

'PROVIDING A MORAL COMPASS FOR BRITISH PEOPLE': THE WORK OF JOSEPH TREGELLES PRICE, EVAN REES AND *THE HERALD OF PEACE*.

Some years provide more notable anniversaries than others, and 2016 was certainly one that offered many. It was 800 years since the death of King John, 400 years since the literary world lost William Shakespeare and it was the anniversary of the death of Miguel de Cervantes of Don Quixote fame. There were anniversaries of civil wars and international conflicts, including the 1716 exile of the 'Old Pretender' James Edward Stuart to France after the failure of the Jacobite rising; in 1916 the battle of the Somme saw the death or wounding of up to a million men; and the Irish Republic was proclaimed the same year along with the taking up of arms by the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the Easter Rising in Dublin. Of course, there were many more anniversaries, but the most significant for Friends was the establishment of a peace society in 1816.

Quakers had an established opposition to military activity and their pacifist inclinations were given greater prominence in the post-Restoration years of the seventeenth century. The international conflicts of the following centuries, and especially the Napoleonic Wars (1793–1815), provided further evidence of the barbarity of so-called civilised societies and the recourse to armed conflict. One nineteenth century social commentator observed:

During an eventful period of twenty-five years of nearly unremitting warfare, every nation of the civilized world has been involved in the contest [the Napoleonic Wars], and each has, in turn, shared its miseries, or groaned beneath its burdens. On some of those countries which have been the theatre of combat, the storm has burst with the fury of a volcanic eruption; whole provinces, systematically devoted to destruction, have exhibited a scene of extended havoc, that has left few vestiges of civilization; in a few fleeting moments, flourishing cities have been reduced to a heap of smoking ruins; and the

fields of Europe have been stained with the blood of millions.

He went on to add that these were 'the genuine effects of war' and thereafter sketched out the horrors associated with military campaigns. In his important study Martin Cadeal has observed that there was a transformation in attitudes towards war, whereby fatalism was 'replaced by a variegated peace-or-war debate in which an articulate minority went as far to argue for the achievability of positive and lasting peace' and this 'affected all countries to varying degrees; but it occurred first in Britain'.

Two of the leading Quaker campaigners were Joseph Tregelles Price (1784-1854), whose family owned the Neath Abbey ironworks, and Evan Rees (1791-1821), the son of a Neath ironmonger, who wrote the piece of social commentary above. Both men sought an end to such barbarity. In a letter to his sister, Junia, written in May 1814, Price wrote that he was determined to create a peace society that, he hoped, would lead to 'the general and universal preservation of peace', and significantly that he had 'a host ready to join'. On 7 June 1814, the day that war between France and England officially ended, he outlined the necessity for the society at Plough Court Pharmacy in Lombard Street, London, with, among others, William Allen (1770-1843), Basil Montagu (1770-1851) and Frederick Smith (1757-1823). The purpose here is to explore the work of Price and his efforts to secure peace as well as that of Rees who was the corresponding secretary of the Society and the first editor of the monthly journal, the *Herald of Peace*, which he began publishing in 1819. These developments were important for the way in which Quakers and others provided a moral compass for British people, particularly as the Religious Society of Friends was, at this time, redefining itself as a reformist body rather than an allegedly inward-looking community of believers.

Joseph Tregelles Price, a Cornishman, was born in 1784 and educated in Dorset until he was fourteen. After this he was employed in his father's mercantile business and, in 1818, became a partner at the Neath Abbey coal and ironworks in Wales. In 1821, on the death of his father, he was appointed as manager and subsequently (c.1829) the Managing Director of the company. He was known for his engineering skills, dogged perseverance and philanthropy, while the workers at the Neath

Abbey ironworks believed that 'the work of their hands, under the inspection of their beloved master, could not be surpassed anywhere'. A later testimony acknowledged that Price had 'won the respect and regard of the large number of persons over whom he presided, and he was ever alive to promote their moral and religious welfare'. Indeed, he implemented welfare programmes, provided educational facilities for the working class, and sought an end to poverty.

After the Peace of Paris in 1815 and Napoleon Bonaparte's final surrender, there were calls for an organisation that would promote international mediation when conflict seemed likely. Consequently, on 14 June 1816 a meeting of like-minded men took place and led to the creation of the London-based Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace as well as a number of regional societies. The London-based group consisted of ten participants, including the prominent reformers Thomas Clarkson and Joseph Hall, but Price's mother was anxious that her son ought to avoid the complications of involvement in a high profile organisation. He nevertheless unequivocally informed her that he felt 'the subject so deeply, that if brought upon a death-bed, he believed he should not feel acquitted if he omitted to make this effort'. Although there was strong external opposition to the society, Price helped to construct a programme of activity that promoted negotiation to prevent war, a reduction in armaments manufacturing, and an international court for the settling of international disagreements. The aims were advanced elsewhere, including the establishment of a subscription-based auxiliary peace society in the Neath-Swansea area (c. 1817) which provided members with a number of short publications amounting to half the subscription rate of 5s. per annum. Whether it was the cost of membership or its largely Quaker configuration, the Swansea and Neath Auxiliary Peace Society initially remained a small body of peace campaigners.

During the 1820s Price and other members reiterated the intentions of the society and fostered greater participation. This is illustrated in 1822 in the Swansea and Neath Peace Society's publication, *A Summary of the Purposes of the Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace*, while, in a speech at Swansea Town Hall on the tenth anniversary of regional society (3 July 1827), Price articulated the need for the wider distribution

of the society's literature throughout the country. At this time, the Swansea and Neath Peace Society had forty registered subscribers, but, despite concerted efforts, the Peace Society failed to create additional regional groups. In contrast, Price had greater success on the international stage as a campaigner for peaceful mediation. From 1819 he had actively encouraged French pacifists and the establishment of La Société de la Morale Chrétienne (SMC – the Society of Christian Morality). With his French counterparts, Price advocated the peaceful resolution of conflict, the abolition of slavery, and the reform of laws which prescribed capital punishment. There was one surprising beneficiary from such activity. In 1830 Prince Polignac, a principal advisor to unpopular King Charles X, claimed that he had avoided execution largely because of Price and his work with the SMC. It was stressed that the SMC had been very influential in amending the law for political prisoners just prior to Polignac's trial as a traitor.

In his search for peace, Price steadfastly refused to let his deteriorating health hinder his work. In June 1843 he attended the international peace convention in London, and on 25 August 1843 he and a number of other Quakers sought a peaceful resolution to the disturbances in west Wales associated with the Rebecca Riots. Showing sympathy for the plight of the labourers as well as promoting peaceful resolution to the rural disturbances, Hannah Backhouse who accompanied Price to Carmarthen recorded that this activity was primarily 'directed against the number of turnpike gates and the heavy taxes tolls on a population unable to bear them'. The magistrates approved of the advice of the Friends, and others were equally attentive when the Quakers held an additional large gathering 'on the benefits of peace and the horrors of civil war'.

On 18 May 1847 Price presided over a public meeting in London, the aim of which was to convince the government to accept arbitration between Britain and other countries if war was the likely outcome of strained diplomatic relations. A year later, Price petitioned parliament to secure peaceful solutions via international arbitration and observed that this would lead to a corresponding reduction in national spending on 'our large military and naval establishments'. Yet he was aware that if he and his fellow campaigners were to change hearts and minds

then such an undertaking would take considerable time and effort for these proposals to be adopted. His commitment to the Society was unwavering as he continued to promote the benefits of peaceful resolution to the end of his life. This was noticeable during the conflict (c. October 1853) between Russia and the Ottoman Empire (and subsequently France) over the rights of Orthodox Christians in Ottoman-held territories and the Tsar's resolve to have control over the Caucasus. The French argued that they were defending the rights of Roman Catholics in the region and any assumption of sovereign authority for Christians in the Ottoman Empire undermined eighteenth century treaties. The weakness of the Ottoman Empire, alongside the fear of Russian expansion, made this a complicated international disagreement. The situation deteriorated when, in March 1854, Britain and France declared war on Russia to curtail its territorial encroachments on the Black Sea and Crimean peninsula. The Crimean War lasted until February 1856. During the ever-increasing violence, particularly because of the use of new military technology, the war attracted considerable newspaper coverage and enflamed Russophobia. One consequence was the creation of several Foreign Affairs Committees to monitor the progress of the war, while Price and other members of the Peace Society advocated negotiation for the long-term settlement of the Eastern Question. For others who worked in the armaments and ordnance manufacture the question of peace and war posed a different challenge, one that might lead to unemployment and great financial hardship. Naturally, they believed that the pacifists were entirely unpatriotic. On 28 July 1854, Price chaired a meeting of the Peace Society in Neath where the speaker was accused of being anti-monarchical and unpatriotic. Although Price was able to restore order, an impromptu band played 'God Save the Queen' to drown out the speakers. Undaunted, in December 1854, he delivered a speech in London in opposition to the Crimean War, but this was to be his last peace testimony. He would nevertheless have endorsed the unequivocal view of the 'Duty of Peace Men' that they were 'to abide faithful in their testimony to the truth' and, although 'numerous and formidable may be the forces arrayed in opposition to their views, He that is with them is greater than all they that are against them'.

In contrast to Price, Evan Rees is little known in Wales and

perhaps only slightly better acknowledged in Quaker circles. He was the sixth son of Evan of Esgaircoch in Montgomeryshire and Elizabeth Rees of Neath, and was born in Neath on 15 December 1790. His father had come to Neath between 1770 and 1773, and established himself as an ironmonger. Significantly, in the early years of the nineteenth century Evan Rees assisted Price as secretary of the Peace Society. In a meeting at Plough Court in June 1816 it was agreed that one of the aims of the Society was to 'print and circulate Tracts, and diffuse information tending to shew, that War is inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity', and Rees agreed to participate, alongside Price, as a member. Significantly, he agreed to be the editor of the Society's journal, the *Herald of Peace* which provides evidence of an astute individual whose aim was to promote a better world where peaceful negotiation was the norm rather than perpetual conflict and the incalculable misery it brought in its wake.

From the detailed memoirs of his brother, Jonathan, written in 1853, it is possible to get a better insight into the character of Evan who was 'not a man of gloom', despite living through some difficult periods in British and European history, but rather a person who had 'a lively temperament and cheerful disposition'. Moreover, he was 'always accustomed to truth and candour, he detested falsehood, equivocation, and meanness'. He was raised among Friends and his father was determined that young Evan would receive an education that would equip him with the necessary tools to produce a better world. The memoir throws light on Evan's childhood, his education at Sidcot in Somersetshire, and the scrapes that young boys usually got into. What was unusual, given his Quaker upbringing, was his interest in the military. On one occasion, while in school, he was distracted by music and pageantry associated with a company of soldiers who passed by. He was not allowed to see them, but this did not seem to deter him 'as he threatened to jump out of the window' in order to have a look at this passing spectacle. Evan was a lover of books, but what is clear is that in his early years he had what was described as 'a taste for warlike achievements, and an admiration of what is called heroic valour'. The memoir naturally went on to comment that he had yet to discern 'the painful effects and demoralising tendency of war'. A childhood accident nevertheless deprived him of sight in his

right eye, but he persevered in his schoolwork and became an apprentice in Birmingham before returning home to Neath when he was twenty-one years old. He initially used his talents to help establish a public library in Neath in 1813.

A brief tour of southern England in 1814 brought him to Portsmouth where, as in his childhood, he was won over by the 'grand naval and military spectacles which were then exhibited for the amusement of the Royal visitors'. The assessment of these displays and its impact on Rees is evident in the memoir:

In this circumstance the effects of his early reading, which we are told induced a taste for warlike achievements, may be clearly traced; and whilst it stands out to his subsequent opinions on war, and his strenuous advocacy of the principles and practices of universal peace, it proves not only that a great change must afterwards have taken place in his views on this important question, but that this change was a result of a thorough conviction of the sinfulness of war.

A subsequent visit to France shortly thereafter was the key to this change as his 'susceptible mind revolted at the heartless cruelties and ruthless misery it [war] entailed'. He related stories of conscription to the Napoleonic army even among French Quakers at Congénies, and the consequent loss of family members. Napoleon's return from exile on Elba in February 1815 caused further consternation. Mothers were concerned for the safety of their sons and visualised them starving or dying in the frozen wastelands of Russia, while the French military 'exulted in the return of their furious leader, under whose blood-stained standards they threatened to renew their atrocities, and again to deluge Europe with blood'. On his return home, Evan was offered a job in London, but as the merchandise included guns and swords he declined the post. Nevertheless, he permanently removed to London and became a member of the Peel Meeting.

In the aftermath of Napoleon's return to France and subsequent defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815, Rees energetically joined those individuals (Quaker and non-Quaker) who sought a peaceful resolution to conflict and he willingly took up the position of corresponding secretary and the first editor of the Society's journal, the *Herald of Peace*. In a later editorial of the journal, the Peace Committee recognized that

he was intrinsic to the vitality of that organisation, particularly because he had invested considerable time and effort into the successful running of it. He was simply 'its centre and its soul', and they acknowledged that his exertions were exceptional as he 'communicated to others the feelings which occupied his own mind; and certainly a public society never possessed a more zealous, judicious, and devoted labourer'.

During this period of editing the journal, Rees found time to compile the *Sketches of the Horrors of War* which was based on Eugène Labaume's accounts of the 1812 Russian campaign. The extracts provide evidence of Napoleon's ill-fated attack on Russia, but the text also provides Rees' assessment of the consequences of war, particularly noting the loss of half a million lives in 173 days in 1812. In the introduction, he explained that historians and other social observers naturally concentrated on 'the achievements of the warrior', but ignored 'the sufferings of the wounded' or the 'tears of the widow and the orphan'. In contrast to his youth, the glorification of war was stripped bare:

All the powers of language, and every embellishment of style, have been lavished to immortalize the soldier's fame – to veil the hideous deformity of war – to give perpetuity to deeds of destruction – and to transform the destroyer of man into the most exalted of the human race. War is represented as the field on which the noblest energies of man are displayed; but to form a just conception of its nature we must view it in its characteristic abominations, not through the delusive medium by which it is invested with an alluring and baneful splendour.

He reflected on the popular adulation of Wellington's victories over Napoleon's forces in January and April 1812, and the 'acclamations of unhallowed triumph' which he roundly condemned:

The injury sustained by the vanquished, will be found to regulate the demonstrations of public joy. If they have lost their thousands, it will call forth general congratulation; if tens of thousands have perished in the fight, it will kindle a transport of delirious exultation. But to rejoice in the calamities of our fellow men, must surely be inhuman, and ungenerous; it must... render the heart callous to the finest feelings of humanity.



Then, as now, these extracts serve to show the brutality of conflict and 'convince every ingenuous mind of the monstrous irrationality and great wickedness of war'. Rees' overall conclusions were equally thought provoking. He considered that instead of celebration there should be sombre reflection of a battlefield drenched in blood, and that the appropriate music should be that of the 'groans of the wounded', and ultimately posed the question: 'what is the value of human life, or what the importance of human woe'? The publication of the tract was naturally contentious and even a relative of Rees thought that it should not carry his name on the title page, but he argued that 'a work without a name is not by any means so respectable'. He felt that if he was to combat 'public vice and error' then it was his responsibility to have a public face rather than to hide behind the anonymity of his words. Despite ill-health, and a request to resign as editor in 1818, Rees worked on the journal for another two years before his resignation was accepted in the autumn of 1820.

Although of failing health, Rees invested his time in serious matters: political and social reform, emigration, and commerce. He also found time to write to the Peace Society one last time. He acknowledged that there was an efficient organisation in place despite the retirement of some leading members, including himself, but noted that subscriptions had fallen due to the worsening economic situation in Britain at the time. He expressed delight at the first signs of democratic rights in Spain, Portugal and Naples, but was worried by the establishment of the Holy Alliance of Austria, Prussia and Russia, and the attack on Naples. He thereby questioned Tsar Alexander I's former commitment to peaceful negotiation -

The Emperor (Alexander) of Russia, the advocate of Peace Societies, - where are now the principles he once professed? From the extent of his influence, one word, would from him extinguish in its embryo this iniquitous, this atrocious war! But alas! That influence, that power is thrown into the opposite scale, and the Emperor sanctions a war undertaken to prevent a monarchy from giving to his subjects the blessings of a free constitution.

Rees's campaigning was still not over as he sought better

social and working conditions both at home and overseas. In November 1820 he sought permission from Friends to make a visit to New South Wales, both for the improvement of his health and particularly because of his dissatisfaction with the condition of prisons and in the treatment of criminals in the penal colonies. He embarked on his journey in March 1821, but caught a fever while on-board and died before he reached Australia on 28 June 1821. He was aged just thirty. The obituary notices recorded his ability, integrity and devotion to good causes. Finally, the *Cambrian* recorded in March 1822 that Evan Rees had simply been the 'friend of human kind'.

To conclude, it was fitting that on the two hundredth anniversary of the Peace Society on 14 June 2016 FHS members were asked to remember these two significant Welshmen who have remained largely in the shadows. They certainly deserve wider recognition as some of the decisions they took were not easy. They faced considerable opposition and challenged the prevailing ethos of the period that they were living in, but, as Quakers, they had a long-standing history of activism to fall back on. Believing that their course of action was the right way forward they helped to challenge prevailing attitudes towards war and peace. As shown, Joseph Tregelles Price lived a long and meaningful life in stark contrast to that of Evan Rees, but the handsome tributes in the newspapers to both men are indications of their high standing. Although, arguably, Price's death signalled the end of a particular period where peaceful negotiation and reconciliation were the watchwords of so many of his fellow campaigners, these two men had dedicated their lives to improving the lot of others. Their advocacy of humanitarianism, opposition to war, and their sense of justice represented a fine legacy for future generations to emulate.

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## END NOTES

1. See M. E. Hirst, *The Quakers in Peace and War* (London: Swarthmore Press, 1923); Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972); Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730-1854* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and his 'The Quaker Peace Testimony and its contribution to the British Peace Movement: An Overview', *Quaker Studies*, 7, 1 (September 2002), 9-29.
2. Evan Rees, *Sketches of the Horrors of War* (London: London Peace Society, 1819), p. 1. These details were extracted from Eugène Labaume, *Relation Circonstanciée de la Campagne de Russie, en 1812...* (Paris: C.L.F. Panckoucke, 1814).
3. Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention*, p. 2.
4. William Bacon Evans, 'Joseph Tregelles Price', *Annual Monitor* (London, 1855), pp. 158-9.
5. This is discussed in Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 150ff; Robynne Rogers Healey, 'Quietest Quakerism, 1692-c.1805', in Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 47-62.
6. Thomas Mardy Rees, *A History of the Quakers in Wales and their emigration to North America* (Carmarthen: W. Spurrell and Son, 1925), p. 258; Evans, 'Joseph Tregelles Price', p. 158.
7. For a wider assessment of Price's personal and business interests, the promotion of educational opportunities in industrial south Wales, and his philanthropic activities, especially trying to save the life of 'Dic Penderyn' who was later executed for his alleged part in the Merthyr Riot of 1830, see Richard C. Allen, 'An Indefatigable Philanthropist: Joseph Tregelles Price (1784-1854) of Neath, Wales', *Quaker Studies* (forthcoming).
8. Evans, 'Joseph Tregelles Price', p. 159.
9. *Seren Gomer*, 1 (1818), 155; 2 (1819), 294-5.
10. See *Seren Gomer*, 5 (1822), 148-9.
11. *Herald of Peace*, n.s. 6, part 1 (1827), p. 131; *Cambrian*, 14 July 1827.

12. Goronwy J. Jones, *Wales and the Quest for Peace: From the Close of the Napoleonic Wars to the Outbreak of the Second World War* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1969), pp. 3–5. pp. 3–5. For further interpretations of this period, see Ceadel, *Origins of War Prevention*, pp. 222–79.
13. *Herald of Peace*, 4 (1825), pp. 186–9; 5 (1826), pp. 139–42; John D. Crossfield, 'Richard Smith and his Journal', *JFHS*, 14, 3 (1917), 120–1, n. 78. Also, see Hirst, *Quakers in Peace and War*, p. 244; Vanessa Fabius Lincoln, 'Organizing International Society: The French Peace Movement and the Origins of Reformist Internationalism, 1821–1853', University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D. thesis, 2013.
14. *Courier*, 1830; *Cambrian*, 13 November 1830, p. 4; Evans, 'Joseph Tregelles Price', p. 162.
15. John Jefferson (ed.), *The Proceedings of the First General Peace Convention Held in London, June 1843* (London: Society for the Promotion of Permanent Peace, 1843), pp. 8, 9, 23.
16. See H. C. Backhouse, *Extracts from the Journal and Letters of Hannah Chapman Backhouse* (London: n.p., 1858), pp. 258–61; H. Tobit Evans, *Rebecca and her Daughters* (Cardiff: Educational Publishing Co., 1910), pp. 148, 153. For other assessments of the Rebecca movement, see David Williams, *The Rebecca Riots: A Study in Agrarian Discontent* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1955); Pat Molloy, *And They Blessed Rebecca: An Account of the Welsh Toll-Gate Riots, 1839–1844* (Llandysul: Gomer Press 1983); Rhian E. Jones, *Petticoat Heroes: Gender, Culture and Popular Protest in the Rebecca Riots* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015).
17. *Herald of Peace* (1847), p. 281.
18. *Cambrian*, 20 May 1848. Also, see Jones, *Wales and the Quest for Peace*, pp. 13–14.
19. For additional information, see M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1968); A. L. Macfie, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923* (London: Longman, 1989).
20. *Cambrian*, 28 July 1854.
21. Hirst, *Quakers in Peace and War*, p. 244.
22. 'Duty of Peace Men', *Advocate of Peace*, 1847–1884, 11, 7–8 (July and August 1854), 122–6.

23. Jonathan Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees* (London: privately printed for Jonathan Rees, 1853), pp. 1, 6–10. The secretary was a Welshman on three occasions: Rees, then Henry Richard ‘the Apostle of Peace’ from 1848 until 1883, and lastly William Jones of Ruthin. See Emyr Wyn Jones, ‘William Jones of Ruthin: Quaker and peacemaker’, *Cylchgrawn Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru/National Library of Wales Journal*, 26, 4 (Gaeaf/Autumn, 1990), 401–26 (401–3).
24. This is included in Rees, *Sketches of the Horrors of War*, p. 3.
25. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. vi, 2, 11.
26. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. vi, 12–13. See also *Herald of Peace*, New Series, II (1823), 9–13.
27. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, p. 16.
28. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, p. 21.
29. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. 28–30.
30. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, p. 31.
31. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, p. 37.
32. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. 45–7.
33. Rees, *Sketches of the Horrors of War*, p. 23.
34. Rees, *Sketches of the Horrors of War*, p. 3.
35. Rees, *Sketches of the Horrors of War*, pp. 3–4.
36. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, p. 63.
37. Rees, *Sketches of the Horrors of War*, p. 24.
38. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, p. 67.
39. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. 67–9.
40. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. 85–6.
41. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. 86–8.
42. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. 85–6.
43. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. 99–106.
44. Rees, *Memoirs of Evan Rees*, pp. 109–115; *Cambrian*, March 1822.

The illustration on the cover is the title page of Evan Rees, *Sketches of the Horrors of War* (London: London Peace Society, 1819)