

CHAPTER IX

LIFE IN LEEDS

I FOUND a great deal of life, industry, and energy among the population of Leeds. Although trade was bad, and they had much misery to contend with, they were anxious to help themselves by all conceivable and rightful methods. Some thought that politics might help them, others placed their reliance on co-operation. They might be seen groping, perhaps blindly, in the dark, after some grand principle, which they thought would lead them to fresh life, and liberty, and happiness. But disappointments too often befell them. The disposition to co-operate together for mutual benefit and defence, first manifested itself in strikes and combinations — its most imperfect form. Although these efforts were for the most part failures, the energy they displayed was nevertheless immense. During the strikes which occurred about 1840 in the manufacturing districts — including Manchester, Stockport, Preston, Bradford, and Leeds—not less than three millions sterling in wages had been virtually thrown away by the working people. Think of such an amount of capital being expended on land, buildings, establishments for co-operative production, or on the means of physical, moral, and intellectual improvement—what great

results might not have been anticipated from it! At the same time, this union of efforts showed what a great moral power they had at their command in their beneficent principle of co-operation.

It was indeed already shown in the matter of benefit societies. I became a member of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows, and of the Ancient Order of Foresters. Although they have "words" and "signs," and are invested with some show of secrecy, they are really and truly societies for mutual benefit and support. Not fewer than 8000 working men of Leeds belonged to the Manchester Unity; but there were many other societies—Independent Oddfellows, Gardeners, Foresters, Ancient Druids, Order of the Ark and of the Peaceful Dove, the Knights Templar, the Ancient Romans, Knights of Malta, Loyal Ancient Shepherds and Shepherdesses, and even an Order of Ancient Buffaloes! Looking at the number of members these various lodges contained, I found it was quite within the mark to calculate that the working people of Leeds alone subscribed not less than £15,000 annually for mutual assurance against sickness and accident. Ten shillings was paid weekly to a member while sick; medical attendance was also provided; £10 was allowed on the death of a member, and £5 to the widow, if the deceased brother was married.

With these objects some lodges combined schemes for moral and intellectual improvement. They formed libraries, and had courses of instructive lectures delivered before them. Doubtless there were imperfections in these societies, for no human institution can be perfect; but in the cultivation of friendly brotherhood, and in the practice of mutual help, they

were admirable as beginnings. They were managed on the whole with practical and business-like sagacity. There may have been some waste ; possibly also, full advantage was not taken of the organisation which most of the societies displayed ; but that the general result was most improving to the condition of the working classes, could not for a moment be called in question.*

There was another movement going on in Leeds at the time I settled there, perhaps of a more questionable description. At the same time, the persons who took part in it were by no means of an unintelligent character. I allude to the Socialist movement. Leeds, like other large towns, had a Socialist Hall. This had formerly been Walton's Music Saloon, in East Parade ; and it was afterwards taken by the Mechanics Institute. But when I first knew it, the place was used for Socialist meetings and lectures. I went there occasionally to see what was done and said. The body had preachers or lecturers who could talk cleverly and well. But unfortunately, they mixed up a great deal of atheism with their views of co-operation. It was not until the Revs. Charles Kingsley, Frederick Denison Maurice, and Edward Larken, developed the practice of Christian Socialism that the co-operators were dragged out of this frightful pit.

Robert Owen had been the beginner of the movement. He held that in the competitive system was found the root of all the miseries of society. He proclaimed the negation of all religious belief as essential

* I may mention that I afterwards gave a full account of these movements in the *Quarterly Review*. See articles, No. 212, October 1859, on "Strikes," etc. ; No. 232, October 1864, on "Workmen's Benefit Societies."

to the establishment of his system. His doctrines were economical, metaphysical, and anti-theological. The political economy of Socialism contemplated nothing else than the total abolition of poverty. Productive labour was not to be required of any one after the age of twenty-five. Society was to be composed of communities, each possessing land sufficient for the support, *for ever*, of all its members. The philosopher's stone was a child's toy compared to this arrangement.

The metaphysics of Socialism were comprised in the maxim that character is formed *for*, not *by*, the individual; and that society may so arrange "circumstances" as to produce whatever character it pleases. Man's active agency in the formation of his character was altogether disallowed. There was to be no religion in the new society. "Superior external circumstances alone were to be permitted to act upon and to influence each individual will." The only deity recognised by Mr Owen, as stated in his *Outline of the Rational System of Society*, was "an incomprehensible power which acts in and through all nature, everlastingly composing, decomposing, and recomposing the materials of the universe." Such was his idea of moral sublimity. One had better be "a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn," than believe in this spinning jenny of a universe, with its "decomposing and recomposing."

The preachers or lecturers at the Socialist Hall did their best to illustrate these views. They would read a chapter of the Bible, mock it, and raise a laugh at it. The audiences seemed to be kept together by these means. Tom Paine was the writer most quoted. The lecturers were varied from time to time. The Socialists here borrowed a wrinkle from the

Wesleyan Methodists: they went from circuit to circuit. Among the lecturers I heard, were Lloyd Jones from Wales, Buchanan from Glasgow, and Fleming from Berwick-on-Tweed. Their principal business was to preach against religion, and to cut up the parsons. At the same time, there were some practical heads amongst them, and in course of time lectures were delivered upon home colonisation and co-operation. The members proceeded to collect money for the purpose of buying an estate, to exhibit these principles in active operation. They did collect enough money to purchase a small estate in Hampshire, called Tytherly. A good deal of money was spent on buildings; but after a few years, they found they could not make the place yield a profit, and it came to grief. The estate was, I believe, eventually bought by Lord Ashburton.

But their efforts in co-operation were much more successful. Some of the members started an Operative Land and Building Society, others a Redemption Society. They bought land, erected dwellings, built mills, and by clubbing their means, began to manufacture, and to grind corn for themselves. Such associations were conducted under the provisions of the Friendly Societies Act, and many of them proved very successful.*

But to return to the political movements of the time. When Parliament met, after the general election of 1841, it was found that the Anti-Corn-Law men were greatly outnumbered. In the debate on the Address, Ministers found themselves in a minority of 91, in a House of 629. They accordingly resigned; when Sir Robert Peel was sent for by the Queen, and undertook to construct a new ministry.

* I have given an account of these in *Thrift*, pp. 102-9.

And yet this was the Prime Minister, and this the House of Commons, that afterwards abolished the Corn Laws.

It was left for distress to do the work, though the Anti-Corn-Law leaders did not abate their efforts. Cobden had been returned for Stockport, and was now the recognised parliamentary leader of the League. He made his maiden speech, which was well received; but the main work was done out of doors. Before he went to London, to take his seat in Parliament, he sent me the following letter:—

“MANCHESTER, 3rd *August* 1841.

“MY DEAR SIR,—

“Mr Stansfeld called on me to-day, and I mentioned to him how important it is that the great towns, and Leeds in the number, should be prepared to hold simultaneous meetings at the time when the Corn Laws become the practical question in the House of Commons. It is quite clear that the repeal can not be carried in any other way than that by which the Reform Bill and the Emancipation of the Catholics were wrung from the Aristocracy. The process of the Registration Courts will not effect our purpose unless aided by the masses. In fact, we can't wait the years which would be requisite to turn the eighty Tory majority into a minority. Everything then depends upon our securing the hearty co-operation of the people, and this can only be done by a steady perseverance in the agitation of the question *as a bread tax*, and as it affects the wages of labour. Too much has been said about the interests of capitalists, farmers, and landlords; and too little stress has been laid upon the rights of labour. The process of enlightenment is slow but sure, if we treat the Corn Law as a Wages question. This simplifies the matter, and gets rid of all the rubbish about the protection of interests. *What protection has the labourer?*—should be the Socratic mode of answering any argument in favour of protecting this or that interest. The labourer has

no legislative protection excepting the Union Work-house which the landlord, farmer, and capitalist may equally, in case of need, enjoy.

“But I am arguing the case, when I merely wanted to urge the necessity of organising ourselves for the conflict. How stands Leeds? Have the Corn Law repealers such an influence that you could join in a unanimous demonstration at a public meeting against the bread tax, without interference from the Chartists or Tories? We are in that position here, and unless the other large towns can be worked into the same sound state we shall not be in a situation to take advantage of the chapter of accidents during the ensuing parliamentary campaign, or in the event of a bad harvest. We can hope nothing from Parliament unless influenced from without. In this opinion, the best of our friends in the House concur. When in London, on Friday last, I met Villiers, Warburton, and others; and in talking over the future tactics of the Opposition in Parliament, they expressed a very decided opinion that the course to be pursued indoors must depend altogether upon the movement in the *North*. I very much fear that we are, on the contrary, looking too much for help from the House of Commons, and too little from ourselves. The whole matter lies in a single enquiry—*Can we unite with the people around us?* If not, the game is up, and we deserve no pity if the fate of the house divided against itself falls upon us. If we do unite amongst ourselves now, I think circumstances are conspiring to lead us on to speedy victory. The Corn Law will be the great practical question of the next session. Peel will, or rather *may*, be forced to tamper with the present scale. *Then* will be the time to rouse the people to coerce the party into a full, or at least a fair, amelioration of the law. But we must be preparing now for the occasion. I told you long ago my conviction that a vast amount of ignorance existed even in Leeds upon the subject of the Bread Tax. Did not the late election convince you that I was right? That ignorance still remains, and you must remove it ere you can rouse the people into zealous action. I shall only add, that no other question but that of Corn Law Repeal and Free Trade will take practical hold of the public mind

during the next session. I mean that the suffrage extension question is not at present a practical one. Nothing definite on the subject is before the electoral body, as a body. Is not the agitation of the question a waste of power *now*? And will it not be in fact best forwarded by sticking to the Corn Law, which is as democratic as the most ultra Chartist can desire. Go then incessantly for total and immediate repeal of the Bread Tax. Rouse young and old—rich and poor—men and women, to action, by pressing home the injustice, the wickedness, the foul impiety, of the starvation law. Ever yours truly,

“ R. COBDEN.”

I quote this and the following letters of Mr Cobden to show the intense active interest which he took in the question he had taken in hand. If he wrote such letters to me—a comparatively unknown person, both as regards position and influence—what must he not have done to others in all parts of the country, who possessed a much greater amount of both. He continued to urge the necessity of union of parties against the Bread Tax.

After Parliament had been prorogued, Mr Cobden wrote to me again, on the subject of a proposed conciliatory meeting in Leeds, which Colonel Thompson was to attend. In this letter, he said :—

“ I have never found good to come out of formal attempts at reconciliation with the leaders of the Chartist party. In fact, we have long ago given up the attempt to compromise matters with these worthies, and have rather preferred to work up a party of Corn Law repealers independent of the old leaders. This requires laborious effort on the part of one or two middle class men, but they must not be obnoxious *as politicians* to the Chartists. With proper exertions you will be sure of success. I must reiterate my old song—the people are in nine cases out of ten profoundly ignorant of the nature and

effects of the Bread Tax. I have never been able to join in the unmeasured censures of the working class which I occasionally hear from my friends. The fault lies in the apathy of the middle class. When the latter are fairly up, the working class instinctively fall into their places as the allies of the middle man."

Nevertheless, our public meeting was held. It was summoned by the Parliamentary Reform Association which still continued to exist. The meeting was held in the large room of the Commercial buildings, and was full to overflowing. The Chartists were present in great numbers, and the meeting was occasionally a scene of great uproar and confusion. Colonel Thompson, Mr Jelinger, C. Symons, and others spoke; and Dr Lees, the Temperance Advocate, who on this occasion appeared on the side of the Chartists, addressed the meeting. The occasion was distinguished by an excellent, manly speech from Mr James Garth Marshall, the chairman, who never spoke more admirably nor acquitted himself better. But as a whole the meeting was a failure. Nobody was conciliated, and everything went on as before. Mr Cobden then addressed to me the following remarkable letter:—

"LEAMINGTON, 21st October 1841.

"MY DEAR SIR,—

"There is nothing that is more untoward than your present state in Leeds. At the very time when we want a complete phalanx for the crowning struggle against Monopoly, you are broken into sections waging war against each other. In looking back to your past position—three years ago, when you could hold great and unanimous meetings upon the Corn Law—I fear you are in a worse dilemma just now than at any former period of the Corn Law agitation.

“ I confess when I think of the materials you have had to work with in Leeds, compared with ours in Manchester, I cannot acquit you of having made a very bad use of them. In almost every respect Leeds stood better than Manchester three years ago, or even later. The *Leeds Mercury* sided with the League, whilst the *Manchester Guardian* was, up to the Whig dissolution, the bitter and malignant foe to our out-and-out agitation in Manchester. It is no compliment to you to say that the *Leeds Times* is immeasurably superior to its Manchester namesake. So much for the Whig and Radical press.

“ As for Men, we have not one of the standing of Mr Marshall, possessing his moral courage, right-mindedness, and liberality. We have not one possessing the never failing generosity, and the talent (judging him by his controversy with Mr Baines) of Mr Stansfeld.

“ Then for the people to lead. *You* had an orderly community, quite an example, at your public meetings, for intelligence and good behaviour. Manchester, on the contrary, had not for eight years been able to call a public meeting on any political question. The huge factories of the Cotton district, with three *thousand* hands under *one* capitalist, give to our state of society the worst possible tone, by placing an impassable gulf between master and operative.

“ Such was your condition and such ours when we began the Anti-Corn-Law agitation. The question now is—why does the cause stand so well in Manchester, and why so adversely in Leeds? I can attribute it to no other reason than that it has been *worked* incessantly in the former place, *apart altogether from party politics*.

“ The work has been done by a very few, so few that we have been the laughing-stock even of ourselves, as we sat and chuckled over the splutter we were making in the name of THE LEAGUE! You have not an idea how insignificant a body the working members of The League really comprise. Still we worked. When we could not hold public meetings we got up little hole and corner meetings. Two years and a half ago, we called a public meeting. The Chartist leaders attacked us on the platform at the head of their deluded followers. We were nearly

the victims of physical force. I lost my hat, and all but had my head split open with the leg of a stool. In retaliation for this, we deluged the town with short tracts printed for the purpose. We called meetings of each trade, and held conferences with them at their own lodges. We found ready listeners, and many secret allies, even amongst the Chartists. We resolutely abstained from discussing the Charter or any other party question. We stuck to our subject, and the right-minded amongst the working-men gave us credit for being in earnest, which is all that is necessary to secure the confidence of the people.

“Our strength grew, and the result is that we can now hold a public meeting at any moment. Nay: the repealers carried the war into the Chartist camp on Monday last (see Wednesday's *Guardian*) by upsetting their meeting in retaliation for their interruption of the meeting at the Corn Exchange, at which Colonel Thompson was present. We shall work on in Manchester, for much remains to be done.

“Why do I go over our exploits? Not for egotistical display. We have done no more than our duty: but simply to give you the assurance that everything may be done in Leeds by working perseveringly in the cause of Corn Law repeal. But you are right in saying that the agitation must be separated from the plans of political parties. May not your Young Men's Anti-Monopoly Society—aided by the presence of ministers—tend to rescue the question from the contamination of party?

“I cannot go at length into my reasons for thinking that the only chance open to such as you and me for effecting any amelioration in the condition of the people, is by adhering to the advocacy of practical reform rather than attempting organic changes. I am strongly of opinion that unless commercial reform be effected before, *long before*, political reform can be carried, this country will have received its death warrant at the hands of the aristocracy. We are much nearer the accomplishment of tariff reform than of organic change. Public opinion has decreed the one, whilst there is scarcely an organised public movement for the other.

“Let us work, then, for the practical good, giving all possible countenance and help to the advance of political reform. Believe me, yours very truly,
“R. COBDEN.”

The wisdom embodied in this letter may be judged by the after result of the movement. Although no public meeting was held during the later part of 1841 on the subject of the Corn Laws, a much more important investigation took place. This was the appointment by the operatives of Leeds of an Enumeration Committee, for the purpose of ascertaining the number of unemployed persons in the borough, and the extent of the distress from which they were suffering from want of employment. The principal person who had to do with the initiation of this committee was James Rattray, an operative stuff printer, who consulted me on the subject. James Speed, a handloom weaver, was also connected with it. Rattray acted as secretary, and Speed as the chairman of the committee. The whole proceedings were conducted by the working people themselves. On several occasions I accompanied the enumerators when making their visits, and I witnessed many sad sights. Men, women, and children “clamouring” for food—willing to work, but with no work to do; not angry, not furious, at the laws which kept them idle; but patient, long-suffering, and very helpless. This was the time when a distinguished and compassionate person, hearing of the existence of distress in the manufacturing districts, recommended the operative classes, who were suffering from hunger, to take an occasional pinch of curry powder in a little water to allay the craving for food. What these poor creatures wanted was, not curry, but bread, not warm water, but mutton and beef.

The results of the inquiry were remarkable. It was ascertained by personal visitation, that out of 4752 families examined, consisting of 19,936 individuals, only 3780 persons were in work, while 16,156 were out of work; and that the average earnings per head amounted to only 11¼d. weekly for each individual. Distress continued to increase all over the West Riding. The position of the handloom weavers was especially distressing. Three months later, 16,000 individuals were on the books of the Leeds Workhouse as receiving parochial relief. In addition to this, 10,000 persons had received relief from a fund of £7000 raised by voluntary subscription. Meetings were held to "make known the unparalleled distress which prevailed in the borough, and the gradual decay of trade consequent thereon," and more money was collected for the relief of the sufferers. From the Manufacturers Relief Committee in London, £500 was also obtained for the relief of the Leeds poor. It may be mentioned that at the beginning of August 1841, wheat was quoted at 86s. the quarter.

All this was steadily working for the repeal of the bread tax. Cobden did not fail to take advantage of the situation. He summoned together a meeting of ministers of every denomination at Manchester, to consider the condition of the labouring classes. They were 650 in number; their proceedings were conducted with great order; but they did not fail to protest against the Corn and Provision Laws. Resolutions were carried, unanimously approving of their abolition. Then an Anti-Corn-Law Bazaar was held in Manchester, at which about £10,000 was collected by the sale of goods, for the support of the League. It was not merely the working people

who suffered. Mills were being closed in all the manufacturing districts; bankruptcies were increasingly numerous; and thousands of operatives were reduced to a state of pauperism. Cobden, though he saw his prophecies being fulfilled, was by no means over-sanguine. Let me give another of his letters, to show his views at this time. The first part of his communication, it will be observed, relates to a matter entirely different from the chief subject of his thoughts.

“LEAMINGTON, 6th November 1841.

“MY DEAR SIR,—

“An aunt of mine sojourning here, who is ‘great’ in theology, and deeply versed in Evangelism, Voluntaryism, Puseyism, and all the other *isms*, has been much edified by the perusal of your account of a certain pipe in Dr Hook’s church for carrying the remains of the sacred elements into consecrated ground; and her conscience, or rather her curiosity, is so much troubled that I have promised to ascertain if it be a veritable account, or only a wicked invention of a witty editor. Pray, therefore, oblige me with a line by return to this place, that I may settle her pious longings upon the momentous affair.*

“What an ominous lull there is in the public mind! Political opinion seems for the moment to be

* In March 1841 the Chartists elected working men as churchwardens at Leeds. Some of them were dissenters. It happened that the excellent vicar, Dr Hook, was at that time very much given to High Churchism. He had a *piscina* provided in the New Parish Church, such as is used in Roman Catholic churches, when the priest rinses the chalice or pours away the remains at the celebration of the Mass. This *piscina* consisted of a shallow stone basin with a pipe or drain leading directly to the consecrated ground outside the building. Whether by accident or design, this pipe became choked up with lime, so that the wine poured into the basin accumulated there, and could not get away; hence the necessity for repairs, and the paragraph in the local paper.

at a deadlock. It can't be denied that we are plunged into the profoundest apathy upon the subject of parties. The Whigs are just as unpopular as the Tories—nay, rather more so—and is there any other party even in embryo? As for leaders, the masses have just as much love for Peel as for Russell; and I very much fear that the old radical leaders are damaged past redemption. Hume, Grote, and Warburton, and their followers, might have constituted a party five years ago, but they have since been drummed through Coventry at the heels of 'finality' Lord John, and are now suffering the penalty. I had hoped that Roebuck would have taken the fullest advantage of his fortunate exemption from this ordeal. His four years parliamentary quarantine gave him great advantage at the late sitting of Parliament. I am afraid the country will think with me that he has not made the most of his opportunities. The opposition to Sharman Crawford's motion, and his personal affair with the *Times*, were mistakes; and mistakes, even with honest intentions, are too severely scrutinised nowadays to be committed by a leader without serious injury to his reputation. His indiscretions have, I suspect, impaired public confidence in *Radical* leaders. Wakley's conduct in the House has very much increased this feeling. And the truth must be allowed to be told—we are without political leadership. Parties in the House and out of it are chaotic, and will, I suspect, continue to be so for some time to come.

"In the meantime, all we can hope for is to educate the public mind on practical questions, inoculate the people with sound principles of political economy, draw them from the worship of men to the admiration of abstract truths, and thus prepare them to take advantage of the chapter of accidents. When I was at the annual meeting of the Stockport Mechanics Institute a few days ago, I promised a prize for the best essays on *Machinery*, and on *Capital and Labour*. Couldn't you give a hint of this kind to Mr Marshall?

"You will see that we are going to have a meeting of deputies in Manchester on the 17th, to concoct plans for the winter. We shall thus ascertain in Manchester what are the feelings in different parts of

the kingdom. I am told from all sides that, unless we *do* something, *i.e.*, strike a blow, we shall lose public confidence. *What can we do?* There is always danger of being made ridiculous by showing one's teeth before one is *able* to bite. If we were to attempt a *coup*, and it were to fail like the Chartist sacred holiday, we should be laughed at for ever. Should some practical measures not be speedily carried, they will come too late; and what rational man can say that we are in a fair way for doing anything very soon?

"Still, what more can we do? At least we are not standing in the way of a more hopeful movement; for, of the three questions that now agitate the people—Repeal of Corn Law, Repeal of Union, and Charter—I can't help thinking that our question stands in the place of the favourite in the public mind. Bad is the prospect, even of the best; but so long as there is no better to which to resign the course, we must work away with whip and spur, keeping our head steadily towards the far-distant winning post.

"My opinion is every day strengthened, that we must not seek *official* alliance with Chartists or any other party. The leaders of the Anti-Corn-Law party ought to take every opportunity of avowing their sympathy as individuals for the Suffrage men; but any formal coalition is unwise and unpracticable. Many of the Chartists, as, for instance, O'Connor and Colonel Napier, have their own views upon Corn Laws, which must prevent their joining us; and this ought to satisfy every honest man of their party that it would be quite impossible for the two bodies to coalesce. We must insist upon our right to carry on an independent agitation, and if the *hired* knaves who interrupt our meetings persevere, we must harass them out in their own way. Our Manchester operative Anti-Corn-Law men have declared the *lex talionis* in force, even to sticks and stones; and so formidable was their preparation for the last meeting, that the Feargus men did not venture even to lift their voices in opposition. Indeed, I am told that, since that evening, their committee have passed a resolution against further interference. But I have no faith in those who

follow the 'Star' excepting in their weakness. They are, after all, contemptible in numbers.—Yours very truly,
R. COBDEN."

At length the new ministry met the House of Commons. The Queen opened Parliament in person on the 3rd of February 1842. In the royal speech, she acknowledged, "with deep regret, the continued distress in the manufacturing districts of the country," admitting that the sufferings and privations which had resulted from it "had been borne with exemplary patience and fortitude," and recommended to the consideration of both Houses "the laws which affect the imports of corn and other articles."

Mr William Beckett, one of the members for Leeds, moved the address. Sir Robert Peel is said to have selected him on account of the condition of the Leeds operatives, and more particularly because of the Report of the Enumeration Committee. Mr Rattray, the operative stuff printer, who initiated that movement, afterwards wrote to me as follows, when settled in Glasgow:—"There is no retrospective incident which affords me more real gratification than the fact that Mr William Beckett informed myself and Mr Speed, that it was our report which induced Sir Robert Peel to select him to move the address at the opening of the session of 1842, when the Tariff wedge was put in that was to dislocate the entire fabric of monopoly; and, as I have never forgotten the valuable and hearty assistance which you personally and by the *Times* rendered to that committee, I have taken the first favourable opportunity to express my sense of your worth as a gentleman; and I trust that in a personal and

literary sense, you will not chide me, nor object to the original style of my dedication." *

Sir Robert Peel introduced his new measures on the 9th of February. A total repeal of the Corn Law, he said, would add agricultural to manufacturing distress, and he thought it well to be independent of foreign countries for bread. He accordingly proposed the new *sliding scale* of corn duties, with numerous amendments in the tariff. The alterations in the Corn Law did not satisfy Mr Cobden: he denounced the scheme as an insult to a suffering people. It met with no better success in the north, where it was generally denounced. It unsettled everything, and settled nothing. Thousands of meetings were held, and thousands of petitions were sent in to Parliament. Nevertheless, the ministers carried their measure by a large majority. Cobden went back to the country, to rouse not only the manufacturing but the agricultural classes against the Corn Laws. Meanwhile, an alarming outbreak occurred in the manufacturing districts, which at one time threatened to assume the form of an insurrection.

Southey once said that "the nation that builds upon manufactures sleeps upon gunpowder." The events in progress seemed to prove the truth of the statement. The working people had become restless. They had long been promised a "sacred month" by Feargus O'Connor. It had been postponed from month to month; and now they were about to take the matter into their own hands. Some of the poorer loom weavers at Staleybridge who were unemployed, or on strike, compelled all other branches

* The truth is, that after Mr Rattray left Leeds, he travelled about the world a good deal, and wrote a book, which he dedicated to me.

of trade in the town to follow their example. Most of the principal towns in Lancashire caught the contagion, and all the factory district became suddenly idle. The "sacred month," in which nobody was to work, had at last begun. Crowds of men and women went from place to place, stopping the mills, and turning out the working people. It was comparatively easy to do this. The knowing hands, getting access to the boiler of the factory steam engine, and forcing in the plugs, caused the water to escape over the flames in the furnace. The fire was extinguished; the steam engine stopped; and the hands turned out. In many cases valuable machinery was destroyed.

The contagion spread. By the middle of August crowds of unemployed factory people surged into Yorkshire. They came by the roads leading over Blackstone Edge, down towards Huddersfield and Halifax. Leeds was thrown into a state of great excitement. The magistrates issued 30,000 staves for the use of special constables. The police buckled cutlasses to their sides, and several thousand extra men were sworn in. In hot haste, a dispatch was sent to the Horse Guards for military: and one fine evening in August, the 32nd Regiment of Infantry, a fine body of men, arrived from Weedon, and went marching up Briggate to the tune of "All is lost now" from *Sonnambula*. Prince George of Cambridge was also in the town, at the head of a detachment of Lancers, and a troop of Horse Artillery with their field pieces.

By this time, the manufacturing towns in West Yorkshire were the scene of riotous proceedings. Boiler plugs were forced in, and thousands of unemployed crowded the streets of Dewsbury, Halifax, Holmfirth, and Bradford. A remarkable sight was

to be seen in Skircoates Moor, in the neighbourhood of Halifax. About fifteen thousand "turn-outs" assembled there, passed resolutions in favour of the People's Charter, and spent the night on the purple heather of the moor. They consisted of men, women, and children. It was a sad sight. The greater number of them were arranged in circular groups, and as night fell, they sang Chartist songs. The women were especially excited. Some prisoners had been taken, and they exclaimed, "If we wor men, they wudn't be long there"—that is, in the police station. Others said, "Ye're soft, if ye don't fetch 'em out to-neet."

The women entered Halifax on the following day almost at the head of the mob. When they reached the North Bridge, where the military were drawn up to oppose their progress, numbers of women sprang forward and seized the horses' bridles to turn them aside, exclaiming to the soldiers, "You wouldn't hurt women, would you!" One of the infantry presented his bayonet to a woman; she put it aside and said, "No, no! we want, not bayonets, but bread." The whole scene reminded one of the French Revolution, which, in the language of Burke, arose "amid the fierce cries and violence of women."

The crowd surged onward to Bradford, and then to Leeds. On the morning of the 17th, the report reached the town that a number of rioters were on the road from Bradford. It was true. At Staningley, they forced the boiler plugs of Varley's mill, and compelled the people to leave the factory. They next proceeded to Bramley, and stopped all the mills in that out-township. Then to Armley, Wortley, and Farnley; and now they were approaching Leeds. The mob reached Holbeck and the immense mills of

the Messrs Marshall. The yard-door leading to the boiler of the new mill was strongly barricaded and defended by Mr J. G. Marshall and his workmen. Yet the mob, by repeated efforts, broke in the door, and rushed into the yard. They could not, however, find the boiler plug, and left the place without stopping the mill, or doing further mischief. The soldiers were now called out, and Prince George and his Lancers, together with the Artillery and their field pieces, were formed in a line in Camp Field. The Riot Act was read. The pieces were loaded, and ready to fire; but, fortunately, the mob was dispersed without loss of life. A number of prisoners were taken, and led off to the court-house by the military. The back of the strike was broken; and the "sacred month" ended in about 2000 persons suffering imprisonment for being concerned in these riots in the county of York.

The way was now open for the leaders of the Anti-Corn-Law movement. They renewed their conferences, held public meetings, engaged lecturers to enlighten the people, printed and distributed throughout the country millions of tracts, invaded the agricultural districts and held discussions with the farmers, and worked the movement in the most vigorous manner possible. I was a very humble volunteer and worker in the same cause; and I remember having addressed public meetings at Huddersfield, Halifax, Skipton, and Ossett. At the last place I mounted the pulpit in a Baptist Chapel—the first and only time I have spoken from so elevated a place. Of course, Cobden was the soul and centre of the movement. He spoke often in Leeds and the neighbouring towns. It is not necessary for me to go further into this history,

as the whole question is fully discussed in Mr Morley's *Life of Cobden*.

I remember, however, a story being told me by Mr Rawson of Manchester, which is worthy of being remembered. Mr Thomasson of Bolton had gone with Cobden and Rawson to a country town, to hold a discussion with the farmers in the market-place. Mr Thomasson was a dyspeptic man, and had a very delicate stomach. He could not digest wheat bread, but was driven to the use of bran bread. When he arrived at the country inn, he asked the landlady if she could get him some bran to make bread with. She had never heard of such a thing! But the bran was got, and the bread was made. Next morning, the ostler and the grooms had a horse nose-bag stuffed with bran, and carried it about the streets, followed by a crowd, crying, "This is what these Manchester sweeps would feed us on! This is what they want to bring us to!"

Before bringing this chapter to an end, I may mention that the Corn Laws were repealed by the ministry of Sir Robert Peel in June 1846; and that, of the other two movements above mentioned, the Chartist one collapsed in April 1848, after the Kennington Common procession, and the Household Suffrage one triumphed in August 1867, so far as the residents in towns were concerned, by the "dishing of the Whigs" by the Tories. The Ballot and abolition of property qualification for members followed. But no party has yet had the courage to tackle the far more difficult question—the extension of the Franchise to the agricultural labourer.* Possibly the bogey predicted by Mr Baines in 1841

* This point was, however, afterwards settled in the session of 1884-85.

may be a bogey after all. By giving the agricultural population a fair and equal share in the suffrage, the towns may lose a portion of their political influence, and "the Tories may come in," to the horror of Whigs and Radicals.