

## CHAPTER VIII

### EDITOR OF THE *LEEDS TIMES*

I ARRIVED in Leeds towards the end of November 1838. I had still about six weeks to spend before I began my work as editor. There was time to make acquaintance with the place, to understand the local politics, and prepare for the work to be done.

Leeds forms the centre of an immense manufacturing district. It is the heart of the woollen trade. The people are distinguished for their energy in business, commerce, and politics. They are robust, manly, industrious, shrewd, and hard-headed. When Köhl, the traveller, visited the town, he gave a very poor account of its art and architecture. It has become more ornamented since then. But though there was little art, there was a great deal of common sense and public spirit.

At the time I entered Leeds, there was a considerable amount of distress among the working people. The price of food was high, and wages were low. Good wheat was from 80s. to 86s. the quarter. In fact, the price of corn had not been so high for twenty years. All this told upon the labouring classes. The *Northern Star* was furiously preaching the Charter. Feargus O'Connor was holding torchlight meetings in the manufacturing districts, and approaching more

and more to the doctrines of physical force. On the other hand, the Corn Law repealers were beginning to move, though only by very tentative steps.

The first lecture on the subject was given by Mr Paulton at Leeds on the 29th December 1838. Though Mr Baines, one of the members for the borough, was in the chair, the meeting was very thinly attended. The lecture was read, with not much force; and though the lecturer was thanked, but little effect was produced. A fortnight later, a public meeting was held in the Cloth Hall Yard, for the repeal of the Corn Laws. The meeting was largely attended, partly because Feargus O'Connor was to be there. Mr George Goodman introduced the motion for repeal, and was opposed by the Chartist leader. I presented myself for the first time before a Leeds audience, and moved the previous question. "Who is he? What is he?" I heard asked on every side. "It's the new editor of the *Leeds Times*!" In this way, I soon got to be known. I may add that, after a long palaver, Feargus O'Connor was defeated, and the resolutions were carried by a considerable majority.

I may mention that a meeting had been held at Manchester a few days before, at which the Anti-Corn-Law Association had been formed. Mr Cobden appeared at this meeting, and recommended those present to invest part of their property in the fund, to save the rest from confiscation. Subscriptions were at once put down for large sums; the *Anti-Corn-Law Circular* was started; and the movement was fairly initiated.

Meanwhile I proceeded with my own work—the editing of the paper. I had perhaps some of the qualities necessary for an editor. I had plenty of

energy, and ability for work. I was ready for it at all times—early in the morning, at midday, and at midnight. When a country doctor, I had always been ready to ride at any minute, in all weathers; now I was equally ready to write.

It was pleasant work too. I had to read no end of newspapers, periodicals, and reviews. My pair of scissors took the place of my lancet. I clipped and cut, and made piles of extracts, without fear of injury to any human life. Then I used the paste pot with effect, and made up my slips for the paper. Much of my reading was skimming, but I was soon able to get the gist of a thing.

Readiness and quickness were great points. A newspaper editor cannot be a writer of "moods." He must be ready at noon, ready at night; quick of apprehension, quick at expression. These qualities did not come suddenly. They came by degrees, with constant use and experience. I was willing to work, and was always working.

I used to write about four columns of leader a week, besides subleaders and paragraphs. Then I wrote a column or two of reviews of books. This, with looking over the correspondence, filled up my time pretty well. I had plenty to do, moreover, in my spare minutes. I read many papers before the Literary Institutes, took part in public meetings, and attended at the soirees of Mechanics Institutes throughout the West Riding.

The distress continued to increase in 1839. Flour was 3s. 10d. a stone. This means a great deal to a man who lives by his labour and the eating of bread. To many families it meant destitution, especially at a time when work was scarce. I think it was about this time that my friend Colonel Thompson wrote his

famous little paper on "The Siege of Bolton." It first appeared in the *Sun*, and was spread broadcast through the country on the wings of the press. It was a most vivid account of the intense suffering endured from want of food by the hungry population of that manufacturing town. Of course it pointed a moral. As in O'Connell's celebrated story of the horse, "Will they try Corn?" that was the remedy for starvation.

The Chartists, however, insisted on their own remedy. Nothing but the Charter could answer their purpose: nothing but universal suffrage. They went to all manner of lengths to force their measure before the public. They mustered in the churches, and crowded out the regular congregations. At Manchester, they took possession of the Cathedral, but when the preacher announced his text, "My house is the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves," they left the place abruptly. They mustered at public meetings, and insisted upon the Charter. I was present at a meeting of the British and Foreign School Society held in the Commercial Buildings on the 4th September 1839, at which the publisher of the *Northern Star* and his followers were present. Mr Baines, M.P., was in the chair; but a motion was proposed that Joshua Hobson should preside; and a vigorous contest took place. Mr Baines stood firmly to his post, though Hobson tried to push him out of the chair. The quiet Quaker ladies sat still and looked in amazement. Of course, nothing could be done. The members of the Society eventually retired. The gas was turned off; and the meeting broke up in disorder.

The working people suffered much. Towards the close of the year, at least 10,000 persons were out of

employment in the burgh of Leeds. Though the people complained, they did not riot. It was different elsewhere. There were riots at Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, and other places. At Newport, in Wales, a Chartist insurrection took place, which ended in the capture of Frost and a number of rioters. At Bradford, men openly practised military evolutions on Fairweather Green, furnished with pikes and firearms. Sixteen of them were apprehended by the police, and were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Feargus O'Connor himself was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment for inciting to insurrection and plunder in the *Northern Star*.

The Anti-Corn-Law movement had as yet made no real progress. The Whig ministry, then in office, was dead against it. The Chartists commanded the multitude, and they, or at least the noisiest part of them, were equally opposed to the repealers. In March 1840, a deputation of Anti-Corn-Law men appeared in London, and waited upon the leading ministers. Having stated to Lord Melbourne, then Premier, their object—the repeal of the Corn Law—his lordship curtly remarked, “You know that to be quite impracticable.” Their interviews with the others were equally unsatisfactory. Multitudes of petitions for the repeal were of no use. On the 26th of May, the House of Commons, by a majority of 123, refused to consider the question of the Corn Laws.

What was to be done? My friend, Mr Hamer Stansfeld of Leeds, thought that the true method was to infuse some new blood into Parliament by the extension of the franchise. The ten pound suffrage introduced by the Reform Bill had only enfranchised the middle classes. Why not extend the suffrage to

the industrious people—the working power of the country? After conferring with Mr James Garth Marshall—the friend and correspondent of the late Dr Arnold—it was arranged that a society should be established for this purpose.

Mr Stansfeld was a man for whom I had the greatest esteem. He was frank, free, and open, in all that he did. He possessed the courtesy of the true gentleman; and withal he was intelligent, enlightened, and firm to his purpose. He was full of industry, integrity, and excellence. In a word, his character was sterling. As was said of some one—he had the *whitest* soul that ever I knew.

I felt it to be a great honour to be consulted by such a man. He was pleased to say that he had read and approved my views as to “levelling up” the people as a mass, by education and the extension of privileges—so as to do away with the idea of social exclusiveness. He had read my “Appeal to the Middle Classes,” which had appeared in the *Leeds Times* of 10th August; and suggested that an association should be formed for the extension and redistribution of the franchise. He asked me to write out an address on the subject, which I proceeded to do. This was approved by his friends, and published. A number of leading men subscribed their names, and a public meeting was held in the Music Hall, on the 31st of August 1840, to initiate the new association, James Garth Marshall in the Chair.

The first meeting was very successful. The chairman made an admirable speech. It was quiet, but emphatic. Among other things, he said that “the more immediate cause which originated this association was the late unanimous refusal, by a large majority of the House of Commons, to remove

or modify the iniquitous tax on the people's food—a refusal sullen, unreasoning, without the decency of inquiry, and almost without the formality of a debate." He pointed out the greatest of social dangers that threatens us—the long, unrelieved misery, the long, unredeemed wrongs, which divided society into hostile classes, each by open violence and wrong struggling to preserve their own selfish interests, regardless of the rights of others. He concluded by stating that the mode by which the Society proposed to proceed, was vigorous and well-directed agitation, discussion, and support of such great practical measures as the Repeal of the Corn Laws, National Education, Inquiry into the Condition of the Working Classes—all in reference to, and in strict subordination to, the great special object of Parliamentary Reform.

Mr Hamer Stansfeld followed in a vigorous speech. Alderman George Goodman — afterwards mayor and representative of the borough in Parliament — insisted upon cheap and equal justice for all classes of the community. Councillor Joshua Bower, Mr Joseph Middleton, barrister, and others (of whom I was one), addressed the meeting; and the resolutions were unanimously adopted.

I was afterwards requested to act as Honorary Secretary, and wrote the first address, which was issued to the public. In that address, the disproportionate representation of the people was strongly pointed out. For instance, it was shown that twenty-five small boroughs, of no importance whatever, sent fifty members to Parliament, whilst Leeds, with 20,000 more population than all these boroughs combined, sent only two. It was the same with the towns and cities in Ireland.

Mr Marshall followed this up with other addresses—one to Daniel O'Connell and the Repealers of Ireland, announcing the motto of "Justice for each and for all"—and arguing that "the people should make the Government, and that to the people the Government should be responsible for all its acts." By these publications, and especially by the proposal to have a conference of friends of the movement in Leeds, a considerable amount of interest was excited in the proceedings of the association. When it became known that Hamer Stansfeld had declined the office of mayor of Leeds, in order to devote himself more effectually to the work of the association, the editor of the *Leeds Mercury*—then ably conducted by Mr Edward Baines, junior (afterwards Sir Edward Baines)—proceeded to address him in a series of letters in opposition to the movement, which were published in the columns of that paper on the 21st November, and 12th December, 1840; and the 2nd of January 1841.

It is unnecessary to go at any length into the details of this controversy. But it may be briefly mentioned that Mr Baines opposed the proposed measures—Household Suffrage, The Ballot, Redistribution of the Representation, Triennial Parliaments, and Absolution of the Property Qualification—on the grounds principally that they would "let in the Tories"—that they would "destroy the influence of towns," "strengthen the aristocracy," and "perpetuate the Corn Law." The pamphlet in which the letters were afterwards published, bore this argument on its front. Mr Baines held, no doubt truly, that a great portion of the working people to whom the franchise was to be extended ("perhaps a majority") could not write their own names; that the

measure would thus be transferring power from the educated to the uneducated classes; and that the redistribution of the suffrage would, by including so many more of the county voters, diminish the ascendancy of the towns, and give to the county population "an immense and unassailable preponderance."

Mr Hamer Stansfeld defended himself, also in the columns of the *Mercury*; and his letters were afterwards published in a pamphlet form. Mr Stansfeld denied the justice of refusing the suffrage to the people of the counties, on the grounds stated by his opponent. He would trust them, and believed that the Ballot would sufficiently protect them in the exercise of the franchise. Mr Roebuck also gave an admirable lecture before the association, in which he clearly and brightly illustrated "The Science of Government." Later the controversy became merged in the proceedings of the great Suffrage Festival, which took place in Messrs Marshall's new mill at Holbeck, on the 21st of January 1841.

The mill had just been erected, and was not yet supplied with machinery. It was built in the style of an Egyptian temple, with an immense chimney like an elongated pyramid. The great roof was supported on iron pillars—there being grass enough on the top for sheep to feed—and the room itself covered five times as much space as Westminster Hall, extending over nearly two acres of ground. It was certainly the largest room in the world; and on this occasion was densely packed. The proceedings, on account of the heterogeneous audience, and the frequent howlings of the Chartists, were very confused.

The object was to have a friendly conference with

the working people, and to exchange thoughts freely with them about the extension of the franchise. Their leaders were invited to be present, and to address the meeting. The speakers on the side of the Household Suffrage Association were, Mr James Garth Marshall, the Chairman, Mr Joseph Hume, M.P., Sir George Strickland, M.P., Mr John Arthur Roebuck, Mr Sharman Crawford, Mr Williams, M.P., and Col. Perronet Thompson; and on the part of the Chartists, Messrs Moir, delegate from Glasgow, O'Neil from Birmingham, Lowry from Newcastle, Mason from the Midland Counties, and Deegan from Sunderland. The resolutions were passed, some of them amidst howling; and though they all went in the direction of a large extension of the franchise, the speakers differed to a large extent with respect to the various "points" of the Charter.

Dan O'Connell was expected to attend the meeting, in which case the Chartists intended to shout him down; but he did not make his appearance until the following day—when there was a conference in the Cloth Hall Rotunda in the morning, and a dinner in the evening—at which the great Dan made one of his best speeches. Hume, Roebuck, and Col. Thompson also spoke.

Although the Household Suffrage Association continued its operations, and started a Working Man's Club in Albion Street, where a library was established, lectures delivered, and discussions held, nothing came of the movement. It was like flogging a dead horse to make it rise and go. It would neither rise nor go. After the lapse of two or three years, the association expired of inanition. Another movement took its place, and the rapidly growing distress compelled the country to take

into consideration the question of the Corn Laws.

It was about the beginning of 1841 that I had my first communication from Mr Cobden. He had declined to attend the Household Suffrage meeting in Marshall's mill, although (he said) "the principles so ably advocated by the Leeds Association had always had his humble advocacy, and he should continue, individually, to give them all the support in his power," but that "his engagements during the next month, in the cause of Corn Law abolition, would occupy every moment of his leisure." Shortly after, a communication appeared in the *Anti-Corn-Law Circular*, addressed to me by name, in which the editor virtually assailed the attitude taken by the Leeds Suffrage Reformers. To this I sent a letter in reply, requesting its insertion in the *Circular*. Mr Ballantyne, who was then the editor, handed my letter to Mr Cobden, who wrote to me, requesting me not to press for the insertion of my communication.

He said: "The letter in the *Circular* addressed to you, expressly draws a distinction between the readers of the *Star*, and the working classes generally. Under such a state of things as 12,000 or 15,000 copies of a Chartist paper (insidiously opposing the Anti-Corn-Law Party) selling weekly in Leeds, it was merely argued that that was a proof of the necessity for advocating the Repeal of the Corn Laws. You will judge whether you would wish your letter to appear. I think it would be hardly fair, and might be calculated to do harm. Why should we even *appear* to be at variance, when the Anti-Corn-Law Party, and rational radicals are really identically the same in politics? Our only difference is as to the means of carrying out our objects. We think *time* must be regarded, along with labour, as essential

means to the obtaining of Corn Law Repeal, and are willing to give a further trial of both. I wish the Leeds A. C. L. men had held on to the question for a year or two more. When the Whigs go out, *then* will be the time for a new combination of parties, with a chance of getting some aristocratic leaders. Unhappily, we are not fit to run alone without the guidance of the latter. By the way, do you see *Dan's* abuse of the Anti-Corn-Law League for interfering with the Whigs at Walsall? Observe, too, that he says in the same speech, that he is for Universal Suffrage. Although joining you, he is preparing for a retreat upon the *Charter*. The artful dodger!"

The Chartists continued their uproarious proceedings at public meetings. It became almost impossible to hold an assemblage on any subject without their interference. They were especially violent against the Corn Law men, assuming that if their movement succeeded, the Chartists would be nowhere. At a meeting at Deptford in April, the Chartists were ejected by force; but at a meeting in the Cloth Hall at Leeds they succeeded, and forced the mayor from the chair. It was the same at Edinburgh and elsewhere.

In the face of the increasing distress, the Whig Ministry proposed, in May 1841, to revise the Corn Laws, and the Premier (Lord Melbourne) acknowledged that he had "changed the opinion which he formerly held—grounded as that opinion was on purely temporary interests." The new proposal was to fix the duty on wheat at 8s. a quarter, and to reduce the duties on timber and sugar. A meeting of Leeds Delegates was held on the 7th of May in the Rotunda of the Coloured Cloth Hall, when it was resolved to petition Parliament "in favour of the abolition of monopolies generally, and especially for the reduction

of the sugar and timber duties, and the repeal of the Corn Laws."

Upon this Mr Cobden wrote to me the following letter:—

"MANCHESTER, *Saturday*.

"MY DEAR SIR,—

"I fear from the tenor of the *Mercury* that the Anti-Corn-Law deputies will be preparing themselves for Monday next to support Ministers and desert our League. We are determined in Manchester to stick to total and immediate repeal, and wherever a branch association drops off from us, we will do our best to rear up another in its place. The proposal to unite the agitation against the timber duties, sugar duties, etc., will be a virtual secession from our League. It will be an infringement upon the rules, which restrict us exclusively to the subject of total and immediate repeal. My object in writing is to beg that you will stand up for us at the Monday's meeting, and prevent any rupture. I see by the *Mercury* that Members of Parliament and others have advised us to enlarge our objects. Yes! *we* are very troublesome to M.P.'s, both Whig and Tory, and they would be glad to turn us into anything but what we are. They know if we become mere *tariff-reformers* they may pass muster—just as Stanley, Graham, and Co., passed off as excellent Parliamentary Reformers before the Reform Bill. But when we come to the test of Total Repeal of the Bread Tax, they can't shuffle, and so they dislike us, and would willingly separate us from one another to weaken us.—Believe me, yours faithfully,

"RICHARD COBDEN."

The proposals of Ministers were lost in the House of Commons. A motion by Sir Robert Peel, expressing want of confidence in the Ministry, was defeated by a majority of only one. A succession of defeats at length compelled them to resign, and Parliament was dissolved on the 22nd of June 1841.

We were now in for a new election. Mr Baines

had expressed his intention of not offering himself again to the constituency; Sir William Molesworth had lost the confidence of the electors; and it was consequently necessary to find two new candidates. Probably in deference to the Household Suffrage Association, Joseph Hume was selected as the strongest man; and a comparatively unknown gentleman, Mr Aldam, a mild Whig, as the other. The two Tory candidates were Mr William Beckett, the well-known banker, and Lord Jocelyn.

To aid in the election, I started a little penny paper entitled *The Movement*. It passed through four numbers. In the first I gave a biography of Joseph Hume, which he himself said was exceedingly well done: "he did not know how I could have picked up so many facts about his character and history." A native of Montrose, he was educated as a surgeon—principally through the efforts of his mother, who was a person of equally strong character with himself—and went out to India in the service of the East India Company. He soon displayed his extraordinary perseverance and capacity for labour. During the Mahratta War, he was with Lord Lake's army; and in the bustle of the camp, and while engaged in the laborious duties of his profession, he studied the language. When Colonel Achmuty—at that time interpreter to the army—became disabled, the only person found able to hold communication with the natives was the indefatigable surgeon from Montrose, who was immediately promoted to the office of interpreter. Besides continuing his medical duties, he was requested to fill the offices of Paymaster and Postmaster of the troops! He performed all his duties with such activity and industry as to secure for him the marked approbation of the

Commander-in-Chief, as well as his private friendship.

After a period of industrious prosperity, he returned to England. He travelled through Great Britain; made himself acquainted with every place of manufacturing celebrity in England, Scotland, and Ireland; then he travelled abroad, in Spain and Portugal, Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Italy, and France. By the temper of his mind, his experience and information, his habits of patient industry and research, and the solidity of his fortunes, he was now well able to fill with effect a seat in the legislature of his country. He was elected for Weymouth in 1812—three years before the battle of Waterloo.

From the time that he took his seat in Parliament, down to the year 1841, when he offered himself to the Leeds constituency, Joseph Hume distinguished himself by his indefatigable industry. There is scarcely a page of the parliamentary register which does not contain some record of his sayings and doings. In the finances, the revenue, the excise, the public accounts, the army and navy, the representation of the people, the removal of religious disabilities, he was always at work. He was the most regular attender, the most consistent voter, the most laborious investigator, the most active and useful member, perhaps, who ever sat in Parliament. Financial questions were his favourites. Shortly after he entered the House, he found that the public accounts were imperfect; and that frauds to an immense amount might be (and probably were) committed without the possibility of detection. He was defeated again and again, but stuck to his text. Attention was at last awakened; converts came slowly dropping in; and in 1822, the Select Committee,

which had been appointed at his urgent desire, reported in favour of his method of so preparing the accounts, that the true balance might be struck between income and expenditure. For twenty years more he continued on his unpaid mission, checking the accounts, and advocating all manner of improvements, in trade, in commerce, in reducing taxation, and in extending freedom. And now he offered himself to the largest manufacturing town in Yorkshire.

But he was not good enough for Leeds. Mr William Beckett, an able man no doubt, was at the top of the poll; Mr Aldam was second; and Joseph Hume third. He was accordingly defeated. To show the pleasant way in which things were done in the North, a coffin was carried in front of the hustings, which was openly proclaimed to be the coffin in which Mr Hume was to be buried. He was not buried, however, but lived to do a great deal of useful work. He was at once returned to Parliament by his fellow townsmen of Montrose, and took his seat as usual. He lived to see the end of the Corn Laws; and during the later years of his life, he devoted his energies to throwing open public places—the British Museum, National Gallery, the Tower, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, Kew Gardens, and such like—to the people at large. It seemed only reasonable that they should be permitted to see the collections maintained by the public taxes. Now, thanks to the persevering tenacity of Joseph Hume, they were at length enabled to enjoy the sight of their own property.\*

\* I have endeavoured to bear my testimony to Mr Hume's philanthropic efforts in *Self-Help*, pp. 115-117; and *Duty*, pp. 317-320. I wonder that no Life of Joseph Hume has been published. It would form a fine record of indefatigable and useful perseverance.