The Quaker Deputation to Russia: January–February 1854

TWO months before the outbreak of the Crimean war, a deputation from the Society of Friends in Great Britain travelled to the court of Nicholas I, Emperor of All the Russias, in order to try to avert the conflict that was seen by the great majority of their countrymen as not only inevitable, but to be welcomed. The meeting between Nicholas and the Quakers was probably the last direct contact between the Emperor and any Englishman, but few historians have given much attention to this extraordinary mission. Perhaps most modern scholars feel the way that contemporaries felt, that the deputation was nothing more than an eccentric gesture on the part of a naïve religious sect, doomed to failure from the beginning and meriting, therefore, no serious consideration. For a number of reasons, however, it is an interesting phenomenon to study. Aside from the fact of its own intrinsic interest, a study of the deputation can tell us, in view of the reaction it caused, a great deal about the climate of opinion in Britain during the early months of 1854. Such a study also shows the pacifists Henry Richard[1] and Richard Cobden in an interesting light; and John Bright, who was to become the most eloquent critic of the war, reveals a negative sort of indifference which might surprise those who are acquainted only with his later pronouncements.

The contemporary accounts of the deputation written by Robert Charleton[2] and Henry Richard contain gaps that must be filled in, in each case, by reference to the other man's narrative. I have collated these two accounts and have tried to put the story of the deputation into its historical context by referring to related outside events. I have included more detail than is available in any of the secondary accounts and have corrected some of the errors which these accounts contain. The result is a single narrative of the deputation, based almost exclusively on primary sources and corrective of

[1] *Dictionary of National Biography.*
[2] Robert Charleton (1809–1872), of Bristol. *D.N.B.*

traditional errors—in most cases of detail, in one important instance of interpretation.[1]

The idea of sending a group of Friends to Nicholas, bearing with them an appeal that the Emperor do all in his power to avert a war between his country and England and France, originated with Joseph Sturge of Birmingham. Sturge's biographer relates that "in December, 1853, while Mr. Sturge was in earnest conversation with his friend Mr. Joseph Cooper . . . the idea was started whether some good might not be effected by a deputation from the Society of Friends waiting upon the Emperor of Russia."[2] Russia and Turkey had been at war for two months and in Britain agitation to join the conflict on the side of Turkey was at a pitch. The general war fever was aggravated by the Russophobe press, which clamoured constantly for the destruction of Nicholas, the "booted autocrat". The deputation, as its sponsors knew, would be decidedly a last ditch effort.

Sturge must have approached Richard Cobden on the subject of the deputation shortly after the conversation with Cooper. Cobden was not at all sympathetic. He wrote to Joseph Sturge, 28th December, 1853: "I don't think you ought to encourage the idea of sending a mission to the Czar. Your business lies with the people of Birmingham."[3] Less than a week later he returned to the subject:

> I rather think you overrate the effect of deputating to crowned heads. "Friends" have been charged with being too fond of the "great", and the memoirs of Allen and other biographies give

[1] The major primary sources are Robert Charleton's letters as they appear in Anna F. Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton* (2nd ed.; London, 1876) and Sturge's account of events in Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (London, 1864). It should be noted that Richard, in giving an account of the deputation, often draws heavily on the Charleton letters. For some reason—why, I have not been able to discover—Richard quotes the letters in a different form than they appear in Fox's *Memoir*. Although he presents them as direct quotations, he actually paraphrases the originals, giving them greater dramatic force. Secondary works which contain an account of the deputation are Margaret Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War* (London, 1923); Stephen Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge* (London, 1919); Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, 2 vols. (London, 1921); Mary H. Pease, *Henry Pease* (London, 1897); Richenda C. Scott, *Quakers in Russia* (London, 1964).

[2] H. Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, p. 463. Joseph Cooper (1800?–81) was a recorded minister of the Society of Friends, active in the Peace Society and anti-slavery movement. See *Annual Monitor* for 1883, pp. 142–152.

[3] *Sturge Papers*, British Museum, Additional MS. 50131.

> some colorable sanction to the suspicion that you have *tuft-hunters* among your body. If a party of Friends were *now* to set off on a visit to Nicholas, it might I think expose them to the charge of seeking their own glorification. Nothing short of a miracle could enable such a deputation to accomplish the end in view; and miracles are not wrought in our times. Besides it is we after all who are responsible for the bloodshed.[1]

But Sturge was not deterred by Cobden's pessimism. He brought his concern to the Meeting for Sufferings in London and that body, on Friday, 6th January, 1854, appointed a seventeen-man committee to draft an address to Nicholas. On 9th January, the drafting committee called for a Special Meeting, which was held, accordingly on Wednesday, 11th January. At that time the draft of the address was submitted to the Meeting, altered slightly and approved of. Upon adjournment, the drafting committee was instructed to see that the address was "duly signed and to arrange for its presentation".[2]

The address, recorded in the minutes of the Meeting, need not be reproduced here in full.[3] It spoke to the Emperor "under a deep conviction of religious duty and in the constraining love of Christ", without presuming "to offer any opinion upon the questions now at issue". The Society of Friends, "as a Christian Church [which has] uniformly upheld a testimony against all war, on the simple ground that it is utterly condemned by the precepts of Christianity",

1 Cobden to Sturge, 3rd January 1854. *Sturge Papers*, British Museum, Add. MS. 43722. The reference is to William Allen, who had been friendly with Nicholas's predecessor, Alexander I of Russia. See also Cobden to Sturge, 10th January, 1854 (*Sturge Papers*, British Museum, Add. MS. 50131): "If I cared more than yourself for ridicule or the disadvantage of living in a minority. I should not take the course I have done. It is not to spare you from such ordeals that I deprecate a visit to the Czar. But I felt and still feel that we have too much to do at home to allow such diversions."

2 *Meeting for Sufferings minutes*, XLVI (Friends House Library, London). Strictly speaking, it was the 6th January Meeting which made the decision to send the address, not the Meeting of 17th January, as stated by Rufus Jones (*Later Periods of Quakerism*, II, p. 725) and others. The London Meeting for Sufferings, under the 1833 Discipline, would have been acting in its capacity as a standing committee of Yearly Meeting and, in approving of the deputation, would have been acting on behalf of the Society of Friends in Great Britain.

3 The address, along with the Emperor's verbal reply after the presentation of the address on 10th February, and his written reply, in French, dated 1/13 Février and signed by Nesselrode, may be found in *The British Friend*, XII (1854), 68–70; *The Friend*, XII (1854), 49–51; *The Herald of Peace*, n.s. XLV (1854), 26–27. Many contemporary daily newspapers also printed the address and the replies, in whole or in part.

approached Nicholas as a Christian ruler, in the hope that he would heed the gospel command to "love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you . . . ". That is to say, the address requested that the Emperor act like a Christian. It was signed by forty-seven Friends.[1]

Four days after the address had been accepted by the Meeting, Cobden wrote Sturge another impatient and discouraging letter:

> I am sorry you are going to Petersburgh and really cannot see what good you propose to do. It seems to me a very irrational step and calculated to weaken your influence where alone your efforts can have a chance of being attended to with any success, viz. amongst your own countrymen.[2]

Yet it was precisely because his own countrymen would listen to no counsel, were it not one of war, that Sturge had decided the last hope for peace lay in an appeal to the enemy.

On Tuesday, 17th January, a Special Meeting for Sufferings chose Sturge and Robert Charleton of Bristol as members of the deputation. A third member was wanting and his selection was left to the drafting committee, the spot for his name being left blank on the commission.[3] Since Edward Pease, in Darlington, noted in his diary on 19th January that his son, "yielding to the desire of the Meeting for Sufferings", was to accompany Sturge and Charleton on their journey, it is reasonable to assume that Henry Pease decided to join the others on 17th January after the Meeting, or sometime on 18th January.[4] In any event, it was known by Thursday, 19th January, exactly who would be attempting the mission.

It was on that Thursday that Cobden sent a final letter to

1 *Meeting for Sufferings minutes*, XLVI, pp. 380–382. The members of the deputation were not on the drafting committee, nor did they sign the completed address. An examination of the names subscribed to the address shows that all signatories were either correspondents, recorded ministers or appointed elders; and this was also true of those on the drafting committee. At this time, none of the deputation fell into any of these categories.

2 Cobden to Sturge, Jan. 15, 1854. *Sturge Papers*, British Museum, Add. MS. 43722.

3 *Meeting for Sufferings minutes*, XLVI, p. 383. Most historians imply that this was the first and only Meeting (e.g. Hirst, Hobhouse, Jones). Henry Pease was not appointed at this time, as Hirst and Hobhouse indicate.

4 Henry Pease (1807–81); *D.N.B.* See *The Diaries of Edward Pease*, ed. Alfred E. Pease (London, 1907), p. 310.

Sturge, in which he declined to give his friend a letter of reference to anyone in St. Petersburg.[1] Cobden's attitude in this affair is strange. It is doubly strange when one considers that on a previous occasion he praised Sturge for doing that for which he was at present condemning him. When Denmark was at war with Schleswig and Holstein in 1850, Sturge, Frederic Wheeler and the well-known American pacifist Elihu Burritt visited the heads of both factions in an attempt to prevent bloodshed. As Stephen Hobhouse has pointed out, Cobden was full of praise for Sturge on that occasion. He wrote warmly to him: "You have done good service by breaking through the flimsy veil with which the diplomatists of the world try to conceal their shallow craft . . . by your startling expedition to Rendsburg and Copenhagen . . ." "You have done good work . . . never mind the sneerers."[2] There is no mention of "tuft-hunters".

On Friday, 20th January, the deputation left London. The route to St. Petersburg took them through Düsseldorf, Berlin, Königsberg and Riga. A full account of this exhausting journey (two hundred horses were required for the coaches and sledges), undertaken in the dead of winter through the coldest part of Europe, is to be found in Robert Charleton's letters. (I omit them here, because, although they make entertaining reading, they contain nothing pertinent to the main purpose of the mission.)[3]

Arrival in St. Petersburg

The party arrived in the Russian capital at seven o'clock in the evening of Thursday, 2nd February. In the time between their departure from London and their arrival in St. Petersburg, the diplomats had not been inactive.

Briefly, the immediate diplomatic situation was as follows. On 22nd December, 1853, England and France had issued a joint demand that the Russian fleet take no action whatever against Turkey; and on 3rd January, 1854, the allies sent their own fleets into the Black Sea in order to enforce the demand. On 16th January, Nesselrode, the Russian Chancellor, ordered Baron Brunnow, the Russian

1 Cobden to Sturge, 19th January, 1854. *Sturge Papers*, British Museum, Add. MS. 43722.

2 S. Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge*, p. 138.

3 Anna Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton*, pp. 62–69, for the journey.

ambassador in London,[1] to inquire whether the allies meant to keep Turkey from attacking Russia—whether, in Nesselrode's words, there would be *"juste réciprocité"*. On 23rd January, while the Quaker deputation was travelling from Düsseldorf to Berlin, the British Foreign Secretary, Clarendon, received Brunnow and considered Nesselrode's inquiry. Now Nesselrode's instructions to Brunnow had been that if a satisfactory answer to his inquiry were not given by Clarendon, diplomatic relations were to be broken off. It happened that on 31st January, Clarendon gave Brunnow what was to prove to be an unsatisfactory answer. The court at St. Petersburg did not yet know that and it appears that Brunnow did not, immediately upon receipt of Clarendon's reply, send a courier off to Nesselrode. Rather, he waited a few days before acting. The great question in St. Petersburg diplomatic circles at the moment the deputation arrived in the city was: what was Clarendon's stance and how would Brunnow respond to it? Obviously, the three Quakers had no idea of these developments.[2]

For a time, British diplomacy took no official notice of the deputation. The British press, however, had a field day with the Quakers.

As Kingsley Martin has shown, public opinion against Russia, as both formed and interpreted by the popular press, pushed many of the moderate politicians (most notably the Prime Minister, Lord Aberdeen) into a war which, left to their own devices, they would probably have chosen to avoid.[3] By the account of Henry Richard, "there were two reasons and two only" why there was a Crimean war, and one of these was public opinion "so inflamed by the press into fury against Russia that it swept the Government as with the force of a hurricane into the war".[4] Given the standards of

1 Count Philipp von Brunnow (1797–1875), Russian ambassador in London, 1840–1854, 1858–72.

2 For documents relevant to these manoeuvrings, see Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers*, 1853–1854, Vol. XLIV (London, 1865), "Correspondence respecting the suspension of diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Russia, January and February, 1854", pp. 98–105.

3 *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston* (rev. ed.; London, 1963).

4 H. Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, p. 486. The other reason was the war-like attitude of Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe, British ambassador at Constantinople. Those who held Richard's views argued that Stratford made war inevitable by assuring the Turks of England's support no matter what the situation.

the press, it would be expected that they would damn the deputation. Damn it they did, most of the periodicals attacking frontally, a few employing faint praise.

The Times of 21st January referred to the deputation as a "piece of enthusiastic folly", before launching into a wholeheartedly vicious assault in the issue of 23rd January.

Perhaps the best example of those accounts that might be called favourable, was one of the first to appear, on 21st January, in Henry Pease's own home town, in *The Darlington and Stockton Times*:

> It is well known that the Peace Society and especially the members of the Society of Friends, have always been consistent in their endeavours to inculcate peace doctrines; and however chimerical it may seem to some men, it must be admitted that they are earnest in the views they hold, and in the fact that a deputation from the Peace Society has actually proceeded to St. Petersburgh, we have the best answer to those who doubt the sincerity of their motives. We certainly have no faith in the success of their mission; the love of peace has not yet penetrated the cold regions of the north sufficiently to thaw the Autocrat into such a melting state as to induce him to pay much attention to the theories of the British Peace Society, however good they may be.

Sturge is written about in his own town by *The Birmingham Mercury*, in the same grudging way. The issue of 28th January says that "his mission, though a mistake, is a most amiable one. His benevolence, though pure waste, is still benevolence."

One of the few really encouraging notices appeared in Edward Miall's journal, *The Nonconformist*, on 25th January:

> Such an attempt will, of course, provoke only the ridicule of that unfortunately numerous class, who set down enthusiasm in any cause as fanaticism and who dread being in a minority. But it is, after all, men of faith and self-sacrifice, like Mr. Pease and Mr. Sturge, who are the pioneers of improvement . . .[1]

Miall was right in predicting the ridicule, which followed soon after news of the deputation had circulated. *Punch* was scathing enough, but its satire was gentle compared with the

[1] For Edward Miall (1809–81), M.P. for Rochdale 1852–1857, see *D.N.B.* This article was doubly generous, considering that Miall—who had actively supported the peace congresses—now favoured war with Russia; see Arthur Miall, *Life of Edward Miall* (London, 1884), p. 192.

onslaught of that citadel of crown and caste, *John Bull*. And the evidence suggests that *John Bull*'s view was typical of the hawkish majority in England when they found that their hatred of Russia had not been shared by the Society of Friends. In an article entitled "Czar Nicholas and the Three Wise Men from the East", *John Bull* compared the reception which the Quakers received in St. Petersburg with that accorded in London to Tom Thumb, or "the Kaffir Chief when he got abroad". But this was simply badinage. More vicious was the construction which it inferred should be placed upon the deputation's motives, unfortunately echoing Cobden's criticism.

> With all their "simplicity" we suspect that the "Friends" are much too shrewd a race to have imagined for a moment that any practical effect would result from this "mission". If so, knowing that they were going on a bootless errand, wherefore did Mr. Sturge, Mr. Pease and their nameless Bristol brother go at all? Was it to parade themselves before the world as more righteous than the rest of mankind? or simply to gratify their sectarian vanity, by showing what consequential people they are with whom even such a man as Czar Nicholas will shake hands?[1]

The contempt of the opinion represented by *John Bull* was to be expected, for it was against such opinion that the Quakers had always fought. What is striking is the fact that those who should have been sympathetic offered no support, or only offered it after the event. An article on the deputation did not appear in *The Herald of Peace*, the official publication of the Peace Society, until March, when the Quakers had been back in England for a week. In fact, when *The Times* stated that the deputation originated with the Peace Society (an error which occurred in many accounts), Henry Richard, secretary of the Society, was quick to issue a disclaimer. Richard's only comment on the deputation until after their return to England, is to be found in a letter to *The Times*, published on 23rd January, in which he denies any connection with them and any knowledge of the nature of their mission. It is worth noting that this disclaimer (which, in view of Sturge's active participation in the Peace Society,

[1] Issue of 25th February. At first, Robert Charleton's name was not given in newspaper accounts, but by this date it was certainly a matter of common knowledge.

seems a little gratuitous) won the approval of *John Bull*. That journal noted the denial with glee:

> The Peace Society is giving indications of returning sanity. Three gentlemen of unwonted humility and diffidence have volunteered to become the Horatii of the Eastern quarrel and to try the effect of the undoffable broadbrim upon Czar Nicholas. The Peace Society, whose credentials they meant to have borne with them, has wisely declined to endorse their errand and they will have, therefore, to proceed, if at all, "on their own hook".[1]

The Herald of Peace did finally print a handsome article in the March issue praising the efforts of the deputation. The fact remains that as the mission travelled across the European wastes, the Peace Society did nothing to counteract the ridicule to which they were subjected at home. But as the three were unaware of the diplomatic struggle taking place over their heads, so were they oblivious to the clamour in the press which centred directly on them. They were spared the knowledge that at home their names symbolized, to the great majority whose only desire was to get on with the business of battering the Russians, everything from the childishly naïve to the hypocritically self-interested. They had become scapegoats.

The deputation's arrival in St. Petersburg had been expected. W. C. Gellibrand, an Englishman resident there, told them on 3rd February that their mission was "doubtless well known to the Russian authorities", because the English newspapers had preceded them. Because the Friends did not intend to make any contact with the English authorities in St. Petersburg until after they had met the Emperor, and because their presence in the capital was so obviously a matter of common knowledge, Gellibrand advised them to apply directly to Nesselrode for permission to present the address to Nicholas. This they did on 4th February. Nesselrode sent an immediate reply arranging to meet them himself, in order to discuss the address and its presentation. This preparatory meeting was set for Monday, 6th February, at 1 p.m.[2]

While Nesselrode and the deputation were exchanging

[1] Issue of 28th January.

[2] Charleton's letter of 4th February, 1854, in Anna Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton*, p. 72. Anna Fox does not indicate to whom Charleton's letters were addressed.

notes in St. Petersburg, Brunnow, in London, was informing Clarendon that the communication of 31st January did not satisfy the principle of *"juste réciprocité"* and that diplomatic relations between his country and England were as of that moment suspended.[1]

On the day appointed by Nesselrode for his meeting with the deputation, a messenger arrived at the Friends' lodgings to say that the Chancellor, because of business with the Emperor, would have to postpone his meeting with them until 1.30 p.m. "That he should thus send purposely," wrote Charleton, "in order to avoid keeping us waiting half-an-hour, we thought a rather unusual mark of politeness." When the meeting did take place, Nesselrode received the deputation "with great courtesy and affability" and "expressed his entire concurrence" with the address, after Sturge had read it to him. He promised to arrange an audience for the deputation with the Emperor.[2]

The Friends were dining at the home of another Englishman, A. Mirrielees, on 9th February, when the message arrived. The Emperor would see them the following day at 1.30 p.m.

What did the Friends think that they could achieve when they met the Emperor? Reading Charleton's letters or Henry Richard's *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* one is struck by the absence of false optimism. There is no evidence that they thought that the international situation would be radically changed by their visit to St. Petersburg. But neither do they exhibit undue pessimism. The best way to describe their attitude would be to call it "guardedly optimistic". Sturge, Pease and Charleton undertook this strenuous journey for two reasons. The first was the hope that some small good might come out of their mission and a belief that any contribution to the cause of peace, however slight, would justify the physical hardship and financial expense which they would have to bear. The second was more personal. They were acting for themselves, although not in the petty way suggested by *John Bull*. They felt it necessary to make a

1 Foreign Office, *British and Foreign State Papers*, Vol. XLIV, p. 104.

2 Charleton's letter of 6th February, 1854, in Anna Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton*, p. 74. Henry Richard wrongly places the meeting between Nesselrode and the deputation on 2nd February (*Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, p. 469).

personal testimony on behalf of peace, regardless of whether or not the diplomats should choose to emulate, or the masses applaud the gesture.

Was there any reason to believe that the mission might have a positive effect on a deteriorating situation? The evidence indicates that the situation was not as black as hindsight demands that we should consider it, and that the Quaker deputation could have acted as a bridge between the hostile powers—were it not for the diplomatic rupture of which St. Petersburg was still unaware. The Quakers were treated with a warmth and deference which their humble station would not merit, unless it were that the Russians believed that they could play some sort of role, even a minor one, in helping to avert a war.

W. C. Gellibrand, who was, according to Charleton, a well-informed and judicious observer of events in St. Petersburg, told the deputation "that the probability of such a mission being useful *now* is much greater than it would have been several months ago, or at any former period of the dispute".[1]

The assumption behind Gellibrand's judgement coincides with the opinion expressed by Sir Hamilton Seymour, British envoy at St. Petersburg, in a despatch to Clarendon dated 30th January. "I am told constantly," he wrote, "(the statement was repeated to me half-an-hour ago by a person in whose opinion I have great reliance) that Russia is very desirous of avoiding war—and I feel confident that the fact is so, but the wish applies only to the present juncture."[2] And concerning a dinner party at Lord Granville's on 8th February, John Bright wrote: "I had a good deal of quiet conversation with Lords Aberdeen and Granville on the subject of the threatened war. I think there is an impression among the ministers that Nicholas will give in and that peace will yet be maintained."[3] I cite these comments to support the judgement that the deputation was not engaged in an absolutely hopeless endeavour. The diplomatic rupture, news

1 Charleton's letter of 9th February, 1854, in Anna Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton*, p. 78.

2 Public Record Office, *F.O.* 65/444/88. It must be admitted that Seymour was capable of contradicting any judgement as soon as he had uttered it. Sir George Hamilton Seymour (1797–1880); *D.N.B.*

3 Bright to his wife, 9th February, 1854. *Bright Correspondence*, the Library, University College, Gower Street, London.

of which was travelling toward St. Petersburg via diplomatic courier, would from the Russian point of view preclude a peaceful settlement, but again, no one there yet knew of Brunnow's decision. In meeting the deputation, Nicholas was, I believe, in a tragic position. He was grasping at peace, but circumstances had put peace beyond his reach.

Friends Received by the Emperor

The meeting between the Quaker deputation and the Emperor Nicholas took place on 10th February.[1] The address was read aloud by Sturge; and after the presentation, Sturge made some further remarks. He explained the nature of the Meeting for Sufferings, disparaged the war-like tone of the articles in the English press and made a final appeal to Nicholas, as a Christian, to avert a war whose major victims would not be those who started it, but rather "innocent men with their wives and children".

Nicholas replied in French, Baron Nicolay acting as interpreter. In his reply (taken down immediately after the meeting and submitted to Nicolay, who assured its accuracy), he stressed the nine hundred years' tie between Russian and Greek Christianity, and Russia's right to protect her co-religionists living under Turkish rule. He stated his admiration for England, his affection for Queen Victoria, his readiness to overlook personal insults if peace might thereby be maintained. He concluded by saying: "As a Christian I am ready to comply with the precepts of religion. On the present occasion, my great duty is to attend to the interests and honour of my country."[2]

It was a very emotional encounter. The Friends reported that when the Emperor took his leave of them, there were tears in his eyes—a phenomenon which was noted by the Empress, whom the deputation met after leaving the Emperor. It is, of course, impossible to extrapolate evidence

[1] The sources for all subsequent writing on the subject are Charleton's letter of 11th February, in Anna Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton*, pp. 78–81, and the account in H. Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, pp. 477–478. Richard makes use of what seems to be a free paraphrase of the Charleton letters to describe much of the interview, but his account includes the Emperor's verbal reply, which Charleton's does not. Mary Pease places the interview on a Thursday (*Henry Pease*, p. 61), whereas it took place on Friday, 10th February.

[2] H. Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, p. 478.

of Nicholas's diplomatic intentions from his display of emotional sincerity. He was not about to play the Christian if it meant betraying what he conceived to be "the interests and honour" of his country. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that he had been willing to compromise in order to keep the peace and, when he met the deputation, he was probably quite sincere in stating his intentions to avoid war, if at all possible. He took the opportunity of the meeting with the deputation to unburden himself in a manner that it would have been impossible to adopt with the official representatives of a hostile power. From all that Nicholas would have been able to gather, Sturge, Pease and Charleton represented the only Englishmen in all the world who were prepared to give him a sympathetic hearing.[1]

On Saturday, 11th February, the day after their meeting with the Emperor, the deputation called on Hamilton Seymour, their first official contact with a diplomatic representative of their government in St. Petersburg. In a dispatch to Clarendon, Seymour notes that they had not contacted him earlier, and he comments ironically on the Emperor's assurance to the deputation that he is "intent upon Peace".[2]

The deputation had hoped to leave St. Petersburg as soon as they had transacted their business, but on the afternoon of Saturday, 11th February, they were paid a call by Baron Nicolay, who asked that they remain for a few more days. The Emperor, he said, wanted to present them with a written reply to their address; and the Duchess of Leuchtenberg, the Emperor's daughter,[3] wanted them to call on her the following Tuesday. Were they to agree to this, the Russian government would make their return easier by sending a

1 There is outside evidence that the Emperor was overwrought at the time of this meeting. Writing to Clarendon, Seymour states that on 9th February, General Castelbajac, the French Ambassador at St. Petersburg, was advised by Russian officials "that in the present excited state in which the Emperor Nicholas has been for some days" it would not be advisable to see him (Public Record Office, *F.O.* 65/445/132). Barthélemy Dominique Jacques Amand, marquis de Castelbajac (1787–1864), maréchal de camp, served as French envoy to Russia 1844–1854.

2 Public Record Office, *F.O.* 65/445/145. On 12th February, Seymour sent Clarendon a copy of the address presented to Nicholas (*F.O.*65/445/147).

3 Maria Nikolaevna (b. 1819), eldest daughter of Nicholas I, married Maximilian, 2nd duke of Leuchtenberg (1817–1852).

courier ahead of them to arrange for fresh horses at each stage. The Friends agreed to stay.[1]

On Sunday Nicolay called again. The Emperor wanted to give the Friends a "little present in token of his satisfaction" with their visit. The gift was declined. The deputation felt that accepting a gift of any sort would weaken their moral influence in England.[2]

The Emperor's written reply was delivered to the deputation on Monday, 13th February. In French, signed by Nesselrode, it was essentially a re-statement of Nicholas's verbal reply of 10th February.[3]

Until noon on Tuesday, 14th February, the three Quakers had been treated not only with politeness, but with great warmth and friendliness by all of the Russians with whom they had come into contact. That changed when they called on the Duchess of Leuchtenberg. There they were received with mere formal courtesy and all three were struck by the chilly atmosphere. The explanation for this development, as given by Charleton, was that "the arrival of news from England, with the tone of the debates in Parliament" had offended the Russians.[4] Henry Richard paraphrases Charleton's letter and makes, quite possibly as the result of a later conversation with Sturge, a conjecture into a certainty:

> "We called," says Mr. Charleton, "at the palace of the Grand Duchess as proposed. But here our reception was very different from what it had been a few days before at the Imperial Palace. Instead of the earnest and cordial manner of the Emperor and Empress, the Grand Duchess received us with merely formal politeness. Her sorrowful air and the depressed look of the gentleman in waiting, made it evident that a great change had come over the whole aspect of affairs. Nor were we at a loss to account for this change. *The mail from England had arrived*, with newspapers giving an account of the opening of parliament and of the intensely warlike speeches in the House of Commons."[5]

Since this conjectural interpretation of the events of 14th

[1] Charleton's letter of 11th February, 1854, in Anne Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton*, pp. 80–81.

[2] Charleton's letter of 13th February, 1854; *ibid.*, p. 81.

[3] For the written reply, see above, p. 80, n. 3.

[4] Charleton's letter of 16th February, 1854, in Anne Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton*, p. 83.

[5] H. Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, p. 480. The emphasis is Richard's.

February has been accepted and echoed by all of those who have since written about the incident at the Duchess's palace,[1] I have thought it worthwhile to investigate whether or not what the deputation thought was happening was in fact what actually happened. My conclusion is that they were very right in assuming that something was troubling the Russians, but that they were understandably mistaken as to the cause of the anxiety.

Dispatches in the Public Record Office show that a courier could make the winter trip between London and St. Petersburg, depending upon the weather, in somewhere between seven and ten days. In 1854, Parliament opened on 31st January, and had the Emperor wanted news of the speeches there, he could have had them in hand at least a day or two before he met the deputation on 10th February. And if he had been disposed to, he could have shown his displeasure at that meeting, instead of receiving the deputation so warmly. But the Emperor and his court were not waiting for news of Parliament. They were much more concerned with Clarendon's reply to the demand for "*juste réciprocité*", a hard diplomatic fact that would leave no more room for compromise, should it not be an answer to Brunnow's liking. That reply and news of Brunnow's subsequent action reached St. Petersburg on Monday, 13th February. On that day, at twenty minutes before two o'clock, Hamilton Seymour was informed by Nesselrode that diplomatic relations between England and Russia had been suspended.[2] The deputation would know nothing of this, but by noon on Tuesday the Emperor's daughter would. The Friends were fortunate that their reception was at least polite, for it must have been this news that caused the chilly reaction of the Duchess of Leuchtenberg.

Whereas the journey to St. Petersburg took thirteen days, the return trip, begun immediately after the encounter with the Duchess and sped along by the Russian courier, took only nine. The deputation arrived back in London on

[1] A brief history of this interpretation, in order of publication: Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (1864), p. 480; Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton* (1876), p. 83; Pease, *Henry Pease* (1897), p. 63; Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge* (1919), p. 147; Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (1921), II, p. 726; Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War* (1923), p. 258; Scott, *Quakers in Russia* (1964), p. 110.

[2] Public Record Office, *F.O.* 65/445/156.

Thursday evening, 23rd February. On Friday they paid a call to Lord Aberdeen and on Saturday reported to the Meeting for Sufferings. Saturday evening, after an absence of five weeks, the three went their separate ways, Sturge to Birmingham, Pease to Darlington and Charleton to Bristol.[1]

Postscript

There are two matters of interest connected with the deputation which would not fit well into the narrative.

(I) A. W. Kinglake

The first concerns the allegations made by A. W. Kinglake with regards to Nicholas's attitude towards the Quakers. When Henry Richard published his *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* in 1864, he noted that "Mr. Kinglake insinuates in his last volumes and promises to prove in his next" that the Emperor's warm feeling for the deputation "became afterwards changed into a frenzy of anger against the Friends for having deceived him". Richard announces that he will be looking for proof of Kinglake's charges, something better than "imaginary conversations" invented to substantiate a point.[2]

What were Kinglake's original insinuations, what were his later allegations and do any of them hold water?

The first two volumes of *The Invasion of the Crimea* were published in 1863. It is in Volume I that the "insinuation" to which Richard must be referring occurs. Giving a very brief and fanciful account of the meeting between the deputation and the Emperor, Kinglake makes the comment that "a little later and the Czar would have stamped in fury and driven from his sight any hapless aide-de-camp who had come to him with a story about a deputation from the English Peace Party". An appended note promises that "the scene of violence here prospectively alluded to will be mentioned in a later volume . . . "[3]

It is not until 1868 that Volume IV and the promised scene of violence are published. Richard's suspicions are

[1] The return is described by Charleton in Anna Fox, *Memoir of Robert Charleton*, pp. 82–88; an account of the Meeting for Sufferings to which the deputation reported is found in the *Minutes*, Vol. XLVI, p. 391.

[2] p. 482n.

[3] pp. 402–403.

justified: the scene is pure fantasy. Kinglake pictures the Emperor taking to his bed after the Russian defeat at the battle of the Alma. Railing at his comforters, he shouts:

> You are the men, you are the very men, who brought me to this —who brought me into this war by talking to me of the power of the English "peace party". Yes; you are the men, the very men, who persuaded me that the English would trade and not fight. Leave me! Leave me![1]

Kinglake's assertion is that the Emperor, having been misled by his advisers, believed that the peace party (which, in Kinglake's first volume was represented by the Quaker deputation) spoke for the majority in England. Believing that with the peace party in the ascendant there would be no war, Nicholas failed to take the proper military precautions and had paid the price by suffering a disastrous defeat. This accounts for the hypothetical scene of rage wherein he drives out the aide who would present the deputation.

In other words, Nicholas only admitted Sturge, Pease and Charleton because he was convinced that they represented the strongest party in England. When he discovered they did not, he was outraged. Several facts refute these conjectures.

First, the Russians knew what sort of men Quakers were, what values they held and in what esteem (or lack of it) they were held by their more war-like countrymen. At their first meeting, Nesselrode and the deputation discussed such mutual acquaintances as William Allen, Thomas Shillitoe and Daniel Wheeler—all Quakers and all well known to the imperial family.

Second, the deputation personally made disclaimers concerning their political power, enough to convince even those who might not already know how small a segment of opinion they represented.

Third, the government in St. Petersburg was aware that the Friends' deputation had no official sanction, through the newspapers mentioned by Gellibrand and in view of the fact that they did not work through diplomatic channels in order to contact the Russian authorities.

Finally, the Russians knew, from official dispatches and from the newspapers that it was the war party, not the peace party that was in the ascendant in England.

[1] pp. 45–46.

Further refutation of Kinglake's point comes from two sources. Henry Richard knew of Quakers who had met the Empress after the death of Nicholas. During these meetings, she referred favourably to the deputation, something she would not have done had the Emperor, whom she idolized, flown into a rage at the memory of being hoodwinked by them.[1] And Stephen Hobhouse quotes a personal remembrance of Prince Nicholas Galitzine in support of the fact that the Emperor never ceased thinking warmly of the three Friends.[2]

(II) John Bright

One final matter needs dealing with. It seemed to me, as I looked through the documents relating to the deputation, that John Bright would have had something encouraging to say about it. He was himself a Quaker, he corresponded regularly with Joseph Sturge and it is his name, moreover, which comes most readily to mind when we think of those who actively opposed the Crimean war. But I could discover no word of Bright's on the subject. Not only does he not offer support for the mission, he seems to be blackly pessimistic about the cause of peace in general.

The letters of John Bright to his wife, which are in the Library of University College, London, are the best guide to Bright's sentiments at this time. Because they have not, to my knowledge, appeared in print, and because they present the intriguing picture of a man feeling one way, yet controlling his feelings in order to act in a different, more positive way, I present the following extracts.

> Feb. 19, 1853: "Cobden and I are going today to dine with S[amuel] Gurney to talk over *peace* matters—tho' I don't see much use in it."
> Sept. 29, 1853: "I don't like the Peace Conference at all—don't feel as if I could make a speech to any good—I think I am hardly used by it."
> Oct. 3, 1853: "The Peace people are very urgent—and really I am in no mode for making a speech if I get to Edinburgh! What a nuisance it is to be a 'public man' and to be expected to be able always to make good speeches."

John Bright did in fact attend the Peace Congress in

[1] H. Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, p. 482n.
[2] S. Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge*, p. 148, n. 2.

Edinburgh (the last in that series of Congresses which began in 1848) and he made what was considered a very good speech indeed. Still, in spite of his public valour, his private depression continued. His most pessimistic statement of all came on 18th February, 1854, five weeks before Great Britain declared war on Russia. He wrote to his wife concerning Lord John Russell's culpability in "dragging the country into this miserable and wicked war". He wrote:

> I am so distressed at the immorality of government and people on this question that, could I justify such a step to the world, I would retire from public life. I feel I must either allow myself to grow into indifference, or else sustain an injury to my temper from the disgust with which I am filled.

John Bright became the war's most eloquent opponent; and at Yearly Meeting in 1854, he went on record in support of the deputation to Nicholas.[1] Joseph Sturge and his friends badly needed support at the time of their journey and it was unfortunate that the foremost Quaker pacifist of the day was unable to offer it to them.

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1 *The Friend*, XII (1854), 110.