

(XI) A FREE PARDON



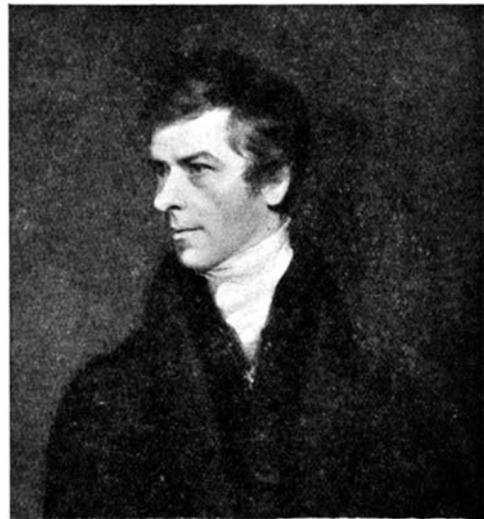
WITH its mind full of the revolutionary bogey, the Government became alarmed. On April 28, 1834, the Duke of Newcastle arose in the House of Lords to protest against the large processions of Trade Unionists who were in the habit of congregating in the metropolis in great numbers "to the great alarm of the respectable and peaceful inhabitants." He was referring not only to the demonstration in the Copenhagen Fields, but to the assembly on the previous Sunday of some 7,000 men marching in procession, as Lord Londonderry said, "to the great terror of the peaceful and well-disposed inhabitants."

Government
becomes
alarmed

Lord Londonderry solemnly warned the Government that their belief that the Trade Unions would die a natural death was mistaken. He understood that on the previous Sunday 15,000 names had been enrolled in the Unions.

Then the Lord Chancellor arose. The Mr. Brougham of the earlier days of the Reform Agitation had now changed into the pompous Lord Brougham. His mind no longer contained any recollection of the huge demonstrations in which he himself had taken part or of the prolonged agitation, of the public meetings, of the strong language in which he and others had indulged in the effort to pass the Reform Bill. He pronounced it was manifestly wrong to form an immense procession for the purpose of doing that which six people could execute just as effectually as 60,000. He implored the members of the Trade Unions to listen to the "wholesome and wise advice of those who had no interest in deceiving them." He hoped that they would no longer "continue to contribute the hard wrung pennies from their dearly-earned wages for the purpose of supporting a set of idle good-for-nothing agitators." He pleaded that "it was because he was a sincere friend of the working classes of the country that he was an enemy of Trade Unions."

Lord
Brougham's
bitter speech



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LORD CHANCELLOR BROUGHAM

Here we see plainly the spirit in which Lord Brougham regarded the Trade Unions. There was no sympathy shown in that quarter: just an implacable determination to punish and repress.

The news that the men were already on their way to Australia may have made many feel that the task of securing their release was hopeless. It was not known what had happened to George Loveless, and it was assumed that he also had sailed on April 11. Yet, despite

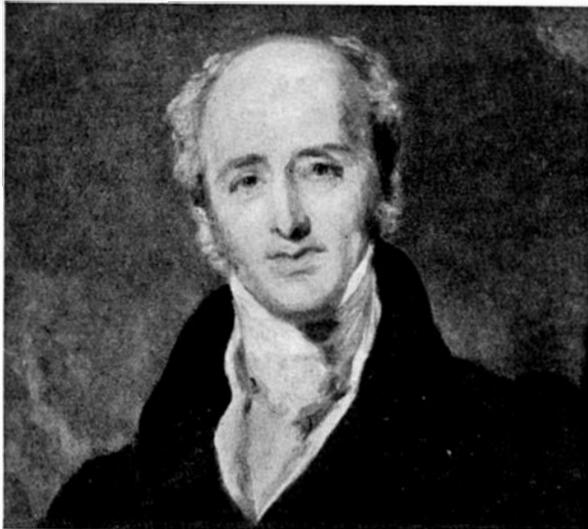
The
agitation
continues

The
Dorchester
Committee is
formed

the apparent hopelessness of the effort the agitation went on. Public meetings in London and the provinces continued the protests with unabated vigour, but the welfare of the families of the banished men was not lost sight of. Foremost in the dual task of organising the protest and the collection and distribution of succour were the sixteen working men who formed the London Dorchester Committee. The exact date of the formation of this Committee is not certain, but it is probable that it grew out of the early efforts of the Grand Meetings of the working classes, held under the guidance of Robert Owen. Certainly, it must have been in operation very early in the agitation because its Secretary, Robert Hartwell, a compositor, in a document issued on August 15, 1838, stated that the Committee had then been in existence over four years. It held its meetings at the "Turk's Head" Tavern, King's Street, Holborn.

In June, 1834, there was a change in the Ministry, the Cabinet under Lord Grey having fallen in consequence of difficulties which arose from the renewal of coercion in Ireland. A new Cabinet was formed under Lord Melbourne, which held office from June, 1834,

Ministerial
changes take
place



EARL GREY

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to November of that year, when it was suddenly dismissed by William IV, after various difficulties had arisen. There was an interim of a few weeks and a Tory Ministry was formed under Sir Robert Peel. This only lasted till April, 1835, when it was out-voted on a resolution of Lord John Russell to appropriate the surplus revenues of the Irish Church to non-ecclesiastical objects. Lord Melbourne became Prime Minister for the second time, and his Ministry continued in office during the whole period of the agitation for release of the Dorsetshire labourers. It can be understood that in the midst of these political diver-

sions, the atmosphere was not very propitious in the House of Commons for the pushing ahead of the petitions for release. Nevertheless, petitions were presented from time to time, whilst outside the House the agitation went on unceasingly.

Relief for
the distressed
families

We have seen how, at a very early stage, attention was paid to organising relief for the families. It was certainly needed. Imagine the situation in which the women found themselves. Their husbands torn from their side, branded as common criminals and transported overseas. The Parish authorities, dominated by the landowners and farmers, were indisposed to help them.

The magistrates were determined to humble them to the dust. James Frampton, in

a letter to Viscount Howick, Under-Secretary of State, dated May 3, 1834, said:—

Frampton's
letter to Lord
Howick

“It is perfectly true that I, and the other Justices acting with me, refused to allow any parochial relief for the wives and families of those convicts; and we gave as our reason for so doing that we had ascertained from the gaoler that they had been supplied by their wives with more food than they could consume during the time they were in the gaol, which would have been continued after their conviction had the regulations of the prison allowed it. We also told them that on their husbands entering the Union, the leaders of it engaged to maintain all the families of those who joined the Union for so long a time as they were thrown out of work and deprived of their earnings, in consequence of their belonging to the Union; and that therefore they ought to apply to those leaders and require them to keep their promise. Our object in doing this was to prove to the labourers that the leaders of the Unions had deceived them if they did not support their families; and if they did maintain them to lessen the funds of the Union at the same time that it relieved the Parish.”

Frampton later states that the Justices had declined Parish relief to any persons “whose names appeared in the book, which was proved on the trial of the six men to contain a list of those who had taken the illegal oath and had joined the Union.”

All this was obviously done for the purpose of deterring people from having anything to do with the Union. The Justices, as has been emphasised, were determined to use the machinery of the State to the utmost in the effort to destroy the Union. In the course of the same letter, Frampton informs Lord Howick:—

Justices want
to smash
Union

“The Justices have particularly recommended to the farmers (who have expressed themselves most willing to follow our advice) that every encouragement should be given to those labourers who did not join the Union by increasing their wages and placing them in all the most profitable work, so that they may feel the advantage of their good conduct by making a marked difference between them and the Unionists; and on no account at present to make any addition to the wages of the latter, lest it should have the slightest appearance of being done thro' fear.”

The magistrates were resolved that not only the men folk but the women and children should feel the heavy hand of the law for the heinous crime they had committed in combining in their own defence.

The close blood relationship which existed amongst the families made the blow even harder. Dinniah Loveless, sister of George and James, had married Thomas Standfield. At one fell swoop, as Thomas Wakley pointed out in the House of Commons, she had been



VISCOUNT HOWICK

An afflicted
woman

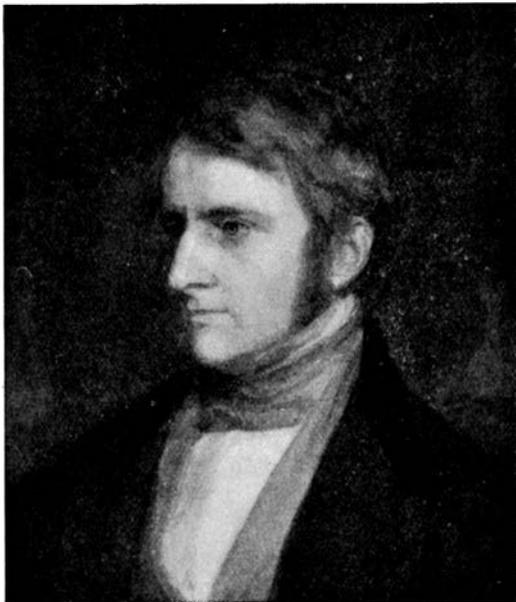
deprived of her husband, her two brothers and her eldest son, John. How was she to battle alone and unaided for herself and her five remaining children? The wife of George Loveless, with her three children, the eldest aged nine years and the youngest aged seven, was in little better plight. I am glad to render testimony to the Trade Unionists of that day for the timely help they afforded the families of the absent men.

The relief
begins

We see from the letters of James Frampton, the Magistrate, to Lord Melbourne, that a stranger "well dressed, although not a gentleman," had been down to Tolpuddle and had taken away with him the wife of George Loveless and her son. The stranger was a London cabinet maker, named Newman, who was engaged in distributing money to the distressed families, which had been subscribed by the Trade Unionists. The village parson, the Rev. Thos. Warren, was approached for a similar purpose. He did not speak very favourably of the men, and it was apparent from his attitude that it was no use attempting to enlist his sympathies.

Mr. H. Heatherington of the *Poor Man's Guardian*, a paper which stoutly championed the cause of the labourers, explained how he visited Tolpuddle in October, 1834, to distribute money to the families. He says that Mrs. Dinniah Standfield, wife of Thos. Standfield, in whose house the Union held its meetings, had been denied parochial relief by order of the magistrates. The Parish authorities had told her that her eldest children must support the younger ones, and that she must support herself.

Mr.
Heathering-
ton's
testimony



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JOHN ARTHUR ROEBUCK

William Loveless, another brother of George, writing from Burton, near Bridport, on November 20, 1834, thanked Heatherington for his kindness to the family. He said that the last words of his brother George to him were, "William, do your best that the tyrants do not starve my dear wife and children. I care not for myself so that my wife and children be taken care of." Worthily were these sentiments carried out by the Trade Unionists and their staunch band of radical supporters.

Regular assistance was afforded throughout the whole of the period of the transportation, not only in money but in wise guidance, helpful counsel and fraternal regard. The women were made to feel that although their breadwinners were away, the great fraternity to which they belonged was not merely a name. They were regularly paid a sum approximate to the wages of their husbands, by the Dorchester Central Com-

mittee in London. The paltriness of the local authorities is shown by the statement of Robt. Hartwell that the Parish Overseer had summoned Mrs. Standfield for poor rates, whilst she was subsisting on the money allowed by the Committee. By her spirited conduct, after having twice been summoned to Dorchester, she escaped payment.

Activity began to revive in the House of Commons. A new protagonist had joined forces with the small band who were working determinedly inside the House for release. This was Thomas Wakley, the Member for Finsbury, recently elected, who threw himself into the agitation with a vigour, determination and an eloquence which must command the highest esteem from Trade Unionists. Petitions from Newcastle, Dundee, Belfast, Chard, Wisbey Moor, together with sixteen presented by Wakley himself, eight of which were from Dorchester, descended upon the House in a seemingly never-ending stream.

Thos. Wakley takes up the case

Joseph Hume announced in the House that over 800,000 people had signed petitions for release. Wakley's speech in support of the petition was probably the most masterly in a long and active public career. J. A. Roebuck, M.P., says: "a more touching and beautiful appeal to our sympathy and our justice it was never my lot to hear." On June 25, 1835, Wakley once more brought forward a motion for an address to the King.

800,000 sign petitions

Lord John Russell, who had now become Home Secretary, asked Wakley to postpone his motion. He said that he was prepared to recommend to the King that pardon be granted to the whole of the men on condition that they remained in the colonies. He was ready further to recommend that James Hammett, John and Thomas Standfield and James Brine should receive a full pardon when they had been overseas two years. With regard to George and James Loveless, he regarded them as the ringleaders. They would not be allowed to return to England.

Conditional pardon granted 25 June, 1835



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EARL RUSSELL

Speaker after speaker arose to protest against the grudging character of this conditional pardon. It was useless for the legal luminaries of the Government to argue that the conviction was technically correct. Everyone knew that the crime for which they had been punished was that of joining the rapidly growing Trade Unionism amongst the agricultural workers.

Wakley's motion for pardon was rejected by 308 votes against 82, but the first move had been made. A conditional pardon at least had been offered to four of the men, and it was the determination of the stalwarts of the agitation that this conditional pardon should give way to a full and free one.

Wakley's motion rejected



A few weeks later, Lord John Russell communicated with the Rev. Thos. Warren, at Tolpuddle, and asked him to see whether the wives and families of the Martyrs were willing to join their husbands in the colonies. The Clergyman's report is on the next page.

The undaunted Wakley continued to agitate on every conceivable occasion for the total remission of the sentences. In presenting a petition from 5,000 inhabitants of Bristol on August 12, 1835, he contrasted the punishment inflicted on these unfortunate men with the perfect immunity which members of Orange Lodges enjoyed. Once again the petition was ordered to lie on the table, but Wakley's persistency was having some effect.

On February 23, 1836, Sir William Molesworth seconded a motion by Joseph Hume for the suppression of Orange Lodges, contending that they were illegal. He insisted that the Dorsetshire labourers had been condemned for a far more innocent act. The difference was that their chief, unlike the Orangemen, was not a Prince of the Blood.



National Portrait Gallery

SIR WILLIAM MOLESWORTH

This was clearly a reference to the Duke of Cumberland. Members were becoming more and more uneasy at the feeling in the country, that there was one law for the rich and another for the poor.

A few days later, on March 3, again in reply to the indomitable Wakley, Lord John Russell stated that four out of the six men would, as had already been stated, be able to return at the end of two years, and that period would expire in October, 1836. Since the late discussions upon the Orange Lodges, he had thought it his duty to recommend to His Majesty, that such part of the sentence upon two of the Dorsetshire labourers that required their continuance in the Australian Colonies for the whole period of their transportation, should be com-

mutated. At the same time, if other favourable circumstances were brought to his knowledge, he knew of nothing to prevent him from recommending to His Majesty a further extension of the royal mercy.

In respect of George and James Loveless, they would be allowed to return at the end of three years in the colonies. Previously, of course, he had stated that they would not be allowed to come back to this country until the full seven years of their sentence had elapsed. Now they would be allowed to return after serving three years exclusive of

Tolpuddle, August, 3^d
1835.

Sir, I called upon the Wives of the two Lovells, according to your desire, & acquainted them with the proposal contained in your note, as directed by Lord John Russell; "whether they & their families were disposed to accept the indulgence of a free passage to join their husbands in New South Wales, & Van Diemens Land."

To day, they have given me their answer: They wish to hear from their respective husbands, whether their going out would be agreeable to them. They are now about to write to them to that effect: if their husbands approve of their going out, they will be thankful to accept of this indulgence. The one, the Wife of George Lovell, is anxious to go: The other, the Wife of James Lovell, does not herself wish to go, but is ready to go, in obedience to her husband, if it is his desire.

As soon as they receive an answer to their respective letters, if their husbands wish to receive them & their families, they will petition your Government for this indulgence.

I am, Sir,
Yr ob^t Servant

Thos Warren.

Your letter owing to the incorrectness of its address, did not reach me so soon, as it otherwise would have done;

Tolpuddle

Blanford, is the usual
address.

the time of the voyage. Russell was troubled in conscience, as we can see by the correspondence which passed between him and Lord Melbourne.

In the course of a letter dated October 2, 1835, from Endsleigh, Lord John Russell remarked:—

“One of the Dorchester labourers, Loveless, made a confession that he had been seduced by Londoners, and had got the men to take oaths thinking there was nothing in it against law. Upon which I wrote to the Colonial Office that the two Lovelesses should be pardoned after three years in the colony. Now Joseph Hume writes me a letter, which I send you. I am not disposed myself to do more than I have done, for then we should be in their power, instead of their being in ours. What say you? To be sure the Duke of Cumberland and the Duke of Gordon are far more guilty than the labourers, but the law does not reach them, I fear.”

Lord Melbourne, however, did not see matters in quite the same light. The enmity with which he had pursued the Martyrs was unabated. In his letter from Panshanger, dated October 6, 1835, he agreed with Russell that the question of the Orange Lodges required serious consideration and then went on to observe:—

“I am certainly quite against doing anything more in the case of the Dorsetshire labourers. I thought the matter had been considered to have been settled. Perhaps if it will tend to prevent the revival of the question, you might facilitate their being joined by their families. You call Loveless’s statement that he had been seduced by Londoners a confession—I call it a defence or justification, and probably false. Did he state who those Londoners were?”

Russell, however, was not so easily convinced that the matter had been disposed of. In a subsequent letter he said:—

“The question of the Dorchester labourers is not finally disposed of. The debate ended in the House of Commons by Peel’s saying that if any circumstances came to my knowledge in their favour it was quite open to me, on my responsibility, to give them a further remission. Since that



DUKE OF CUMBERLAND

time two circumstances have transpired—one that Loveless gave a very fair, and I believe, true account, that the evidence against him was agreeable to the fact, but that he took what he did from the suggestion of others, and that he did not know it was unlawful. Now as to the unlawfulness, it required putting together two Acts of Parliament to prove that the thing was unlawful; O’Connell says now that it was lawful, and no proclamation warned them that what was notoriously done all over London was illegal. Secondly, it appears that the Duke of Cumberland and Lord Wynford have been doing the same thing only with more cunning, and *deserve* at least a more severe punishment. I have already offered the wives of the Lovelesses

Lord John
Russell writes
Melbourne

Russell
urges further
clemency

Duke of
Cumberland
more guilty
than the
labourers

Tolpuddle March 18 - 1836

May it Please your Lordship

My Lord we whose Names are hereunto filed
with feelings of our warmest gratitude and of our most
humble acknowledgements Return to you our grateful
Thanks for your kindness shown towards us by Procuring
for our husbands Mr Deen and Relatives His Majesty's
most gracious Pardon viz on the forementioned occasions
But more Especially by Procuring Pardon for the two
Lovelaces to Return with the others at the end of
two years And by Hearing of your unswerving
Benevolence for them and us

We will as in duty bound Ever pray
for your Lordships health Happiness and Prosperity

Elizabeth Lovelace

Sarah Lovelace

C. Baine

Jessiah Standfield

H. Hammett

to go out, but they would not go till their husbands were consulted. Certainly if I stay in office, I shall not keep the sentence in force the whole seven years."

The persistence of the agitation and Lord John Russell's strong feeling that the sentence could not be maintained, were having their effect. Melbourne on October 13, 1835, observed:—

"I do not myself care much what is done respecting the Dorsetshire labourers. But you know the feeling which exists against their being brought back into the Country."

Melbourne must have been singularly ill-informed as to the state of feeling in the country, and the agitation which had already secured a conditional pardon was soon to reach its consummation. The Dorchester Committee and the good friends who had worked so arduously for the relief of the six men were soon to have their reward.

On March 14, 1836, after Wakley had presented several petitions on behalf of George and James Loveless, Lord John Russell stated that His Majesty had been pleased to grant a free pardon to the whole of the men. So, after an agitation lasting almost two years, the full pardon had been secured. The news was immediately communicated by the Dorchester Committee to the wives and families of the six absent ones. They replied in words evidently chosen for them explaining their gratitude for the Home Secretary's kindness. A long time was still to elapse before their loved ones were to return again to Tolpuddle.

A full pardon
14 March,
1836

