

## John Bright—Nineteenth Century Humanitarian

By LEONARD S. KENWORTHY

*[In this issue we continue our policy of printing, from time to time, articles of more than temporary interest. The article is presented both for its own sake and as preparatory material for the World Conference of Friends. The author is now Master of history, Brunswick School, Greenwich, Connecticut. He is a graduate of Westtown School and Earlham College, holding an M. A. degree from Columbia University. He is the author of a recently published biography, "The Tall Sycamore of the Wabash."—Eds.]*

John Bright was born "on the sixteenth day of the eleventh month, one thousand and eight hundred and eleven," at "Greenbank," Rochdale, England. His father, Jacob Bright, was owner and proprietor of "The Hanging Road Mill" and in the community a judge in Israel, acting as consultant in business affairs, adviser in personal matters, and friend to all.

The character of Martha Bright, his mother, is best revealed in the words she penned in her notebook in 1819:—

"I have no wish at all," she wrote, "to see my children great or noted characters, neither have I any right to expect that they will be distinguished for any extraordinary talents. But that they may be found filling up their station, however humble it may be, with uprightness and integrity, is both at this time and often my humble prayer."

His ancestors were industrious middle class workers, quite typical of the stratum of society to which he gave his entire life. Some of them had suffered persecution for their religious beliefs. He was a representative of their finest qualities, their highest ideals. For such a background he was eternally grateful, often expressing his gratitude publicly.

His education was limited to short periods of attendance at the Townhead School in Rochdale,

the Penketh School,<sup>1</sup> Ackworth, Newton-in-Bowland, the Haddon School, and what is now known as Bootham, formerly York School. These schools were good for their day, but according to Bright, "even in Quakerdom there was room for educational amendment."

More valuable in his development than the formal learning was the atmosphere which pervaded the schools he attended. Emphasis was placed on simplicity, straightforwardness, and sincerity of living with high regard for the worth of every individual and the necessity for personal guidance by direct communion with God.

The influence of this environment is inestimable. One biographer has emphasized it by writing:—

"His boyhood had been passed in the atmosphere of the Society of Friends, that intangible but pervading spirit which instills rather than teaches the doctrine of the equality and brotherhood of men and women, of rich and poor; the uselessness of worldly distinctions; and the supreme duty of humane conduct."

This is indeed high testimony to the educational and religious ideals of Friends, but it does not seem like an overstatement in the case of John Bright when one senses throughout his public work

"that intangible but pervading spirit" to which Trevelyan refers.

Barred as a Dissenter from the universities, he never attained the thorough classical education considered essential to a well-bred man in nineteenth century England. His lack of grounding in the classics was compensated by his knowledge of the English language, in which the Bible and Milton's writings were his textbooks.

At fifteen he went to work in his father's mill and began his life-long associations with the working classes of England. His education meanwhile



JOHN BRIGHT



was rounded out by many activities. In the Rochdale Literary and Philosophical Society he gained information, knowledge of parliamentary procedure and experience as a speaker, all of which stood him in good stead later. A Mediterranean trip, including Greece, Egypt, Palestine, Sicily and Italy, and an extended trip to Ireland, gave him the broadening experience of travel before he was twenty-five.

#### FRIENDS AND HUMANITARIAN REFORMS

His family background and education had contributed much as early influences shaping his character and his views on life. Important as these were, the influence of the Society of Friends was even greater. This group provided him with the essential philosophy and outlook on life which pervaded his thinking and dominated his actions in his crusades for humanitarian reforms.

To John Bright, as to those of his faith, man is of infinite value in the universe, transcending in importance reason or any of the faculties of the mind; nature, or any of its forces. It is his endowment with a spark of the divine which makes him of infinite value and places his life, not in the hands of men to arrange in rank, classify in position, differentiate in opportunity, segregate by race, or subjugate in social or economic slavery, but in the hands of God whose guidance he must seek and whose leading he must follow. This is the nearest that Friends approach to a creed; this the nearest that John Bright subscribed to any dogma.

There is unanimity among the biographers of John Bright as to this influence. It could hardly be otherwise. His most famous biographer, George Trevelyan says:—

"He was also a Friend, and the Friends are a spiritual aristocracy. He practiced the silence of his sect, and drew thence the strength of his soul, the purity of his heart, and the quality of his speech."

The best expression of this influence comes from Charles A. Vince in his study of *John Bright*. After discussing the various factors which shaped his life, he concludes:—

"It is still more important that the student of his career should not for a moment forget that he was a member of the Society of Friends. The discipline of that society has been pre-eminently successful in promoting both private virtue and a generous sense of public duty. Bright's religion was the foundation of his public as well as of his private character; and the faith he possessed by inheritance and by education was that of a sect whose presentment of Christianity has sedulously given to the consecration of daily life priority over observance and doctrine."

If Bright profited by his contacts with the Society of Friends, the Society also profited by

his membership in it. He was one of its outstanding exponents.

Rufus Jones has written that:

"No other Friend since William Penn has put the Quaker peace position to such a public test, and no other Friend has succeeded to the extent he did in carrying Quaker ideals into practice as the sound and stable basis of national policy."

Bracketing him with an entirely different exponent of Quakerism, he further says that:

"In John Bright and John G. Whittier the ordinary group-level of life was transcended and Quakerism received an interpretation into life through persons who were undoubtedly men of genius."

One reason for his importance to the Society of Friends lies in the fact that he helped to rescue the group from a period of self-consciousness in which it was introspective to a damaging degree, worrying over its own soul and forgetting too often the souls of others.

The impetus he gave to a group struggling to free itself from doctrinal disputes and renew its testimonies in the field of service to humanity cannot be over-estimated. He opposed the practice of disowning members and encouraged Friends to take an active part in political and social reforms.

Throughout his public career, he was encouraging by precept and example the application of the Quaker testimony for social reforms. Paralleling such activities as the extension of the franchise and the repeal of the Corn Laws were the Quaker movements for the abolition of capital punishment, the passage of laws and the provision of institutions for the more humane care of the insane and criminal, the organization of the Adult Schools, the formation of the Home and Foreign Missionary Associations, and the rise of the First Day School Association.

To Friends then and to Friends today his life embodies two cardinal essentials of Quakerism—individual character and social consciousness.

#### THE ANTI-CORN LAW AGITATION

The first major issue to which John Bright devoted his talents and his energy was the repeal of the iniquitous Corn Laws which had been passed as protective measures against foreign trade during the French Revolution and had never been relaxed.

During the 30's and 40's conditions among the poorer classes had been aggravated so much by these laws that life was intolerable. Home trade was poor; foreign trade stagnant. Grain from abroad had been excluded, thereby limiting an already insufficient supply. The landed oligarchy had profited from this scarcity by an increase in prices at the expense of the middle and lower classes.

In the case of a medium sized family Cobden



calculated that the tax on bread would consume about one-fifth of the family income. To their entreaties for aid these people often received such advice as was offered by a protectionist duke who said that they should take an occasional pinch of curry powder with water to replace food.

Once the populace had purchased what little food money could buy, there was little left with which to buy manufactured goods. Thus the middle classes were materially affected by a loss of sales through the diminished purchasing capacity of the poor.

Conditions in the homes of the laborers were appalling. In one Dorsetshire village an average of 36 persons were living in a house. Blankets and furniture were luxuries. One-tenth of the population were paupers. Two remedies were suggested. One was the capture of the vote by the workers in order to correct the existing evils by framing working laws. The other was the repeal of the harsh Corn Law which intensified such conditions. The advocates of the first method organized the Chartist Movement, which met with little success in this period. The second approach to the solution of the problem was the agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League. Bright became associated with the group in 1838, but his active association with the movement did not come until 1841, when he joined the group at the earnest request of Cobden. Together these two, the David and Jonathan of British politics, toured England, organizing a disorderly mob into a mighty political force.

Peel's Great Budget of 1842 reflected the pressure exerted by this new body, for it included a revision of the sliding scale on grain imports in favor of free trade. It was the beginning, even though a very small one. The Anti-Corn Law League redoubled its efforts, inventing new methods of political education and striking at both major parties. Together the cotton spinner and the calico printer appealed to the manufacturers and home owners in the cities and the small land owners in the country, picturing to them the rotting hovels which the Corn Laws had made possible, bombarding them with facts on the loss of trade, and substantiating their claims with figures which translated "the meaning of duty on grain in terms of £. s. d."

The League was a new political weapon and a most effective one. "It was democracy, no longer as a vague threat for the future, but as an invading reality." In an era when political meetings were rare, it was holding meetings practically every night somewhere in England; in a time when literature was limited, it was distributing as high as nine million tracts in 1843; in a period when political education was almost unknown, it was instructing thousands in the basic concepts of democracy. The movement was commanding the services of 800 organizers, speakers, and officials and expending as high as 90,000 pounds in a single year (1844) and as much as 250,000 pounds in another year (1845).

The main power of the League came through the personalities of its leaders, Bright and Cobden, who were "a matchless combination." Cobden was the strategist, the cautious planner; Bright, the emotionalist, the fervid mover of masses. "While Cobden moved the reason, Bright moved the heart." They were often joined by a third speaker, William Johnson Fox, a Unitarian minister whose oratory was more ornate but more effective with certain groups. The combination of these three was fully as effective as that of the two. "Cobden was argument, Bright was passion, Fox was rhetoric."

In his power as a speaker lay Bright's power as a statesman. Lord Salisbury once declared that "he was the greatest master of English that this generation—I may say of several generations—has seen."

According to Trevelyan, "Not only were Bright's speeches his one form of perfect achievement, but they were his one great political weapon." When consulted about his life, Bright testified to the importance of his speeches by the terse answer, "My life is in my speeches."

It soon became evident that the League needed representatives in the House of Commons and Bright was eventually elected from Durham, cathedral city stronghold of the Tories.

But even the election of Anti-Corn Law advocates was not enough to repeal these monstrous laws. The political acumen of the League leaders was then demonstrated in an even more forceful way. According to the election laws the purchase of freehold property worth forty shillings a year entitled a person to the vote, while fifty to sixty pounds could make a county voter. The resort of the League tacticians to this method of increasing the number of their voting sympathizers strengthened them materially.

The Budget of 1845 slashed away still farther at the rapidly diminishing power of the Mercantilists, so much so that *Punch* accused Peel of "bigamy"—attachment to Free Trade while still espoused officially to Mercantilism.

Then the rain descended and the blight came and the House of Mercantilism fell—founded as it was upon the theory that the poor could survive on potatoes if grain was not available—and great was the joy of John Bright and his friends. The rains of 1845 demolished the English harvest and the blight of the same year destroyed the Irish potato crop. The fate of the Corn Laws was sealed. What man had as yet failed to do, nature with two decisive strokes had accomplished.

Powerful as the registration movement had become as a political weapon, there was another weapon which also spoke. In a comparatively short time, a fund of a quarter of a million pounds or close to a million dollars had been raised for expenses of the League and also as an indication of the support of its followers. It was to be used at the discretion of men who had proved themselves masters of political strategy. Bright made



no reference to it but it did not need any publicizing. It spoke for itself, as money has a way of doing.

Finding the opposition in his Cabinet quite strong, Peel resigned and the Whigs under Lord John Russell were asked to form a Cabinet. Personal jealousies and their unwillingness to pose as the champions of democracy before the certain opposition of the House of Lords blocked the formation of a Whig government.

The buck was passed back to Peel, the Tory who had pledged himself years before to uphold the Corn Laws; Peel, the leader of a party, a majority of whose followers opposed the revision; Peel, whom Disraeli was ready to succeed if he deserted to the revisionists. And desert he did.

Confronted with a question of more importance than the solidarity of a party already partially destroyed, faced by a revolution in England if he did not repeal these laws, motivated by a desire to regain adherents to conservatism among the middle classes, backed by a divided party, Peel, the Protectionist, committed political suicide, led the Repeal movement, and achieved lasting fame for this act.

Like Spaniards at a bull fight, the Protectionists cheered vociferously while Disraeli and his ilk mangled him unmercifully. But the House of Commons said "Thumbs up" and the Repeal of the Corn Laws was accomplished in the House of Lords, June 25, 1846.

By the repeal of these laws the keystone of the protective system was dislodged, general agricultural prosperity was restored, prices were lowered, famine was abolished, poverty lessened, and the power of Great Britain released to take its place as the foremost nation of the nineteenth century.

More than that, the power of public opinion had been demonstrated and a victory achieved through peaceful methods. In the history of human progress these are more than landmarks, they are huge monoliths towering above the minor achievements in the struggle for a better world.

The League, having served its purpose, was disbanded, instead of living on until the brass on its name-plate needed polish, and its officers walked to board meetings with canes.

As lieutenant to Cobden, John Bright had come to the forefront as a leader in humanitarian reform. Henceforth he was to replace his superior officer and lead the battles for the unenfranchised masses.

#### IRELAND

Ireland has provided England with a perennial political problem from the days of Daniel O'Connell—and before—to the days of Eamon De Valera—and undoubtedly after, but no more so than in the middle years of the nineteenth century.

A series of disturbances resulting from the abolition of the Irish Parliament by the Union Act in 1800 had been further agitated by the oratorical diatribes of Daniel O'Connell and intensified by the famines of 1845 and 1846.

Bright, always the friend of the lower classes and the apostle of freedom, had been impressed on his first visit to the Emerald Island in the 30's by "the crowd of beggars that gathered round the coach at every place where we stopped to change horses." That picture came back to him often as he read about the Irish troubles and saw the influx of Irish into Lancashire which was "periodically overrun by the pauperism of Ireland."

Represented as they were in Parliament by second or third rate men, Bright became their mouthpiece when he warned his colleagues that "if the majority of the people in Ireland counted fairly out had their will, and if they had the power, they would unmoor the island from its fastenings in the deep, and move it at least 2,000 miles to the west."

To him, there were two causes for such unrest and discontent—absentee ownership of land and the Established Church. He denounced these twin evils with equal vehemence.

Peel tried to settle the first by granting a sum of money for the education of Irish priests. To Bright this would have acted as a sedative where a surgical operation was needed. He labeled the grant "hush-money."

To him it was absolutely wrong that the Irish Anglican church, which claimed but eight to twelve per cent. of the population as its communicants, should receive tithes and rentals from the entire population. The injustice of this was further revealed when one took into account the income from the large endowments and property which the church owned outright. It was Bright the Dissenter, Bright the Quaker, speaking out against forced participation in any religion or compulsory support of any sect. And it was Bright the humanitarian speaking out against any further financial load for the already impoverished peasant.

His views on absentee landlordism were corroborated by what he saw in another visit to Ireland in 1849. He cited the "small and wretched hovels in quarries and nooks in the road in which some wretched family finds a shelter," the trenches where 6,000 victims of famine, fever and cholera were "buried in the rags they died in, uncoffined and unknown," and the families who were ready to bind themselves for years in order to secure passage to America as "the fruits of aristocratic and territorial usurpation and privileges."

He was absolutely convinced that the initial step was the security of tenure for the peasants and a measure at least of compensation for improvements made by them. These views he embodied in the Tenants' Rights Bill which he tried unsuccessfully to put through the Commons.

Another trip to Ireland in 1852 further intensified his belief in the need for tenant ownership and impressed him anew with the equally distressing conditions caused by the domination of the State Church. From then on he became the modern Jeremiah lamenting over the sins of the



Church and the landlords, crying out for Disestablishment and Disendowment. And like the ancient prophet, few heeded his warnings. For twenty-five years he hammered away at the seemingly impregnable wall of resistance erected by the Commons. Occasionally a stone would fall, in the way of a slight concession, to pacify the restless Irish, but the wall did not begin to crumble until by a curious twist of fate he was unable to deliver the final blow because of his temporary retirement from active service on account of his health, overtaxed by work in behalf of many reforms.

The first definitive measure came in 1869, reducing the Irish Anglican Church to a voluntary basis and setting aside some of the church property as a reserve fund for future use in case of an unseen calamity in Ireland, such as the famine of 1845. The second measure was passed in 1870 and dealt with the land, recognizing certain minor rights as belonging to the tenants, granting compensation for improvements made by tenants on their farms, promising compensation for evictions where they were caused through no fault of the tenant, and establishing loans to farmers with which they might buy their land. This last was one of the major concessions to the ideas for which Bright had pressed so long.

The reforms for which he had striven were now partially accomplished. The hand that shaped the final legislation was Gladstone's but the voice which brought it about was the voice of Bright. From then on, the Irish leadership passed into more revolutionary hands.

The Irish peasant had not gained all that he might have desired or all that he might have expected for his welfare and for the welfare of those whose interests were really one with his. He had profited, however, by the interest of John Bright, who had so ably championed his cause. To the settlement of Irish troubles he had contributed much as another one of those humanitarian reforms to which he gave his life.

#### THE CRIMEAN WAR

Throughout his career John Bright had been an ardent pacifist. He had favored non-intervention abroad and had denounced Palmerston and other English exhibitionists who were ready to display the power of the British empire on the slightest provocation.

A supreme test of his peace principles came in the Crimean War. Against the onslaught of his colleagues, the villification of his opponents, the ridicule of the press, and the desertion of his friends, he maintained that the war was a travesty needlessly perpetrated on the British people. He would have nothing to do with it.

When the war began, Bright was thoroughly aroused. He ridiculed the idea that England was fighting a despot in the person of Nicholas of Russia, pointing out that despotism had existed

longer and in more virulent forms in Turkey. He minimized the idea that the war was being fought to maintain the balance of power. He warned against the boast that France and England had once more been brought into an alliance, pointing out that "alliances are dangerous things. It is an alliance with Turkey," he said, "that has drawn us into war. I would not advise alliances with any nation, but I would cultivate friendship with all nations." His remarks to that effect are strikingly similar to the much-quoted warnings of Washington in his Farewell Address and even more similar to Jefferson's advice in his First Inaugural, to cultivate "peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none."

If his opposition had been confined to these aspects of foreign policy, however, they would deserve little space in a discussion of John Bright as a humanitarian. As it was, his remarks in the early part of the war dealt chiefly with questions of international relations; those in the latter part of the conflict were devoted chiefly to portraying the physical, mental and financial suffering endured unnecessarily by thousands of those whom he championed.

In his now famous Watkin letter, printed in the *London Times*, he touched upon these points. Raising the question, "And what is the cost?" he had written:

"Many, perhaps fifty millions sterling, in the course of expenditures by this country alone, to be raised from the taxes of a people whose extrication from ignorance and poverty can only be hoped for from the continuance of peace. The disturbance of trade throughout the world, the derangement of monetary affairs, and difficulties and ruin to thousands of families. Another year of high prices, notwithstanding a full harvest in England. Chiefly because war interferes with imports, and we have declared our principal foreign food-growers to be our enemies. The loss of human life to an enormous extent."

An able summary indeed of the folly of the Crimean war, or of any war, on a smaller or larger scale.

There was but one other count on which he could indict war so strongly and that was as a humanitarian who looked upon war as unloosing all the baser elements of society. On this final point he rested his case, concluding with this peroration:—

"This is war—every crime which human nature can commit or imagine, every horror it can perpetuate or suffer; and this it is which our Christian Government recklessly plunges into; and this it is which so many of our countrymen at this moment think it patriotic to applaud! You must excuse me if I cannot go with you. I will have no part in this terrible crime. My hands shall be unstained



with the blood which is being shed. The necessity of maintaining themselves in office may influence an administration; delusions may mislead a people; Vattel may afford you a law and a defence; but no respect for men who form a Government, no regard I have for 'going with the stream,' and no fear of being deemed wanting in patriotism, shall influence me in favour of a policy, which, in my conscience, I believe to be as criminal before God as it is destructive to the true interest of my country."

The immediate verdict to his indictment of the Crimean War was "Not Guilty," but history has reviewed the case, reversed its original decision, and agreed with Bright.

In 1855 there was some hope of peace. Negotiations were started but developments soon caused uneasiness over the success of the conference and while they were still deliberating, Bright delivered what has come to be known as his "Angel of Death" speech, in which he gave utterance to "one of the half dozen most famous phrases that have ever passed the lips of any English orator." He said in part:—

" . . . I cannot . . . but notice that an uneasy feeling exists as to the news which may arrive by the very next mail from the East. I do not suppose that your troops will be beaten in actual conflict with the foe, or that they will be driven out to sea; but I am certain that many homes in England in which there exists a fond hope that the distant one may return—many such homes may be rendered desolate when the next mail shall arrive. The angel of death has been abroad through the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings. There is no one, as when the first-born were slain of old, to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two sideposts of our doors, that he may spare and pass on; he takes his victims from the castle of the noble, the mansion of the wealthy, and the cottage of the poor and the lowly, and it is on behalf of all these classes that I make this solemn appeal."

In concluding this famous speech, Disraeli said to him: "Bright, I would give all that I ever had to have made that speech you made just now." Bright jotted down these words: "And I just said to him, 'Well, you might have made it if you had been honest.'"

At last peace was declared on January 26, 1856, and one of the most unjustified wars in the annals of history came to a close.

Bright had not been able to prevent the war. He had not succeeded in hastening its end. But he had achieved something of real significance. He had focused men's minds on the horror of war, its toll in lives, in taxes, in property, in suffering, and its futility in accomplishing any lasting results of real worth. His pronouncements were a matter

of record in the House of Commons and in the files of the *Times* and other papers. Of infinitely more value were the records and impressions they made on men's hearts and minds.

It is probable that this powerful peace propaganda helped to create much of the sentiment which kept Britain out of the various struggles which plagued Europe during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

During the war he had been caricatured, villified, and burned in effigy. Many there were who at the close of the war could still disagree with him violently in his statements and yet admire him for the courage of his convictions, the sincerity of his beliefs and the earnestness of his panegyrics against war.

### CIVIL WAR

No sooner had England resumed its normal activities after its foray into the Crimea than civil war broke out in the United States. In England the sympathies of the upper classes were definitely with the South. They approved its emphasis on the social graces as opposed to what they considered the crudities and excesses of the frontier and the puritanical restraints of New England. They favored its advocacy of free trade in contrast to the tariff barriers of the North. They knew that a northern victory would furnish convincing evidence of the success of the revolutionary American system of government and encourage the lower classes of England in their demands for more adequate representation.

It is quite natural, therefore, that the great champions of democracy should have bestirred themselves to enlist the support of the masses for the northern cause. Among these men Bright was outstanding.

His participation was prompted by two considerations—his desire to support the advocates of democratic government, and his desire to free three million slaves from bondage and thereby prevent the world-wide revival of slavery which he foresaw in the event of a southern victory.

To convert the laboring class to the northern cause was a Herculean task. The workers were dependent upon the South for work. Any blockage of southern ports would bring a shortage of cotton in England and necessitate the closing of factories.

Bright's appeal to them, therefore, was on a higher plane than that of economic security. It was an appeal to the workers for the preservation of inalienable rights which had been refused them thus far and which would most certainly be refused if the democratic experiment in America failed.

Such an alignment with the North meant sacrifices—unemployment, suffering, and even starvation. But labor saw the issues and to its eternal credit, responded heroically.

One by one the mills were closed, including the Bright plant at Rochdale, and the workers were kept alive only through the generosity of their fellow countrymen and contributions in money and kind from American sympathizers.



During the early months of southern victories, Bright was worried, but nevertheless optimistic. In one of his letters to the New England abolitionist, Charles Sumner, he expressed his belief in "a higher power . . . (who) watches over the interests of mankind in these great passages of the history of our race, and I will trust that in this supreme hour of your country's being, it will not fail you."

His optimism seemed unwarranted. Relations between England and the North were almost severed as a result of the Mason and Slidell and *Alabama* affairs. Men on both sides, desirous of maintaining peace, prevented an open break and thus averted an international conflict. Bright was one of the leaders in the formation of a conciliatory policy.

When Lincoln carried out his earlier resolve to free the slaves and issued the Emancipation Proclamation stating that on January 1, 1863, slaves in those States "in rebellion against the United States" should "be then, henceforth and forever free," sentiment in England for the North became more pronounced.

Bright was jubilant over the issuance of a Proclamation which marked a great step forward in the development of human liberties, gave momentum to the workers of England to press for enfranchisement, and aided him in his efforts to enroll English support for the North.

When word came of Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Bright was overjoyed. In his diary he wrote:—

"This great triumph of the Republic is *the event of our age*, and future generations will confess it, for they will be better able than this to estimate the gain to freedom and humanity which will spring from it."

When the news of the President's assassination arrived, Bright was overcome. To Sumner he confided that "for fifty years, I think, no other event has created such a sensation in this country as the great crime which has robbed you of your President."

For four years Bright had devoted himself unsparingly to the cause which his great soul felt of supreme importance to the world at that time. Now that the war was over he protested strongly against the needless destruction of more lives through radical reconstruction policies. To him, retaliation against those who had been vanquished by executing the rebels and traitors was repugnant,—intolerable.

It is dangerous to estimate what the eventual outcome might have been if Bright and his fellow workers had not kept England from throwing its support on the side of the South. It is reasonable to believe that such support, followed as it would inevitably have been by a French alliance, would have been disastrous to the Union.

One more humanitarian reform had claimed the leadership of John Bright and one more victory for humanity had been achieved with his aid.

## EXTENSION OF THE FRANCHISE

The victory of the middle class and workers over the landed aristocracy in the repeal of the Corn Laws had come after an intensive campaign extending over many years. The high protective tariff walls had not fallen at the sound of the first trumpet. They had fallen only after years of tramping around England by Bright and Cobden and their allies.

Bright was convinced that further reforms would come faster and easier if the franchise were extended still farther than it had been by the Reform Act of 1832. He was of the opinion that:—

" . . . the rich people of a country, invested with power, and speaking generally for rich people alone, cannot sufficiently care for the multitudes and the poor. They are personally kind enough, but they do not care for the people in the bulk. . . . It is a long distance from castles, and mansions, and great houses, and abounding luxuries, to the condition of the great mass of the people who have no property and too many of whom are always on the verge of poverty."

He was convinced that suffering would not be alleviated, poverty relieved, or justice insured by either the upper or the middle classes alone. As proof he cited the history of England and those deplorable conditions which had been remedied only upon the insistence of the masses. He was a firm believer in the working classes, with whom he repeatedly allied himself. Over and over again he declared this in phrases like the following: "My sympathies are naturally with the class with which I am connected, and I would infinitely prefer to raise the class of which I am one than by any means whatever to creep above it or out of it."

Such statements were not campaign verbiage, they were expressions of the sincere convictions of one who has been called "the mouth-piece of a detested minority."

Despite his distrust of the upper classes and his confidence in the working man, he believed that progress would be made only as the nation moved forward as a unit. In his famous Glasgow speech of October 13, 1866, he closed with a most forceful presentation of this concept of government. Speaking of administering justice he maintained that:—

" . . . no class can do that. The class which has hitherto ruled in this country has failed miserably. It revels in power and wealth, while at its feet, a terrible peril for its future, lies the multitude which it has neglected. If a class has failed, let us try the nation. That is our faith, that is our purpose, that is our cry—Let us try the nation."

The entering wedge in breaking the political power of the aristocracy had come in 1832 with the passage of the Reform Bill, which eliminated many of the rotten boroughs and increased the number of representatives from the cities and counties.



The Chartist Movement had cleared the path by defining the issues with which he must deal, and in arousing the populace to the need for change. It had likewise obstructed the path by inadequate leadership and resorts to violence. Feeling that the Chartist Movement had fallen into disrepute, he organized in 1849 the Commons League, which eventually gave way to the Reform League, which played a similar part up to the passage of the Reform Bill of 1867 to that taken by the Anti-Corn Law League prior to 1846.

Many gains were made, but much of the progress made in the 40's and 50's was destroyed by the engrossment of the nation in the Crimean War and the changes in ministry. After a brief retirement from politics, Bright returned to the House of Commons in 1859 as a representative from Birmingham, a district which would be deeply affected by any change in the franchise laws and therefore a section intensely interested in such measures. From then on Bright used this city as the base of operations.

The next few years bear a striking resemblance in the activities of the Reform League to the years preceeding 1846. Throughout the country meetings were being held which "exceeded in numbers and influence almost every meeting that was held by the Anti-Corn Law League."

The politicians, however, were too likely to try to satisfy their constituents by a pretense of love for Reform and a vagueness of promises, without producing results. Bright compared them with "that deplorable Atlantic cable, of which I read the other day in the newspapers, that 'the currents were visible, but the signals were wholly indistinct.'"

As he moved from one town to another he "became more emphatically than ever the Tribune of the People . . .," more and more loved by the masses, more and more hated by the upper classes. *The Saturday Review* put it even more tersely when it declared that "Mr. Bright governs although he does not reign." The opposition forces by 1866 were becoming frantic and as a last resort tried unsuccessfully to pit the middle class against the lower class.

It was only a question now of which party would receive the credit for the Reform Bill rather than whether it could be passed. The Gladstone ministry proposed a bill in 1866 extending the suffrage, but a coalition of Liberals and Conservatives defeated the measure and Gladstone resigned, uttering his prophetic remark, "You cannot fight against the future; time is on our side."

With the formation of the Derby ministry with Disraeli as the leader in the House of Commons, came the passage of the Reform Bill of 1867, the second great milestone in the extension of English liberty during the nineteenth century.

This was the "crowning triumph of Bright's career," the measure for which he had been upbraided and villified had been accepted as wise and constitutionally patriotic. The workers of

England were recognized as political citizens and awarded the franchise. John Bright had won still another victory as a humanitarian reformer.

#### MINOR MOVEMENTS AND SUMMARY

If the repeal of the Corn Laws, the disestablishment of the Irish Church, the extermination of absentee ownership, the abolition of slavery, and the rejection of imperialism as the basis of foreign policy commanded the major portion of John Bright's time and energy, they did not preclude his interest in other reforms.

Swamped by the demands of what he considered more pressing problems and dismayed over the bitter and uncharitable language and tactics of his associates, he gradually severed his official connection with the temperance cause, but not his interest in temperance.

It was he who in 1847 foresaw the inevitable conflict in America over the subjugation of three million Negroes and he who urged an increase in cotton production in India in order to forestall an industrial crisis in England in the event of a shortage of American cotton. It was John Bright, too, who in 1848 as chairman of the Select Committee on India brought forth an indictment of British rule which made possible the establishment in 1853 of a competitive Civil Service system which antedated the setting up of a similar scheme in the United States by thirty years.

Again it was John Bright who proposed the policy of gradual participation by the natives of India in their government, a policy which England has been forced to adopt in more recent years. Bright could honestly declare in 1853 that "no one out of office has paid so much attention to this question (of India) as I have done."

His opposition to capital punishment was almost an obsession. In 1868, partly through his efforts, public executions were abolished, but he continued privately and publicly to inveigh against any executions whatever. After an exhaustive study of his life, J. B. Mills was led to conclude that "there was no subject of a social or semi-political character in which he had for many years taken so great an interest" as this one of capital punishment.

Discrimination along racial lines he abhorred. On April 15, 1853, he delivered a brilliant speech on the Admission of Jews, pleading for racial equality in all phases of political life. To him is due a large share of the credit for the admission of Dissenters to Oxford in 1854 and their recognition as possible candidates for teaching positions and fellowships in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 1871. Likewise it was John Bright's activities which helped abolish the various taxes on papers and changed them from luxuries to common commodities.

Bright never aspired to a post in the Cabinet or to the position of Privy Councillor. He preferred to dwell among his own people. He declined overtures from Disraeli at various times, but in



1868 he joined Gladstone's Cabinet and became "the first son of the free churches who attained a high position in political life. He was the first Protestant Nonconformist since the Restoration to become a minister of the Crown." In 1882 he felt it necessary to resign as a protest against the bombing of Alexandria by the British.

From then on until his death on March 27, 1889, he was no longer so actively associated with English politics.

With the simplicity which had characterized his life he was laid to rest on the 29th of March, 1889, in the Friends' Burial Ground in Rochdale. Over his grave stands a simple slab marker which reads: "John Bright. Born November 16th, 1811. Died March 27th, 1889." This is enough, for those who know the history of the struggles for the extension of human rights and the efforts for the enrichment of human lives know the contributions of John Bright. His life was a testimony to the principles of the Society of Friends, an embodiment of the humanitarian reforms of the nineteenth century, a monument to the idealistic strivings of mankind.

In his eulogy of John Bright, delivered in the House of Commons on March 29, 1889, Gladstone struck a high note in representing this public admiration for Bright as a statesman when he said:—

"We feel that Mr. Bright is entitled to a higher eulogy than any that could be due to intellect or any that could be due to success. Of mere success he was indeed a conspicuous example; in intellect he may lay claim to a distinguished place; but the character of the man lay deeper than his intellect, deeper than his eloquence, deeper than anything that can be described or seen on the surface, and the

supreme eulogy which is his due I apprehend to be this, that he elevated political life to a higher elevation, and to a loftier standard, and that he has thereby bequeathed to his country the character of a statesman which can be made the subject not only of admiration, and not only of gratitude, but of reverential contemplation."

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY ON JOHN BRIGHT

For those interested in more detailed data on John Bright, there is a wealth of material. The outstanding biography is *The Life of John Bright*, written by George M. Trevelyan and published by Houghton Mifflin in 1914. A good short account is the one by Charles A. Vince entitled *John Bright* and published by Stone in Chicago in 1898.

The exhaustive study of *John Bright and the Quakers*, written by J. Travis Mills and published in two volumes in 1935 by Methuen in London, gives much material on the minor movements with which he was connected and which have been neglected or minimized by most of his biographers. It is likewise excellent in showing John Bright's activities as they related to the development of historic Quaker testimonies.

The best short account of his life which is easily available is the sketch by Rufus M. Jones in the second volume of *The Later Periods of Quakerism*. "The Centennial Souvenir," a supplement to *The Friend* (London) for October 13, 1911, is valuable and interesting but less easily obtained.

*The Diaries of John Bright*, edited by R. A. J. Walling and published by Morrow Company in New York in 1931, are valuable source materials, as are the two volumes of *Public Addresses by John Bright*, edited by Thorold Rogers and printed by Macmillan in 1879.

## Whittier MS. Discovered "to Order"

By EDWARD D. SNYDER

Last spring in editing the Whittier MSS. in the possession of Haverford College I noticed that the collection did not include the original autograph letter signed, which the poet sent to the College on the occasion of its semi-centennial in 1883. The gap was so serious that I started at once advertising for the document both verbally and in print. In the *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Association* I wrote:—

"The original manuscript is not in the possession of the College, and it is earnestly hoped that if it should appear in some file of old letters, the present owner will notify the authorities of its whereabouts."

Only a few weeks later the document came to light—but *not* as a result of my inquiry, and in such amusing circumstances that no very special credit goes to any one of the three people concerned

in the discovery. X advised Y to keep a sharp lookout for the Whittier letter; Z, not knowing of this, happened to find a package of neglected letters in the darkest corner of a closet in one of the College buildings, and without examining the contents, requested Y to look over the letters and save anything of value. Y was thus forced to discover the Whittier letter!

Now when the re-discovered manuscript was collated with the copy of it officially printed in *The History of Haverford College and Semi-Centennial Celebration at Haverford College*, it was observed that the printed copy was in error in four places, and though two of these errors in transcribing were negligible, two others seriously affected the meaning of the letter and in fact turned Whittier's periodic sentences almost into nonsense. Discussion of the foregoing points has brought to light the fact that many of Whittier's admirers