

Joseph Sturge and the Crimean War. I. The Search for a Cause

BY nineteenth-century standards, Joseph Sturge was in every way a model Quaker. The wealthy head of a thriving Birmingham grain firm, he chose to live unostentatiously, less committed to getting and spending than to philanthropic and social concerns. Among other things, Sturge had been engaged in the anti-slavery movement (for which cause he undertook the journey made famous in his published journal *The West Indies in 1837*), the Anti-Corn Law League and the movement for franchise reform.¹ Yet nowhere are his Quaker principles more strikingly revealed than in his attitude toward war and in his attempts to secure world peace.

As a birthright member of the Society of Friends, Joseph Sturge had been imbued with the spirit of pacifism from

¹ Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, London, 1864, hereafter cited as *Memoirs*. See pp. 73-249 (anti-slavery), 269-290 (Anti-Corn Law League) and 291-341 (franchise reform).

Most of what has been written about Sturge, including Stephen Hobhouse's competent *Joseph Sturge*, London, 1919, has largely been derived from Richard's standard biography. This is understandable. Richard tells us that he had for his sources "a correspondence . . . extending between three and four thousand letters", as well as "a large number of other documents and records, including diaries, reports of societies, minutes of committees, pamphlets, newspapers, etc.", and he had an intimate, first-hand knowledge of his subject. Very few of the documents which Richard had at his disposal have survived to the present day and for this reason Richard's biography is essential to anyone who wishes to write about Sturge. By modern standards, Richard does not use much of the material available in his day. The result is that many statements of fact concerning Sturge are unsubstantiated by reference to the sources; and this is particularly true of the activities of Sturge at the time of the Crimean war. Fortunately, there are letters and other documents written by or relating to Sturge which have not yet been exploited, and by referring to these it has been possible to develop a more accurate picture than that presented by Richard of Sturge's role in the pacifist opposition to the war.

These documents, mainly unpublished, are to be found in the Manchester Central Library, at the West Sussex County Record Office, among the Additional MSS. of the British Museum, in Friends House Library, in the Library of Woodbrooke College and in other repositories. The Sturge revealed by these documents is benevolent, but more hard-headed than Henry Richard's Sturge. He is a Quaker pacifist, deeply committed to the principle of non-violence, yet ready to employ any methods other than violent ones in order to achieve results.

childhood; and one incident from his early days is significant. In 1813, at the age of twenty, Sturge was ordered to serve in the militia, and he refused. Under the provisions of the law,¹ his property was distrained, and we are told that he returned home one day just in time to see the sheep being driven off of his farm.² Pacifism, in nineteenth-century England, conflicting as it did so directly with the dominant political principle, nationalism, was an ideal for which one could expect to suffer.

Throughout his career, Sturge had had many supporters, people who applauded him for his philanthropy, or for the part he played in Corn Law repeal, or for his active role in the movement to abolish slavery. He even won admirers as a result of his involvement in the Peace Society and the Peace Congress movement of the late 40s and early 50s—that is to say up until the Crimean war. At that point, however, Sturge lost most of his support, because his brand of pacifism was of the politically embarrassing variety which refuses to go dormant in time of war. If we are to recognize Joseph Sturge's achievement in resisting the war, then we must understand the context in which he operated, particularly from the autumn of 1853 onward. One way to accomplish this is to read almost any standard account of the war, noting how every writer on the subject comments upon the inflamed state of public opinion. Another (and this has not been done in any detail, to my knowledge) is to consider what happened to the organization in which Sturge was most deeply involved, the Peace Society, at the time when, as Kingsley Martin says, "most of its members were either dumb or apologetic."³

The British Peace Society (more formally, The Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace) had

¹ For the law, see *Statutes at Large*, Vol. VIII, London, 1770, p. 86. The provisions of this law were extended in 1802 in 42 Geo. III, cap. 90, secs. 27, 33 and 50—see *Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. I, London, 1804, pp. 451, 452 and 456.

² *Memoirs*, pp. 23–24. The Account of Sufferings for Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Monthly Meeting indicates that on April 16, 1813, Constable William Osborne took from Joseph Sturge two ewes and six lambs, valued at £11.6s, in order to satisfy a local militia fine of £10. London Yearly Meeting, MS. Book of Sufferings, Vol. XXXIV, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Quarterly Meeting Returns to Yearly Meeting (1814).

³ B. K. Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston*, new and rev. ed.; London, 1963, p. 196.

been founded in 1816 after, and in reaction from, the Napoleonic wars. The Society grew slowly at first, joining with the American Peace Society during the 1820s and 30s to form the nucleus of an international peace movement whose culmination was the series of Peace Congresses held during the 1840s and early 50s. The world's first General Peace Convention held in London in June, 1843, attracted 324 delegates, mostly from Britain (292), a few from America (26) and the continent (6);¹ but the real blossoming of the peace movement took place between 1848 and 1853, with International Peace Congresses in Brussels (Sept. 20–22, 1848), Paris (Aug. 22–24, 1849), Frankfurt (Aug. 22–24, 1850), London (July 22–24, 1851), Manchester (Jan. 27–28, 1853) and Edinburgh (Oct. 12–13, 1853).² Large numbers of delegates attended these meetings. The Proceedings of the London Congress exaggerate only slightly in claiming the attendance of “more than a thousand delegates”—by actual count there were 969.³ Moreover, in the years before the Crimean war, the cause of peace was well financed. Early in 1853, at the time of the French invasion scare in Great Britain, Richard Cobden claimed that in order to counteract anti-French propaganda, the movement could have “any amount of money we require”.⁴

What sort of people supported the peace movement? Concerning the Manchester Congress, Cobden noted that the delegates were “quiet, earnest, influential men from all parts of the kingdom”,⁵ and the *Proceedings* of the London Congress state that those who attended were “selected for the most part, on account of the honourable distinction they had locally acquired among their fellow citizens”.⁶ The records support these assessments. An appendix to the London Congress *Proceedings* lists all the delegates, with their place of residence and their occupation. I have grouped

¹ Arthur C. F. Beales, *The History of Peace*, London, 1931, pp. 66–67.

² *Proceedings* of five of the Congresses are bound together in *Reports of the Peace Congresses, 1848–53*, London, 1861. These do not include the Manchester Congress, reports of which are available in the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times*.

³ The complete list of delegates is in *Proceedings of the Fourth General Peace Congress*, London, 1851, pp. 83–104.

⁴ Cobden to Joseph Parkes, February 6, 1853 (Parkes Papers, University College Library, London).

⁵ Cobden to Joseph Parkes, January 31, 1853, *ibid.*

⁶ *Proceedings of the Fourth General Peace Congress*, London, 1851, p. 1.

the delegates according to county and occupation (the original gives no breakdown), and the list does indeed show that they were men of substance who came not only from all parts of Great Britain, but from many European countries and from the United States.

Delegates to the London Peace Congress
July 22-24, 1851

BY COUNTRY	NUMBER OF DELEGATES	By OCCUPATION	
		Merchants, tradesmen manufacturers	409
Great Britain	862	Clergymen	224
United States	61	Misc. professional men	
France	20	(writers, architects, engineers, artists, etc.)	89
Germany	14	Gentlemen	86
Belgium	4	Teachers and professors	25
Spain	4	Physicians and surgeons	22
Canada	2	Lawyers	17
Italy	1	Bankers	16
Austria	1	Farmers	15
	—	Members of Parlia- ment	13
Total	969	Students	5
	—	Yeomen	2
		No occupation listed	46
		Total	969

In the period which immediately preceded the Crimean war, then, most of those in the peace movement came from the substantial middle class. Had all those who supported the Peace Congresses—the business-men, clergymen and Members of Parliament—actively opposed the war with Russia, there might not have been a Crimean war. But the influential men who favoured peace in theory were, for various reasons, unwilling to work for peace when the test came.

In this regard, it is interesting to see what happened to those Members of Parliament who supported the Peace Society before Britain became involved with Russia. No fewer than twenty-eight M.P.s had adhered to the principles of the Peace Society, most of them as late as October 1853. I have compiled the following list, indicative of parliamentary support for the peace movement:

NAME OF M.P.	CONSTITUENCY	NATURE OF SUPPORT*
Henry Aglionby	Cockermouth	1
Thomas Barnes	Bolton	4
Michael T. Bass	Derby	1
James Bell	Guildford	1, 2, 3
John Bright	Manchester	1, 3
John Brocklehurst	Macclesfield	1
Joseph Brotherton	Salford	1, 2, 3, 4
William Brown	Lancashire S.	1, 2
John Cheetham	Lancashire S.	2
Richard Cobden	West Riding, Yorks.	1, 2, 3
Charles Cowan	Edinburgh	3
Joseph Crook	Bolton	2, 3
Frank Crossley	Halifax	2
William Ewart	Dumfries	1, 2, 3
Thos. Milner Gibson	Manchester	2
George Hadfield	Sheffield	1, 2, 3
Lawrence Heyworth	Derby	1, 3
Charles Hindley	Ashton-under-Lyne	1, 3
Joseph Hume	Montrose	2, 3, 4
James Kershaw	Stockport	1, 2, 3, 4
William Laslett	Worcester	2
John MacGregor	Glasgow	1
Edward Miall	Rochdale	1, 2, 3
Apsley Pellatt	Southwark	1, 3
W. T. Price	Gloucester	3
Wm. Digby Seymour	Hull	4
John B. Smith	Stirling	1, 2, 3
William Wilkinson	Lambeth	2

*1 = Delegate to London Peace Congress (1851); see *Proceedings*.

2 = Member of deputation to Lord Aberdeen from Manchester Peace Congress, seeking reduction in armaments; *Herald of Peace*, n.s. XXXIV (April, 1853), p. 201.

3 = Signed invitation to Edinburgh Peace Congress (October, 1853); *Herald of Peace*, n.s. XL (October, 1853), p. 272.

4 = Signed "letter of adhesion" to Edinburgh Congress; *Herald of Peace*, n.s. XLI (November, 1853), p. 284.

When on March 31, 1854, John Bright rose in the House of Commons in order to condemn the declaration of war, none of the other twenty-seven men on the above list spoke in support of him. The views of many of the erstwhile supporters of peace are displayed in the remarks made by several of them, shortly before the declaration.

Although "he highly approved of the conduct of the Government in making war their *dernier ressort*", George Hadfield nevertheless announced that "Europe would find the wrath of the peaceful man more effectual than the fury of the enraged Emperor".¹

¹ Speech of February 24, 1854, *Hansard*, 3 ser., CXXX (1854), p. 1283.

Frank Crossley pursued the non-interventionist theme. "England was not a part of continental Europe and ought not, therefore, to entangle herself with European politics", he stated. However, "deprecating war as a great evil, still he admitted . . . that if the impending war should come, it ought to be prosecuted with vigour and rapidity".¹ He did not offer any compelling reasons why war should not come.

One of the most assertive statements in favour of war came from Joseph Hume, one of those who had been among the strongest supporters of the Peace Congresses. Hume said that "he was prepared . . . to support, by our Navy, to the fullest extent, what he considered to be the honour of the country and . . . to resist those aggressions which Russia had gradually been making on the neighbouring countries".²

With the collapse of all parliamentary support for peace, in February, 1854, war with Russia became almost inevitable. When Joseph Sturge failed to join his former co-workers in the peace movement in modifying his pre-war views, the number of men willing to offer him public support shrank to a handful. Most of his friends in the Peace Society fell silent or turned hawkish, the townspeople of Birmingham disavowed him and he was castigated by a previously sympathetic press. At no time in his life had Sturge been less admired than during the Crimean war. At no time was he more deserving of admiration.

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Joseph Sturge had been an active pacifist throughout his life, but it was not until the years preceding the Crimean war, from the time of the Peace Congresses onward, that the cause of peace became his *major* concern. Richard says of Sturge that from 1848 to 1854 "a large proportion of his time, energies, and influence were devoted to [the peace movement] and around no one's personal history could the movement be made to revolve with greater propriety than around his. For he was to a large extent its animating spirit."³ Briefly, here follow a few of Sturge's pre-war involvements.

In 1850, Sturge, Frederic Wheeler and the American pacifist Elihu Burritt attempted to mediate in the conflict

¹ Speech of February 17, 1854, *ibid.*, p. 910.

² Speech of February 22, 1854, *ibid.*, p. 1114.

³ *Memoirs*, p. 428.

between Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein.¹ This action, even though unsuccessful, has a place both in the history of international arbitration and in Sturge's personal history, for it prefigures his later, successful attempt to have an arbitration clause inserted in the Treaty of Paris.

In 1852, Sturge held a public meeting to protest against Britain's involvement in the Kaffir (or Caffre) war² and, at about the same time, was writing letters and circulating petitions in opposition to a new Militia Bill.³

One arresting bit of evidence of Sturge's willingness to oppose war in any of its manifestations is to be found in the Bevan Naish Collection in the Library of Woodbrooke College. When the Duke of Wellington died in November, 1852, a day of public mourning was declared in his honour. Joseph Sturge, however, refused to involve himself in the tributes to the Duke's memory, offered by the townsmen of Birmingham. In fact, he and two other Friends, George Barrow and William White, drew up a manifesto explaining why they could not "join in the homage now paid to a Military Hero, or in any way sanction the Funeral Pageant".⁴ They had their statement printed on a placard which they circulated throughout Birmingham prior to the funeral. It was, of course, an unpopular action and called forth counter-placards, one of which, signed "Justicia", demanded that "those who are calling themselves the unoffending Quakers prove themselves such, by not opposing the government and the voice of the people".⁵ Another, signed "Argus", reiterated the old slur that it was the object of the Quakers, in taking this step, "to be peculiar from their fellows".⁶ Sturge was undaunted, and throughout this period continued to occupy himself with preparations for what was to prove the pen-

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 434-455.

² Cobden to Sturge, January 3 and January 8, 1852, Cobden Papers, British Museum, Add. MS. 43656.

³ Sturge to "My dear Friend" [unknown], February 4, 1852, Manchester Literary Club Papers, Vol. IV, Manchester Central Library; Cobden to Sturge, n.d., 1852, Cobden Papers, Vol. LXIV, West Sussex County Record Office; Cobden to Sturge, February 19, 25, 28, etc., 1852, Cobden Papers, British Museum Add. MS. 43656.

⁴ Woodbrooke College Library, Bevan Naish Collection, Vol. II, pp. 22-23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

ultimate International Peace Congress, to be held in Manchester in January, 1853.¹

In January occurred the French invasion scare, that outbreak of national hysteria which was to call forth the best effort ever on the part of the Peace Society. Sturge played an active role in helping to calm his countrymen's fears of Napoleon III, by raising funds in the North for anti-war propaganda and by joining a deputation to Lord Aberdeen, who, said Sturge, "received us very differently to what Lord Melbourne did in the early days of the Anti-Corn Law Cause".²

There was to be no war with France. The English gave up their French bogey, but only to adopt a Russian one. By the summer of 1853, there were new rumblings of war, about which Sturge wrote to his American friend, Lewis Tappan:

We are here in much uneasiness as to whether this Russo-Turkish affair may not lead to a European war. What strangely inconsistent beings professing Christians are! A few months ago Louis Napoleon was held up as a monster in human shape and we were put to great expense to prepare against the pretended danger, that he and his people would turn pirates and suddenly come over to murder and rob us. Now we are uniting our fleet with that of this very monster to fight with the Turks against a professedly Christian country.³

It was the prospect of war against Russia that was now to occupy Sturge's attention, although as late as November, 1853, we hear of Sturge organizing a meeting to oppose the *Burmese* war.⁴

In the new year, 1854, Sturge undertook the mission to St. Petersburg, an enterprise which, eccentric though it seemed to his countrymen, was no mere whim, but part of a consistent pattern of behaviour which had been developing for some years.⁵

Shortly after the deputation's return from Russia, the

¹ Sturge to George Wilson, October 2, December 7, December 9, 1852, Wilson Papers, Manchester Central Library.

² Sturge to Wilson, February 28, 1853, Wilson Papers, Manchester Central Library. See also letter of February 10. Sturge was from this time onward consistent in maintaining Aberdeen's reputation as a peace seeker.

³ Sturge to Tappan, July 8, 1853, in *Memoirs*, p. 461.

⁴ Bright to Sturge, November 17, 1853, Bright Papers, British Museum, Add. MS. 43389.

⁵ For the full story, see my article "The Quaker Deputation to Russia: January-February, 1854", *J.F.H.S.*, 52 (1969), 78-96.

Crimean war began. Before considering Sturge's wartime activities, it will be worthwhile to note Henry Richard's assessment of his subject's character. I insert this testimony because most of the evidence to be presented indicates Sturge's energy and powers of organization, but gives little indication of those humane qualities for which Sturge was particularly noted. This, then, is the man who was honoured after his death by those very townspeople of Birmingham whose opinions he had so often challenged and whose prejudices he had so unsparingly refuted:

His activity of body and mind was marvellous. As the poet says of another character, "He was a man of an unsleeping spirit"; nor was it easy for anyone engaged in the same enterprise with him to slumber at his post. Not that there was anything fussy or dictatorial in his manner, but that the contagion of his earnestness communicated itself to all those around him. Who could complain of being stimulated to exertion by one who was willing himself to bear so large a share of the burden of labour? . . . But more valuable than all to those associated with him were those moral qualities of character by which he was distinguished; his calm courage springing from unfaltering faith in the truth and power of great principles; the habitual serenity of temper which no excitement or provocation could seriously ruffle; the utter self-forgetfulness which never intruded the susceptibilities of personal vanity to disturb the conduct of a great enterprise; and the sunny cheerfulness of mind which seldom failed to light up the less sanguine spirits of some of his associates with a ray of hope in the darkest hour of discouragement and gloom. He had, moreover, the rare and inexpressibly valuable power of inspiring undoubting confidence in the purity and simplicity of his own motives, which drew men towards him with a sort of instinctive and child-like trust.¹

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For many years before the Crimean war, Joseph Sturge had worked for a durable peace. When war threatened, he did what he could to avert it and for his actions was criticized as being either naïve or malicious. Finally, when the war erupted, he continued to put into practice his pacifist principles, slowly and tentatively at first, but increasingly, as the war progressed, with characteristic energy.

Few Sturge manuscripts have survived from the first months of the war. It may be that proportionately more documents pertinent to the period April-September, 1854, have been lost than for other periods. It is also possible

¹ *Memoirs*, pp. 428-429. Compared with some of the poets and writers who wrote obituaries for Joseph Sturge, Richard was not exaggerating.

that Sturge, an avid correspondent, suspended his usual habits for a time. There is no way of proving which of these conjectures is the correct one, but for two reasons I favour the latter.

In the first place, in travelling to St. Petersburg, Sturge had undertaken an arduous journey on behalf of a principle which was scorned by most of his countrymen. This he was used to bearing. However, there seems to have been some criticism of his actions from within the Society. Friends as a whole supported what he had done, but individual Quakers had taken exception to the handling of the deputation. In April, 1854, a letter which violently attacked the character and principles of Nicholas I appeared in *The British Friend*.¹ Pseudonymously written by "X", it was as condemnatory of the motives of the Russian Emperor as the Russian-baiting periodical *John Bull* had ever been. This personal blast at Nicholas followed one month after that same journal had published the account of the deputation of Sturge, Pease and Charleton, an account which tended to stress the humane aspects of Nicholas's character. In May, *The British Friend* reprinted an article from the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* which put the deputation in a bad light. *The British Friend* did not concur in any way in the judgment offered, but printed the article because the editors believed it to be "suggestive of serious thought to us as a body".² Nevertheless, both this article and the letter of April, appearing in the leading Quaker periodical, must have troubled such a committed Friend as Joseph Sturge.

At London Yearly Meeting, held that year from May 22 to June 1, Sturge had an opportunity to reply to his critics. After relating the details of the mission, he delivered an emotional justification of the way the matter had been handled by those who had made the journey to St. Petersburg. John Stephenson Rowntree tells us that Sturge, when he addressed the Meeting, "was considerably affected, acknowledged the deficiencies of the deputation, wished

¹ XII (April, 1854), 113-114. *The British Friend* during the period 1854-1856 was never militantly anti-war, but concerned itself largely with internal matters pertaining to the Society of Friends. This is not to say that it ever expressed any sentiment which could be construed as approving of the war. (The same may be said of the other British Quaker periodical, *The Friend*.)

² *The British Friend*, XII (May, 1854), 132-133.

more suitable friends had offered, but said that if the business was to do over again, in the most essential particulars they would have to take the same course".¹ After he had spoken, "W. T. Clayton and W. Fowler . . . expressed some regret" that the deputation should have commented on the character of Nicholas, "a subject on which there was a decided difference of sentiment".² Sturge carried the day easily, however, for the report is that

there seemed . . . to be but one feeling in the meeting, as to the concern itself having been a right one; as well as to its having been judiciously and effectively carried out, which was expressed by more than a few.³

There was no mass movement on the part of the Society of Friends to dissociate itself from the deputation—quite the contrary. The evidence is that two Quakers, Clayton and Fowler, and "X" (who may have been either Clayton or Fowler, or may not even have been a member of the Society) criticized the manner in which the deputation had portrayed the Russian Emperor. Others may have voiced criticisms, either directly to Sturge, or which may have reached him second-hand. His reaction at Yearly Meeting indicates that he was quite sensitive on this point, and it is possible that such criticisms were responsible for a minor spell of introversion, causing the usually steady flow of his correspondence to slacken for a time.

I believe, however, that there is another reason why we have fewer letters from Sturge at this time than at any other. Reading Sturge's correspondence, one is struck by its *practical* quality. Virtually every one of his surviving letters is concerned with a particular enterprise. Sturge had done what he could to stop the war and had failed, and for a time the initiative was with the other side. For the

¹ Unpublished journal of Yearly Meeting, 1854, Friends House Library, MS. Vol. S 366.

² *The Friend*, XII (June, 1854), 110. The first Friend would most likely be William Impey Clayton (1800–1855), of Dunmow, Essex, the "T", probably being a misprint; and the second is certainly William Fowler (1827?–1905), of Essex. *The British Friend* does not give the names of those who expressed displeasure at the deputation's attitude toward Nicholas and Rowntree names only Fowler. For more on William Impey Clayton, see Francis Corder and Ellen Clayton, *Francis Clayton, 1739–1774, of Chiswick and His Descendants*, Gloucester, 1892, pp. 34–37.

³ *The British Friend*, XII (June, 1854), 150–151. The deputation's strongest support came from John Bright.

moment, there was little that the pacifists could actually do, and this accounts for the falling off in Sturge's correspondence: he had nothing to write *about*. What I am saying will become more apparent when we consider Sturge's part in the founding of the *Morning Star*, for it is then, with a definite and practical end in mind, that he is at his most prolific as a letter writer.

Sturge had not given up looking for a way to put his pacifist beliefs into practice. Shortly before attending Yearly Meeting, he was present at the annual meeting of the Peace Society, held in London on May 23. His remarks there indicate that even if his pacifist sentiments had momentarily no practical outlet, his opposition to the war was not for that reason any less intense. He moved a resolution:

That this meeting cannot but regard the war with Russia as furnishing additional illustration of the evils that have frequently come upon this country from the practice, unhappily too common in our history, of interfering by force of arms in the quarrels of other nations; and is of the opinion, that it is the duty and wisdom of the English people to urge upon their Government the adoption of the full principle of non-intervention in their foreign policy.

After stating the resolution, Sturge said that "Christianity, as well as true policy" dictated a policy of non-interference; and that England was surely "the last nation in the world to teach morality to other people", considering her conduct in Caffraria, India and China. Indicating that he was aware of the sort of criticism which was to be made by Clayton and Fowler at the forthcoming Yearly Meeting, he said that

he was, perhaps, a little blinded by having had an opportunity of shaking hands with the Emperor of Russia, [but that he] was persuaded history would show that the whole blame of the war did not rest on one side.

"Christianity", he said, "destroyed all nationalities", and it grieved him "to see so many ministers of religion assenting to rather than checking the military spirit of the country".¹ When Sturge had finished speaking, he was applauded by a sparse audience. At the 1854 Peace Society meeting, twenty-three men are listed as attending, whereas in 1852,

¹ *Herald of Peace*, n.s. XLVIII (June, 1854), p. 74. The problem of Christian ministers supporting the war was one which particularly distressed Sturge's biographer, Henry Richard, who edited the *Herald*.

when there had been no war, on the platform alone there were over forty-one.¹

For the first few months of the war, Sturge searched unsuccessfully for a satisfactory outlet for his pacifist convictions. Often, during this period, we must interpret Sturge's actions through letters written to him, because the original Sturge letters have not survived. There are several letters to Sturge from Cobden and Bright during the period April-August, 1854, which indicate that Sturge had returned to one of his earliest social preoccupations, the slave trade. But these letters show that he is less concerned with slavery *per se*, than with slavery in the Turkish Empire, considered as one more reason why England should not be that country's ally.

In a letter to Cobden in April, Sturge had compared unfavourably the condition of slaves in the United States with that of Cuban slaves.² Another letter in June discusses slavery in America,³ and early in July Sturge is looking for help with a scheme to discourage American slavery by encouraging the growing of cotton in India.⁴ The connection with the Crimean war begins to be made toward the end of July, at which time Cobden and Sturge corresponded concerning some of the more brutal aspects of slavery in the Turkish Empire, such as sodomy and castration.⁵ In August, the two men continued to discuss the problem. Sturge had reported that the Quakers were "stirring" about the Turkish slave trade, and had asked Cobden to furnish particulars about the trade. Cobden replied that he had spoken to Ionides, the Greek consul, who had told him that "if any body doubts [the extent of slavery in the Turkish Empire], let them send an order to Constantinople for half a dozen black eunuchs".⁶ The Society of Friends never made the slave trade the focal point of an anti-war propaganda effort, but these letters indicate the direction of Sturge's thinking. The theme of the unseemliness of Christian nations fighting

¹ *Ibid.*, n.s. XXIV (June, 1852), pp. 67-68.

² Cobden to Sturge, April 6, 1854, Cobden Papers, British Museum, Add. MS. 43656.

³ Cobden to Sturge, June 8, 1854, Sturge Papers, British Museum, Add. MS. 43722.

⁴ Bright to Sturge, July 4, 1854, B.M., Add. MS. 43723.

⁵ Cobden to Sturge, July 28, 1854, B.M., Add. MS. 43722.

⁶ Cobden to Sturge, August 14, 1854, *ibid.*

with one another on behalf of the infidel does recur in Sturge's letters, in the writings of Henry Richard and in such tracts as the *Christian Appeal*.¹ It is the basis of Sturge's inquiries into the horrors of the Turkish slave trade.

During this time, the threat of official backlash against the Quaker pacifists had been growing. In May, Sturge had written Cobden about a bill proposed by Lord Campbell "for preventing unofficial intercourse with foreign potentates". On the face of it, such a bill would have prevented the Quaker deputation from travelling to St. Petersburg; however, Sturge seemed to be ignorant of the details. Cobden advised him to "get a copy of the bill and if it be as bad as you suppose, then try to ascertain whether the *government* intends to support it". If this were the case, Sturge should "send a deputation to the leading men on the other side of the House to ask them to oppose it".² This is the only mention, in the records which have survived, of Sturge's concern in this matter, and it is not possible to discover what action he took, if any. The details of the bill and its history are these:

On Friday, April 7, 1854, Campbell introduced before the House of Lords "An act to prevent any unauthorized negotiations or intercourse touching public affairs between the subjects of Her Majesty and any Foreign Potentate or State". In presenting the bill, Lord Campbell claimed

I shall be able clearly to show that this is the law of nations . . . that it has been in several instances infringed to the prejudice of public affairs in this country . . . and that we have an undoubted right to legislate with respect to the conduct of British subjects abroad.³

The timing of this Bill suggested that it was prompted by the Quaker deputation; and at the second reading, Campbell revealed that this was the case and that he wanted to see all such missions stopped. He attacked the Quaker deputation specifically, and to support his case, invoked before his colleagues "an authority which they would all reverence", namely, Edmund Burke!⁴

¹ See Stephen Frick, "The *Christian Appeal* of 1855: Friends' Public Response to the Crimean War", *J.F.H.S.*, lii (1970), 203-10.

² Cobden to Sturge, May 2, 1854, Sturge Papers, British Museum, Add. MS. 43722.

³ *Hansard*, 3 ser., CXXXII (1854), pp. 605-606.

⁴ *Ibid.*, CXXXIII (1854), pp. 13-20.

Lord Lyndhurst, while referring to the "absurd pilgrimage" of the Quakers, nevertheless spoke against the Bill. In a highly diplomatic way, Aberdeen advised Campbell to withdraw his bill and was supported by Clanricarde. Campbell, however, proceeded with the second reading and his proposal was referred to a select committee.

At the select committee meeting on May 11, in order to allay the fears of his colleagues who felt that the bill threatened traditional English liberties, Campbell announced that it was not his intention to prohibit purely private delegations and that the bill "would not apply to such a deputation as had recently proceeded from the Quakers of this country to the Emperor of Russia".¹ This was quite a turnabout, because it had been apparent from the second reading that *the* purpose of the bill was to prevent just such missions. The bill could not survive in its original form, nor was there much reason for Campbell to pursue it now that his intentions had been thwarted. The select committee met on May 22² and again on June 2, at which time they reported against proceeding with the bill.³

Sturge may have called on Aberdeen before the second reading. Certainly it was not necessary that he should enlist the aid of the Opposition, for after May 9, when Aberdeen advised Campbell to withdraw his proposal, it was evident that the bill would receive no support from the Government and would be short-lived.

Had Campbell's bill passed into law, or had it even threatened seriously to do so, then fighting against it might have provided a suitable channel for Sturge's still pent-up energies. But it did not; and at the end of the summer, still seeking an outlet, Sturge was writing to Cobden and Bright with a proposal for publicizing the anti-war writings of "Mr. McQueen". James MacQueen's book about the Crimean war had just been published. *The War: Who's to Blame, or the Eastern Question Investigated from the Official Documents*,⁴ is heavily documented with facts about the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

² *Lords Journal*, LXXXVI (1854), p. 172.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁴ London, 1854. A massive volume of over 400 pp., one's first reaction on reading it is to wonder how it could even have been written and published in the short time that had elapsed since Britain had declared war on Russia, let alone have made any claim to accuracy of detail. James MacQueen (1778-1870): editor, author, geographer [*D.N.B.*].

diplomatic background of the war, Russian industry, the slave trade (white as well as black) in the Turkish Empire, the cost of the war and the like. Cobden was sceptical of MacQueen. He told Sturge that he had distrusted MacQueen's manner of using statistics ever since the latter had placed his talents at the disposal of Lord George Bentinck, the protectionist, at the time of the anti-Corn Law struggle.¹ Bright agreed to look at MacQueen's book, but refused to be "responsible in any way for it".² Sturge let the matter drop.

* * *

Toward the end of 1854, Sturge became engaged in a public controversy reminiscent of his attack on the funeral pomp for the Duke of Wellington in November, 1852, and his popularity suffered even more on this occasion than on the previous one. Henry Richard gives few details of the controversy, but he writes of Sturge that

the language in which he was spoken of at that time by some of his fellow citizens of Birmingham . . . was such as fills one now with surprise and sorrow, and would probably give sincere pain to those who used it, if it were now quoted. We forbear, therefore, further allusion to the circumstances of that unhappy period.³

The unpleasant language which Richard forbore to quote appeared mainly in the columns of the *Birmingham Journal*. An editorial of December 9, 1854, begins:

Mr. Sturge, next to the Austrian alliance and the Smithfield Cattle Show, is the topic of the week. For five mortal days, his address to the working classes has gathered groups of readers at every dead wall, and has found its way into the principal journals of the kingdom, accompanied by comments more flattering to his love of notoriety than to his judgment or his patriotism.

The cause of the excitement was a placard dated December 2, 1854, and signed by Sturge, entitled *The Russian War. To My Fellow Townsmen of the Working Classes*.⁴ In the address printed on the placard, Sturge

¹ Cobden to Sturge, August 21, 1854, Sturge Papers, British Museum, Add. MS. 43722.

² Bright to Sturge, September 4, 1854, *ibid.*, B.M., Add. M.S. 43723.

³ *Memoirs*, p. 494. Richard deals briefly with this phase of Sturge's life and gives an abridged version of the address to the working classes, pp. 489-494.

⁴ Woodbrooke College Library, Bevan Naish Collection, II, pp. 20-21. The placard, dated 12th Month 2, 1854, was printed in *The Times* of December 6 and appears in Richard, *Memoirs*, pp. 492-494.

cited the Crimean war as the direct cause of the current high price of bread. His remarks will shortly be considered, but first the setting in which they occurred must be understood.

Ever since the beginning of the war, the price of bread had risen. A number of people blamed the high prices on the desire of the corn factors to reap huge profits; and Joseph Sturge was one of Birmingham's leading corn factors. Ironically, Joseph Sturge, one of that small group of pacifists who unequivocally opposed the war, was widely accused of encouraging the war in order that he might use it as a cover for inflating the price of grain.

For several weeks before the eruption of the controversy, this idea that the factors were responsible for the high cost of bread was being bruited about. On October 28 the *Birmingham Journal* reported:

We have received several communications on the subject of the extraordinary rise in the price of wheat, some of which we cannot publish, as they are directed against tradesmen who have really no more influence on the market value of wheat than we have, and although we can sympathize with our correspondents whose comforts have been abridged by the high prices, we must decline to publish insinuations against tradesmen who are wholly guiltless of any offence.

In retrospect it may be argued that the *Journal* aggravated the problem by not publishing these letters immediately, thereby giving those who were being attacked no chance to refute the charges against them. It is apparent that a whispering campaign directed against some of the corn factors, particularly Joseph Sturge, flourished during the early part of November.

On or about November 20 the matter was brought to a head. The occasion was the distribution in Manchester and Birmingham of a placard entitled *The War and Dear Bread*. The anonymous author of this placard stated as his thesis that the cost of bread was a result of the lack of Russian wheat on the British market, and that the war was therefore directly responsible for the high prices. In developing his statement, he cited Harriet Martineau as one of his authorities, using her book *The History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace* (London, 1849) to buttress his arguments.¹

¹ For Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), see *D.N.B.*

This proved to be an extremely unpopular opinion. In describing the fate of the placard, one Manchester daily echoed the tone of most of the newspaper commentary on the subject:

The officers of the law have very properly put a stop to the activity of the would-be-mischievous noodles who have been placarding the walls in this and other localities with treasonable appeals to the working classes, calling on them to be discontented with the present war as the cause of the late advance in the price of bread.¹

The placard was pulled down, but not before Robert Martineau had obtained one and sent it to his sister for her consideration. Harriet Martineau, in turn, sent a letter to the *Birmingham Journal*. It was published on November 25, along with one from Robert, explaining how he had come to send the placard to Harriet. In her letter, Miss Martineau disclaimed any sympathy with the opinions of the author of *The War and Dear Bread*, claiming that the arguments which he had borrowed from her applied only to the *Napoleonic* wars and not to the present conflict with Russia.

In the same issue, the editors of the *Journal* printed, under the heading "The Un-English Party", an extract from the *Daily News* which contradicted *The War and Dear Bread*.²

A week later, the *Journal* published a letter, signed pseudonymously by "Fair Play", which defended the opinion that the war was responsible for the price of bread; and on the same day or immediately thereafter appeared Joseph Sturge's controversial placard addressed to the working classes.

In the placard, Sturge disclaims any knowledge of the identity of the author of *The War and Dear Bread*, but says that he knows the man who circulated the placard in Birmingham, and approves of the decision to distribute it. He joins the controversy about the cost of bread by contradicting Harriet Martineau. In his words

[N]o one conversant with the foreign corn trade of this country would venture to assert that, could we be supplied from the shores of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azof, the present rate of prices could be maintained. From *five* ports in these seas alone, upwards of Thirty Millions of Bushels of wheat were shipped in 1853, to the United

¹ *The War Express and Daily Advertiser* (Manchester), November 24, 1854. I have been unable to locate a copy of *The War and Dear Bread*.

² The original appeared in the *Daily News* on November 23.

Kingdom and other parts of Europe. Wheat which is now worth Ten Shillings per bushel in England, can, at the present time be bought in some of these ports at less than Two Shillings per bushel.

Sturge says that he has received an anonymous warning that if the price of bread is not lowered "something of a very serious nature will occur to disturb the peace of the town, and you will be considered then in a worse light than even Nicholas himself". Sturge offers to meet the author of the threat to discuss the problem.

Then Sturge defends John Bright's position on the war by drawing an analogy between Bright's situation and that of Sir Robert Walpole in 1739 and Charles James Fox at the time of the Napoleonic wars. He sees them all as patriotic Englishmen, unjustly accused of "doing the enemy's work".¹

In concluding, he says what most of his countrymen wanted least to hear:

When we reflect on the atrocities committed in wars of aggression by this country within the last twenty years, in India, in China, in Afghanistan, and lastly in Africa and Burmah, it will be seen that, however unjust towards Turkey the invasion of the principalities by Russia might be, it sinks by comparison into insignificance.

Although he called for Christian love, Joseph Sturge's words had an inflammatory effect upon those to whom they were addressed, far greater even than that created by *The War and Dear Bread*. On December 9, two letters attacking Sturge were printed in the *Birmingham Journal*.² The first, signed by Edwin George "on behalf of the carpenters and joiners of Birmingham", stated that "the working classes are disgusted with the placards in question being addressed to them" and suggested that if the author "were to listen to the remarks of those who read his placards he would soon be convinced of the futility of his attempts to assist in doing the work of the enemy".

George's remarks were bland compared with those in the second letter, signed by George Griffith. Griffith must have read the reprint of the placard which appeared in *The Times* of December 6. He wrote:

¹ Because of his stand on the war, some of Bright's Manchester constituents had recently burnt him in effigy.

² A reprint of the Sturge placard also appeared in this issue, with the editorial comment: "At the request of Mr. Sturge, made in a manner which, if it had been done by a man capable of an intentional impertinence, we should have called it so, we publish the following address."

The perusal of the letter which appeared in *The Times* of this date, bearing the signature of "Joseph Sturge", must fill the mind of every Englishman with disgust. Its selfishness, hypocrisy and cunning are alike conspicuous.

Why not denounce the Kaffir war at the time it occurred? Because no American barrel flour comes from thence. Friend Sturge's feelings were not so disturbed then as they are now that his trade is lessened by the Black Sea war.¹

Griffith also accused Sturge of having been a member of a cartel whose purpose was to inflate prices by cornering the market in wheat.

There are indications that the controversy continued with great heat, but it soon disappeared from the columns of the *Birmingham Journal*. Sturge wrote one more letter, refuting Griffith's claim that he had joined a combine in order to drive up grain prices (December 16). There was another abusive letter from Griffith; and there was one by David Smith which defended Sturge's reputation (December 30). By the new year, the dispute, if not forgotten, had passed out of the press. It was an interesting affair in so far as it revealed not only the attitudes and activities of Joseph Sturge, but also the temper of the British people and their press under the strain of war.

* * *

(The war was almost a year old, yet Joseph Sturge had found no suitable outlet for his energies. During the second year of the war, however, he became deeply involved in plans for founding the world's first daily newspaper dedicated to the cause of peace. The story of Sturge's essential role in the founding of *The Morning Star* will be related in a subsequent issue.)

STEPHEN FRICK

¹ It should be noted that Sturge actively opposed the Kaffir war, and that if the parallel argument were true—that Sturge, as a corn factor, was making extra profits out of the inflated price of wheat—then he would not, logically, given his "selfishness, hypocrisy and cunning", have been at all "disturbed" about the loss of Black Sea wheat. Would Sturge have profiteered in grain? In the *Memoirs* (pp. 52-54), Henry Richard quotes a letter of November 11, 1844, from Sturge to "C.D., Corn Exchange, London". In this letter, Sturge sets down the temperance principle which caused him to give up all his trade in malting barley, thereby sacrificing "large annual profits". It would seem odd if he were capable of carrying principle to such an extreme in the instance of temperance, but not in support of pacifism—an area of actual life-and-death concern to him.