵ and the League republished Fitzwilliam's series of *Addresses to the Land Owners of England* for mass circulation. Early in May 1840, for example, 17,000 copies of one edition were sent through the post to Church of England parsons.¹²⁶ Far from being a supporter of the League however, Fitzwilliam pressed his case with vigour inside Parliament because he feared the spread of extra-parliamentary associations such as the League.¹²⁷ Moreover by adopting Fitzwilliam as its own the League shared in the opprobrium of his public support for Church rates and the New Poor Law, his reputation as a 'cold hearted' landlord in Ireland and England, as well as well as his widely publicized opposition to parliamentary reform.¹²⁸

Other aristocrats were identified with the League at various stages including Earl Ducie and the Marquis of Westminster. A renowned agriculturalist and breeder of short-horn cattle, Ducie was no parliamentary asset: during his thirteen-year tenure in the House of Lords he spoke only on three occasions, rarely voted and never for repeal.¹²⁹ Ducie's support - celebrated by his inclusion together with Radnor and Kinnaird, in a series of portraits of League heroes¹³⁰ - helped to buttress the League's claim that it represented the nation, including the productive aristocracy. Westminster was reputed to be among the wealthiest peers. He neither spoke nor voted for repeal with any great enthusiasm, but he supported the League financially. It was in his interest to do so; he stood to gain a small fortune from it. In 1846 it was estimated that the receipts from Westminster's London properties would jump by £500,000 a year following the repeal of the Corn Laws.¹³¹ The most significant thing about the League's 'noble

roll', however, was its brevity. The House of Lords divided three times on the question of Corn Law repeal between 1839 and 1846 with the highest support it enjoyed being from forty-two peers who voted for Fitzwilliam's resolution in 1840 which merely sought to establish a committee of inquiry.¹³² As the *Sheffield Iris* lamented, the number of Lords who supported Brougham's amendment for free trade in corn in 1842 could be counted on the fingers of one hand.¹³³

In the aftermath of repeal Brougham was among the first commentators to give the sole credit to Peel when he contended that the League could have agitated for a century without success but for the Prime Minister's conversion.¹³⁴ This view has a strong following among historians who, to use Anthony Howe's words, regard repeal as the 'supreme act of enlightened Conservative statesmanship'.¹³⁵ Although Brougham was consumed by his feud with Cobden he had a point: in 1846 the most important men in the 'decisive theatre' were not Cobden and Radnor but Peel and Wellington. Nevertheless the League had left its mark on the Parliamentary politics. Firstly, faced with the hostility of both major parties in the early 1840s, the League had begun to develop plans for the disruption of Parliament by a determined minority. Although it did not fully implement the 'guerilla warfare' it promised, it had left a template for others to copy. Secondly, and most importantly, the League accelerated the development of political parties with Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary wings and encouraged constituencies to demand a more direct form of representation from their MPs.¹³⁶ As early as 1841 the League Council had declared that any Parliamentary candidate who refused 'to commit himself is not worth having'.¹³⁷ Reflecting on their treatment of Edinburgh's MPs, Bright denied that the Edinburgh Leaguers began with the intention of unseating them; their aim was simply to make Macaulay and Gibson 'serve' their constituents by bending them to their will.¹³⁸ The new age of representative politics which this foreshadowed had not yet arrived. Macaulay was triumphantly returned at Edinburgh in 1852 having insisted on his independence as a precondition for re-contesting the seat.¹³⁹ Nonetheless the League's role in an era of transition was important. Contrary to Brougham's dismissive assessment, both Gladstone and Peel – the former more grudgingly than the latter – gave credit to Cobden for bringing forward repeal.¹⁴⁰ The view from the Tory back-bench was much the same. On the eleventh night of the marathon debate on repeal in February 1846 a weary Tory back-bencher, George Finch, sneered at the League for 'thundering its anathemas against the Corn Laws' from the stage of the Covent Garden Theatre. 'If Ministers would thus yield to the clamour of the League,' he warned the House, 'they would have plenty of other leagues.'¹⁴¹ Significantly Finch went on to appeal to the court of public opinion, defined in democratic terms:¹⁴²

He was sure that if there was universal suffrage, and the votes of the people to be taken on this subject, there would be an immense majority in favour of the Corn Laws, and free trade would be thrown into the British Channel.

Here was a portentous measure of the League's impact even among the ranks of the defeated Tories. Sitting in the House during Finch's remarks may have been another Tory back-bencher, Benjamin Disraeli. Earlier in the debate, Disraeli had devoted much of his hour-long speech to a savage diatribe against his leader who, he believed, had betrayed the fundamental principles on which the Conservative party rested.¹⁴³ Twenty years later Disraeli would stun the political world with a *volte face* of his own when, as the leader of a re-united Conservative party, he introduced the 1867 Reform Act which would nearly double the size of the British electorate. The seeds of this bold attempt to grasp the nettle of Parliamentary reform - described famously by Carlyle as 'Shooting Niagara'¹⁴⁴ - may well lie in the new political realities generated by the League in the 1840s.

Notes

1. N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1958), chap. 10.
2. A. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 6-8, 28-9.
3. A. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League* (London, 1853), 2 vols.; *Manchester Examiner*, 24 January 1846.
4. Holyoake's contribution to 'Johnson's American Cyclopaedia' (1874) is repr. in his *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, (London, 1893), vol. 2, p. 229.
5. See *inter alia* J. Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden* (London, 1977); W.O. Aydelotte, 'Parties and Issues in Early Victorian England', in P. Stansky (ed.) *The Victorian Revolution: Government and Society in Victoria's Britain* (New York, 1973), pp. 93-114; *idem.*, 'The disintegration of the Conservative Party in the 1840s: A Study of Political Attitudes', in W.O. Aydelotte, A.G. Bogue and R.W. Fogel (eds) *The Dimensions of Quantitative Research in History* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 319-46; T.J. McKeown, 'The Politics of Corn Law Repeal and theories of Commercial policy', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 19, 1989, pp. 353-80; I. MacLean, 'Rational Choice and the Victorian Voter', *Political Studies*, vol. 15, 1992, pp. 496-515; C. Schonhardt-Bailey, 'Linking Constituency Interests to Legislative Voting Behaviour: The role of District Economic Composition in the Repeal of the Corn Laws', in John A. Phillips (ed.), *Computing Parliamentary History: George III to Victoria*, Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 87-118; 'Lessons in Lobbying for Free Trade in 19th-Century Britain: To Concentrate or Not', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 85, no. 1, 1991, pp. 37-58.
6. See B. Harrison and P. Hollis (eds), *Robert Lowery: Radical and Chartist* (London, 1979), p. 140.
7. Prentice, *History*, vol 1, pp. 160-1; M. Goffin (ed.), *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin* (Stroud, 1993), p. 50. See also S. Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1844, repr. Oxford, 1984), pp. 26-8.
8. WRSO, Cobden Papers, J. Parkes to Cobden, 31 May 1841.
9. H. Ashworth, *Recollections of Richard Cobden M.P. and the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1878), pp. 41-3; 88-97; Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, pp. 153-6.
10. Extract in *Manchester Times*, 27 January 1844. The best known study of the use of Conventions fails to mention those held by the League. See T.M. Parssinen, 'Association, convention and anti-Parliament in British radical

- politics, 1771-1848', *English Historical Review*, vol. 87, July 1973, pp. 504-33. See also J.A. Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 19-20.
11. *Manchester Times*, 27 January 1844.
 12. In Sheffield, for example, concerns were expressed about whether the delegates were ever elected. See *Sheffield Iris*, 26 July 1842.
 13. Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 327
 14. See Appendix 2. A Conference in London during July 1842 brought together again those that had met in February although a list of who actually attended was not published.
 15. *Morning Advertiser*, 10 February 1842.
 16. *Nonconformist*, 16 February 1842.
 17. Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 309-10
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 310; *Standard*, 10 February 1842
 19. *Morning Advertiser*, 10 February 1842.
 20. *Nonconformist*, 16 February 1842.
 21. J. O'Connell, *Recollections and Experiences During a Parliamentary Career from 1833 to 1848* (London, 1849), vol. 2, p. 135.
 22. *Sun*, 10 February 1842.
 23. *Nonconformist*, 16 February 1842.
 24. *Sun*, 11 February, 12 February, 1842.
 25. *Scotsman*, 31 July 1839; 2 February 1842; 20 September 1845; J.B. Mackie, *The Life and Work of Duncan McLaren* (London, 1888), vol. 1, pp. 227-9.
 26. *Sun*, 11 February 1842; R. Vaughan, *The Age of Great Cities, or, Modern Civilisation Viewed in Its Relation to Intelligence, Morals, and Religion* (1843, repr. Shannon, 1971).
 27. See MPL, George Wilson Papers, Cobden to Wilson, 24 August 1843; W. Bagehot, 'Memoir of the Right Honourable James Wilson' (1860) repr. in N. St John-Stevs (ed.) *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot* (London, 1968) vol. 3, pp. 323-64.
 28. J.C. Buckmaster, *A Village Politician: The Life-Story of John Buckley* (1897 repr. Horsham, 1982).
 29. *Sheffield Iris*, 19 June 1838; 8 January 1839; 12 July 1842; 30 August 1842; 7 October 1843; 25 November 1843. Ibbotson's boast was omitted from Prentice's account of the delegation; see *History*, vol. 1, p. 353.
 30. *Sheffield Iris*, 10 August 1841.
 31. *Ibid.*, 22 June 1841; 13 September 1842. Bayley would later gain national notoriety when he was accused in the House of Lords of inciting the assassination of Peel's private secretary.
 32. *Scotsman*, 2 February 1842; 20 August 1842; 5 March 1845; 3 December 1845.
 33. See R. Wallace, *Organise! Organise!, Organise! A Study of Reform Agitations in Wales*, (Cardiff 1991), pp. 15n, 61, 90.
 34. *Teetotaller*, 19 September 1840. At this time Reynolds resided in Hackney Road, Bethnal Green. Although they do not note any involvement in the League, the authors of Reynolds' entry in the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* note his role in the *Teetotaller* just prior to the time of the Conference. See L. James and J. Saville, 'Reynolds. G.M.W.', *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (London, 1976), vol. 3, pp. 146-51.
 35. F. Boase (ed.), *Modern English Biography* (1892, repr. London, 1965), vol. 1,

- pp. 1458–9; T. Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper* (1872, repr. Leicester 1971), pp. 224.
36. T. Mackay, *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles, LLD* (London, 1905), p. 91, 94.
 37. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 9 September 1841.
 38. WSRO, Cobden Papers, A. Prentice to Cobden, 27 September 1841.
 39. *Ibid.*, McLaren to Cobden, 7 March 1842.
 40. *Sentinel*, 30 March 1844.
 41. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 15 July 1841.
 42. A. Bisset, *Notes on the Anti-Corn Law Struggle* (London, 1884), p. 143.
 43. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 15 July 1841.
 44. *Ibid.*
 45. MPL, Wilson Papers, R. Cobden to Wilson, 14 July 1842; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 21 July 1842. As the *Sentinel* commented in October 1843 the idea was an old one, having been attempted by Thomas Pitt in 1781 against the American war. *Sentinel*, 7 October 1843.
 46. *Sentinel*, 10 February 1843; 2 March 1844.
 47. WSRO, Cobden Papers, Cobden to Ashworth, 7 April 1842. See also A. Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 1987), p. 146.
 48. *Hansard* [House of Commons], 1842, *passim*.
 49. *Hansard*, [House of Commons], 1844, *passim*. For Bowring see Boase, *Modern English Biography*, vol. 1, p. 362.
 50. Bisset, *Notes*, p. 150; MPL, Wilson Papers, R. Cobden to Wilson, 14 July 1842.
 51. See F.S.L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1978), pp. 50–2; 59–67; 144–6; 161–2.
 52. *Hansard* [Commons], 15 March 1839, cols. 785–6.
 53. WSRO, Cobden Papers, G. Wilson to Cobden, 26 August 1841; 27 September 1841.
 54. MPL, Smith Papers, Anti-Corn Law League papers, S. Smith to Smith, 11 October 1880; *Manchester Times*, 29 June 1844.
 55. As W.O. Aydelotte wrote in 1962, for the historian the division lists ‘can constitute a kind of questionnaire which we may submit to the dead’; ‘Voting Patterns in the British House of Commons in the 1840s’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 5, 1962–3, p. 134.
 56. *Manchester Times*, 23 March 1839. See also *North Cheshire Reformer*, 29 March 1839; *Pilot*, 25 February 1839; *Scotsman*, 27 March 1839; *Charter*, 24 March 1839; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 27 July 1843; *League*, 6 July 1844; 14 June 1845.
 57. *Sheffield Iris*, 27 July 1841.
 58. *Pilot*, 25 May 1840; *Hansard*, [House of Commons], 24 February 1842, cols. 1082–7; 15 May 1843, cols. 407–11; 26 June 1844, cols. 1549–52; 10 June 1845, cols. 381–4; 4 March 1846, cols. 577–8. This was not his usual behaviour – in 1849 he was the Irish MP with the best attendance record. See *Clonmel Chronicle*, 20 October 1849.
 59. *Pilot*, 24 October 1842.
 60. *Northern Star*, 24 March 1838.
 61. *Dundalk Democrat*, 27 October 1849. See also *Pilot*, 11 March 1839; *Nation*, 27 July 1850.

62. O'Connell, *Recollections*, vol. 1, p. 142.
63. C. Schonhardt-Bailey, 'Linking Constituency Interests to Legislative Voting Behaviour', p. 87.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-2.
65. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, p. 27. See also T.J. McKeown, 'The Politics of Corn Law Repeal', pp. 353-80; I. MacLean, 'Rational Choice and the Victorian Voter', pp. 496-515.
66. Analysis based on the descriptions in C.R. Dod, *Electoral Facts from 1832 to 1853, Impartially Stated: Constituting a Complete Political Gazetteer* (1853, repr. Brighton, 1972). In Ireland it is clear that the majority of votes for repeal came, paradoxically, from MPs who represented constituencies that would be most likely to be damaged by it. See P.A. Pickering, 'The "Two Repeals": Irish MPs and the Corn Laws', Paper presented to the 10th Irish-Australia Conference, LaTrobe University, Melbourne, September 1998.
67. Calculations based on Dod, *Electoral Facts*, and F.H. McCalmont, *The Parliamentary Poll Book of All Elections from the Passing of the Reform Act in 1832 to July 1880* (London, 1880).
68. J.A. Phillips and C. Wetherell, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England', *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 1, p. 432 and *passim*.
69. Howe observes that one of the conclusions implicit in Schonhardt-Bailey's work is that 'the Whigs of 1832 were far more successful than they, and certainly the Chartists believed, in creating a rational, efficient and representative political order', *Free Trade and Liberal England*, p. 27.
70. G.W. Cox, *The Efficient Secret: The Cabinet and the Development of Political Parties in Victorian England* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 57-8.
71. See P.H. Bagenal, *The Life of Ralph Bernal Osborne MP* (London, 1884), pp. 47, 52-3, 77-8. By 1847 'many borough electors had suffered too much during the interval to repeat their opposition' and Carrington's will prevailed. We are grateful to Barry Smith for providing us with access to his copy of this book. For a discussion of small seats see E. Jaggard, 'Small Boroughs and Political Modernization 1832-1868: A Cornwall Case Study', *Albion*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1998, pp. 622-42.
72. Bisset, *Notes*, pp. 142-3. Villiers' predecessor, William Whitmore, was a strong opponent of the Corn Laws.
73. None of the four have been included in the list of core supporters because they did not participate in the requisite number of repeal divisions.
74. *Manchester Times*, 3 October 1840; 5 December 1840; 19 April 1845; E.W. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden of Manchester* (London, 1891), pp. 200-1.
75. F.W. Fetter, *The Economist in Parliament 1780-1868* (Durham, 1980), p. 255; *Manchester Guardian*, 21 January 1843.
76. Fetter, *The Economist in Parliament*, p. 272.
77. Fielden's *The Curse of the Factory System* (1836, repr. London, 1969) was a popular radical text. For his attitude to the League see S.A. Weaver, *John Fielden and the Politics of Popular Radicalism* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 244-6.
78. John Rylands Library, Fielden Papers, Fielden to Wilson, 28 January 1843.
79. See, for example, *Manchester Times*, 4 May 1844.
80. *Ibid.*, 26 June 1841.
81. G.F. Berkeley, *My Life and Recollections* (London, 1865), vol. 1, p. 359. See also N. Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel* (London, 1965), pp. 211-12.

82. *Manchester Times*, 16 February 1839; *Manchester Guardian*, 13 February 1839; Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 84; McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, pp. 46-7.
83. Prest, *Politics in the Age of Cobden*, p. 79; *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1844, p. 123; *Sentinel*, 11 November 1843.
84. *Sentinel*, 29 April 1843; T.H. Duncombe, *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, Late M.P. for Finsbury*. Edited by his son Thomas H. Duncombe (London, 1868), pp. 366-7.
85. J. Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1879) vol. 1, p. 263. See also N. Edsall, *Richard Cobden: Independent Radical* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), pp. 124-5.
86. R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck with Chapters of Autobiography* (London, 1897), pp. 146, 176, 179.
87. Mackie, *Life of McLaren*, vol. 1, p. 279.
88. *Scotsman*, 5 June 1839; 25 January 1840.
89. Mackie, *Life of McLaren*, vol. 1, p. 260 and chaps 10 and 12 *passim*.
90. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 266.
91. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 266, 267-8.
92. *Scotsman*, 13 April 1844.
93. *Ibid.*, 24 April 1844; 27 April 1844.
94. Mackie, *Life of McLaren*, vol. 1, pp. 272-4.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
96. *Scotsman*, 11 July 1846.
97. J.C. Williams, 'Edinburgh Politics: 1832-52', Ph.D thesis, Edinburgh University, 1972, pp. 262-3.
98. G.O. Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (London, 1876), vol. 2, pp. 183-4. Unbeknown to the Edinburgh Leaguers Macaulay had indicated that he would not serve in any incoming Whig ministry that was not committed to total and immediate repeal; see pp. 169-70.
99. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 184.
100. Quoted in P. Kelly, 'Constituents' instructions to Members of Parliament in the eighteenth century', in C. Jones (ed.), *Party Management in Parliament 1660-1784* (Leicester, 1984), p. 170.
101. Trevelyan, *Life of Macaulay*, vol. 2, p. 151.
102. *Pilot*, 11 March 1839.
103. PP, *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors, Reports from Committees*, 1846, vol. VIII, p. 217. See also the attempts to coerce Peter Ainsworth, MP for Bolton, detailed in the *Sentinel*, 18 February 1843.
104. M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties* (London, 1902). See also MacLean, 'Rational Choice', pp. 497-503; M. Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism* (Oxford, 1995).
105. Mackie, *Life of McLaren*, vol. 1, p. 273.
106. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 January 1840; *Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1840.
107. *League*, 4 July 1846. See also *Manchester Examiner*, 10 January 1846; 24 January 1846.
108. WSRO, Cobden Papers, J. Parkes to R. Cobden, 29 December 1838.
109. Mackay, *Autobiography of Smiles*, p. 98.
110. Extract in *Charter*, 3 November 1839.
111. *Manchester Times*, 6 January 1844.

112. *Ibid.*, 4 May 1844. Earl Ducie was also praised for his high farming techniques; see *League*, 14 September 1844. See also D. Spring, 'Earl Fitzwilliam and the Corn Laws', *American Historical Review*, vol. 59, no. 1, October 1953, p. 299.
113. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 25 December 1839. For a sketch of his life see the entry in *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 11, p. 191.
114. The words are George Wilson's: *Manchester Times*, 20 January 1844.
115. See A. Aspinall, *Lord Brougham and the Whig Party* (Manchester, 1927), p. 229; see also R.K. Huch, *Henry, Lord Brougham: The Later Years 1830-1868* (Lampeter, 1993), pp. 179-87.
116. The printed version of Brougham's speech went through two editions in 1839. It is repr. in A. Kadish (ed.), *The Corn Laws: The Formation of Popular Economics in Britain* (London, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 151-215.
117. *Hansard* [House of Lords] 11 June 1840, col. 1043; 18 April 1842, col. 637.
118. WSRO, Cobden Papers, J. Parkes to R. Cobden, 29 December 1838.
119. Huch, *Brougham*, pp. 179, 187.
120. See R.K. Huch, *The Radical Lord Radnor: The Private Life of Viscount Folkstone, Third Earl of Radnor* (Minneapolis, 1977).
121. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 154.
122. *Ibid.*, pp. 153-7
123. Huch is incorrect to suggest that he was the only peer to do so.
124. See *Northern Star*, 7 July 1838; 2 November 1839.
125. *League*, 6 January 1844. See also *Manchester Guardian*, 15 January 1840.
126. *Manchester Times*, 9 May 1840. This was the fourth edition of the tract originally published in 1832. It is repr. in Kadish, *The Corn Laws*, vol. 1, pp. 205-76.
127. Spring, 'Earl Fitzwilliam', p. 295.
128. *Northern Star*, 23 June 1838; *Sheffield Iris*, 3 November 1840; 9 February 1841; *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 15 May 1841.
129. See also *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 23, pp. 905-6.
130. *Manchester Times*, 21 January 1843.
131. Spring, 'Earl Fitzwilliam', pp. 298, 299.
132. *Hansard* [House of Lords], 14 March 1839, cols. 624-6; 11 June 1840, cols. 1043-5; 18 April 1842, col. 637.
133. *Sheffield Iris*, 26 April 1842. They were Brougham, Radnor, Kinnaird, Vivian and Clanricarde.
134. See Huch, *Brougham*, p. 189.
135. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, p. 7. Howe does not subscribe to this view.
136. See *inter alia* I. Jennings, *Party Politics* (Cambridge, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 103, 123; Ostrogorski, *Democracy*, vol. 1, pp. 134-5; D.E. Beales, 'Parliamentary Parties and the "Independent" Member, 1810-1860', in R. Robson (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 4-5.
137. *Manchester Times*, 3 July 1841.
138. Mackie, *Life of McLaren*, vol. 1, p. 269
139. Trevelyan, *Life of Macaulay*, pp. 311-14.
140. M.R. Foot and H.C. Matthew (eds), *The Gladstone Diaries* (Oxford, 1974), vol. 3, p. 547, 30 June 1846; Morley, *Life of Cobden*, vol. 1, pp. 388-9.
141. *Hansard* [Commons], 23 February 1846, cols. 169, 173. We are grateful to Brian Harrison for bringing this reference to our attention.

142. *Ibid.*, col. 173.
143. *Hansard* [Commons], 20 February 1846, cols. 1318-47. Disraeli concluded his speech by contemplating the enfranchisement of the people as an alternative to the 'thraldom of Capital'.
144. T. Carlyle, 'Shooting Niagara: And After?', 1867 repr. in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (London, 1899), vol. v, pp. 1-48.

CHAPTER 9

THEATRES OF DISCUSSION: LEAGUE MEETINGS AND RITUALS

The pulpit, the exchange, the market-place, the crowded hall, the farmers' dining room, the ladies' drawing room, the county meeting, the open field, the highways and byways of the country - all have been made the scenes and theatres of an animated and instructive discussion of these doctrines.

George Thompson, 1844¹

George Thompson's reference to League meetings as theatres of animated discussion draws attention to one of the most important and least studied aspects of the repeal campaign - its dramaturgy, the theatrical presentation of itself and of its opponents. In towns and villages all over the British Isles the repealers showed themselves to be masters of the art of the staged presentation, and they gave much time and money to it. Rousing enthusiasm to a degree that few could have expected from exponents of the 'dismal science' of Political Economy, they used their public gatherings to impart a flair, colour and inspiration to the exposition of their doctrines. This was more than the phenomenon that is sometimes described as the razzmatazz of politics, although there was certainly an element of that. To adapt the words used by a Chartist historian, the meetings were *the* League experience for many supporters.² As the Revd Massie demonstrated by his re-enactment of Luther's burning of Leo X's Bull (see Introduction), those who participated in League meetings were invited to take their assigned parts in a great historical drama based on a script that gave meaning to their lives as individuals, as a nation and as members of humankind. Responding eagerly to the words, body language and impassioned performances of speakers such as Massie and Thompson, they saw themselves as active participants in the long but assuredly triumphant struggle of European and British liberalism against the forces of feudal backwardness. To those of them who were puzzled by the great questions raised by an age of rapid change the meetings could provide reassurance at the most basic emotional level in ways that could not be replaced by the reading of a book or tract. Merely by gathering together in a warmly supportive atmosphere Leaguers received answers to some of the most basic questions that any individual

has to answer: Who are my friends? What do we hold in common? Who are the 'others' against whose values we define our own?

As they took their places in what were often carefully choreographed and ritualized performances - in halls where stage props in the form of symbolic decorations and iconic representations provided capsule statements of all that drew them together - Leaguers not only heard but saw and participated in representations of a great narrative that depicted them as embattled individuals and victims of class oppression. Replete with potent myths and metaphors, this narrative portrayed them as a people struggling over the centuries to overthrow the 'Norman Yoke' of aristocratic exploitation. It gave vitality to the creed of Political Economy by rescuing what might otherwise have been arid commercial theories and placing them in the framework of the Protestant Work Ethic. It gave form to the bourgeois dream of a polity, economy and society that would be thrown open to the ambitions of those with skills, knowledge and energy (*la carrière ouverte aux talents*). It gave them the right to rally together for a holy war of class conflict, on the outcome of which depended all the values of their version of Christian civilization - in the home, the workplace, the nation and the great family of mankind. The League taught all this in print, but for many of its supporters the compelling force of the message came from interactive performances in the theatres of animated discussion where leaders and rank and file could act out their shared sense of purpose and hurl defiance at their enemies.

Recent historical writing, however, does nothing to prepare us for the importance of dramaturgy in the history of the League. The provincial middle class in early Victorian Britain has acquired a reputation for puritanical austerity. Historians write of its 'rational' and 'utilitarian' distaste for ceremony and its evangelically driven 'onslaughts against the bright lights, false gaieties and inflamed passions of the theatre world'.³ Thus it comes as a surprise to find the following entry in the diary of W.C. Macready, one of the most famous actors of the day: 'Cobden and Wilson, of the Anti-Corn Law League, called to speak about taking Drury Lane Theatre next year for fourteen nights!'⁴ In fact, this was no momentary aberration on the part of men who claimed to voice the opinions of the middle class. Far from resembling Mr Gradgrind, some prominent members of the League had a passion for the stage. Cobden is a good example. When he met Macready, there was much talk about politics, but the conversation eventually turned to the theatre which Cobden knew well from his youthful years in London when he had written two (unsuccessful) plays, one of them called *The Phrenologist*.⁵ W.J. Fox, a minister of religion as well as a League orator, was another avid theatre-goer. An admirer of Macready, he was so interested in the stage that he became a regular drama critic for the *Chronicle* and did not hesitate to bring references to the theatre into his sermons.⁶ Attending one of Fox's services, Macready heard an address on 'the influence of those arts connected with the imagination upon religious feeling', a recurrent theme for Fox who saw the theatre as a

powerful means of raising the moral and intellectual standards of the nation. No mean judge, Macready was impressed by Fox's pulpit performance that day: his 'words burned and kindled my enthusiasm as no speaker ever did before'.⁷

It was not necessary to visit London to indulge a taste for the theatre. Manchester had its Queen's Theatre, and its Theatre Royal was re-built on a more splendid scale in 1845 after a fire. When the new Theatre Royal opened with a full house the *Manchester Guardian* welcomed it as a valuable contributor to the life of the mind in the local community, noting how appropriately it had been situated 'in the vicinity of our public buildings, as the Natural History Society's Museum, the Concert Hall, the Free-trade Hall, the Royal Institution, Athenaeum, Mechanics' Institution etc'.⁸ Not content with attending stage performances, many Mancunians seem to have had no inhibition about putting themselves on show in theatrical style. Writing to William Tait in 1836, Cobden described the Manchester Festival of that year as 'the boldest thing ever attempted'. A whole section of the city centre was transformed for the occasion with a saloon across Mosley Street, a banqueting room over Charlotte Street and covered bridges connecting the Theatre Royal, the Assembly Rooms and the Portico across Back Mosley Street. One of the rooms in the theatre was fitted up as a Turkish Divan lit by gas in cut-glass candelabra, and the interior of the theatre was converted into an immense Persian tent. The climax of the Festival was a Fancy Dress Ball which, in the words of *The Times*, brought together 'thousands of richly and strangely dressed characters'. Among them were people whose names would appear later in reports of the League's own ceremonies and celebrations: four Cobdens, including Richard dressed as a barrister, Archibald Prentice as a Highlander, George Wilson as a Neapolitan Prince, and Henry Rawson as Hamlet.⁹ Evidently, many early Victorians had an enthusiastic sense of theatre - even those of them who lived in Manchester and subscribed to the tenets of Political Economy, 'the dismal science'.

Undoubtedly there must have been evangelicals who recoiled from these exotic scenes in the belief that theatres and dancing were immoral. Earlier in the century they had gone on the offensive to root out these sources of evil, as in Bradford where the Revd David Stoner, a Methodist preacher, succeeded in driving a visiting group of actors out of town and converting their 'synagogue of Satan' to other purposes.¹⁰ During the 1820s and 1830s Joseph Sturge, an early benefactor of the League, had even attempted to deny the use of the Birmingham Town Hall to the organizers of the city's famous Music Festival, because the word of God would be profaned in the oratorios that were performed there.¹¹ These were extreme examples, but, as a movement that claimed to represent the moral sense of the nation, the League had to take account of the strength of religious convictions and scruples when it devised its rituals of community. It was helped by the fact that the evangelicals had their own version of the theatre. As Doreen Rosman points out, at meetings across the country, most notably at the May

Meetings of the religious and philanthropic societies, evangelicals came together for 'dazzling displays of oratory by the greatest preachers of the day, histrionic disputes and cordial reconciliations'.¹² There were highly emotional scenes when escaped slaves told their tales of suffering to weeping audiences, and when missionaries, returning as heroic figures from romantically far-distant lands, introduced colourfully robed former Buddhists, feathered native Americans and other exotic converts. Audiences at Exeter Hall and other evangelical gathering places were renowned for their exuberance. A visiting American clergyman was astounded by what he witnessed when he attended the 1838 season of religious meetings in London. It was not so much the preaching of 'stars of the first magnitude' that impressed him or the set-piece events such as the public catechizing of Jewish child converts, and the appearance of a Syrian Christian in Arab dress; it was the enthusiastic participation of the audiences in the public theatre of these occasions that remained most vividly in his recollection:¹³

I have not yet become quite accustomed to this English method of expressing approbation. The speaker can never be at a loss whether he interests his audience or not. If his sentiments are approved, and communicated with thrilling effect, there is such a burst of loud applause, such clapping of hands, swinging of hats, stamping of feet, and cheering of voices, that he is obliged to stop till the deafening roar calms down. . . . Never have I seen such indication of a wave of intense emotion rolling over a mass of human beings, as during one of these out-burstings of applause. It presents before you the view of thousands of faces lit up at the same instant with intense, fervid, sympathetic emotion.

Many of the League's staunchest supporters came from this tradition, and much of its success arose from the flair with which it devised rituals and celebrations to satisfy their craving for colourful and emotional dramatic occasions in which they could display themselves as members of a Christian nation that was taking the lead in the making of a new world.

Thus there was nothing shame-faced about their decision when the League leaders made an arrangement with Macready for taking Drury Lane and moved on from there to Covent Garden Theatre where they staged a highly successful series of meetings as well as their great bazaar. They even took the scenic artist of Drury Lane and the Italian Opera House into their pay and sent him to Manchester where he transformed the Free Trade Hall into a 'Tudor Hall'.¹⁴ There was no outcry of protest, and at meetings across the country it was only too evident that most of the League's supporters took great delight in 'bright lights, false gaieties and inflamed passions'. Making full use of the new gas technology, Leaguers commissioned immense and imaginatively designed clusters of gas illuminations for decorations and slogans; some of their orators exhibited theatrical talents of high quality; and the audiences were exuberantly demonstrative in their responses. A new era in public life was opening. As the old politics of aristocratic influence receded, the League was devising a new form of popular politics with a dramaturgy of richly varied rituals and ceremonials.

The great Manchester banquet in January 1840 provides an excellent example of the skill with which the League devised its rituals as a form of public theatre.¹⁵ It was planned to be the largest ever held in Britain and invitations were sent to mayors and representatives from towns across the nation and to every MP who had voted for Villiers' motion. There was no hall in Manchester big enough to seat such a gathering, and a special pavilion was constructed that was larger, so the *Circular* boasted, than Exeter Hall. The original intention was to make Manchester 'unusually gay' by offering the banquet as the centrepiece of a special celebratory season. It was to be followed by a dinner for the working men's ACLA; then there was to be a soirée attended by ladies; and finally it was hoped that the Lyceums, Temperance societies and other self-improvement groups that overlapped in membership with the League would rent the pavilion for their own demonstrations. These plans were altered when it was decided that 'our fair countrywomen' would be allowed to attend the banquet. On that night 3220 people attended as planned, and a further five hundred were squeezed in. There were even reports of profiteering from an unofficial blackmarket in ticket sales. A day later the working men's dinner in the same pavilion was also highly successful, despite rumours that the food consisted only of the leftovers from the banquet.



Illustration 4 *Great Free Trade Banquet at Manchester*

This was one of the well reported 'theatres of animated discussion' at which the League rallied its supporters and presented itself as the voice of the nation. (*Illustrated London News*, 11 February 1843) Reproduced by permission of Archives and Special Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

The arrangements showed how carefully the League leaders complied with the cultural expectations of their supporters. The distinction between the banquet and the dinner provided segregation by class; the building of a special gallery for the ladies provided segregation by gender; the division of the public prayers between Anglican and Dissenting clergymen respected sectarian considerations; there was a careful balance between satisfying the requirements of wine drinkers and teetotallers; there was the decision to offer 'an old English' meal that was not too sumptuous to contrast with the starvation of the people on which the speakers would expatiate; and there was extensive advertising of the names of orators who were well known to a variety of interest groups. In addition to several MPs, these included the Revd Thomas Spencer, George Thompson, and Dr John Epps who between them represented nearly all the reform movements of the day.

The occasion was recorded, not only in the glowing word pictures of reporters but also in a specially commissioned lithograph. Observers reconstructed a scene that was virtually a capsule statement of the League's ideology, its values, and the care it took with its self-presentation. The banquet was supervised by fifty vice-presidents who were immediately identifiable by their white League rosettes and button-holes in which artificial ears of corn were combined with greenery. At the tables were seated local supporters and delegates from towns as far apart as Aberdeen and Taunton, showing by their mere presence that the League was the voice of the nation and not, as its enemies said, a clique of Manchester millowners. Everything in the pavilion was chosen to proclaim that these were people of substance - there was a spirit of 'solid comfort as well as the charm of elegance and splendour'. The roof and sides of the pavilion were made of white and pink cloth; and elsewhere there were 'gorgeous draperies', devices in silver and brilliant colours, Ionic pilasters and a striking Etruscan frieze. Dominating the scene was the word 'Justice' picked out in hundreds of gas jets flanked by the letters VR in 'flaming characters'. The medium was modern, but the message was one in which the demands of the people against the aristocracy were mingled with a newly flaunted popular constitutional reverence for the throne. Lifting their gaze, observers noted that this was a celebration that was conducted on two levels with the men banqueting and listening to the speeches at floor level while the women sat and ate separately in their gallery. The League was safeguarding the respectability of its female supporters the better to use it for its own purposes. Along the front of the gallery, immediately below the ladies' faces, were the slogans and icons that voiced the moral language of the movement including biblical texts condemning those who withheld corn from the people and calling on the landowners to see that 'honesty is the best policy'. By juxtaposing the slogans on the front of the gallery with the ladies' faces the League was identifying itself with the values of religion, morality and philanthropy that were conventionally attached to early Victorian womanhood. In this most carefully choreographed of ceremonies no opportunity had been lost to proclaim the

League's vision of itself as the voice of the nation's Christian conscience.

The boldness of this proclamation should not be underestimated. In the very recent past national identity had focused on an 'imagined community' (to use Benedict Anderson's term) in which the political establishment drew freely on sources of loyalty - war, national rivalries, empire and anti-Catholicism¹⁶ - to which most repealers were either hostile or willing to set aside in favour of their vision of a globalized free market where individuals and nations would interact peacefully. The League had to work hard to create a nationwide public opinion based on its version of Britishness. The anti-slavery movement had provided important precedents, and some of the Leaguers were already known to each other by participating in its conferences and deputations, but these precedents were very recent, and the League was venturing on to new territory when it embarked on the task of creating a movement that could transcend disparate regional, religious, gender and cultural loyalties and beliefs. To place Manchester, not London, at the centre of this vision emphasized the boldness of the venture. Admittedly, across the provinces at this time there was a deep-seated suspicion of the national capital as the locus of parasitism, corruption and misgovernment, but Manchester had few claims to offer as an alternative national centre. League spokesmen sometimes tactfully invoked the Hanseatic League as a model for an association of British cities that would be linked together by their opposition to the Corn Laws,¹⁷ but, if this was a vision of Manchester as a latter-day Lübeck, it was one that did not immediately commend itself to important groups of reformers in other regional centres. Writing to George Wilson in 1841, Cobden saw the history of the previous two years as a sorry tale of rivalries and dissipated energies: 'Leeds ran away after a political *ignis fatuus* - Glasgow deserted us for tariff reform - Birmingham has never had a lucid interval yet.'¹⁸

Donald Read's list of the 'essentials' laid down by Cobden for a successful agitation that could overcome these problems - 'centralised administration and finance', a single objective and an emphasis on religion and morality - is good as far as it goes,¹⁹ but it misses the care that was taken by League leaders to provide meetings, rituals and collective ventures that could bring people together from all over Britain and keep them loyal to the lead from Manchester. Commenting on a League meeting in 1839, William Weir, a Scot, described it as a means of enabling 'the friends of free-trade throughout the empire . . . to become acquainted with each other, in order that a closer & more energetic co-operation to promote their common interests may be ensured for the future'.²⁰ Bonding them together in what became a cohesive national movement the League enjoyed considerable success in its attempts to create a national network of supporters. Its lecturers and speakers went out from Manchester to agitate in places large and small throughout Britain, and, with the assistance of the new railways, it brought its activists together at large gatherings. J.G. Kohl marvelled to see how effectively the League influenced the whole country through its 'festivals, Anti-Corn Law bazaars, Anti-Corn-Law banquets, and

others of a like nature' - they were 'like great national anniversaries'.²¹ Eventually the activists knew each other so well that, when repeal was attained, some of them experienced a sense of loss as well as of triumph. It was more like 'the breaking up of an united Household than of a political Assn.', C.E. Rawlins of Liverpool wrote to George Wilson in 1846.²²

The sheer enjoyment of these occasions should not be overlooked - the 2477 bottles of (mainly fortified) wine and the forty barrels of ale and porter as well as spirits that were drunk at the Manchester banquet in 1840 sufficiently attested to the atmosphere of conviviality on that famous occasion.²³ For the League, as for any other political movement, it was important to keep up the morale of its followers and lock in their sense of fellowship for a long struggle. But merely festive demonstrations were not enough, Cobden told Wilson: they would have to make people come and then give them something to do - 'work & strong action' were needed.²⁴ Typically therefore the League's meetings, even those that were advertised as social functions, were associated with tasks such as fund-raising, petitioning and electoral registration, with committees being set up to take responsibility for public appeals. A meeting could also be an extremely cost-effective means of publicity. After the Manchester banquet, for example, the pavilion was thrown open to members of the public, but they had to pay for the right merely to walk through on a visit of inspection.²⁵ More importantly, the League's public gatherings were reported in its own publications, and in the local press from where they were picked up in newspapers all over the country. Delegates were encouraged to report back to the people they represented which in turn could give rise to further newspaper reports. All over the country repealers followed the Manchester model and organized similar social functions which were well reported. At one exceptionally spectacular banquet in the Liverpool Amphitheatre on 31 January 1843 a display of transparencies culminated in one that exploded as part of a pyrotechnic display showing 'Free Trade over all the world'.²⁶ The reluctant recognition by *The Times* that the League had become 'a great fact' was born of this well-orchestrated publicity.²⁷

As the early hopes of a speedy victory evaporated, and the League recognized the need to keep its followers interested and involved by a combination of hard work, social bonding and sheer good fun, an informal calendar of events evolved. Of these the lecture was probably the most typical League experience for many supporters, a public gathering of great flexibility that could be held in a formal lecture hall, a theatre, chapel or even in the open air. Some were combined with musical entertainment.²⁸ For Ebenezer Elliott the public lecture was 'the power of powers' beside which his own well-known writings amounted to nothing.²⁹ In 1839 the League offered to send a lecturer to any town within thirty miles of Manchester, if rent, gas and placards were paid for in addition to a subscription of £5 to League funds.³⁰ The anti-slavery movement supplied the most useful precedent. During the 1830s its leading activists had set out to overwhelm Parliament and obtain the total and immediate emancipation

of the slaves in the British colonial empire. Central to this strategy for public agitation was the decision to send a team of lecturers called 'agents' to address audiences across the land, raise funds and petitions and organize local societies.³¹ From its early days the League assiduously followed this model to promote its own programme of 'total and immediate' repeal. According to its report for 1839, in that year professional lecturers had given 400 lectures to 600,000 people while volunteers including Dr Epps, Thomas Plint of Leeds and members of the Manchester Operative ACLA, had lectured to a further 200,000.³²

There were varied reports as to the quality of the lecturers, but there was undoubtedly considerable talent and a wide range of experience in the large team that the League eventually assembled. Some of them, including A.W. Paulton (a student surgeon), R.R. Moore (a barrister) and Sidney Smith (an Edinburgh solicitor and lecturer)³³ were gentlemen who could satisfy the tastes of a middle-class audience; others such as John Finnigan, Timothy Falvey and John Murray came from the ranks of the working men and Irish labourers whom they were sent out to address;³⁴ and there were those - James Acland, an actor and journalist was one - who belonged to the 'uneasy' middling class which supplied so many of the activists in the reform movements of this era.³⁵ It is difficult nowadays to imagine a lecture as an occasion of colour and drama, but the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* was full of reports about the enthusiastic reception of its lecturers. Paulton, for example, was greeted with 'rapturous applause' in Dudley; he 'revolutionised' Worcester and created 'a deep impression' in Kidderminster.³⁶ Sidney Smith evoked 'unbounded enthusiasm' in Doncaster; and Shearman was greeted by 'deafening cheers' in Louth.³⁷ To meet the demand for lectures the *Circular* printed several of Smith's in the hope that people would declaim them to their friends, but it was careful to explain that no one who merely read out the words could hope to emulate a speaker of his talents; it would be necessary to emulate his powers of dramatic talent and mimicry.³⁸

In his distinctive way, Acland too made the most of his acting skills to devise a highly effective theatre of public defiance against the aristocracy. At one stage in a grotesque parody of the chivalric traditions of the aristocracy his reports described him galloping through the shires on a 'White charger' calling on the Duke of Buckingham to stand forth as a defender of the Corn Laws and meet him face to face in debate. His progress, he reported to Manchester, was nothing short of 'a triumph of repeated victories' at the meetings where he lectured and raised petitions.³⁹ On another celebrated occasion, when the Duke of Cleveland mistakenly allowed himself to be goaded into trading insults with him, Acland took the quarrel to the ducal seat at Raby Castle where he distributed tracts on the surrounding estates and, after lecturing to the Duke's neighbours and tenants for three hours, obtained a show of hands expressing 'their conviction of the Duke's gross ignorance'.⁴⁰ As one repealer put it, actions such as these breathed a new spirit into areas of the country where labourers were still held in the feudal

tyranny of aristocratic rule.⁴¹ These reports, which had obviously lost nothing in the telling, formed one of the most colourful parts of many League meetings and reassuringly confirmed the League's great narrative of a nation throwing off the 'Norman Yoke' of class oppression. Even the many lectures that were broken up by Chartists, hostile magistrates and rural mobs told a story with historic resonances for many League supporters: their lecturers were following a path that had been trodden by John Bunyan, George Fox, John Wesley and Thomas Clarkson.⁴² In a magnificent theatrical gesture Shearman even arrived at a League Council meeting in 1839 carrying a large blue sack containing torn Cambridge University caps and gowns, together with fragments of benches and chairs that he had gathered up after a fight with undergraduates who had invaded one of his lectures.⁴³ The gownsmen were renowned for their rowdy defence of their rank and privileges, and their entirely predictable response to the appearance of an Anti-Corn Law lecturer in the town provided vivid evidence to support the League's vision of itself as a battering ram of righteousness that was smashing its way into the innermost strongholds of sectarian and class unrighteousness.

There were many examples of the readiness of League organizers to provide colourful and out-of-the-ordinary experiences that would attract audiences to their meetings and provoke reports in the press. Following the precedent of the anti-slavery and missionary societies they made some use of overseas visitors as draw-cards that could also provide evidence of the universality of free trade. At one of his lectures George Thompson brought along 'a gentleman of colour from Rhode Island',⁴⁴ and John Curtis of Ohio became something of a favourite with League audiences in many parts of Britain. Referring to a speech that Curtis gave in the Manchester Corn Exchange attended mainly by working men, Richard Cobden described it as the best he ever saw for enthusiasm.⁴⁵ The 'distinguished Orientals' who attended a League meeting provided a more exotic touch, and when the Prince of Muscat (dressed in 'Eastern costume') arrived in Manchester with an introduction to George Wilson, it was reported that he was surrounded by 'thongs' of curious Mancunians.⁴⁶

Second only to the lecture as the typical League experience was the tea party. Alexander Somerville, the League's 'Whistler at the Plough', described one that he attended in Bolton in 1843. It was a fund-raising event attended by twelve to thirteen hundred people, who participated in an 'auction' in addition to purchasing tickets at 1s 6d. Some of the best-known repealers were there that evening, including John Bright, R.R. Moore, Dr John Bowring, Joseph Brotherton, Lawrence Heyworth and John Brooks, but for Somerville this was a very feminine occasion; 'caps, and combs, and curls, and lace, and ribbons' were everywhere. It was a gathering of friends - 'husbands with their wives, lovers with their loved ones, fathers and mothers, little sisters and little brothers'. The tea party was held in the local Temperance Hall, one of the venues of self-improvement in which League spokesmen delighted to be seen, and those

who attended were plied with 'cake, sandwiches, dishes of oranges, dishes of grapes, and other et-ceteras of teetotalism'. This choice of diet was given further ideological force by some Leaguers who seized on the opportunity to make personal gestures on behalf of the cause. Thus Moore insisted on drinking hot milk because he would not take tea or other dutiable foodstuffs, and Bright likewise refused to give any encouragement to the sugar producers of the Empire by consuming the products they sold on the British market with the help of tariff protection.⁴⁷

Somerville described this as a typical provincial League tea party, and, although he almost ignored the speeches, this seems to have been the case, for, like the League banquets, the tea parties followed a model that was devised in Manchester during 1840. This was the 'Great Anti-Corn Law Tea Party' in October of that year. The *Circular* compared it favourably with the League banquet a few months earlier. Ladies had been present on that occasion but only as spectators, and they had been a small minority; now they were half of those present, and they took an active part, giving a 'new interest and animation to the scene'. There were seventy tables each presided over by a lady who had chosen friends and family members to join her in what was virtually 'an aggregate of family parties'.⁴⁸ Spokesmen for the League always had a good word to say about the tea parties for the sense of family that they imparted to what might otherwise have been seen as a businessman's matter. Richard Cobden saw them as 'the only way to reach the family fire-sides',⁴⁹ and the *Manchester Times* believed they were so important that they deserved a chapter to themselves in any history of the League because of the enthusiasm they had engendered.⁵⁰ Their significance, however, has been overlooked by a recent historian who has described associations like the League as a form of public life characterized by 'homosociality' (single-sex social bonds) that excluded women and conflicted with the heavy emphasis on home and domesticity in Victorian middle-class culture. Admittedly, the League provided many opportunities for the 'homosociality' of its male leaders, but, far from exemplifying a 'reduction in the venues where middle-class couples could socialise freely', it also provided, through its tea parties, bazaars and other gatherings, new forums that brought whole families out from the home to participate together in a carefully reconstructed form of public life.⁵¹

By hailing its tea parties as family parties the League was not softening its message. The speeches could be very hard-hitting, and, as Somerville noted, the flags and mottoes that festooned the halls could 'say a great deal', sometimes more than a speaker would dare to voice.⁵² The ones used at the 'Great Anti-Corn Law Tea Party', for example, plundered the Bible for texts to describe the aristocrat as 'a man of blood' who was cursed by the people and driving them to acts of madness. The threat of revolution implied by this stage setting was reinforced by the suspension from the ceiling of one of the best known of the stage props that the League used to symbolize aristocratic oppression - the one shilling loaves of Poland, France and England. The Polish loaf was double the size of the English,

and the French one was 50 per cent larger than its English counterpart.⁵³ Neither country was noted for free trade and Poland especially not for its well-fed peasantry. Sometimes a Russian loaf replaced the Polish one, but the basic point remained the same. Although the symbolism was confused, reports referred to the interest the loaves aroused and, in a simplified form, they became an enduring emblem in popular iconography. Looking back to the 'Hungry Forties' during the fierce debate over tariff reform in 1904, the lingering image for David Miles of Heyshott was 'the big loaf for Free Trade and the small loaf for Protection stuck up in one o' the winders' on his way to school.⁵⁴

As Somerville also noted, tea parties provided an excellent venue for giving public receptions to League notabilities and visiting speakers. George Thompson was a firm favourite on these occasions. His style of oratory was characterized by great flights of what one reporter called 'glowing sentiments', 'lofty figures' and 'impassioned language'.⁵⁵ He was no strait-laced puritan; he could play to his audiences' sense of fun by swooping from the sublime heights of moral earnestness to discharge sustained bursts of waggish derision on the enemy, the sinner, the hypocritical aristocrat. Thus, when he delivered the opening speech at a tea party in the Manchester New Corn Exchange, he quickly took his audience to what he called 'the everlasting principles of justice and righteousness', delighting them with the scriptural quotations that they knew so well and drawing from them 'long continued' outbursts of cheering. He then went on to explain in some detail how the Corn Laws worked to flout the word of God. Then suddenly, with a quick change of mood, he launched into a biting humorous attack on landowners who told the poor not to import grain from foreigners while they themselves pursued a lifestyle that was full of foreign commodities, like the Italian opera where they could 'witness the debut of the adorable Madame Shew-her-legs, the divine *figurante*, who has just been imported all alive from the capital of Prussia'. By this stage, so the report went, the audience was convulsed with laughter, but then, with another quick change of mood, Thompson drove home the point of his speech: he appealed for the support of a very different sort of woman, the respectable middle-class lady such as those who were in his audience.⁵⁶

Strongly contrasting with the relaxed and informal atmosphere of the tea parties were the great meetings of delegates that the League organized from its earliest days. These took many forms, and, especially in 1841 and 1842 when the League was seeking to attract the support of sectional interests there were many of them. As shown elsewhere they included the skilfully choreographed conferences of Dissenting ministers of religion that were held in Manchester, Edinburgh and Caernarfon between August 1841 and January 1842 (see Chapter 5). These ministerial conferences took their places alongside other assemblies that voiced opposition to the Corn Laws from representatives of such regional staple trades as the hosiery industries of the Midland Counties; the flax and linen trade of Forfarshire and Fife; the woollen industries of the West Country and Leeds; and the cotton

manufactures of Manchester.⁵⁷ As the League presented itself to the nation on platforms all over the country the appearance was being created of an industrious and Christian middle class rising up in outrage against the iniquities and selfish incompetence of the aristocracy.

More important because of their prominence in the 'pressure from without' on Parliament were the great conventions that the League frequently organized in London, especially when Charles Villiers's annual motion on the Corn Laws was debated in the House of Commons. The political power and menace of these gatherings has been noted, but they served even more effectively as a form of theatre that displayed the Leaguers to themselves and to their supporters in the provinces. The deputations that they sent, ostensibly to lobby Cabinet ministers, created scenes that could afterwards be depicted as symbolic confrontations of Manichean intensity. Joseph Livesey described one of these occasions when, with tears streaming down their cheeks, a deputation of repealers unavailingly described the plight of the starving people to a taciturn and discourteously obdurate Prime Minister.⁵⁸ The ability to shed tears over the contemplation of the great truths of religion was a sign of the regenerate heart, one of the leading evangelical Dissenters of the day had written,⁵⁹ and weeping was an important part of the body language of the 'moral radicals' who entered public life in the name of Christianity and morality. They were proclaiming their own authentic piety no less strongly than they were emphasizing the plight of suffering humanity.⁶⁰ Emerging from their assemblies of the righteous where they proclaimed their 'national character' in a way that did not admit of an alternative, they traversed the corridors of Westminster to confront the evil 'other' with whom they were familiar from the evangelical discourses of the day. Having found him in the person of Lord Melbourne or Sir Robert Peel, they then returned to their provincial chapels, temperance halls and other meeting places where they told their tale of aristocratic insensibility in the metropolis.

The declaratory function of the League's great public meetings became, if anything, more prominent during the later years. As Peel's government weathered the crisis of 1842 and settled into what seemed like a seven-year tenure of power the prospects of repeal receded into the future and there was a risk, as enemies frequently asserted, that the movement would fade away. Never had it been more important to bond the members together, and never did the public theatre of the League flourish more. In 1843 Cobden and Wilson made their arrangements with Macready to appeal to the nation from the London stage; earlier in the same year the League had opened its own theatre in Manchester, the Free Trade Hall.

The forerunner of the Free Trade Hall rallies were the weekly meetings that the League held in its Manchester headquarters at Newall's Buildings. Starting off in a small room, as numbers grew these were moved to the Gallery of Paintings. For the most part these meetings were concerned with the delivery of reports and arrangements for various activities such as fund and petition raising, but they soon acquired a convivial atmosphere with

ladies in the audience and lecturers playing to the crowd by providing lively reports of their experiences in various parts of the country.⁶¹

By the end of 1842 the League's meetings were too large for Newall's Buildings, and they were transferred to the Corn Exchange, which could hold two to three thousand people, while a special building, the Free Trade Hall, was constructed.⁶² The building was also designed for use by other societies, for public meetings, concerts and even for dancing. Built in six to eight weeks, it could hold 10,000 people including a gallery for ladies. It was well warmed and ventilated and a special acoustics expert was employed to ensure audibility. The 'League lights', sixteen large gas candelabra in the form of Chinese lanterns, added a touch of the exotic to the scene.⁶³ The Free Trade Hall was a building for which French historians use the term *architecture parlante* (architecture with a message).⁶⁴ It stood on St Peter's Fields, a site that carried the public memory back to the day in 1819 when the Yeomanry Cavalry and Hussars had perpetrated their infamous attack on a peaceful crowd of political protesters. The Peterloo Massacre is better remembered for its association with the movement for manhood suffrage, but League spokesmen saw it differently, for, as they pointed out to Chartists and other opponents, one of the most prominent of the banners carried that day had been one for repeal of the Corn Laws.⁶⁵ This was obviously the sort of historical interpretation that Alcide Fonteyrand, a visiting French journalist, was given when John Bright took him to Manchester in 1843. He saw the Free Trade Hall as a memorial 'like a cenotaph raised on the shades of the victims' of Peterloo. All around him on the walls he would have seen other emblems of free trade in the form of sheafs of corn with the word 'free'.⁶⁶

By 1845, doubtless inspired by their experience of the London theatres, the League leaders were dissatisfied with the décor of the Free Trade Hall. It was then that they commissioned the scenic artist of Drury Lane and the Italian Opera House to redesign the interior as a Tudor Hall.⁶⁷ The outcome was described by the *Manchester Guardian* as 'a new and gay attire'. The dominant colour was crimson; and there were panels that had been specially painted by London artists. The intention may have been to invoke the image of a Protestant Merry England set between the feudal backwardness of the Middle Ages and the oppressive era of Stuart misgovernment, but Tudor architecture was in fashion at the time, and, as their willingness to use Chinese and other eastern settings amply indicated, the Leaguers were typical Victorians in the eclecticism of their taste. But there was no mistaking the message that was set forth most sharply on those walls in a whole mythology of metaphoric self-presentation. The visitor's gaze was directed to mottoes and devices in which the Protestant work ethic was mingled with Adam Smith's vision of a world that would be guided to peace and prosperity by the 'invisible hand' of free-market economics and the skills of industrious, freedom-loving Britons. A mariner's compass stood for 'Navigation', a Bible for 'Faith', three stalks of wheat for 'Perseverance', a pelican feeding her young for 'Affection', an anchor for 'Hope', scales for

'Justice', a woolpack for 'Trade', an owl for 'Wisdom', a pair of compasses for 'Fair Division', olive branches for 'Peace', a cornucopia for 'Plenty', a cap on a pole for 'Liberty', fasces for 'Strength', a beehive for 'Industry', a ship leaving port for 'Enterprise', a spider spinning a web for 'Ingenuity', a ship in full sail for 'Free Trade', and an hour-glass with the words 'Time will show'. One of the devices held pride of place in this presentation of the repealers as the *avant garde* in the rise of industrial civilization and progress; it took the form of a railway engine with a name-plate on which were inscribed the words 'The League'.⁶⁸ These were sentiments that were becoming commonplace in Victorian writings. Samuel Smiles, a League sympathizer who was then devising the early versions of his *Self-Help* would have recognized them, and Tennyson set them forth in the rollicking railway metre of his *Locksley Hall*:

Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new:
That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do:
For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales.⁶⁹

From time to time the idea was discussed of building a Free Trade Hall in London, but nothing came of this.⁷⁰ London had always been a problem for the League. With its large population and its commercial importance it looked like an obvious ally for a free-trade programme, and as the seat of government it was a place that many repealers came to know well through their lobbying and other activities in the 'pressure from without'. From London, through Parliament and the press, it was possible as nowhere else to speak to the nation. But London was difficult to move; as Francis Place told Cobden, it was too diverse to have a local interest, and the various boroughs had little in common. It was much easier to carry on a reform agitation in Manchester where a few men of property and influence could take a decision and carry it through.⁷¹ The problem was also one of the provinces versus the capital and of North versus South. Reformers from the provinces saw London as the seat of a corrupt aristocracy; and Londoners, even other reformers, often made them feel unwelcome. J.B. Smith told Cobden in 1839 that in his experience of visiting London on League business, the 'change of feeling is something like descending into an ice-house compared with Manchester'.⁷² Henry Ashworth, who tried to rouse support in 1842, found a reluctance to 'partake the spirit of the League which is very rude and vulgar in the eyes of many fastidious persons'.⁷³ The problem was never overcome, but the League acquired offices in 67 Fleet Street,⁷⁴ a central position through which it could transact its business and provide a visual demonstration that the provincial storming party was permanently in Town. Thus, when the Queen and Prince Albert opened the Royal Exchange and London was festively decorated for the occasion, the League proudly boasted that its display was the biggest in Fleet Street.

On the top of the building was an illuminated crown with the letters V and A, together with an inscription invoking 'The Union of All Nations'. Among the flags of the many countries that the League hoisted on the summit of the building that day to proclaim its message of international free trade and peace was an immense crimson banner with the eye of Providence directing its rays on the words 'National Anti-Corn Law League'.⁷⁵ The Leaguers were proclaiming their right to a place of pride in the celebration of a monarch whose sympathy they claimed for their universal programme of benevolence to mankind. By 1845 there was a further improvement when visiting repealers acquired a pied à terre in the Free Trade Club, housed in the first instance at 11 Parliament Street, and then at 27 Regent Street, where they could avail themselves of a reading room, dining rooms and a reference library.⁷⁶

None of this did much to win hearts and minds in London. For that, as John Bright told George Wilson in 1843, they would have to hold great meetings, and in the absence of a suitable hall these would have to take place in a theatre.⁷⁷ The League had held meetings in the usual London venues for reformers - the Freemasons' Tavern and the Crown and Anchor - but these were not spacious enough for the great demonstrations that Bright had in mind. There were risks - would Londoners attend this new form of theatre? - but the outcome was an immediate and spectacular success with large numbers of people having to be turned away. Admittedly, the Drury Lane shareholders soon overruled the agreement that Cobden and Wilson made with Macready, and after a few meetings the arrangement was not extended. An approach to Exeter Hall (indicative of the League's presentation of itself as a religious and philanthropic society) was also rebuffed.⁷⁸ But Covent Garden Theatre was obtained and became the scene of the great weekly demonstrations that were the highlights of the League's calendar of activities during its last years. Rank and file supporters responded well to the choice of venue. As the *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular* reassured them, they had nothing to fear: 'the respectability of the whole assemblage sustained the character of what these meetings really purport to be, meetings of the middle classes'.⁷⁹

If one word were to be chosen to sum up the meetings at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, it would be 'enthusiasm'. This was not left to chance. The leaders and the most popular orators of the movement regularly took to the stage; there were dramatic moments when prominent agriculturalists and other converts made their declarations of faith in the League; and new campaigns were launched from there. It would be possible to select any of these meetings for a case study, but none of them quite matched the remarkable display in February 1844. As usual the theatre was densely packed, with the bright dresses of the ladies in boxes adding to the colour of the occasion. George Thompson had just returned from India and was to make a speech, but it was Daniel O'Connell who provided the principal attraction that evening. He had always been a great favourite with League audiences, and now, fresh from a notoriously biased court where he had

been answering unavailingly the charges of conspiracy that Peel's government had brought against him, he was the hero of the hour. O'Connell's attendance at public meetings was an item of theatre in itself; always late, he would bring proceedings to a halt while audiences cheered his entry. That evening was no exception. He was an hour late, and from time to time the meeting was interrupted when sounds from the large crowd in the street suggested he was approaching. When at last he appeared, all restraint vanished as the audience rose and cheered him for more than ten minutes. 'Covent Garden shook to its foundation', the *League* reported; there had been nothing like it in the theatre's history. 'Every voice was strained to the utmost, every arm was raised, and hats, handkerchiefs, and shawls, and even open umbrellas, were waved in the air, to greet the entrance of the honourable and learned gentleman.'⁸⁰

These large meetings had the great advantage of being reported in the London newspapers from where they were carried to other parts of Britain and copied into the local press, but the League's leaders recognized that this did not satisfy the craving of their supporters for a sight and sound of the great men of the movement. As a consequence whistle-stop tours across the provinces became a recognized feature of the League's calendar with 'deputations' of leading spokesmen substantially taking the place of the lecturers who had been employed in earlier years. Some idea of the pace that was set during these tours may be obtained from one of Cobden's letters to Henry Ashworth in which he referred to eight days of travelling and addressing meetings at Alwick, Cockermouth, Durham, Haddington and Berwick.⁸¹ The day had passed when League speakers had to run the gauntlet of hostile mobs, and the leaders were now able to visit rural areas where the landowners' influence was strong. Even Cambridge, the scene of the great battle from which Shearman had emerged with his blue bag of torn and broken trophies, now received the League quietly.⁸² Elsewhere League 'deputations' could make triumphal progresses. When, during their great swing through Somerset, Devon and Cornwall in April 1843, Cobden, Bright and Moore arrived at the Taunton railway station, the church bells were rung and a band played them into town along streets bedecked with white flags on which free trade mottoes were displayed.⁸³ Presenting his annual report in January 1845, Wilson estimated that since October 1843 over two hundred of these deputation meetings had taken place in England and Scotland.⁸⁴

Colourful though all this campaigning was, it was outshone by the two bazaars that the League held in Manchester and London in 1842 and 1845. The 1842 bazaar was probably the greatest of George Wilson's many contributions to the League, coming as it did at a time when the movement was having to make the difficult adjustment to the Tory victory in the 1841 General Election. It was his special project, one that he carried through with the assistance of the League's women supporters especially Mrs Elizabeth Woolley.⁸⁵ A bazaar, he explained, would give the rank and file members an opportunity to make a fresh start by raising money to promote

efforts against the new Parliament and spread information about repeal,⁸⁶ but there were many other advantages. Firmly identified in the public mind as women's work for religious and charitable objects, bazaars endorsed the League's carefully cultivated image of itself as a moral and philanthropic movement. They also fulfilled a useful bonding function through the committees that were set up in towns in various parts of Britain to make arrangements for the production and collection of items for sale at the stalls. An illustration in Joseph Livesey's *Struggle* showing women settling down for a weekly sewing session captured the atmosphere in Preston and doubtless in other places.⁸⁷ The 1845 bazaar carried this bonding process even more successfully to the national level when places from all over Britain furnished goods for stalls, sent ladies to serve at them and provided contingents of visitors, many of them transported there on special railway excursions. The *Globe* exulted to see the League leaders using the bazaar 'to bring together their friends from all parts of the kingdom to meet each other face to face, hand to hand; to keep alive the spirit which had not slept, nor flagged, but which, without a motion to action, might have slept or flagged; to show who the League's friends are and what they can do'.⁸⁸ Lengthy reports in newspapers and other publications (some of them illustrated) gave the bazaars great publicity, but the League left little to chance. The 1845 bazaar was timed to coincide with the May Meetings in Exeter Hall which many repealers were likely to attend, and, as advance publicity, 30,000 letters were sent out and 75,000 advertising tracts were stitched into one month's issues of several widely distributed magazines. So far did the League cast its net that it advertised to the European readers of *Galigiani* and sent prospectuses to American and Canadian journals in the hope that transatlantic contributions would be sent to the bazaar.⁸⁹

The two bazaars were literally theatres of discussion. They took place in theatres - the Theatre Royal in Manchester and Covent Garden Theatre in London - and the Leaguers did nothing to tone down the theatrical qualities of the venues. The Theatre Royal was too 'sombre' for their tastes, and in three days Wilson and his colleagues converted it so thoroughly that, as the *Bazaar Gazette* put it, the visitor could step from a dull wintry Manchester afternoon into 'a scene of brilliant magnificence'. There were crimson and white decorations, Chinese lamps lit by gas (the ones used at the 1836 Fancy Dress Ball), and 'gay stalls fraught with the products of more than eastern luxury'.⁹⁰ A specially produced *Bazaar Gazette* introduced the visitor to forty of these stalls, some of them provided by committees which supplied staple products from towns in the North and the Midlands. Items made and collected by the ladies predominated. There was fancy work, useful clothing and a bewildering array of bric-a-brac that included Jeremy Bentham's pencil case and a choice of locks of hair from the heads of George Thompson, Napoleon and an Egyptian pyramid builder. There was a book stall attended by local authors, a post office for sending jocular messages, a picture gallery that included B.R. Haydon's famous painting of the 1840 anti-slavery con-vention, and displays of

machinery models. Visitors wearied by the busy scene at the stalls could retreat to the refreshment room, listen to the Bury Juvenile Band, enjoy the entertainment provided by the Lancashire bell-ringers or watch Punch and Judy, but they could never forget the purpose of the event; League mottoes in porcelain letters, including one of approximately twenty feet, proclaimed the dire warning that 'whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard'.⁹¹

The 1842 bazaar was a foretaste of its successor in 1845. A 'Grand Gothic Hall', like one of 'the imaginary halls in the palace of Aladdin', was constructed in the Covent Garden Theatre.⁹² It was, the *Morning Herald* wrote, 'a scene so novel and romantic, so incongruous and grotesque, that for a moment we could fancy ourselves transported to the east, and about to deal with Turks and Mussulmans'.⁹³ Ladies wearing League rosettes attended at the stalls, many of which, as had been the case at Manchester, were stocked with needlework, shawls and bric-à-brac, but there was a marked change in emphasis on this occasion; in 1845 there was a successful attempt to give the bazaar the appearance of an industrial exhibition. In the heart of London the landlords' Parliament was to be shown the power of the nation's industry and the part it could play in a global system of free-trade. It was the best of everything British, according to the *League*: there were Manchester textiles, cutlery from Sheffield, ironwork from Coalbrookdale, the products of the Potteries and all that could be produced by 'the hardy intellect and the iron will of man, and the generous sympathies and delicate tastefulness of woman'. To reinforce the League's point about international exchanges under a free trade system there was even a display of wheat from Australia.⁹⁴ Invoking its interpretation of English history as a story of struggle to throw off the Norman Yoke, the League hailed an achievement that had been brought about, not by the 'fiat of a government, but that self-acting, self-organising energy characteristic of our Anglo-Saxon race'.⁹⁵ The message was thrust home by mottoes on the walls bearing aphorisms on free trade including a mischievous choice of quotation from Sir Robert Peel. A similarly mischievous sense of theatre characterized other arrangements at this bazaar. In a thrust at the landlords' selfishness visitors were invited to contribute to the purchase of beds for impoverished agricultural labourers.⁹⁶ This bazaar too had its 'Post Office', but there was a difference from the one in the Manchester Theatre Royal. Showing that their radical sympathies embraced their European counterparts, the repealers had erected it, they said, 'at the earnest request of Mr Mazzini and other Italian exiles', and for that reason they had placed busts of murdered Italian patriots on either side of the door to bar the way to Sir James Graham, the Home Secretary.⁹⁷ The reference was to the revelation that, under a warrant issued by Graham, the British postal authorities had been opening and re-sealing letters addressed to Mazzini so that the Foreign Office could transmit material from them to the Austrian ambassador who in turn could enable his government to arrest suspected nationalists (Illustration 5). Described by a recent historian as 'the political

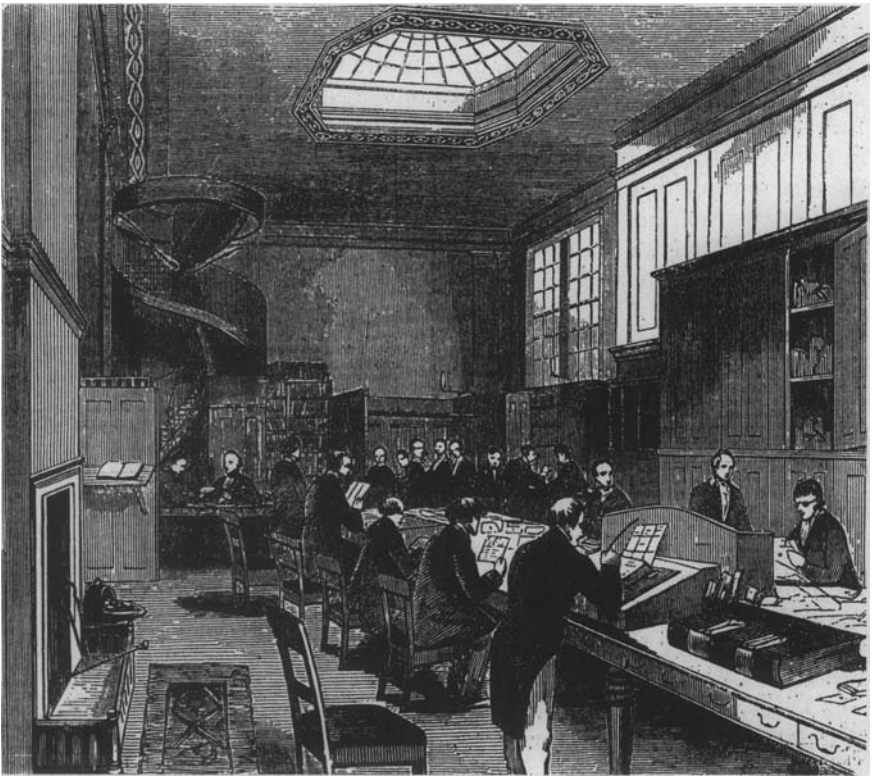


Illustration 5 *The Secret Office at the Post Office*

The Leaguers directed public indignation against this secret government department where letters of foreign revolutionaries and British radicals were opened, copied and re-sealed. (*Illustrated London News*, 29 June 1844) Reproduced by permission of Archives and Special Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

event' of 1844, this event had considerable importance for British domestic politics. Graham was 'a keen letter-opener', and under his instructions the Post Office had been opening the letters of several British radicals including (though this was not known at the time) Cobden.⁹⁸

It was all very enjoyable as well as being politically effective and most profitable as a fund-raising exercise. It was also what seems to be the only occasion when misgivings were voiced about the League's venture into the culture of the theatre. Edward Miall's *Nonconformist* took the puritanical view that bazaars lowered 'that seriousness of tone which ought ever to pervade an agitation for large and righteous ends', and it hoped that the League's success would not encourage others to follow the example.⁹⁹ The *Friend* took a similar tone from a Quakerly perspective, regretting to see that young ladies had been asked to serve at stalls in a theatre and condemning a whole host of what it saw as improper activities including the playing of music, the sale of goods by raffle and the decision to hold an

evening promenade for the stall attendants and other repealers.¹⁰⁰ *The Times* too had been surprised by this 'promenade': it was not the sort of event to be expected from 'the prim sectarians who form a large proportion of the constituency of the Anti-Corn-Law League'. A band had played popular music including polkas in the presence of Quakers as well as Independent, Unitarian and Wesleyan ministers of religion. All had gone well until 11.00 p.m. when someone proposed that there should be dancing, an idea that brought an immediate threat of a walk-out by several of those present. Peace was only saved by the intervention of W.J. Fox who persuaded the 'anti-saltatory' faction to accept a compromise by which the Novellos and other vocalists would sing until midnight after which 'the conscientious' would leave and dancing would take place.¹⁰¹ It was a solution that showed yet again how skilfully the League navigated its way through the diverse cultural predilections of its middle-class followers.

Where Manchester and London led, other places followed. A host of small quasi-bazaars sprang up across the country. In Preston, for example, the local ACLA took over the theatre to raise money as a contribution to the 1842 bazaar. The stage was decorated with flags and mottoes and a Corn Law sliding scale painted on canvas was suspended overhead. Towards the front of the stage a model of a canal was constructed along which a vessel made trips carrying manufactured exports.¹⁰² In 1845 at Leeds, Frome, Bristol, Bolton, Barnsley, Bradford, Rochdale and Edinburgh the local ACLAs raised money by exhibiting their contributions before sending them off to Covent Garden. The exhibition at Leeds, it was reported, was 'an unbroken scene of gaiety and animation', and in Edinburgh two thousand visitors passed through in two days.¹⁰³ The repealers of Manchester did better still when they displayed the contributions they had raised for the 1845 bazaar. In the Free Trade Hall where a fancy dress ball had just taken place they retained the decorations, added a fountain, and brought in the 'Cambrian Brothers' to play polkas and other popular airs on their brass instruments and the 'rock harmonicon'.¹⁰⁴ Later that year a follow-up bazaar took place in Manchester complete with a band that attended daily to play popular music from dance and opera.¹⁰⁵ Newspaper reports of the bazaars summarized how useful these gatherings were for the League in its attempts to create a coalition of support that could hold together over the years. They were much more than fund-raising functions the *Manchester Guardian* commented; they provided 'an agreeable *reunion* for the fellow workers' and 'a sort of "high change" where they may look to find their *collaborateurs*'.¹⁰⁶ For the *Morning Chronicle* they were 'a great social and political fact' in their own right: 'No amount of public meetings, Parliamentary petitioning, or popular noise and excitement, could give so significant a demonstration of genuine power'.¹⁰⁷

The pride in industry that was displayed at these bazaars attracted favourable attention (Illustration 6). The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 denied the League an opportunity to fulfil its promise to hold a fully-

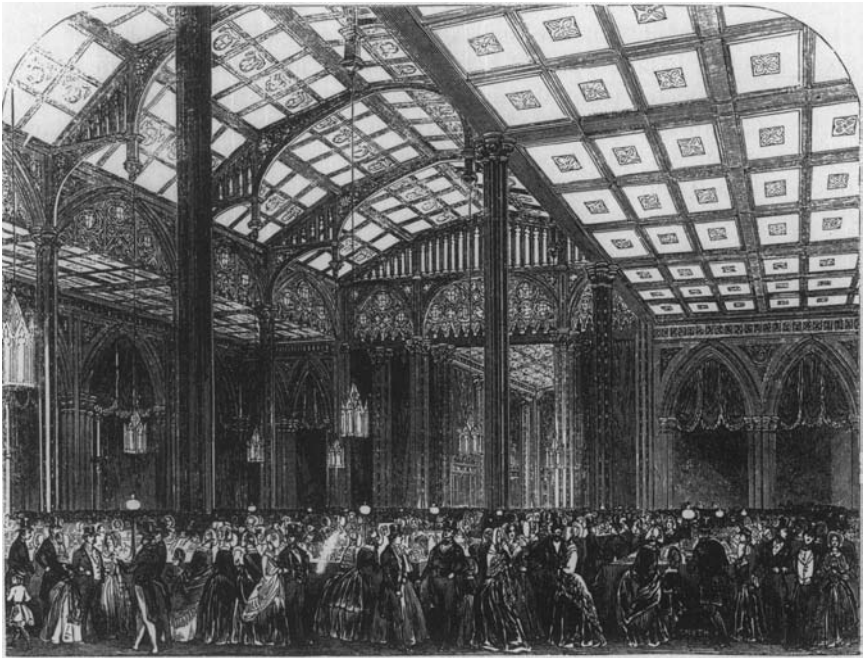


Illustration 6 *The League Bazaar*

The great bazaar at Covent Garden Theatre was one of the most successful means by which the League publicized itself as a 'great fact' and raised large sums of money. (*Illustrated London News*, 17 May 1845) *Reproduced by permission of Archives and Special Collections, University of Melbourne Library.*

fledged national industrial exhibition in 1846 or 1847, but others were alive to the precedent, and Henry Cole included Cobden on the Commission that planned the Great Exhibition of 1851.¹⁰⁸ Foreign observers saw the bazaars and the other great gatherings of the League as evidence that the British expression of national identity was being reshaped in ways that sharply distinguished Britain from countries such as their own. In continental Europe, as J.G. Kohl pointed out and many refugees in London would have confirmed, agitators such as Wilson and Cobden would have been clapped in gaol as enemies of absolute governments that were jealous of any threat to their control of the state and public behaviour; in Britain, however, people were allowed to deploy their talents and energies in peaceful campaigns against the 'fundamental laws' of the State. Kohl saw the League's meetings as 'great national anniversaries' where all - working men as well as businessmen; women as well as men - were invited to share in the fulfilment of the liberal vision of a future when free commerce between the peoples of the world would usher in an era of international peace.¹⁰⁹

Notes

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4. F. Pollock (ed.), *Macready's Reminiscences and Selections from His Diaries and Letters* (London, 1876), p. 525.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 529; J. Morley, *The Life Of Richard Cobden* (London, 1876), vol. 1, p. 26.
6. F.E. Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository* (New York, 1972), p. 335.
7. Pollock, *Macready*, p. 349.
8. *Manchester Guardian*, 1 October 1845.
9. Quoted in *Ibid.* 21 September 1836.
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11. A. Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 1987), pp. 43-4.
12. D. Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture* (London, 1984), p. 80.
13. J. Clark, *Glimpses of the Old World, or, Excursions on the Continent and in Great Britain* (London, 1847), vol. 2, pp. 25, 32, 37-8.
14. *League*, 4 October 1845.
15. The description of this banquet is based on the *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 10, 24, 31 December 1839, 7, 16 January 1840.
16. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991); L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992), pp. 1-9.
17. *League*, 8 June 1844.
18. MPL, Wilson Papers, Richard Cobden to George Wilson, 9 October 1841.
19. D. Read, *The English Provinces c.1760-1960: A Study in Influence* (London, 1964), p. 134.
20. MPL, *Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book*, William Weir, 9 January 1839.
21. J.G. Kohl, *England and Wales* (1844 repr. London, 1968), p. 144.
22. MPL, Wilson Papers, MS 20/10, C.E. Rawlins to George Wilson, 6 July 1846.
23. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 January, 1840.
24. MPL, Wilson Papers, M20/4, R. Cobden to G. Wilson, 9 October 1841.
25. *Manchester Guardian*, 18 January 1840.
26. *Struggle*, n.d., no. 59.
27. In his 'Political Dinners in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain: Platform, Meeting Place and Battleground', *History*, vol. 81, no. 264, October 1996, p. 547, Peter Brett mistakenly asserts that the League did not use dinners 'in any concerted way to communicate and spread its ideas'.
28. *Scotsman*, 25 April, 1841.
29. MPL, *Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book*, Ebenezer Elliott to Sidney Smith, 11 November 1839.

30. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 26 November 1839. The distances and costs were scaled up to £10 for 100 miles.
31. Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge*, pp. 51–6.
32. MPL, J.B. Smith Papers, Anti-Corn Law League Papers, *The Report of the Council of the Anti-Corn Law League to the Deputies of the Various Associations and Districts Assembled at Manchester this day*, 14 January 1840.
33. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1838; MPL, *Anti-Corn Law League Letter Book*, Sidney Smith, 25 February 1839.
34. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 24 December 1839.
35. *Hull Portfolio, or, Memoirs and Correspondence of an Editor*, 29 October 1831. For the middling class see R.S. Neale, *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1972), pp. 22–3.
36. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 April 1839.
37. *Ibid.* 30 April 1839.
38. *Ibid.* 11 June 1839.
39. *Ibid.* 11 March, 8 April 1841. The famous Eglinton Tournament when aristocrats had jousted in armour had aroused widespread ridicule when it took place in 1839. See I. Anstruther, *The Knight and the Umbrella: An Account of the Eglinton Tournament 1839* (London, 1963).
40. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 20 October 1842
41. H. Dunkley, *The Charter of the Nations, or, Free Trade and Its Results: An Essay on the Recent Commercial Policy of the United Kingdom* (London, 1854), p. 348.
42. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 21 May 1840.
43. *Ibid.* 28 May 1839.
44. G. Thompson, *Corn Laws: Lectures Delivered Before the Ladies of Manchester and Its Vicinity on The Subject of a Memorial to the Queen, Manchester* (Manchester, 1841), p. 25.
45. BL, Cobden Papers, Richard Cobden to Charles Villiers, 13 September 1841, Add MSS 43662.
46. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 18 April 1843; *Manchester Guardian*, 18, 22 October, 1845.
47. A. Somerville, *The Whisler at the Plough* (1852, repr. London, 1989), pp. 159–66.
48. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 5 November 1840.
49. BL, Correspondence of Joseph Sturge, Richard Cobden to Joseph Sturge, [1841], Add. MSS 50131.
50. *Manchester Times*, 1 May 1846. There was another advantage: at a time when the League's lectures and other public meetings were often invaded by Chartists, the invitation lists and tickets that controlled entry to a tea party offered a greater means of security.
51. J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London, 1999), pp. 6, 123–4, 133, 141. Brett, 'Public Dinners', p. 550 notes the emergence of tea parties and soirées at this time but overlooks their use by the League.
52. Somerville, *The Whistler at the Plough*, p. 161.
53. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 5 November 1840.
54. Mrs Cobden Unwin (ed.), *The Hungry Forties: Life under the Bread Tax* (London, 1904), p. 27. This book also contains a facsimile of a letter from Cobden recommending that a handbill be printed 'representing the great and little loaves', which he followed with a sketch.

55. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 27 January 1842.
56. WSRO, Cobden Papers, C-U 1025, Newsclipping, n.d. 'Tea Party In Honour Of Col. Thompson and the Anti-Corn Deputies'.
57. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 13 January 1842.
58. *Struggle*, n.d. no. 30.
59. R.W. Dale (ed.), *The Life and Letters of John Angell James: Including an Unfinished Autobiography* (London, 1861), p. 218.
60. The point that is made here is similar to the distinction between 'instrumental and expressive politics' in F. Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Basis of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (Melbourne, 1968), pp. 34-40.
61. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 8 October 1842.
62. *Ibid.*, 20 December 1842, 31 January 1843.
63. *Manchester Guardian*, 18, 21 January, 8 February 1843.
64. T.A. Markus (ed.), *Order in Space and Society: Architectural Form and its Context in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1982), p. 7.
65. *Manchester Times*, 29 October 1839.
66. *Revue Britannique*, January 1846; *Manchester Guardian*, 18 January 1843.
67. *Manchester Guardian*, 1 October 1845; *League*, 4 October 1845.
68. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 January 1845.
69. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Locksley Hall' (1842) in Lionel Trilling and Harold Bloom *Victorian Prose and Poetry* (New York, 1973), p. 430.
70. *Scotsman*, 13 May 1843.
71. BL, Cobden Papers, Francis Place to Richard Cobden, 4 March 1840, Add. MSS 43667.
72. WSRO, Cobden Papers, CP1, J.B. Smith to Richard Cobden, 1839.
73. BL, Cobden Papers, Henry Ashworth to Richard Cobden, 22 December 1842, Add. MSS 43649.
74. *League*, 3 May 1845.
75. *Ibid.* 2 November 1844.
76. *Ibid.* 6 July 1844; *Economist*, 24 May 1845.
77. MPL, Wilson Papers, M20/6, John Bright to George Wilson, 9 June 1843.
78. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 2 May 1843.
79. *Ibid.* 18 April 1843.
80. *League*, 24 February 1844.
81. WSRO, Cobden Papers 30, Richard Cobden to Henry Ashworth, 17 October 1843.
82. *League*, 12 July 1845.
83. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 18 April 1843.
84. *League*, 25 January 1845.
85. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 10 February 1842.
86. *Ibid.*
87. *Struggle*, n.d. 1845.
88. Quoted in the *Manchester Guardian*, 31 May 1845.
89. *League*, 18 January, 22 February 1845.
90. *Bazaar Gazette*, 1843, p. 4; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 10 February 1842; *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January 1842.
91. *Bazaar Gazette*, 46-7; *Manchester Guardian*, 12 February 1842.
92. *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, 1845, p. 3.
93. Quoted in *Economist*, 10 May 1845.

94. *League*, 12 April, 3 May 1845.
95. *Ibid.* 12 April 1845.
96. *Ibid.*, *League*, 31 May 1845.
97. *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, p. 5.
98. F.B. Smith, *Radical Artisan: William James Linton 1812-97* (Manchester, 1973), p. 53; *idem.*, 'British Post Office Espionage, 1844', *Historical Studies*, April 1970, pp. 190-202.
99. *Nonconformist*, 14 May 1845.
100. *Friend*, 6 June 1845.
101. Quoted in *League*, 31 May 1845. See also *Illustrated London News*, 31 May 1845.
102. *Struggle*, 1842, no. 51.
103. *League*, 3 May 1845.
104. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 May 1845. The *Illustrated London News*, 28 May 1842, shows a rock harmonicon as something like a xylophone consisting of an arrangement of rock fragments which were struck by wooden hammers to produce the musical notes.
105. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 October 1845.
106. *Ibid.* 18 October 1845.
107. Quoted in *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 16, 1845.
108. For the League's promise to hold an industrial exhibition see *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 14. For the bazaar precedent and Cobden's participation in the Great Exhibition, see N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1958), p.161 and N.C. Edsall, *Richard Cobden: Independent Radical* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), p. 247.
109. Kohl, *England and Wales*, pp. 143-6.

**‘THE PROGENY OF MAMMON’:
A BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF
THE MANCHESTER ANTI-CORN LAW
ASSOCIATION COUNCIL, 1839-40**

In the first place, then, this ‘League’ is headed (and tailed too) in Manchester, by a squad of wiseacres calling themselves the Manchester Chamber of Commerce ... [T]he open, undisguised folly and dishonesty of the whole, was enough to have Mammon himself vomit at the sight of his own progeny.

John Paul Cobbett, *Champion and Weekly Herald*, January 1840¹

The reasons John Paul Cobbett gave for his condemnation of the Anti-Corn Law League have often been echoed over the years. Picking up Richard Cobden’s description of the League as a ‘middle class set of agitators’, Asa Briggs described the League as a ‘uniquely powerful instrument in the forging of middle-class consciousness’, a claim echoed by Norman Longmate: ‘Here was a new phenomenon in British history, a middle-class organisation that neither sought nor needed upper-class patronage ...’² Among modern historians G.R. Searle has come closest to echoing Cobbett: ‘The Anti-Corn Law League ... was very much a “business organisation”, the only major political movement to have been launched from within a Chamber of Commerce.’³ Allied to these conceptions based on class are typologies of pressure groups (as conceived by sociologists and political scientists) which identify the League as an archetypal ‘interest group’.⁴ Again Cobden provides the peg on which much of this hangs in his oft-quoted admission in 1843 that ‘most of us entered into the struggle in the belief that we had some distinct class interest in it’.⁵ The use of class as an analytical term has become unfashionable over the past two decades. Most historians now rightly eschew ‘grand narratives’ which ‘privilege’ one category (in this case class) in preference to equally important ways of understanding the social world: gender, nationality, religion, age and so on. This desire should not, however, blind us to the ‘grand narratives’ that were meaningful to the historical actors. Many Leaguers used the language of class themselves to

understand their world. At much the same time as Marx and Engels were beginning to analyse Britain in the light of fashionable French conceptualizations of society,⁶ the League was using language described by Asa Briggs some years ago as a form of 'middle class Marxism'.⁷ The characterization remains a compelling one because, like Marx, Leaguers identified commerce and industry as the driving force of their age.

From the outset attempts to characterize the League have relied heavily on the well-known attributes of its leaders. For example, in his biography of Robert Peel published in 1846, William Cooke-Taylor described the 'principal members' of the Tory Premier's nemesis as the 'master-manufacturers'.⁸ For John Morley, this was 'the struggle for political influence and social equality between the landed aristocracy and the great industrialists'.⁹ There has been little disagreement among recent historians. Anthony Howe, in his detailed study of the Lancashire cotton lords, offers a typical summation: 'The initial membership of the Manchester Association and of the League were [sic] both heavily recruited from the textile masters, together with merchants and professional men.'¹⁰ Howe's footnote points the reader to committee lists in Archibald Prentice's history of the League, but, in fact, Prentice, a participant as well as a recorder, is one of the few commentators to sound a discordant note. Musing over the committee of the Manchester Association he wrote: 'It comprised not only men of the first station in our community, but a great many who, if they could not contribute largely to the funds of the Association, could contribute what was equally valuable, work - earnest, conscientious, gratuitous work.'¹¹

Prentice's comment reminds us that characterizations of the movement have not been founded on sustained biographical analysis. The object of this chapter is to set aside previous classifications of the League in favour of a prosopographic analysis of the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association Council (ACLA Council) of 1839-40 (see Appendix 4). This group of 105 men included many founders of the Association a year before, as well as many of those who oversaw the inception of the League itself during their tenure of office. Although it included most of the prominent leaders of the movement - Cobden, Smith and Wilson (not Bright) - its typical member was, and is, not well known. The studies by McCord and Longmate, for example, contain references to fewer than a dozen of them.¹² It is by no means a perfect sample. One member, James Howie, for example, removed to Edinburgh in the early 1840s, and another, James G. Frost, died in July 1840 shortly after his election.¹³ Inevitably, important gaps in the information about many of the lesser-known Council members remain - among them a handful who are simply names on a list - which preclude precise statistical analysis. But that is not the objective. Here the task will be to compare and contrast their backgrounds, sociological characteristics, and institutional involvements, to the extent that they can be recovered, with those of their better-known associates, in order to explore the patterns of association which underpinned the Council. Part of this process will be the

production of an 'identikit' Leaguer which, for all its faults, will represent a sharper impression than the sweeping generalizations - often based on crude amalgams of Cobden, Bright and a handful of others - that have prevailed hitherto.

We have selected a local sample in preference to a national group regardless of the fact that the latter presents fewer problems in obtaining consistent biographical information, and is more suited to a direct comparison with Brian Harrison's model study of the temperance leadership.¹⁴ We have resisted the temptation to attempt to do for the League what Harrison did for temperance because a local sample opens up the patterns of association and webs of dependence in a way that a disparate national group does not, and allows us to restore to the history of the League many of those who are absent from it: from Joseph Nadin junior, solicitor, theatre-owner and son of the notorious deputy constable who arrested Hunt at Peterloo to Paul Willert, merchant, musician and patron of the arts.

The members of the ACLA Council of 1839-40 spanned several generations from its youngest member, Henry Rawson, who was 21 years old in 1840, to the elder statesman of Manchester Liberalism, Thomas Potter (aged 65 in 1840). The most notable feature of the age distribution, however, was not the spread, but the preponderance (over 43 per cent) of men aged between 40 and 49 compared with only a handful in their twenties and thirties. The average age of the Council members was 46 (median age 47) which is remarkably similar to the average age of 45 that Harrison offers for the temperance leadership of the mid-1830s.¹⁵ At an average of a decade older than a comparable sample of the leadership of the Manchester Chartists, the ACLA Council was a mature group, although it is notable that its outstanding leaders, Richard Cobden and George Wilson, were among its youngest members, and more in line with the age of their Manchester Chartist counterparts.¹⁶ Their birthplaces suggest that Cobden's well-known equation of the League with the location of its headquarters ('The League is Manchester'¹⁷) only tells part of the story: early Victorian Manchester was an immigrant city and the League was a cosmopolitan movement. Admittedly just under half of the Council were native-born Lancastrians, with another handful from neighbouring Yorkshire and Cheshire.¹⁸ Around the table in the Council Room at Newall's Buildings, however, were many other regional accents which underscore the 'Britishness' of the movement. In addition to seven who hailed from the Midlands (Adshead, Callender, Harvey, Smith, Wilson and Henry and William Rawson)¹⁹ there were natives of London (Watkin), Sussex (Cobden) and Somerset (Taylor),²⁰ as well as an Irishman (Henry) and four Scots (Bannerman, Ballantyne, Howie, and Prentice - a further three had Scottish parents).²¹ There was even an international dimension to the Council provided by natives of the United States of America (Dyer), Piedmont (Novelli), and a minor German principality, Mecklenburg-Strelitz (Willert).²²

Despite the diversity of their geographic and ethnic origins, this was a remarkably stable group. Where evidence exists, it suggests that those who migrated to Manchester did so as young men and had been settled for a long period by 1840. Born in Ireland and spending his early years in the United States, Alexander Henry, for example, came to Manchester in 1799 as a 21-year-old; a year later a 26-year-old Thomas Potter crossed the Pennines from Tadcaster in Yorkshire to make his new home in Manchester. At the age of 17, William Harvey arrived from Derbyshire in 1804, about the same time as Thomas Harbottle, and five years later another young man, 20-year-old William Nield, migrated from Cheshire. The following year the young John Edward Taylor, who had been born in Ilminster in Somerset, made his first appearance on the public platform in his adopted home.²³ A further group (Prentice, Callender, Garnett) settled in Manchester around the middle of the second decade of the nineteenth century; Willert arrived from Germany in 1821, and Novelli from Italy before 1824 when his name first appeared in connection with local business and community affairs.²⁴ Cobden, who settled in Manchester as a 24-year-old in 1828, was one of the later arrivals among the group.²⁵

The length of residence and the age were also evident in the well-established familial roots among the group. This was an overwhelmingly married group: of the fifty-four whose status is known fifty-two were married (although Joseph Heron did not marry until reaching the age of 71). For well over half of those who were married there is evidence of children (an average of just over three per couple). The surprising fact that this was below the national average at this time almost certainly reflects inadequate information. At Matthew Curtis's funeral, for example, there were four adult sons and an unknown number of adult married daughters, but only four have been counted.²⁶ Where we do have comprehensive information it suggests that the incidence of children was well above the national mark. Elkanah Armitage and his wife, for example, had nine children, as did Edmund Ashworth and his wife, while his elder brother Henry and his wife had eleven children.²⁷ Mr and Mrs Holland Hoole were another couple that had nine children; the Gregs had six and the Cobdens had seven children (one died aged fifteen and two died in infancy).²⁸

Many of the ACLA Councillors enjoyed the active support of their wives in the campaign for repeal. For example the wives of twenty-nine of our sample of ACLA Councillors sat on the bazaar committees, collected petitions and memorials, or hosted tables at the celebrated League tea parties (see Chapter 6). In many cases the children of the ACLA Councillors took up where their parents left off. Nine sons of the ACLA Council went into the House of Commons. Francis Evans, the eldest son of William and Mary Evans, for example, served three terms in Parliament as a Liberal MP between 1888 and 1906.²⁹ The pattern was a familiar one. Both of Thomas Potter's sons became MPs, although they were not in the House at the same time. His eldest son, John, shot to national prominence when, as a Palmerstonian Liberal, he defeated John Bright in 1857; his

younger son, Thomas Junior, was a more radical Liberal who succeeded Cobden as MP for Rochdale in 1865. Joseph Grafton's son, Frederick William, was also a Liberal who entered the House as MP for North Lancashire in 1880.³⁰

Absalom Watkin's son, Edward, was active in the League in his own right, serving as one of Cobden's most trusted lieutenants in Manchester, before going on to a Parliamentary seat when he succeeded the late James Kershaw, an ACLA Council member, in Stockport in 1864.³¹ Another ACLA Councillor, Alexander Henry, who was an MP from 1847 to 1852, did not live to see either of his sons enter Parliament. Twice defeated in Manchester, Mitchell Henry entered the House as a Liberal representing Galway in his father's homeland. On the other hand, John S. Henry, and the son of another ACLA Councillor, William Callender junior, exemplified the extent to which the face of Lancashire politics had changed after 1868 when they won seats in Westminster as members of the Conservative party.³² In some cases the sons went one step further than the fathers. For example when Benjamin Armitage was elected as a Liberal MP for Salford in 1880, he had succeeded where his father, Elkanah, had failed in 1857.³³ Most impressive of all, the political tendrils of Andrew Bannerman's family reached into Number 10 Downing Street when his nephew, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, became Liberal Prime Minister in 1905.³⁴

Without reaching the lofty heights of the House of Commons the children of other ACLA Council members were also politically active. Another of Absalom Watkin's sons, Alfred, was a Manchester alderman and mayor, and no less than five members of the Armitage family followed Elkanah into elected office at local government level in Manchester and Salford.³⁵ Samuel Watts's son, on the other hand, went on to become one of the leaders of the Union and Emancipation Society and the National Reform Union; the daughters of Archibald Prentice and Aaron Nodal hosted tables at League dinners and both John Mallon's daughters, Martha and Elizabeth, were on the League's Bazaar Committee; John Ormerod's son was a member of the Manchester branch of the Young Men's Anti-Monopoly Association.³⁶ Some members of the committee were themselves the products of a political upbringing. Henry Rawson, Thomas Higson and Henry Marsland, who sat on the ACLA Council alongside their fathers, William, John and Samuel, are only the most obvious examples.³⁷ Robert Phillips's elder brother, Mark, was the first MP elected for the newly created borough of Manchester by the Reform Act; their father, Robert senior was a well-known local reformer who declined a baronetcy at the time of Victoria's coronation.³⁸ John, the father of Edmund and Henry Ashworth, was an Alderman in Bolton and a stalwart of local Liberal politics.³⁹ Charles Walker's father was a celebrated local radical who had attracted the wrath of Church and King mobs during the 1790s and was subsequently tried for treason.⁴⁰ Endogenous marriage also played a part in binding the ACLA Council together. James Howie and

Archibald Prentice were brothers-in-law, as were Robert Hyde Greg and Robert Phillips (Greg married Phillips's sister), and George Wilson married the daughter of his fellow ACLA Councillor, Jonathan Rawson.⁴¹

Secondary relationships were just as important in the sociological structure which underpinned the ACLA Council. We have referred already to the convivial function of the ACLA's rooms in Newall's Buildings which brought many of these men together on an almost daily basis for a 'homosocial' gathering. In an age that would come to regard Cobden as one of its heroes there is plenty of evidence of 'friendship' with him. William Evans was a friend, a claim attested by his role as pall-bearer at Cobden's funeral.⁴² According to his obituary, Robert Nicholson introduced his friend Cobden to the Stockport Liberals who adopted him as their candidate for Parliament,⁴³ and Henry Ashworth, in his *Recollections of Cobden and the League*, remembered that it was Cobden who wanted to meet him. Their 'intimate' friendship, he recalled, began in 1837 through the agency of a mutual friend - and later ACLA Councillor - Samuel Darbishire.⁴⁴ Among the less well-known members of the ACLA Council the evidence of friendship is harder to trace, often being recorded incidentally. Nonetheless that which exists suggests that personal relationships were important. When the author of Paul Willert's obituary wrote that he and Joseph Heron were 'great friends' he was not exaggerating. For many years Willert and his wife and Heron went on holiday together; when Willert died in 1879 Heron married his widow.⁴⁵ A young Matthew Curtis started as an employee of J.C. Dyer who came to regard him with 'a solicitude almost paternal in its character';⁴⁶ and Absalom Watkin's diary contains references that suggest a social relationship with John Shuttleworth and, to a lesser extent, Thomas Higson.⁴⁷ Other secondary relationships, such as business partnerships, which often had a basis in friendship, were also evident among the ACLA Council: Andrew Bannerman and Joseph Grafton were business partners, as were William Harvey and Charles Tysoe, and William Evans and William Nicholson. Robert Stuart and James Murray were founding members of the Manchester and Salford Banking Company and James Kershaw and William Callender were workmates before becoming partners. Although not on the Council, William Bickman, subsequently an active member of the League, was also their partner.⁴⁸

Like Harvey and Tysoe, Kershaw and Callender prayed together: the former pair at the Bible Christian Chapel in Salford, the latter at the Mosley Street Independent Chapel in Manchester. Information as to the religious affiliation of the ACLA Councillors is available in forty-eight cases - less than half the committee - but sufficient to give some impression of the religious composition of the League in Manchester. Harvey and Tysoe were the only ACLA Councillors who were Bible Christians, a small, radical sect that was peculiar to south-east Lancashire (as noted above, it is not to be confused with the Methodist off-shoot of the same name).⁴⁹ Harvey's brother-in-law, Joseph Brotherton, the MP for Salford and a

prominent Leaguer in his own right, was a founding member of the sect.⁵⁰ Kershaw and Callender were among a dozen Independents on the ACLA Council (25 per cent of the sample). Other members of the ACLA Council bear testimony to what one historian has called the 'sectarian heterogeneity' of Lancashire Nonconformity.⁵¹ With nearly 15 per cent of ACLA Council members identified as 'Friends', it is clear that Quakers played a significant role. The ACLA Council even contained three Methodists including two Wesleyans (Holland Hoole and Samuel Stocks). Given the prominence of Baptists in the Anti-Corn Law movement (see Chapter 5) it is surprising that there was only one, William Nield, a convert from Quakerism, among the ACLA Council.⁵² Baptist congregations in Victorian Lancashire, notes one historian, were chiefly 'lower middle class in composition'⁵³ which may offer a partial explanation for this discrepancy. Other single denominational representatives on the ACLA Council were members of Scottish sects: a Presbyterian Secessionist (Prentice) and a Sandemanian (Wilson).

The single largest denomination among the ACLA Councillors whose religious affiliation is known were the Unitarians who made up over 30 per cent (fifteen members) of the sample. The role played by Unitarians in wresting control of Manchester's political and social infrastructure from the old Tory-Anglican élite has been written about extensively.⁵⁴ At less than 2 per cent of Manchester's church-going population (in 1851),⁵⁵ the Unitarians were vastly over-represented on the ACLA Council, and this was typical of the disproportionate influence they attained. Commentators such as J.T. Slugg marvelled to see how the small Cross Street congregation (one of two in Manchester) could produce five mayors and a dozen MPs.⁵⁶ Although small, Manchester Unitarianism was not monolithic, and it would be wrong to imply that the League benefited from seamless support from this small, powerful sect. Unitarianism, moreover, was a source of friction within the ranks of Nonconformity which may have spilled over into the ACLA Council. As previously noted, the principal antagonists in the unseemly dispute over access to the Lady Hewley Trust sat together on the ACLA Council. Clearly, while the representative Leaguer was almost certainly a Dissenter, this rubric did not denote a homogeneous group free from jealousies, disputes and intra-denominational controversy.

Not surprisingly, at a time when Dissent was proliferating in Lancashire, there was only a handful of Anglicans on the ACLA Council. At 10 per cent, the number of Anglicans on the Council was not dissimilar to the mere 12.6 per cent of the church-going population of Manchester identified as members of the Church of England by the Census of Religious Worship in 1851. In this respect, as in others, the religious profile of the ACLA Council is similar to that of the temperance leadership offered by Harrison. His sample is overwhelmingly Dissenting, with Quakers and Independents among the most prominent groups (Unitarians were also reasonably well represented). The large number of Methodists among the ranks of the temperance leadership represents the only major

difference.⁵⁷ The apparent lack of Anglican involvement in the League does, however, contrast markedly with the image of a 'solid phalanx of urban Anglican employers' offered by Anthony Howe in his study of the Lancashire cotton lords.⁵⁸ Hostility towards the Established Church was a common attribute among the ACLA Council. A number of ACLA Councillors (Dyer, Hadfield, Potter, Prentice and Smith) were veterans of the local United Dissenters Committee and had taken a prominent role in its successful struggle against Church Rates. Several (including Brooks, Anglican though he was, Hadfield and Prentice) went on to membership of the Anti-State Church Association, a forerunner of the Liberation Society of the 1850s. The same impulse which set these men against the Established Church led many to support religious toleration in a broad sense: from Potter and Prentice who actively campaigned for Catholic Emancipation to Stocks and Adshead who took to the platform to speak out against discrimination against the Jews.⁵⁹

This commitment to what one historian has called a form of religious libertarianism⁶⁰ was also evident in widespread support for voluntarism in education. As the 1840s wore on voluntarism became the source of increasing division among liberals. At the time of the formation of the ACLA Council, however, the divisions of later years were covered over by an uneasy truce. In fact, a commitment to education was one of the most common characteristics among the ACLA Councillors. In April 1836 Potter, Brooks, Callender, Cobden, Wilson and Jonathan Rawson (together with three others) formed a small committee which organized a series of lectures in Manchester to promote education.⁶¹ This ad hoc committee constituted the nucleus of the Society for Promoting National Education that was formed in Manchester in October 1837 under the presidency of another ACLA Councillor, William Nield (Wilson was Secretary). Nield was a veteran educationalist having chaired the Committee of the Lancasterian Free School that opened in Manchester in 1809.⁶² The Society for Promoting National Education, also known as the Friends of Education, was a direct forerunner of the controversial Lancashire Public Schools Association that was formed in 1847 and which would also have a solid core of Leaguers, including a dozen members of the 1839-40 ACLA Council, on its committee.⁶³

While all its members, including those in the League, could accept a general commitment to the spread of education 'upon liberal principles, untinged by sectarian prejudices',⁶⁴ in reality they fall into two distinct groups. First, there were those who accepted a role for the State in the provision of education. Others, however, were deeply suspicious that increased government involvement would be to the advantage of the Church of England and, if pushed, they quickly fell back to the principle of total voluntarism. Thus in 1843 when Sir James Graham, the Tory Home Secretary, introduced a new Factory Bill containing education clauses that gave a greater role to the Established Church, it provoked a storm of protest (and was eventually withdrawn). In Manchester the opposition to

Graham's proposal was dominated by Leaguers, including over two dozen members of the 1839-40 ACLA Council.⁶⁵ Cobden, however, spoke in favour of the clauses, describing them as a step in the right direction, which placed him, uncomfortably, in opposition to many of his strongest political allies.⁶⁶ Similar divisions among the ACLA Councillors were evident in 1845 over the government's proposal to provide increased funding to the Roman Catholic seminary at Maynooth in Ireland.⁶⁷

It is difficult to describe the typical education of a member of the ACLA Council. At one end of the spectrum there were several men who might easily have found a place in the pages of Samuel Smiles's *Self Help*. Elkanah Armitage, for example, was the seventh son of eight children in a family of poor hand loom weavers in Failsworth, who left school at the age of eight. '[T]henceforth,' notes the author of his obituary, 'he had to depend upon his own impulses to self-improvement for all teaching but that of the Sunday school and the workroom.'⁶⁸ James Kershaw was another son of an impoverished hand loom weaver who, despite what was described as a 'liberal' education for 'one of his position', became a warehouse lad at an early age.⁶⁹ Working alongside Kershaw at Joseph Leese's warehouse on the corner of High Street and Cannon Street was William Callender who had begun as a draper's assistant (the two would eventually own the company in partnership with Leese's son, himself a League supporter).⁷⁰ Comparing his father and Cobden, Edward Watkin described them as 'self-educated men' with little formal schooling: 'Each had habitually "burnt his midnight oil" after long hours of day labour.'⁷¹ Cobden recognized the same characteristics in another ACLA Councillor, John Ballantyne. As he told William Tait in 1839, Ballantyne (recently engaged as the editor of the *Anti-Corn Law Circular*), and his brother, (the editor of the sympathetic *Bolton Free Press*), were 'self-taught men of energy and talents'.⁷² Most remarkable of all in this respect was Joseph Adshead. According to Florence Nightingale, who came to regard him as the 'best pupil' of her views on medicine, Adshead 'had raised himself' and 'could hardly write or speak the Queen's English'.⁷³ Adshead's 'vulgarity', however, was not evident in his numerous pamphlets and tracts on a range of social issues.

At the other end of the spectrum there were examples of a high level of formal education. Robert Phillips, for example, went to Rugby; Henry McConnel's family fortune was sufficient to afford the fees of 100 guineas per year at Manchester College; and Robert Greg completed his education at Edinburgh University with an extensive European tour.⁷⁴ Between these two extremes was a range of middle-class educational experiences. Thomas Higson, Joseph Nadin junior, and Holland Hoole, for example, attended Manchester Grammar which set them on the road to apprenticeships in business and the law.⁷⁵ Opened in the early 1500s the Grammar was one of Manchester's few direct links with the past. Its reputation as a bastion of Toryism helps to explain why Nadin, Orator Hunt's tormentor, chose to send his son there; as late as 1833, Prentice was still excoriating the school's elitism in the pages of his *Manchester Times*.⁷⁶

The fact that Joseph Junior graduated from the school into the ranks of the League is a testimony to the changing political realities of Victorian Britain, as is the fact that three ACLA Councillors (including two Dissenters) would subsequently serve as school Trustees. Admittedly these positions flowed from public office, but this was not the case with another ACLA Councillor, Peter Eckersley. Although not himself a pupil there, Eckersley chose to educate his son at the school.⁷⁷ Joseph Heron was educated at a local Moravian School before being articled to a Manchester solicitor.⁷⁸ Henry Ashworth was educated at a Quaker boarding school, but joined the family business at the age of fourteen. Despite later prosperity Henry and Edmund Ashworth dismissed the option of a university education for their children as a frivolous indulgence.⁷⁹

Despite his prejudice against universities, Henry Ashworth was a staunch advocate of scientific education, a preference that was typical of other ACLA Councillors. A number were active participants in a range of educational institutions, foremost among which was the Literary and Philosophical Society established in 1781. Membership in this society was exclusive (determined by ballot), expensive and consequently small, totalling a modest 178 by 1842.⁸⁰ Devoted to scientific and literary inquiry the Society attracted international attention. According to Prentice it was free from the 'political bigotry' which 'grievously embittered other associations', and he and a dozen other members of the ACLA Council were active members.⁸¹ ACLA Councillors were also active in the Mechanics' Institute, including James Murray, Thomas Hopkins, J.C. Dyer and Phillip Novelli, who were among the founders in 1824.⁸² It did not end here: James Kershaw was involved in the Natural History Society; Richard Cobden and Henry Ashworth travelled to meetings of the British Association together, where John Shuttleworth gave papers; Cobden, Wilson and John Rawson were leading figures in the Manchester Phrenological Society.⁸³ Similarly, a dozen ACLA Councillors were active in the pioneering efforts of social investigation undertaken by the Manchester Statistical Society which was formed in 1833. The efforts of this small group of men (only sixty members in 1839-40) summed up the ethos of the age.⁸⁴

The most important educational institution with links to the ACLA Council, however, was the Manchester Athenaeum. Founded in 1835 for the 'improvement and entertainment of the young men resident in the town', by 1838 it had approximately 1000 members who paid the subscription of 30s per annum. For their money the members of the Athenaeum gained entrée to a 'resort for reading the public prints', a lecture hall and a library.⁸⁵ A solid core of the ACLA Council (seventeen members) helped found and nurture the Athenaeum, including Cobden who regarded it as nothing short of a 'manufactory for working up the raw intelligence of the town'.⁸⁶ By the mid-1840s, however, the Athenaeum faced incessant financial trouble - one commentator going so far as to describe it as a 'melancholy memento to Manchester folly and pride'⁸⁷ -

but the early years were not without difficulty either. Again the source of the problems was the role of the Unitarians in the committee which, in turn, might have had repercussions on the ACLA Council. According to Edward Watkin the Unitarians had contributed £3200 of the Athenaeum's £10,000 building fund, but neither this, nor Cobden's ongoing support, protected them from repeated challenges when it came to the election of directors.⁸⁸ Thus in terms of both education and religion what appear ostensibly to be common attributes among the ACLA Council could also serve to divide them.

Penetrating beyond the façade of these educational institutions is difficult. Fortunately the diaries of Absalom Watkin - a member of both the Literary and Philosophical Society and the Athenaeum - allow us to explore the life of the mind of an ACLA Councillor. In 1810 at the age of 23, Watkin adopted a 'Plan for Life' that included three hours' study every day across a broad range of disciplines: divinity, history, natural and experimental philosophy, geography and law.⁸⁹ For years thereafter his diaries catalogue a voracious appetite for literature in fulfilment of the plan. Watkin's reading reflected the eclecticism of the age; there is no apparent pattern or discernible object to it other than a broadly defined quest for illumination. In no particular order he read the poetry of Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley; sermons by Paley and Blair; the memoirs of Marmontel, Madame Roland and Harriet Wilson; histories by Gibbon, Scott (*Life of Napoleon*) and Voltaire (*History of Charles XII*).⁹⁰ Interspersed with these were items such as Plato's *Phaedo*, Palley's *Etymological Compendium*, Middleton's *Free Inquiry in the Miraculous Powers Ascribed to the First Ages of the Christian Church*, *Othello*, *Don Juan*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Travels in Mesopotamia*. On the day that he lectured to the Literary and Philosophical Society on monasticism he spent several hours consulting Salmon's *The Protrusion of the Lower Bowel*.⁹¹ Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was also on his reading list, although he does not record that it left any particular impression. He also read the fashionable periodicals of the day including the *Quarterly Review* and the *Edinburgh Review* together with contemporary inquiries such as John Kay's *Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes in Manchester*.⁹²

What makes Watkin's didactic enterprise the more impressive was that it was pursued in combination with an active public life and a successful business career. In this he was typical of the ACLA Council. A detailed analysis of their occupations presents a complex picture. The occupational profile presented in Appendix 5 has been compiled from a variety of sources and takes account of the fact that many individuals, either simultaneously or in succession, pursued more than one form of business. Consequently several individuals are recorded under more than one heading. At first glance the occupation profile seems to offer ample evidence of how Manchester came to be known by the colloquialism, 'Cottonopolis', which, at the same time, reinforces traditional characterizations of the League as a manufacturers' pressure group. In addition to the

ten who were engaged in cotton spinning, many of those listed as manufacturers were involved in the cotton industry. Some of these businessmen, Robert Greg, Henry and Edmund Ashworth, Henry McConnel and John Brooks, ranked among Britain's greatest. As George Wilson boasted to a Parliamentary Committee in 1846 'there is no employer of labour in this country who gives employment to 5,000 people and upwards who is not a member of the council of the League'.⁹³ But these men were not typical of the Council. As the proprietor of a relatively small starch works and later a railway and telegraph company director, Wilson was more typical of his fellow ACLA Councillors than either Greg or Brooks.

In fact Appendix 5 bears testimony to the breadth of Manchester's regional economic base, encompassing everything from coal mining to glass manufacturing, and to a substantial role for commerce as well as manufacturing in the local economy. Admittedly, the division in the appendix between commercial and manufacturing activity is misleading in the sense that many individuals pursued both forms of business. For example, Brooks exported manufactured cotton and flax to China, Brazil and elsewhere in his own ships which returned laden with coffee, sugar, spices, silk, timber and dye-stuffs.⁹⁴ The occupation profile points to a marked heterogeneity among the occupations of the ACLA Council in a number of cases. This heterogeneity was of scale as well as type. In particular it highlights that a substantial minority of ACLA Councillors followed relatively humble commercial occupations, from agents and grocers to a baker and a salesman. These were the hard-working men, not of the 'first station', who have dropped out of the history of the League. The suggestion that great industrialists did not dominate the League is supported by the work of V.A.C. Gatrell. Analysing a sample of the Manchester poll books for the Parliamentary by-election of 1839 in which Robert Greg, a prominent figure in the emerging campaign for repeal, faced a staunch protectionist Tory, Sir George Murray, Gatrell has shown that Greg's narrow victory owed a great deal to the support of those he calls the urban '*menu peuple*'.⁹⁵ Correspondingly, Gatrell tells us, Greg received only lukewarm support among his 'status equals', with as many as 47 per cent of the major textile producers and 65 per cent of the professionals voting Tory.⁹⁶

A large number of the ACLA Council (35) were directors of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce,⁹⁷ but this was not the whole story. For most of the 1830s opponents of the Corn Laws faced a wall of indifference in their efforts to force the Chamber to act. J.B. Smith earned the epithet 'Mad' Smith as a result of his dogged persistence in the face of stiff resistance. At the annual general meeting in 1835, for example, he moved that the Chamber collect a petition against the Corn Laws during the current Parliamentary session, but he was treated with utter contempt when Hugh Birley, the infamous Peterloo magistrate and inaugural President of the Chamber, and James Wood, an aspiring Tory MP, combined to move

the previous question – a crude tactic for stifling debate.⁹⁸ In 1836 and 1837 Smith was fobbed off with the lame excuse that 'No favourable opportunity [had] presented itself during the past year of laying before Parliament the opinion of the chamber.'⁹⁹ As Prentice pointed out in an editorial dripping with cynicism, the Chamber had been waiting in vain for a favourable opportunity since 1833.¹⁰⁰

Smith was not a lone voice in the Chamber – later evidence would suggest that over half of the 300 members supported repeal¹⁰¹ – but he did not command a majority on the board of directors. Beginning at the 1838 annual meeting and culminating in 1839, the League set out to capture the Chamber, with spectacular success. Within the year Smith was President, with a comfortable majority for repeal among the Board. The essentially political strategy adopted in relation to the Chamber was thus a blueprint for the tactic that would later be adopted by the League in relation to Parliament and, in microcosm, it generated just as much hostility and division. Only part of the board was elected annually and by early 1846 what had become an annual purge of the remnants of Tory members provoked a split, with about 70 members seceding to form the rival Manchester Commercial Association.¹⁰² Although many Tories joined the new association, its core was a group of moderate Whigs – James Aspinall Turner, who would later defeat Bright, was President – as well as some Leaguers (notably William Nield). Having complained bitterly of the Chamber's lack of bold leadership in the matter of commercial freedom and gone to the trouble of taking it over, the principal architects of the strategy, Smith, Cobden and Dyer, made little use of their trophy. Cobbett was wrong: control of the repeal campaign never left Newall's Buildings in Market Street.

Nonetheless, the high incidence of membership of the Chamber opened the League to accusations of self-interest which, in a polemical atmosphere, flew thick and fast. It was unpleasant and not always limited to the narrow question of repeal. Among the ACLA Council, for example, Thomas Potter was accused by the Chartists of bribing Daniel O'Connell and C.P. Villiers to vote against measures designed to protect children working in factories; on the other hand, the favourite of the Tory back-bench, W.B. Ferrand, claimed that John Brooks offered him cash to vote for a higher tariff on coffee in order to protect his interests as an importer.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, many Leaguers freely admitted their self interest. For them repeal offered not merely the promise of increased profit, but a bulwark against ruin. Many ACLA Councillors suffered badly during the trade depression that commenced in 1837, the effects of which they believed were exacerbated by the Corn Laws. Henry McConnel's company, for example, lost an estimated £36,000 over the period 1837-43;¹⁰⁴ Joseph Adshead went bankrupt in 1840; Andrew Bannerman, J.C. Dyer and J.B. Smith incurred substantial losses as a result of the collapse of the Bank of Manchester in 1841,¹⁰⁵ and Holland Hoole was the Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce in 1842 when he went bankrupt, losing a fortune

accumulated over thirty years in business. Hoole died a year later leaving his wife and nine children 'totally unprovided for' until a subscription was collected among his colleagues that raised £1000. For Archibald Prentice the accusation of self-interest was not only 'ungenerous' it was irrelevant: 'Happy it is,' he wrote, 'when the interest of a class is the interest of the whole community!'.¹⁰⁶

Support for Corn Law repeal was obviously the issue that united the ACLA Councillors above all others, and in some cases this correlated with rabid support for *laissez faire* economics. Samuel Stocks, for example, told a Parliamentary Commission in 1834 to 'repeal all the Acts which affect labour and wages, and do with them as you would do with the wind, let them alone'.¹⁰⁷ For similar reasons Henry Ashworth supported the New Poor Law Amendment Act and flouted the law by operating his factories for eleven hours a day after the passage of the Ten Hours' Act. Early in the 1830s another ACLA Councillor, Thomas Harbottle, had appeared briefly on the list compiled by working class radicals of notorious 'Midnight Robbers' who worked their employees long into the night.¹⁰⁸ Gatrell argues that, despite their internal disputes, the Manchester middle class 'shared' a 'homogeneous intellectual culture' that was dominated by a 'popularised version of Ricardian political economy'. To illustrate his point he quotes Robert Greg's younger brother, W.R. Greg, himself an active Leaguer. 'We cannot raise the mass out of their misery,' the younger Greg argued in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1849, 'they must raise themselves'. 'Neither the most boundless benevolence, nor the most consummate ability,' he continued, 'can fight against the clear moral and material laws of the universe.'¹⁰⁹ Other ACLA Councillors were certainly keen students of the 'dismal science' of Political Economy. Thomas Williams, for example, published numerous papers on various economic subjects, and J.B. Smith was not only a fervent admirer of the works of Adam Smith but also a self-proclaimed expert on the Bank of England. Similarly Joseph Heron's experience of studying Political Economy under the supervision of Nassau Senior seems to have prepared him for active membership of the League.¹¹⁰

Although Gatrell is correct to point to the existence of 'real flesh and blood' Gradgrinds and Bounderbys in the Manchester world,¹¹¹ this was not the whole story as far as the League was concerned. At the same time as Samuel Stocks was urging the Factory Commission to recommend to Parliament that it abolish factory regulation, other future ACLA Councillors, such as Dyer and McConnel, were telling the government to stiffen the law to prevent the exploitation of children in factories.¹¹² Others, opposed in principle to government intervention in the market-place, promoted self-regulation. Formed in March 1847 the Manchester Early Closing Association was a voluntary alternative to the Ten Hours' Bill, then making its way through the House of Commons. On the platform at the inaugural meeting were its president, George Wilson, and two other ex-ACLA Councillors, William Watkins and William Harvey.¹¹³ In the early 1830s Hoole had been a strident opponent of factory legislation, publishing

a pamphlet that attacked the leading factory reformer of the day, Lord Ashley. By the end of the decade, however, he had become a vocal advocate of shorter working hours and better wages. His conversion occurred at exactly the same time as he renounced Toryism and joined the ACLA Council.¹¹⁴

In local government too there were ACLA Councillors who recognized the importance of a regulated market place. Given that 'retrenchment' would go on to be a core demand on the liberal agenda it is easy to overlook the role played by many Leaguers in visionary schemes for social improvement through the agency of local government. William Nield and Thomas Hopkins, for example, the latter of whom was reputed to have 'controverted Ricardo' in his own published works on economics, led the successful opposition to the sale of the Manchester Gas Works in 1834. The Gas Works episode had considerable symbolic significance in Manchester where Parliament had broken new ground early in the 1820s by legislating to allow gas establishments to be 'created by public funds and ... conducted by public bodies for the public benefit'. Profits from the gas works funded social improvement schemes in Manchester until the late nineteenth century by which time it was looked upon fondly as a successful experiment in 'municipal socialism'.¹¹⁵

An examination of political activity throws up important shared characteristics and experiences, as well as some deep-seated divisions, among the ACLA Council. A substantial number of the ACLA Council (about 65 per cent) had at least some prior or subsequent political involvement. It is worth lingering over this group of 74 men more closely. Not surprisingly, given their average age, many of them entered the campaign for repeal as seasoned political veterans. The ACLA Council included, for example, over half of an important coterie of advanced liberals that had come together in Manchester in 1815. Later dubbed the 'small but determined band', these men (among them Potter, Taylor, Shuttleworth, Watkin, Prentice, Harvey and Smith) had campaigned on a broad front to break the Tory-Anglican hold in Manchester. Commercial freedom had been a part of their agenda, but its primary objectives were religious liberty and political reform.¹¹⁶

In pursuit of this broader reform agenda a handful of the ACLA Council had been among the crowd at Peterloo in 1819, including John Shuttleworth who later testified in 'Orator' Henry Hunt's defence at his trial. Although they were not present at St Peter's Fields on that fateful day, others such as J.S. Ormerod and Joseph Grafton had signed a well-known letter of protest in the immediate aftermath of the Yeomanry action, a time when it was dangerous to do so.¹¹⁷ These men provided the League with a flesh and blood basis for its carefully projected self-image as the custodian of the tradition of popular protest represented by Peterloo. The following year George Hadfield, Thomas Potter and J.E. Taylor organized local meetings in support of Queen Caroline.¹¹⁸ During the 1820s another group of later ACLA Councillors (including Thomas Burgess and J.G. Frost) was

involved in meetings that expressed alarm at the state of the country and renewed the demand for political reform.¹¹⁹

Many more ACLA Council members had served their political apprenticeship during the struggle for Reform and its aftermath in the early 1830s. In the first contest for the seat of Manchester in 1832, George Hadfield, J.B. Smith and J.C. Dyer were instrumental in organizing a small group that included several other future ACLA Councillors - Thomas Harbottle, James Kershaw, Archibald Prentice, William Callender, C.J.S. Walker, John Shuttleworth and a youthful George Wilson - to promote the candidacy of Charles Poulett Thomson. A disciple of Bentham and Huskisson, Thomson had advanced views on free trade and was an opponent of slavery. In later accounts both Hadfield and Prentice identify Thomson's election committee as an important precursor of the League.¹²⁰ Still more common among ACLA Councillors (30) was membership of the South Lancashire Reform Association and its successor organization, the Manchester Reform Association. Formed in 1835 at a time when the spectre of a Tory government had briefly materialized, the South Lancashire Reform Association was committed to the promotion of the Liberal interest through the Registration Court. A number of Council members also supported the campaign for a secret ballot in Parliamentary elections, with a dozen joining an organization called the Friends of the Ballot in 1837.¹²¹

By far the most common political activity among the members of the Manchester ACLA Council was related to local government. No less than 48 of the ACLA Councillors (66 per cent of the politically active group) held elected office either in Salford, Manchester or one of the out-townships.¹²² It included no less than five of the first six mayors of Manchester (1838-48) and three of the last four Boroughreeves of Salford (1841-44). The story of Manchester's bitter and protracted struggle for Incorporation in the second half of the 1830s has received considerable attention from historians¹²³ (a similar struggle took place in Salford during the early 1840s), but the extent to which the battle for municipal power served as a proving ground for the Anti-Corn Law League has not been emphasized. On the one hand the battle for Incorporation covered similar rhetorical ground to the later campaign for repeal: it was, as Cobden wrote in an influential pamphlet in 1837, a struggle against the power of the feudal aristocracy.¹²⁴ At a more practical level the Incorporation struggle gave many Leaguers their first taste of electoral politics and provided a forum in which political strategies were tested. The inaugural election for the Manchester Town Council late in 1838 was dominated by men who were simultaneously establishing the ACLA. Of the 48 Town Councillors elected in December 1838 half (24) were among the members of the ACLA Council in 1839-40.¹²⁵

Even this remarkable figure does not reveal the full extent of the symbiotic relationship between the League and new Corporation. On the one hand, ACLA Councillors not only stood for election, they also ran the elections. The Returning Officer for the inaugural election, John Hyde,

and no less than eight of the Presiding Officers in the fifteen wards, were members of the ACLA Council at the time of the poll.¹²⁶ Moreover, no sooner was the Town Council in office than senior positions in the new administration were taken by members of the ACLA Council. Foremost among these acts of political patronage was the appointment of Joseph Heron as Manchester's first Town Clerk. The fact that Heron subsequently held the position with distinction for over forty years owed more to good luck than good management. He had been earmarked for the job even before the Royal Charter had been granted, and he owed his selection to the fact that he had been on the executive of the South Lancashire Reform Association in 1835, before becoming a solicitor to the General Association of Mill Owners, and a member of the Incorporation Committee (where he impressed Cobden and Wilson), and, of course, a member of the ACLA Council.¹²⁷ Other ACLA Council members to enjoy the favour of the new administration were John Ogden, appointed Clerk of the Peace, Thomas Higson, appointed City Magistrates' Clerk, and James Chapman, whose appointment as City Coroner provided an important test case of the legality of the new authority.¹²⁸ Under the terms of the Municipal Corporations Act the most powerful positions within the gift of the ordinary councillors were the 16 Aldermanic seats. By 1840-41 the ACLA Council domination of the Town Council had resulted in them taking nine of the sixteen positions including the Mayoralty.¹²⁹

Taken together the political careers of these ACLA Councillors suggest some important conclusions. Firstly, they reinforce the point made earlier, that what is surprising is not the League's sudden embrace of electoral politics in 1840-41, but the fact that it did not occur sooner. On the one hand, seven years before the League's adoption of an extensive registration strategy important members of its Council were fully aware of its exigency having participated in the establishment of a local organization for just that purpose. On the other hand, about half the Council were veterans of the bitter local electoral contests that had been waged during earlier decades. Not only had an electoral strategy been tested with great success at the Chamber of Commerce, it was also used with great effect to resolve the impasse between the newly Incorporated Town Council and its pre-existing rival, the Police Commission. While the dispute over municipal authority was being tested in the courts, supporters of the Town Council, the vast majority of them Leaguers, effectively silenced the opposition at the Police Commission by incrementally eroding the Tory majority at the annual polls after 1839. By 1842 the complexion of the Commission had been changed to such an extent that it meekly ceded its powers to the new Town Council.¹³⁰ Little wonder that the League embarked on Parliamentary politics with optimism.

Moreover, Parliament held little mystique for these men. At different times thirteen of the ACLA Council stood for Parliament,¹³¹ with seven going on to become MPs. Even among those who were successful four had previously tasted defeat, including Cobden, who failed in his first bid for

election in 1837, and J.B. Smith, who unsuccessfully contested three elections before he finally secured a seat in the House of Commons in 1847. Smith's first electoral contest was in 1837 in the Lancashire constituency of Blackburn when he gained a derisory nine votes. His second attempt was the well-known Walsall by-election which initiated the League's ill-fated electoral strategy.¹³² William Rawson was another victim of this strategy, suffering a heavy defeat at the Dudley by-election in 1844.¹³³ The men the League sent on to the national political stage were not naive and innocent; they were hardened political campaigners.

Secondly, the political experiences of the ACLA Council undermine the League's oft-repeated claims to political neutrality.¹³⁴ The group included one well-known Tory, Holland Hoole, who had run the Conservative election campaign in Salford as recently as 1837, but he was the exception that proved the rule. The bulk of the ACLA Council were liberals. Some, such as William Callender, saw themselves as Whigs, and the trajectory of others who had begun their careers during the fraught years of postwar radicalism was unmistakably towards respectability and moderate Whig politics. John Edward Taylor, for example, had been part of the 'small but determined band' of 1815, but by 1840, as editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, he was the leading spokesman for the Whigs, and openly critical of the League.¹³⁵ Another of the 'small but determined band', John Shuttleworth, accepted government office in 1839. According to local rumour the office of Stamp Distributor was considered by the Whigs to be a small price to pay for the silence of one of their most vociferous critics of past years.¹³⁶ By this time Thomas Potter had earned a knighthood as well as the loathing of the Manchester Chartists, who believed that he had gone back on his word to support a campaign for universal suffrage in the aftermath of the passage of the Reform Bill.¹³⁷ By 1840 even Prentice had resiled from universal suffrage (he would later re-commit to it) contemplating instead an educational franchise and other 'organic changes' that fell short of his earlier prescription for constitutional change.

At the other end of the liberal spectrum was James Hampson. A member of the original Manchester Political Union in 1830, in 1835 he had been part of the committee that was formed to raise a monument to Henry Hunt in Manchester. By 1842 Hampson had not only embraced Joseph Sturge's Complete Suffrage Union, but he had also joined the Carpenters' Hall branch of the National Charter Association, dominated as it was by supporters of Feargus O'Connor.¹³⁸ At a meeting of his fellow shopkeepers Hampson explained his decision to join the working-class Chartists: 'Their interests,' he told them, 'were bound up with that class entirely.'¹³⁹ In politics the typical ACLA Council member, however, was neither Hoole, Potter nor Hampson. Far more typical was John Brooks. Although he boasted that he had signed the 1842 Chartist National Petition, Brooks was content to channel his considerable energies into the campaign for political reform through the agency of the Complete Suffrage Union, becoming its inaugural Manchester president.¹⁴⁰

Numerous other members of the ACLA Council would subsequently join Brooks on the Council of the Manchester and Salford Complete Suffrage Union including Elkanah Armitage, William Harvey (another member of the 'small but determined band'), and Lawrence Rostron, a veteran of the South Lancashire Reform Association.¹⁴¹ Support for universal suffrage ran deep among the Manchester Leaguers. A comparison with Brian Harrison's study of the temperance leadership is instructive on this point. Although he finds that the political allegiance of the temperance leaders was overwhelmingly liberal, he identifies less support for suffrage reform than was evident among the ACLA Council.¹⁴²

The core of support for radical political reform in the ACLA Council that surfaced in the Complete Suffrage Union was evident in support for John Bright's candidacy for one of the Manchester seats in 1846-47. Bright's campaign committee was made up entirely of Leaguers, including eleven members of the ACLA Council.¹⁴³ It was also carried forward into the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association in 1848-49. Despite its origins in Liverpool, this Association came to share many characteristics with the League: from its offices (Newall's Buildings) to its office bearers (Wilson, Rawson and Hickin) as well as at least twenty members of the ACLA Council.¹⁴⁴ Many of the same men went on to play a role in the Lancashire Reformers' Union in the late 1850s which was a direct forerunner of the National Reform Union founded in 1864 (Wilson was President, and Armitage, Treasurer, of each organization in succession).¹⁴⁵ The League Caucus, as it came to be called, did not hold unchallenged sway in Manchester politics. Bright's candidacy was opposed by many local Whigs and some moderate ex-Leaguers, including William Nield, and Thomas Potter's sons, Thomas junior and John. There was a pattern to the dispute: many of Bright's opponents had broken away from the League-dominated Chamber of Commerce and transferred their energies to the Manchester Commercial Association at the beginning of 1846. Although it failed to develop into a full-scale electoral contest, the 1847 nomination dispute was a dress rehearsal for Bright's defeat in 1857 at the hands of the President of the Commercial Association, J.A. Turner, ably assisted by former ACLA Councillors, such as Jeremiah Garnett, William Callender and Absalom Watkin.¹⁴⁶

Of course to limit the discussion of political involvement to narrowly defined questions of constitutional reform and forays into electoral politics, would be to adopt a definition of politics that was unrecognizable to the ACLA Councillors themselves. The breadth of their commitment to reform in politics, religion and education has already been discussed, but there was much more: the typical ACLA member was, to borrow a phrase coined by Edward Watkin, involved in 'world mending'.¹⁴⁷ The scope of their activities ranged impressively from global to local: fourteen ACLA Councillors, for example, were active in the peace movement,¹⁴⁸ eighteen were involved in either the British India Society, the anti-slavery movement or the League of Universal Brotherhood.¹⁴⁹ At a local level numerous

ACLA Councillors were involved in a formative campaign for civic improvement that led to the creation of public parks in Manchester during the mid-1840s;¹⁵⁰ others (notably J.G. Frost and J.B. Smith) were involved in the Ancient Footpaths Society, a small organization dedicated to halting the encroachment of Manchester's urban sprawl;¹⁵¹ more than a dozen served as trustees of Freeholders Building and Land Societies. The list goes on. A handful were active promoters of temperance and vegetarianism; William Harvey advocated a regimen of physical puritanism that involved abstinence from meat, drink and tobacco.¹⁵² Robert Nicholson was a leading participant in the Domestic Mission, a pioneering attempt to ameliorate the social problems associated with Manchester's festering slums; Robert Stuart was renowned for his 'broad benevolence'; and Joseph Adshead received a medal from the King of Sweden for his tireless work in the cause of prison reform.¹⁵³

Before attempting to summarize by sketching the outline of an 'identikit' member of the ACLA Council it is important to highlight one area in particular where evidence is lacking. While obituary writers and eulogists give details of public life and service they rarely offer more than rudimentary biographical information and private sources exist for only a handful of Leaguers. Nevertheless, there are fragments of evidence which point to the avid pursuit of cultural and recreational activities among the ACLA Council, and it is important to bring them to light as a challenge to the popular image of the typical Leaguer as a dour Mr Gradgrind.¹⁵⁴ Absalom Watkin was an aspiring poet, Jeremiah Garnett was a skilled angler, renowned woodsman and naturalist and George Hadfield was an 'expert swimmer'. Robert Nicholson was an avid art collector; and Henry McConnell's collection of 'modern art', which included works he had commissioned from Etty, Eastlake, Callcott and Turner, was regarded as 'unrivalled out of London'. Although he was better known as a speaker on political causes, Archibald Prentice's last public lecture was on the 'bacchanalian songs of Burns'; and Paul Willert was a director of the Manchester Concert Hall for more than forty years.¹⁵⁵

Our representative Leaguer was a mature man in his late forties. If he was not a native Lancastrian then he had, at least, been a resident in Lancashire for many years by the time he joined the ACLA Council. He was married with children, who were, in turn, likely to become politically active in their own right. In religion he was a Dissenter, most typically a Unitarian, an Independent or a Quaker. Although this made him an heir to a tradition of religious Dissent, his religious affiliations may also have brought him into conflict with his fellow ACLA Councillors. In terms of education the picture is less clear. He might have been a model of the self-educated, self-made man that fired the imagination of mid-Victorian Britain, but he was just as likely to have been the beneficiary of a conventional middle-class education that ended in the early to mid-teens with a move into an apprenticeship or the family business. Either way, he is likely to have been both a consumer and active promoter of adult

education with a high likelihood of membership of the Manchester Athenaeum, the Statistical Society, the Mechanics' Institute or the Literary and Philosophical Society. As with religion, the prevalence of a general commitment to educational endeavour among the ACLA Councillors tends to obscure the potentially divisive aspects of the question. In particular our stereotypical Leaguer's attitude to the voluntary principle would have determined whether the spread of education or opposition to the Established Church took priority. Despite only a small number of examples upon which to base the conclusion, it is likely that our identikit ACLA Councillor was a voluntarist first and an educationalist second.

At the same time the typical ACLA Councillor was man of many good causes who pursued reform at various levels from global to local to personal. 'World mending' also involved political reform and activism. On the one hand, our 'identikit' Leaguer was almost certainly a political radical, most likely a veteran of the South Lancashire Reform Association or its successor organization, the Manchester Reform Association, and a supporter of the traditional programme of post-war radicalism: universal suffrage, shorter Parliaments and the ballot. This commitment would have been likely to see him join the Complete Suffrage Union rather than the Chartists. On the other hand, at a practical level our 'identikit' Leaguer was highly likely to have sought and obtained local elected office and been hardened by the vicissitudes of electoral politics. As well as savouring victory he may well have tasted defeat.

In terms of occupation was he one of the 'progeny of mammon'? The ACLA Council contained a number of the captains of industry who would spread Manchester's fame to the four corners of the globe, but it also contained a number of men - grocers, linen drapers, bakers - who belonged to that amorphous stratum of early-Victorian Britain where the lower middle class shaded off into those who have been called the labour aristocracy. There were, to borrow the Chartists' description, millocrats and shopocrats. In terms of numbers the typical ACLA Councillor was either a manufacturer, a merchant, or someone whose business interests involved a combination of both, and he was likely to have been a member of the Chamber of Commerce. Despite the objections of some recent historians, he would have used the language of class freely, seeing himself as part of the middle class. Support for repeal may well have been part of a wider objection to government interference, but did not necessarily make him a rabid apostle of *laissez faire*. Although he is open to the accusation that his support for free trade was in his individual economic interests, it was just as likely to form part of his broader prescription for peace, prosperity and good government. While some ACLA Councillors were Whigs or became increasingly reconciled to them, the our 'identikit' ACLA Councillor was one who carried a broad-based radical creed forward into the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, the Lancashire Reformers' Union, the National Reform Union, and nineteenth-century Liberalism.

Notes

1. *Champion and Weekly Herald*, 19 January 1840.
2. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 8 September 1842; A. Briggs, 'The Language of "Class" in Early Nineteenth-Century England', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History* (London, 1967), p. 59; N. Longmate, *The Breadstealers: The Fight against the Corn Laws, 1838-1846* (London, 1984), p. 19.
3. G.R. Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1993), p. 17. C. Schonhardt-Bailey, 'Lessons in Lobbying for Free Trade in 19th-Century Britain: To Concentrate or Not', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 85, no. 1, 1991, p. 43; G. Wootton, *Pressure Groups in Britain 1720-1920* (London, 1975), pp. 61-2.
4. G. Alderman, *Pressure Groups and Government in Great Britain* (Harlow, 1984), p. 13; Wootton, *Pressure Groups*, p. 71; C. Schonhardt-Bailey (ed.), *Free Trade: The Repeal of the Corn Laws* (Bristol, 1996), pp. xv-xvi.
5. Quoted in J. Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1879) vol. 1, p. 141.
6. See D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 411 quoting a yet-to-be-published essay by Gareth Stedman Jones.
7. A. Briggs, *Chartist Studies* (London, 1959), p. 298. See also Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, p. 413.
8. W. Cooke-Taylor, *Life and Times of Sir Robert Peel* (London, 1846), vol 3, p. 205.
9. Morley, *Life of Cobden*, vol. 1, p. 187.
10. A. Howe, *The Cotton Masters 1830-1860* (Oxford, 1984), p. 209.
11. A. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (Manchester, 1853), vol. 1, pp. 188-9.
12. N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1958), pp. 223-4; Longmate, *The Breadstealers*, pp. 261-70.
13. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 16 April 1839; *League*, 21 February 1846; *Manchester Guardian*, 22 July 1840; F.S. Stancliffe, *John Shaw's 1738-1938* (Manchester, 1938), pp. 132, 395.
14. B.L. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (Keele, 1994), chap. 7. There are also opportunities for comparison with Howe, *Cotton Masters*; J.H. Fox, 'The Victorian Entrepreneur in Lancashire', in P. Bell (ed.), *Victorian Lancashire* (Newton Abbot, 1974), pp. 103-26; P.A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (Basingstoke, 1995), chap. 8.
15. Harrison, *Drink*, p. 139.
16. Pickering, *Chartism*, p. 140.
17. Quoted in McCord, *Anti-Corn Law League*, p. 80.
18. This is a much lower percentage than Howe who identified 80 per cent of his prosopographic sample as Lancastrians. See Howe, *Cotton Masters*, p. 51.
19. T. Swindells, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men* (Manchester, 1906-8), First Series, pp. 251-2; Fifth Series, p. 50; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 August 1857; 18 February 1861; W.E.A. Axon, *The Annals of Manchester* (Manchester, 1886), pp. 317, 356; MPL, *Biographical Index: 'Death of Alderman Harvey'*, December 1870; L. Marshall, 'Smith, John Benjamin', in J.O. Baylen and N. Gossman (eds) *Biographical Dictionary of Modern English Radicals* (Sussex, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 467-8;

20. Axon, *Annals*, p. 286; Morley, *Life of Cobden*, vol. 1, chap. 1; T. Baker, *Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel: Its Foundation and Worthies* (London, 1884), pp. 124-5.
21. *League*, 21 February 1846; Swindells, *Manchester Streets*, First Series, p. 209; Barker, *Memorials*, pp. 122-3; A. Somerville, *Free Trade And The League: A Biographic History of the Pioneers of Freedom of Opinion, Commercial Enterprise and Civilisation in Britain From the Times of Serfdom to the Age of Free Trade in Manufactures, Food and Navigation* (Manchester, 1854), vol. 2, p. 487. Those with Scottish parents were Wilson, McConnel and Stuart.
22. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 26 March 1840; *Manchester Guardian*, 19 March 1879; Axon, *Annals*, pp. 327-8; R.A. Scott, *A Century of Science in Manchester* (London, 1883), p. 311.
23. Axon, *Annals*, pp. 224, 231-2, 288, 292; *Sentinel*, 4 March 1843; *Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1864; MPL, *Biographical Index*: 'Death of Alderman Harvey'.
24. Axon, *Annals*, pp. 273, 332, 324; *Manchester Guardian*, 19 March 1879; A. Prentice, *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester 1792-1832* (1852, repr. London, 1970), p. 249; E. Baines, *Baines' Lancashire: A New Printing of the History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County Palatinate of Lancaster* (1824, repr. New York, 1968), p. 243.
25. N.C. Edsall, *Richard Cobden: Independent Radical* (Cambridge Mass., 1986), pp. 3-4. Derek Fraser has characterized the battle for local dominance in Manchester as a struggle between 'long-established ruling families' and the 'newly-founded dynasties' of 'go-ahead migrants'. Many of the ACLA Council are part of this latter group; the evidence here suggest that even the 'new men' had been settled for a number of years. See D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England* (London, 1976), p. 115f.
26. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 June 1887. The national birth/marriage average for 1840-9 was 4.425. See E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), pp. 189-91.
27. R. Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise* (Oxford, 1970), p. 247; MPL, *Biographical Index*: 'Death of Sir E. Armitage', November 1876.
28. J.F. Smith (ed.), *The Admission Register of the Manchester School with some Notices of the More Distinguished Scholars* (Manchester, 1866), vol. 3, pp. 46-7; M.B. Rose, *The Greys of Quarry Bank Mill: The Rise and Decline of a Family Firm, 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 68. Edsall, *Richard Cobden*, p. 294.
29. Entry on Evans in M. Stenton, *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament* (London, 1976-8), vol. 2, p. 112; *Manchester Guardian*, 7 November 1896.
30. Entries on John and T.B Potter and F.W. Grafton in Stenton, *British Members of Parliament*, vol. 1, pp. 163, 316; vol. 2, p. 290; Axon, *Annals*, p. 271.
31. Stenton, *British Members of Parliament*, vol. 2, p. 364. Watkin's own account of his involvement with the League is in his *Alderman Cobden of Manchester* (London, 1891).
32. Stenton, *British Members of Parliament*, vol. 1, pp. 63, 188; vol. 2, p. 168; Axon, *Annals*, pp. 288, 356.
33. Stenton, *British Members of Parliament*, vol. 2, p. 9; Axon, *Annals*, p. 271.
34. Swindells, *Manchester Streets*, First Series, p. 210; J.A. Spender, *The Life of the Right Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London, 1923), vol. 1,

- pp. 3–4. Andrew's sister, Janet Bannerman, was reputed to have exercised a strong liberal influence on her son, the future Prime Minister.
35. Axon, *Annals*, p. 351; J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns 1830–80* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 18, 36n.
 36. Axon, *Annals*, p. 376; Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 170; *National Anti-Corn Law Bazaar, to Be Held in the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, London*, Ladies Committee, (May, 1845); *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 10 February 1842. A brainchild of Cobden's, the title of this organization – which had branches in about ten localities – is misleading. While they were young by comparison with the Council, the members were not youths. W.H. Chaloner's reference to the Young Men's Anti-Monopoly Associations as the 'first British political organisation to harness the enthusiasm of youth', is equally misleading. See W.H. Chaloner, 'The Agitation against the Corn Laws', in J.T. Ward (ed.), *Popular Movements c.1830–50* (London, 1970), p. 145; Pickering, *Chartism*, p. 230n.
 37. *Manchester Guardian*, 27 November 1879; *Pigot & Slater's General and Classified Directory of Manchester and Salford* (Manchester, 1841), p. 127; Barker, *Memorials*, p. 115; J.T. Slugg, *Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago* (1881, repr. Shannon, 1971), p. 173; .
 38. Swindells, *Manchester Streets*, Third Series, p. 59; Axon, *Annals*, p. 339; Stenton, *British Members of Parliament*, vol. 1, p. 310.
 39. Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise*, pp. 21, 225.
 40. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 October 1875; Slugg, *Reminiscences*, pp. 110–11.
 41. *Manchester Guardian*, 2 March 1839; Axon, *Annals*, p. 348; Rose, *The Gregs*, p. 68; D.T. Price, 'Wilson, George', in Baylen and Gossman (eds), *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 2, p. 549.
 42. *Manchester Guardian*, 7 November 1896; Edsall, *Richard Cobden*, p. 417.
 43. *Manchester Guardian*, 1 November 1886.
 44. H. Ashworth, *Recollections of Richard Cobden M.P. and the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1878), pp. 23–4. Sidney Smith's impression was that Cobden did not like Wilson. See *MS Journal of Sidney Smith, Freetrader and Liberal Politician with Related Documents 1792–1882*, National Archives of Scotland, RH4/156.
 45. *Manchester Guardian*, 19 March, 1879; S. Simon, *A Century of City Government: Manchester 1838–1938* (London, 1938), p. 408.
 46. *Manchester Guardian*, 10 June 1887.
 47. M. Goffin (ed.), *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin: A Manchester Man 1787–1861* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 21, 42, 91, 102, 104, 108, 135–6, 145, 220, 224, 313, 317, 352.
 48. *Love and Barton's (Manchester) Exchange Directory* (Manchester, 1848), pp. 42, 87; L.H. Grindon, *Manchester Banks and Bankers: Historical, Biographical and Anecdotal* (Manchester, 1877), p. 281; Swindells, *Manchester Men*, First Series, p. 209; Second Series, p. 19; MPL, *Biographical Index: 'Death of Alderman Harvey', December 1870; 'Death of James Kershaw' n.d.; 'Death of W.R. Callender Snr', n.d.* Bickman was also later in partnership with another ACLA Councillor, Henry Rawson.
 49. Howe's discussion of religion is marred by this fundamental error; see *Cotton Masters*, pp. 62, 67.
 50. A detailed study of Brotherton's career as cotton spinner, local MP, lay preacher, teetotaler, vegetarian, educationalist, political radical and free

trader is long overdue. For a discussion of his role in the Bible Christians see P.A. Pickering and A. Tyrrell, ‘“In the Thickest of the Fight”’: the Reverend James Scholefield (1790–1855) and the Bible Christians of Manchester and Salford’, *Albion*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1994, pp. 461–92.

51. Howe, *Cotton Masters*, p. 71.
52. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1864.
53. J. Lea, ‘Baptists and the Working Classes in Mid-Victorian Lancashire’, in S.P. Bell (ed.), *Victorian Lancashire*, p. 60.
54. See V.A.C. Gatrell, ‘Incorporation and the Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester 1790–1839’, in D. Fraser (ed.) *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 15–61; J. Seed, ‘Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830–50’, *Social History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1982, pp. 1–25.
55. PP, *Population (Great Britain): Religious Worship (England and Wales), Accounts and Papers*, vol. 89, 1852–3, p. cclxiii.
56. Slugg, *Reminiscences*, p. 173.
57. Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 154, 156–7.
58. *Population (Great Britain): Religious Worship (England and Wales)*, p. cclxiii; Howe, *Cotton Masters*, p. 71. Given the large minority of Irish Catholics among the Manchester population – approximately 10 per cent – the percentage of Anglicans among the rest would have been proportionately higher.
59. *Manchester Times*, 13 February 1836; 25 June 1836; 9 March 1844; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 July 1840.
60. M.J. Turner, ‘The Making of a Middle Class Liberalism in Manchester c.1815–32: A Study in Politics and the Press’, Unpublished D Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1991, p. 43.
61. *Manchester Times*, 23 April 1836.
62. B. Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780–1870* (London, 1974), p. 136.
63. See *Manchester Guardian*, 9 November 1850, p. 1.
64. Objectives of the Society for Promoting National Education quoted in Gatrell, ‘Incorporation’, p. 45.
65. *Manchester Times*, 1 April 1843; *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 25 April 1843. The Committee included James Kershaw (chairman), William Callender, James Carlton, George Hadfield, Thomas Harbottle and John Brooks, the ACLA President, as well as the Secretary of the ACLA, William Bickman. Others involved were Potter, Watkin, Grafton, Watts, Pearson, Besley, Hoole, Stuart, Woodcock, Edward Evans, Harvey, Rostron, Clark, Ashworth, MacFarlane, Chapman, William Rawson, Armitage, Prentice and Wilson.
66. Morley, *Life of Cobden*, vol. 1, p. 300; *Manchester Times*, 20 May 1843. See also D. Ayerst, *The Manchester Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper* (New York, 1971), pp. 72–3.
67. See *Manchester Times*, 19 April 1845; 17 May 1845; 24 May 1845; 31 May 1845.
68. MPL, *Biographical Index*: ‘Death of Sir E. Armitage’, November 1876.
69. Swindells, *Manchester Streets*, Second Series, p. 19; MPL, *Biographical Index*: ‘Death of J. Kershaw Esq. MP’, n.d.
70. Axon, *Annals*, pp. 332–3.

71. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden*, p. 58.
72. WSRO, Cobden Papers, Cobden to Tait, 6 June 1839.
73. F. Nightingale to Samuel Smith, 25 February 1861, in M. Vicinus and B. Nergaard (eds), *Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale: Selected Letters* (London, 1989), pp. 218-20.
74. Howe, *Cotton Masters*, p. 57; Axon, *Annals*, p. 348; Seed, 'Liberal Culture', p. 7.
75. Smith, *Admission Register*, vol. 3, pp. 46, 50, 290, 296.
76. J. Aston, *A Picture of Manchester* (1804, repr. Manchester, 1969), pp. 167-73; Gatrell, 'Incorporation', p. 44; Prentice quoted in R. Walmsley, *Peterloo: The Case Re-opened* (Manchester, 1969), p. 523.
77. Axon, *Annals*, pp. 251, 360; *Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1864; Smith, *Admission Register*, vol. 3, p. 278.
78. MPL, *Biographical Index*: 'The Late Sir Joseph Heron', n.d.
79. Boyson, *The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise*, p. 246.
80. B. Love, *Handbook of Manchester: Being a Second and Enlarged Edition of Manchester As It Is* (Manchester, 1842), p. 196.
81. Aston, *A Picture of Manchester*, pp. 17-25; Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 229-30; Love, *Handbook of Manchester*, pp. 197-8.
82. Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, p. 249.
83. Stancliffe, *John Shaw's*, p. 140; Ashworth, *Recollections*, pp. 22-3; Axon, *Annals*, p. 190; Slugg, *Reminiscences*, pp. 109-10; *Manchester Times*, 26 December 1835.
84. See T.S. Ashton, *Economic and Social Investigation in Manchester and Salford 1833-1933* (London, 1977), pp. 1-12, 140.
85. Swindells, *Manchester Streets*, second series, pp. 32-3; B. Love, *Manchester As It Is, or, Notices of the Institutions, Manufactures, Commerce, Railways, etc., of the Metropolis of Manufactures* (1839, repr. Manchester 1971), p. 100.
86. Quoted in Edsall, *Richard Cobden*, p. 38.
87. [J. Easby], *Manchester and the Manchester People* (Manchester, 1843), p. 7.
88. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden*, pp. 120-2.
89. Goffin (ed.), *The Diaries of Absalom Watkin*, p. 7.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 18, 19, 21, 23, 44, 69, 90, 167, 172, 183.
91. *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16, 140, 168, 171, 174.
92. *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 110, 154.
93. PP. *Report from the Select Committee on the Votes of Electors, Reports From Committees*, 1846, vol. 8, p. 217.
94. *Scotsman*, 27 December 1843.
95. Gatrell, 'Incorporation', pp. 40-1.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
97. 31 were listed as members of the Manchester Exchange in 1848. See *Love and Barton's Exchange Directory*, *passim*.
98. *Manchester Times*, 14 February 1835.
99. *Ibid.*, 13 February 1836; 18 February 1837.
100. *Ibid.*, 15 July 1837.
101. *Ibid.*, 15 February 1845.
102. *Ibid.*, 14 February 1846; Howe, *Cotton Spinners*, pp. 202-5. The *Manchester Examiner*, 7 February 1846, characterized the seceders as 'merchants, as opposed to manufacturers' who were more inclined to 'bend the head in servility to the exactions of the aristocracy'.

103. *A Series of Letters from Feargus O'Connor Esq. Barrister at Law; to Daniel O'Connell Esq. M.P. Containing a Review of Mr O'Connell's Conduct during the Agitation of the Question of Catholic Emancipation; Together with an Analysis of His Motives and Actions since Becoming a Member of Parliament* (London, 1836), pp. 87-95; *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 22 May 1841; *Scotsman*, 27 December 1843.
104. C.H. Lee, *A Cotton Enterprise 1795-1840: A History of M'Connel and Kennedy, Fine Cotton Spinners* (Manchester, 1972), p. 152.
105. Swindells, *Manchester Streets*, First Series, pp. 251-2; *Manchester Times*, 12 October 1844.
106. Smith, *Admission Register*, pp. 46-7; Prentice, *History*, vol. 1, p. 94. See also Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics*, p. 18f.
107. PP, *Factories Inquiry Commission, Supplementary Report, Employment of Children in Factories*, 1834, part 2, vol. 10, p. 178.
108. J. Campbell, *An Examination of the Corn and Provision Laws from their First Enactment to the Present Period* (Manchester, 1841), pp. 28-9; *Poor Man's Advocate*, 3 March 1832. Other ACLA Councillors to publicly oppose the 'Ten Hours' Act were Thomas Williams, Elkanah Armitage, Henry McConnel, Henry Wadkin and Samuel Marsland. See *Ten Hours' Advocate*, 13 March 1847.
109. V.A.C. Gatrell, 'A Manchester Parable', in J.E. Benyon *et al.* (eds) *Studies in Local History: Essays in Honour of Professor Winifred Maxwell* (Cape Town, 1976), pp. 32-3. See also A.J. Kidd, 'Introduction: The Middle Class in Nineteenth-Century Manchester' in A.J. Kidd and K.W. Roberts, *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Government* (Manchester, 1985), pp. 11-12. For a revisionist view see M.J. Turner, 'Before the Manchester School: Economic Theory in Early Nineteenth-Century Manchester', *History*, vol. 79, no. 256, June 1994, pp. 216-41.
110. MPL, *Biographical Index: 'The Late Sir Joseph Heron'*, n.d.; Handwritten entry: 'Thomas Hopkins' n.d.; Ashton, *Economic and Social Investigation*, pp. 178-9.
111. Gatrell, 'Manchester Parable', p. 32.
112. *Factories Inquiry Commission, Supplementary Report, Employment of Children in Factories*, 1834, pp. 197, 200.
113. *Manchester Examiner*, 6 March 1847.
114. Axon, *Annals*, p. 320; Smith, *Admission Register*, vol. 3, pp. 46-7; C. Driver, *Tory Radical: The Life of Richard Oastler* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 175-6.
115. A. Redford, *A History of Local Government in Manchester* (London, 1950), vol. 1, p. 345; vol. 3, p. 77; Simon, *A Century of Local Government*, p. 362; W.H. Thomson, *History of Manchester to 1852* (Altrincham, 1966), p. 314, 363-4. The Gas Works remained in ratepayer control until it was nationalized by the post-war Labour Government.
116. See Turner, 'Middle-Class Liberalism', *passim*.
117. Goffin (ed.), *Diaries of Absalom Watkin*, p. 42; Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, pp. 165-6.
118. MPL, MS *Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, MP (Pendelton, 1882), pp. 66-7.
119. Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, p. 254.
120. MPL, MS *Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, pp. 115-122; Prentice,

- History*, vol. 1, pp. 21–4. See also L.S. Marshall, 'The First Parliamentary Election in Manchester', *American Historical Review*, vol. 47, 1942, pp. 525–6.
121. *Manchester Times*, 7 March 1835; 10 February 1838; 23 November 1839; 7 December 1839; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 10 December 1839. Those involved are identified in Appendix 4.
 122. In addition Edmund Ashworth was a Councillor in Bolton (1838–41). See J. Clegg, *Annals of Bolton: History, Chronology, Politics, Parliamentary and Municipal Polls* (Bolton, 1888), p. 175.
 123. See *inter alia* Fraser, 'Urban Politics', pp. 40–3; Redford, *Local Government in Manchester*, vol 2.
 124. A Radical Reformer [R. Cobden], 'Incorporate Your Borough: A Letter to Inhabitants of Manchester', repr. in W.E.A. Axon, *Cobden as a Citizen: A Chapter in Manchester History* (London, 1907), p. 140. See also Redford, *Local Government in Manchester*, vol. 2, p. 13; L. Purbrick, 'The Bourgeois Body: Civic Portraiture, Public Men and the Appearance of Class Power in Manchester, 1838–50', in Kidd and Nicholls, *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism* (Manchester, 1999), p. 92.
 125. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1838. Several other inaugural Town Councillors were prominent Leaguers although they are not part of the present sample.
 126. Andrew Bannerman, James Frost, Thomas Harbottle, Joseph Heron, Thomas Higson, James Murray, Robert Stuart and Thomas Williams. See *Manchester Guardian*, 12 December 1838.
 127. *Manchester Times*, 7 March 1835; 27 January 1838; 10 February 1838; *Northern Star*, 28 April 1838; Swindells, *Manchester Streets*, Second Series, pp. 32–3; Slugg, *Reminiscences*, p. 136; MPL, *Biographical Index*: 'The Late Sir Joseph Heron', n.d.; Fraser, 'Urban Politics', p. 147.
 128. Axon, *Annals*, pp. 205, 206, 391; Smith, *Admission Register*, vol. 3, p. 296.
 129. William Nield, Mayor, Thomas Potter, John Brooks, William R. Callender, Richard Cobden, James Kershaw, James Murray, John Shuttleworth and Charles W.S. Walker. In addition to these a further three Aldermen were well-known Leaguers (John Burd, Alexander Kay, Henry Tootal). See *Manchester Guardian*, 11 November 1840.
 130. See *Manchester Times*, 26 October 1839; *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 5 October 1839; 26 November 1842.
 131. Armitage, H. Ashworth, Brooks, Cobden, Greg, Hadfield, Henry, Kershaw, Phillips, H. Rawson, W. Rawson, J.B. Smith, and Stocks. See F.H. McCalmont, *The Parliamentary Poll Book of All Elections from the Passing of the Reform Act in 1832 to July 1880* (London, 1880), pp. 24, 26, 36, 88, 90, 151, 177, 182, 238, 243, 258, 282.
 132. *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 90, 258, 282. The other two who tasted defeat before becoming MPs were Greg and Hadfield.
 133. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
 134. See *inter alia*, *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 9 September 1841; *League*, 26 April 1845.
 135. Axon, *Annals*, p. 358; Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, p. 165–6. For example see Taylor's criticism of the League over Walsall: *Manchester Guardian*, 6 January 1841; 20 January 1841; 6 February 1841.
 136. A. Prentice, *Organic Changes Necessary to Complete the System of*

- Representation Partially Amended by the Reform Bill* (Manchester, 1839); Slugg, *Reminiscences*, p. 174.
137. See Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists*, pp. 88-9.
138. Prentice, *Historical Sketches*, p. 368; *Manchester Times*, 11 April 1835; *Northern Star*, 16 July 1842; *British Statesman*, 16 July 1842; *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 10 December 1839; *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 2 July 1842; Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists*, p. 103.
139. *Manchester Times*, 18 June 1842.
140. *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 2 July 1842; *Manchester Times*, 16 July 1842.
141. *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 2 July 1842.
142. Harrison, *Drink*, pp. 153, 163.
143. *Manchester Examiner*, 21 November 1846; 23 January 1847.
144. *Manchester Guardian*, 3 May 1848; 13 January 1849; 3 February 1849; 26 May 1849; 27 September 1851. See also Nicholas C. Edsall, 'A Failed National Movement: The Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, 1848-54', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 44, 1976, pp. 108-131.
145. *Manchester Guardian*, 9 March 1859; Price, 'Wilson', p. 349.
146. *Manchester Times*, 11 December 1846; Axon, *Annals*, pp. 286; 332; MPL, *Biographical Index*: 'The Late Jeremiah Garnett', September 1870. Watkin, who had nominated Bright in 1847, attracted national attention with his public opposition to Bright's stance over the Crimea. For 1847 see J. Skinner, 'The Liberal Nomination Controversy in Manchester, 1847', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 55, 1982, pp. 215-18.
147. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden of Manchester*, p. 58.
148. *Manchester Guardian*, 31 October 1840; 1 March 1845; *Manchester Times*, 7 November 1840; 24 June 1843.
149. *Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 31 December 1840; *Manchester Times*, 1 August 1840; *Manchester Guardian*, 9 October 1839; 29 August 1840; *Manchester Examiner*, 26 February 1848.
150. See T. Wyborn, 'Parks for the People: The Development of Public Parks in Manchester, c.1830-1860', *University of Manchester Working Papers in Economic and Social History*, no. 29, November 1994.
151. MPL, Smith Papers, J.B. Smith, *Reminiscences*, typescript, 1913, p. 30; Stancliffe, *John Shaw's*, p. 132.
152. MPL, *Biographical Index*: 'Death of Alderman Harvey', December 1870; Axon, *Annals*, p. 325; B. Harrison, 'The British Prohibitionists: A Biographical Analysis', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 15, 1970, no. 81.
153. *Manchester Guardian*, 18 February 1861; Swindells, *Manchester Men*, First Series, pp. 251-2; MPL, *Biographical Index*: 'The Late Mr Robert Nicholson', November 1886; 'The Late Mr Robert Stuart', April 1879.
154. The Gradgrind image has also been rejected by Seed and Gunn. See Seed, 'Liberal Culture', pp. 1-2; S. Gunn, 'The "Failure" of the Victorian Middle Class: A Critique', in J. Wolff and J. Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester, 1988), p. 17.
155. MPL, MS *Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, pp. 38-9; D.S. Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 91-3, 446; J. Treuherz, 'The Turner Collector:

Henry McConnel, Cotton Spinner', *Turner Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1986, pp. 37-40; Goffin, *Diaries of Absalom Watkin*, *passim*; MPL, *Biographical Index*: 'The Late Mr Robert Nicholson', November 1886; Slugg, *Reminiscences*, p. 196; *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1870; 19 March 1879; *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 16, p. 302. Another prominent Leaguer, Salis Schwabe, was a cultured lover of music who played piano and organ with 'delicacy and sentiment'. In 1848 Frederick Chopin stayed at Schwabe's house when visiting Manchester to give a concert. See I. and P. Zaluski, *The Scottish Autumn of Frederick Chopin* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 27; Frédéric Chopin to Wojciech Grzymala, 4 September 1848, *Chopin's Letters* (New York, 1988), pp. 381-2.

CONCLUSION: 'A LONG AND DOUBTFUL ROAD'

The immediate aim of the Leaguers is the abolition of the corn-laws, but they do not propose to stop at this object. They will then turn the weapons which brought down the corn-laws, against all the trade monopolies and custom-house restrictions, first in England and then in other countries, until at length all commercial restrictions between different nations, shall be totally done away with, and trade rejoice in the golden sunshine of freedom all over the world. A tempting object, but alas! a long and doubtful road.

J.G. Kohl, 1844¹

By 1850 Britain had embarked on the 'long and doubtful road' envisaged by Kohl, but few shared his foreboding. For many Britons free trade held out the prospect of strengthening peace and prosperity at home and abroad. Apart from 'half a dozen young Hotspurs in the House of Commons', noted an American commentator, H.B. Stanton, in 1849, 'Nobody hopes for a permanent revival of the old order of things.'² With considerable skill and attention to detail recent historians have traced the vicissitudes of free trade as an idea from 1846 through its Gladstonian and Edwardian phases, the crisis of the early 1930s, and to the brink of its most recent resting place in the canons of Thatcherism.³ There is no need to rehearse its 'long and doubtful road', even in outline. By mid-century too the League stood as a successful model that could be used to pursue other questions. Here historians have been less rigorous. As early as 1843 George Wilson had recognized that the League's political machinery was breaking new ground. 'They were anxious that when the League should have been dissolved they should leave a record of their labours', he told an audience at Drury Lane theatre, which would guide and instruct 'others in that path of usefulness which they had opened up'.⁴ The view from the Tory back-bench was, as we have seen, much the same. 'If Ministers . . . yield to the clamour of the League', George Finch, the Tory Member for Rutland, had warned the House in 1846, 'they would have plenty of other leagues'.⁵

As expected almost as soon as victory was secured the League's political strategies were emulated both at home and abroad. Across the Irish Sea the

Tenant League was shaped by Charles Gavan Duffy who was a keen student of the organization which 'beat the aristocracy of England in their fiercest contest'.⁶ At the other end of the colonial empire J.D. Lang's proposal for an Australian League shows unmistakable signs of his association with Cobden and Bright.⁷ Nor was imitation limited to the Empire. French observers took a keen interest in the League, and its great dinners provided them with an inspiration for the banquets at which they harassed Louis-Philippe's government before the 1848 Revolution.⁸ In 1856 Camillo di Cavour launched a campaign for the unification of Italy from an organization in his native Piedmont that was explicitly modelled on the League.⁹ These examples are only the tip of the iceberg.

Writing in the *Manchester Examiner* even before the repeal legislation had passed, Abraham Paulton expressed a hope that was shared by many Leaguers when they looked to the future. Repeal, he wrote, will 'sweeten the breath of society':¹⁰

On all popular questions, the results, direct and indirect, of the coming free trade victory will be most powerful and beneficent. It will be new light and strength to us all. On such matters as poor laws, taxation, education, sanitary reform, ecclesiastical reform, and organic political reform, we shall see our way infinitely better, and have far more power to proceed in it.

For individuals the way forward often proved to be far more complicated than Paulton envisaged. The roles played by the men who led the League in pursuing and, in some cases, failing to pursue, the agenda Paulton put on the table are well known. The image of Cobden and Bright in defeat in 1857, the 'leaders of a forlorn hope, voices crying vainly in what was for them the moral wilderness of Palmerstonian England',¹¹ is a powerful one; as is the image of George Wilson sitting at his post in Newall's Buildings, ready to call the League faithful to action, and chairing a succession of organizations that were landmarks in the development of the Victorian Liberal Party. Amidst the victory celebrations some of the lesser-known League cadre began to count the costs. After he had read a draft of Peel's legislation J.A. Roebuck, who had no cause to love the League, confided to his wife, the Leaguers 'are done for': 'The lecturers, the printers, the patriots will cease to have a pretext for their union, and their outcry, and *ergo*, for their pay, and thus an army of noisy people will be suddenly disbanded.'¹² Edward Watkin recalled later in life that 'when the fight was over there were many wounded; many could not get employment because they had been agitators; some who had got acclimatised to public meetings and political excitement, and could hardly settle down again quietly to work for their living'.¹³

What became of some of the 'army of noisy people' who agitated on behalf of the League? In the same week that the press carried the rumour that repeal would be included in the Queen's speech, James Acland placed advertisements seeking investors in a £3,000,000 scheme to attach locomotive engines to ships and haul them overland between Manchester

and the River Mersey.¹⁴ Having failed to excite sufficient interest in his Mersey and Manchester Ship, Railway and Dock Company, he turned to George Wilson who helped him get a job with an electric telegraph company. This career proved short-lived when it emerged that 'Slippery Jemmy' had used the information that came under his purview to shorten the odds of gambling on the Stock Market. From insider trading Acland returned to the life of political insider, acting as a parliamentary lobbyist, election agent - for Tory as well as Liberal - compiler of Poll Books and polemicist which, as often as not, became vehicles to attack his former political masters. Acland recaptured some of his earlier notoriety in 1867 upon his appointment as 'election and registration adviser' to the Reform League on whose executive he was a vociferous and controversial member.¹⁵ In some respects his career was similar to that of his colleague, John Finnigan. Following a dispute with Daniel O'Connell in 1846 Finnigan was expelled as an Irish Repeal Warden and by 1848 he had come the full circle by referring to Feargus O'Connor as a 'distinguished leader and patriot'. As revolution spread through the capital cities of Europe, Finnigan was instrumental in concluding an alliance between the Manchester Chartists and the members of the Irish Confederation who had refused to renounce the use of violence, the issue that had led them to secede from O'Connell's Repeal Association. Finnigan's activities led to his arrest in August 1848. His brush with the law did not prevent him from being one of the speakers who were called back into action by the League in 1852, although it is doubtful that his employers would have approved of his subsequent role as a Lancashire recruiting agent for the Brotherhood of St Patrick, a direct forerunner of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.¹⁶

Timothy Falvey was another Irish-born Leaguer who quarrelled with O'Connell ('although he worshiped that man') in 1846. Following repeal Falvey left Lancashire, returning to Southampton, the base from which he had done much of his lecturing on behalf of the League in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset, to become editor of the *Hampshire Independent*. Holding this post for twenty-one years, Falvey became a stalwart of the Southampton Liberal Club and a ubiquitous presence in local Parliamentary and municipal affairs until his death in 1889.¹⁷ Sidney Smith embarked on a number of ventures including the secretaryship of the Masters' Association in the engineering trades and the writing of guide books for emigrants, but it was as the electoral manager of the Liberal Party in London that he was best known in subsequent decades.¹⁸ George Thompson and W.J. Fox both entered the House of Commons in 1847, but their legendary powers of oratory proved to be less effective than in Covent Garden. Both were defeated in 1852 (although Fox was later returned at a by-election). Finally, John Murray, the League's 'best lecturer to working men', died in 'the office he held for years, as station master at Balkington, on the Trent Valley Railway'.¹⁹ Several members of the League Council were also attracted to the burgeoning world of railways, although at a more elevated level as investors or, in the case of William Rawson and

Edward Watkin, as railway company magnates. This book has attempted to show that Leaguers not only owned railways, they also worked on them.²⁰

The League has never been overrun by 'a plague of historians', as the *Manchester Times* feared.²¹ In comparison with Chartism it has been almost ignored, and with every new advance in Labour historiography the League gets left further behind. A recent essay by Antony Taylor is a case in point. Mulling over accounts of the incorporation of Chartism into the mainstream of Victorian Liberalism in the 1870s and 1880s, Taylor points out that the 'Liberal version of recent political history was a profoundly "Whig" one that excluded all those elements that did not fit easily into the mid-century political consensus'.²² The point is well made. What Taylor has overlooked, however, is that the League, too, has been a victim of a nineteenth-century interpretation. The League that lurks in the writing of many Labour historians is the one that would have sufficed for most Chartists in the early 1840s: a middle-class pressure group made up of dour Nonconformist businessmen, and factory owners, the 'Cobbling-Whigs', the 'progeny of mammon'.²³ This is the League which, by and large, is to be found in school text books, previous narrative histories, and in a recent spate of document collections. The League we have sought to present in this book was a much more varied, vital, robust and even radical organization. Our League upheld an inclusive definition of the British nation in terms of nationality, gender and class that challenged the existing order in fundamental ways. Our League brought many innovations to the practice and scale of declaratory politics and, in its confrontation with both major political parties inside and outside of Westminster, it represented an important staging post in the development of modern political institutions. Our League expanded the horizons of political action for women, working people, rural communities and whole regions where the politics of deference to the old aristocratic order had hitherto held sway.

When Andrew Carnegie, the American multi-millionaire industrialist whose philanthropy on both sides of the Atlantic earned him international renown, sat down to write his autobiography, he traced the origin of his personal ethos to his childhood in the Scottish town of Dunfermline, 'perhaps the most radical town in the kingdom'. Born in 1835 'to poor but honest parents', Carnegie came from radical stock. His grandfather, reputedly a friend of Cobbett, wrote for Cobbett's famous *Register* and produced his own radical newspaper that expressed similar views to those of England's greatest journalist. Carnegie's father and uncle too were 'good radicals', the latter being imprisoned in 1842 for addressing a prohibited meeting. A boy of seven at the time, Carnegie recalls being 'deeply impressed with the great danger overhanging us because a lawless flag was secreted in the garret'. The cause which brought the Carnegie family into conflict with the law was repeal; the flag, painted by his father to be carried at the proscribed meeting, denounced the Corn Laws. Carnegie goes on to describe the 'intense political excitement' in Dunfermline during the 1840s; the earnest discussions among working men where the 'names of

Hume, Cobden and Bright were upon everyone's tongue'; and the large public meetings where, hoisted onto someone's shoulder, he heard speakers including his father and John Bright, the latter in a Lancashire accent harsh to his Scottish ears. 'It is not to be wondered at,' Carnegie concludes, 'that, nursed amid such surroundings, I developed into a violent young Republican whose motto was "death to privilege".'²⁴ This is a legacy of the League that has been lost to history. With all its blemishes, it deserves to be rescued with as much care and passion as E.P. Thompson displayed when he set out to rescue the 'poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" hand-loom weaver, the "utopian" artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity'.²⁵ We hope to have placed signposts for future researchers when, following the example of Chartist historians, they set out to investigate the regional variants of the campaign for the People's Bread, thereby restoring the League to its rightful place in the history of popular politics in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Notes

1. J.G. Kohl, *England and Wales* (1844, repr. London, 1968), pp. 145–6.
2. H.B. Stanton, *Sketches of Reforms and Reformers of Great Britain and Ireland* (1849, repr. Miami, 1969), p. 279.
3. See E.F. Biagini, 'Popular Liberals, Gladstonian finance and the debate on taxation, 1860–1874', in E.F. Biagini and A.J. Reid (eds), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 134–62; A. Howe, 'Towards the "Hungry Forties": Free Trade in Britain, c.1880–1906', in E.F. Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865–1931* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 193–218; F. Trentmann, 'The Strange Death of Free Trade: The Erosion of "Liberal Consensus" in Great Britain', in Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community*, pp. 219–50; A. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846–1946* (Oxford, 1997).
4. *Anti-Bread-Tax Circular*, 4 April 1843.
5. *Hansard* (Commons), 23 February 1846, col. 173.
6. *Cork Examiner*, 23 November 1849; *Nation*, 8 September 1849; 12 January 1850; 27 April 1850.
7. M. McKenna, *The Captive Republic: A History of Republicanism in Australia 1788–1996* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 50. For Lang's trip to Manchester see *Manchester Examiner*, 4 September 1847; 28 September 1847. Paul Pickering has work in progress on this episode.
8. *Oeuvres Complètes de Frédéric Bastiat* (Paris, 1855), vol. 1, p. 120; J.J. Baughman, 'The Political Campaign In France, 1847–1848', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1953, pp. 62, 81, 214. Alex Tyrrell is researching the French connections of the League.
9. See G.M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright* (London, 1925), p. 91n.
10. *Manchester Examiner*, 10 January 1846.
11. N. McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics 1846–1857', in R. Robson (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), p. 87.

12. R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck with Chapters of Autobiography* (London, 1897), p. 167.
13. E.W. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden of Manchester* (London, 1891), p. 104.
14. *Manchester Times*, 6 December 1845; 13 December 1845.
15. See J. Acland, *Parliamentary Incongruities and Electoral Anomalies as Affecting the Representation of the People in the House of Commons* (London, 1855); *idem.*, *Case in Support of the Claim of the Messengers in Bankruptcy for Compensation under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Bill, now before the House of Commons* (London, 1860); *idem.*, *The Imperial Poll Book of All Elections from the Passing of the Reform Act in 1832 to the end of 1864; to which is prefixed an argument upon Representation as it is and as it should be* (Brighton, n.d. [1864]); N. Longmate, *The Breadstealers: The Fight Against the Corn Laws, 1838–1846* (London, 1984), p. 237; H.J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone* (Sussex, 1978), pp. 237–8; J. Breuilly, C. Niedhart and A. Taylor (eds), *The Era of the Reform League: English Labour and Radical Politics 1857–1872* (Mannheim, 1995), p. 332. We are grateful to Dr Owen Ashton for bringing this reference to our attention.
16. See *Manchester Examiner*, 27 June 1846; 18 March 1848; *Northern Star*, 25 March 1848; 19 August 1848; *Manchester Guardian*, 26 August 1848; *Freeholder and Commercial Advertiser*, 19 April 1852; G.P. Connolly, 'Little Brother Be At Peace: The Priest As Holy Man in the Nineteenth-Century Ghetto', in W.J. Shiels (ed.), *The Church and Healing* (Oxford, 1982), p. 205n.
17. See *Manchester Examiner*, 1 August 1846; anon., *In Memoriam: Timothy Falvey* (Southampton, 1889), pp. 3–8. Falvey's memoirs 'Politics in the Past' were serialized in the *Hampshire Independent* beginning in 1887 but, unfortunately, the section covering the League was not published before his death.
18. *Northern Star*, 10 January 1852; S. Smith, *Whether to Go and Whither? Being a Practical View of the Whole Southern Field of Settlement, New South Wales, Port Phillip, South Australia, Western Australia, New Zealand, &c for Intending Emigrants* (London, 1852); MS. *Journal of Sidney Smith, Freetrader and Liberal Politician with Related Documents 1792–1882*, 31 March 1881, National Archives of Scotland, RH4/156.
19. Watkin, *Alderman Cobden*, p. 105.
20. See *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1845. According to C.R. Fay, *The Corn Laws and Social England* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 102; however, MPs with railway interests voted against repeal in 1846.
21. *Manchester Times*, 21 February 1846.
22. A. Taylor, 'Commemoration, Memorialisation and Political Memory in Post-Chartist Radicalism: The 1885 Halifax Chartist Reunion in Context', in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts (eds), *The Chartist Legacy* (Rendelsham, 1999), p. 263.
23. Thus for Dorothy Thompson, the 'story of the relationship between the League and the Chartists has been told often and well'. See D. Thompson, 'Who Were "The People" in 1842?', in M. Chase and I. Dyck (eds), *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 123.
24. *The Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie* (1920, repr. Boston, 1948), pp. 4–11.
25. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 12.

APPENDIX 1

ANTI-CORN LAW ASSOCIATIONS, 1838-44

England

Locality	County	Date of formation (or first mention in League press)
Altrincham	Cheshire	May 1840
Ashton and Dukinfield	Lancashire	April 1839
Barnard Castle	Durham	March 1840
Barnoldswick	Yorkshire	January 1842
Barnsley	Yorkshire	February 1840
Barnstaple	Dorset	February 1842
Batley	Yorkshire	February 1842
Beaminster	Dorset	February 1842
Belper	Derbyshire	February 1840
Bideford	Devonshire	March 1840
Bilston	Staffordshire	February 1842
Birmingham	Warwickshire	September 1839
Blackburn	Lancashire	February 1842
Bolton	Lancashire	February 1840
Boston	Lincolnshire	May 1839
Bradford	Yorkshire	May 1839
Bridgnorth	Shropshire	February 1840
Bridport	Dorset	February 1840
Brighouse	Yorkshire	February 1842
Brighton	Sussex	January 1844
Bristol	Gloucestershire	February 1843
Broseley	Shropshire	June 1842
Burnley	Lancashire	January 1840
Bury	Lancashire	February 1842
Cambridge	Cambridgeshire	November 1843
Carlisle	Cumberland	February 1840
Chatham	Kent	June 1841
Cheadle	Cheshire	March 1840
Cheltenham	Gloucestershire	May 1839
Chorley	Lancashire	February 1840
Clitheroe	Lancashire	May 1841

Locality	County	Date of formation (or first mention in League press)
Coalbrookdale	Shropshire	March 1842
Cockermouth	Cumberland	March 1840
Colchester	Essex	February 1842
Colne	Lancashire	February 1840
Congleton	Cheshire	June 1839
Coventry	Warwickshire	May 1840
Croydon	London	June 1842
Darlaston	Staffordshire	December 1839
Darlington	Durham	March 1840
Daventry	Northamptonshire	October 1841
Derby	Derbyshire	October 1842
Devizes	Wiltshire	February 1842
Doncaster	Yorkshire	April 1839
Ebley	Gloucestershire	February 1842
Exeter	Devonshire	February 1842
Fairford	Essex	February 1842
Finsbury	London	May 1843
Gainsborough	Lincolnshire	April 1839
Gateshead	Durham	February 1840
Gatley	Cheshire	March 1840
Gillow Lane, Bolton	Lancashire	December 1841
Gloucester	Gloucestershire	January 1842
Great Torrington	Devonshire	February 1840
Great Yarmouth	Norfolk	November 1843
Grimstead East	Sussex	February 1842
Halifax	Yorkshire	April 1843
Hampstead	London	October 1843
Hanley	Staffordshire	December 1839
Harborough	Leicestershire	March 1840
Haslingden	Lancashire	November 1839
Hebden Bridge	Yorkshire	January 1840
Holmfirth	Yorkshire	February 1841
Horsham	Sussex	July 1845
Huddersfield	Yorkshire	March 1841
Hull	Yorkshire	June 1839
Idle	Nottinghamshire	December 1839
Keighley	Yorkshire	December 1844
Kendal	Westmorland	December 1839
Kidderminster	Worcestershire	October 1840
Kingsland	London	October 1841
Kirkburton	Yorkshire	June 1843
Knutsford	Cheshire	February 1842
Lancaster	Lancashire	October 1839
Leeds	Yorkshire	April 1839
Leek	Staffordshire	March 1841
Leicester	Leicestershire	February 1840

Locality	County	Date of formation (or first mention in League press)
Leigh	Lancashire	May 1841
Little Horton	Yorkshire	December 1839
Liverpool	Lancashire	July 1839
Lockwood	Yorkshire	December 1841
London (metropolitan sub-branches)		
All Saints and Trinity		November 1842
Barking		November 1842
Bermondsey		February 1840
Bethnal Green		February 1842
Bishopsgate		December 1841
Bonningham		February 1842
Bow		February 1842
Brentford		February 1842
Bromley		November 1842
Camberwell and Dulwich		February 1842
Camden-town		November 1842
Carshalton		November 1842
Chelsea		February 1842
Christchurch		October 1842
Clerkenwell		February 1842
Crayford		June 1842
Dartford		September 1841
Deptford		March 1841
Edmonton		February 1842
Greenwich		December 1840
Hackney		February 1842
Haddington		November 1842
Hammersmith		February 1842
Holloway		November 1842
Hounslow		June 1840
Hoxton		November 1842
Islington		February 1842
Kensington		June 1841
Kentish-town		February 1842
Lambeth		December 1841
Marylebone		December 1841
Merton		November 1842
Newington		November 1842
Poplar		February 1841
Portland-town (St John's Wood)		November 1842
Richmond		November 1842
Rotherhithe		February 1842
Shoreditch		December 1841
Somer's-town		November 1842

Locality	County	Date of formation (or first mention in League press)
St Ann's		February 1842
St George's (Shadwell)		October 1840
St Luke's		June 1842
St Margaret's		November 1842
St Martin's		February 1842
St Martin's-in-the-Fields		June 1842
St Mary's Rectory		November 1842
St Pancras		February 1842
St Saviour's		November 1842
Stepney		November 1842
Stratford		June 1842
Surrey		November 1842
Tooting		February 1842
Tottenham		December 1841
Uxbridge		November 1842
Vauxhall		November 1842
Wallington		November 1842
Wandsworth		November 1842
Wapping		February 1842
Westminster		November 1842
Whitechapel		December 1841
Woolwich		February 1842
Longton	Staffordshire	December 1839
Longtown	Cumberland	December 1840
Loughborough	Leicestershire	January 1841
Luton	Bedfordshire	December 1843
Macclesfield	Cheshire	June 1839
Maidstone	London	December 1841
Malmesbury	Wiltshire	October 1844
Manchester	Lancashire	October 1838
Mansfield	Nottinghamshire	February 1840
Middlesboro' on Tees	Yorkshire	May 1845
Middleton	Lancashire	May 1843
Mitcham	Surrey	March 1840
Nantwich	Cheshire	March 1840
Newcastle upon Tyne	Northumberland	February 1842
Newton	Cheshire	July 1840
Newton and Failsworth	Lancashire	December 1839
Northampton	Northamptonshire	December 1843
Northwich	Cheshire	February 1840
Norwich	Norfolk	April 1843
Nottingham	Nottinghamshire	March 1840
Oldbury	Shropshire	February 1842
Oldham	Lancashire	March 1840
Otley	Yorkshire	May 1841
Oxford	Oxfordshire	February 1842

Locality	County	Date of formation (or first mention in League press)
Paddington	London	December 1841
Plaistow	Essex	February 1842
Plymouth	Devonshire	April 1843
Portsdown	Southamptonshire	April 1845
Prescot	Lancashire	January 1841
Preston	Lancashire	February 1842
Queenshead	Yorkshire	February 1840
Rastrick	Yorkshire	March 1840
Rochdale	Lancashire	February 1840
Ross	Hereford	February 1842
Ryecroft	Yorkshire	March 1843
Sabden	Lancashire	November 1842
Salford	Lancashire	December 1838
Sandbach	Cheshire	March 1840
Settle	Yorkshire	December 1839
Sheffield	Yorkshire	March 1840
Skipton	Yorkshire	January 1843
Soho	London	June 1842
South Shields	Durham	January 1843
Southampton	Hampshire	February 1842
Southwark	London	January 1840
St Giles	Berkshire	February 1842
Stafford	Staffordshire	October 1839
Stalybridge	Cheshire	January 1841
Stamford	Lincolnshire	May 1839
Stratford	Essex	February 1842
Stockport	Cheshire	December 1838
Stockton-on-Tees	Durham	July 1839
Stoke Newington	London	November 1841
Stoke-on-Trent	Staffordshire	February 1840
Stone	Staffordshire	February 1840
Stourbridge	Worcestershire	March 1840
Stroud	Gloucestershire	December 1841
Stroudwater	Gloucestershire	March 1840
Sunderland	Durham	February 1840
Sutton-in-Ashfield	Nottinghamshire	February 1840
Taunton	Somerset	December 1843
Tiverton	Devonshire	?
Todmorden	Lancashire	February 1842
Totnes	Devonshire	May 1843
Truro	Cornwall	June 1839
Tynemouth	Northumberlandshire	May 1844
Upper Hallam	Yorkshire	August 1841
Uxbridge	Buckinghamshire	February 1842
Wakefield	Yorkshire	April 1839
Walthamstow	Essex	September 1841

Locality	County	Date of formation (or first mention in League press)
Wandsworth	London	February 1843
Warrington	Lancashire	January 1841
Wellingborough	Northamptonshire	July 1844
West Bromwich	Staffordshire	April 1841
West Ham	Essex	December 1840
Westbury	Wiltshire	February 1842
Wheathampstead	Hertfordshire	May 1844
Wigan	Lancashire	December 1841
Winchester	Hampshire	April 1844
Wolverhampton	Staffordshire	January 1841
Yeadon	Yorkshire	January 1840
Yeovil	Somerset	March 1843
York	Yorkshire	September 1840

Scotland

Aberdeen	Aberdeen	August 1839
Arbroath	Angus	December 1839
Auchtermuchty	Fife	December 1841
Bridgeton	Lanark	February 1838
Denholm	Roxburgh	February 1840
Dumbarton and Vale of Leven	Dunbarton	February 1842
Dundee	Angus	July 1839
Dunfermline	Fife	March 1840
Edinburgh	Midlothian	August 1839
Falkirk	Stirling	April 1842
Fife	Fife	January 1842
Forfar	Angus	December 1840
Galashiels	Selkirk	November 1845
Glasgow	Lanark	January 1839
Hamilton	Lanark	Jan 1838
Hawick	Roxburgh	January 1840
Inverness	Invernesshire	October 1841
Jedburgh	Roxburgh	February 1840
Kelso	Roxburgh	January 1842
Kilmarnock	Ayrshire	February 1842
Kirkcaldy	Fife	June 1837
Kirriemuir	Angus	February 1840
Langholm	Dumfries	May 1840
Leith	Midlothian	February 1839
Linlithgow	West Lothian	February 1842
Maybole	Ayr	March 1843
Montrose	Angus	January 1840
Newton Stewart	Wigtown	October 1839
Paisley	Renfrew	February 1840

Locality	County	Date of formation (or first mention in League press)
Perth	Perthshire	December 1839
Peterhead, Aberdeen	Aberdeen	August 1839
Slateford (near Edinburgh)	Midlothian	February 1840
Stirling	Stirling	February 1840
Stranraer and Rhins of Galloway	Wigtown	October 1839
Thornhill	Perthshire	October 1839

Wales

Bagillt	Flintshire	June 1840
Caernarfon	Caernarfon	April 1841
Caerwys	Flintshire	June 1840
Carmarthen	Carmarthen	May 1841
Carmel	Flintshire	June 1840
Flint	Flintshire	June 1840
Greenfield	Flintshire	June 1840
Halkyn	Flintshire	June 1840
Holywell	Flintshire	June 1840
Llangollen	Denbighshire	May 1840
Merthyr Tydfil	Glamorganshire	December 1842
Mostyn	Flintshire	June 1840
Penypylle	?	June 1840
Swansea	Glamorganshire	December 1842
Whitford	Flintshire	June 1840

Ireland

Armagh	Armagh	July 1840
Belfast	Antrim	June 1840
Carrickfergus	Antrim	June 1840
Cork	Cork	September 1840
Drogheda	Louth	April 1840
Londonderry	Londonderry	July 1840
Sligo	Sligo	July 1840

Other

Isle of Man		September 1841
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Operative Anti-Corn Law Associations

Bacup	Lancashire	December 1842
Bolton	Lancashire	February 1840
Bridgnorth	Shropshire	October 1840

Locality	County	Date of formation (or first mention in League press)
Carlisle	Cumberlandshire	February 1840
Doncaster	Yorkshire	December 1839
Dundee	Angus	September 1839
Glasgow	Lanark	April 1843
Halifax	Yorkshire	October 1841
Hanley	Staffordshire	February 1840
Huddersfield	Yorkshire	January 1841
Kendal	Westmorland	December 1839
Lancaster	Lancashire	February 1840
Leeds	Yorkshire	February 1842
Leicester	Leicestershire	March 1840
Liverpool	Lancashire	January 1840
Manchester	Lancashire	April 1839
New Islington, Manchester	Lancashire	July 1839
Preston	Lancashire	January 1843
Salford	Lancashire	July 1841
Sheffield	Yorkshire	November 1839
Stalybridge	Cheshire	February 1840
Uxbridge	London	March 1840
Wigan	Lancashire	June 1841

Note: This Appendix was compiled from extensive sources. These are detailed in the notes of the relevant chapters.

Locality	Jan 1839 M	Feb 1839 L	Mar 1839 M	Jan 1840 M	Mar 1840 L	Apr 1841 M	Feb 1842 L	Jan 1843 M
Burnley			X	X	X		X	X
Burton-on-Trent								X
Bury							X	X
Calne							X	
Cambridge				X				
Camden Town							X	
Carlisle				X	X		X	X
Castle Douglas				X				
Cheadle								X
Cheltenham				X	X		X	
Chesham							X	
Chipping								X
Chorley					X		X	X
Cleckheaton				X				X
Coalbrookdale								X
Colchester							X	
Colne				X			X	X
Congleton				X			X	X
Coventry							X	
Cupar							X	
Dalton								X
Darlaston				X	X			X
Darlington								X
Darwen							X	
Denton and Haughton							X	
Derby			X	X	X			
Devizes							X	
Dobcross				X				
Doncaster				X	X		X	X
Driffield							X	
Droylsden					X			
Dublin					X			X
Dudley				X				
Dumbarton							X	
Dundee			X				X	X
Dunfirmline				X			X	
Ebley							X	
Edinburgh	X		X	X	X		X	X
Exeter							X	
Fairford							X	
Fenton				X				
Finsbury					X			
Forfar							X	
Frome							X	
Glasgow	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Glossop				X				X

Locality	Jan 1839 M	Feb 1839 L	Mar 1839 M	Jan 1840 M	Mar 1840 L	Apr 1841 M	Feb 1842 L	Jan 1843 M
Macclesfield							X	X
Maidstone					X			
Malton								X
Manchester	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mansfield					X		X	X
Marylebone				X				
Maybole							X	
Middleton								X
Mitcham							X	
Morton (near Bingley)								X
Mottram				X			X	
Nantwich								X
New Basford							X	
Newcastle upon Tyne				X			X	X
North Brierley				X				
North Essex				X				
Northwich							X	X
Nottingham	X		X	X	X		X	X
Oldbury							X	
Oldham				X	X	X	X	X
Otley								X
Oxford							X	X
Padiham								X
Paisley				X	X		X	
Pontypool							X	
Poole							X	
Prescot							X	X
Preston	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Queenshead							X	X
Rastrick				X	X		X	X
Reading							X	
Rochdale				X	X	X	X	X
Ross							X	
Saddleworth				X	X		X	
Settle				X				X
Sheffield	X			X	X		X	X
Shelbourne							X	
Shelf				X				
Smethwick							X	
Southwark				X	X			X
Sowerby Bridge			X	X	X	X		
St Pancras			X	X				
Stalybridge				X			X	X
Stirling				X	X			
Stockport	X	X		X		X		X
Stourbridge					X		X	

Locality	Jan 1839 M	Feb 1839 L	Mar 1839 M	Jan 1840 M	Mar 1840 L	Apr 1841 M	Feb 1842 L	Jan 1843 M
Stranraer				X				
Stroud							X	X
Sunderland					X			X
Taunton				X			X	
Tintwistle								X
Todminster							X	
Todmorden							X	X
Tower Hamlets				X	X			
Ukeston							X	
Uxbridge					X		X	
Varley								X
Walmsley							X	
Walsall								X
Walthamstow							X	
Warrington	X		X	X		X	X	X
Watford							X	
West Bromwich							X	X
West Ham							X	
Westbury							X	
Wigan	X		X	X			X	X
Wigton							X	
Wilsden				X	X			
Wolverhampton	X			X	X		X	X
Woodbridge							X	
Worcester							X	

Note: This Appendix was compiled from extensive sources. These are detailed in the notes of the relevant chapters.

APPENDIX 3

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO VOTED
FOR TOTAL AND IMMEDIATE REPEAL,
1842-46

Key:

- ✓ - Voted in favour
- X - Voted against
- - Not present for the division
- P - Paired in favour
- - Not an MP at that time
- (B) - Borough
- (C) - County

Name	Constituency	C'try	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846
Aglionby, Henry	Cockermouth, Cumbria	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Ainsworth, Peter	Bolton, Lancs.	(C) Eng	✓	-	X	-	-
Aldam, William	Leeds, Yorks.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Armstrong, Andrew	Kings	(C) Ire	-	-	✓	-	-
Baine, Walter	Greenock, Renfrew	(B) Sco	■	■	■	✓	X
Bannerman, Alex	Aberdeen	(B) Sco	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Barclay, David	Sunderland, Durham	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	✓	-
Barnard, Edward	Greenwich, Kent	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	-
Bellew, Richard	Louth	(C) Ire	-	-	P	P	-
Berkeley, Craven	Cheltenham, Gos.	(B) Eng	-	✓	-	P	✓
Berkeley, George C	Gloucestershire West	(C) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Berkeley, H.F.	Bristol, Gos.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blake, Mark	Mayo	(C) Ire	✓	-	✓	-	■
Blake, Valentine	Galway	(B) Ire	✓	-	-	-	-
Blewitt, Reginald	Monmouth	(B) Wal	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Bouverie, Edward	Kilmarnock	(B) Sco	■	■	✓	✓	✓
Bowring, John	Bolton, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bridgeman, Hewitt	Ennis, Clare	(B) Ire	✓	-	-	-	-
Bright, John	Durham	(B) Eng	■	■	✓	✓	✓
Brotherton, Joseph	Salford, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Browne, Robert	Mayo	(C) Ire	-	-	✓	-	-
Browne, William	Kerry	(C) Ire	X	✓	-	-	X
Bryan, George	Kilkenny	(C) Ire	✓	-	■	■	■
Buller, Charles	Liskeard, Cornwall	(B) Eng	X	✓	-	-	X

Name	Constituency	C'try	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846
Buller, Edward	Stafford, Staffs.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	-
Busfield, William	Bradford, Yorks.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Butler, Peirce	Kilkenny	(C) Ire	P	-	-	-	X
Byng, George	Chatham, Kent	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Cavendish, Charles	Youghal, Cork	(B) Ire	-	X	-	✓	-
Cavendish, George	Derbyshire Northd.	(C) Eng	-	X	-	✓	X
Chapman, Benjamin	Westmeath	(C) Ire	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Childers, John	Malton, Yorks.	(B) Eng	X	X	✓	P	X
Christie, William	Weymouth, Dorset	(B) Eng	-	✓	P	✓	✓
Clay, William	Tower Hamlets, Middx.	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	P	-
Clements, Lord	Leitrim	(C) Ire	P	-	-	X	-
Clive, Edward	Hereford	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	-	-
Cobden, Richard	Stockport, Cheshire	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colborne, W.N.	Richmond, Yorks.	(B) Eng	X	X	-	✓	✓
Colbrooke, Thomas	Taunton, Som.	(B) Eng	X	-	✓	✓	X
Collett, John	Athlone	(B) Ire	■	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collins, William	Warwick	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Corbally, Matthew	Meath	(C) Ire	-	✓	-	-	-
Cowper, William	Hertford	(B) Eng	X	-	-	✓	X
Craig, William	Edinburgh, Midlothian	(B) Sco	-	✓	✓	✓	X
Crawford, William S.	Rochdale, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Currie, Raikes	Northampton	(B) Eng	✓	✓	P	P	✓
D'Eyncourt, Charles	Lambeth, Surrey	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	X
Dalmeny, Lord	Stirling	(B) Sco	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dalrymple, John	Wigtonshire	(C) Sco	-	X	-	-	✓
Dashwood, George	Wycombe, Bucks.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	-	-
Dennistoun, John	Glasgow, Lanark	(B) Sco	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Duff, James	Banffshire	(C) Sco	X	X	X	✓	-
Duncan, George	Dundee, Forfar	(B) Sco	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Duncan, Viscount	Bath, Som.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Duncannon, Visent	Derby	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	-
Duncombe, Thomas	Finsbury, Middx.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Dundas, James	Greenwich, Kent	(B) Eng	✓	✓	-	-	✓
Dundas, David	Sutherlandshire	(C) Sco	-	-	✓	✓	-
Dundas, Frederick	Orkney and Shetland	(C) Sco	-	-	✓	✓	-
Dundas, John	Richmond, Yorks.	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	-	-
Easthope, John	Leicester	(B) Eng	✓	-	✓	✓	-
Ebrington, Viscount	Plymouth, Devon	(B) Eng	X	-	-	✓	✓
Ellice, Edward	Coventry, War.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	X
Ellice, Edward Jnr	St Andrews	(B) Sco	P	✓	-	✓	✓
Ellis, Wynn	Leicester	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Elphinstone, Howard	Lewes, Sussex	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Escott, Bickham	Winchester, Hants	(B) Eng	X	X	X	X	✓
Etwall, Ralph	Andover, Hants	(B) Eng	-	-	-	✓	✓
Evans, De Lacy	Westminster, Middx.	(B) Eng	■	■	■	■	✓
Ewart, William	Dumfries	(B) Sco	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ferguson, Robert	Kirkcaldy	(B) Sco	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fielden, John	Oldham, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Name	Constituency	C'try	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846
Fitzroy, Charles	Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fitzwilliam, George	Peterborough, Northants	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	-	-
Fleetwood, Hesketh	Portsmouth, Hants	(B) Eng	P	✓	-	-	X
Forster, Matthew	Berwick-upon-Tweed	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	X
Fox, Charles	Tower Hamlets, Middx.	(B) Eng	-	✓	-	P	✓
Gibson, Thomas	Manchester, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gisborne, Thomas	Nottingham	(B) Eng	■	✓	✓	-	-
Gore, Robert	New Ross	(B) Ire	-	-	-	✓	X
Granger, Thomas	Durham	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	✓	-
Grey, George	Devonport, Devon	(B) Eng	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Grosvenor, Robert	Chester, Cheshire	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	P	-
Guest, Josiah	Merthyr-Tydfil, Glam.	(B) Wal	-	-	✓	✓	-
Hall, Benjamin	Marylebone, Middx.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Harford, Summers	Lewes, Sussex	(B) Eng	✓	■	■	■	■
Harris, John	Newcastle-u-Lyme, Staffs.	(B) Eng	✓	■	■	■	■
Hastie, Archibald	Paisley, Renfrew	(B) Sco	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawes, Benjamin	Lambeth, Surrey	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Hay, Andrew	Elgin	(B) Sco	✓	✓	-	-	-
Hayter, William	Wells, Som.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	-
Heathcoat, John	Tiverton, Devon	(B) Eng	P	-	-	-	-
Heron, Robert	Peterborough, Northants	(B) Eng	✓	✓	-	-	-
Hindley, Charles	Ashton-u-Lyne, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Holland, Robert	Hastings, Sussex	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Horsman, Edward	Cockermouth, Cumbria	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	P	X
Howard, Charles	Cumberland East	(C) Eng	X	-	-	✓	X
Howard, Edward	Morpeth, Northumberland	(B) Eng	X	-	-	✓	X
Howard, James	Malmesbury, Wilts.	(B) Eng	-	-	-	✓	-
Howick, Viscount	Sunderland, Durham	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	■
Hume, Joseph	Montrose	(B) Sco	■	✓	-	✓	X
Humphrey, John	Southwark, Surrey	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	P	-
Hutt, William	Gateshead, Durham	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	✓	-
Jervis, John	Chester, Cheshire	(B) Eng	-	✓	P	P	-
Johnson, W.A.	Oldham, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Johnstone, Alex	Kilmarnock	(B) Sco	✓	✓	■	■	■
Langston, James	Oxford City	(B) Eng	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
Langton, William	Somerset East	(C) Eng	✓	✓	P	-	-
Larpent, George	Nottingham	(B) Eng	✓	■	■	■	■
Lascelles, William	Wakefield, Yorks.	(B) Eng	-	-	-	✓	-
Layard, B. Villiers	Carlow	(B) Ire	-	✓	✓	-	✓
Leader, John	Westminster, Middx.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	P	-
Leveson, Viscount	Lichfield, Staffs.	(B) Eng	P	-	✓	-	■
Listowel, Earl	St Albans, Herts	(B) Eng	P	-	-	✓	-
Loch, James	Wick	(B) Sco	-	-	-	P	X

Name	Constituency	C'try	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	
Macaulay, Thomas	Edinburgh City	(B) Sco	-	✓	✓	✓	X	
Majorbanks, Stewart	Hythe, Kent	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	
Marshall, William	Carlisle, Cumbria	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	
Marsland, Henry	Stockport, Cheshire	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	-	-	
Martin, John	Tewkesbury, Glos.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	
Matheson, James	Ashburton, Devon	(B) Eng	■	-	P	✓	-	
Maule, Fox	Perth City	(B) Sco	-	✓	-	✓	X	
McCarthy, Alex	Cork City	(B) Ire	■				✓	
McTaggart, John	Wigton, Wigtonshire	(B) Sco	-	X	-	-	✓	
Mitcalfe, Henry	Tynemouth, Northumb.	(B) Eng	X	-	-	✓	✓	
Mitchell, Thomas	Bridport, Dorset	(B) Eng	X	-	✓	✓	✓	
Moffatt, George	Dartmouth, Devon	(B) Eng	■				✓	
Morison, William	Clackmannan and Kinross	(B) Sco	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	
Morpeth, Viscount	Yorkshire, West Riding	(C) Eng	■				✓	
Morris, David	Carmarthen	(B) Wal	-	-	-	-	✓	
Morrison, James	Inverness	(B) Sco	-	-	-	P	-	
Muntz, George	Birmingham, Warwick	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	
Murphy, Francis	Cork City	(B) Ire	✓	-	✓	P	■	
Murray, Alexander	Kirkcudbrightshire	(C) Sco	-	-	-	✓	✓	
Napier, Charles	Marylebone, Middx.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	
O'Brien, John	Limerick City	(B) Ire	-	✓	-	-	-	
O'Connell, Daniel	Cork	(C) Ire	✓	-	-	-	✓	
O'Connell, John	Kilkenny City	(B) Ire	-	-	-	-	✓	
O'Connell, Maurice	Tralee, Kerry	(B) Ire	P	-	✓	-	-	
O'Connell, Morgan J	Kerry	(C) Ire	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
O'Connor, Denis	Roscommon	(C) Ire	X	X	-	P	-	
O'Ferrall, Richard	Kildare	(C) Ire	P	-	-	-	-	
Ord, William	Newcastle, Northumb.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	
Osborne (Bernal), R	Wycombe, Bucks.	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	✓	X	
Oswald, James	Glasgow, Lanark	(B) Sco	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	
Paget, Alfred	Lichfield, Staffs.	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	✓	-	
Parker, John	Sheffield, Yorks.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pattison, James	London	(B) Eng	■	-	✓	✓	✓	
Pechell, George	Brighton, Sussex	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	P	✓	
Phillips, George	Poole, Dorset	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	
Phillips, Mark	Manchester, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Phillpotts, John	Gloucester City	(B) Eng	✓	✓	-	P	-	
Pigot, David	Clonmel	(C) Ire	P	-	-	-	-	
Plumridge, James	Penryn & Falmouth, Corn.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ponsonby, Charles	Poole, Dorset	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	-	
Protheroe, Edward	Halifax, Yorks.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Pulsford, Robert	Hereford	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	P	-	
Ramsbottom, John	Windsor, Berks.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	-	■	
Rawdon, John	Armagh City	(B) Ire	-	-	✓	-	-	
Ricardo, John	Stoke, Staffs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	
Rice, Edward	Dover, Kent	(B) Eng	X	✓	-	✓	-	

Name	Constituency	C'try	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846
Roche, David	Limerick City	(B) Ire	-	✓			
Roebuck, John	Bath, Som.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	-	-
Ross, David	Belfast, Antrim	(B) Ire	-	✓	✓	P	✓
Rundle, John	Tavistock, Devon	(B) Eng	✓				
Russell, Edward	Tavistock, Devon	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Russell, John	London	(B) Eng	X	X	-	✓	X
Rutherford, Andrew	Leith	(B) Sco	-	-	✓	-	-
Scholefield, Joshua	Birmingham, Warwick	(B) Eng	✓	✓			
Scott, Robert	Walsall, Staffs.	(B) Eng	-	✓	P	✓	-
Scrope, George	Stroud, Gos.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	-
Seale, John	Dartmouth, Devon	(B) Eng	-	✓	-		
Seymour, Lord	Totnes, Devon	(B) Eng	P	X	-	✓	X
Sheil, Richard	Dungarvan	(B) Ire	-	-	P	-	-
Shelburne, Earl	Calne, Wilts.	(B) Eng	P	-	✓	✓	-
Smith, Benjamin	Norwich, Norfolk	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Smith, John A.	Chichester, Sussex	(B) Eng	X	-	✓	P	X
Smith, Robert	Northampton	(B) Eng	-	✓	P	P	-
Sombre, David	Sudbury, Suffolk	(B) Eng	P				
Somers, John	Sligo	(B) Ire	✓	-	-	-	-
Somerville, William	Drogheda	(B) Ire	-	-	-	P	-
Standish, Charles	Wigan, Lancs.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	-	-
Stansfeld, W.R.	Huddersfield, Yorks.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stanton, William	Stroud, Gos.	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	-	X
Staunton, George	Portsmouth, Hants	(B) Eng	X	-	-	-	✓
Stewart, Patrick	Renfrewshire	(C) Sco	✓	✓	P	P	-
Strickland, George	Preston, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Strutt, Edward	Derby	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stuart, P. James	Ayr	(B) Sco	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stuart, William	Waterford	(C) Ire	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Tancred, Henry	Banbury, Oxf/Northants	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thornely, Thomas	Wolverhampton, Staffs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Towneley, John	Beverley, Yorks.	(B) Eng	X	✓	✓	-	-
Trelawny, John	Tavistock, Devon	(B) Eng		✓	✓	✓	✓
Troubridge, Edward	Sandwich, Kent	(B) Eng	-	-	✓	✓	✓
Tufnell, Henry	Devonport, Devon	(B) Eng	-	✓	✓	✓	X
Turner, Edmund	Truro, Cornwall	(B) Eng	X	✓	-	✓	-
Villiers, Charles	Wolverhampton, Staffs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Villiers, Frederick	Sudbury, Suffolk	(B) Eng	✓				
Vivian, John H.	Swansea, Glam.	(B) Wal	P	✓	-	✓	X
Wakley, Thomas	Finsbury, Middx.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Walker, Richard	Bury, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wallace, Robert	Greenock, Renfrew	(B) Sco	✓	P	✓		
Warburton, Henry	Kendal, Westmorland	(B) Eng			✓	✓	✓
Ward, Henry	Sheffield, Yorks.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Watson, William	Kinsale, Cork	(B) Ire	X	-	-	✓	-
Wawn, John	South Shields, Durham	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Westerna, John	Kings Co.	(C) Ire	P	-	-	-	-
White, Henry	Longford	(C) Ire	P				

Name	Constituency	C'try	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846
White, Luke	Longford	(C) Ire	P	-	-	-	-
White, Samuel	Leitrim	(C) Ire	-	-	-	-	✓
Wilde, Thomas	Worcester	(B) Eng	✓	-	-	-	-
Williams, William	Coventry, Warwick	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wilson, Matthew	Clitheroe, Lancs.	(B) Eng	✓	-	-	-	-
Wood, Benjamin	Southwark, Surrey	(B) Eng	✓	✓	-	-	
Wood, Charles	Halifax, Yorks.	(B) Eng	X	-	✓	P	✓
Wood, George	Kendal, Westmorland	(B) Eng	✓	✓			
Wood, Matthew	London	(B) Eng	✓	-			
Wrightson, William	Northallerton, Yorks.	(B) Eng	X	-	✓	✓	X
Yorke, H. Redhead	York City, Yorks.	(B) Eng	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Total (including tellers)			92	127	126	122	80
Pairs			17	-	10	24	-
Total			109	127	136	146	80

Sources: *Hansard*, 1842-6; C.R. Dodd, *Electoral Facts from 1832 to 1853, Impartially Stated: Constituting a Complete Political Gazetteer* (1853, repr. Brighton, 1972); F.H. McGilmour, *The Parliamentary Poll Book of All Elections from the Passing of the Reform Act in 1832 to July 1880* (London, 1880).

APPENDIX 4

MANCHESTER ANTI-CORN LAW ASSOCIATION COUNCIL, 1839-40

Key:

A-Sl	Anti-Slavery movement
ABMon	anti-Bible Monopoly
ACR	anti-Church rates
AFedB	anti-Factory Education Bill
AMay	anti-Maynooth grant
ASCA	Anti-State Church Association
BFBS	Manchester Auxiliary of British and Foreign Bible Society
BIS	British India Society
CCS	Lancashire Commercial Clerks' Society
CSU	Complete Suffrage Union
ECA	Early Closing Association
Ex	Manchester Stock Exchange
FB	Friends of the Ballot
FBS	Freeholders Building and Land Societies
IC	Manchester Incorporation Committee
LIC	Lancashire Independent College
LPhS	Literary and Philosophical Society
LPSA	Lancashire Public Schools Association
LRU	Lancashire Reformers' Union 1859
LUB	League of Universal Brotherhood
M+	Wife involved in 1841 or 1845 Women's committee
MATH	Manchester Athenaeum
MCAss	Manchester Commercial Association
MCC	Manchester Chamber of Commerce
MI	Manchester Mechanics' Institute
MRA	Manchester Reform Association
MSS	Manchester Statistical Society
NEdS	Society for Promoting National Education
P	Peace movement
PFRA	Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association
PhS	Manchester Phrenological Society
RLI	Committee for Religious Liberty in Ireland
RTS	Religious Tract Society
SLRA	South Lancashire Reform Association
YMAMA	Young Men's Anti-Monopoly Association

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
ADSHEAD	Joseph	40	Ross, Hereford	M		Independnt	Merchant; estate agent	Local	BFBS; MSS; Math; Ex. Involved in prison reform; supported voluntary education. Author of several pamphlets on social questions
ARMITAGE	Elkanah	46	Newton Heath, Manchester	M+	9	Independnt	Draper; manufacturer	Local	SLRA; IC; CSU; MCC; Ex; FBS; BIS; Parks; CCS; LPSA; AFedB; PFRA; LRU. Leading liberal in Salford. Humble origins; worked in factory for 20 years before rising to manager. Knighted in 1848. Unsuccessfully contested Salford in 1857.
ASHWORTH	Edmund	40	Birtwistle, Bolton	M+	9	Quaker	Manufacturer	Local	MCC; Ex; MSS; P; PFRA; LRU; A-SI. Active support for education and temperance.
ASHWORTH	Henry	46	Birtwistle, Bolton	M+	11	Quaker	Manufacturer		MCC; EX; MSS; P; PFRA; LRU; A-SI; AFedB. President of Bolton Reform Association; active in range of 'good causes': opposed factory reform; supported New Poor Law. Unsuccessfully contested Salford in 1859.
BALLANTYNE	John		Scotland				Editor		Editor of the <i>Anti-Corn Law Circular</i> . A self-taught man of 'energy and talent'.

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
BANNERMAN	Andrew		Scotland			Dissenter	Calico printer/ banking		MCC. Presiding-officer at Manchester Council election 1838; involved in crash of Bank of Manchester.
BARNES	James R.			M	1		Cotton spinner/ railway shares		Ex. from Bolton. No other information.
BESLEY	William			M+			Agent		AFedB.
BREWER	John						Packer		Ex. No other information.
BROOKS	John	56	Whalley, Lancashire	M+		C of E	Manufacturer/ Merchant	Local	CCS; MRA; MCC; A-SI; P; NEdS; CSU; ASCA; Parks; FBS; MAth; BIS; AFedB; ACR; PFRA. Signed Peterloo protest, 1819; pro-Bright, 1846
BUNTING	Robert						Baker/flour dealer		No other information
BURGESS	Thomas						Calico printer		Active in reform agitation c.1826
CALLENDER	William R.	46	Birmingham	M+	2	Independnt	Manufacturer/ Merchant	Local	SLRA; MSS; IC; MCC; MAth; AFedB; LPSA; Parks; BIS; LIC; MRA. Whig; opposed to Bright, 1846
CARLTON	James					Independnt	Manufacturer/ Merchant		CCS; MCC; FBS; AFedB
CHADWICK	James								No information
CHAPMAN	James						Solicitor		FB; AFedB; MMI (Secretary) appointed Coroner 1839; sec. C.P. Thomson's election committee, 1835; provisional League Exec

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
EVANS	William			M+	1		Drysalter/ Railway shares	Local	FBS; MRA; MCC; Ex; PFRA; LRU. League Exec (attended 444 meetings); active in Union & Emancipation society.
FROST	James G.	died 1840					Corn Merchant	Local	Salford Boroughreeve, 1836; Involved in reform agitation c.1826; member of Ancient Footpaths society
FULLER GARNETT	John H. Jeremiah	47	Wharfeside, Otley	M+	4	C of E	Estate agent Journalist	Local	No other information MCC; Ex. Whig; opposed Bright, 1846; supported J A Turner in 1857.
GOODIER GRAFTON	William Joseph S.			M	1	Independnt	Calico Printer	Local	No information SLRA; CCS; P; MATH; AFedB. Signed Peterloo protest, 1819.
GREG	Robert H.	45	Manchester	M+	6	Unitarian	Manufacturer (cotton)	MP	SLRA; CCS; MCC; Ex; MSS; NEdS; LPhS; Math. Supported Ballot; involved in reform agitation, c.1826.
GROUNDS	Henry H.						Merchant/ Railway shares		MCC.
HADFIELD	George	52	Sheffield	M+		Independnt	Solicitor	MP	ACR; ABMon; P; AFedB; LIC; MATH; ASCA; BIS; RLI; AMay; LRU.
HALL	Edward			M+			Manufacturer	Local	BIS; P. A Salford Constable; Prov. League Exec.

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
HAMPSON	James						Grocer/ wholesale provision dealer	Local	IC; CSU; MRA; PFRA. Mem Manchester Political Union, c.1830; mem of Hunt Monument Comm c.1835, joined Chartists, 1842.
HARBOTTLE	Thomas			M+		Independnt	Cotton spinner/ manufacturer		SLRA; IC; CSU; RLI; AMay; AFedB
HARVEY	William	57	Whittington, Derbyshire	M	5	Bible Christian	Cotton spinner	Local	MCC; Ex; CSU; FBS; AFedB; pro- Bright; ECA; P; LPSA; PFRA; LRU. 1815 'small determined band'; at Peterloo and signed protest; mem. Vegetarian Soc; UK Alliance; Anti- Tobacco Soc.
HENRY	Alexander	62	Ireland, raised USA	M	2	Unitarian	Merchant/ Railway Shares	MP	Ex; MATH; SLRA; IC; PFRA.
HERON	Joseph	31	Manchester	M (at age 71)		Independnt	Solicitor		SLRA; MATH; FB. Manchester's first Town Clerk; involved with General Association of Mill Owners.
HIGSON	John						Solicitor		No other information
HIGSON	Thomas	36	Manchester	M+	4		Solicitor		City Magistrates' Clerk, 1839; Salford Constable.
HOLLAND HOOLE	Robert Holland	44	Manchester	M+	9	Wesleyan	Cotton merchant Cotton spinner	Local	No other information MCC; AFedB; BIS. Involved in General Association of Mill Owners; organized Tory campaign in Salford, 1837.

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
HOPKINS	Thomas	60					Gentleman	Local	MI; MCC; LPhS; Signed Peterloo protest, 1819.
HOWIE	James		Scotland	M+			Calico printer		CSU. Prov League Exec.
HUDSON	Isaac						Ribbon manufacturer/ hosier		No other information
HUDSON	James						Fustian manufacturer		No other information
HYDE	John						Merchant	Local	MCC; Ex. Manchester Boroughreeve, 1836.
KERSHAW	James	45	Manchester	M	3	Independnt	Calico printer/ cotton merchant	Local/ MP	SLRA; MCC; MRA; IC; Parks; P; AFedB; AMay; LIC;; FBS; pro- Bright; BIS; PFRA LRU; Mem Natural History Society; Friends of Free Church of Scotland; John Shaw's club
LABREY	William	47				Quaker	Tea dealer	Local	No other information
LINDON	William								No information
LOCKETT	William	63	Manchester	M+			Silk mercer (retired c.1831)	Local	BIS; P; PFRA
LOWE	Francis						Traveller		No other information
MACFARLANE	John						Merchant		LPhS; AFedB.
MALLON	John			M	2		Linen draper		Mem. of O'Connell's election committee, 1836.
MARSLAND	Henry	47		Single		Unitarian	Cotton spinner/ merchant	Local	LPhS.
MARSLAND	Samuel					Unitarian	Cotton spinner		Ex; LPhS

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
McCONNEL	Henry	39	Manchester			Unitarian	Cotton spinner		SLRA; MCC. Favoured regulation of factories in 1830s
MOLINEAUX	Thomas			M+			Glass manufacturer	Local	No other information
MORTON	F.C.						Banker	Local	No information
MURRAY	James								MSS; MI; SLRA; MCC Signed Peterloo protest, 1819.
NADIN	Joseph Jnr						Solicitor/ theatre owner		Son of Deputy Constable who arrested Hunt at Peterloo
NAYLOR	John								No information
NICHOLSON	Robert	38	Ardwick Manchester			Unitarian	Merchant		FB; MCC; Ex; MATH; LPhS; PFRA At Peterloo; involved in Manchester Domestic Mission.
NICHOLSON	William			M+			Drysalter	Local	Ex; MRA; LPhS
NIELD	William	51	Bowdon, Cheshire	M	1	Quaker/ Baptist	Calico printer	Local	MCC; Ex; MSS; MATH; BFBS; IC; P; NEdS; RTS; LPhS; Parks; MCAss. An educationalist; trustee of Owens College; opposed to Bright, 1846.
NODAL	Aaron			M	1	Quaker	Grocer	Local	No other information
NOVELLI	Philip		Piedmont, Italy				Merchant		MI; MCC.
OGDEN	John						Solicitor		FB Clerk of Peace, Manchester.
ORMEROD	John S.			M	1		Salesman		LCC; Ex; FBS; PFRA. Signed Peterloo protest, 1819; a Pendleton Constable, 1841.

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
PEARSON	Benjamin					Quaker	Blanket manufacturer		MCC; AFedB.
PHILIPS	Robert N.	25	Manchester	M+		Unitarian	Merchant/ Manufacturer	MP	MAth; MSS; LPSA. Trustee of Manchester Grammar School, 1849; supported Bright.
POTTER	Thomas	65	Tadcaster, Yorkshire	M+	2	Unitarian	Manufacturer/ Merchant	Local	MCC; 1832; SLRA; RLI; CCS; NEdS; ACR; AFedB; IC; MRA; Parks; MATH. 1815 'small determined band'; supported Catholic Emancipation; Prov. League Exec
PRENTICE	Archibald	48	Scotland	M+	1	Presbytrn	Printer/ Publisher	Local	RLI; IC; LPhS; FB; MRA; ABMon; AFedB; MCC; ASCA; FBS; LUB; CSU; PFRA. 1815 'small determined bank': signed Peterloo protest; supported Catholic Emancipation; active in reform agitation, 1830-2; Prov. League Exec; pro-Bright, 1846; involved in Salford Temperance League.
RAWSON	Henry	21	Nottingham	M	1	Unitarian	Stockbroker newspaper owner/railways		Ex; YMAMA; CSU; FBS; PFRA LRU. League Exec (258 meetings); pro- Bright, 1846; President of Reform Club, 1874; defeated candidate for Salford, 1868.

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
STANDRING	John	35					Manufacturer/ Chemist	Local	No other information
STOCKS	Samuel					Wesleyan	Manufacturer/ cotton spinner/ bleacher	Local	MCC; FB. Defeated candidate for Macclesfield, 1841.
STUART	Robert	49	Manchester	Single			Cotton spinner/ banking		Ex; SLRA; LPhS; LRU; AFedB. Noted for educational and benevolent activities.
TAYLOR	John E.	49	Ilminster, Somerset	M+		Unitarian	Printer/ Publisher	Local	MATH; LPhS. 1815 'small determined band'; signed Peterloo protest, 1819.
TYSOE	Charles					Bible Christian	Cotton spinner/ manufacturer	Local	Ex; BIS. Involved in campaign against Stamp Tax; mem. Vegetarian Society; pro-Bright, 1846
WADKIN	Henry			M	1	Quaker	Sewing Cotton manufacturer	Local	No other information
WALKER	Charles J.S.	52	Manchester				Gentleman/coal	Local	SLRA; IC; FB; MRA; LPSA; FBS; BIS. Active in reform agitation, 1830-2; Prov. League Exec.
WATKIN	Absalom	53	London	M+	4	Methodist/ C of E	Cotton broker	Local	Ex; SLRA; CCA; MATH; NEdS; LPhS; AFedB; LPSA; BIS. 1815 'small determined band'; pro-Bright in 1846, (not in 1857).
WATKINS	William B.	51		M	2	C of E	Drysalter/ merchant	Local	Ex; MRA; MCC; FBS; ECA; LPSA; LRU. Trustee of Manchester Grammar and Owens College.

<i>Last Name</i>	<i>First Name</i>	<i>Age in 1840</i>	<i>Birthplace</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Elected Office</i>	<i>Organizational profile and brief career summary</i>
WATTS WHITLOW	Samuel John			M M+	1	Independnt	Merchant Laceman/ railway shares		AFedB; no other information No other information
WILKINSON WILLERT	John Paul F.	46	Mecklenburg -Strelitz	M	1		Merchant	Local	No information MRA; MCC; Ex. Director of Manchester Concert Hall 1825-68.
WILLIAMS	Thomas H.			M+			Agent	Local	MRA; MCC; Ex; MSS
WILSON	George	32	Hathersage, Derbbyshire	M+		Sande- manian	Starch manufacturer/ railways	Local	IC; ECA; MRA; P; MCC; LPSA; AFedB; PFRA; LRU; FBS. League President; President Phrenology Society; pro-Bright, 1846.
WOODCOCK	William						Cotton merchant	Local	AFedB; Ex.

N = 105

Note: This Appendix was compiled from extensive sources. These are detailed in the notes of the relevant chapters.

APPENDIX 5

OCCUPATION PROFILE OF THE
MANCHESTER ACLA COUNCIL,
1839-40

<i>Type</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Commercial	Agent	5	
	Baker	1	
	Banker	5	
	Cotton broker/ merchant	5	
	Draper	3	
	Flour dealer	1	
	Grocer	3	
	Hosier	1	
	Importer	1	
	Merchant	20	
	Merchant (corn)	1	
	Packer	1	
	Salesman	1	
	Silk mercer	1	
	Smallware dealer	1	
	Stockbroker	1	
	Tea dealer	2	
	Traveller	1	
Wholesale provision dealer	1		
Total	55	(45.1)	
Manufacturing	Bleacher	1	
	Calico printer	8	
	Coal proprietor	1	
	Cotton spinner	10	
	Drysalter	3	
	Engineer (machine maker)	1	
	Laceman	1	
	Manufacturer (blanket)	1	
	Manufacturer (chemist)	1	
	Manufacturer (cotton)	2	
	Manufacturer (fustian)	1	
Manufacturer (glass)	1		

<i>Type</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
	Manufacturer (ribbon)	1	
	Manufacturer (starch)	1	
	Manufacturer (unspecified)	15	
	Manufacturer (wool)	1	
	Total	49	(40.2)
Professional	Publisher/editor/journalist	5	
	Solicitor	8	
	Stamp Distributor	1	
	Total	14	(11.5)
Other	Gentleman	4	(3.2)
	Total	112	(100)

Note: This Appendix was compiled from extensive sources. These are detailed in the notes of the relevant chapters.

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SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

A full statement of the sources used for this book will be found in the notes at the end of each chapter. The principal sources are listed below, arranged under the following headings:

Manuscript Sources

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Newspapers

Published Works (pre-1900)

Published Works (post-1900)

Theses

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Richard Cobden Papers, British Library

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