

"Ordinary Talents and Extraordinary Perseverance": The Life of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton

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"ORDINARY TALENTS AND EXTRAORDINARY PERSEVERANCE":
THE LIFE OF SIR THOMAS FOWELL BUXTON

by

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ABSTRACT
"ORDINARY TALENTS AND EXTRAORDINARY PERSEVERANCE":
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Born into a gentry family with roots in the Society of Friends, the evangelical social conscience of Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786-1845) was developed as he operated a brewery in Spitalfields, perhaps London's poorest parish. He was instrumental in raising funds for poor relief and establishing soup and bread kitchens there during the winter of 1816-1817. His interest and research on penal discipline brought him national prominence and led to a parliamentary seat which he held for nearly two decades. Buxton's association with noted activist William Wilberforce (1759-1833) led to his own involvement in the anti-slavery movement, a cause he fiercely championed, resulting in Britain's abolition of slavery throughout the Empire in 1834. After leaving Parliament in 1837, Buxton focused on revitalizing Africa through a program to end international slavery and encourage African self-sufficiency. This resulted in the disastrous 1841 Niger expedition that effectively ended Buxton's public career and paved the way to British imperialism in Africa. Buxton was a man of many interests, and aside from his work for penal reform, poor relief, and abolition, he also supported Catholic emancipation and ending the Hindu suttee. Few nineteenth-century social reformers have had as much of an impact or have cast as long a shadow as Buxton. At the time of his death, many saw him as the epitome of Christian activism. Yet, today Buxton remains largely ignored and forgotten.

The intent of this study is to examine the life of one of Great Britain's most prominent social activists. Using his *Memoirs*, personal papers, and the papers and books of his friends, associates, and contemporaries, I have sought to paint a portrait of an individual driven by religious motives and idealism to improve his world.

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David S. Bruce, B.A., M.A.

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"A Noble, Simple, True Man:"
A Historiographical Introduction to Thomas Fowell Buxton

At the time of his death in February 1845, Thomas Fowell Buxton was one of the most famous Englishmen on earth. Heralded as a hero, Buxton was praised by royalty and commoner alike. Such was the power of his memory and the nature of his works, that Buxton's celebrated status remained secure until the end of the First World War. Within a decade, however, this would change, and the name previously so well-known in the western world literally vanished overnight from the public consciousness.

Today, few are aware of Buxton or his contributions. Those who recognize his name see him as emancipator and liberator of the enslaved throughout the British Empire, at the expense of his other philanthropic works and goals. For fourteen years, Buxton and his small staff of family, friends, and fellow abolitionists, waged a public war with slave-holders and those tolerant of slavery. Yet during that same period he also directed his energies and efforts towards other causes that he believed would make England a shining example of Christian morality and social equality.

Traditionally, it has been easy for historians to compare Buxton to such noted reformers and Christian thinkers as William Wilberforce (1759-1833), Thomas

Clarkson (1760-1846), and Zachary Macaulay (1768-1838), for they also worked diligently for years to end the legal slave trade and later enslavement itself.¹ By the time Buxton arrived on the public stage, the slave trade had been abolished, but the institution remained. In many ways, he was the successor to many social reformers who preceded him. In terms of penal reform, he continued Sir Samuel Romilly's (1757-1818) efforts to limit the use of capital punishment. With Sir James Mackintosh (1765-1832), he helped lead the fight to reassess judicial punishment in Great Britain.² In the matter of slavery, he was the intellectual heir to seventeenth-century

¹ William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, and Zachary Macaulay were all prominent reformers who believed that Christian salvation necessitated direct action, generally in the form of social improvement. For more on Wilberforce, see John Wolfe, "Wilberforce, William (1759-1833)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29386> (accessed June 23, 2009). For more on Clarkson, see Hugh Brogan, "Clarkson, Thomas (1760-1846)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5545> (accessed June 23, 2009). For more on Macaulay, see J. R. Oldfield, "Macaulay, Zachary (1768-1838)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17350> (accessed June 23, 2009).

² Sirs Samuel Romilly and James Mackintosh focused their parliamentary careers on abolishing capital punishment in Great Britain. For additional information on Romilly, see R. A. Melikan, "Romilly, Sir Samuel (1757-1818)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24050> (accessed June 23, 2009). For more on Mackintosh, see Christopher J. Finlay, "Mackintosh, Sir James, of Kyllachy (1765-1832)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, October 2005, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17620> (accessed June 23, 2009).

abolitionist/author Aphra Behn (c.1640-1689), arguing that slavery was not only a physical state, but one that ensnared the mind and soul.³ He was also the theological heir to Wilberforce in arguing that abolition had to be accompanied by religious development and the promulgation of the Christian Gospel among former slaves. He pushed for Catholic emancipation,⁴ promoted elimination of the Hindu suttee, and was at the forefront of a disastrous expedition in Africa that nonetheless paved the way for Victorian missionary work and British imperialism in Africa later in the century.

In characterizing Buxton as merely an abolitionist, biographers and historians have done him and his legacy a grave disservice. Thomas Fowell Buxton was an eminent and tireless advocate for various humanitarian causes. A relentless researcher, Buxton anticipated the methodology of modern social scientists. The brother-in-law of renowned Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) and Joseph John Gurney

³ Seventeenth century author Aphra Behn is best known for her antislavery novel, *Oroonoko* (1688). See Janet Todd, "Behn, Aphra (1640?-1689)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1961> (accessed June 23, 2009).

⁴ Catholic emancipation, also known as "Catholic relief," was the movement to remove the social and political restrictions forced on Roman Catholics by the Acts of Uniformity (1549-1662), and the Test Acts (1673). See John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

(1788-1847), he shared their zest for social crusades.⁵ By focusing exclusively upon the image of "*Buxton the Liberator*," biographers have minimized or ignored Buxton's many other causes, such as penal reform, including reducing the use of capital punishment, repealing anti-Catholic legislation, and improving the lives and welfare of the peoples of Africa and India. To each of these issues, Buxton responded with a strong sense of drive and determination. He was an inspired leader.

Moreover, because Buxton's sense of spirituality and faith were both well-known even in his lifetime, it is easy to dismiss him as a "religious fanatic" advancing a socially liberal agenda. Buxton could be self-serving and vain, character flaws of which he was well aware and the source of much internal conflict. He often questioned his own spirituality and faith, and the realization that he could never attain an idealized state of saintliness weighed heavily upon him. More importantly, he was a man of his times and in putting him into this broader context,

⁵ Elizabeth Fry was Quaker philanthropist who focused on penal reform. She was also Buxton's sister-in-law. See Francisca de Haan, "Fry, Elizabeth (1780-1845)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10208> (accessed June 23, 2009). Her brother, Joseph John Gurney, was a successful Quaker banker and theologian. See Edward H. Milligan, "Gurney, Joseph John (1788-1847)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11771> (accessed June 23, 2009).

it is possible to gain a better and more complete understanding of his life. At a personal level, for example, his marriage was a model of the companionate ideal emerging in the late eighteenth century.⁶

Beginning a month after his death in 1845 and continuing until about 1926, there were no fewer than twelve books written about Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton. Although each an independent work, nearly all were based upon *The Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Baronet, with Selections from His Correspondence*, edited and published in 1848 by Buxton's youngest son, Charles.⁷ This immediately successful biography proved so extensive and accessible that it became the basis for all subsequent biographies of Buxton. It is fair to state that without this source, several of these subsequent works by distributors with interests in religious manuscripts, or by religious organizations with social reform agendas, would never have been published.

⁶ A "companionate marriage" was one where "emotional satisfaction" was valued more than tangible gain - in effect, a marriage based on affection and support, rather than one based on financial, material, or status profit. See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*. Abridged ed. (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1979), 217.

⁷ Charles Buxton, ed., *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Baronet. With Selections From His Correspondence* (Philadelphia: Henry Longstreth, 1849), iii. Henceforth referred to as *Memoirs*. This study uses the American edition (Philadelphia: Henry Longstreth, 1849).

The first biographical work on Buxton, however, was John Garwood's *A Funeral Sermon for the Late Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Baronet*, published in spring 1845, just weeks after Buxton's death. The sermon, preached in the district church of St. Mary, Spital Square, was given by Garwood at a memorial service held in March 1845. It was followed later that year by the dual biography, *The Brief Memoirs of Thomas Fowell Buxton and Elizabeth Fry*, written by Fry's brother (and Buxton's brother-in-law), Joseph John Gurney. Both Garwood's and Gurney's books were minor works, and aside from praising Buxton for his Christian piety, offered limited insight into the man or his accomplishments. Like many sermons published during the nineteenth century, Garwood's work stressed Buxton's moral fiber and personal righteousness. Gurney's joint biography took a similar approach to its subjects, but also noted Buxton's efforts to end the slave trade within British dominions, the civilized West, and Africa itself. Both books were prepared as memorials for a publicly celebrated social activist; both declared that Buxton's famed stance against slavery and his advocacy of a self-sufficient Africa made him a hero for the ages. "Thousands of the sable children of Africa would, if they could," Gurney concluded, "have followed him with tears to the grave; and

may we not reverently believe, that an infinitely more numerous company of angels, have bid him welcome to the mansions of rest and glory?"⁸

Buxton's friends were not satisfied with these sketches of his life and wanted a work of substance. Their search for a professional author failed miserably. In 1847 the family eventually convinced a reluctant Charles Buxton to write the *Memoirs*.⁹ Although writing his father's memoirs initially did not interest the younger Buxton, there were a number of benefits to doing so. Charles was able to incorporate his father's personal papers into the project, something that "could not well have been submitted to the inspection of any one not a member of the family."¹⁰ Moreover, serving as the editor of his father's memoirs allowed him to control how his father was depicted. "I could hardly refuse," Charles wrote, "so interesting, though responsible, a duty."¹¹ In recounting his father's life, Charles was determined to avoid adding to the hagiography surrounding his father and instead, "state the facts, and leave the reader to draw conclusions for

⁸ Joseph John Gurney, *Brief Memoir of Thomas Fowell Buxton and Elizabeth Fry*. (London: Charles Gilpin, 1845), 32.

⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, iii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

himself."¹² His sole goal "was to show, as plainly as possible, what sort of person my father was, so that the reader should feel as if he had been one of his most intimate friends."¹³ To this end, the younger Buxton kept discussion of other abolitionists and reformers to the bare minimum; his goal was to better familiarize the public with his father as both a private man and public servant. The result extended to some six hundred pages, and was an immediate sensation. The book proved so popular that it was updated and republished several times, and remained in print in Great Britain and the United States until the mid-1920s.

The success of the *Memoirs* paved the way for other monographs on Buxton. Joseph John Gurney reissued his book in 1848, although it seems his purpose in doing so was to incorporate corrections so as to make his account compatible with Charles Buxton's now "official" biography. A series of sermons given at the Exeter Hall Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) by popular Congregationalist minister Thomas Binney was published in 1849.¹⁴ Entitled *Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Bart. — A Study*

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., iv.

¹⁴ The Reverend Thomas Binney was a leading Congregationalist minister and founding member of the Colonial Missionary Society. See R. Tudur Jones, "Binney, Thomas (1798-1874)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National*

for Young Men, the work held Buxton's moral character up as a model for enterprising young men to follow and was one of several works Binney published to promote moral reform.¹⁵ Binney found the *Memoirs* to be nearly indispensable to his own work and borrowed heavily from it. He selected key incidents from Buxton's life to address three character-oriented questions:

What were the things which constituted his outward, visible life, – which men saw, and could judge of and appreciate? What were those inward elements, – those sources of power and strength, of either head or heart, – which were the vital mainsprings of his active being? – and then, again, the last question, – How was it that his mind was awakened?¹⁶

The answer to these questions, Binney exclaimed, were all found in a close examination of Buxton's life. "None of you may be BUXTONS *in the actual form of your outward course*," Binney told his audience, "but all of you may, *in your principles and character*."¹⁷ This charge was not to be taken lightly, for as far as Binney was concerned, Buxton

Biography, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2421> (accessed June 23, 2009).

¹⁵ Thomas Binney, *Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Baronet: A Study for Young Men*, 2nd ed. (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1853). Binney republished *A Study for Young Men* in July 1853, because he believed the original English version "appeared in a form somewhat uninviting." Attached to the newer edition was another Binney lecture, "*The Wife; or A Mirror for Maidenhood*," published in the hope that young women might also take the initiative to become better individuals. This new volume was designed as a companion piece to still a third Binney essay, "*Is It Possible to Make the Best of Both Worlds?*" (iii).

¹⁶ Binney, *Study*, 8-9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 148. Emphasis is Binney's.

could do no wrong. The man who spearheaded the end of British slavery was characterized as, "A GOOD MAN,—a loving, liberal, large-hearted, thorough Christian man,—a noble, simple, true man."¹⁸ Of those few occasions where Buxton's actions might seem suspect, as in Buxton's acceptance of the apprenticeship clauses in the Slavery Emancipation Act (1834), Binney rationalized, "I can only say, without going into reasons, that I conceive he did what not only admitted of defence but of justification. I believe he was right."¹⁹

As the century wore on, several other works detailing the life of Buxton proved to be perennial favorites in England. The continued success of Buxton's biographies was undoubtedly linked to British imperialist interests and anti-slavery efforts in late nineteenth-century sub-Saharan Africa. If, as Rudyard Kipling declared, the darker races were the "white man's burden,"²⁰ then Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton at least provided Britons with an example of how the white man should behave towards those races.

Although editions of the *Memoirs* were published in Germany and France, sales never reached the levels of those in England. Works on Buxton, however, did briefly find an

¹⁸ Ibid., 128. Emphasis is Binney's.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

²⁰ Rudyard Kipling, "White Man's Burden," 1899. *Collected Verse of Rudyard Kipling* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1926), 215.

audience in the United States prior to the American Civil War. Virtually all of the material composed on Buxton in Great Britain before 1863 was reissued by American publishing houses in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Buxton's staunch abolitionist views, as well as the growing legend of his moral character, struck a chord with American social reformers. American merchant and philanthropist Amos Lawrence was so taken with Buxton's life that he purchased and distributed "large numbers" of Rev. Thomas' Binney's *Study for Young Men*.²¹ Eventually, Lawrence began a correspondence with Buxton's widow, Hannah Lady Buxton, who was so moved by his adoration of her husband that she sent him a copy of the *Memoirs*.²² Meanwhile, Massachusetts judge Daniel Appleton White claimed the *Memoirs* was so powerful a work that it "almost persuad[ed] him to be an abolitionist, altogether indeed such . . . as [Buxton] was."²³ Mary A. Collier, an American abolitionist, published *Memoir of Thomas Fowell Buxton: Embracing a*

²¹Amos Lawrence (1786-1852) was a successful Massachusetts merchant, who supported a number of public and private charities. William R. Lawrence, ed. *Extracts from the Diary and Correspondence of the Late Amos Lawrence, with a Brief Account of Some Incidents in his Life* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860), 298.

²² Ibid.

²³ Daniel Appleton White (1776-1861) served as a probate judge in Essex County, Massachusetts, and was a key member of the Essex Institute, a museum and county historical society. George W. Briggs, *Memoir of Daniel Appleton White. Prepared by Request of the Essex Institute, and Read at the Meeting of January 11, 1864* (Salem, Massachusetts: C. W. Swasey, 1864), 31.

Historical Sketch of Emancipation in the West Indies and of the Niger Expedition for the Suppression of the Slave Trade, a heavily edited version of Charles Buxton's biography, that focused on emancipation on the eve of the American Civil War.²⁴

In 1865, American Methodist minister Zachariah Atwell Mudge penned *The Christian Statesman: A Portraiture of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*, the first original biographical work on Buxton created in the United States. Mudge continued the trend of retelling the story found in Buxton's *Memoirs* with little or no new interpretations of the man or his accomplishments. Given the uncertainty and social chaos prevalent at the end of the Civil War, however, Mudge extolled his subject as an omen of good tidings to come to America:

We have given, somewhat in detail, the history of the spirit of those antislavery reforms in which he was engaged, that foreshadow the wonderful events now passing under the eye of the American reader. Sketches of these earlier struggles of right against might will be read, we think, with an interest quickened by the conflicts of the present hour.²⁵

²⁴ Mary A. Collier, *Memoir of Thomas Fowell Buxton: Embracing a Historical Sketch of Emancipation in the West Indies and of the Niger Expedition for the Suppression of the Slave Trade* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1861).

²⁵ Zachariah A. Mudge, *The Christian Statesman; A Portraiture of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton: With Sketches of British Antislavery Reform* (New York: Carlton & Porter, Sunday School Union, 1865), 6.

While the *Memoirs* were the basis for much of the text, *The Christian Statesman* incorporated other contemporary works in its portrait of Buxton. Among these were personal recollections written by Gurney and Elizabeth Fry, the memoirs of William Wilberforce and Joseph Sturge (1793-1859), news articles, and interviews with those who knew Buxton during his lifetime.²⁶ Despite these additional sources, *Christian Statesman* remained true to the format established by Charles Buxton; it was yet another in what was becoming a growing list of titles dedicated to Buxton's spiritual example. Interest in Mudge's account was slight when compared to other works on Buxton; it was the first book on the subject that did not immediately go into a second edition. A revised edition was published in 1886, two years before Mudge's death, but American interest in Buxton failed to match that in Great Britain. Once emancipation was achieved and Reconstruction ended, American interest in Buxton's other efforts at social reform quickly declined as did sales of books about him.

After 1865, emphasis on Buxton's abolitionist role underwent reinterpretation. No longer considered the

²⁶ Joseph Sturge was a philanthropist, abolitionist and social reformer. See Alex Tyrrell, "Sturge, Joseph (1793-1859)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26746> (accessed June 23, 2009).

primary activist against British slavery, Buxton found himself relegated to being a supporting member of a cadre of British abolitionists. Subsequent works, such as George Maunder's, *Eminent Christian Philanthropists: Brief Biographical Sketches Designed Especially as Studies for the Young* (1868)²⁷ and Charles D. Michael's, *The Slave and His Champions: Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton* (1890), were distinctly different from earlier biographies in that they reminded readers that British emancipation did not come through the efforts of just one individual, but rather through the efforts of an organized movement. Both books were collections of brief biographies, assembled under the theme of public morality, and both targeted younger readers in hopes of instilling in them personal values. In *The Slave and His Champions*, for example, Michael noted the "mantle of Wilberforce could have fallen on no man worthier than . . . Thomas Fowell Buxton."²⁸ While untried in matters regarding the abolition of slavery, Buxton was so energetic and determined; he "speedily made for himself a name worthy to be coupled with that of his noble

²⁷ George Maunder, *Eminent Christian Philanthropists: Brief Biographical Sketches Designed Especially as Studies for the Young*. (Wesleyan Conference Office, 1868).

²⁸ Charles D. Michael, *The Slave and His Champions: Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*, 2nd ed. (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1890), 115.

predecessor." Michael added, "Higher praise than that cannot be given him."²⁹ Of the man himself, Michael again stressed the role of religion in Buxton's life: "He submitted himself and all his affairs to Divine guidance, with the most childlike trust and simplicity."³⁰ Buxton's character was so impervious to harm that even those who did not like what he represented "would agree that his life was entirely devoted to doing good to all men."³¹ Considering that the emphasis of the collection was on the anti-slavery effort, it is not surprising that Michael devoted less than a paragraph to Buxton's efforts for prison reform and virtually nothing to his work for India, Africa, or Ireland. Rather, he noted, "Mr. Buxton was already predisposed in favor of anti-slavery."³²

Some authors chose to highlight Buxton's life as a model of Christian temperament. In 1883, for example, the Reverend William H. Davenport Adams published "*Good Samaritans, or Biographical Illustrations of the Law of Human Kindness*," a book for moral and ethical development.³³ "I have brought together a goodly company of educational

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

³² Michael, *Slave*, 121.

³³ William H. Davenport Adams, *Good Samaritans, or Biographical Illustrations of the Law of Human Kindness*. (London: W. Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1883).

reformers, of Christian missionaries, of philanthropists, of Good Samaritans," Adams explained. "Men and women who have dedicated their lives to the great work of making their fellow-creatures better, purer, happier."³⁴ In a section entitled, "Work on Behalf of the Slave," Adams included a brief biography of Buxton alongside one for Wilberforce. "We have spoken of Thomas Fowell Buxton as the 'Elisha of the anti-slavery movement,' upon whom the veteran Wilberforce devolved his mantle," Adams wrote. "The biography of this thorough English gentleman is worth studying, for it tells of a good and great life, inspired by a really lofty sense of duty and by a wise and generous philanthropy."³⁵

In Adams' view, Buxton was the ideal English gentleman. Buxton could have lived a quiet life, but when he saw a social injustice, he acted. "It would be folly to speak of Buxton as a man of genius," wrote Adams. Rather, he was

a man of cultivated mind and refined taste, with a good deal of that mild wisdom which comes of patient observation and reflection. The thing that gave dignity and interest to his life was the perseverance with which he maintained a great and sacred cause. The cause raised the man; it elevated his thoughts, it broadened the horizon of his vision, it lifted him out of the atmosphere of commonplace.³⁶

³⁴ Adams, *Good Samaritans*, v-vi.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

In *Conquering Success, or Life in Earnest* (1903), William Matthews also presented Buxton as a subject worth emulating. Buxton's life was an example of what could be accomplished through hard work, religious piety, and determination.³⁷ Buxton's life also demonstrated that character could be shaped by the company one kept, and to stress this point, Matthews pointed to the relationship Buxton maintained with his in-laws, the Gurneys. When Thomas James edited a book on character written by his father, Reverend John Angell James, he noted that "history is philosophy teaching by facts [and] biography is philosophy teaching by the character and actions of living men."³⁸ He included Buxton's *Memoirs* alongside his recommendation of Boswell's "Life of Johnson." These "may all be read with advantage."³⁹

Some authors had to work hard at justifying Buxton's presence on their pages. In 1871, for example, Charlotte Yonge wrote *A Book of Golden Deeds*, a primer for adolescents designed to instill morals and ethics. In defining what constituted a "golden deed," Yonge wrote,

³⁷ William Mathews, *Conquering Success or Life in Earnest* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903), 95-96.

³⁸ "The Christian Father's Present to His Children," *The Works of John Angell James*, T. S. James, ed. (London: Hamilton Adams & Co., 1862), 194.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

There is a courage that breaks out in bravado, the exuberance of high spirits, delighting in defying peril for its own sake, not indeed producing deeds which deserve to be called golden, but which, from their heedless grace, their desperation, and absence of all base motives - except perhaps vanity - have an undeniable charm about them, even when we doubt the right of exposing a life in mere gaiety of heart.⁴⁰

Yonge selected a minor and bizarre episode in Buxton's life from 1816 to make her point. While living at Hampstead, Buxton maintained a small stable of horses, several cats and a number of dogs, which he used on his numerous shooting and hunting weekends. One of these dogs, Prince, became rabid in early July. After being informed by his servants that Prince had "killed the cat, and almost killed the new dog, and had bit at" the servants. Buxton, reasoning that the dog was suffering from some other malady, rode off on business, but not before leaving instructions for Prince to be tied up.⁴¹ When he returned home, however, Prince had gotten loose and threatened to attack everyone in sight. "I saw Prince covered with mud, and running furiously, and biting at every thing [sic]. I saw him bite at least a dozen dogs, two boys, and a man."⁴² Ultimately, Buxton was forced to put down Prince, as well

⁴⁰Charlotte Mary Yonge, *A Book of Golden Deeds of All Times and All Lands* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1871), 3.

⁴¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 57.

⁴² *Ibid.*

as several other animals on the property.⁴³ For Yonge, Buxton's "perfect coolness and presence of mind shown in

⁴³ Buxton's account of the episode is so strange that it is puzzling as to why Yonge would cite it as an example of a "golden deed." As Buxton later wrote to Hannah on July 15:

"Of course I was exceedingly alarmed, being persuaded he was mad. I tried every effort to stop him or kill him, or to drive him into some outhouse, but in vain. At last he sprang up at a boy, and seized him by the breast; happily I was near him, and knocked him off with my whip. He then set off towards London, and I rode by his side, waiting for some opportunity of stopping him. I continually spoke to him, but he paid no regard to coaxing or scolding. You may suppose I was seriously alarmed, dreading the immense mischief he might do, having seen him do so much in the few preceding minutes. I was terrified at the idea of his getting into Camden Town and London, and at length considering that if ever there was an occasion that justified a risk of life, this was it, I determined to catch him myself. Happily he ran up to Pryor's gate, and I threw myself from my horse upon him, and caught him by the neck: he bit at me and struggled, but without effect, and I succeeded in securing him, without his biting me. He died yesterday, raving mad.

"Was there ever a more merciful escape? Think of the children being gone! I feel it most seriously, but I cannot now write more fully. I have not been at all nervous about it, though certainly rather low, occasioned partly by this, and partly by some other things.

"I do not feel much fit for our Bible meeting on Wednesday—but I must exert myself.

"P. S. Write me word whether Fowell has any wound on his fingers, and if he has one made by the dog, let it be cut out immediately; mind, these are my positive orders."

He afterwards mentioned some particulars which he had omitted in this hurried letter.

"When I seized the dog," he said, "his struggles were so desperate that it seemed at first almost impossible to hold him, till I lifted him up in the air, when he was more easily managed, and I contrived to ring the bell. I was afraid that the foam, which was pouring from his mouth in his furious efforts to bite me, might get into some scratch, and do me injury; so with great difficulty, I held him with one hand, while I put the other into my pocket and forced on my glove; then I did the same with my other hand, and at last the gardener opened the door, saying, 'What do you want?' 'I've brought you a mad dog,' replied I; and telling him to get a strong chain, I walked into the yard, carrying the dog by his neck. I was determined not to kill him, as I thought if he should prove not to be mad, it would be a great satisfaction to the three persons whom he had bitten. I made the gardener, who was in a terrible fright, secure the collar round his neck and fix the other end of the chain to a tree, and then walking to its furthest range, with all my force, which was nearly exhausted by his frantic struggles, I flung him away from me, and sprang back. He made a desperate bound after me, but finding himself foiled, he uttered the most fearful yell I ever heard. All that day he did nothing but rush to and fro, champing the foam which gushed from his jaws; we threw him meat, and he snatched at it with fury, but instantly dropped it again.

the whole adventure are, perhaps, some of [the incident's] most remarkable features." She praised the manner in which Buxton conducted himself. Here, Buxton acted not from "sudden impulse, no daring temper, but from the grave, considerate conviction of the duty of encountering the peril on the part of the person most likely to be able to secure others."⁴⁴

Three other nineteenth-century works merit brief mention. Hannah Ransome Geldart wrote *The Man in Earnest: Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton* (1852), London's Religious Tract Society, summarized Buxton's life as a part of an anthology of significant lives in the late nineteenth century and issued a biography by S. S. Pugh entitled, *Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Baronet: The Man Who Broke the Fetters of*

"The next day when I went to see him, I thought the chain seemed worn, so I pinned him to the ground between the prongs of a pitchfork, and then fixed a much larger chain round his neck; when I pulled off the fork, he sprang up and made a dash at me, which snapped the old chain in two ! He died in forty- eight hours from the time he went mad."

He writes to his wife a day or two afterwards, - "I shot all the dogs, and drowned all the cats. The man and boys who were bitten, are doing pretty well. Their wounds were immediately attended to, cut, and burnt out.

"What a terrible business it was. You must not scold me for the risk I ran; what I did I did from a conviction that it was my duty, and I never can think that an over-cautious care of self in circumstances where your risk may preserve others, is so great a virtue as you seem to think it. I do believe that if I had shrunk from the danger, and others had suffered in consequence, I should have felt more pain, than I should have done, had I received a bite." Buxton, *Memoirs*, 57-59.

⁴⁴ Charlotte Mary Yonge, "The Mad Dog, 1816," *A Book of Golden Deeds of All Times and All Lands* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1871), 382.

the Slave, in 1903.⁴⁵ None of these volumes were available for review for this study. These were the last significant works on Buxton to appear for quite some time. While the *Memoirs* continued to be republished as late as 1926, no major work appeared on Buxton's life or accomplishments for another two decades—the largest such gap of time between books on Buxton since his death eighty years earlier.

In 1946, Ralph Mottram published *Buxton the Liberator*, which again re-envisioned Buxton, this time as a leader on behalf of universal justice.⁴⁶ Written over a century after his death, *Liberator* depicted Buxton's humanity as an example for the victorious West in terms of both dealing with the defeated powers and meeting the needs of an emerging Third World. Despite this global approach, *Liberator's* style and delivery were straight out of the nineteenth century. The same can be said of the latest look at the legacy of Buxton, that of Oliver Barclay's

⁴⁵ During the latter half of the nineteenth-century, the Religious Tract Society published *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Christians*, a series of short biographical essays on prominent religious activists. Each volume was an anthology containing between eight and ten biographies, numbering approximately twenty pages. The set contained at least five volumes—the biography on Buxton appeared in the *Fifth Series*, but none of the editions examined contained publication dates. Repeated attempts to secure a copy of the Buxton biography for this study were unsuccessful.

⁴⁶ Ralph H. Mottram, *Buxton the Liberator* (London: Hutchinson & Company, Limited, 1946).

Thomas Fowell Buxton and the Liberation of Slaves (2001).⁴⁷

The first such undertaking since Mottram, Barclay's book is a throwback to the biographical works of Thomas Binney and Zachariah Mudge, placing Buxton and his actions clearly within the context of Quaker evangelicalism.

The years between 1967 and 1975 saw the reissue of a number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Afro-themed works, in part to stress awareness of minority contributions to Western civilization. Two of Buxton's texts reappeared in the late 1960s, as a part of Dawson's (London) Colonial History Series. In 1968, G. E. Metcalfe edited and reissued a facsimile single volume combining Buxton's two major works, *The African Slave Trade* (1839) and *The Remedy* (1840). While not purely biographical, Patricia M. Pugh's *Calendar of the papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, 1786-1845*, (1980) catalogued the Buxton family's collection of manuscripts and documents, which are at Rhodes House Library, Oxford. Essentially a limited edition annotated bibliography for a private organization, Pugh's *Calendar* was the first such listing of Buxton materials made by someone outside the Buxton family. Four years later, Buxton's personal papers were released on

⁴⁷ Oliver R. Barclay, *Thomas Fowell Buxton and the Liberation of Slaves* (York: William Sessions, 2001).

microfilm by Harvester Press, providing students and scholars with a fuller resource than even the *Memoirs* could provide.⁴⁸ In 2009, Gale, an online research and publishing corporation, announced a new digital archive, "Slavery and Anti-Slavery," that includes the Buxton Papers, housed in the Rhodes House Library.⁴⁹

Earlier biographies depicted Buxton as one dimensional, emphasizing his accomplishments and personal ethics as the product of his spiritual foundation. This study seeks to avoid such a simple characterization. Buxton was a man driven to succeed by an inherent mix of justice and ambition. He was determined to correct what he believed were society's flaws. As will be demonstrated, he was not simply a staunch and indefatigable advocate for the abolition of slavery, but also farsighted in his perception of societal reform. Buxton championed a concept that was relatively new in the early nineteenth century—the cause of human rights. Whether it involved the condition of Britain's penal system, the inconsistency of judicial discipline and punishment, the ritual murder of Hindu widows in India, or the continued oppression of Great

⁴⁸ *The Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, 1786-1854*. 17 reels. (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Microform Publications, 1984).

⁴⁹ Gale Digital Archives, "Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive," <http://www.gale.cengage.com/servlet/ItemDetailServlet?region=9&imprint=000&titleCode=DABF&cf=n&type=3&id=228367>.

Britain's Roman Catholic community, Buxton regarded any offence against another as a crime against humanity itself that needed to be set right. At a time when many in Britain believed that merely ending the trade in African slaves was a sufficient act of Christian charity, Buxton maintained that the treatment of Africa and her peoples, whether good or bad, would have far-reaching ramifications for Great Britain and the world. He was the first to propose a comprehensive plan for religious education, territorial exploration, and agricultural development in Africa, and while his plan met with limited success during his lifetime, it served as the basis for subsequent humanitarian efforts in Africa.

Now is an apt time to reexamine the life of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton. In 2007, celebrations of the two-hundredth anniversary of Britain's abolition of the slave trade reacquainted the general public with the efforts of such men as Wilberforce, Clarkson and Macaulay, as well as a host of other late-eighteenth century abolitionists to end the trade. Following their success, some, most notably Wilberforce, focused on abolishing slavery within the empire. While Thomas Fowell Buxton was too young to play a role in the effort to abolish the slave trade, he would succeed Wilberforce as the leader of the crusade to abolish

slavery. His important contribution to this historic watershed in British imperial history has been recently recognized by the British government with a commemorative plaque at the Director's House for the Old Truman Brewery in London, where Buxton worked and resided in the years before he entered Parliament.⁵⁰ It is a small token to remember a man whose accomplishments surpassed his expectations. "I hold a doctrine, to which I owe - not much, indeed, but all the little success I ever had," Buxton once said, "that with ordinary talents and extraordinary perseverance, all things are attainable."⁵¹

⁵⁰ English Heritage, "Blue Plaque for anti-slavery campaigner Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton," Marquette University, <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.12089>. The plaque presentation was held on September 26, 2007, and participants included several Buxton descendants. According to the English Heritage website, they are "[o]fficially known as the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, English Heritage is an Executive Non-departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Our powers and responsibilities are set out in the National Heritage Act (1983) and today we report to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport." English Heritage, "Who We Are," Marquette University, <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.1665>.

⁵¹ Thomas Fowell Buxton to Joseph John Gurney, November 25, 1819. *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

**Chapter One:
"Principles Early Planted"**

In 1755, London oil merchant and banker Isaac Buxton married Sarah Fowell and established a residence on Thames Street on London's south side, about one-half mile north of the Thames River. It was here that Sarah gave birth in early 1756 to the couple's first son, Thomas Fowell, whom they named after his grandfather.¹ Isaac Buxton was moderately successful in both of his business ventures, a fact substantiated by the will he prepared in October 1756.² At that time, he bequeathed his wife a sizable allotment consisting of properties, securities, and two-thousand pounds of "good and lawful money of Great Britain."³ Isaac, who died in 1782, never amended the will, which suggests that he possessed a high degree of business acumen thus ensuring that his family would be able to live comfortably in the event of his death. Naming both his father and father-in-law as co-executors of his estate, Isaac compensated them with a generous sum of twenty guineas each, "for their trouble."⁴

¹ For the sake of clarity, Thomas Fowell Buxton the elder will be referred to as Thomas Buxton from this point.

² *Last Will and Testament, Isaac Buxton, Esquire*; 3 October 1756. Public Record Office, National Archives, Catalogue Reference: Prob 11/1097.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

As with Isaac Buxton, there is little information available about his son Thomas. He followed in his father's footsteps and worked, for a time at least, as a merchant. In 1785, at nearly thirty, Thomas married Anna Hanbury, daughter of fellow merchant and brewer, Osgood Hanbury, a distant relation to the Buxtons. Although Thomas was a member of the Church of England, the Hanburys were prominent members of the Society of Friends, or as they were more commonly known, the Quakers. By this time, Thomas had received a sizeable inheritance from his father's estate and may have sought to withdraw from the business world. Shortly after his marriage, Thomas relocated his family to Castle Hedingham in Essex, some fifty miles away from London. It was here that Anna gave birth to their first child, Thomas Fowell, on April 1, 1786. Within a year, the family would move yet again, this time establishing a permanent residence in another part of Essex, at Earl's Colne. The property at Earl's Colne was not particularly large, but it was sizable enough to merit a mention in John Cary's *New Itinerary*, a traveler's almanac of Great Britain.⁵ During the next seven years, Anna gave birth to four more children: Charles, Sarah

⁵ John Cary, *Cary's New Itinerary: Or An Accurate Delineation of the Great Roads, Both Direct and Cross Throughout England and Wales; With many of the principal Roads in Scotland*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for John Cary, 1802), 551.

Maria, Anna, and Edward, who was born shortly after his father's death in 1793.

In the *Memoirs* of his father, Charles Buxton characterized his grandfather Thomas Buxton as a man slight both in property and fortune,⁶ an interesting depiction considering that Thomas earmarked five thousand pounds, properties and securities, for his wife and Thomas Fowell in the last testament he prepared in 1790.⁷ It is possible, although there no evidence, that the family's fortune took a downward turn in the time between the preparation of this will and its execution three and one-half years later, yet this seems highly unlikely. In addition to his own earnings and the inheritance from his father in 1782, Thomas Buxton also received a sizable dowry with his marriage to Anna Hanbury.

In any case, Thomas Buxton remained so positive regarding his affairs that few outside his home were aware of any financial issues affecting the family. Rather, his contemporaries saw him as a "man of gentle and kindly disposition."⁸ He was eventually elevated to the position of High Sheriff of Essex County, a promotion that one

⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 14.

⁷ *Last Will and Testament, Thomas Buxton, Esquire*; 22 October 1790. Public Record Office, National Archives, Catalogue Reference: Prob. 11/1241.

⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 14.

historian attributed to the wealth and influence of the Hanbury family.⁹ As sheriff, Thomas Buxton was diligent in the performance of his duties, and often used his position to relieve the suffering of those prisoners confined in his jail. He conducted regular visits to check on their mental and physical well-being. He was known to "exercise hospitality on a liberal scale."¹⁰ He also performed unspecified acts of philanthropy and encouraged the same in others—actions which may have had a strong influence on the later endeavors of his namesake.¹¹

What is interesting about the senior Thomas Buxton is the utter lack of information on him from any of his children, and in particular from his eldest son and namesake who otherwise seemed to record remembrances of virtually every person he encountered. There is no information through which the relationship between father and son can be judged. Buxton's failure to record even the most mundane remembrance of his father in his journals or personal papers suggests that the pair had a relationship that was less than ideal, assuming of course, that there was any bonding at all.¹²

⁹ Mottram, *Buxton the Liberator*, 10.

¹⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² During this period, the relationship between father and son emphasized personal and civic responsibilities over emotional

In contrast to what is known about Thomas Buxton, far more information is readily available about Anna Hanbury. "My mother," Buxton wrote, "was a woman of a very vigorous mind, and possessing many of the generous virtues in a very high degree."¹³ She was also described as a "kind-hearted, original-minded person," with a strong will and equally strong intellect.¹⁴ As noted, Anna Hanbury came from a prominent and longstanding line of Friends; this, in part, accounts for the philanthropic interests of her son. Her character would continue to influence her son for the remainder of his days. "She was large-minded about everything," Buxton wrote, "disinterested almost to an excess; careless of difficulty, labour, danger, or expense, in the prosecution of any great object."¹⁵

The theory that there was little bonding between father and son is supported by the fact that in 1790, a four-year-old Buxton was sent away to boarding school in Kingston-upon-Thames, where he remained until shortly after his father's death in 1793. The experience would have a profound effect upon him for the next decade. It was

attachment. Bonding beyond that of familial loyalty and Christian duty would have been rare. See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, rev. ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 344-345.

¹³ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 15-16.

¹⁴ Augustus J. C. Hare, *The Gurneys of Earlham*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen, 1895), 1:123.

¹⁵ Hare, *Gurneys*, 1:123.

during his attendance at Kingston that Buxton first displayed the more questionable aspects of his character—obstinacy, single-mindedness, and a fierce temper. Those were traits that would serve him well as an adult, but made him a difficult child. It is likely that he displayed these traits at home as well, thus providing a possible reason behind his parent's decision to send him away to school.

Buxton never directly addressed what occurred during his stay at Kingston, but shortly after his arrival, he became increasingly despondent. For reasons unclear, but likely rooted in feelings of homesickness, Buxton did poorly at the school, and while the *Memoirs* stop short of characterizing the treatment he received as abusive, it is clear that the child was not cared for in an ideal manner.¹⁶ His physical health immediately went into decline, aggravated in part by a diet poor in quality and insufficient in nutrition.¹⁷ It is also likely that it was during this point in his life that Buxton began to display another characteristic that would have a life-long impact:

¹⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 15-16.; See also Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 17. Charles Buxton suggests that the maltreatment his father received at Kingston were the source of his life-long physical ailments. Zachary Mudge, on the other hand, suggests that while Buxton's "health was broken," during his tenure at the school, his condition was remedied when his enrollment there was terminated.

¹⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 14.

fits of unimaginable mania followed by lengthy bouts of depression. Should this be the case, then Buxton's poor performance at Kingston is understandable. What defies understanding, however, is why his parents made no attempt to remove him from Kingston despite his failure to thrive.

Religion was important in the Buxton household. As a practicing Anglican, Thomas Buxton insisted that his sons be brought up in that faith, most likely for professional reasons.¹⁸ His wife and daughters remained members of the Society of Friends. There is no evidence to suggest that Anna Buxton overtly attempted to convert her sons to her faith, but as will be demonstrated, her beliefs and moral influence had a great impact on their future conduct. After her husband's death, it does not appear that Anna imposed any particular religious view on her children, insisting instead that they maintain both a high regard for the Scriptures and that they possess a solid, moral center.¹⁹

When Thomas Buxton suddenly died at the age of thirty-eight on the morning of December 3, 1793, young Buxton became the master of the house at the tender age of seven—a

¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

role which his mother encouraged him to play.²⁰ "My mother, a woman of great talents and great energy," Buxton mused, "perpetually inculcated on my brothers and sisters that they were to obey me and I was rather encouraged to play the little tyrant."²¹ As to how much of a "tyrant" Buxton became, the record is unclear. Given, however, that his early makeup was strongly self-centered and egocentric, it is not hard to imagine that Buxton soon became the bane of his siblings' existence. The situation was not helped by Buxton's vigorous nature and "bold and determined character."²² Despite his overbearing nature towards his siblings, the relationships among the five appear to have been good, for they remained close well into adulthood.

To his new position as head of the household, Buxton brought his self-described "daring, violent, [and] domineering temper."²³ His ability to conduct himself in a manner beyond his years led one anonymous contemporary to comment that Buxton "was never a child; he was a man when

²⁰ Charles Buxton recorded the date of his grandfather's death as occurring in 1792, and this date has been cited in nearly all subsequent biographies and discussions on Buxton's early life. An examination of the *Times* (London), however, confirms the date cited above.

²¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 14-17. Buxton's elevation to head of the household was typical for fatherless families. According to Davidoff and Hall, "Sons were expected to be ready to take over as head of the family if necessary." Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 345.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 14-17.

in petticoats."²⁴ Buxton noted that his mother treated him "as an equal," and encouraged him to "express [his] opinions without reserve."²⁵ Buxton's son and biographer Charles wrote that while Anna Buxton could be strict, she preferred a "hands-off" approach in handling her children, a policy that seemed especially beneficial to her sons. "There was little indulgence, but much liberty. The boys were free to go where they would, and do what they pleased,"²⁶ and this was especially true of her eldest. Anna knew, however, when to exercise parental control, and once she did so, it "was paramount over [Buxton], as over his brothers and sisters." Her secret, as she confessed to a friend, was simple: "implicit obedience, unconditional submission."²⁷

Yet despite this seemingly liberal aspect to her nature, Anna Buxton possessed a dark, controlling side, one her son could not explain. Buxton never characterized her as 'unbalanced,' but he recognized that something was clearly wrong in her personality. "Her greatest fault," he wrote, "is the violence of her temper, and, except at Weymouth, individually, I have suffered little from its

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ There is no indication of her attitude regarding the "liberty" of her daughters.

²⁷ *Buxton, Memoirs*, 14-17; see also Hare, *Gurneys*, 123-124.

effects and have been generally able to avert them [sic] from others."²⁸ Buxton does not recount any instances of physical violence or abuse, but it is clear that his mother could be an intimidating force. Her irate moods did not instill fear in him; rather it was their intensity and duration that concerned him the most. There is not enough information on Anna Buxton's mental makeup to provide a diagnosis of her personality. This said, Buxton's characterization of his mother suggests that like her son, she also suffered from some form of manic depression, or that she possessed a personality that was both aggressive and confrontational. In any case, Anna's bouts of anger were not limited to members of her immediate family. At one point her public behavior became enough of an embarrassment that Buxton felt compelled to apologize privately for her actions. "I am afraid that you only know the worst side of my mother," Buxton wrote to his fiancée in 1806, assuring her that she had never been the target of his mother's wrath. "I do not think you are sufficiently

²⁸ Thomas Fowell Buxton [henceforth TFB] to Hannah Gurney, March 18, 1806. Thomas Fowell Buxton, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, 1st Baronet, 1786-1845*, 17 reels, (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press Microform Publications, 1984).

aware of her singular generosity, but I suppose you are by this time tired of the subject."²⁹

Their mother's possible mental condition aside, the Buxton children lived a relatively happy and contented life in Essex. They often spent their holidays with their paternal grandmother, Sarah Buxton, at either her London residence or at Bellfield, the country house in Weymouth that was completed just before her husband's death.³⁰ While in the city, Buxton noted, his grandmother was extremely strict and controlling; the children occasionally found it difficult to adapt to such an environment.³¹ Time spent at Bellfield, however, provided an entirely different experience, for it was here that their grandmother loosened her grip and afforded them freedoms similar to those granted by their mother. It was here that Buxton found himself happiest, being outdoors and among loved ones. Buxton excelled in outdoor activities; his growing "size and strength well fitted him for country amusements."³² These country visits offered another benefit which the children enjoyed: Weymouth had the distinction of being one

²⁹ TFB to Hannah Gurney, March 18, 1806, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

³⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 18.

³¹ Charles Buxton wrote that his great-grandmother lived an extremely formal life, so much so that "even the exceptions to her rules were methodically arranged; her Sunday discipline, for example, was very strict, but on one (and only one) Sunday in the year, she gave the children the treat of a drive in the park!" *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.* 17.

of the favorite resorts of George III and the royal family. The Buxtons were the king's neighbors, and members of the royal family frequently called at Bellfield during their holidays.³³

Of his early social relationships, none gave Buxton as much pleasure as the close friendship he developed with Abraham Plaistow, his family's gamekeeper. A young man himself, Plaistow enjoyed hunting, shooting, and fishing—all interests which Buxton eagerly shared and would continue to pursue for the rest of his life. Yet Buxton's association with Plaistow was not entirely one of fun and games; a true bond of friendship and respect developed between the pair and they remained close for the rest of their lives. "My guide, philosopher, and friend," as Buxton characterized him, was a strong father figure for the rambunctious youth, and a person for whom Buxton "ever felt, and still feel, very great affection."³⁴ Contemporary biographers of Buxton praised Plaistow's influence on him, and all agreed that the impression the young gamekeeper left upon Buxton's character was significant.³⁵ Plaistow, who could neither read nor write, nonetheless succeeded in giving Buxton and his brothers an education that featured

³³ Ibid., 19.

³⁴ Ibid., 18.

³⁵ See Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 18-19; Barclay, *Thomas Fowell Buxton*, 19.

his own "rustic knowledge" and distinctive view on the world. His fearlessness and mastery of his environment did not obstruct a well-formed intellect, what Buxton termed, "mother-wit." It was this trait, along with a high standard of integrity and honor, which earned Buxton's greatest admiration and affection. The sentiment was mutual, for while Plaistow seems to have been given charge of all three young Buxton men, he possessed a particular fondness for young Thomas. "Such was my first instructor," Buxton wrote,

[A]nd, I must add, my best; for I think I have profited more by the recollection of his remarks and admonition, than by the more learned and elaborate discourses of all my other tutors. He was our play-fellow and tutor; he rode with us, fished with us, shot with us on all occasions.³⁶

None of Plaistow's wisdom seemed to help where school was concerned. Buxton's academic performance at Kingston continued to deteriorate, and within weeks of his father's death, Anna Buxton removed her son from the school, placing him and his brothers in the care of the Reverend Dr. Charles Burney in Greenwich. Freed from the abusive environment of Kingston, Buxton began what was to be a six-year union with one of the better private instructors in London. Charles Burney's credentials were impeccable. As

³⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 18.

a highly respected master of Greek literature—the *Times* characterized him as “one of the first Greek scholars of this time”—he was but one member of a family noted for their “literary and scientific eminence.”³⁷ Burney’s father had been a noted professor of music and acquaintance of Dr. Samuel Johnson. Even among his contemporaries familiar with his background, the eccentric Burney was hailed as “one of the most learned and accomplished scholars” in England.³⁸

This change in environment, however, had little effect on Buxton’s academic performance. While his overall physical and emotional well-being benefited from the relationship with Burney, Buxton’s grades showed hardly any improvement at all. In fact, he may have actually

³⁷ The *Times*, (London), December 30, 1817, 3 (henceforth, *Times*).

³⁸ John Garwood, *A Funeral Sermon for the Late Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, Bart., Preached in the District Church of St. Mary, Spital Square, on Sunday, March 16, 1845* (London: B. Wertheim, Aldine Chambers, Macintosh; 1845), 4-5. Greatly respected, Dr. Burney was considered a colorful character during his lifetime (d. December 28, 1817). “Among the peculiarities of the late Dr. Burney, were two of a very innocent kind: the first was, the possession of the best wine, of the best vintage; the next, a dread of a fresh current of air. Shut the door! Was the first salutation uttered by him to any one who entered his apartment, and but a few of his associates ever neglected this rule. This custom, it seems, did not abandon him even on the most critical and trying occasions; for it is said, that having been robbed while returning home one evening in his own carriage, along the Greenwich-road, by a couple of footpads, who were more eager in obtaining his money than contributing to his accommodation, he called them back to [sic] a peremptory tone, and while they were wondering at what he wanted with them, he exclaimed, in his usual manner, and with his own peculiar emphasis, “Shut the door!” A voice accustomed to command produced the desired effect, and he was instantly obeyed.” *Times*, March 11, 1819, 3.

performed worse than he did while at Kingston.³⁹ His chief problem lay in the fact that he lacked the self-discipline and motivation necessary for a formal education, often being distracted by other interests, especially his desire to be outside. Moreover, Buxton felt awkward in his surroundings. A popular youth, Buxton was nicknamed "Elephant," by his new friends, a testimony to his growing frame and "kind and gentle" nature.⁴⁰ By the time Buxton reached the age of fourteen, he had all but given up on his education, viewing it as a nuisance. As he stood to inherit property in Ireland when he came of age, he could anticipate revenues that would provide him with the life of a modest country gentleman and support an occasional foray into public service.

At some point during 1800, Buxton managed to convince his mother to let him end his education so that he might live at home.⁴¹ Anna reluctantly surrendered to her son's repeated requests and allowed him to leave Dr. Burney's school with the understanding that he would continue his education independently at home. Not surprisingly, things

³⁹ Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 4-5. Garwood claimed that Buxton did well under Burney, a questionable statement when Buxton himself complained that "I left school, where I had learnt little or nothing, at about the age of fourteen." See Buxton, *Memoirs*, 15.

⁴⁰ Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 19. He would eventually reach a height of over six feet, "extraordinarily tall" for the period, according to Mudge.

⁴¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 19.

did not work out the way Anna Buxton had hoped or as Buxton had promised. By his own account, Buxton did very little while on this educational sabbatical and took full advantage of the freedoms his mother provided. He immersed himself in sports; hunting remained a personal favorite and he was often seen enjoying himself on horse rides about the area. On those rare occasions when he attempted to open a book, Buxton choose works that lacked academic value: novels, newspapers, and magazines-materials to provide personal amusement when no other such enjoyment could be found. When questioned by family and friends, Buxton protested that he was absorbed in independent study. In truth, however, his existence had become one almost entirely focused upon carefree pleasure. He acknowledged that many who knew him felt their intervention was the only way to save him from certain self-destruction. These friends utilized a combination of public ridicule and private reproof to pressure him to abandon his errant ways. Although well intentioned, these efforts were ultimately futile, leaving his friends angered and Buxton both annoyed and frustrated.⁴²

During the autumn of 1801, fifteen-year old Buxton traveled to Earlham Hall, near Norwich, to spend time with

⁴² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 19.

his friend, Joseph John Gurney. What began as a holiday excursion would set in motion a series of unexpected changes in both Buxton's attitude and character which would affect him for the rest of his life. Distant relatives of the Buxtons, the Gurneys were descendents of one of England's oldest families. They could trace their lineage back to William the Conqueror, when they held a position of prominence. The family's fortunes fell dramatically over time. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Gurneys were reduced to being merchants and bankers. Gurney's father, also named John, sold wool and worsted yarn.⁴³ Against the advice and wishes of his family, he married Catherine Bell, "a graceful and handsome brunette," in May 1773.⁴⁴ Like her husband, Catherine came from the local gentry, but the chief reason for his family's resistance to the marriage was the fact that she brought no money to the relationship.⁴⁵ Over the course of the next twenty years, the pair produced twelve children—seven daughters and five sons—although the eldest son died in

⁴³ Hare, *Gurneys*, 1:18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:14-16. Gurney's pursuit of Bell is another example of Lawrence Stone's companionate marriage model. He married for love rather than personal advancement or enrichment. See Stone, *Family*, 234-41.

infancy.⁴⁶ In 1786, the family took over the Earlham property, and in 1803, the popular, kind, and sociable patriarch was admitted as partner into the Norwich Bank, the bank the Gurney family had owned for over a century.⁴⁷

Not wealthy by the standards of the time, the Gurneys were certainly far better off than some of their neighbors. Thus, the Gurney children were taught at an early age not only to be thankful for their blessings, but also to be cognizant of the sufferings of others. To this end, their parents ensured they were well acquainted with the people who lived around their Bramerton cottage. They made regular visits with the poor and destitute.⁴⁸ When Catherine Bell Gurney died suddenly in 1792—some thirteen months, incidentally, before Thomas Buxton—it was her eldest daughter, also named Catherine, who was forced to become the female head of the household at the age of seventeen.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The eldest boy, John, died in 1778. A subsequent son was born in 1792, also named John. It is this latter John with whom Buxton developed a friendship.

⁴⁷ Hare, *Gurneys*, 1:18-25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:20.

⁴⁹ Catherine's assumption of her mother's role was expected of the eldest daughter, much like Buxton's becoming the "man of the house" upon his father's death. It was certainly welcomed by her father John, who apparently granted her a great deal of authority in dealing with her siblings. "Her rule was one of love," August Hare wrote, "but her word was law." Hare, *Gurneys*, 1:34. While her siblings respected Catherine's new position within the familial hierarchy, they were unprepared for the change in atmosphere. Catherine was apparently far stricter than her mother had been, but "never severe." *Ibid.*, 1:46. Among her bigger challenges were attending to sister Elizabeth's bouts

When it came to education, the Gurney family adopted a progressive stance. Neither parent was considered well-educated: The elder John "received the most commonplace education,"⁵⁰ but was considered to have a good deal of common sense. More importantly, he happened to be "fast enough to prevent others from noticing" his educational deficiencies.⁵¹ Likewise, Catherine Bell was "highly though self-cultivated,"⁵² and used every opportunity to give her children-both boys and girls-the most liberal learning she could provide. Visitors with interests in science, religion, or literature were often welcomed for short stays with the Gurneys.⁵³

The Gurney children-Catherine, Rachel, Elizabeth, John, Richenda, Hannah, Louisa, Priscilla, Samuel, Joseph John, and Daniel-were instructed on a near daily basis. When not being instructed by Mr. Hemlin, the master of the Bramerton village school, for example, the Gurney children were taught by their mother.⁵⁴ Moreover, Catherine Bell wanted her children to have a well-rounded education. Ignoring the trend that argued against a classical

with depression, and the squabbling between Louisa, Richenda, Elizabeth, and Priscilla.

⁵⁰ Hare, *Gurneys* 1:21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

education, she insisted that her children know Latin, French, and master "[their] own language,"⁵⁵ as well as the basics of mathematics, geography, history, natural history, and art. She also insisted that her children know how to draw from nature, so as to better appreciate the environment.⁵⁶ Finally, she wanted her daughters to have an understanding of running a household. Catherine Bell taught them the value of "plain work," domestic duties, and how to sew, and when she took over her mother's place, Catherine continued more of the same.⁵⁷

In some circles, the Gurney family was considered to be the "leading Quaker family of England."⁵⁸ Their association with the Society of Friends was nearly as old as the organization itself, going back to the days of George Fox in the mid-seventeenth century.⁵⁹ Thus it is surprising that the Gurney parents afforded their children a certain latitude in their religious education. Being "devout in her own heart"⁶⁰, Catherine Gurney used the Bible as her text and encouraged her children to use it daily.⁶¹ Yet like her husband, she did not force her spiritual views

⁵⁵ Ibid., 27-28.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ This paragraph borrows heavily from Hare, and is a summary of pages 21-28.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁶¹ Ibid., 21.

onto her offspring. "It was always a fixed rule with Mrs. Gurney," a biographer wrote, "to leave her children to judge for themselves as to the special line of their Christian path."⁶² Like Anna Buxton, the Gurneys were "Public Friends," meaning that while they identified with the Society's tenets, they lacked the "warm espousal of their principles."⁶³ John Gurney was known to be deeply attached to the Society, but could be "most liberal to those of different sects and opinions," much to the discomfort of his fellow Quakers.⁶⁴ Yet the Gurneys willingness to allow their children to follow their own paths had a downside. Many of their children struggled privately with doubts about Christianity and religion.⁶⁵

Thus what most astonished Buxton during his visit was that every member of the Gurney clan, "even the younger portion of the family[,] was zealously occupied in self-education, and full of energy in every pursuit, whether of amusement or of knowledge."⁶⁶ Nor did the elder Gurney put

⁶² Ibid., 27.

⁶³ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 17. Hare states that John Gurney was capable of wearing "[T]he Quaker costume to a certain extent" Hare, *Gurneys* 1:17. It seems, however, that the elder Gurney fluctuated in his beliefs. At one point, daughter Richenda lamented in her diary over the fact that her father had become more active in his faith. "Oh how I wish Father wasn't so Quakery today," she wrote. Ibid., 1:24.

⁶⁵ Hare, *Gurneys* 1:79-80.

⁶⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 19-20; see also Hare, *Gurneys* 1:46. August Hare noted that the girls enjoyed an especially close relationship-when not fighting among themselves. "The sisters enjoyed themselves immensely.

restraint on the children's domestic amusements. Their home was often visited by members of the royal family, and seemed filled with an energy missing from Buxton's own. When left to themselves, the interests of the Gurney children tended towards intellectual pursuits. The Gurneys enjoyed sketching and reading under the old trees in the parks. On occasion, they took excursions, some on foot and others on horseback. They showed an interest in the flora on their own property and often returned home from countryside excursions to study the various wild flowers they had come across and picked. In short, the Gurneys displayed a singular curiosity about the world which Buxton lacked. To Buxton's surprise, the Gurneys accepted him as an intellectual equal-despite his own lack of education-and Buxton discovered a newfound pleasure in being included in their educational pursuits.⁶⁷

Buxton particularly enjoyed the company of seventeen-year-old Hannah Gurney. To characterize Hannah simply as "Buxton's muse" is an understatement, for of all the people who influenced him, she was by far the most important. "Of Hannah, who became the wife of Fowell Buxton," one

They scoured the country on their ponies in scarlet riding-habits. On one occasion it is recorded that the seven linked arms drew a line across the road, and stopped the mail coach from ascending the neighboring hill." *Ibid.*, 1:46.

⁶⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 19-20.

biographer wrote, "we find no specific sketch."⁶⁸ In his sermon on Buxton's life, John Garwood commented only that Hannah was "the sister of that most benevolent lady, Mrs. [Elizabeth] Fry, whose deeds of kindness are so generally known to all, and from which connexion we may naturally suppose his future life received an incentive to the works of love in which he so abounded."⁶⁹ In trivializing Hannah and her role in Buxton's life, these biographers do both of them a grave disservice.

Born on September 15, 1783, Hannah was the seventh Gurney child. As she grew up, she developed a sense of playfulness and humor. She was also highly regarded for her common sense, and by her teens was considered a natural beauty.⁷⁰ She easily took to learning, and after her mother's death taught younger brother Joseph how to read and spell, as well instructing him in basic geography.⁷¹ More importantly, however, Hannah possessed a wealth of talent and energy, and was successful in virtually every

⁶⁸ Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 28.

⁶⁹ Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 6. Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845), was a noted Quaker philanthropist, penal reformer and minister.

⁷⁰ *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton, From Papers Collected by Her Granddaughters*. (Printed for Private Circulation. London: Bickers and Son, 1883), 3-4; see also Hare, *Gurneys* 1:39. The chief problem in assessing Hannah Buxton's character and influence is that very little information is available about her. The *Memorials* booklet, assembled in 1883 by her family on the tenth anniversary of her death, is apparently the only dedicated biography available.

⁷¹ Hare, *Gurneys* 1:43.

undertaking.⁷² It is clear she was a woman of high intellect, well-read and socially conscious, as well as one whose personal interests tended toward artistic creativity, especially drawing. The younger four Gurney sisters, Richenda, Hannah, Louisa and Priscilla, were known both within the family and within the neighborhood as "the four girls," as they shared so close a bond in thought and action.⁷³

Inspired by the Gurneys' behavior, Buxton modified his own actions. He extended his visit to Earlham until the end of the year which afforded him time to be near Hannah. "You need not fear that I am losing my time," he boasted to his mother, "for being with the Gurneys makes me ten times more industrious than any thing else would."⁷⁴ The environment was far more conducive to learning than any previous experience, and a changed Buxton eagerly took advantage. "Whilst I was at Northrepps, I did little else but read books of entertainment (except now and then a few hours of Latin and Greek,) ride, and play at chess. But since I have been at Earlham, I have been very industrious."⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid., 39.

⁷³ *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 3.

⁷⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 25-26.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 22.

This was welcomed news for Anna Buxton, for she always believed her eldest son would attend college. It was a frequently discussed topic between them during this period. On at least two occasions, however, the subject disinterested Buxton. For reasons not explained, and much to his dismay, Anna Buxton was insistent that her son attend the College at St. Andrew's, in Scotland, suggesting her interest in its progressive curriculum. Buxton did not explain his opposition to her goal, but he made no secret of his displeasure. "My aversion [to St. Andrews]," he wrote to her in October 1801, "ever was, and ever will be invincible." ⁷⁶

Buxton failed to give voice to his motives in resisting St. Andrews, yet as an Englishman, he was not alone in his dislike, or even distrust, of the Scottish university system. English contempt for Scottish schools like St. Andrews came from a number of sources: terms were too short, classes were too disorganized. Lacking any entrance or completion examinations, it was difficult to determine where one stood in comparison to one's peers. There was no sense of competition or challenge; it was too business-like. Although there was a degree of truth to these complaints, the Scottish system was designed with the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 21.

immediate needs of Scots in mind. Scottish universities excelled in programs such as science and philosophy- programs that bested their English counterparts. Many Englishmen, however, were uninterested in such disciplines. For them, it may have come down to simple bigotry and nationalist ideology- Scotland, regardless of its proximity, was no place for a true Englishman.⁷⁷

Previous biographers suggest that Buxton had no interest in going to college, but that he hastily reconsidered this decision after his visit to Earlham.⁷⁸ Certainly, Buxton was an unmotivated student prior to late 1801, but there is nothing in Buxton's personal papers to justify the conclusion that he did not plan to attend college. Although he exhibited an effort at educating himself that was less than sincere, Buxton held no outward animosity towards the idea of obtaining an education or attending college. Instead, he was against attending St. Andrews. On the other hand, the effects of his earlier experience at Kingston should not be underestimated, for this may have negatively impacted Buxton's views on formal

⁷⁷ This relies heavily upon Elie Halévy's *England in 1815* (trans. By E. I. Watkin and D. A. Barker; London: Ernest Benn, Ltd, 1913; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 538-543; Charles Grant Robertson, *The British Universities*, "Benn's Sixpenny Library, No. 112," (London: Ernest Benn, Ltd., 1930), 15-17; Robert D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People, 1750-1918*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 29-32.

⁷⁸ Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 34.

academia. If so, this helps to explain his mother's perseverance on the subject of higher education. Buxton knew his defiance would offend his mother and he attempted to sway her decision with reason. "[You might think] 'How ungrateful, after all the pleasure he has had.' Pleasure, great pleasure, I certainly have had, but not sufficient to counterbalance the unhappiness the pursuance of your plan would occasion me."⁷⁹ Ultimately, he recognized the futility of his obstinacy and her need for "unconditional submission" when he finally informed her, "[I]f you command, I will obey."⁸⁰ Herself wearied by his antagonism, Anna Buxton relented and removed St. Andrews from further consideration. Buxton stood to inherit property in Ireland, and she reasoned it would serve him better to become acquainted with that environment before he came of age.⁸¹ Thus, she felt it more prudent to direct her son towards an Irish school, Trinity College in Dublin.

After returning home in the winter of 1801, Buxton set about making his university plans a reality. The time at Earlham made him painfully aware that there was much to do before he could consider attending college. Thus, displaying the tenacity and determination that would

⁷⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

eventually become synonymous with his name, Buxton threw himself wholeheartedly into his studies. His first obstacle, unsurprisingly, was in overcoming his own academic shortcomings. This was made somewhat easier by his mother's willingness to vacation with the Gurneys in Wales, a move designed to reacquaint herself with her distant relatives, as well as provide Buxton with more time with Hannah.

In the spring of 1802, Buxton was committed to the care of an Irish clergyman in Dublin, Dr. John Moore, in order to prepare for the rigors of university life.⁸² This arrangement seems to have provided an atmosphere conducive for preparatory studies, but Buxton nevertheless felt out of place. His understanding of the classics was sorely inadequate, and left the young man feeling "inferior to every one of his companions in classical acquirements,"⁸³ a belief that speaks volumes about his performance under Dr. Burney. As serious a setback as this was, Buxton nevertheless resolved to tackle the problem directly.

⁸² "The then Head-master [sic] of Cavan Royal School was Dr. John Moore. He held the first school in Ireland at that time at his own place, Donnybrook Castle; and when appointed by the Lord Lieutenant (Lord Hardwicke) to the School of Cavan, he brought with him to the county about forty boys. Among these were several who were afterwards noted in the history of Ireland: one, indeed, well known in the history of the world as the great apostle of peace and liberty - Thomas Fowell Buxton." Henry Seddal, *Edward Nangle: The Apostle of Achill: A Memoir and a History* (London: Hatchards, 1884), 26.

⁸³ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 23.

Supported by his family, the Gurneys, and especially Hannah, he labored in hopes of improving his level of knowledge. He turned his back on those habits he felt were distracting, including "desultory reading," and shooting. In this manner, he was determined to become a "youth of steady habits, of application, and irresistible resolution."⁸⁴ The hard study paid off handsomely when Buxton was admitted to Trinity College as a fellow commoner in 1803.⁸⁵

For an Englishman of the early nineteenth century, Ireland was not the worst place in the world, but for some it certainly came close. "The streets of Dublin," barrister George Cooper wrote in 1800, "are crowded with craving wretches, whose distresses are shocking to humanity, and whose nakedness is hurtful to the eye of decency." The buildings, neighborhoods, and possessions of the wealthy, he noted, were "magnificent beyond measure." Cooper's travel journal describes an Ireland of polar opposites - citizens were either marvelously rich or hopelessly impoverished, the latter the condition, he estimated, of nearly three-quarters of the Irish. Unlike London, there was no sense of order about Dublin or its

⁸⁴ Ibid., 23-24. See also, Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 34.

⁸⁵ Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 5; Buxton, *Memoirs*, 26.

surroundings, nor did people attempt to pass themselves off as the "middling sort." Rather, the cityscape and the local populace varied from one extreme to the other. "The eye reverts, as in Egypt, from the pyramid to the mud-cottage. The air is either 'mocked with idle state,' or the earth is defiled with more than Cassrarian wretchedness."⁸⁶

"The country is not quite so dreary," another of Buxton's contemporaries, Mary Ann Grant, wrote of Ireland. "There is a beautiful lake, near the town, which is a fine object, and the scenery round it is pleasing."⁸⁷ Despite this, she noted only a continued English military presence prevented a repeat of the events of 1798, since the Irish seemed determined to riot. "God grant," she wrote in her journal,

that [the army] may be able to quell these threatened disturbances; it is fearful to look forward to what may be the consequence, should a rebellion actually take place, and the French take advantage of it to effect a landing; it is generally believed they would experience a too favourable reception: in a case so dreadful, I could be almost tempted to wish for a masculine habit, and proportional strength to enable me to face the enemy, rather than be left to the mercy

⁸⁶ George Cooper, *Letters on the Irish Nation: Written During a Visit to that Kingdom, in the Autumn of the year 1799* (London: Davis, 1800), 66-75, quoted in Glenn Hooper, ed., *The Tourist's Gaze: Travelers to Ireland, 1800-2000* (Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2001), 4-5.

⁸⁷ Mary Ann Grant, *Sketches of Life and Manners, with delineation of scenery in England, Scotland and Ireland* (London: Cox, 1810), 248-254, quoted in Hooper, *Tourist's Gaze*, 13-15.

of these unhappy, misguided people. I trust, however, that our fears are greater than the danger.⁸⁸

Others, such as one anonymous journalist who wrote of Ireland in 1806, viewed the island as an occupied state and British soldiers so fearful of insurrection that they were overly aggressive in their vigilance against further violence.⁸⁹

It was into this atmosphere of tension that Buxton found himself thrust as he began his studies in early 1803.

"I must first tell you," he wrote Hannah,

that my rooms are now compleatly [sic] furnished, and that this is the first day of my living in them. I have three Rooms, a bed Chamber, a study, and a drawing room, besides a pantry and cellar. My brother has employed most industriously in buying furniture &c. &c. all of which my breakfast things and glasses especially are in the highest style, and the papering most elegantly adapted for showing off to the best advantage my most valuable possessions, your drawings.⁹⁰

Buxton's letters betray no sense of fear or apprehension of the trouble which soon impacted his studies. On July 23, 1803, just weeks after his arrival, a revolt led by Robert Emmet began in eastern Ireland. Known as the "Kilwarden Rebellion," the uprising lasted only a

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Anonymous, *Journal of a Tour in Ireland, performed in August 1804* (London: Phillips, 1806), 22-24, quoted in Hooper, *Tourist's Gaze*, 10-12.

⁹⁰ TFB to Hannah Gurney, September 2, 1804, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

few weeks, but the idea of open conflict resurrected memories of the 1798 rebellion and fears of a French invasion. While such fears were understandable, they were ultimately unfounded. Emmet's affair was mishandled from the start, and the expected French invasion failed to materialize. Buxton joined a volunteer corps and, in a move that reflects well upon both his leadership and character, soon found himself elected to the rank of lieutenant.⁹¹ The strain of incorporating military drilling into an already hectic study schedule weighed heavily on him; he was understandably relieved when the crisis passed with Emmet's capture five weeks later.

This brief episode aside, Buxton's performance at Trinity College was better than at any other time in his academic career. He immediately set his sights upon the *Premium*, a competitive honor bestowed each semester upon the class' best student. His efforts were rewarded when he secured the award later that year, a feat repeated several times over the course of the next four years. He took it upon himself not only to identify his academic weaknesses but to resolve them as quickly as possible. For example, he made "a firm resolution to conquer" his perceived

⁹¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 24-25. See also, Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 35.

inferiority in reading, spending many hours reading British poets and other classical literature.⁹²

Yet while Buxton the student possessed a standard of living that was better than what could be maintained by the average Dubliner and secured excellent evaluations of his scholarship, Buxton the man had difficulty in reconciling himself to the absence of his true love. His missives to Hannah reflect not only his deep affection for her but also a profound sense of loss because of her absence. He often complained to her of his loneliness, noting once that his only guests were "a few hungry, half starved ants."⁹³ While Hannah was a significant stabilizing force throughout Buxton's life, her influence reached its apex during these collegiate years. "Thinking of you all is my most powerful charm against the Demons," he wrote. "I think I cannot do better than answer and thank you for your most acceptable letter which arrived yesterday."⁹⁴ After a particularly serene sunset, he wrote, "I hope you observed it, for there is a great pleasure, to me at least, when at a distance from those I love, in thinking that there [sic] eyes and

⁹² TFB to Hannah Gurney, April 1805, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*. See also, Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 39.

⁹³ TFB to Hannah Gurney, September 2, 1804, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

mine are fixed on the same objects. . . . I fear there is but little hope of seeing you again for a year."⁹⁵

Buxton's affection for the Gurneys also manifested itself in a strong sense of indebtedness that resonates through his letters to various family members. He wrote to them often. His feeling of personal obligation and gratitude was never more evident than in his letters to Hannah:

Think how happy I must be to have to tell you that my utmost examinationary hopes are realized, that I have certificate & *Valde in omnibus*, what is better that I can ascribe my success to nothing but my Earlham visit.⁹⁶

It was Hannah, however, who provided Buxton with the principal moral support he desperately needed. After successfully completing the 1805 spring term, he happily wrote:

I must thank you or rather congratulate you for if I could be of service to you I should think it the best of all subject for congratulations on the effects of your influence. I am sure that if I had not thought that I was partly working for you, I never should have been able to read so much during this month. Perhaps you will be surprised to hear that I never was better prepared & indeed it was well for me that I was for the opposition gang answered a great deal better than I could have suspected.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid., August 14, 1804, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁹⁶ Ibid., May 3, 1805, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

He concluded, "I think that you are as much concerned in my successes as I am myself."⁹⁸ Notes of self-congratulatory news grew so common that Buxton later confessed reluctance to send her further word of his academic success for fear of sounding vain. "But I still think," he concluded, "it is not so much vanity as a wish to gratify you."⁹⁹

Buxton's early letters to Hannah revolve around two common themes: his indebtedness to her and a clear declaration that his successes were for her. He believed that without her support, he would have achieved considerably less success. These letters reveal a young man, confident and somewhat self-absorbed, determined to impress the woman he loves. Promises of good behavior extracted by Hannah kept Buxton focused on his studies and prevented him from participating in field sports and billiards, two of his favorite pastimes. Hannah apparently eased such prohibitions during academic holidays, however, and Buxton looked forward to such breaks from his schoolwork to relax. "Is there any horse that can carry me a hunting," he wrote to his sister Anna. "I hope there is, for I am determined on pleasure of every kind during my stay in England."¹⁰⁰ On those occasions when Buxton found

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., June 29, 1805, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁰⁰ TFB to Anna Buxton, c. 1804, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

himself in a lighter mood, he often joked with Hannah, teasing her for failing to write longer letters or for delaying to send him new drawings with which he could fill his walls. Hannah's role in his life grew increasingly important during this period. He was very pleased when she offered her own insight into his accomplishments and activities. In addition to providing substantial moral support, he also relied upon her to provide him with news from Earlham and London. To say that Buxton merely loved Hannah is an understatement; she was becoming indispensable to him. He valued her opinions, rarely making a major decision without her input.

Likewise, Buxton had become increasingly important to Hannah. Catherine Gurney was likely among the first to comment on Buxton's significance to her sister and the Gurney family. Shortly after Buxton proposed to Hannah in 1805, Catherine wrote her future brother-in-law that her sister's "attachment to thee is of the strongest, and consequently most durable nature."¹⁰¹ Conversely, she wanted Buxton to know that along with Hannah's love and that of the Gurney clan there were certain expectations:

I know Hannah's happiness is completely dependent on thee, I know too how strongly and increasingly she

¹⁰¹ Catherine Gurney to TFB, December 15, 1805, as printed in *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 12.

feels the importance of *religious* principle; therefore, for her sake as well as thy own, I am most anxious that thy mind should be equally impressed by the importance and the necessity of seeking to possess it, as the foundation of all your future comforts. I am quite sure that Hannah, with her feelings on the subject, never would be completely happy, unless it were the consistently regulating principle of action in thy mind, in preference to any particular affection.¹⁰²

Her sister Rachel also saw fit to steer Buxton's spiritual growth:

Thy habit of constantly reading some parts of the Scripture is a most excellent one, and of marking the parts that strike thee. . . . Writing notes upon these may sometimes, perhaps, be useful, and it is a good thing in the morning to take some excellent text, and to digest it, that it may be a watchword for the day and a remembrancer of the good desires formed in the beginning of it. I have frequently thought that no religious exercise is so indispensable as that of prayer before the business of the day commences. . . . Does not life become doubly sweet to those whose hearts are in possession of that *peace* which passeth all understanding? And does not this humble and faithful dependence upon our Creator surely yield this peace?¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁰³ Rachel Gurney to TFB, December 13, 1806, as printed in *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 16. Rachel's insistence that Buxton develop a religious foundation is interesting considering her own experiences: Sometime around 1796, Rachel began a relationship with Henry Enfield, the son of family friends, with an eye on marriage. Enfield, however, was a Unitarian, and his religious views upset the elder John Gurney such that he not only barred Rachel from further involvement with Enfield, but also later exiled the rest of the Enfield family from Earlham. This sent Rachel into a state of severe distress and depression, which abated only when the elder Gurney relaxed his stance towards young Enfield, three years later.

By the time the pair finally reunited in November 1799, the situation had changed. While Rachel was excited at the prospect of rekindling their romance, Enfield was not. Much to her dismay, Enfield seemed completely indifferent towards his former love. When it became apparent that a reconciliation of sorts was not forthcoming, John Gurney interceded and wrote young Enfield, formally ending their disagreement for the sake of Rachel. Yet this too met with cold response. It was only weeks later, after some investigative efforts on

These were the first of many letters sent by the Gurney women to Buxton during this latter phase of his courtship. While singing the praises of religious study and education, each of these letters also has a darker, near threatening aspect which suggests that Buxton had not yet achieved a level of religious dedication with which the family was comfortable. These "helpful" missives also seem to suggest that his future with Hannah might be imperiled if he made no effort to attain that spiritual level. This may go a considerable way towards explaining why Buxton's spirituality was at once so publicly strong, yet privately anxious.

It was during his academic residence in Dublin that Buxton first exhibited a tendency to overexert himself to the point of physical exhaustion. In his relentless pursuit of the Premium, Buxton often worked himself so hard that he usually required days of idleness in order to recover. Even on those rare occasions when he did not push himself, he tended to aggravate existing problems, making

the part of her father, that Rachel learned the truth: During their separation, Enfield married someone else.

The grief was too much for Rachel. "From that day," a biographer wrote, "Rachel's spirits were broken and her beauty faded" (Hare, *Gurneys* 1:118), and from that point onward, she began to explore her own spirituality. It appears that while she did not formally break from the Friends, she became increasingly uncomfortable with the sect and entered a phase of experimentation with other denominations. In this light, one might conclude that Rachel's sisterly advice was designed to prevent Hannah from suffering a similar fate.

recovery more difficult and costly. Worse still, this manic cycle severely crippled Buxton's fitness, rendering him susceptible to a host of physical maladies and left his health in a precarious state for the remainder of his life. As he prepared for his summer examinations in 1804, for example, his vision was affected by an unidentified inflammation so debilitating that it "as yet compleatly [sic] prevented [him] from opening a Book."¹⁰⁴ Not to be deterred, especially since he feared being ill-prepared to compete against his classmates for the Premium, Buxton continued to maintain a rigorous routine of reading and correspondence. His resolve was not enough, nor were the host of leeches, blisters, and other remedies provided by his doctor; the deterioration of Buxton's sight grew worse. His condition had become so serious by this point that once his physician learned the young man continued to study, he shocked Buxton with an open display of violent anger. The doctor had been "so liberal in his epithets of mad and foolish because I have been writing, that for fear of affronting him entirely, I must stop," he confessed to Hannah.¹⁰⁵ His complaints of poor vision and discomfort

¹⁰⁴ TFB to Hannah Gurney, June 15, 1804, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

continued well into the autumn of that year.¹⁰⁶ Several weeks later and likely due to these lingering problems with his vision, Buxton fell into a sewer while racing across the college's campus. The accident left him incapacitated for nearly two weeks. Yet Buxton demonstrated the same single-mindedness as he had when undergoing other physical problems. Unable to bend his leg or place any weight upon it, his greater concern remained his academic studies.

"The worst of it is that loss of blood and want of exercise have made me quite unable to apply to my examinations."¹⁰⁷

After nearly four years, Buxton finally proposed marriage in March 1805. Hannah readily accepted. In letters written shortly thereafter, he began to refer to her as "my dear Wife," and of himself as her "affectionate Husband."¹⁰⁸ This was not the only change that his letters reveal. On occasion, and with no sense of regularity or pattern, the words "*thee*," "*thou*," and "*thine*" can be found interspersed throughout Buxton's letters. Words rarely used in the letters prior to his engagement, these pronouns would become more common over the course of their relationship, suggesting a strong Friends influence. Anna Buxton was a member of the Friends, as were her daughters,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., September 2, 1804, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., December 2, 1804, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., May 3, 1805, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

and most of the Gurneys. One might conclude that Buxton was merely reflecting years of being exposed to such common terms among his family and friends so that the words naturally found their way into his vocabulary. Yet none of these acquaintances considered themselves to be active members of the sect, save for Elizabeth Gurney, who had progressed further into her faith than any other member of Buxton's set. Rather, there was another possibility: that during a period of personal loneliness and physical ailment Buxton was gradually and finally developing a spiritual awareness.

At the same time, Buxton's reputation as a student and scholar had become so renowned that together with perennial competitor John Henry North he was offered a seat in October 1805 in the prestigious Historical Society, a university organization. Formed with the goals of promoting historical study, and rhetorical debate, the Historical Society offered Buxton his first opportunity to speak before an audience, something to which he initially did not warm.¹⁰⁹ The adulation he received for his speeches, however, was more than enough to quell his fears. The Society became yet another area in which Buxton was determined to excel.

¹⁰⁹ Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 39-40.

Despite the success he achieved, Buxton remained insecure about his own abilities. "My antagonists are very tremendous," he complained to John Gurney. "In the first place, there are North and Montgomery. I hardly know which of them I ought to dread the most; they are both of them excellent scholars."¹¹⁰ North was John Henry North, and while both he and Buxton became acquaintances as classmates, the pair became exceedingly good friends years later during their tenures in Parliament.

Competing in the Society offered Buxton a chance at more recognition, for those presenters whose speeches were well received, could, through an accumulation of votes, be rewarded with medals for both eloquence and their study of history. There were a total of four such prizes, in addition to various other university awards, and when Buxton finally concluded his studies in the spring of 1807, he surprised even himself by winning all of them, including the medal of the Historical Society. Moreover, Buxton had so impressed his associates that he was eventually elected president of the Society. Yet while clearly proud of his accomplishments, Buxton tried to retain a sense of indebtedness to the Gurneys for his academic success. "If

¹¹⁰ TFB to John J. Gurney, n.d., quoted in Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 36.

I have been the trumpeter of my own praise a little too much," he wrote, "you must remember that one slight word of approbation from Earlham would be more grateful to me than the loudest applause from the whole world besides."¹¹¹

Academic success also served to counteract several personal setbacks in 1805. Anna Buxton remarried a fellow Quaker by the name of Edmund Henning from Weymouth. Moreover, relatives successfully contested the Irish property, which Buxton believed to be his. The costs of defending his claim, as well as a number of poor financial decisions made by his mother, resulted in a significant reduction in his family's property. Faced with the loss of the income he had anticipated up to this point, Buxton threw himself into his studies as a means of distraction. The financial setback also forced Buxton to weigh his career options. He "longed for any employment that would produce me a hundred a year, if I had to work twelve hours a day for it."¹¹² One path Buxton considered was that of being a lawyer, but doubts regarding the religious ramifications in the taking of oaths caused him to reconsider, or at least postpone any immediate action. He investigated other opportunities, usually in business, but

¹¹¹ TFB to Hannah Gurney, April 1805, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹¹² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 36.

for one reason or another, they failed to materialize. Nearly a year passed and Buxton was no closer to resolving the problem than when he started. Richard Gurney was in the process of entering the fabric business, following in his father's footsteps, and had asked Buxton to join him. Buxton had no interest in dealing in wool, but with no other options on the horizon, he began considering his future brother-in-law's offer. This was short-lived, for another and more promising pathway was finally about to open up for him.

Sampson Hanbury, Anna Buxton's brother, had suggested the prospect of employment at the Truman and Hanbury Brewery to Buxton once before. The time had now come for the young man to take up the offer. Truman and Hanbury was one of several well-established breweries located in London. Originally constructed by Thomas Bucknall in the 1660s, the firm was purchased by Joseph Truman in 1679. The Hanburys entered the business by the 1790s, and by 1805, Sampson owned a one-third interest in the enterprise.¹¹³ In the early nineteenth century, it was just

¹¹³ Sampson Hanbury purchased his first share of the business in 1789, and secured the rest by 1805. The remaining shares were held by the sons of Sir Benjamin Truman, who wanted to remain silent partners. Hanbury remained the operator of record and his name appeared on all business documentation. *Trumans, the Brewers: The Story of Truman, Hanbury, Buxton & Co.* (London: Newman Neame Limited; Curwen Press, Ltd., 1966), 18-21.

one of hundreds of small beer factories throughout England.¹¹⁴ This said, it was one of the more profitable breweries in the country. Prior to Hanbury joining the business, Truman's controlled twenty-six public houses. Following the Napoleonic wars, "Truman and Hanbury's" controlled over 200 establishments and contracts with some 300 others.¹¹⁵ In March 1806, Hanbury offered his nephew a position at the brewery and the use of a home in Brick Lane for seven years. Buxton was elated. "It is a very nice house," he told Hannah, "and will save us the rent of another."¹¹⁶ While this employment provided him with a source of income and addressed his immediate concerns, Buxton remained cautious. Buxton had grounds for such a wary attitude as his place in the firm was not assured. Sampson's silent partners in the brewery expressed their concerns, fearing Buxton's lack of experience would render him as useless to them as a complete stranger. Hanbury,

¹¹⁴ The brewery remained active until 1971, when it was purchased by brewers Watney Mann. It ceased production entirely in 1988.

¹¹⁵ *Trumans*, 32. Hanbury's influence was substantial, as many public houses were able to secure an operating license only after contracting with him. Ben Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Morals: Decency and Dissent in Britain, 1789-1837*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 261-263.

¹¹⁶ TFB to Hannah Gurney, March 3, 1806, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*. Although Buxton was thrilled about the prospects of working at the brewery, Hannah was not. She did not care for Sampson Hanbury and harbored strong reservations about Buxton taking the job. Verily Anderson, *The Northrepps Grandchildren* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), 102; 122.

however, dispelled their fears, as he thought his nephew the best candidate for the position.¹¹⁷

In April 1807, Buxton completed his studies and graduated. He was understandably thrilled with his accomplishment, especially considering the obstacles he had faced. After a successful course of study, Buxton, who had heretofore been a poor student with little discipline or determination, left the university with thirteen Premiums and the Gold Medal.¹¹⁸ Shortly before he left school, Buxton was approached by university representatives, hoping to convince him to seek the university's seat in Parliament. The idea intrigued him, but he ultimately dismissed it as he believed himself far too young to assume such an important responsibility.¹¹⁹ The decision left Hannah feeling content as well, since she did not seem pleased with the prospect of Buxton entering politics.¹²⁰

The following month, Buxton married Hannah Gurney on May 13, 1807.¹²¹ He took his uncle's offer of employment and joined the brewery as a salaried clerk. The position was entry-level employment, but Hanbury offered his nephew

¹¹⁷ Ibid., March 18, 1806, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹¹⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 34.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 34-35; Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 5.

¹²⁰ TFB to Hannah Buxton, March 1806, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹²¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 35.

the promise of advancement. Shortly thereafter, Buxton found himself promoted to manager with the prospect of a partnership in the near future.¹²² The house on Brick Lane was a benefit that afforded him a good amount of comfort, at least where financial matters were concerned.¹²³ Buxton took to the brewery, and married life seemed to suit both him and Hannah. Early 1808 saw the birth of their first child, a daughter, whom they named Priscilla, after Hannah's sister. The following year, Hannah gave birth to their first son, Fowell.¹²⁴

Shortly after their marriage, the Buxtons became more committed to their religious futures. In 1807, Buxton and Hannah began to participate in Friends meetings at Devonshire House, in London.¹²⁵ Buxton's transformation from a barely practicing Anglican to a full-fledged member of the Friends, largely because of Hannah's influence, seemed complete. It also happened that Devonshire House was one of the more prominent meeting places, having such members as philanthropist William Allen. Co-founder in 1808 of the Society for Diffusing Information on the Subject of the Punishment of Death, Allen was a part of an

¹²² Ibid., 36-41.

¹²³ Binney, *Study*, 10.

¹²⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 36.

¹²⁵ Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 6-7.

evangelical movement that wanted to redefine what qualified as a capital crime.

Buxton's standing as a Quaker was brief, in part because he found himself wanting a deeper understanding of Christianity than the Devonshire meetings were providing.¹²⁶ This crisis in conscience may have been brought on by family news that was as tragic as it was unexpected. In early 1811, Buxton received word that his youngest brother, Edward was in the Haslar Hospital at Gosport. This was Edward's first attempt to contact the family after his mysterious departure five years earlier.¹²⁷ Subsequent events read as if they were taken from the pages of Dickens. Buxton and his brother Charles raced to the facility. Aside from their brother's whereabouts, neither knew anything of his physical condition or, more importantly, why he suddenly chose to end his self-imposed disassociation from the family. When both finally arrived at the hospital, they were

[D]irected to a large ward full of the sick and dying, they walked through the room without being able to discover the object of their search; till at length, they were struck by the earnestness

¹²⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 46.

¹²⁷ Most accounts agree that Edward Buxton left around 1805, embarking on a maritime career. They differ, however, in determining what happened next: Edward either abandoned his ship sometime thereafter, or left in pursuit of employment with the East India Company. In any case, all accounts agree that he made no discernable attempt to contact his family during his absence until this incident.

with which an emaciated youth upon one of the sick beds was gazing at them. On their approaching his bed-side, although he could scarcely articulate a word, his face was lit up with an expression of delight that sufficiently showed that he recognised them: but it was not for some moments that they could trace in his haggard features the lineaments of their long-lost brother.¹²⁸

Edward lingered a number of weeks, but his condition did not improve. Buxton had his brother moved to his home where the family was able to reconcile. Edward, however, died of dysentery a few days later, on August 26.

Edward's death was the first of several during this decade that would both plague Buxton and threaten the foundation of his spirituality and that of his family. Although Buxton emphasized the blessing of at least being able to see his brother before his passing, he was also shaken by the experience. Until this point, Buxton had not dealt with the finality of death first hand. His father's passing in 1793 occurred when Buxton was seven, and at a point when he lacked any real theological understanding. The deaths of parents were an expected and unavoidable fact of life. The deaths of siblings, especially under such tragic circumstances, were not.

It was not long thereafter that Buxton slowly drifted back towards his Anglican roots. Following the advice of a

¹²⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 42.

friend, he began attending services at Wheeler Street Chapel, Spitalfields, in 1811. Buxton immediately fell under the sway of the Reverend Josiah Pratt, its charismatic pastor.¹²⁹ In Pratt's sermons, Buxton found what he considered to be his "first real acquaintance with the doctrines of Christianity."¹³⁰ For Buxton, Josiah Pratt was an urban version of Abraham Plaistow. Where his childhood friend instilled in him an appreciation for his "mother wit" and common sense, Pratt's leadership and understanding nature filled Buxton's need for spiritual growth and enlightenment.¹³¹ It is easy to see why Buxton was drawn to the Wheeler Street Chapel. The Devonshire Meeting may have identified a spiritual void within Buxton, but that organization failed to address it. Pratt, through the Wheeler Street ministry, was able to satisfy Buxton's spiritual needs by making the workings of Christianity plain for him, as well as encouraging Buxton to find practical applications of his faith through helping the less fortunate.

¹²⁹ The Reverend Josiah Pratt (1768-1844) was an evangelical minister and founding member of the British and Foreign Bible Society. See J. H. Overton, "Pratt, Josiah (1768-1844)," rev. Ian Machin, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22707> (accessed June 17, 2009).

¹³⁰ Hare, *Gurneys* 1:235.

¹³¹ Pratt argued that happiness was only possible after one willingly submitted to God's will. Follett, *Evangelicism*, 78. This clearly had an impact on Buxton and Hannah, as both repeatedly assert this theme in their letters, journals, and diaries during times of crises.

Mr. Pratt gave us a capital sermon in the morning on 'Let each consider not only his own things, but also the things of others.' Urgently exhorting us to have the same mind which was in Christ, to use all our opportunities of doing good, & he gave us the 12th Chap: [sic] of Romans, as declaring how we are to attain to this state.¹³²

Between this point and 1816, Buxton did his best to attain a greater state of godliness. By his own account, he took part in any charitable function that was promoted in his district.¹³³ Any activity that relieved the suffering of the distressed, promoted religion, and "especially those connected with education," found Buxton as an avid supporter.¹³⁴ His enthusiasm in these endeavors was such that he subsequently recruited his brother Charles and close friend (and future brother-in-law), Samuel Hoare, Jr. Through Pratt's urgings, Buxton turned to study to deepen his understanding of Christianity. He began reading essays by Cotton Mather and sermons by William Cooper, often rushing home from a sermon to do so while Pratt's teachings remained fresh in his mind. He found in the church the impetus to commit himself to humanitarian causes, and attributed his success to Pratt's influence.

¹³² Notebook Journal, March 9, 1817, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹³³ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 40.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*.

"Whatever I have done in my life for Africa," he wrote, "the seeds of it were sown in Wheeler Street Chapel."¹³⁵

In September 1812, Buxton's brother-in-law, Joseph John Gurney, recruited him to make a public speech at the meeting of the Norwich Auxiliary Bible Society. As Gurney later recalled,

[Buxton's] commanding person, his benevolent and highly intellectual expression of countenance, his full-toned voice, together with his manly yet playful eloquence, electrified the assembly, and many were those on that day who rejoiced that so noble and just a cause had obtained so strenuous and able an advocate.¹³⁶

Although by this point Buxton had committed himself to charitable causes, he had not yet stepped onto the public stage. Buxton was dissatisfied with his performance, but Joseph John Gurney, and members of the Society, were elated.¹³⁷

Just as Buxton's religious views began to evolve, so too did his relationship with the brewery. The clerical duties were a perfect fit for Buxton. He made £300 per year and had the Brick Lane house. Moreover, his uncle dangled the possibility of a partnership at the end of three years service, should things continue to work well as

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46; Hare, *Gurneys* 1:235.

¹³⁶ Gurney, *Brief Memoir*, 7.

¹³⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*; 45.

they had since Buxton joined the brewery.¹³⁸ His duties now included overseeing the brewery's accounting, and though completely unfamiliar with business recordkeeping, Buxton brought himself up to speed in no time, eventually revising Hanbury's antiquated system to accurately reflect the business's assets. Hanbury's silent partners objected, arguing that Buxton's changes resulted in a reduction of profit. At least one staff member, Buxton's clerk, also objected, claiming that Buxton had replaced one complicated system with another, and one that made less sense than the former. Buxton set out to win over his critics. To the firm's management, he proved that their older system listed profits that did not exist thus threatening the stability of the brewery. Not only did this ultimately satisfy his employers, it also paved the groundwork for their eventually offering him a partnership in 1811.¹³⁹ His clerk, on the other hand, was pacified with training by Buxton himself, and the pair became good, lifelong friends thereafter.

When not fully engaged in his work, Buxton managed to find time for self-enrichment. "I have become again a hard reader, and of sterling books," he wrote to his friend John

¹³⁸ *Truman's*, 22.

¹³⁹ *Buxton, Memoirs*, 44.

Henry North.¹⁴⁰ These included Blackstone's *Commentaries*, along with the writings of Montesquieu and Bacon, as well as any volume of English literature or study in politics that he could acquire. He was especially fond of Pope, who quickly became Buxton's favorite poet.¹⁴¹ He also continued his religious studies and the mentor-student relationship he had with Josiah Pratt.

At this stage in his life, Thomas Fowell Buxton was a happy young man whose fortunes were on the rise. In less than four years, Buxton proved an astute and shrewd businessman. Having begun as a clerk for his uncle Sampson Hanbury, Buxton was now a partner in one of Great Britain's largest breweries. He was also by this time a young husband with a wife who had inspired and challenged him to be a better man. When in the city, they lived modestly on Brick Lane, a benefit of Buxton's employment, with their children-Priscilla, aged 3, and her two year old brother Fowell. Buxton had also embarked on a path of spiritual discovery. While many biographers will claim he had had a clear view of his faith from childhood, in truth Buxton did not feel completely secure in his faith until he discovered the Reverend Pratt and the Wheeler Street Chapel.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴¹ Hare, *Gurneys* 2:68.

Responding to Pratt's challenge to live his faith, Buxton had engaged in various charitable activities. Events during the winter of 1816-1817 would provide him with the opportunity to assume a leadership role in assisting the poor.

Chapter Two: Spitalfields

In April 1815, Mount Tambora, a volcano located on the island of Sumbawa (in modern day Indonesia), erupted with devastating fury. The magnitude of the volcano's blast was unprecedented, and the incident remains one of the most violent displays of raw natural force in the last ten millennia.¹ People living some 750km (approximately 325 miles) away from the volcano reported feeling the tremors of the eruption, while the event was heard by those some 370km (about 175 miles) away.² A significant part of Sumbawa was destroyed outright, and somewhere between sixty and ninety thousand people lost their lives in the calamity.³ Millions of tons of volcanic ash were thrust

¹ Richard V. Fisher, Grant Heiken, and Jeffrey B. Hulen, *Volcanoes: Crucibles of Change*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 170; Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1850*. (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 170; Tom Simkin and Richard S. Fiske, *Karakatau 1883: The Volcanic Eruption and Its Effects*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983) 235.

² R. J. Blong, *Volcanic Hazards: A Sourcebook on the Effects of Eruptions*, (Sydney, Australia: Academic Press, 1984), 53-61.

³ This figure refers to the eruption and its immediate effects in the South Pacific. It is subject to dispute since no one knows how many residents lived on Sumbawa or within its immediate environs prior to Tambora's eruption. Fagan states that approximately fifteen thousand were lost in the inferno, with an additional forty-five thousand dying from the effects of starvation and contaminated resources (Fagan, *Little Ice Age*, 170). Fisher (et al.), cites a lower figure, stating there were only twelve thousand killed in the initial blast and forty-four thousand killed on the neighboring island of Lombok from collateral damage (Fisher, et al., *Volcanoes*, 171). Simkins and Fiske, on the other hand, cite earlier studies of the eruption and place the total dead at or near ninety-thousand, but like other studies, state that the majority died from starvation and lack of water in the time following the eruption. (Simkins & Fiske, *Karakatau*, 235).

into the atmosphere, obstructing sunlight, polluting the air, and destroying crops and wildlife.⁴ Hundreds of trees, uprooted by the blast, rained upon what remained of the island's harbor and surrounding waters. So much timber had been thrown into the ocean that expeditions to determine what remained of Sumbawa were near impossible for days after the explosion.⁵ The eruption was nothing short of catastrophic; its consequences awesome.

Tambora's eruption was but one of several such events that had occurred within the previous five years. Each eruption sent a good deal of volcanic dust and debris into the stratosphere; much of that had not dissipated by the time Tambora erupted.⁶ In the case of the latter, the sheer volume of volcanic dust spewed into the atmosphere was enough to affect global weather patterns. In Asia, eastern Europe and parts of western North America, the new year brought average or above-average temperatures. Yet in many other parts of the world, temperatures failed to reach their traditional levels, and collectively the climate ranged from unusually cool to downright cold. Strange meteorological phenomena were reported throughout the

⁴ Fagan notes, "The ash discharge was one hundred times that of Mount Saint Helens in Washington State in 1980 and exceeded Krakatau in 1883." *Little Ice Age*, 170.

⁵ *Times*, November 20, 1815, 3.

⁶ H. H. Lamb, *Climate, History and the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 247-8.

world. In North America and southern Europe, for example, snow fell well into July. There were killing frosts in New England as late as August. Across the Atlantic, Britons were experiencing weather that struck with no rhyme or reason. Constant rains in the west were accompanied by abnormally low temperatures. In mid-September, ice was reported on the Thames while Scotland and Scandinavia enjoyed warmer than usual temperatures that were rarely seen in those areas.⁷

The greatest threat from all of this, however, was to agriculture. Most of that year's crops, especially those of corn and wheat, either experienced severely retarded growth (resulting in late harvests), or, as in the case of Britain, were completely wiped out. Globally, thousands were faced with the distinct possibility of starvation. Soup kitchens were established in many of Britain's larger cities to feed the poor. The costs of grains and milk skyrocketed while at the same time, the costs of meats plummeted as farmers were forced to slaughter pigs and cattle they could no longer afford to feed. There was no clear definition of the seasons, and the year 1816 became known as the "year without a summer." This was only the

⁷ Fagan, *Little Ice Age*, 170; Fisher, et al., *Volcanoes*, 171.

first of the new year's misfortunes and an ominous sign of things to come.⁸

For many in Britain, this was not the year they had expected. Europe was slowly recovering from being ravished by nearly three decades of war and destruction. Napoleon, stopped by the armies of an Allied Europe at Waterloo less than a year earlier, had only recently been sent to his fate on the isle of St. Helena, in the South Atlantic. Poor harvests, not unknown prior to these wars, were becoming more common. Millions, left destitute because of these events, soon found themselves starving when forced to compete for meager foodstuffs with former soldiers recently discharged from military service. Those who could find food were only slightly better off; high prices for grains and bread meant many could not afford to eat. These tragedies would be compounded in due time. The winter of 1816-17 had far-reaching consequences around the world, but few places would be as affected as Europe. Several major epidemics would have their genesis during this year of unstable weather, including the typhus epidemic of 1816-19 and a resurgence of plague in the Mediterranean at the same time.⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Lamb, *Climate*, 247-8.

One consequence of the weather's sudden severity was its dire affect upon the poor living in Spitalfields. One myth associated with Buxton—and repeated in various biographical works—is that the winter of 1816-17 was particularly hazardous, almost exclusively so, to the residents of this part of London. In truth, as shown above, most of Britain was suffering in some form or another, and the brunt of that misery fell upon the poor.

Few places in Great Britain knew the depths of poverty as did Spitalfields. This area of the metropolis included "besides the parish of that name, those of Bethnal-Green, Shoreditch, and part of Whitechapel, the Hamlets of Mile End New Town and Mile End Old Town, and some other places in the vicinity."¹⁰ The area took its name from a priory and hospital called "St. Mary's Spital" (some accounts use "Spittle"), that was constructed on the site in 1197. The region maintained its pastoral appearance for the next three centuries, but the hospital and supporting buildings flourished until the priory was destroyed during Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in 1534. Shortly thereafter, the government used the land as a training area for archers and cavalrymen. By 1570, "Spital Fields," as

¹⁰ *Speech of Thomas Fowell Buxton, Esq., at the Egyptian Hall, on the 26th November, 1816, on the subject of The Distress in Spitalfields. To Which is Added the Report of the Spitalfields Association, Read at the Meeting,* (London: William Phillips, 1816), 17.

it was then known, saw the construction of its first private residences, in this instance, for members of London's growing gentry. It was during this period of development that coins, glassware, urns and the remnants of ancient coffins were discovered, providing evidence that the area had previously served as a cemetery during the time of the Roman occupation.¹¹ Charles II granted a license for the creation of the Spitalfields Market in 1682, and the district seemed destined to become a community of affluent Londoners who sought respite from the metropolis.

An incident in France would have the most impact on the quarter. After Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, Spitalfields became a refuge for French Huguenot weavers who fled religious persecution. Thousands immigrated to England with the hope of finding religious toleration. The majority of these new arrivals were masters in the production of silk and textile products. These craftsmen established England's silk trade, and according to one historian of the area, introduced "the

¹¹ 'General Introduction', *Survey of London: volume 27: Spitalfields and Mile End New Town* (1957), pp. 1-13. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=50147&strquery=roman> (accessed 26 April 2009).

weaving of lustrings, alamodes, brocades, satins, paduasoyes, ducales and black velvets."¹²

It was during the eighteenth century, as one historian noted, that the Huguenots "made their mark on the landscape of Spitalfields."¹³ They built *La Neuve Église*, one of nine churches in the parish by 1740, which "became a religious landmark that encapsulated the sense and place of Spitalfields."¹⁴ Rows of modest brick dwellings lined the streets and the area initially enjoyed a great deal of prosperity. This success, however, was often off-set by lengthy periods of unemployment or economic depression; thousands were left without work and faced the very real possibility of starvation. Worse, as Anne Kershen notes, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a new underclass began to appear as less prosperous weavers, dyers, and merchants, reacted to the economic disparity between themselves and their more successful brethren. Many turned to criminal activities to support their families, and as the local economy worsened, the crime rate increased.

¹² Walter Thornbury, *Old and New London: A Narrative of Its History, Its People and Its Places* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1881), 150

¹³ Anne J. Kershen, *Strangers, Aliens and Asians: Huguenots, Jews and Bangladeshis in Spitalfields, 1660-2000*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

Beginning in 1773, the Spitalfield Acts offered legal protections while regulating the trade for area weavers.¹⁵ Yet the frequency of unemployment among the weavers was such that by 1797, more prominent members of the Spitalfields community formed the Spitalfields Soup Society, an organization that sought to alleviate their suffering. A soup kitchen was opened on Brick Lane where soup and potatoes were sold to those families who could substantiate need. The society's members were also active in canvassing the community to find those residents who might benefit from their philanthropy.¹⁶ In 1801, the census determined that there were 15,091 residents within the area.¹⁷ The population would remain near this level with no significant change during the course of the next century. By 1811, the Soup Society estimated that some 6,000 residents were being fed daily.¹⁸

Another philanthropic organization formed to address poor relief was the Spitalfields Association. Formed by

¹⁵ Ibid. These measures created an artificial sense of security for the Spitalfield weavers and accomplished little else. They were repealed in 1824.

¹⁶ 'Brick Lane', *Survey of London: volume 27: Spitalfields and Mile End New Town* (1957), 123-126. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=50163> (accessed 26 April 2009).

¹⁷ 'General introduction', *Survey of London: volume 27: Spitalfields and Mile End New Town* (1957), 1-13. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=50147&strquery=fire> (accessed 26 April 2009).

¹⁸ 'Brick Lane', *Survey of London*, 123-126. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=50163> (accessed 26 April 2009).

area businessmen and religious leaders in the district during the harsh winter of 1812, it ceased operations shortly afterwards.¹⁹ The terrible winter of 1816, however, necessitated its revival, and Buxton would play an important role in this initiative.

From the reconstituted association's perspective, what hurt Spitalfields the most was the lack of affluent residents. "The number of opulent individuals in this district is exceedingly small," the association complained.²⁰ "Its enormous population is chiefly composed of the manufacturing and labouring classes, who are employed by persons residing for the most part in the city."²¹ On the surface, this was not bad as it demonstrated the industrial importance of the area to both the city and country. Yet when the economy was affected by depression, as it was in 1815, the result was often mass unemployment in Spitalfields. "Multitudes are at once deprived of employment," the report noted, "and suffer all the miseries of want."²² Moreover, rather than band together to address their common problems during economic crisis, most people segregated themselves along

¹⁹ *Speech of Thomas Fowell Buxton*, 18.

²⁰ *The Report of the Spitalfields Association* was prepared in 1816, apparently as an internal document. It, along with the transcript of Buxton's speech, were published by the association in 1817.

²¹ *Speech of Thomas Fowell Buxton*, 17.

²² *Ibid.*

occupational lines. Bricklayers, for example, tended to form associations to address the need for food, shelter, and clothing for other bricklayers—not the community at large. As a result, this fragmentation of the working populace along lines that went back to the Middle Ages was not only counterproductive, but possibly aggravated existing social conflicts, many of which would come to a head in the next few years.

To assist the "immense mass of Poor in the North-east" of London, newspapers announced that a public meeting would be held on November 26.²³ The gathering had two goals in mind: First, and most obvious, the meeting would call together an assortment of prominent local figures to discuss how the problems facing that community could be quickly, efficiently and charitably addressed. The second purpose was to draw attention to the appalling state of the area's soup kitchens. The meeting attracted Spitalfields' elected representatives, prominent area businessmen and clergy, and the evangelical set. Buxton and Samuel Hoare made plans to leave the city for vacation (accompanied by Abraham Plaistow),²⁴ but the lure of assisting in an obvious moment of need was too tempting for either to ignore. Both

²³ *Morning Chronicle* (London), November 23, 1816, 1.

²⁴ TFB to Hannah Buxton [henceforth HB], November 23, 1816. *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

were well acquainted with the state of the soup kitchens, having spent a good part of the late autumn working with them as well as funding other charitable acts. They immediately cancelled their plans in order to participate.²⁵ "The wretchedness was great indeed," Buxton wrote Hannah. "We are going to have a public meeting, and I hope a profitable one, for without a large supply of money we must suspend our operations."²⁶

"The Meeting which was held yesterday in the Egyptian Hall afforded a proof," the *Times* proclaimed the following morning, "if any had been wanting, that the *poor* have many friends in this great metropolis - friends, whose sincerity is proved, not by tedious or inflammatory harangues; but by giving food to the hungry, and clothing the naked."²⁷

Although scheduled to begin at two o'clock in the afternoon, the hall was nearly filled to capacity by 1:30 p.m.²⁸ When the Lord Mayor arrived a short time later, the meeting was opened. "The Lord Mayor," the *Times* continued, "in a very clear and satisfactory opening speech, laid down those principles in which a little consideration has rendered almost *axiomatical* on the subject of the relief of

²⁵ Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 72.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁷ *London Times*, November 27, 1816; 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

the poor."²⁹ The mayor argued that the current state of distress was not only beyond society's comprehension but presently beyond the existing poor relief system to resolve. Institutions had, for whatever reasons, failed the very people they were meant to help. The mayor asserted that the best way to help the poor was to "maintain their independent spirit, together with their industrious habits." The goal was to provide the means for the poor to work and to do so in such a fashion that was neither demeaning nor insulting:

There should be an economy of relief, which, while it takes money from the pocket of the humane, may brace the arm of labour, and reanimate hope in the heart of the fainting sufferer. Hope does not come to him who feels himself a dead weight upon society, but to him who pleases himself with the thought that he contributes something to the general stock.³⁰

Buxton was the first to address the assembly after the mayor. His purpose was to explain the purpose and mission of the assembly, and to justify the measures taken by the Spitalfields Association to remedy the current crisis. He related how as an employer and resident, he found it impossible to walk the streets of Spitalfields and not feel disheartened by what he witnessed daily. To bolster the belief that the poor should have relief with dignity,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Buxton awed his audience by providing them with historical justification. "There was a clause in the 43d Elizabeth, the great foundation of the poor laws," he began, "by which it was provided, that when the support of the indigent should become too burdensome, or beyond the means of any particular parish, the parishes adjoining should be made liable to contribute."³¹ This was, as Buxton explained, especially true in the case of Spitalfields as the suffering there had advanced so far beyond the control of local authorities that it only made common sense for them to call upon London for assistance. Yet even as his audience warmed to this statement, Buxton immediately cooled their enthusiasm. The legislation proved to be toothless in this situation, as it required those parishes to be of the same county; London, he noted, "was a county of itself."³² At this point, Buxton further confounded his listeners by noting that a solution was possible. He noted that at least half of those weavers and other workers presently suffering in Spitalfields worked for employers who resided within London itself. As the city therefore owed some percentage of its income to the businesses owned and operated by these employers, then it stood to reason

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

that the city indirectly employed these workers. As the city profited, Buxton noted, so should those in its employ.

There is no record of just how long Buxton spoke at the meeting; judging from the materials printed and published after the fact, it is unlikely that his speech exceeded twenty minutes. Yet this small portion of time would serve as yet another major turning point in Buxton's life. Everything that subsequently happened to him and his family, including his various social endeavors and political career, had its genesis in the twenty or so minutes during which Buxton addressed the members and guests of the association. Subsequent biographers, beginning with Joseph John Gurney, would treat this episode as an extraordinary feat (with providential overtones): Gurney characterized the Mansion-House meeting as "The first occasion on which [Buxton's] great powers, in this line of action, were publicly manifested."³³ Thirty years later, John Garwood characterized Buxton as speaking "in such a manner as to draw immediate attention to the man, and to lead to the general inquiry [as to] who he was."³⁴ The first praise for Buxton's performance, in fact, came from the next speaker, who focused his comments on the

³³ Gurney, *Brief Memoir*, 6.

³⁴ Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 15

"benevolent and arduous application" of Buxton and others in studying the problems the Spitalfield weavers actually faced.³⁵

Buxton's pastor, the Rev. Pratt, was present and made a brief presentation of his own, stating that, "It was evident that Providence designed by this means to exercise the benevolence of the rich, and to try the temper and patience of the poor sufferers."³⁶ At that moment, with perhaps a bit of melodrama, Pratt was handed a document by another member of the Society. It announced the first subscriber, whom the pastor characterized as a "benevolent female," one Mrs. Price of Chelsea, who pledged £100. Pratt continued that he "hoped the same example would be followed by the rest of her sex, who were at all times so liberal in cases of distress to distribute their bounty to the afflicted."

The end result was more than anyone could have anticipated. Approving the need for a subscription, the organization finished its business and the meeting concluded. Letters of support, however, soon "poured in from all sides," and within twenty-four hours of the speech, the association had received several thousand

³⁵ *Times*, November 27, 1816; 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

pounds in donations.³⁷ More impressive, before the end of the year - just four weeks later - the Spitalfields Benevolent Society, as the association was now known,³⁸ reported that more than £43,000 had been raised to address the needs of the poor, including a donation from the Prince Regent, who felt so strongly about the meeting's results, that he sent £5,000.³⁹

The Prince Regent was not the only member of the government to be affected by Fowell Buxton's persuasive manner. Following the newspaper coverage of the Mansion House meeting, Buxton received complimentary notes from several prominent members of London society, but none more prophetic than that from reformer and abolitionist William Wilberforce. This note was a modest letter congratulating Buxton for humanitarian efforts and encouraging him to do more. "It is partly a selfish feeling," Wilberforce wrote, "for I anticipate the success of the efforts, which I trust you will one day make in other instances, in an assembly in which I trust we shall be fellow-labourers, both in the motives by which we are actuated, and in the objects to which our exertions will be directed." The letter, as

³⁷ Ibid., 16.

³⁸ In late 1816, the Spitalfields Association changed its name to the "Spitalfields Benevolent Society."

³⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 62-63; Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 14.

Charles Buxton would later write, proved to be "almost prophetic."⁴⁰

Buxton's review of the event was decidedly mixed. The "meeting went off capitally," he wrote to Hannah a few days later.⁴¹ In assessing his own performance, however, Buxton was less generous. "I felt very flat, and did not go though the topics I meant to touch upon, and upon the whole, considered it a kind of failure."⁴² All the same, his letter indicates that he was in fact thrilled to be a participant. Buxton even sent daughter Priscilla a copy of a newspaper report of the event and his speech. "I hope it will make [you] desirous of serving the poor," he added.⁴³

Buxton remained amazed at the reception his speech received. "To my great surprise, all others took a very different sense of it & I have had compliments enough to make me blush."⁴⁴ He later learned from the committee that some £2,000 in contributions could be attributed to his presentation.⁴⁵ In subsequent days, Buxton grew comfortable enough with events to revel not only in how his speech was received, but also in the large contributions it helped to generate. To persuade middle- and upper-class non-

⁴⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 62

⁴¹ Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 74.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ TFB to HB, November 27, 1816. *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, November 28, 1816. *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

residents of the value of contributing to their fund, the Spitalfields Association used their 1816 report to characterize their district in a more flattering light. The average Spitalfield weaver was described as being "[i]noffensive and quiet in his demeanor, and accustomed to decent and domestic habits."⁴⁶ Work and industry were, the report claimed, second nature to him, and he thrilled in his occupation. When the weaver could find work, he could live with an air of respectability. When this was not possible, "his condition is particularly helpless."⁴⁷

Buxton soon learned that serving the poor could be a risky venture. The issue at this point was not only determining what needed to be done, but also who would assume the responsibility to see it through. While there were many who wanted relief from a host of inequities and believed it to be the government's duty to assist them, others-like Buxton-believed that private philanthropy was preferable.⁴⁸ There was also a legitimate fear that any

⁴⁶ *Speech of Thomas Fowell Buxton*, 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 68-69. This argument was rooted in differing perceptions of personal and societal responsibilities. Those who favored parliamentary action to protect the underprivileged with poor relief and government-sponsored social programs argued that this was a Christian duty and thus an obligation of a Christian state. Their opposition, however, noted that by providing for the welfare of the poor, the government would eliminate their desire and obligation to work; they would see relief not as "the

charity given would not reach those in the greatest need.

"In illustration of the misuse of the funds raised for the poor," one author wrote to the *Times*,

[W]e need go no farther than the evidence given in the Police Report published by order of the House of Commons. It is there clearly proved, and Mr. Merceron is constrained to admit the fact, that 925l. of the Poor's Fund of the parish of Bethnal-green, of which the said Mr. Merceron was the treasurer, had been applied by him to the discharge of his lawyer's bill for defending him against certain prosecutions for frauds and perjury.⁴⁹

exercise of a private virtue" but that of "a legal right." See Himmelfarb, *Idea of Poverty*, 148-149.

⁴⁹ *Times*, November 26, 1816; 2. Joseph Merceron (1764-1839) operated a corrupt political machine while serving as magistrate for Bethnal-Green, and his skillful use, or rather abuse, of power netted Merceron a sizeable personal fortune. "He has eleven public houses, his own property, and collects the rents of eleven more. He is one of the licensing magistrates and of course has an interest in preserving *their* license, whatever the abuses they may commit." *The Philanthropist, or Repository for Hints and Suggestions Calculated to Promote the Comfort and Happiness of Man*, (London: Printed by Richard and Arthur Taylor, Printers' Court, Shoe Lane, 1819), 133. "Besides being treasurer of the poor," according to another account, "[Merceron] was a commissioner of assessed taxes, and a principle commissioner of sewers, which gave him such an influence, that it might be truly said the inhabitants of St. Matthew, Bethnal-Green, had been in state of complete subserviency to his despotic dominion. He was a man of large property, and none dared for many years to doubt his infallibility." *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics and Literature, for the Year 1818*, (London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1819), 277. It was Merceron's love of dog fighting and bull baiting, however, that led to his downfall. In 1816, Merceron's sporting ways ran raised the ire of the Reverend Joshua King, who challenged Merceron's dominance in the community. As a result, Merceron found himself facing a number of damaging trials in subsequent years that exposed his dishonesty. He was found guilty of embezzling funds from a £12,000 donation that was left in his care for the citizens of both Bethnal-Green and Spitalfields. His attempts to explain the matter were both unrepentant and unconvincing, and he was imprisoned. Upon his release, however, Merceron managed to return to power and by 1830 had reestablished himself as the undisputed boss of Bethnal-Green. Also see Sydney and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: the Parish and the County*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1906), 87-90.

Sadly, Merceron was not alone in committing such acts of financial abuse in London, and the poor were often at the mercy of such men. Charity, even among the well-intentioned, had its limits, and it was only a matter of time before the affluent expressed their resentment at being repeatedly asked to support the poorer classes. Some years later, Buxton wrote Hannah that such cases of abuse only made the situation worse because "when the mite extracted from the widow, and the pound bestowed by the benevolent, are alike wrested from the bank of charity in which they were deposited, to feed a vortex to which I will not trust myself to give a name."⁵⁰

The laurels Buxton initially garnered from his role in alleviating the plight of the Spitalfields poor also reawakened Buxton's old insecurities about vanity and pride. He questioned whether there were any underlying motives for his actions and expressed to his wife a fear that such praise could go to his head. "I cannot make out how people are so deluded," he confessed to Hannah. "They run up a plain unvarnished statement of fact, as if it were an effort of unexampled genius but happily I escape the delusion & am convinced that I judge better than they do &

⁵⁰ Ibid.

I decidedly see nothing at all remarkable."⁵¹ These fears also seem to have had a physical side as well; shortly after the speech, Buxton fell ill yet again.⁵² The episode proved an important milestone in his spiritual journey.

⁵¹ TFB to HB, November 29, 1816. *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

Chapter Three: "An Inner Light"

"Our true religious life begins," American abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote in 1855, "when we discover that there is an Inner Light, not infallible but invaluable, which 'lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' Then we have something to steer by; and it is chiefly this, and not an anchor, that we need."¹ Spirituality was at the center of Buxton's personality, and it helped form the nature of his character. Understanding how it impacted his sense of being is important in comprehending his accomplishments. Nearly every work published on Buxton's life and achievements has offered some comment on his spirituality, and his biographers are often struck by the intensity of his spiritual side. From where did this tremendous sense of piety spring? How did Buxton come to find, as Higginson termed it, his "inner light"?

The most common interpretation is that Buxton experienced a telling religious conversion early in his adult life. John Garwood, among others, suggests that as a young man, Buxton spent much of his youth away from

¹ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "The Sympathy of Religions," in *The Magnificent Activist: The Writings of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1823-1911*, ed. Howard N. Meyer (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 354.

organized religion but returned to it about the time of his marriage to Hannah Gurney in 1807. Those biographers who advocate this theory emphasize the significance of Hannah's influence. Since it was she, as he often acknowledged, who influenced his return to academia through her own example, supposedly she exerted the same influence in spiritual matters. This theory is highly plausible because Buxton repeatedly credited Hannah with playing a major role in his personal development, including his spirituality. John Garwood further suggests that following his father's death in 1793, Buxton had little or no interest in spiritual matters until after his engagement to Hannah. After Buxton graduated from college and married, he began attending meetings hosted by the Society of Friends—a direct result of his relationship with Hannah.² There can be no doubt that Hannah's spirituality made a deep impression upon Buxton. Keeping his Bible at his bedside, Buxton made a concerted effort to read daily, in part, to please Hannah. "I never felt so Earnest [sic] a desire to correct my faults & to devote myself heartily to Endeavoring [sic] to improve myself in those things which alone will contribute to our mutual happiness," he wrote to her in 1806.³ One

² Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 6-7.

³ TB to HB, Sept 19, 1806, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

must not ignore, moreover, the influence of the entire Gurney family, a group of individuals whom Buxton repeatedly credited with changing his life.

There are other possibilities for Buxton's character change. Charles Michael notes that Buxton turned to religion as a young adult after avoiding it for much of his youth, but Michael points to a different source of inspiration, a near fatal illness that left Buxton incapacitated throughout much of 1813.⁴ On January 7 of that year, Buxton was overcome with what he would later characterize as a "bilious fever."⁵ There are few clues as to what this malady may have been.⁶ The illness struck suddenly and severely, leaving Buxton weak and debilitated. The severity of the disorder intensified, and by January 9, two days after the attack began, Buxton's physical condition had become so shocking, his friends grew concerned for his life and Buxton would spend nearly an hour "in most fervent prayer."⁷ Those prayers, however, were not for comfort or relief from his physical suffering. Instead, Buxton prayed for his illness to become even more

⁴ Michael, *Slave and His Champion*, 118-120.

⁵ Notebook Journal, "Thoughts," September 1813, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁶ It is likely that Buxton suffered from an outbreak of malaria. The disease was a regular occurrence in early nineteenth-century London, where Buxton was residing at the time.

⁷ Notebook Journal, "Thoughts," September 1813, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

dangerous and debilitating, in the hope that this would serve as the catalyst for an improved relationship with God.⁸ "I have for some years been perplexed with some doubts as to the truth of Christianity," Buxton confessed. "I do not know if they did not arise more from the fear of doubting than from any other cause - the object of my prayer was that this incredulity might be removed."⁹

This prayer, and the ones that followed during his affliction, went to the heart of what Buxton believed about his own spirituality. He was painfully aware of his own shortcomings. Plagued by doubts regarding belief, he was equally tormented by his declaration that what faith he possessed had been half-hearted. Hannah often reminded him that Christ died for his sins, a statement in which he took great comfort. Yet he was confused as to why someone so lax in religion as himself ("I . . . who have passed as unguarded a life, and who [has] to lament so many crimes, especially so much carelessness,")¹⁰ could merit salvation. He knew of others who had presented themselves as consummate Christians, but were grossly tormented during their final days. How then, he questioned, could he feel secure in his faith? How could he find acceptance? The

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

following morning, Buxton was pleased to discover that while his illness remained, his mind was now free of any doubt. His insecurities were gone, albeit for the moment, for these questions would periodically trouble him throughout his life. For now, however, his crisis of faith was abated and his misgivings "were replaced by a degree of certain conviction, totally different from anything I had before experienced."¹¹

Buxton chose to view his illness as faith-affirming, but Hannah saw it as divine chastisement. "He reverted to his former life,—how he had often done one thing when he knew that another was the right. . . . that appeared to me to have been his temptation."¹² She was convinced that Buxton's illness was God's way of signaling His displeasure at Buxton's failure to remain true to his spiritual training. Hannah wasted no time in sharing her feelings with her husband. "[Buxton] was, he said, convinced in judgment," Hannah noted, "but his heart had not been sufficiently touched to influence his conduct throughout."¹³

¹¹ Ibid. Evangelicalism "stressed the importance of the conversion experience." Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 83. Buxton was already a Christian and by this point was a faithful member of the Wheeler Street chapel. Yet the fact that Buxton (as well as many of his biographers) consider this episode to be his spiritual turning point suggests that he may not have considered himself to have been truly "converted." This may account for why Buxton saw this episode as such an important part of his development.

¹² *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 32.

¹³ Ibid.

For both Buxton and his wife, this incident was strongly, perhaps resolutely, linked to his spiritual nature.

For Buxton, this episode contained a hidden bonus, one that was cause for celebration. "It would be difficult to express the satisfaction and joy which I derived from this alteration," he wrote.¹⁴ Buxton held that illness was one of the many tools God used to bring humanity back to submission, for it was through the weakened state of bodily illness, that God captured humanity's attention from worldly materialism, and prepared the mind to be receptive to instruction. During his bouts of sickness, Buxton argued, he felt "more earnest" in his appeals to God. He felt a sense of personal freedom that everyday life failed to offer him, and he came to believe that divine wisdom and guidance would above all "emancipate my heart from the shackles of the flesh."¹⁵ Thus Buxton viewed these periods of severe illness as acts of spiritual purification, and it was for this reason Buxton seems to have looked forward to them. Even as these bouts grew increasingly severe-Buxton was on the brink of death more than once-he viewed any lesson gained from these episodes to be well worth the pain and discomfort. Chief among these lessons was that of the

¹⁴ Notebook Journal, "Thoughts," September 1813, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, August 6, 1815, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

fragility of life. It was only through his own illness that he was able "to feel the poverty and unsteadfastness of all human possessions," he wrote in 1815. It allowed him "to look upon life as a flower that falleth and the graces of whose fashion perisheth."¹⁶

Had Buxton not directed much of his time to reflecting upon his own Christian spirituality, it is quite possible that he would be regarded as a deeply stoical and meditative philosopher. Thomas Wentworth Higginson mused that, "Men forget the eternity through which they have yet to sail, when they talk of anchoring here upon this bank and shoal of time,"¹⁷ but this was hardly the case with Buxton. He kept numerous notebooks filled with personal reflections and observations, and it is from these that we gain some insight into his system of belief. Buxton spent hours examining what he considered to be evidence of God's existence. For him, the universe was nothing short of being a living, breathing catalogue of God's magnificent work.¹⁸ Furthermore, many of his observations center on the belief that even the greatest schemes and designs of man were nothing in the eyes of God. Let man, he urged, "look throughout the world he inhabits and see how small the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Higginson, "Sympathy of Religions," 354.

¹⁸ Notebook Journal, "Reflections on the Works of Creation," c. 1817/1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

scene he fills-how pitiful the theatre, on which he plays his part."¹⁹ Despite this view, Buxton believed that all actions offered a teaching moral. This, too, was imperative, for he believed that at the root of all action was a divine lesson for those who took the time to seek it out.

In January 1815, Buxton conducted his annual self-assessment, an attempt to objectively scrutinize his performance during the previous year, as well as an opportunity to venture into philosophical or theological points of discussion. Once again, Buxton found it necessary to question his own spiritual passion. On this particular occasion, he lamented the lack of significant spiritual growth and voiced his disgust in failing to develop as a Christian. Although "fully impressed" with the afterlife (and "its grandeur, its terrible or blessed consequences"), he found himself unable to satisfactorily disengage from this world. His interests and pursuits were too "earthly" for his tastes. The nature of his being, he lamented, remained far more temporal than he wanted: "How it is, I know not."²⁰ Moreover, he had come to view the

¹⁹ Ibid., "Reflections on the Works of Creation," c. 1817/1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

²⁰ Ibid., January 1, 1815, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

world with a sense of disdain and contempt. "Yes, I see it in its best estate - vile and unsatisfying."²¹

In spite of this, he tried to make sense of his predicament. True, he reasoned, he was not the Christian he believed he should be, but was not this realization a wake up call? Did not this knowledge afford him the opportunity to work harder with greater care? Could he answer for his lack of Christian activity when the time came? Several questions weighed heavily on his mind, but Buxton acknowledged what had to be done. He vowed to "seize the present moment": to commit to immediate action and earnest prayer. In this, he would direct his mind and heart towards God more than he had ever done in the past.²²

Any incident could place Buxton in a reflective mood, as the deaths of a fellow brewer and his son attest. Both men attained great success within their lives: the father, as a businessman was regarded as "the greatest Brewer of his time,"²³ while the son gained success as a famed politician. Buxton saw the great lesson of their lives in the manner of their deaths. Neither experienced true happiness, for the father died of stress, while his son committed suicide. In life, both acquired wealth and

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., August 6, 1815, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

popularity, Buxton acknowledged, but in death, none of their accomplishments could equal the slightest Christian act. "What a lesson to my darling projects!" Buxton proclaimed.²⁴ He might very well attain a similar degree of success, but then what? Any accomplishments in this life, he reasoned, would need to have some currency with God or else it was all for naught. This belief was a means by which to quantify and qualify his own spiritual deeds. "Suppose me in possession of the fullness of my hopes," he asked, "must I be happy?"²⁵

Buxton's faith was such that he could find comfort and strength from unlikely events. On one particular Friday in late July 1815, for example, Buxton suffered a number of successive calamities. It was during this "extraordinary day," that he realized that a mistake in his record keeping meant he was several thousand pounds poorer than he originally thought, making early retirement impossible. While castigating himself for making such a mistake, a nearby building containing gunpowder exploded. Eight people were killed outright, and the ensuing fire threatened to spread to the brewery itself. Buxton helped in putting that fire out, but worse was in store for him

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

because that same evening his home on Brick Lane was robbed. This produced further aggravation, for his fear was that a pregnant Hannah, who was staying at their estate away from the city, would be adversely affected by news of their misfortune. "The morning changed me from affluence to competence, and the evening was likely to have converted competence to poverty," he penned in his notebook.²⁶

The next few days were hardly any better. The following week, Buxton traveled to Weymouth and discovered the affairs of the bank of which he was a trustee, were also in disorder. This was particularly vexing for him because it involved not only his money, but funds of family and friends. Through it all, however, he maintained a belief that these tribulations held for him stern lessons from God. The sheer quantity of distressing news was "mortifying,"²⁷ he acknowledged, but his calm demeanor remained, for the most part, a tribute to his faith. Only when he learned that same evening that the business affairs of his younger brother Charles were also in serious disarray did this stoic façade finally crack. "I find that I can suffer my own misfortunes with comparative indifference but cannot sit so easily under the misfortunes

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

of those that are near to me."²⁸ Still, even this momentary lapse offered a lesson, for Buxton immediately interpreted it as a call to be prepared for any trials sent forth "from the merciful hand of God."²⁹

To add to these concerns, Buxton also had to worry about Hannah. Since their marriage, Hannah's health fluctuated, and at one point she was near death after suffering a bout with scarlet fever. The death of her father on October 28, 1809, proved stressful, but it was the rapid succession of tragedies throughout the ensuing decade that would test not only the Buxtons' faith but Hannah's sanity.

In June 1811, Buxton and his wife added a daughter, Susannah, to their growing family. During her pregnancy, Hannah prayed constantly for her own spiritual development, but feared that she had not done enough. "May I entreat Thee that those dear to me may not suffer from my deficiencies," she asked. "This I chiefly feel for my beloved children."³⁰ Priscilla, their eldest child, was three years old; Thomas Fowell, their only son, was a year

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 23. Hannah's prayers reflect a concern that she had not adequately attended to her children's spiritual development. "The anxiety about a child's health was increased for Christian mothers who feared for their children's souls and the ultimate devastation of never meeting with them again in Heaven if they died unprepared." Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 340.

younger. Now with Susannah, Hannah was happier than ever. "I cannot think how sweet and dear she is to me," Hannah wrote to her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Gurney. "I never felt so proud of a baby before, or delighted with one."³¹

The Buxtons' happiness, however, was short-lived. Susannah became ill and died on November 17. Buxton makes no mention of the loss of his daughter in his *Memoirs*, but Hannah's diary, on the other hand, betrays the inner turmoil with which she wrestled. Her loss was profound, yet she tried so desperately to see Susannah's death as the will of a merciful God.

The hand of the Lord has been raised to afflict me, and He has taken to Himself my beloved baby. I have found it hard to resign her, but I pray that I may be delivered from a spirit of murmuring. . . . Oh, that I could utter a song of thanksgiving and praise to Him whose love so tenderly covers us!³²

Despite her attempt to find comfort within her spirituality, Hannah's grief was overwhelming.³³

³¹ HB to Elizabeth Gurney, June 13, 1811, cited in *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 27. Elizabeth Sheppard Gurney was married to Hannah's younger brother Samuel Gurney.

³² *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 27.

³³ Elizabeth Fry was equally distraught over the death of little Susannah. "The event of her death has been very affecting to me, and most unexpected to us all . . . she was one of the loveliest, sweetest, and most lively of little babies." Of Hannah, Elizabeth wrote, "I was not there at her death, but comfort was then near to her dear mother, and faith that strengthened her to believe it was well, and that [Susannah's] spirit had ascended unto God, who gave it." Katherine Fry and Rachel Elizabeth Cresswell, ed., *Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry, with Extracts from Her Journal and Letters*, 2 vol., (London: Charles Gilpin, 1847), 1:179.

Over the course of the decade, Hannah and her husband would have six more children: Edward North, named after Buxton's late brother, was born in 1812, followed in 1814 by John Henry, affectionately called "Harry" by the family. The Buxtons left the Brick Lane address for North End, Hampstead, in 1815, and shortly after the move, their daughter Rachel was born.³⁴ Three other daughters - Louisa in 1817, Hannah in 1819, and Richenda in early 1820 - followed in quick succession. Buxton and his wife were exceedingly proud of their family. Buxton loved his children and delighted in playing games with them whenever time allowed. Hannah, again found happiness in motherhood, but she never lost the sense of incompleteness that Susannah's death had given her. She reflected on Susannah's death in her diary, and it is evident that she had still not come to accept her loss:

Scarcely a day ever passes that I do not feel the vacancy in my little flock, and picture Susannah filling her right place. I fear I have not come to full resignation to the will of God, when He took that sweet child from me. I constantly think of her, and fancy her amongst us, and never dwell on her without much feeling. Still it is a trial that no longer interferes with my happiness. . . . I cannot but frequently feel, oh, may I never be tried in this way again; but I desire to have my will more subjected than it is.³⁵

³⁴ North End was the primary residence of Samuel and Louisa Hoare. The Buxtons moved to a house on the property which, for the time being, served as their primary residence as well.

³⁵ Ibid., 27-28.

Notwithstanding Hannah's prayers, other tragedies followed. Hannah's brother John Gurney married their distant cousin Elizabeth Gurney in 1807, but Elizabeth died after a sudden illness on May 12, 1808. Devastated, John turned to religion to ease his pain, but was never able to fully overcome his depression. His recovery was further complicated by his physical sufferings. According to Hare, John "had received some strain in lifting his dying wife, from which he walked lame ever after."³⁶ Their sister, Priscilla Gurney, nursed her near-invalid brother,³⁷ but John's physical and mental health quickly deteriorated. He died on August 9, 1814.³⁸

Three years later, Buxton's younger brother Charles succumbed to an unnamed illness at Weymouth, leaving a widow and two children.³⁹ Charles displayed no hint of ill health until the previous January, and Buxton was disturbed

³⁶ Hare, *Gurneys of Earlham* 1:257.

³⁷ In 1811, Priscilla Gurney became a "decided" Friend: "'a plain Quaker' in both language and dress," and further committed to her own spiritual development. She received a number of marriage proposals about this time but refused them all, in part due to her attendance on John. In 1813, she became a Quaker minister like elder sister Elizabeth, and wrote a collection of hymns known as "Gurney Hymns," that were very popular, especially within the Quaker community. Hare, *Gurneys*, 1:237.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 1:257.

³⁹ Charles died on July 3. *Times*, July 8, 1817; 4. Charles married Martha Henning in December 1811, with whom he had Anna (c.1812-1843) and Edmund Charles (1813-1878). Martha Henning was the daughter of an Edmund Henning, and it appears that this is the same Edmund Henning who married Anna Buxton-mother to both Thomas Fowell Buxton and Charles-in 1805.

by what he termed a "gradual & perceptible decay."⁴⁰ As might be expected, Buxton took his brother's death in the same manner in which he took other bad news—he rationalized that Charles' death served a greater purpose in God's will. He also attempted to maintain in public a calm and accepting demeanor. Privately, however, Buxton characterized Charles' illness as "the heaviest affliction of my life."⁴¹ Shaken, he tried to view Charles' final weeks in a positive light. "I trust that few days pass in which I forget to thank God for this dispensation," he wrote, "and to rejoice that he has (as I doubt not he has) 'for this corruptible put on incorruption.'⁴² Still, it had been a mere three months earlier in April, when an optimistic Buxton confided in his notebooks that, "Last Sunday I was . . . with Charles, who is very poorly—God grant that he may recover—I have so much to thank God about, with regard to him—his increased & increasing seriousness & piety."⁴³

⁴⁰ Notebook Journal, January 4, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁴¹ Ibid. Buxton's *Memoirs* give little insight into their relationship except to note that while the brothers were of vastly different personalities (p. 65), there was a close bond between them. "[T]hou knowest, O Lord!" Buxton wrote, ". . . how deeply I loved, and how long and how intensely I lamented him." Buxton, *Memoirs*, 66-67.

⁴² Notebook Journal, January 4, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁴³ Ibid.

As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, Buxton had begun a public career that required him to spend increasing amounts of time away from Hannah and his family. This put Hannah in the position of raising their children while Buxton parented from a distance. While her husband was in London during the middle of 1819, Hannah confided her views of her children:

Our seven darling children are a continual source of pleasure . . . my dearest Fowell most sweet and lovely in his conduct, though sadly idle, and painfully backward in his lessons. Priscilla is most promising. My darling Edward and Harry are much pleasure to me, Edward some care, for I feel that I am deficient in my pains with him. . . . Harry remarkably generous and noble, truly promising. My two little girls, Rachel and Louisa, are, I fear, too much a source of pride, as well as of particular enjoyment. They are a beautiful, black-eyed pair, fat and healthy, and universally admired. My precious baby, Hannah, a source of tender interest and pleasure, full of smiles and activity, but not very handsome. I do not find my heart so much wrapped up in my babies as it used to be, and yet, when fears arise for any of my tenderly loved treasures, how soon do I become sensible that they are entwined very tight about my heart.⁴⁴

The happiness and faith of both Buxton and his wife were again sorely tested after Thomas Fowell, who had been away attending school, returned home on March 20, 1820. There is no indication the youth was sick prior to this visit. Buxton makes no note of the possibility, yet by the morning following his arrival, the child was seriously ill.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.

Buxton's meticulous notes make no reference to what afflicted his son, although it is likely that Thomas Fowell was suffering from the measles. Buxton's hopes for his son's improvement were dashed early. Thomas Fowell was taken to the home of his aunt Martha Buxton to rest, but his condition grew increasingly worse, and in the early morning hours of March 28, the youth died.⁴⁵ Buxton immediately turned to his faith for both support and comfort. "We bless the Lord for all his mercies which have been on this occasion many & eminent," he wrote to his brother-in-law William Forester, possibly that same evening. "In the midst of our affliction we do rejoice that he is spared the pain & withdrawn from the temptations of the world."⁴⁶

The disease, however, had not run its full course in the Buxton household. Less than two weeks after Thomas Fowell's death, Buxton's daughters Hannah and Louisa both came down with illness. Hannah died at home on April 17, the same day Buxton's third daughter, Rachel, was diagnosed with the illness. She, in turn, was moved to the home of Samuel Hoare, but that was not enough: Rachel died on April 27. Louisa, who had been sent to stay with the Frys,

⁴⁵ Martha Buxton was the widow of Buxton's brother Charles.

⁴⁶ TB to William Forster, [n.d., likely written in late March 1820], *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

survived until May 1, when she also, finally succumbed. Harry, who was the first in the family to become "alarmingly ill with the croop [sic]" a week before his brother's arrival,⁴⁷ survived with no apparent ill effects.

In less than one month, Buxton and his wife had lost four of their eight children: Thomas Fowell was not yet an adolescent; his sisters were all under the age of four. "On May the fifth," Buxton wrote in his private journal, "we committed . . . our darlings to the grave . . . we shall see them no more."⁴⁸ While Buxton believed such acts were a part of a grand divine plan and sought comfort in the notion, others were not as certain or as understanding. "My dearest brother and sister Buxton being so heavily afflicted," recorded Elizabeth Fry in her journal, "has brought me into very deep conflict, in short almost inexpressible."⁴⁹

Shortly after the funerals of their children, Buxton took his wife and elder three children to Tunbridge Wells for several weeks to recuperate.⁵⁰ Over the course of the next month, the Buxtons attempted to put the tragic loss of

⁴⁷ Notebook Journal, [n.d., January-May 1820], 31-33, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, [n.d., but early 1820], 32, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁴⁹ Fry, *Memoirs* 1:360.

⁵⁰ *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 61. The infant, Richenda, remained at home with a nurse.

their children behind them—Buxton by immersing himself in work and Hannah through introspection and prayer.⁵¹ Despite their close and intimate relationship, Buxton seems to have made little effort to assist Hannah during this period. Hannah felt especially comforted by long walks and private talks with her husband, but for the most part, he was absent, focusing on other affairs in London. She attempted to control her grief by writing lengthy passages in her diary wherein she praised God, expressed thankfulness for the time she had with her children, and prayed for their spiritual security. She also wrote loving remembrances of her children, especially young Thomas Fowell.

When young Edward began to feel ill in the middle of June, the fragile sense of stability that Hannah had created for herself began to crumble. Edward's condition brought back painful memories of Thomas Fowell's death three months earlier,⁵² reminding Hannah of her inability to save her son. She felt "sick at heart lest I should have sorrow still upon sorrow," but was "willing to commit [Edward] into [God's] hands, to take or to leave him as is

⁵¹ Ralph Mottram noted that Buxton was "so affected that his reforming zeal found no concrete outlet." Mottram, *Buxton the Liberator*, 40.

⁵² Ibid.

consistent with His wisdom."⁵³ Hannah was prepared for the worst, but shortly thereafter Edward recovered.

The family returned to Hampstead in late June 1820. The homecoming, however, was extremely difficult for Hannah, who up to this point seemed to have accepted the will of God. She reiterated in her diary that she had accepted God's judgment and even attempted to view her loss in a positive light. "God's Holy Spirit dwelt richly in them, and because these things were in them and did abound, therefore did they partake of this blessed peace which passeth understanding."⁵⁴ But as she spent the next week removing everything that belonged to Rachel, Hannah, and Louisa whatever strength she had left her. "To see their hats in a row bespeaking the departure of such numbers at a stroke was hard," she wrote. "I found my faith tried by it."⁵⁵

In August 1820, probably to escape the memories that remained for them at Hampstead, the Buxttons moved and set

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Linda Pollock refutes the notion that there was a "dramatic transformation" in parents experiencing emotion over the loss of a child during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather, parents, aware of the possibility of childhood death, regarded their children's illness with a "heightened [sense of] anxiety" and expressed "anguish at their death." She also notes that infants were not "mourned as deeply as older children," because while the former held promise, the latter also possessed a role within the household. Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 140-141.

up what was to become their permanent residence at Cromer Hall, Norfolk.⁵⁶ This offered the family the promise of starting anew. Four days after arriving at their new home, however, Priscilla Gurney, Hannah's younger sister, arrived. "Her breath [was] labored and her cough very hard," Hannah noted.⁵⁷ Priscilla was so weak that Buxton had to carry her to an upper bedroom so that she could rest.

"I have seldom known a person of such sterling ability," Buxton wrote of Priscilla. "I have listened to many eminent preachers and many speakers also . . . I deem her as perfect a speaker as I ever heard."⁵⁸ Buxton praised everything about Priscilla: her voice, her beauty, her clarity of mind, and "her own strong conviction" that she was preaching "truth," were all characteristics which he found admirable.⁵⁹ After the death of her brother John in 1814, Priscilla had pursued her ministry. In 1816, she went to Nice, France, to visit an invalid cousin. After her cousin's death, Priscilla remained in France for a short time, speaking and ministering to a "colony of

⁵⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 105. The Hoares also relocated to Cromer, and occupied a small house on the property. Buxton, meanwhile, continued to use the Brick Lane address on occasion.

⁵⁷ *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 81.

⁵⁸ Hare, *Gurneys*, 1:238.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

'Friends' " at Congeries.⁶⁰ She returned to the family's estate at Earlham in 1817, but remained for only a few months. Later that year, she took her ministry to Ireland where she remained until late spring 1818.⁶¹ In early 1819, Priscilla's health began to fail. After spending the winter with her sister Rachel on the Isle of Wight, Priscilla returned to Earlham. "It became evident that she was sinking in decided decline."⁶² Augustus Hare attributes Priscilla's poor health to physical exhaustion from her ministry.⁶³

In reality, Priscilla was dying of consumption. Her arrival at Cromer Hall was likely at the request of Buxton and Hannah; their new home offered them the room to care for Priscilla, and its location—on the coast and away from any city—would provide her with some measure of comfort. In early 1821, Rachel arrived at Cromer to help, but it was evident to the family that Priscilla would not live much longer. In March, Priscilla, her voice reduced to a whisper, gave Buxton and Hannah her final blessings, urging them to remain steadfast in their faith. She prayed for

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:265.

⁶¹ Ibid. 1:273.

⁶² Ibid., 1:317.

⁶³ Ibid.

Buxton's continued professional success, but also prayed that her sister be granted inner strength.⁶⁴

Three days before her death, Priscilla told her sisters that she had something important that she needed to tell Buxton and asked that he be sent for. Oddly, Buxton seemed reluctant to return to Cromer Hall. He wrote Hannah a quick note peppered with reasons why he could not leave London at that moment:

[A] meeting about the Slave Trade tomorrow morning, and a debate about the Slave Trade tomorrow evening; a meeting with Stephen on the same subject on Wednesday; and that of the Sunday School children on Wednesday evening, are the reasons which seem to supersede every inclination.⁶⁵

Although he wanted to be with Priscilla, he was determined to remain in London, "at least until tomorrow's account comes."⁶⁶

Shortly after posting his letter, however, Buxton's anxiety got the better of him, and he raced back to Cromer. He immediately went to Priscilla's side; it was obvious that she did not have long to live. Priscilla was emaciated; her breathing was strained and she coughed incessantly.⁶⁷ When she became aware that Buxton was next to her, she managed to grasp his hand and looked him firmly

⁶⁴ *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 88.

⁶⁵ TFB to HB, March 22, 1821, as cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 95.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 106.

in the eye. "The poor, dear slaves," she said.⁶⁸

Surrounded by her family, Priscilla Gurney died two days later on March 25.

Priscilla's final message to Buxton—in fact, her presence in the Buxton household—is important because it is her deathbed plea for abolition that Buxton viewed as the critical moment wherein he decided his future objective. Buxton repeated his account of Priscilla's plea in an October 1821 letter, and from that point forward credited the incident for his participation in the abolition movement.⁶⁹ Interestingly, none of the accounts written by the Gurney siblings, including Hannah, make mention of this last request, despite the fact that during the last week of her life, Priscilla was surrounded constantly by family.⁷⁰ What is noted is that Buxton and Priscilla had been emotionally close since his introduction to the family; she took great joy in his being present during her final days.⁷¹ At the same time, they shared a fixation on the welfare of the poor and destitute.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Also see Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, ed., *Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney, with Selections from his Journal and Correspondence*, 3rd. ed. (London: Headley Brothers; New York: Friends' Book & Tract Committee, 1902), 106; Fry and Cresswell, *Elizabeth Fry*, 1:388-389.

⁷¹ Braithwaite, *Joseph John Gurney*, 106; *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 89; Fry and Cresswell, *Elizabeth Fry*, 1:388.

Aside from Buxton, Thomas Binney provides the first mention of Priscilla's influence. He notes that Priscilla "repeatedly sent for Buxton, 'urging him to make the cause and condition of the slaves *the first object of his life.*'"⁷² Ralph Mottram mentions only that the "remembrance of [Priscilla's] single-hearted piety was with him for the rest of his life, transmuted in the energy with which he waged his many humanitarian campaigns."⁷³ Zachariah Mudge, meanwhile, mentions only that Priscilla died with the Buxton family.⁷⁴

Buxton later wrote that he "could not but understand" what Priscilla meant as it had been the subject of multiple conversations.⁷⁵ As will be discussed, by January 1821, Buxton was a member of the African Institution, an organization created by Wilberforce in 1807. If Priscilla influenced this course of action, he does not mention it. Rather, Buxton's participation in the organization was likely due to a lingering interest upon which he decided to act.

⁷² Binney, *Study*, 72. Emphasis is Binney's. "It is distinctly stated, that [this conversation with Priscilla] was one of the things to which he often referred, as preparing his mind for accepting the advocacy of the anti-slavery cause. He never, I believe, lost the impression, nor failed to be influenced and sustained by it." *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷³ Mottram, *Buxton the Liberator*, 40.

⁷⁴ Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 94.

⁷⁵ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 106

What is particularly interesting, however, is that in crediting Priscilla's influence over him, Buxton has identified yet a third woman who actively shaped his career. His mother allowed him freedom; Hannah showed him responsibility and ambition. Now, it was Priscilla who encouraged him in what became his life's purpose.

Chapter Four: Buxton and Penal Reform

If the Norwich Auxiliary Bible Society presentation some years earlier is often viewed as Buxton's introduction to the evangelical community,¹ the Mansion-house speech was most definitely his introduction to Britain at large. Where the former presented him as an advocate in the making, the latter demonstrated he had the skills needed to sway an audience. Buxton clearly realized the overall significance of what transpired in November 1816, as well as the possible benefits such notoriety could offer. By the end of the year, a transcript of his speech was published, the proceeds of which went to further assist the Spitalfields' weavers and their families. Weekly press releases proclaimed just how much money had rolled into the Association's coffers since the meeting.² Buxton's efforts to assist the Spitalfield poor provided him with a certain public stature he had not anticipated. He decided to capitalize on his newfound success and promote penal reform.

Ascertaining Buxton's motives for involving himself in the penal reform movement is problematic. His interest may

¹ Gurney, *Brief Memoir*, 7.

² These statements were published weekly. See *Morning Chronicle* (London), November 30, 1816, 2; *Ibid.*, December 11, 1816, 1; *Ibid.*, December 19, 1816, 1; *Ibid.*, January 11, 1817, 1.

be attributed to Reverend Pratt or may have been developing long before their meeting. Early biographers, starting with Joseph John Gurney in 1845, suggest or explicitly attribute Buxton's interests in prison reform to the Gurney family, and in particular the influence of Elizabeth Fry, a noted advocate for reform even before Buxton married into the family. A committed Friend, Fry set her sights on reforming penal conditions throughout Britain, starting with London's central and most notorious facility, Newgate. By the time Buxton went public with his own research, Fry had already done much to draw attention to various abuses. According to Gurney, Buxton may have had a long interest in penal reform, but he did not act until after "being especially struck with the marvellous [sic] change for the better which had been produced among the female prisoners in Newgate, by the Christian efforts of his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Fry."³ Another contemporary commented that Buxton's efforts on the part of prisoners was "an enterprize [sic] of love in which he was, probably, led first to engage by witnessing the beneficial results which had attended the efforts of his sister-in-law, Mrs. Fry, among the prisoners in Newgate."⁴

³ Ibid., 7-8.

⁴ Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 18.

To her credit, Fry discounted the notion that she had any influence over her brother-in-law in this matter. According to Fry, Buxton, Samuel Hoare, and several mutual friends, were attempting to form "a society for the reformation of the juvenile depredators, who infested London, in gangs," and had begun their work as early as 1813.⁵ Fry's daughters, who oversaw the publication of their mother's personal memoir in 1848, argued that it was instead Buxton who influenced their mother's prison work and kept "alive in the mind of Mrs. Fry, the interest awakened in 1813 for the female prisoners at Newgate."⁶

The attempt by family, friends and supporters to date Buxton's actions around 1813 may be deliberate on their

⁵ Fry and Cresswell, *Elizabeth Fry*, 1:259.

⁶ Ibid. Determining whether it was Buxton who influenced Fry or vice-versa is a near impossible task since at various times each credited the other for motivating them to act. As noted, the Fry daughters attributed their mother's actions to Buxton, while his *Memoirs* did just the opposite. "The exertions of Mrs. Fry and her associates had prepared the way." Buxton, *Memoirs*, 54.

In 1847, *The Memoirs of Mrs. Elizabeth Fry* was published by the Reverend Thomas Timpson, who inferred that Fry had been "informed" about the conditions of Newgate and wanted to investigate matters for herself. Thomas Timpson, *Memoirs of Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, including a History of Her Labours in Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners, and the Improvement of British Seamen*, (London: Aylott and Jones, 1847), 30. The notion that Fry was moved to act by public conversation (as opposed to a specific individual) seems to have become the standard explanation as to how she became involved in the penal reform movement. In 1889, Emma Pitman published a biography of Fry that credited "some members of the Society of Friends, who had visited Newgate in January," as the true impetus behind Fry's initial visit to the prison in 1813. Emma R. Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, (London: W. H. Allen & Company, 1889), 29. Another biography by J. E. Brown made no mention of fellow Friends, but noted that Fry "was asked by some who knew the sad condition of its occupants to visit them regularly." J.E. Brown, *Elizabeth Fry: The Prisoner's Friend*, (London: The Sunday School Association, 1902), 25.

part, and for three obvious reasons. First, it was after the mysterious illness that placed him near death which he viewed as a divinely-inspired and life-changing turning point. It was also after he was firmly under the tutelage of Josiah Pratt and his social ministry. Finally, it was just a year after his speech to the Norwich Auxiliary Bible Society, the first and very public display of Buxton's evangelical beliefs. Buxton's own accounts, however, paint a very different picture that further muddles the picture. According to his *Memoirs*, the catalyst for this crucial turn in his public career was decidedly less glamorous than anyone had imagined. Supposedly, he was inspired in 1816 during a morning walk with Samuel Hoare outside of Newgate.⁷ The problem is that Buxton's personal correspondence demonstrates that he had expressed an interest in forming an anti-capital punishment society as early as 1808. He confided to Hannah that one of his intentions for that year was to join an organization devoted to the abolition of capital punishment, but there is no indication that he also wanted to extend his activism to improving penal conditions. It might seem tempting to attribute his interest in penal reform to his father who showed a kind

⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 64. This information conflicts with that provided by Elizabeth Fry and suggests that while Buxton, Hoare, and the others may have been interested in juvenile delinquency, they did not take any steps to address it.

eye towards his jail's inmates, but it is problematic to do so since Buxton was only seven years old when his father died and had been away attending the Kingston school for most of the three years prior. What appears certain is that Buxton was concerned about capital punishment as early as 1808 and juvenile crime by 1813.

The idea of conducting first-hand investigations into penal conditions was introduced by John Howard, a Quaker philanthropist with an interest in social reform, in the 1770s.⁸ When Howard died in 1790, it was William Allen, another Quaker sharing Howard's interests in penal reform, who continued Howard's efforts. In 1808, Allen was one of the founding members of the "Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge upon the Punishment of Death and the Improvement of Prison Discipline" (SDK), an organization whose purpose was to make the public aware of the crisis within Britain's

⁸ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 365. John Howard (1726-1790). See Rod Morgan, "Howard, John (1726?-1790)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.libus.csd.mu.edu/view/article/13922> (accessed June 12, 2009). A very good discussion of the relationship between evangelicals and penal reform is found in Richard R. Follett, *Evangelicalism, Penal Theory and the Politics of Criminal Law Reform in England, 1808-1830* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire (UK) and New York: Palgrave, 2001). For the evangelical influence on social issues in Great Britain in general, see Boyd Hilton, *That Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

penal system.⁹ He further promoted his ideas in his publication, *The Philanthropist*, which ran from 1811 to 1818. When Elizabeth Fry began her visits to Newgate Prison's female ward in 1813, Allen began visiting the prison's male section to observe and minister as well.

Shortly after Buxton's stroll outside Newgate Gaol with Samuel Hoare in 1816, the "Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline and for the Reformation of Juvenile Offenders (SIPD)" was founded. One source asserts that Buxton was among the society's founding members. "The Christian heroism of Elizabeth Fry, seconded by the labours of her brothers-in-law, Samuel Hoare and Fowell Buxton, led to the formation of the Society for the Reformation of Prison Discipline in 1816."¹⁰ Augustus Hare asserts that the Newgate stroll "led to their entering into communication with Mr. Peter Bedford, Mr. William Crawford, Dr. Lushington, the Hon. E(dward) Harbord, and others

⁹ *The Life of William Allen with Selections from His Correspondence*, 2 vol. (Philadelphia: Henry Longstreth, 1847), 78. Allen (1770-1843), was a noted Quaker philanthropist and abolitionist. See Leslie Stephen, "Allen, William (1770-1843)," rev. G. F. Bartle, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/392> (accessed June 14, 2009).

¹⁰ William Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1904), 1:122n.2. The "Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline and for the Reformation of Juvenile Offenders (SIPD)" may have in fact been the "Society for the Reformation of Prison Discipline (SRPD)." The organization went through a number of name changes over the course of its existence. In 1866, it became the "Howard League for Penal Reform," which continues efforts to this day to affect changes in Great Britain's penal laws.

interested in improving the condition of the English jails: and the 'Society for the Reformation of Prison Discipline' was formed."¹¹ Buxton was the organization's treasurer, joined by Hoare, who served as the society's chairman. Other prominent reformers were active with the organization including Allen, Wilberforce, Dr. Stephen Lushington and Lord Suffield (Edward Harbord), all of whom "were afterwards so closely associated with him in the attack upon negro slavery."¹²

Buxton decided to examine the conditions in Newgate for himself. Accompanied by Samuel Hoare, Buxton visited the facility on January 4, 1817, but never completed the tour. He encountered over forty young men, some of whom were condemned, and all living under conditions he

¹¹ Hare, *Gurneys*, 1:276. V.A.C. Gatrell notes the creation of the SDK, which he refers to as the "Punishment Society." V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770-1868*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 398-401. Gatrell notes that within a year "the Punishment Society [as he refers to it] included Wilberforce and Clarkson, along with that tightly intermarried Quaker clan of Frys, Buxtons, Hoares, Gurneys, and Fosters which dominated the extra-parliamentary penal reform movement between 1808 and 1830 and was active in ant-slavery as well." *Ibid.*, 399. At no point, however, does Gatrell distinguish between Allen's SDK and the SIPD.

¹² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 64. Also see *The Fourth Report of the Committee of the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline, and for the Reformation of Juvenile Offenders* (London: T. Bensley, 1822), ii. Stephen Lushington (1782-1873), was a lawyer, judge, Member of Parliament, and noted abolitionist. See also S. M. Waddams, "Lushington, Stephen (1782-1873)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17213> (accessed June 14, 2009). Edward Harbord (Lord Suffield), was a prominent member of Parliament. See [Anon.], "Harbord, Edward, third Baron Suffield (1781-1835)," rev. H. C. G. Matthew, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12232> (accessed June 26, 2009).

considered revolting. Disgusted and horrified by the abuse and inhumanity he witnessed, Buxton abruptly left the prison.¹³ The incident served to reinforce his belief that something had to be done to protect the human rights of those who ran afoul of the law.

In relating the experience to Hannah the following day, Buxton noted that he now had two distinct and different paths before him, and "the time is now come for choosing" which path to follow.¹⁴ He could either seek out a life that would afford him financial security and worldly acclaim, he declared, or he could lead a life that glorified God. As it now stood, he straddled both worlds. The brewery offered the financial security and promise of success that Buxton sought. If he were so inclined, he could become as famous and as wealthy as his uncle Sampson Hanbury. The visit to Newgate, however, offered him a chance to relieve the sufferings of his fellow men and do what he perceived to be God's will. More importantly, that visit convinced him his vacillation was no longer acceptable—it was now time to choose the life he wanted to lead. The Newgate experience strengthened his resolution to do something about the conditions of prisons and the

¹³ Ibid., 64; TFB to HB, January 5, 1817, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁴ Ibid.

punitive nature of English law. In typical fashion, he immediately set about learning all he could about the prison system in Great Britain.

In November 1817, Buxton, along with Hoare and several other members of their family, joined with the Reverend Francis Cunningham as he journeyed across the Channel in hopes of establishing a chapter of the Bible Society in Paris.¹⁵ Buxton and Hoare, who "took a great interest" in Cunningham's endeavor, also planned to inspect and assess the Continental penal systems, and in particular those prisons located in Antwerp and Ghent, including the *Maison de Force*.¹⁶

What first struck Buxton following his arrival in France was the degree of disinterest in religion among the populace. His letters and diary entries, written as he traveled through the country, reflect both a profound sense of shock and dismay at what he considered French religious apathy. While the Enlightenment promoted such high-minded ideas as personal and intellectual liberties, it did so at the expense of organized religion. The Revolution, which relied so heavily on the teachings of the *philosophes* in its early phase, echoed their sentiments in attributing

¹⁵ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 67-70. The Reverend Francis Cunningham was brother-in-law to both Buxton and Hoare, having married Hannah's younger sister Richenda Gurney (1786-1855) in January 1816.

¹⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 67.

much of society's ills to organized religion. Both Catholic and Protestant denominations were subordinated to a secular state.¹⁷ By the time Napoleon restored religious institutions to France, their influence over many French citizens was lost. Buxton observed that, "The Protestants are sadly indifferent, and the Catholics are either quite philosophically careless or thoroughly bigoted."¹⁸ While Cunningham found some promising support for a Bible Society, Buxton was disheartened and disgusted by what he observed. He failed to appreciate that French society had spent years immersed in an environment dismissive of religious belief. His letters home reflected what he perceived as a sense of hopelessness among the French rooted in secularism. "Altogether, there is little appearance of religion. The amusements and businesses of the Sunday [sic], the utter absence of the Scriptures, the perpetual reiteration of 'Mon Dieu' in every sentence, the indifference as to truth; in short, all that strikes the eye and the ear, indicates the absence of any spiritual

¹⁷ For a discussion on religion in France during this period, see Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000); Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever: Religions Identity in Modern France*, (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); and Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 69.

understanding."¹⁹ His letters also underscore a determination on his part to overcome such indolence, both in the greater world, and in his own heart.

The trip was not entirely business, nor did Buxton consider the French to be completely devoid of charm. "Thus far I have thoroughly enjoyed my journey; the people are civil and engaging, and full of life," he wrote Hannah. He and Cunningham took in the sites as tourists: visiting Versailles for breakfast, the Louvre for the art (where he loved the Italian works but objected to Peter Paul Ruben's "great, sprawling, allegorical Deities,") and touring the Legislative Assembly ("Wonderfully smart - too much so . . . [different] from the negligent grandeur of the British Parliament").²⁰ All the while, however, the fact that two decades of catastrophic violence had only just ended was not lost on Buxton. Eighteen months after Waterloo, France was still in the process of trying to establish some sense of postwar normalcy.

What an odd thing it is . . . that we should have spent the last twenty-three years in cutting each other's throats; and that we should so often have illuminated at the grateful intelligences, that ten thousand of these our lively friends were killed, and twenty thousand wounded! . . . If it be our duty to love our enemies, the military preparations are an extraordinary way of displaying our affection.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 70.

²⁰ Ibid., 68-69.

²¹ Ibid., 68.

After an unimpressive meeting with Tallyrand,²² Buxton and Hoare were off to Antwerp and Ghent, determined to accumulate as much information as possible on their prisons and philosophy on penal rehabilitation. Specifically, they wanted to visit the *Maison de Force*, the Continent's newest prison.

Buxton's visit was for his own edification, with his purpose being, as he later wrote, to determine whether *Maison's* success was due to something exclusive to its location, or whether it could serve as the template for future penal systems around the world.²³ When the party returned to England a month later, Buxton immediately set to analyzing and processing his data, preparing a summary of his findings for the society. This experience imbued Buxton with a sense of vitality and importance that clerking for the brewery had failed to provide. It was not enough to suggest reform; here he had the opportunity to participate in the act of reforming. Overwhelmed with his assessment, the society surprised Buxton with an unexpected

²² *Ibid.*, 69.

²³ Thomas Fowell Buxton, *An Inquiry, Whether Crime and Misery are Produced or Prevented, by Our Present System of Prison Discipline*, (London: John and Arthur Arch, Cornhill; Butterworth and Sons, Fleet Street; and John Hatchard, Piccadilly, 1818), vi.

request that the summary be presented to the general public.²⁴

Buxton was leery about having the report made public as the society proposed. What motivated him to do so was the belief held by some within the society that Parliament might address the issue of penal reform during the 1818 session.²⁵ Buxton realized that any documentation that might sway the legislature towards the society's position was better than none at all.²⁶ Hoping to capitalize on what seemed to be a growing public interest in prison reform, Buxton began work on a book that would clearly address the issues and offer feasible reforms. To present a balanced argument, however, he first needed to conduct more research.²⁷

Buxton's investigation of Britain's penal system was conducted in a decidedly scientific manner. He began with information previously obtained by the society on several penal facilities, including the jails at St. Albans, Bury, Ilchester, Guildford, Bristol, and Borough Compter, and the penitentiaries at Millbank and Tothill Fields. Buxton also

²⁴ Ibid., 71.

²⁵ Ibid., vi.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ John Garwood characterized Buxton's willingness to act at this time as a defining moment. "Thus did he imbibe the spirit of his Master, into whose ears have ever entered 'the groaning of the prisoner, and the sighing of the oppressed.'" Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 19.

wanted to include information on the *Maison de Force* and the prison in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.²⁸ With the exception of the Philadelphia prison, these institutions were accessible. Buxton was able to make repeated visits to each facility to observe conditions, interview employees and prisoners, and to evaluate the completeness and accuracy of earlier reports.

Buxton noted the dates of each visit, the names of his companions, and those of the people he interviewed.²⁹ On many of these visits, Buxton was accompanied by his brother-in-law, Samuel Hoare, whose role (as was the case with anyone who accompanied Buxton on these trips) was two-fold: to observe the conditions of each institution and assist Buxton in recording what was observed.³⁰ Buxton took copious notes on everything. He sought out both administrators and inmates for private interviews and, when permitted, he recorded as much of the meeting as possible. He also made every attempt to authenticate any rumors he heard regarding conditions in the jails. Before leaving each facility, Buxton read the rough drafts of his

²⁸ Buxton visited each of the institutions with the exception of the Philadelphia prison, for which he relied on reports and other publications for data.

²⁹ Buxton, *Inquiry*, vii.

³⁰ While Samuel Hoare appears to have been Buxton's usual companion during these visits, he was also accompanied on occasion by William Crawford "and others." Buxton, *Memoirs*, 70-71.

observations to the warden, the jailers, and anyone he had interviewed to ensure his report contained no misrepresentations or falsehoods. In the event he could not do this, he sent copies through the mails with a request for review. Accuracy was paramount to Buxton's mission.³¹

The majority of institutions included in Buxton's report were characterized as woefully inadequate. Inmates were confined but not regulated. Often the very influences that contributed to their incarceration - alcohol, gambling and violence - were readily accessible inside the prison walls. Minor criminals, such as pickpockets and thieves, were not segregated from those who had committed more heinous crimes like armed robbery or murder. Criminal offenders gained a nefarious education at the hands of their cellmates, thus making rehabilitation even more remote. The exception to this sorry pattern was the *Maison de Force*, which was given high marks by Buxton who found the treatment of prisoners to be conducive to both rehabilitation and social productivity. "Nothing in the whole institution struck me so much," he later wrote "as

³¹ Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 18.

the subdued, civil, submissive, decent behaviour of all the prisoners."³²

Buxton noted in the introduction to his study that, "It was necessary to prove that evils and grievances did really exist in this country, and to bring home . . . the increase of corruption and depravity."³³ He feared that some of the scenes of misery depicted in his book would reek of sensationalism, but the need to show the system as it operated was necessary.³⁴ "Against the pain which this pamphlet may give to the affluent and the powerful," Buxton intoned, "must be weighed the secret sufferings, the unknown grievances, the decay of health, and corruption of morals, which by its suppression, may be continued to the inmates of many dungeons in this country."³⁵ In February 1818, Buxton published *An Inquiry whether crime be produced or prevented by our present System of Prison Discipline*.

In the *Inquiry*, Buxton recommended over two dozen changes to the system, including those that would require the judiciary to take into consideration the impact of

³² Buxton, *Inquiry*, 75. Buxton was at a loss when trying to compare the *Maison de Force* with Newgate Gaol. "I can convey no adequate conception of the contrast," he wrote. "The most boisterous tempest is not more distinct from the serenity of a summer's evening; the wildest beast of prey is not more different from our domesticated animals, than is the noise, contention, licentiousness, and tumult of Newgate; from the quietness, industry, and regularity of the *Maison de Force*." *Ibid.*, 75-76.

³³ Buxton, *Inquiry*, v-vi.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, iv.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vi-vii.

sentencing on the accused. "Our law is not . . . a system of bloody vengeance," he wrote. "It does not say, so much evil is repaired by so much misery inflicted."³⁶ This was, in fact, the crux of Buxton's argument - that when determining a prisoner's sentence, the judiciary failed to make a distinction between a just punishment and undue cruelty. Rather than rehabilitation and reintegration into society, those who fell afoul of the law were the victims of a vendetta perpetuated by the very system that should have helped them. From the moment of arrest, accused offenders were subjected to public humiliation. Long trials and hearings that were either delayed or protracted, created hardships for the accused and their family. For those awaiting trial, prisons posed risks to their morals, health, and work ethic. Incarcerated with "hardened and convicted criminals," in unvented cells, they breathed putrid air and lived in "close contact with the victims of contagious and loathsome disease, or amidst the noxious effluvia of dirt and corruption."³⁷ If convicted and incarcerated, the prisoner was subject to idleness, the lack of religious training or comfort, and exposure to far more insidious residents, none of whom could assist with

³⁶ Ibid., 12.

³⁷ Ibid., 10.

his return to society. Buxton emphasized that this created a public crisis because by isolating the offender without making any attempt at rehabilitation, society was in effect exacerbating the problem of antisocial behavior.³⁸ "In short," he explained, "by the greatest possible degree of misery, you produce the greatest possible degree of wickedness . . . you return him to the world impaired in health, debased in intellect, and corrupted in principles."³⁹

Buxton took issue with penal confinement as it was being implemented in Great Britain. He argued that every aspect and action of the criminal justice system had to have a point—a reason for existing—and if it did not, then that action ran contrary to good social policy.⁴⁰ He focused on the differences between what the laws directed *should* happen, and what actually occurred in the penal environment. Buxton noted which jails used hand and leg irons, for example, and under what conditions their use was permitted. He also examined how prisoners were fed. The variances were great. At Ipswich, for example, debtors were dependent on charitable donations, while in the larger jails, such as Norwich and Milbank, debtors received at

³⁸ Ibid., 14.

³⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 15.

least one and one-half pounds of bread per day, as well as other foods.⁴¹

Those men and women sentenced to confinement for debt were of special concern to Buxton because he saw the sentence as ironic. "It is inflicted on a class of men who are already too often weighed down by misfortune."⁴² The jailing of debtors with felons had been banned since the late seventeenth century.⁴³ Yet this was exactly what was happening—the mingling of debtors and felons under one penal roof. Buxton not only objected to the practice, but condemned the act of confining anyone for non-violent crimes as a crime itself because it imposed upon the accused certain tribulations that were unnecessary and thus unjust. "Whatever goes beyond mere confinement," he wrote, "is injustice."⁴⁴ The law only allowed for imprisonment, not the evils associated with prison life, such as starvation and maltreatment. Being confined is the offender's sentence, and "ought therefore to be the whole of his suffering."⁴⁵ Too often, Buxton complained, "the law

⁴¹ Ibid., 60.

⁴² Ibid., 6.

⁴³ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 7.

condemns a man to jail, and is silent as to his treatment there."⁴⁶

Buxton estimated that forty percent of those released from England's various jails and prisons eventually returned again, and added that his calculations were far lower than those given by the jailers in London and its immediate vicinity.⁴⁷ Of the good jails, Buxton estimated that the rate of recidivism was only five percent. Moreover, in bad jails, over one-third of the inmates suffered from disease or other health problems. In the good jails, such suffering was negligible.⁴⁸ Buxton concluded that those poor penal facilities violated the "very spirit of the British Constitution," and as such were illegal.⁴⁹ He believed "Whenever labour, inspection, classification, and religious instruction are neglected, there have [been] found symptoms of misery and increasing vice." By contrast where there is "an appearance of health, industry, and cleanliness," there were "numerous instances of reformation."⁵⁰

Declaring that "[c]rime and misery are the natural and necessary consequences of our present system of prison

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 144-145.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 124,

discipline,"⁵¹ Buxton offered a number of possible remedies. He suggested that magistrates conduct the accused to jail with "every possible attention to his feeling; with decency and secrecy."⁵² Buxton also advocated that jails encourage personal industry as one means to reform. He recommended that authorities engage inmates in some form of work and that they also share in the profits to either meet their obligations or to prevent their families from descending further into destitution. He also encouraged prisons to ban alcohol from their premises, to create educational and religious training programs, and here commended that ministers be induced to give prisons their utmost attention.⁵³

The *Inquiry* went through five editions in the first year of its publication and appears to have been popular with the general public as well as those affiliated with the society.⁵⁴ The *British Review and London Critical Journal*, for example, placed the *Inquiry* in the larger context of national morality.⁵⁵ Evaluating the book alongside other recently released materials on social

⁵¹ Ibid., 62.

⁵² Ibid., 9.

⁵³ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁴ The work met with so much success that it went through five editions the first year of publication, and was and later published on the Continent, as well as in Turkey and India. Buxton, *Memoirs*, 73-74.

⁵⁵ "Means of National Improvement," *British Review and London Critical Journal*, vol. XII, no. XXIV (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1818), 285-323.

reform—including, ironically, the *First Report of the Committee of the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline*—the magazine noted that Buxton's work was "one of those few publications which is emphatically the author's own."⁵⁶ Calling into question the motives behind the current debate on social reform, the magazine found the *Inquiry* refreshing and praised Buxton for his "original thinking" on the topic and the "singular honesty" that was drawn from "the feelings of [a] man and Christian."⁵⁷ The magazine expressed surprise at much of what Buxton reported, but politely noted that there were problems with his reporting. In some areas Buxton's characterization of abuse and neglect was shaped by exaggeration and hyperbole, the magazine complained. "Nor can we suppress the observation," the review continued, "that Mr. Buxton, like the rest of mankind when their hearts are engaged in some great question of abuse, throws a colour over his statements not by any means amounting to misrepresentation, but which reveals a mind not wholly impartial."⁵⁸ Moreover, the magazine was disturbed by what it considered to be shameless manipulation in some of Buxton's accounts. Specifically, the author cited Buxton's account of a

⁵⁶ Ibid., 306.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 312.

"veteran sailor" incarcerated at Tothill Fields prison who claimed to have landed troops at Bunker's Hill during the American Revolution and served alongside Admiral Horatio Nelson at Trafalgar.⁵⁹

It matters nothing to the point of prison management that this man was a sailor, or a veteran, and talked of Nelson and Trafalgar; his story might or might not have been true, but it was no real aggravation of the case against the prison, and ought not to have been introduced *ad captandum* in a statement like that before us.⁶⁰

These critiques aside, the *British Review* could "find no fault with the general strength of the terms in which Mr. Buxton expresses his indignation at the shameful neglect in which this greatest concern of a moral nation has been so long suffered to lie. His censure is no more than the case deserves."⁶¹ If Buxton's *Inquiry* failed to move the public to act, the magazine concluded, "we shall be in down right despair of any substantial advancement in national morality."⁶²

⁵⁹ The battles of Bunker's Hill and Trafalgar took place on June 17, 1775, and October 21, 1805, respectfully. Viscount Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), noted British admiral, commanded the fleet at Trafalgar. See N. A. M. Rodger, "Nelson, Horatio, Viscount Nelson (1758-1805)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19877> (accessed June 13, 2009).

⁶⁰ Ibid. *Ad captandum* is short for "*ad captandum vulgus*," meaning, "to please the crowd."

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. 318.

Buxton was determined that would not be the case. The changes that he believed were necessary to make the penal system more humane could not be made by any private organization, nor could local municipalities be trusted to establish any type of consistency in the way they dealt with accused or convicted offenders. Substantive reform required action by Parliament.

Chapter Five:
Buxton in Parliament, 1819–1822

Thomas Fowell Buxton's flirtation with public office first occurred in 1807 when he was asked by members of Trinity College to seek their seat in that year's contest. He declined the offer, responding that his youth left him ill-prepared to take on such a position of importance. Privately there is reason to believe that Buxton's refusal was influenced heavily by his then-fiancé Hannah, for his correspondence with her suggest that she was not comfortable with the prospect of living in the public eye. Despite this, the mere suggestion that he might represent the college thrilled Buxton immensely and he expressed a great deal of pride in being considered capable of such a position when he was not yet twenty-one years of age.¹

Over the course of the following decade, however, both excuses lost their potency. Now in his early thirties, Buxton was at once a successful businessman, loving husband, and father. He also developed a public following in the months after the Spitalfields speech. Hannah's feelings about fame notwithstanding, that speech thrust her husband firmly into the public eye and reawakened his interest in public office. The Mansion House episode

¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 34-35; Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 5.

represented Buxton's political "coming out" to the world at large. He demonstrated that he had a grasp of local social issues and the gift of oratory so often needed to affect public attitudes and change. Having secured the praise and admiration of such national figures as the Prince Regent and William Wilberforce, it was only natural for Buxton to reconsider running for Parliament.

In early 1817, Buxton was again asked by friends to consider entering an election contest, this time for Weymouth, in southeastern England. Surprisingly, Buxton again refused the offer, citing personal reasons. While it is possible Hannah repeated her objections to a life in politics, it is more likely that his refusal was prompted by his concern over the rapidly deteriorating health of his younger brother Charles. Another reason could have been his belief that his election lacked divine sanction. Simply put, he may not have believed that serving in Parliament was in God's immediate plan for him. There is no indication that he further discussed the matter with his associates. Privately, however, he reasoned that public office would allow him to better promote his Christian beliefs and social reform agenda. If nothing else, a seat in Parliament would afford him the ability to further champion penal reform. His interests had once again been

piqued; a run for Parliament was possible, but for Buxton it had to correspond with his spiritual goals.

"I fancy," he wrote in his journal, "my election at a future period is very probable—if it will tend to my real good or to the good of others, I believe it will be so determined by Providence."² Buxton feared choosing a path that conflicted with his true spiritual calling. This consideration influenced all of his post-collegiate decisions. In agonizing over a parliamentary campaign, he was not concerned with the possibility of losing. Rather, Buxton wanted to avoid misinterpreting his own desires as the will of God. His journals indicate that this concern was at the forefront of his thinking. Failure to distinguish his personal desires from his true calling haunted Buxton, and he was more than willing to do *nothing*, if doing anything would obscure his divine path. "If merely my vanity is to be gratified," he wrote in January 1818, "I earnestly pray God to avert the fulfillment of my wishes. I am too well aware of my own blindness, to have my heart much set upon it."³

The sign for which Buxton awaited arrived in June 1818. The Prince Regent publicly acknowledged the

² Notebook Journal, January 4, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

³ Ibid.

political impasse between the Whigs and Tories in Parliament that hindered the effective functioning of his government. With no hope of breaking the stalemate and the lack of a satisfactory solution on the horizon, the Prince Regent announced Parliament's dissolution on June 10. This action sent hundreds of would-be office seekers scurrying around England's various counties in hopes of building instant constituencies. The Prince's action was no surprise; rumors of dissolution had been discussed in the press for months, and even the *Times* agreed that the measure was a long time in coming.⁴ It did, however, put Buxton in a prickly spot regarding his future. If he were to make his move now, he would have to do so quickly; the Weymouth elections would occur in two weeks, and while he was well known in Weymouth, this did not guarantee that he could be elected.

After a great deal of prayer and introspection, Buxton determined that he could not ignore the opportunity that lay before him. Still, he feared that his personal ambition might be obstructing his religious goals. His conscience, however, was satisfied enough to allow him to race off to Weymouth to announce his candidacy. By approaching his campaign with the same determined attitude

⁴ *Times*, June 11, 1818; 3.

with which he approached all other endeavors, Buxton made it the focal point of his life, allowing the process to consume whatever free time he had. Save for the time he spent in religious study and prayer, what remained of Buxton's personal time was spent making speeches and meeting with voters. He even found himself forced to forego his daily letters to Hannah, eventually apologizing that he was too busy to write while canvassing Weymouth for votes.⁵ For someone who had never lived with the common crowd, Buxton's sense of ease and security among them was nothing short of profound, an opinion even he held. Those who sought public office risked being thrashed twice: orally, by an opponent whose speeches could border on the libelous, and physically, by his opponent's supporters.⁶ As for himself, Buxton encouraged neither, but there is evidence that his opponents did. He cheerfully wrote Hannah, stating that he could walk among a drunken crowd without fear of injury. "All danger of personal violence is at an end," he wrote.⁷

⁵ TFB to HB, June, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*. Contrast this with the rebuke he offered Hannah eighteen months earlier, when she claimed to be too busy to correspond with him.

⁶ This was often the case in contests. When one candidate in Leicester acquiesced, for example, "the populace collected several baskets of stones in the market-place, for the purpose of assailing the friends of the successful candidates," leaving several of their victims severely wounded. *Times*, July 1, 1818, 3.

⁷ TFB to HB, June 20, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

The morning of June 24 found Buxton upbeat about both the election and his probability of success. "I cannot walk out with[out] hearing from every individual the cry of 'Buxton for ever'-the popular favor is entirely with me," he wrote to Hannah that morning. His own polling convinced him that he would win, despite the fact that the election had been marred by not a few ugly incidents. In one instance, a friend of Buxton's was imprisoned for publicly questioning the character of one of the opposing candidates ("he is a villain . . . and a coward," Buxton himself described the candidate)⁸, as well as doubting the mayor's impartiality. Buxton reacted with surprise and quiet embarrassment, for privately he believed the mayor's action to be well within the bounds of public decorum.⁹

The election provided Buxton with his first true exposure to the electoral system, as well as to the ugliness that often accompanied political campaigns. "A contested election is no slight exertion mental or bodily," he argued.¹⁰ Most of the negative attacks were directed at other candidates, but Buxton received his share of mud. One opponent bitterly attacked Buxton's open spirituality

⁸ Ibid., June 24, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., June 30, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

by accusing him of "fanaticism & evangelicism,"¹¹ but such assaults on his character seem to have been rare. Instead, Buxton learned he possessed an odd talent, and he liked it. He appreciated that he could make others uncomfortable with his views, as was the case with a group of Portlanders, who were so alarmed by one of his speeches that they immediately returned to their homes.¹² In writing home, he took pride in the fact that his campaign touched a common chord with the Weymouth voters. Despite this, Buxton continued to wrestle with doubts over whether he had made the right decision in running for office. Should he be elected, Buxton was determined to serve his constituents faithfully - but only if the chasm between his earthly desires and spiritual purpose could be effectively bridged.¹³

Two days later, however, circumstances had dramatically changed. With three days to go until the election, Buxton, who stood as an Independent, came to believe that his differences with the Whigs were so insurmountable that he estimated that he would miss first place by nearly ninety votes, or nearly ten percent of the polled electorate. Also gone were the convictions of

¹¹ Ibid., June 24, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

success of which he had proudly boasted on June 24. "I am very really sick of the bustle," he confided to Hannah, "and my expectations of success are considerably diminished this morning."¹⁴ This was an understatement, for Buxton's sudden melancholia left him certain that his chances of obtaining even a decent second place showing were tenuous at best. "I hope by tomorrow's first [light] to say something final," he added, "but whether defeat or victory I cannot tell."¹⁵ The heightened pace of the election's waning hours was more than Buxton anticipated; the constant need for speeches and rebuttals proved too much for his constitution and left him weak and fatigued. The warm seasonal temperatures, moreover, seemed to work against Buxton and weakened him even further. Finally, his longing for and need to be with Hannah weighed the heaviest upon his heart. As his campaign drew towards its conclusion, it was Buxton's typical tenacity that forced him to see things through to completion. Tired and depressed, Buxton gave himself over that evening to finding comfort from the Scriptures, thus avoiding any last minute election anxiety. He accepted Hannah's advice that he try to relax. "I have determined like a very prudent good Husband to keep away."¹⁶

¹⁴ TFB to HB, June 26, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Buxton's fears were unfounded. Much to his surprise, he easily won the seat for Weymouth. The stress of campaigning was now over. "I am a Member of Parliament," he immediately informed his wife. "My only feeling has been if it is right."¹⁷ More importantly, freedom from campaigning allowed him to return his attentions to his family, and in particular, Hannah. Buxton acknowledged that his success would mean a significant change in their lifestyle. He promised his wife he would "do all I can to render being in parliament as little of a privation to thee as possible."¹⁸

Buxton made at least two speeches to his supporters following his victory, but it was the "chairing" of the victors for which the people eagerly awaited. The "chairing," a long-established post-election parade that featured the victorious candidates being hoisted around town in a sedan, was for Buxton "one of the most lively entertaining spectacles" he had ever seen. "Mounted in chairs decorated with flowers & blue ribbons, a band of music preceded us - The people were delighted beyond measure."¹⁹ The crowd, which Buxton estimated to be over two thousand strong, carried their newly installed

¹⁷ Ibid., June 29, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., June 30, 1818, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

representative through every street in Weymouth. All the while, male supporters enthusiastically cheered him on, and women—"hundreds," he noted—took to dancing throughout the parade.²⁰ Instead of exiting the sedan when the procession finally concluded, Buxton stood and gave a speech thanking the people for their support. That evening, he attended a meeting with the trade guilds, where he gave yet another speech. Later, he told Hannah that in the week following the election, he gave an average of three speeches each day. Although he still questioned whether his political interests were divinely inspired or motivated by personal vanity, in the end, Buxton considered the entire election episode to be a curious affair. "Nimble nonsense," he commented, quoting hymnist William Cowper's poem, *Conversation*, is "a faithful description of my harangues."²¹

When Buxton took his seat in Parliament on January 14, 1819, he did so with an extensive agenda already in mind. The personal goals he outlined in his journals were almost exclusively centered on alleviating the suffering of his fellow human beings. He wanted, for example, to begin by focusing on issues with which he was familiar, such as providing assistance to Britain's growing numbers of poor

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

and destitute. The years he spent in Dublin as a student provided him with an awareness of the tensions between England and Ireland, and here, too, Buxton wanted to be of service. Although he had said little about slavery and emancipation prior to this point, Buxton noted in his journal a desire to take action by joining an antislavery society in London.²² Chief on his list, however, was legislation regarding the criminal law, the reform of prisons, and the well-being of those confined. His primary objective, Buxton wrote to his brother-in-law John J. Gurney, was nothing less than the "abolition of the

²² This is another instance in which determining the source for Buxton's motivations is confusing. The *Memoirs* suggests that Buxton's interest in the antislavery movement began after he entered Parliament. "When Mr. Buxton first entered Parliament, his attention was drawn to this question by a letter from his brother-in-law, Mr. William Forster, who, after describing the interest taken by Mr. Buxton's friends in his efforts for the improvement of prison discipline, expresses their earnest desire that he would 'take up another most important and extensive question, the state of Africa, and of the slave population in the West Indies.' Buxton, *Memoirs*, 128. The passage continues and notes that Buxton himself often cited Priscilla Gurney's deathbed plea as his inspiration. This suggests that Priscilla initiated a discussion on the issue with him shortly after his election victory. If Buxton's statement is taken at face value, then it is a confusing claim considering that he made the journal entries above in January, 1819, nearly two years before Priscilla's death. Buxton also attributed his abolitionist beliefs to his mother, who put the issue of slavery in the context of national morality. As long as Great Britain continued to maintain the institution of slavery, she told him, "[H]ow can we ask forgiveness of our sins?" He claimed to have been strongly influenced during his childhood by his sisters, whom he mocked for joining the "anti-saccharides," a late eighteenth-century social movement that advocated abstaining from West Indian grown sugar and rum. Buxton, *Memoirs*, 127. Other biographers relate these stories, all drawn from the pages of the *Memoirs*. *The Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton* makes no mention of Buxton's abolitionist leanings (aside from Priscilla's request) until after Buxton has begun introducing legislation for abolition. Much like his interest in penal reform, it is difficult to determine when Buxton developed an interest in abolition.

punishment of death, except for murder."²³ This, Buxton knew, was an uphill battle, but he reasoned that with Hannah's support and a good deal of prayer, he would overcome any opposition in much the same manner as he had in the past.

Buxton would be well within his element as a Member of Parliament. The camaraderie he found there was something he had not experienced since his college days. The frequent interaction with learned men, all of whom - at least on the surface - were there with the common purpose of serving the public good, was a source of excitement for the junior member from Weymouth. Buxton expected to find the greatest minds in Britain in Parliament, and indeed some fellow members were impressive, in both their intellect and bearing. William Wilberforce, for example, was an interesting person with whom to chat and socialize.²⁴ Other members, however, like George Canning, astounded him by their intellectual inadequacy. "His reasoning," Buxton confided to long-time friend and future member of the House, John Henry North, "is seldom above mediocrity."²⁵

Buxton recognized that, despite his earlier achievements, his first real test would come on the day he

²³ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 83.

²⁴ TFB to HB, February 1819, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

²⁵ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 86.

finally addressed his fellow MPs. "I was told by many," Buxton wrote his mother, "that it is a most terrific business to say anything in the House."²⁶ Reputations had been both made and broken on the floor of Parliament, a fact of which Buxton was well aware. "[I] feel pretty certain that when I have something to say I shall not be afraid to utter it."²⁷ When the opportunity to address the House first presented itself, Buxton made a few, albeit minor, remarks. These early parliamentary speeches "had few pretensions to eloquence," but were speeches that were deeply rooted in his personal beliefs and he found the experience exhilarating.²⁸ Whatever doubts and fears he felt upon entering the House were now gone, or at least sufficiently quieted. He was indeed a Member of Parliament, and he was more than willing to undertake any challenge that might stand between him and what he increasingly saw as his divine mission.

To this end, Buxton participated in discussions on the state of all confinement facilities, whether they be major institutions such as Newgate or local jails. He was particularly interested in the state of Britain's prison ships. The hulks, as they were called, were an unusual mix

²⁶ TB to Anna Buxton, February 8, 1819, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 83.

of expediency and creativity. When the American Colonies erupted into full-scale rebellion in 1775, it was no longer feasible for judges and magistrates to sentence felons to transportation to North America. This, coupled with an abrupt rise in crime, resulted in a novel solution to overcrowded penal facilities. Large aging vessels, in some cases decommissioned naval warships, were to house those prisoners who would otherwise have been transported.

Intended as a temporary expedient, the hulks created additional problems that had not been anticipated and were not easy to resolve.²⁹ Some prisoners remained locked on board hulks for years. Those who survived their incarceration were physically and mentally broken. Crime did not abate, nor did the hostilities in America, and as a result, more and more Britons convicted of minor crimes were being crammed onto the ships. Overcrowding, disease, poor sanitation and malnutrition to the point of starvation – the very issues the hulks were supposed to alleviate – now existed on these ships.

Buxton's chance to address the Commons at length came less than two weeks after taking office, during a debate on

²⁹ Pieter Spierenburg, "The Body and the State: Early Modern Europe, *The Oxford History of the Prison: The Practice of Punishment in Western Society*, ed. Norval Morris and David J. Rothman, (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 76.

the state of convict ships. Under consideration was the petition of a Dr. Halloran, convicted of forging a frank on a document in 1804. Sentenced to transportation, a punishment he believed far exceeded the nature of his offence, Halloran had spent fifteen years under close confinement. In his petition, he complained of numerous abuses, from being confined in jails with felons, to being housed on a convict ship. A man of advanced age, Halloran also suffered from illnesses he caught when he spent time onboard the hospital ship *Alonzo*. In short, Halloran sought mercy and argued that his societal debt had been more than paid.

Marmaduke Lawson, the representative of Boroughbridge, was also a newly elected member of the House. He did not share Buxton's views on crime and punishment. He used his opportunity to address the House to urge the dismissal of Halloran's complaints and those of other prisoners. Had he stopped there, it is possible, although unlikely, that Buxton might have ignored the matter. Yet Lawson, seeing he had the attention of the House, pushed onward, and when he began to ridicule Halloran and those similarly imprisoned, Buxton could not remain silent.

Seizing the opening Lawson presented, Buxton took his colleague to task for his ridicule, and condemned Lawson's

levity as inappropriate. More importantly, Buxton continued, there was no indication that Halloran's claims of abuse and ill-treatment had ever been investigated. Observing that life in prison was not easy, and less so for those stationed on the penal hulks, Buxton reasoned that Halloran's allegations deserved investigation. The House stood silent. Lawson, stunned by Buxton's retort, did not directly respond. Other members of the House immediately supported Buxton's position and criticized Lawson's comments. Lawson quickly tried to save face, but he was clearly chastened by Buxton's remarks.³⁰ James Mackintosh, who became Parliament's foremost advocate for legal and penal reforms after the death of Samuel Romilly in 1818, had earlier pointed out to the House that Buxton was their resident expert on the nation's penal system and that he could be their best resource in the matter.³¹ Halloran's petition allowed Buxton to demonstrate his expertise on penal reform.

In a real sense, the incident with Marmaduke Lawson marked Buxton's arrival in Parliament. The occasion presented him with his first opportunity to demonstrate that he could be the type of representative he wanted to

³⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 98.

³¹ *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 1st ser., vol. 39 (1819), col. 94.

be. Over the course of the next few weeks, Buxton spoke out whenever issues involving the law were presented, usually limiting his input to inquiring whether the allegations made by penal petitioners were valid or asking if they had been investigated. He questioned whether the petitioners had received a just sentence, and often wanted to mitigate those punishments that seemed excessive. In most cases, the answer to both questions was so ambiguous that the House was forced to delay action on the petitions in favor of additional study.

On February 18, Henry Bennet, the member from Shrewsbury, introduced a motion to form a committee to reconsider the punishment of criminal transportation. Bennet questioned the negative economic effects of shipping prisoners to New South Wales. The colony had recently demonstrated tremendous potential in terms of natural resources and wealth. Bennet related the story of a free farmer in the colony who not only operated a thriving sheep farm, but recently marketed a number of sheepskins, so luxurious, that he was able to sell them for over five shillings each—a hefty sum.³² Yet free farmers were reluctant to immigrate to the area. The territory's criminal population outnumbered legitimate colonists.

³² Ibid., col. 490.

Bennet argued that if the judiciary continued to rely so heavily on transportation to the area, any benefits from New South Wales would be lost. Judges needed to either impose the death sentence or some alternative punishment. "Transportation, which ought to be the greatest punishment next to death," he protested, "should not be made the object of choice."³³

In the end, Bennet's measure failed to garner much support. Buxton admitted that his own knowledge on transportation was "extremely limited and insufficient," but even so he had reservations about Bennet's motion.³⁴ *Parliament seemed content to make all matters regarding punishment the sole responsibility of a single committee that would return with a resolution in short order. This focus on expediency was the problem, Buxton noted, because it would be "utterly impossible . . . to make a report in any thing [sic] like reasonable time."*³⁵ Rather, Buxton argued, the best way to proceed was to accumulate information and data which could be used to draw a more beneficial conclusion. *In the end, Bennet's measure failed to garner much support. Buxton's role was minor, but reflected what was becoming his standard method of*

³³ Ibid., col. 478.

³⁴ Ibid., col. 507.

³⁵ Ibid.

*operation: He wanted time to study the problem in order to form a comprehensive understanding of the issues before formulating any resolution.*³⁶

Within two months of taking his seat, Buxton was on his way to realizing one of his parliamentary goals. On March 1, Viscount Castlereagh made a motion requesting the appointment of a special investigative commission known as a "Select Committee" to examine the state of jails and other prisons in Great Britain.³⁷ If approved, the committee would not only investigate the operation of the nation's prisons but would also consider penal reforms to insure the humane treatment of inmates. In effect, Castlereagh was asking Parliament to do what Buxton, Fry, and other proponents of penal reform had supported for years.

Mackintosh welcomed the idea of a committee, but believed the problem facing the prisons was far too great for just one committee to handle. More to the point, he

³⁶ Buxton was an early critic of this type of punishment. Martin Wiener notes that the use of hulks and transportation as punishments only gradually became the focus of penal discipline reformers. Martin Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 98.

³⁷ Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh (1739-1821) was an Irish representative peer in Parliament and noted philanthropist. See J. A. Hamilton, "Stewart, Robert, first marquess of Londonderry (1739-1821)," rev. Roland Thorne, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26506> (accessed July 6, 2009).

feared that Castlereagh was proposing a Select Committee to appease the prison reformers at the expense of those opposed to capital punishment. To a degree, Mackintosh was correct—Castlereagh believed that the agenda of anti-capital punishment advocates could undermine the entire legal system.

This was the opportunity for which Buxton had long waited. Yet before he could address Parliament on the prisons, he needed to correct what was clearly a misunderstanding on the part of Castlereagh. To support his proposal for the committee, Castlereagh asserted that Buxton believed that crime sprang exclusively from the condition of prisons. This was an argument Buxton neither made, nor believed.³⁸ Rather, he was convinced that the detestable conditions of the prisons were only part of the problem. In this, Buxton declared, he was unshakable. Prisons were "as schools and seminaries of the worst vices."³⁹ Here, an unfortunate youth, "addicted, probably, to idleness," was subjected to the most ironic type of punishment imaginable - confinement that offered yet more idleness!⁴⁰ Instead of giving rise to personal industry, prisons made it possible for the unfortunate to further

³⁸ Ibid., col. 758.

³⁹ Ibid., col. 759.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

their education in corruption and vice. In prison, Buxton's unfortunate youth found himself in close confinement with the dregs of British civilization. Each criminal he came in contact with would continue his dark education. The youthful offender would be lost, having evolved into a full-fledged criminal, and, as Buxton ruefully exclaimed, "He was made so by the public institutions of his country."⁴¹ At the same time, Buxton argued that any such committee should be focused on one topic and not attempt overhauling the entire criminal justice system - a task that was neither practical nor warranted. Moved by Buxton's comments, the House voted to create a Select Committee to examine the conditions of English penal institutions. Buxton readily accepted a position on the committee, together with twenty other members, including Wilberforce, Castlereagh, James Mackintosh, and Henry Brougham. Less than three weeks after taking his seat in Parliament, Buxton had secured his first victory.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "The question was then put and agreed to; and a committee was accordingly appointed, consisting of the following members: lord Castlereagh, Sir James Mackintosh, Mr. [George] Canning, Mr. Fowell Buxton, Mr. Bathurst, Mr. Bennet, Sir W. Scott, Mr. [Henry] Brougham, Mr. Serjeant Copley, lord Binning, Sir Arthur Piggott, Mr. Henry Clive, Mr. [William] Wilberforce, Mr. Vesey Fitz Gerald, Sir John Newport, Sir W. Curtis, Mr. Estcourt, Mr. Holford, Mr. Wilmot. Mr. Stuart Wortley, and Mr. Attorney-General." *Hansard*, 1st ser., vol. 39, (1819), col. 759. See also Leon Radzinowicz, *A History of English Criminal Law and*

The following day, March 2, Mackintosh revisited the issue of capital punishment in a lengthy speech. He again requested the creation of a select committee to examine the issue, and this time emphasized that previous Parliaments, most notably those that met in 1750 and 1770, had also wrestled with the subject of capital punishment.

Mackintosh noted that such great men as William Pitt the Elder, Henry Pelham, George Grenville, and George Lyttleton, men "not to be accused of having been rash theorists, or, according to the new word, *ultra-philosophers*," believed an examination necessary, especially now that feasible alternatives to death were available.⁴³ Mackintosh made it clear that he did not object to the idea of capital punishment, but found upsetting the growing list of nonviolent crimes to which the death penalty applied. He noted that the right "of inflicting that punishment to be a part of the right of self-defence with which societies, as well as individuals, are endowed," but that capital punishment was "evil when unnecessary." His goal, therefore, was "to bring the letter of the law more near to its practice," as well as to "make good men the anxious supporters of the criminal law,

its Administration from 1750, vol. 1, *The Movement for Reform* (London: Stevens & Sons Limited, 1948), 528-566.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, col. 780.

and to restore . . . that zealous attachment to the law in general."⁴⁴

If Mackintosh believed this entreaty would bring Buxton to his camp, he was sorely disappointed. Buxton again refused to throw his weight behind Mackintosh's motion, chiefly for the reasons he indicated the day prior - namely, that this was not the time for such a review. To those in Buxton's camp, Mackintosh's speech revisited the same arguments that Buxton offered just a year earlier in the *Inquiry*. In general, he agreed with Mackintosh on a number of points, chiefly that Parliament needed to review the ever growing list of capital offenses. Like Mackintosh, Buxton did not completely oppose the use of capital punishment, but believed that its current usage entailed a great deal of abuse.⁴⁵ "If we merely make forgery, sheep and horse stealing, not capital, it is an annual saving of thirty lives, which is something, and satisfies me in devoting my time to the subject."⁴⁶ Buxton, however, believed that the Select Committee was not the

⁴⁴ Ibid., cols. 783-784.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Buxton never accounted for why he went from wanting the elimination of capital punishment in its entirety to accepting its use under limited circumstances. Because of his focus on nonviolent crimes, it is possible that he viewed more violent crimes as worthy of death as a given fact, and therefore moot in terms of discussion. In any case, his endorsement of even limited uses of capital punishment must have placed him at odds with those members of his family and social circle who were practicing Friends.

⁴⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 83.

appropriate body to conduct this review, arguing that the work already assigned to it was staggering.⁴⁷ Mackintosh's motion was tabled for the time being.

"I am tolerably well," Buxton wrote his mother after completing his first month in Parliament, "and have not been detained very late in the house."⁴⁸ For Buxton, this would become a rare event. By the end of March 1819, Buxton was serving on both the Jail Committee and Criminal Law Committee of the House of Commons. Given his interests and expertise on the subjects, these committees were perfect for him. Such pursuits, however, came at a cost. Dedicating himself fully to their respective goals, Buxton complained that he needed to devote three mornings per week to each, which often left him stressed and fatigued.⁴⁹ He was slowly descending into a life of pressure and anxiety much like the one he created for himself during his

⁴⁷ Hansards, 1st ser., vol. 39, (1819), col. 806-808.

⁴⁸ TFB to Anna Buxton Hennings, February 8, 1819, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁴⁹ TFB to HB, February 1819, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

Buxton's concern about overwork and fatigue were not entirely rooted in his own experiences. Sir Samuel Romilly (1757-1818), the Solicitor-General, spearheaded the attempt to reform Great Britain's penal laws and mitigate the death penalty. On October 30, 1818, Romilly's wife died after a lengthy illness, and Romilly fell into a depressive state so severe that family and friends deemed it necessary to form a suicide watch. Four days later, their fears were realized when Romilly took his own life. Romilly's death robbed the anti-capital punishment faction of its most prominent and credible member. Sir James Mackintosh was an ally to Romilly, but lacked his charisma, whereas Buxton, new to Parliament, lacked political credentials. This said, the general sympathy that many in Parliament felt towards Romilly may have aided in their willingness to support the creation of these penal committees.

collegiate days. As with that earlier period, the burdens of his parliamentary routine would lead to his confinement to bed for days at a time.

After only four months in office, however, Buxton began to feel disillusioned about the manner in which Parliament operated. "I do not wonder that so many distinguished men have failed," he wrote of the institution.⁵⁰ Despite these feelings, Buxton enjoyed his first session in the House well enough to recommend membership to others. He urged his former college classmate, John Henry North, to run for office as well. "I have plenty of acquaintance [sic]," Buxton explained, "but hardly a familiar friend in the House, and this is a very needful thing."⁵¹

When the committees considering penal reform became bogged down in research, Buxton shifted his attentions to other issues. Among these was ending suttee, a traditional Hindu custom in which widows were burned upon their deceased husband's pyres. "I have been very busy in trying to prevent the Widows of the Hindoos [sic] from burning themselves when their Husbands die," he wrote his son Harry in March 1821. "I am going soon to make a speech about it

⁵⁰ TFB to John Henry North, April 19, 1819; as quoted in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 85.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

in Parliament."⁵² After three months of intensive research, Buxton began his campaign to end suttee.⁵³

On June 20, 1821, Buxton addressed the issue in a speech in the Commons. Following his usual form, he stated the problem in clear terms, arguing that the practice ran counter to the basic human right to life. He was not attacking Hinduism, Buxton argued, nor was he the religion's enemy. Indeed, he encouraged the Indians to maintain their own religious identity. Rather, he continued, he was dumbfounded that such a practice which robbed an innocent woman of her life was permitted in what was essentially British territory.

As usual, Buxton backed his claims with hard research, much of which he conducted himself. He focused on data from Fort William, in Calcutta. Since 1817, Buxton reported, nearly 2,400 women were burned to death as a consequence of this custom in that region alone. This was what he could confirm outright; he had no idea how many

⁵² TFB to John Henry (Harry) Buxton, March 19, 1821, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁵³ Eric Hobsbawm suggests the attack on suttee was a part of the European obsession with secularization that was overtaking Europe during this time. He writes: "Outside Europe, of course, conquering whites launched direct attacks upon the religion of their subjects or victims, either - like the British administrators in India who stamped out the burning of widows [*suttee*] and the ritual murder sect of the *thugs* in the 1830s - as convinced champions of enlightenment against superstition, or merely because they hardly knew what effect their measures would have on their victims." Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*, (1962. New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 222.

more died in hidden ceremonies. Buxton cited a recent conversation with a chaplain of the East India Company who reported that in one instance a Hindu widow struggled to escape the assembled crowd and was forcibly thrown upon her husband's funeral pyre which was immediately ignited. "The whole was consumed in a few minutes," he noted.⁵⁴ In another instance, a family who could not afford enough wood for a decent pyre resorted to setting fire to the husband's corpse and the widow's garments. "The fire soon took effect, but it was a considerable time before the sufferings of the unhappy woman were terminated."⁵⁵

Buxton emphasized that he was not interested in banning all traditional Hindu customs. Reproaching Hindus for this traditional practice required tact. He opposed any action that would "excite the apprehension of the natives . . . or shock their religious feelings or prejudices."⁵⁶ He also recognized that his was not the first attempt to end the practice: only recently, the Governor-General of India had achieved limited success in stopping this ritual.⁵⁷ "Still," he argued, "the question was not, in fact, one of religious toleration, but whether

⁵⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol. 5, (1821), col. 1219.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1218.

⁵⁷ Governor-General of India, Francis Rawdon-Hastings, 1st marquis of Hastings (1754-1826).

murder and suicide ought tacitly to be permitted under the British jurisdiction."⁵⁸

Buxton ruled out using force, wanting instead to pressure the Indians to initiate changes to Hindu religious law. Under Hindu law, widows under the age of 16 were exempt from suttee, yet there was evidence that women as young as twelve had perished this way. In fact, he added, one unfortunate widow was only eight years old.⁵⁹ This "evil," he concluded, was not true barbarity, but rather the result of native ignorance which could only be eradicated through proper European instruction.

The problem that suttee presented to Britain required cultural sensitivity. While many in Parliament were horrified by the practice, they were equally concerned with creating the perception that they were interfering with India's age-old religious practices. At best, any action taken by Parliament might result in the end of a custom that threatened the lives of countless Hindu widows annually. At worse, however, parliamentary interference could create an atmosphere of mistrust and hostility among

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., col. 1219. Buxton, wrote to his seven-year-old son John Henry (Harry) about his efforts to suppress suttee. Of this particular case, Buxton confided to Harry that, "I think & in my opinion it would have been better to have given her a good hearty whipping & sent her to school to learn her alphabet." TFB to John Henry (Harry) Buxton, March 19, 1821, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

native Indians that might result in open rebellion against British rule and cost the lives of thousands of British soldiers.

Rather than forcibly stopping suttee, Buxton urged Parliament to implement an aggressive program of education and deterrence to shape the religious mindset of the next generation of Indian Hindus. Due to the sensitivity of the matter, Parliament decided to pursue a gradualist course, letting the practice end over time. The matter was addressed again in 1823, with Parliament again committing to this policy, but by 1830, it was clear that this approach had not worked.⁶⁰ The practice, while not as prevalent as it had been, still occurred. Outraged Britons petitioned Parliament to act. On March 16, 1830, Buxton presented a set of petitions from Protestant Dissenters who demanded Parliament take action on the matter. In the course of the ensuing debate, however, Buxton stated that he had received an unconfirmed report which suggested that the current Governor-General of India, William Bentinck, had already banned the practice. No one else had received this information, so it was decided to request verification

⁶⁰ In 1823, Buxton expanded his research to include the possibility that Hindu infants were also being deliberately killed according to custom. Hansards, 2nd. Ser., vol. 9, (1823), col. 1021.

from India.⁶¹ Three months later, the Indian dispatches confirmed that Bentinick had abolished the practice. Buxton "congratulated the House and the country" after hearing the news, and credited Bentinick for accomplishing a task that previous governors had been unable to achieve.⁶²

On July 6, 1819, the *Report from the Select Committee on Criminal Laws* was presented to Parliament. In conducting their research, the Select Committee focused on two points. First, it sought to determine the nature of Britain's "national morality." Second, it wanted to ascertain whether the criminal law was "useless or mischievous," and could be easily revised or "discarded."⁶³ As might be guessed, the report supported all that Mackintosh and Buxton claimed previously: while the amount of crime in recent years had increased, the number of prosecutions and convictions had significantly dropped. "Evidence sufficiently establishes the general disinclination of traders to prosecute for forgeries on themselves, or to furnish the Bank of England with the

⁶¹ Ibid., vol. 23, (1830), col. 390.

⁶² Ibid., vol. 24, (1830), col. 1355-1356. This did not end suttee issue. British leaders in India proved incapable of completely eradicating the practice and although the number of deaths decreased over time, Parliament continued to grapple with the problem until the end of the nineteenth century.

⁶³ Hansards, 1st. ser., vol. 40, (1819), col. 1521.

means of conviction," the report maintained.⁶⁴ The appendix, containing the committee's research and records, numbered nearly 150 pages—lengthier than the report itself. Mackintosh noted that the committee avoided making any recommendations for action in the report because members believed it would be improper to act without allowing a "more ample inquiry" of their findings.⁶⁵ More importantly, Mackintosh believed that it was essential for the House to reappoint the committee during the next session to gather additional data.

It was not until May 9, 1820, that Parliament's discussion of the criminal laws was revisited. Mackintosh, reiterating the need for the House to reappoint the Select Committee, introduced three bills for consideration based upon the information contained in the 1819 report. These bills called for the repeal of laws that deprived convicted criminals of the "benefit of clergy" in certain cases of theft.⁶⁶ Ten days later, Mackintosh withdrew these bills

⁶⁴ *Report from the Select Committee on Criminal Laws &c.* p.13; 1819 (585) VIII. 1.

⁶⁵ *Hansards, 1st. ser., vol. 40, (1819), col. 1519.*

⁶⁶ Mackintosh's motions targeted those laws that "took away the benefit of clergy from persons convicted of stealing privately to the value of forty shillings in a dwelling house; stealing privately to the value of five shillings in a shop or warehouse; and stealing privately to the value of forty shillings on a navigable river, or in a port of entry and discharge." *Hansards, 2nd. ser., vol. 1, (1820), 235.* "Benefit of clergy" was a legal concept introduced during the Middle Ages that allowed clerics accused of crimes to be tried by ecclesiastical rather than secular courts. By the sixteenth century, this privilege was

and introduced another, this one for "mitigating the severity of punishment" in certain instances of forgery and related crimes.⁶⁷ His goal was to target those laws that called for capital punishment for forgery and its related crimes. Romilly spent years trying to achieve this for the anti-capital punishment faction and this seemed the first step towards eliminating capital punishment.⁶⁸ The stage was therefore set and one year later, on May 23, 1821, Mackintosh, Buxton and those who opposed capital punishment, presented to Parliament a bill that would mitigate the sentence of death for forgery related offenses. In its place, Mackintosh and Buxton suggested transportation until a more acceptable punishment could be found.

The government, represented by the Solicitor-General, Sir John Singleton Copley, argued that there were a number of problems with the bill, starting with the manner in

extended to anyone who could demonstrate literacy by reading a selected passage of scripture. By the late eighteenth century, "benefit of clergy" was seen as a means to avoid capital punishment for crimes where the death penalty might be warranted. It was abolished in 1827. See David Bentley, *English Criminal Justice in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1998), 4-5.

⁶⁷ Hansards, 2nd. ser., vol. 1, (1820), col. 480.

⁶⁸ Romilly did not believe in the complete abolition of capital punishment. Richard R. Follett noted that Romilly believed it only natural for the severity of punishment to increase if lesser acts failed to have any effect on an offender. Rather, Romilly's complaint was rooted in his inability to rationalize "the application of the death penalty to the multitude of crimes for which it was assigned." Follett, *Evangelicalism*, 51.

which it was constructed. Copley argued that the bill was based on the report provided by Mackintosh's Select Committee on July 6, 1820. This was problematic because according to the Solicitor-General the report was based on misrepresentations and falsehoods. Copley was very careful not to condemn the committee members, but he took to task "their method of inquiry, and . . . the circumstances connected with that inquiry."⁶⁹ He claimed that the committee lacked any objectivity. It was largely staffed with members who clearly wanted to limit or eliminate capital punishment and actively sought out testimony from experts and witnesses who held views similar to their own. At the same time, Copley complained, those committee members who supported capital punishment were intimidated into modifying their views to conform to those of the majority.

Even worse, Copley added, the report was "evidently drawn up in a haste[sic]," because it contained numerous inaccuracies, including misstating certain facts about criminal cases.⁷⁰ The most troubling aspect of these errors, Copley said, was that the committee saw fit to condemn the actions of a judge, recently deceased. The

⁶⁹ Hansard, 2nd ser., vol. 5, (1821), cols. 893-971.

⁷⁰ Ibid., col. 894.

report maintained that the judge sentenced a man to death not for the crime of burglary, with which he was charged, but for other offenses not appearing on the initial charge sheet. Copley maintained that the sentence was legal and legitimate, and that at best, the committee should have taken better care to avoid staining the reputation of a jurist who could no longer defend himself.⁷¹ Interestingly, when Buxton asked Copley if the offender had been convicted of burglary, the Solicitor-General undermined his own argument by responding that he had not; the man had been charged with seven of counts of larceny and convicted of four. Copley then noted that he had only mentioned the case in an attempt to clear the judge's name from "the odium which might be thought to have been thrown by the report upon his memory."⁷²

Copley offered an argument based on fear. If Buxton and Mackintosh had their way, Copley continued, then forgery would be a capital offense only when it involved counterfeiting notes from the Bank of England. As it stood, the law applied to forgery of wills—"a crime easily committed, and by which families might be stripped of their entire property."⁷³ It also applied to the forgery of

⁷¹ Ibid., cols. 894-895.

⁷² Ibid., col. 895.

⁷³ Ibid.

marriage records, an offense that likewise affected property, but also had the potential of undermining familial relationships and could "affect the legitimacy and character of its members."⁷⁴ The protection of property deeds and stocks were likewise covered under the forgery law. In previous generations, Copley noted, forgery was treated as a misdemeanour. This was because literacy was low and general commerce was still in its infancy. During the reign of Elizabeth, the punishment for forgery was gruesome: offenders were required to repay twice the value of their theft, be pilloried, have their ears nailed to the pillory, their noses slit, and be seared with a hot iron. Moreover, they forfeited their belongings to the Crown, lost their lands and risked life imprisonment.⁷⁵ Subsequent Parliaments recognized the brutality of these punishments and lessened their severity, but this leniency contributed to an increase in forgery-related offenses. By the eighteenth century, forgery had gotten out of hand with malcontents in the lower classes bringing about the ruin of otherwise honest, hardworking citizens.

Sentences of transportation or confinement, recommended by Buxton and Mackintosh, did not offer the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., col. 896.

same deterrence as capital punishment. Neither induced the offender to reason that his actions might have ramifications, and neither instilled in the offender a sense of fear or shame. In fact, many of those on trial for forgery who had been sentenced to transportation often thanked the judge or celebrated the fact that they were being given the opportunity to leave England.⁷⁶ "The object of punishment," Copley observed, "was the prevention of crime by terror."⁷⁷ Copley admitted that he did not expect any forger to rationalize that his actions might hurt another individual. He did, however, believe that as long as forgery remained a capital offense, potential forgers would think twice before committing their crimes. The choice was simple: Copley told members that they could either defer to the anti-death penalty faction and treat forgery and its related offenses lightly, or sustain the existing laws and the sentence they mandated.

Buxton took the Copley's argument apart, point by point, and turned the discussion into one on the nature of punishment itself. The first argument he needed to refute was the notion that the current law allowed for alternative punishments. For some crimes the law did allow for fines,

⁷⁶ Ibid., cols. 897-898.

⁷⁷ Ibid., col. 897.

imprisonment and in extreme cases, corporal punishments. These, however, were not options in cases of forgery or its related crimes. Copley also argued that the law gave judges the discretion to impose transportation from England for a period of no less than seven years or imprisonment on board prison hulks for a period determined by a court. Both options were dismissed by Buxton as legitimate solutions to crime. Although he and Mackintosh proposed transportation as an alternative to capital punishment, they did so with serious reservations. "I should be guilty of insincerity," he began, "if I were to contend that transportation was any punishment at all. In fact, it is a privilege, and a privilege open to as many of his Majesty's subjects as may qualify themselves for its enjoyment, by the commission of a transportable offense."⁷⁸ The use of the hulks, Buxton continued, were even more problematic as there was no evidence that they served any purpose other than that of immediate convenience. "I am not prepared to state that that mode of punishment is in a perfect state; on the contrary, I entirely distrust its efficiency."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Thomas Fowell Buxton, *Speech of Thomas Fowell Buxton, Esq., in the House of Commons, Wednesday, May 23rd, 1821, On the Bill for Mitigating the Severity of Punishment in Certain Cases of Forgery, and the Crimes Connected Therewith.* (T. C. Hansard: Cornhill, 1821), 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

The problem, as Buxton explained it, was that when stipulated for such a variety of offenses, capital punishment was ineffective. "The punishment of death is supposed to be *necessary* for the prevention of crime," he said.⁸⁰

We have gone on long enough taking it for granted, that capital punishment does restrain crime; and the time is now arrived in which we may fairly ask, does it do so? and in which we are bound to consider the state of crime in that country where this method of repressing it has so long been practised.⁸¹

It had become an easy solution in addressing the problem of crime, he continued, as evidenced by the fact that in the previous century not one area of law had grown as extensively as had the number of capital offenses.⁸² If capital punishment deterred crime, Buxton said, then it was up to Copley to prove it.

In 1818, Buxton continued, no less than 107,000 individuals were processed into Britain's penal system. What made the number all the more unsettling was that these were the offenders who were apprehended; there was no accounting for those who managed to avoid capture. While this figure might seem staggering, Buxton estimated that it accounted for only one-quarter of those engaged in criminal acts. If this were true, Buxton asked, then where was any

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2-3.

⁸¹ Ibid., 3.

⁸² Ibid., 3.

proof that crime had been prevented by such harsh penalties?⁸³

Failing to reform the penal system would have dire consequences for Great Britain, Buxton warned. It would not only aid in the perpetuation of crime and antisocial behaviors, it would undermine civilized society.

The just man sees, that his support is demanded to laws which violate all justice; which confound crimes the most venial and most atrocious, by one terrible uniformity of punishment. The just man sees this, and remains inactive. You ask the merciful man to aid you. But, how can any many who loves mercy contribute to the support of laws which set the common principles of humanity at defiance? And then, the religious man. I know that I am now upon delicate ground; and that this is neither the time, nor the occasion, for catering very largely upon this subject . . . [c]an you afford to lose the religious man from your service? But you do lose him.⁸⁴

Moreover, Buxton noted the committee had learned that nearly ten thousand children in London supported themselves through petty crimes. These children were sinking further into a criminal mindset,

passing through an apprenticeship which, as it will disqualify them from becoming useful members of society, will fit them to become, for a time, the terror, and then the disgrace of your country—and who have yet to revenge on society, its inattention and its carelessness.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

If Copley and his supporters were interested in reducing crime, Buxton noted, then why not enact laws that also addressed this type of rampant poverty?

Buxton spoke for quite some time, arguing that imposing harsh penalties failed to reduce crime.⁸⁶ He closed with the revelation that he had recently visited a prison where eight inmates had been sentenced to death. Visiting the day before their executions, Buxton stated his reason for doing so was not morbid curiosity, but rather that he was led to their cells "by the desire of learning from dying men . . . what was the original cause of their criminality."⁸⁷ Here he found complete justification in his theory - that these condemned had been led down an increasingly darker path, deed by deed, until their last acts resulted in capital sentences. The scene touched Buxton deeply. "It is impossible to witness scenes of this kind," Buxton wrote,

without asking whether we have a right to do so much in vengeance, and so little in prevention - without acknowledging, that as the greatest of all charities is that of turning the sinner from the error of his ways, so the greatest of all cruelties is the cruelty of affording facility to crime and of allowing the seeds of evil to be scattered around us in the

⁸⁶ Hansard's account of Buxton speech runs over fifty columns-essentially twenty five pages-and was later released as a seventy page pamphlet.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 67.

deceitful belief that we can cut off the weed as it rises."⁸⁸

The results of such a system, Buxton concluded, were ultimately devastating to the state. By maintaining a system of punishment that lacked equity, the British government would surely lose public support. The participation and loyalty of otherwise just and proper citizens would decrease, and hundreds-if not thousands-of criminals would evade justice because juries would balk at the idea of sending them to their deaths. This, Buxton noted, was the supreme irony-that a system designed to prevent crime by its unreasonableness undermined justice.

Buxton asserted that his opposition to capital punishment in this instance was justified. Despite this, Buxton feared that his association with penal reform would allow his opponents to characterize him as being too sympathetic to the criminal element. His call for reform did not mean that criminals deserved free reign, he noted. "Let me not be misunderstood, as I sometimes have been, as an Advocate for the Criminal, or the Apologist of Crime."⁸⁹

This was Buxton's finest moment. It was far better than Spitalfields five years earlier and exceeded anything

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Buxton, *Severity of Punishment*, 65. This phrase (and the emphasis placed on it) evidently resonated with either Buxton or his publisher; the transcript printed in Hansard Parliamentary Debates uses the phrase "apologist of crimes." Hansard, 2nd ser., vol. 5, (1821), col. 945.

he had done in the interim. This speech was the one for which he had been preparing himself since becoming involved in the penal reform movement.

The immediate response to Buxton's eloquence was a sense of admiration. Even those members who did not agree with the presentation found reason to compliment Buxton for the scope of his research. John Smith, the member from Medhurst, declared that Buxton's speech was "highly creditable to his talents, but still more creditable to his humanity."⁹⁰ Another member, "eulogized the eloquence and ability of the exposition" displayed by Buxton, even though he strongly disagreed with both Buxton's position and findings.⁹¹ Other members likewise held Buxton's speech in high regard, even if they believed his final position flawed. When the bill was finally put to a vote, Buxton's great oratory was in vain: the bill failed to pass the House by a vote of 118 against, and 74 in support. This action was upheld in a subsequent vote on June 4, when the House again rejected the measure, this time by a vote of 121 against, and 115 in support.

While Buxton failed in his grand appeal, his efforts to revise the use of capital punishment did not go

⁹⁰ Hansards, 2nd ser., vol. 5, (1821), col. 954.

⁹¹ Ibid., 952.

unnoticed. In fact, it was Buxton's failure to convince Parliament to vote in favor of all of Mackintosh's resolutions on the criminal law that set in motion a number of events that would shape his own destiny. And much like Buxton's previous life-changing experiences, this began with a seemingly innocent act: On the evening following his speech to Parliament, Buxton was surprised to receive a lengthy note from Wilberforce. On its own, this letter was not unusual, nor would Buxton have interpreted it as such. Buxton and Wilberforce had grown close over the years, and Wilberforce had previously sent Buxton notes of congratulations or condolences after speeches. Yet this note was different in that Wilberforce's request would change Buxton's life.

Wilberforce's letter began by modestly reminding his colleague that it had been thirty-three years since Wilberforce had announced in Parliament that he would bring the issue of the slave trade to the floor. Shortly thereafter, however, he became deathly ill. Fearing his death would end any possibility for addressing the issue, Wilberforce confessed that he secured from his friend and collaborator William Pitt the Younger, a promise to address the matter in the event Wilberforce could not. "I ought not to look confidently to my being able to carry through

any business of importance in the House of Commons," he confided.⁹² Pitt, however, lacked either the enthusiasm or the intensity brought to the matter by Wilberforce because although Parliament acted to end Britain's participation in the slave trade, Pitt was no longer interested in holding debates on ending slavery within the empire itself.⁹³

Wilberforce's letter betrayed the sense of failure he had experienced for a generation. Convinced that he had been close to ending slavery in 1807, he also recognized that if the deed were not accomplished soon, it might never come to pass. More to the point, Wilberforce conceded that he simply did not have the wherewithal to mount yet another major battle in Parliament. He was now in his sixties and his health had grown worse as he aged. What Wilberforce needed was a partner - a youthful, credible orator who had the tenacity that the older Wilberforce now lacked. "I have for some time been viewing you in this connexion [sic]," Wilberforce wrote, "and after what passed last night, I can no longer forbear resorting to you . . . to take most seriously into consideration, the expediency of your

⁹² William Wilberforce to TFB, May 24, 1821, as cited in *Memoirs*, 109.

⁹³ Henry Stanton dismissed Pitt's pro-abolition stance as "hollow-hearted - a mere trick to gain popular applause in unwonted quarters, and retain his hold upon Wilberforce." Henry Stanton, *Sketches of Reforms and Reformers of Great Britain and Ireland*, (New York: Wiley, 1849), 63.

devoting yourself to this *blessed service*."⁹⁴ In short, Wilberforce needed a man like Buxton.

Wilberforce suggested two reasons for designating Buxton as his heir apparent. The first was Buxton's repeated and oft demonstrated perseverance when it came to combating public opinion to rectify social ills. The second reason Wilberforce put forth was more spiritual in nature. "In forming a *partnership* of this sort with you," he added, "I cannot doubt that I should be doing an act highly pleasing to God and beneficial to my fellow creatures."⁹⁵ Wilberforce attributed his desire to end slavery as being "enforced on me, by every consideration of religion, justice and humanity."⁹⁶

In reading his letter, one cannot help but notice that Wilberforce subtly referenced yet a third reason for his profound request. If successful, this partnership would not only secure the abolition of slavery, it would also strengthen Buxton's own religious conviction. "If it be His will, may He render you an instrument of extensive usefulness; but above all, may He give you the disposition to say at all times, 'Lord, what wouldst thou have me to

⁹⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 110.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Mottram, *Buxton the Liberator*, 43.

do,' or suffer?' looking to Him, through Christ, for wisdom and strength."⁹⁷

Yet Wilberforce was fully aware that Buxton had a full plate: in addition to the brewery and his involvement on the committees on criminal law and punishment, Buxton was still trying to eliminate the Indian *suttee*. Were Buxton to accept his offer, Wilberforce wanted his services only as far as could be "consistent with the due discharge of the obligations . . . already contracted, and in part so admirably fulfilled."⁹⁸ Wilberforce conceded that this was not going to be an easy fight. Nor did he anticipate that it would conclude in his life time. To rectify what he considered his one major failure, Wilberforce needed a man who, he believed, could withstand the attacks from the solidly entrenched economic and imperial interests, as well as from the plantation owners who possessed seemingly unlimited resources. For this endeavor, Wilberforce needed someone who could at once blend Christian piety and extensively researched facts without emotional manipulation or disingenuousness. For this long and arduous fight, he needed Buxton—a man with tremendous emotional and spiritual strengths—to see it through.

⁹⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 110.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter Six: Taking Command, 1822-1829

Buxton did not take Wilberforce's request lightly; but neither did he rush to accept the challenge. Buxton was on the boards of at least three charitable institutions: the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline and for the Reformation of Juvenile Offenders, the Spitalfields Benevolent Society, and the London Dispensary.¹ He was also working to establish infant schools in Spitalfields with the assistance of Samuel Wilderspin.² Buxton's fight over the criminal laws the previous year left him mentally spent and physically exhausted; he was distracted and unfocused. Immersing himself in what was certain to be a major fight was a daunting prospect. In fact, it was not until October 1822, when Wilberforce, Stephen Lushington, Zachary Macaulay, and Edward Harbord (Lord Suffield), visited with Buxton and pressed him to take up the cause, that, unable

¹ *The Annual Subscription Charities and Public Societies in London* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1823), 96-97; 109-111; 119-120.

² Samuel Wilderspin (1792-1866) was a major advocate of infant education. He was the head of the Spitalfields Infant School from its start in 1820. See W. P. McCann, "Wilderspin, Samuel (1791-1866)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29404> (accessed June 22, 2009). Samuel Wilderspin, *Infant Education, or Remarks on the Importance of Educating the Infant Poor, from the Age of Eighteen Months to Seven Years, with an Account of the Spitalfields' Infant School and the System of Instruction There Adopted*, 3 ed. (London, W. Simpkin & R. Marshall, 1825), 31.

to resist any further, he agreed.³ Later, Wilberforce wrote to Buxton suggesting that they meet to prepare a course of action. This "secret cabinet council," as Wilberforce termed it, would determine the abolitionist faction's platform and strategy.⁴

Buxton's hesitancy to accept Wilberforce's challenge may have been rooted in his inability to find a sense of order and direction within the abolition movement. Moreover, of the causes he embraced during his early years in Parliament, slavery and abolition were the ones with which he had the least amount of direct experience. He had included abolition as a part of his overall political agenda in 1820, but gave no indication as to how he hoped to involve himself in the process. Based upon the information contained in his letters and the *Memoirs*, Buxton's first meeting with the African Institution in January 1821, seems to have occurred strictly by happenstance.⁵ He notes

³ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 130.

⁴ William Wilberforce to TFB, n.d., as cited in Caspar Morris, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (New York: Protestant Episcopal Society for the Promotion of Evangelical Knowledge, 1857), 659-660. Wilberforce's participation during this episode is difficult to assess because many of his personal papers were destroyed by his sons following his death in 1833. Buxton, *Memoirs*, 119.

⁵ The African Institution was created by William Wilberforce, James Stephens, and Henry Brougham after the British slave trade ended to "watch over the law abolishing the slave trade." Frank J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1926), 188. It was a major force behind the "Sierra Leone scheme," a plan devised after the American Revolution through which emancipated slaves who had fought for England would be resettled in Africa. The plan allowed for

a strange desire to attend a meeting, and when the opportunity presented itself, Buxton cancelled a planned weekend vacation to attend. After silently observing the society's meeting, Buxton was granted the opportunity to speak. He angrily denounced the society, arguing that their inactivity and general sluggishness was partially responsible for the continuance of slavery within the empire. He also noted that they had seriously compromised their effectiveness because the organization had grown content with lurking in the political background. Its usefulness in mobilizing opinion against the slavery establishment was nonexistent because the public had come to see them as a part of that establishment. The organization held secret meetings with government ministers and tried to gently sway local officials to their cause. These tactics worked well in 1807, in the final push to outlaw the slave trade, Buxton noted, but they were hopelessly outdated now. Confrontation was necessary, both

the creation of a small colony under British control, as well as the introduction of Christian religious training for its inhabitants. The society lost much of its public credibility after it attempted to generate support by publishing a story of slave abuse that was later proven false. Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 177. Wilberforce proposed the creation of the organization in March, 1807, but most sources date the society from its formal introduction to the public in 1808. Pollack, *Wilberforce*, 224; see also James Walvin, *England. Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (Jackson, MS and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 124, and Seymore Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 96.

with the public and Parliament, a method with which this band of purported activists were apparently unfamiliar. Consequently, public opinion on slavery was apathetic, Buxton proclaimed, for the "public knew little and cared little on the subject."⁶

In all likelihood the public had grown tired of the slavery issue. Following their victory in 1807, abolitionists rejected the notion of unconditional emancipation and instead pursued a path by which freedom would come in measured steps. Some abolitionists decided to capitalize on their newfound political capital in a discreet manner by attempting to influence official policy in both Britain and Europe. By 1814, over two hundred separate antislavery organizations, part of a larger interrelated Quaker network, existed in Britain, and would grow to four times that number within the next decade.⁷

Whether Wilberforce was present during Buxton's "vehement reprobation" is unclear. Buxton, however, suspected that he might have offended Wilberforce by his outburst and had second thoughts about being so direct. Two days later, Buxton crossed paths with Wilberforce and expressed genuine surprised at the older man's "Christian

⁶ TFB to HB, January 30, 1821, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁷ Seymour Drescher, "Public Opinion and the Destruction of British Colonial Slavery," *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*, ed. James Walvin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 24.

humility." After thanking Buxton for his frank openness, Wilberforce assured his colleague that his comments were far from insulting. They were, in fact, a welcomed wake-up call for everyone involved.⁸ They discussed the need for a more active antislavery organization, and other issues "too complicated to repeat," he proudly wrote Hannah.⁹ The exchange left Buxton filled with a greater sense of respect for Wilberforce and more desirous of pushing the African Institution into action. In the end, Buxton became a supporter of the organization, and paid an annual subscription of £10.10s.

In the years since that fateful meeting, however, Buxton had become distracted by other issues and familial concerns; his hope of reinvigorating the African Institution gradually became impractical, given his other responsibilities. The deathbed plea of his sister-in-law Priscilla that he act on behalf of the slaves was certainly on his mind at this time, but with the penal reform bill, the suttee legislation, and his parliamentary committees, Buxton was unable to direct his attention towards the issue until 1823.

⁸ Ibid., February 1, 1821, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁹ Ibid.

The first move of what was to become a decade-long contest began in early March 1823, when Wilberforce published a pamphlet in which he presented the reasons why slavery must end.¹⁰ He argued that the chattel system, the lack of legal protections for slaves, and the use of the whip, all fundamentally contributed to a system by which enslaved Africans were dehumanized and maltreated. Wilberforce also attacked the West Indian legislatures as being complicit in this degradation and argued that their leadership had not reflected the best of Christian principles. Even the act of marriage, which Wilberforce characterized as a basic Christian institution, was infected by a system of racism and hostility.¹¹ The institution of slavery was incompatible with Britain's role as a Christian and moral state; its continued presence served only as a dark mark against an otherwise remarkable people. "Let us act with an energy suited to the importance of the interests for which we contend," he concluded. "Justice, humanity, and sound policy prescribe our course, and will animate our efforts."¹²

¹⁰ William Wilberforce, *Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1823).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21-22

¹² *Ibid.*, 77.

Thomas Clarkson also produced a pamphlet, *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies, with a View to their Ultimate Emancipation*, in which he asserted that emancipation had always been a goal for the abolitionists; the question lay in the logistics. Moreover, Clarkson blamed the plantation owners and colonial legislatures for the distress and unrest in the West Indies, noting that they had failed to introduce legislation to ameliorate or improve the lives of their slaves.¹³

These pamphlets served two purposes. First, they were designed to reacquaint the public with the issue of slavery by bombarding readers with facts and statistics. More importantly, however, the pamphlets served as an introduction and fund-raising tool for a new organization, the "Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions," more popularly known as the "Anti-Slavery Society."¹⁴ The African Institution existed in name only, until 1827, when declining membership and financial support brought

¹³ Thomas Clarkson, *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies, with a View to their Ultimate Emancipation* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1823), 1-3.

¹⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 117. Klingberg identifies the organization as the "London Anti-Slavery Society," to differentiate it from other organizations that utilized similar names. Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 245.

operations to a halt. By 1827, the "truly patriotic and Christian"¹⁵ Anti-Slavery Society had effectively supplanted the African Institution as the primary organization advocating change in colonial policies on slavery. Prince William Frederick, the duke of Gloucester and Edinburgh, was its patron and president.¹⁶ Its members included Thomas Clarkson, James Mackintosh, Henry Brougham, Stephen Lushington, and Zachary Macaulay. Buxton and Wilberforce were among its vice-presidents, and Samuel Hoare served as the society's secretary.

On March 18, 1823, Wilberforce submitted a petition to Parliament drafted by Quakers, calling for the immediate abolition of slavery within the British Empire. When Foreign Secretary George Canning asked if he intended to use the petition as the basis for a motion, Wilberforce responded that he would not, but that Buxton would. Buxton then gave the House notice that on April 22 he would introduce a motion asking the House to consider the state

¹⁵ "Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery," *Scottish Missionary and Philanthropic Register* (Edinburgh, Scotland), November 1, 1824, 443.

¹⁶ William Frederick (1776-1834) was the son of William Henry, a younger brother of George III. He was charitable and religious, but his pompous and arrogant manner made him the butt of jokes in the British press. See A. W. Purdue, "William Frederick, Prince, second duke of Gloucester and Edinburgh (1776-1834)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29457> (accessed July 15, 2009).

of slavery within the colonies.¹⁷ Several days later, Sir Robert Wilson introduced another petition in hopes of forcing Parliament to deal with the issue, but the House decided to wait until Buxton had made his motion.¹⁸

House business prevented Buxton from bringing his motion on abolition until May 15. When he was finally afforded the opportunity to speak, Buxton began by stressing to the House that his motives were pure and Christian, and not shaped by distrust or malice towards the West Indian faction. It was, however, "no slight matter" that one million British subjects were slaves.¹⁹

The object at which we aim, is the extinction of slavery—nothing less than the extinction of slavery—in nothing less than the whole of the British dominions:—not, however, the rapid termination of that state—not the sudden emancipation of the negro—but such preparatory steps, such measures of precaution, as, by slow degrees, and in a course of years, first fitting and qualifying the slave for the enjoyment of freedom, shall gently conduct us to the annihilation of slavery.²⁰

Buxton emphasized that the abolitionist faction in the House did not advocate immediate emancipation because to do so with no regard for how former slaves would fit into society was reckless. Rather, Buxton proposed that slave children born after a certain date would be free and the

¹⁷ Hansards, 2nd ser., vol. 8, (1823), cols. 630.

¹⁸ Ibid., cols. 766-71.

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. 9, (1823), col. 258.

²⁰ Ibid., col. 265.

number of people enslaved would diminish through attrition. In ten years, there would be a noticeable difference; in thirty, a drastic difference. Within a generation or two, there would only remain a scattering of slaves and soon, they "will have followed [their] brethren, and slavery will be no more."²¹

This was not, Buxton emphasized, a new or untested plan; it was based on one used in the northern parts of the United States with great success. It was also being implemented in South America, without provoking a riot or disturbance. Slavery was being peacefully and gradually erased in a manner that was fair and practical. Buxton put his critics, especially those of the West Indian faction, on notice that the abolitionists were a determined lot. If the West Indians blocked this goal, Buxton warned, he would not hesitate to turn to the public for support. "The public voice is with us," he proclaimed, "and I, for one, will never fail to call upon the public, loudly to express their opinion, till justice has so far prevailed as to pronounce that every child is entitled to liberty."²²

Buxton continued, attacking slavery from every possible angle. He argued that slave owners had no right

²¹ Ibid., col. 267.

²² Ibid., col. 270.

to exert control over another human being, that their claims were rooted on the "sacred foundations" of "robbery, man-stealing, and murder."²³ He even conceded that the slave owner could avoid a small measure of blame since his actions were licensed by British law. Buxton hammered these points repeatedly, meticulously building his case against the institution. When he felt he had sufficiently established his foundation, Buxton then introduced the heart of his motion. "I move," he said,

That the State of Slavery is repugnant to the principles of the British constitution, and of the Christian religion; and that it ought to be gradually abolished throughout the British colonies, with as much expedition as may be found consistent with a due regard to the well-being of the parties concerned.²⁴

Canning responded to Buxton's motion, stating that in substance he agreed with many of Buxton's points. He took issue, however, with Buxton's introduction of Christianity into the argument. Christian scripture made no references against slavery, Canning noted. Buxton, he continued, was incorrect in attempting to imply a correlation between modern slavery and its ancient Biblical counterpart. Canning pointed out that under Rome, slavery was brutal; slave owners had the power of life and death over their

²³ Ibid., col. 272.

²⁴ Ibid., col. 274-275.

slaves-modern slavery did not operate in that fashion.²⁵

Yet what Canning found interesting was that if Buxton was committed to emancipation on Christian grounds, how could he segregate those enslaved into two groups, with one eligible for immediate freedom, while abandoning the other to a lifetime of servitude?²⁶

Canning agreed that the whipping of women was barbaric and that the practice should be stopped. He likewise concurred that slaves in the colonies did not receive adequate religious education. Canning believed that there needed to be revisions in the law to allow for the recognition of marriage between slaves and to perhaps include marriage as a condition of emancipation. He suggested that the legal system might further be modified so that courts would accept testimony and evidence from slaves and former slaves. In short, Canning stated that the government was not opposed to all of the abolitionists' recommendations. He proposed three immediate resolutions that he believed would lead to the amelioration of colonial slavery:

That it is expedient to adopt effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the condition of the slave population in his majesty's colonies.

²⁵ Ibid., col. 280.

²⁶ Ibid., col. 281.

That, through a determined and persevering, but at the same time judicious and temperate, enforcement of such measures, this House looks forward to a progressive improvement in the character of the slave population, such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of his majesty's subjects.

That this House is anxious for the accomplishment of this purpose, at the earliest period that shall be compatible with the well-being of the slaves themselves, with the safety of the colonies, and with a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of private property.

If Parliament was amenable to those points, Canning stated, he would propose one more:

That the said resolutions be laid before his majesty by such members of this House as are of his majesty's most honourable privy council.²⁷

There was, however, one area of contention in all of this, Canning observed. The British government exercised control over only a small number of its colonies; the remainder had colonial legislatures. Canning did not believe it prudent for Britain to compel those colonies with legislatures to adopt these policies; he wanted these groups to move towards amelioration on their own, with London in reserve for counsel or advice.²⁸

Other members participated in the discussion, including Wilberforce and Brougham, and Charles Ellis, a West Indian planter, who did not deny that the system

²⁷ Ibid., col. 285-286.

²⁸ Ibid., col. 286.

contained problems, but argued for the course of moderation. "The debate was by no means so interesting as we expected," Wilberforce wrote later. "Buxton's opening speech was not so good as his openings have before been. His reply however, though short, was, not sweet indeed, but excellent. . . . [O]n the whole we have done good service, I trust, by getting Mr. Canning pledged to certain important reforms."²⁹

Buxton, meanwhile, received praise from abolitionists and the expected condemnation from the West Indian interests. When he was offered the opportunity to visit the West Indies to see the conditions of slavery in person, Buxton was prepared to accept. As with his penal work, such a journey would allow him the opportunity to investigate slavery first-hand, to interview and question slaves, slave overseers, and slave owners, in their own environment. It would allow him to put an institution into a context that second- and third-hand reports could not provide him. When Wilberforce learned of the offer and Buxton's interest, however, he immediately urged his protégé to abandon the idea. Buxton was a hated man in the West Indies, Wilberforce contended, and even if the

²⁹ William Wilberforce to Samuel Wilberforce, May 17, 1823, as cited in Anna Maria Wilberforce, ed., *Private Papers of William Wilberforce* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), 208-209.

governor allowed him safe passage, no one could guarantee Buxton's safety.³⁰

In August, the unthinkable took place and threatened to undermine Buxton's entire scheme. On August 18, slaves in the British colony of Demerara rose up in rebellion, threatening the safety of the white colonists.³¹ John Smith, a white missionary who had long been critical of slavery and its effects, was arrested two days later and accused of a number of offenses, including fomenting discontent among the slaves, having foreknowledge of the pending uprising, and failing to alert the proper authorities to prevent the insurrection.³² The most damaging charge against Smith was that during the entire episode he remained in contact with one of the revolt's leaders, a slave named Quamina, providing him with advice and counsel and failing to make any attempt to apprehend him.³³ The amount of violence committed by the rebels was surprisingly small, but they were extremely successful in

³⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 123. That Buxton would entertain this notion demonstrates his single-mindedness and myopic focus that bordered on selfishness, as Hannah was pregnant. After the deaths of their children in 1820, Hannah gave birth to two more: Thomas Fowell on August 29, 1821, and their last child, Charles, on November 18, 1823.

³¹ Demerara was a coastal colony and is part of modern day Guyana, in South America.

³² *London Missionary Society's Report of the Proceedings Against the Late Rev. J. Smith, of Demerara, Minister of the Gospel, who was tried under Martial Law and Condemned to Death, on a Charge of Aiding and Assisting in a Rebellion of the Negro Slaves; From a Full and Correct Copy* (London: F. Westley, 1824), 2.

³³ *Ibid.* Quamina was murdered several weeks later.

terrifying the British populace, who were in the minority.³⁴ White plantation owners formed militias and the governor, John Murray, called on British regular troops and marines to crush the resistance. They did so in the most extreme fashion imaginable: over 250 slaves were killed in direct skirmishes with troops, and subsequent "show trials" resulted in dozens being executed with several being decapitated or having their remains placed on public display. Smith was put on trial in October 1823, and was found guilty and sentenced to death on November 24. He died in his cell, however, on February 6, 1824, as he awaited a response on his appeal.³⁵

On February 9, Buxton wrote to Hannah, discussing the Smith incident. This was a dire situation that could damage the abolitionist case. Indeed, Buxton was already convinced that the emancipation cause was irreparably damaged by news of the rebellion. Still, he was prepared to press his case. "Canning . . . seems very cold to me," he told Hannah, "and the report is, he will join the West

³⁴ The slave population numbered about 75,000, compared to about 9,000 colonial whites.

³⁵ Ibid., 179. See E. I. Carlyle, "Smith, John (1792?-1824)," rev. Gad Heuman, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25850> (accessed July 2, 2009). For an excellent account of the Demerara slave rebellion of 1823, see Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Indians. If he does, we shall go to war with him in earnest."³⁶ A subsequent meeting with Canning on February 10 proved exasperating. Buxton had hoped to gain insight into the government's intentions but the discussion left him frustrated.³⁷ Later that evening, Buxton and other abolitionists convened at the Duke of Gloucester's home to develop a strategy that would at once soothe the fears of the public while garnering its support.

Buxton had hoped to leave London in mid-February to rest at Cromer Hall, but when news of Rev. Smith's death reached England that month, Buxton was forced to abandon his plans. The antislavery movement was heading into a crisis; he could not afford to leave the capital, even if his health was at risk. To do so would delay, if not destroy, the abolitionist movement. Buxton repeatedly attempted to get Canning to reveal his position on the slavery issue, only to be rebuffed and denied at every turn. Worse, Canning's unwillingness to openly commit to either side put the abolitionists on the defensive. Without some reasonable idea of what they were up against in the House, Buxton and the antislavery contingent could not plan an effective strategy. Public support was

³⁶ TFB to HB, February 9, 1824. *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton.*

³⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 129.

dwindling and those members of the House who had previously offered support were beginning to pull away. For these reasons, Buxton thought it best, despite his personal circumstances, to stay in London. "My absence would further intimidate our few friends, who are sufficiently timid as it is," he explained to Hannah.³⁸

What angered Buxton most was Canning's unwillingness to take a stand on the issue. If Canning came out in support of the West Indian interests, then the abolitionists could prepare a plan of attack; they could do *something*. As it stood, however, they were forced to wait and do nothing. Buxton concluded that Canning's plan was to leave the issue alone. This inaction on the government's part would be a de facto endorsement of the West Indian planters. Buxton feared that such behavior would allow the West Indians to declare that the abolitionists were a "wild, enthusiastic people."³⁹

On March 15, a number of petitions calling for the abolition of slavery were introduced into Parliament, including one from Norwich, presented by William Smith. More petitions from around the country were presented the

³⁸ TFB to HB, February 17, 1824. *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

³⁹ Ibid., February 24, 1824. *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*. The word "enthusiasm" was a derogatory term to describe a Christian who "let his heart override his reason." Lawrence James, *The Middle Class: A History* (London: Little, Brown, 2006), 195.

following day. In response, Canning introduced a draft of the king's Order in Council for Improving the Condition of the Slaves in Trinidad.⁴⁰ When Canning returned to the issue of ameliorating the lives of the slaves, he seemed to have changed his position. Whereas months earlier he was in agreement with the abolitionists on many points, he now seemed to oppose them all. Canning argued that he had not changed his perspective, that he still favored some acts of improvement, but that a conservative approach was best. "I . . . would proceed gradually," he said, "because I would proceed safely."⁴¹

Although the arguments between both the abolitionists and government would continue for several more hours, Buxton's motion had been effectively decided. The fear that slave insurrections, like that on Demerara, could take place anywhere within the empire eroded most of Buxton's support in the House. It was evident that Canning, while not openly throwing his support behind the West Indian interests, was at least influenced by Demerara. Canning quietly backed away from the previous year's agreement, and abolitionist support in the House, which had been tenuous at best, was further weakened.⁴²

⁴⁰ Hansards, 2nd ser., vol. 10, (1824), col. 1064.

⁴¹ Ibid., col. 1103.

⁴² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 131; 133.

Most abolitionists did not want to make an official response to Canning's speech, but Buxton, supported by Lushington, Samuel Hoare, and several others, argued against remaining silent. They wanted to take the offensive, believing that if they did not make some public effort to refute the government's argument, the abolitionist faction in Parliament would be made a scapegoat for the failure of an abolition bill.⁴³

Buxton was outraged at what he perceived as Canning's duplicity.⁴⁴ Canning did not want to appear to have been swayed or influenced by people acting "under the impulses of enthusiasm," as he characterized the abolitionists.⁴⁵ In one sense, Buxton reasoned, it was a smart political move on Canning's part. Privately, however, Buxton was depressed by the defeat, and saw it as a personal failure. Part of this may be due to the fact that he still had not had the opportunity to recuperate. When news of this setback reached Northrepps, it was Joseph John Gurney who provided comfort. Gurney wrote to Buxton, "I look upon Colonial Slavery [sic] as a monster who must have a very

⁴³ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁵ Hansards, 2nd ser., vol. 10, (1824), col. 1103; see also Buxton, *Memoirs*, 131-133.

long succession of hard knocks before he will expire."⁴⁶ Gurney reminded his brother-in-law that slavery had been around for centuries; it was sheer foolishness to expect the institution to collapse in a matter of days. He suggested that it might take a decade or more to bring about total emancipation, and added with certainty that abolition would happen because their cause served the greater glory of God.⁴⁷ "[B]e contented to suffer thy portion of persecution, and let no frowns of adversaries, no want of faith, no private feeling of thine own incompetency, either deprive thee of thy spirits, or spoil thy speech," Gurney counseled.

The letter buoyed Buxton's spirits.⁴⁸ He began to make plans for a new effort to achieve abolition. Buxton began conducting research into the treatment of West Indian slaves. He wrote scores of letters to friends, associates and religious leaders, any and all who might have contacts on the islands, requesting data and first-hand reports of treatment and abuse. Although he was focused on making abolition a reality, Buxton's health had become critical. In letters to Hannah, other family members and friends,

⁴⁶ Joseph John Gurney to TFB, March 10, 1824, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 132.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 132.

Buxton complained of weakness and fatigue.⁴⁹ Realizing that he could not continue at his present pace, Buxton left London shortly thereafter to recuperate at Cromer Hall.

* * * * *

On June 1, 1824, Henry Brougham presented the House with a number of petitions condemning the actions on Demerara, and in a speech lasting over four hours, he condemned the trial, imprisonment, and subsequent death of John Smith.⁵⁰ Another member, Wilmot Horton, stood in opposition, and declared that, "I think we have abundant proof . . . that Mr. Smith was an enthusiast."⁵¹ While maintaining the view that if Smith was a victim, it was due to his own evangelical leanings, Horton raised one very important issue: That the House was ill-prepared to address any discussion on the matter because no one there was knowledgeable on the events in question.⁵² The discussion continued well into the night. When Stephen Lushington stood to comment on the matter shortly after 1:00 a.m., angry members shouted him down and demanded an adjournment.⁵³ It was not until June 11 that the matter

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Hansards*, 2nd ser., vol. 11, (1824), col. 961-1076.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, col. 1000.

⁵² *Ibid.*, col. 1004.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, col. 1076.

resurfaced, and by this time both sides were firmly entrenched.

On June 23, 1825, Buxton spoke emphatically against the treatment of William Shrewsbury, a Methodist minister who had been tried, convicted and condemned to death for allegedly inciting West Indian slaves to rebel. According to Buxton, Shrewsbury had gone to Grenada as a missionary, and immediately had an effect on his charges. "Instruction was gaining ground; marriages became more frequent; the marriage tie was held more sacred," Buxton explained.⁵⁴ At the same time, Shrewsbury managed to secure the confidence and appreciation of the more benevolent slave owners and non-plantation owning whites. He was successful in his work, but the island harbored a strong anti-Methodist sentiment that ultimately forced the minister to leave. He subsequently went to Barbados.⁵⁵ Shortly after his arrival in 1820, Shrewsbury informed the missionary society that he found his new congregation to be in a sorry condition, and that the local planters had done little to facilitate an environment for Christian education. This, Buxton noted, should have come as no surprise, given that other missionaries had reported the same thing.⁵⁶ Shrewsbury

⁵⁴ Ibid., vol. 13, (1825), col. 1287.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., col. 1289.

worked on his congregation. By 1823, he was experiencing results similar to what he had achieved in Grenada, but in June, he was "publicly accused in the streets, in open day, as a villain."⁵⁷ Merchants, private individuals and a few angered slave owners characterized Shrewsbury as an "enemy of slavery" who was determined to undermine the "West-India interest."⁵⁸

What followed next bore an eerie resemblance to the John Smith incident: On October 5, 1823, rioting took place on the island, and Shrewsbury was subsequently accused of fomenting rebellion. The situation differed greatly from Demerara in that Shrewsbury was threatened and attacked by an angry mob of whites, in some cases spurred on by magistrates and other officials who wanted to expel Shrewsbury from the island. The minister was accused of belonging to the "villainous African Society," something that Buxton later denied.⁵⁹ Yet the most damning accusation against Shrewsbury came from his attackers who reported seeing correspondence from Buxton to the minister. This was evidence in their eyes that Shrewsbury's actions were a threat to the foundations of their way of life.

⁵⁷ Ibid., col. 1290.

⁵⁸ Ibid., col. 1291.

⁵⁹ Ibid., col. 1288.

The problem with this, Buxton continued, was that he had never heard of Rev. Shrewsbury before this incident.

"I never received or wrote a letter to him in my life,"

Buxton protested, nor did he

know that such a man existed in the world, until I happened to take up a newspaper, and there read, with some astonishment, that he was going to be hanged for corresponding with me.⁶⁰

Shrewsbury managed to escape the noose, but only because he went into exile.

Wilmot Horton, the one West Indian planter who constantly responded to claims made by the abolitionists, made no attempt to support or justify the attack on Shrewsbury or his chapel. Instead, Horton, as Canning would afterwards, framed the attack as one of religious persecution rather than one tied to the abolitionist argument. Horton contended that the responsible parties were under a "sort of moral dementation," and their acts were not representative of most West Indians when it came to religious tolerance.⁶¹ Canning noted the obvious similarities with the Smith case, but where Smith's situation had particulars that provoked a violent response, Shrewsbury's circumstances had none.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., col. 1317.

⁶² Ibid., col. 1325. Canning was very careful and deliberate as he wanted to avoid revisiting the Smith case. "Of Mr. Smith he was

After a short statement by Lushington, Buxton urged the West Indian faction to heed his warning.

You have interests greater far than any other class; and interests which will be decided by your conduct now. . . . We do insinuate, that, in a state of society where one class are masters and the other slaves, there must be, and will be, cruelties, and blood, and a deadly hatred of all those who would impart knowledge or Christianity to the negro. But, it is your part to dispel the delusion, if it be one—to separate slavery from these its wretched accompaniments—to sever your system from a system of fierce persecution—to give the people of England the satisfaction of knowing, that there is law and justice for the negro and his teacher. You are in a perilous condition. The reproach of slave-holding is as much as you can endure. If you expect favour,—if you ask toleration from the people of England, you must demonstrate, that slavery is not inseparably connected with a host of other and if it be possible, greater evils than itself.⁶³

Nothing, Buxton continued, would ever convince him to be anything but a foe to slavery. While he did not intend to pursue abolition with recklessness, it had become his life's work. With this speech Buxton irrevocably staked his political future on the passage of an abolition bill. As he drew to a close, Buxton issued a final warning to his West Indian opponents. "If they repeat these outrages . . .

desirous of saying nothing harsh or disrespectful. His guilt or innocence: was not the debate of that night;—and, whatever his errors might have been, he had, God knew, more than amply atoned for them. But, in Mr. Smith's case there was an imputation of guilt—or error—(call it by what name you would), which at least provoked, if it did not justify, animadversion. In the conduct of Mr. Shrewsbury, he must be allowed to say, that there did not appear the slightest ground of blame or suspicion." Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., col. 1345-1346.

if they will link persecution to slavery - slavery, which already totters, will fall."⁶⁴

On March 1, 1826, Buxton presented a petition against slavery that had been taken up in London. What made the document significant was that it boasted over 72,000 signatures. As he presented the petition, Buxton pointed out that his original motions from 1823 calling for the abolition of slavery were still open and required resolution.⁶⁵ In the debate that followed, Canning indicated that he was still unprepared to act. The West Indian legislatures had not acted, and Canning hesitated to do anything that might further aggravate the situation. Rather, Canning wanted to allow the West Indies another year to address the matter.

Although he was angered by yet another delay over the West Indian issue, Buxton had little time in which to dwell on his feelings. He was being bombarded with information and data regarding colonial slavery and the state of Africa. At the same time, Buxton's help was requested elsewhere. In 1821, Buxton met Dr. John Philip, an English missionary working at the Cape of Good Horn in South Africa. Philip wanted Buxton's help in stopping

⁶⁴ Ibid., col. 1346.

⁶⁵ Hansards, 2nd ser., vol. 14, (1826), col. 968.

what he considered to be the genocide of the Hottentots. Buxton was interested in the issue but could do little other than arrange for the dispatch of parliamentary commissioners to the region in 1824.⁶⁶ Philip returned to South Africa, but maintained contact with Buxton and kept him apprised of the situation. Philip returned to England in early 1826, believing that he would be able to secure further help from Buxton. By the time Philip arrived, however, Buxton's attention had shifted towards a new cause.⁶⁷

While John Philip was sailing back to England, Buxton received a visit from Edward Byam, who had previously served as the Commissary General of Police on the British-controlled island of Mauritius.⁶⁸ Filled with "indignation," Byam related to Buxton that the slave trade had never stopped on the island, despite the fact that it was administered by the British government. Still more outrageous, slaves on the island were treated far worse than those in the West Indies, a problem compounded by the fact that the island's proximity to Africa made it easier

⁶⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 183-184.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Mauritius, an island located to the east of Madagascar, was surrendered by France to Great Britain in 1810. Although the residents were allowed to keep the majority of their French customs, including laws and language, the island was considered a British dominion.

to replenish its slave population.⁶⁹ Byam's allegations were so startling that Buxton initially refused to believe that such a situation could exist.⁷⁰ He decided, however, to perform a cursory investigation by speaking with former military men and residents. Buxton came to learn that Byam's characterization of the events on Mauritius was absolutely correct.

On May 9, Buxton brought his allegations before the House and requested the appointment of a select committee to investigate slavery on Mauritius. He alleged that the slave trade continued to thrive on the island until at least 1824,⁷¹ despite the fact that it had been subject to British law since 1810, and was prepared to bring in a host of witnesses including former soldiers, civil servants, and naval officers to testify to what they had seen and provide documentary evidence to support his claims. Buxton supported his request in his usual manner, by citing statistics demonstrating how the island's slave population growth could only be the result of slave smuggling. The thrust of his argument, however, was that misconduct regarding slaves on the island was so prevalent, that he found it impossible to believe that

⁶⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 162.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁷¹ Although Buxton believed the maltreatment of Africans had not stopped, he only had data for the period from 1810-1824.

those in power were unaware of what had occurred. Sir Robert Farquhar, the former governor of the island, immediately objected to Buxton's allegations, complaining that Buxton's data predated British control of the island. He further dismissed Buxton's claims as nonsense, and placed the blame for any slave trading in the region on the French.⁷² Farquhar was joined in his outrage by Wilmot Horton, who viewed Buxton's allegations as a smear against Farquhar. Horton believed that the House should have had the chance to see and evaluate any evidence prior to Buxton speaking on the matter. For his part, Canning agreed conditionally: he would oppose any motion on the matter if Buxton intended to attack Farquhar's character, but if national honor was at issue, the House was duty bound to investigate Buxton's allegations. Canning believed that if Parliament failed to investigate improprieties of British administration then it would weaken British attempts to investigate the actions of other countries.⁷³ Brougham noted that since Buxton said he could support his claims, it was only fair to pursue the matter. Buxton's motion passed, and a Select Committee was appointed with Buxton as its chair.

⁷² Hansards, 2nd ser., vol. 15, (1826), col. 1050-1051.

⁷³ Ibid., col. 1050.

Parliament was in the process of concluding its 1826 session, so the Select Committee investigating Mauritius only met from May 13 until May 23. It had only enough time to call seven witnesses. Although Sir Robert Farquhar was in London and available, Buxton's committee called as its first witness General Gage John Hall, the island's former military commander and, after the departure of Farquhar in late 1817, its acting governor. The committee also interviewed two soldiers, a naval officer and two businessmen, as well as holding a brief discussion with Farquhar, before Parliament was dissolved.

In the ensuing general election in early June, Buxton again stood as a candidate in Weymouth, running this time as a Whig. Unlike previous contests, however, the engagement in Weymouth was particularly contentious. Voters favoring Tory candidates openly challenged and fought with their Whig opponents. So determined were the Tories to ensure a victory for their slate that they attempted to capture the town hall where the ballot box was kept and physically prevent any Whig supporter from registering a vote.⁷⁴ "No Whig voter reached the table without a violent struggle, and very rough treatment."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 165.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Eventually troops were called in to maintain order, but their presence only aggravated the situation. When a large number of Tory supporters managed to break into the hall in an attempt to steal the ballot box, they were removed, and constables were brought in to protect the building.

Buxton was not directly affected by the violence, but he was outraged at the tactics used by his opponents who insisted on opening as many public houses as they could. "The whole town is drunk," Buxton complained to Samuel Hoare.⁷⁶ Buxton also decried the expense of the election. When Joseph John Gurney offered to help defray his election expenses, Buxton immediately refused.⁷⁷ Buxton won reelection handily, but of the four candidates returned from Weymouth, he was the sole Whig. "I shall not be at Cromer Hall until early in August," Buxton lamented after the election. "I am sick of public duties, and run away from them without scruple."⁷⁸

Buxton spent the remainder of the year gathering evidence for an anticipated presentation on Mauritius. While he spent most of his time at Cromer resting and indulging in his favorite sports like horseback riding and

⁷⁶ TFB to Samuel Hoare, June 16, 1825, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 166.

⁷⁷ TFB to Joseph John Gurney, July 18, 1826, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 167.

⁷⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 168.

shooting, Buxton detailed Byam and George Stephen to search Britain's coastal cities to find anyone who had spent any time on Mauritius.⁷⁹ The two, along with assistants, fulfilled their task admirably, and interviewed nearly two hundred former sailors, soldiers and officials "of good character," who knew first hand of the island's activities.⁸⁰ On February 21, 1827, Buxton made a motion to have his select committee on Mauritius re-appointed, but the request was put on hold due to Canning's absence. Buxton later anticipated that he would be able to make his motion on May 26.⁸¹

On May 15, Buxton was to host a working breakfast at his home with General Hall, George Stephen, and Byam, but was too sick to leave his bed. When it appeared that the group would discuss matters informally, however, Buxton "appeared much oppressed with headache, and very languid."⁸² Buxton's personal physician was sent for and found his patient in a deplorable state. The doctor ordered "leeches, quiet and total abstinence" from all

⁷⁹ George Stephen (1794-1879) was a lawyer, abolitionist and social reformer. See Leslie Stephen, "Stephen, Sir George (1794-1879)," rev. Peter Balmford, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26371> (accessed July 15, 2009).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁸² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 169. The *Memoirs* quote a letter written by an unnamed associate of Buxton's that attests to the precarious nature of his health.

work, but Buxton ignored the order and attended that day's session in Parliament. Moreover, Buxton continued his studies that evening, having an unnamed guest read to him from a narrative on Africa.⁸³

Buxton was not the only person suffering from the stress of his unremitting investigating of the Mauritius slave trade. During the May 15 session, a motion had been introduced to investigate recurring problems found with Britain's trade with India; some of the debate's participants found it hard to separate the issue from broader colonial concerns, such as slavery and sugar production. When these topics were brought up, Robert Farquhar stood and offered yet another defense of his administration of Mauritius. He accused Buxton of waging a campaign to discredit Farquhar by making scurrilous claims and then denying him the opportunity of self defense. Buxton, ill though he was, responded by telling Farquhar that he would see all of the evidence in due time.

On May 19, however, Buxton could no longer ignore his worsening health. It was a Saturday, and Buxton decided to use the day to assemble collected reports, testimonies, and letters in preparation for the upcoming presentation;

⁸³ Ibid.

Buxton was determined to demonstrate that Farquhar and his administration were negligent in their duties.⁸⁴ He had not been well that morning and found it difficult to focus. Several times he suddenly pushed himself away from his desk and anxiously paced the floor of his study. When that proved ineffectual, he went outside and paced the grounds. Rather than relieving his anxiety, everything Buxton did seemed to aggravate it further. He began to yell out to no one in particular, "Oh it's too bad, it's too bad! I can't bear it!"⁸⁵ Buxton later related that the information he found in his research was so moving and horrifying to him that he was overcome with emotion. He quit his research that evening, but could not clear his mind. The next morning, he sent Hannah and the children to church; only Priscilla remained. Around midday, Buxton felt ill and told his daughter to send for the doctor. He later noted that he could vaguely recall Hannah's return home, but could not recall anything after she arrived. The years of relentless exertion and disregard of his physical well-being had finally caught up with Buxton. As Hannah entered their home, Buxton felt weak and his world turned black; he crumpled to the floor, victim of a "fit

⁸⁴ Ibid., 170.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 169.

of apoplexy," what the medical community more commonly refers to as a stroke.⁸⁶

It was nearly five days before there was any hint that Buxton would survive. When he awoke, Hannah was the first person he saw. "I well remember the expression of deep anxiety upon her countenance," he said.⁸⁷ There is no reference to the attack in Hannah's *Memorials*, however, and Buxton himself downplayed the episode; it is possible that this was a minor stroke with few long term effects as he fails to mention any. The one consequence that the attack should have had, however, was to make Buxton aware of his obsessive tendencies and in that regard, it failed miserably. Buxton thanked his family and the doctors for facilitating his recovery, but he was both surprised and "mortified" at learning that the date assigned for his presentation had passed.⁸⁸

As was the case with his 1813 episode, Buxton saw his apoplectic fit as a manifestation of God's displeasure. During his recovery, Buxton gave up any responsibility that required too much of his attention, but then found himself filling the void in his thoughts with spiritual reflection. This attack was yet another warning from God,

⁸⁶ Ibid., 170.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

there could be no doubt. Yet Buxton marveled that he had once again been spared for some purpose. He prayed for God to [g]ive me repentance, even bitter repentance," so as to prevent any future disobedience.⁸⁹ When not involved in introspection, Buxton turned to other endeavors. He visited with friends and family members that he had not seen for some time, and was well enough in October to take up shooting again. Buxton also began to slowly return to his reform work. At the end of October, he began communication with Lord William Bentinck, the newly appointed Governor-General of India, regarding suttee. He also returned to his research on Mauritius.

When the houses on the Cromer Hall estate were demolished in January 1828, Buxton moved his family to Northrepps Hall. Here the Buxtons lived for nearly a month in close proximity to Buxton's sister Sarah Maria and their cousin Anna Gurney, who shared a cottage on the property.⁹⁰ Shortly after their arrival, Buxton returned to London, determined to limit his participation in parliamentary business until he felt fully recovered.⁹¹ This plan was discarded on March 6 when Wilmot Horton introduced a motion to have the minutes of discussions

⁸⁹ Ibid., 171.

⁹⁰ *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 104-105.

⁹¹ *Hansards*, 2nd ser., vol. 18, (1828), col. 1045.

relating to manumission orders sent to Demerara and Berbice placed before the House. Whereas previous debates emphasized the moral and legal dimensions of slavery, this discussion focused on whether the government would recognize slaves as property, and if so, how would their value be assessed so that slave owners might be properly compensated. The resolutions Buxton introduced in 1823, as one member noted, assumed that the slaves were of value and, if emancipated, compensation should be rendered to their owners. It was only fair that the matter be further investigated.⁹² Besides Buxton, who was not feeling well, the only other abolitionist present was William Smith. Buxton wanted the support of either Brougham or Lushington, but waited in vain for either man to arrive.⁹³ When a member ridiculed the abolitionists, Buxton's ire was raised.

I had no intention of saying a word, for reasons immaterial to the House. I had resolved to take no part in this or any other discussion during the session, but the honourable member has compelled me to speak the plain truth – and the plain truth is, that he has no right whatever to the person of the negro [sic], though he may have some claim upon the liberality of the British government; and if any man thinks, that it were better not to divulge and insist upon these truths, I tell him that for their proclamation this night, he has to thank the honourable member for Callington, that as often as I

⁹² Ibid., cols. 1034-1035.

⁹³ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 178.

shall hear the honourable member make the charge which he has made this night, so often shall I meet him as I have done.

Buxton's fluctuating health and his mother's death in October, sidelined him throughout most of 1828. While he attempted to make regular visits to Parliament, he spent little time on the floor and gave few speeches. The bulk of his abolitionist work fell to Brougham and Lushington; the former could do little because of his own poor health, and the latter was so overburdened by the workload that it seemed as though he would need rest as well.⁹⁴ On March 20, Buxton met with Colonial Secretary William Huskisson, and offered to turn over to him evidence of the Mauritius slave trade and abuse of the slaves, but only on condition that the government proceeded with the investigation.⁹⁵ For once, Buxton put his health first; pushing the inquiry would require more energy than Buxton could muster at the moment. Aware of this, Huskisson responded that orders in

⁹⁴ Ibid., 180. Chester New noted that there is no evidence that other parliamentary abolitionists viewed Buxton as their leader, and that Brougham, Lushington, and other abolitionists such as George Stephen, worked as a team. Chester New, *The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 296-297. Stephen offers a different view, noting that while Buxton was ill during these debates, Brougham, Lushington and William Smith "did more than sustain him; when sickness compelled his absence, they supplied his place for in truth each was an Ajax in the battle, though each selected his field of conflict for himself, in noble subordination to Buxton's leadership in a cause which circumstances had now made peculiarly his own." George Stephen, *Antislavery Recollections: A Series of Letters Addressed to Mrs. Beecher Stowe, written by Sir George Stephen at Her Request* (London: Thomas Hatchard, 1854), 105-106. See also Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 243.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 181.

council would bring the island's administration in line with British policy. Farquhar, Huskisson noted, wanted satisfaction; either Buxton was to make his case and present his evidence, or Buxton was to publicly retract his allegations. Buxton stood steadfast by his claims, but stated that his health prevented him from proving his statements as vigorously as required.⁹⁶ The matter was not entirely resolved, but Buxton was content that Huskisson was prepared to acknowledge the problem.

Buxton scored what amounted to another coup in July when he let it be known that he intended to make a motion respecting Dr. Philip's plea for the Hottentots. By 1828, Buxton started to pay closer attention to the concerns and complaints of Dr. Philip and his supporters. With little support, Philip had made limited progress with the Hottentots. Still lacking basic equipment, they had nonetheless turned to agriculture as a means to sustain themselves. Philip took great pride in their achievement, for when they had been released from slavery they were "scarcely to be considered as belonging to the human race."⁹⁷ Now, in so short a time, a people who had never

⁹⁶ TFB to Horace Twiss, October 21, 1829, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 197. Twiss was the under-secretary for the colonies.

⁹⁷ Dr. Philip to Buxton, as quoted in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 191.

known a long-term sedentary lifestyle had begun to cultivate fields of food.

"I have not yet determined what I shall say," Buxton noted, but he did intend to request that the House officially recognize the Hottentots as free peoples.⁹⁸ The threat that he might say something, however, seems to have been enough to frighten the government. Secretary for the Colonies Huskisson had been replaced by Sir George Murray in late spring, and Murray had no interest in allowing Buxton to speak.⁹⁹ Murray would quietly agree to Buxton's proposals on the condition that he said nothing. Those were, Buxton mused, "[t]erms not to be rejected, I think."¹⁰⁰

Shortly before the opening of Parliament in February 1829, Buxton, along with James Mackintosh, William Smith, and Zachary Macaulay, attended a meeting at Brougham's residence. Samuel Hoare was also present with the sole aim of preventing them from weighing down the recovering Buxton

⁹⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 184.

⁹⁹ In early 1828, Huskisson resigned his office after a dispute with the new prime minister, Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, on the issue of parliamentary reform. George Murray (1772-1846) was a former military officer and protégé of Wellington. See S. G. P. Ward, "Murray, Sir George (1772-1846)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19608> (accessed July 15, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 184.

with too much work, should that be their intent.¹⁰¹ Meeting to formalize their objectives for the upcoming parliamentary session, including plans to intensify their antislavery and penal reform campaigns, the group could not help but gloat over the problems facing their Tory brethren.¹⁰²

The Tories were experiencing what could best be described as a crisis in leadership. The high hopes that had surrounded the administration formed by the duke of Wellington the previous year had long since faded away. The duke himself faced a number of crises, many of which arose from his handling of the aged, incapacitated, and often incoherent King George IV. Particularly contentious were demands by Dissenters and Catholics for full political rights.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ TB to Joseph John Gurney, February 9, 1829, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*. Hoare had good reason to fear for Buxton's health as his brother-in-law was starting to exhibit the same obsessive behaviors he had prior to his illness. Buxton was still not fully recovered and Hoare feared that participation in any intense endeavor might cause Buxton to suffer a relapse. Buxton, *Memoirs*, 192-193.

¹⁰² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 192-193; see also John Cam Hobouse, Lord Broughton, *Recollections of a Long Life, with extracts from his Private Diaries*. Edited by his daughter Lady Dorchester. 6 vols. (London: John Murray, 1910), 3:301.

¹⁰³ At issue were the seventeenth-century Test and Corporation Acts, a collection of laws that required anyone holding public office to be a member of the Church of England. These acts required office holders to receive Holy Communion in keeping with Anglican rites, and to deny transubstantiation. These requirements effectively prevented many Dissenters and all Catholics from holding public office. In principle Wellington was not opposed to modifying the Acts, provided any such action maintained what Peter Jupp termed the "Anglican supremacy." Peter Jupp, *British Politics on the Eve of Reform: The Duke of*

Wellington had come to view Catholic emancipation as a necessity, but resented having it thrust upon him.¹⁰⁴

Parliament believed emancipation was the cure against general agitation in Ireland.¹⁰⁵ Give in on this one point, they reasoned, and the Irish would be placated.

Wellington, on the other hand, viewed the matter quite differently. The problem with emancipation, he believed, was that this Catholic question was the only thing that kept Ireland in the Union. Eliminate the distinction of religion and the Irish would cease being Protestants and Catholics, and instead become *Irishmen*. When that happened, he argued, their attention would turn towards other Irish issues and ultimately separation from Great Britain.¹⁰⁶ Much to the delight of most Tories and a faction of ultra Protestants, the duke made a great public display of being against emancipation, but tempered that attitude by stating that if Parliament would stay away from grandiose designs, perhaps an equitable solution could be

Wellington's Administration, 1828-1830 (London: Macmillan Press, LTD; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 55. There was less concern over Dissenters because, as Jupp asserts, Wellington believed they were not victims of injustice. Rather than being harmed by the Test and Corporation Acts, Wellington believed these to be minor inconveniences for most Dissenters since they, at least, were Protestants.

¹⁰⁴ Lord Broughton claimed that Wellington was so ill disposed to the politics involved that he even disliked the term, "Catholic emancipation." Broughton, *Long Life*, 3:304-305.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington: Pillar of State*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 168.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

found. In short, the duke sought a quiet, back door solution that would offend as few people as possible.

This approach was rudely undercut when Irish activist Daniel O'Connell announced he would seek the recently vacated parliamentary seat for County Claire, in Ireland.¹⁰⁷ O'Connell was known as the "Irish agitator,"¹⁰⁸ and for some years had been a thorn in the side of every administration that sat in London. Wellington had handpicked a Protestant for the seat, Vesey Fitzgerald, who, until O'Connell's entry into the race, had seemed unbeatable.¹⁰⁹ Complicating the matter were questions regarding O'Connell's ability to even participate in the contest. British law did not prevent a Catholic from running for office, but it did bar one from assuming a seat in Parliament.

In private, the subject made Wellington anxious. Worse, he felt as though he had assumed the full weight of this heavy burden all on his own. He was receiving little support from his chief deputy, Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel, who threatened to resign from office if the matter

¹⁰⁷ Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847) was instrumental in compelling Parliament to address Catholic Emancipation and Irish nationalism. See R. V. Comerford, "O'Connell, Daniel (1775-1847)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20501> (accessed July 15, 2009).

¹⁰⁸ Broughton, *Long Life*, 3:304.

¹⁰⁹ Longford, *Pillar of State*, 167.

was not settled.¹¹⁰ Peel, who equated emancipation with separation, vacillated on the idea for quite some time.¹¹¹ Wellington did not think highly of Peel, privately believing that Peel's inaction was nothing more than an attempt to distance himself from the affair in the eyes of the public.¹¹² More to the point, Wellington believed Peel wanted to be Prime Minister, and any perception of opposition to the duke on emancipation, might be valuable at a later date.¹¹³ The king likewise lacked a strong backbone, asserting privately that he supported the idea of emancipation on one afternoon, only to reject that view hours later because it ran contrary to his Coronation Oath.

For Buxton, as was the case with many of his fellow politicians, Catholic emancipation was not an easy question with which to grapple. Despite his public claims of support, Buxton privately fought his own doubts about the

¹¹⁰ Robert Peel (1788-1850) served as Wellington's Home Secretary before becoming prime minister after the resignation of Earl Grey in 1834. Norman Gash's two volume biography, *Mr. Secretary Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), and *Sir Robert Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel after 1830* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972), as well as his *Politics in the Age of Peel: A Study in the Technique of Parliamentary Representation, 1830-1850* (London and New York: Longmans, 1953), are essential for any understanding of parliamentary politics on the eve of the 1832 reforms. See John Prest, "Peel, Sir Robert, second baronet (1788-1850)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21764> (accessed July 15, 2009).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 172; 175-176.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 176.

cause. Opponents proclaimed that any quarter given to Catholics violated the constitution and put the country in mortal danger. In the end, Buxton felt compelled to throw his support behind the measure as a matter of political consistency. Buxton realized that he could not advocate eliminating the political restrictions placed on Dissenters without doing so for Catholics as well. His constituency in Weymouth was clearly against any relaxation of anti-Catholic measures, and Buxton realized any vote that contradicted the wishes of those ultra-Protestants back home could very well mean his seat in the next election.¹¹⁴ There was no idleness to that threat, as Peel, who had been elected in 1826 on the premise that he would oppose Catholic emancipation, was ousted from his seat at Oxford once he changed his mind and offered the motion his support.¹¹⁵ John Cam Hobhouse noted that the clergy at Oxford refused to vote for Peel, not out of spite, but because doing so would fly in the face of their previous condemnations of Catholic emancipation. Peel was still popular, and his associates quickly found another seat for him. Despite appearances, Hobhouse noted, the vast

¹¹⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 192.

¹¹⁵ Longford, *Pillar of State*, 181.

majority of Oxford was secretly with Peel in their hearts, even if they could not support the bill.¹¹⁶

Buxton had great expectations for this upcoming fight, for this was a conflict that encompassed far more than religion or politics. He saw it as an exercise from which he would develop strength and character. He hoped to "gather from it confidence and encouragement in those other works of humanity in which I am engaged."¹¹⁷

"Peel made a lame speech," wrote Hobhouse, "but he could do no other than he did."¹¹⁸ Indeed, there was little for Peel to do: He offered a number of feeble explanations as to why he had changed his mind. He wanted some sort of settlement, he argued, but wanted one that would be advantageous for all. When this did not seem to be forthcoming, he considered resignation. This was ultimately ruled out as he feared leaving the administration would be prejudicial to the bill. Ultimately, Peel reasoned that he had no other choice but to see the matter through to its conclusion, even though he might appear duplicitous. "We could not help smiling," an excited

¹¹⁶ Broughton, *Long Life*, 3:305.

¹¹⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 192-3.

¹¹⁸ Broughton, *Long Life*, 3:302.

Hobhouse proclaimed, "to hear from his mouth arguments which he had so often opposed and attempted to answer."¹¹⁹

None of the reasons Peel offered were original. "I had heard a thousand times urged by the friends of Emancipation, and which applied to former as well as present circumstances," Hobhouse later remembered.¹²⁰ A pragmatic Wellington realized that "the consequences of resistance would be worse than the consequences of submission."¹²¹ Wellington did manage to score one personal victory: passage of the Catholic Relief Act momentarily deprived the Whigs of the image of being liberal reform activists. Such victories, however, are rarely achieved without serious damage. Many Tories and other political friends were livid and viewed Wellington's support of the Relief Bill as a betrayal of Toryism.¹²² Lord Winchilsea, perhaps the most outspoken anti-Catholic in the House of Lords, characterized the bill's supporters in the Commons as "degenerate senators,"¹²³ while another member of the Lords asked for the dissolution of Parliament. Wellington and Peel were the subjects of endless abuse in the anti-

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ J. E. Cookson. *Lord Liverpool's Administration: The Crucial Years, 1815-1822*, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books; Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, Ltd., 1975); 400.

¹²² Longford, *Pillar of State*, 194.

¹²³ Broughton, *Long Life*, 3:305. This type of language from Winchilsea led to his duel with Wellington some weeks later.

Catholic press.¹²⁴ Friendships and alliances, some going back decades, were smashed or compromised in an instant. Peel's sudden reversal was seen as equally sinister, for his resolute anti-Catholicism had been the pillar to which many of his colleagues had secured their political boats.¹²⁵ Without his steadiness, these members were now being tossed about in a stormy and volatile ocean. Party loyalty dictated they stay the course, but how, when their leaders had jumped ship? Those members who remained faithful tried to make a valiant effort, but even they realized the futility of their actions. Hobhouse noted that Tory members in the House "looked very silly and fidgety," when it was their turn to address the measure.¹²⁶ Humiliated and angry, their feeble protests were not enough to derail the Whig momentum.¹²⁷ Buxton and the abolitionists did not realize it at the time, but by supporting Catholic emancipation, the abolition of slavery was now within reach. In fracturing the Tory resistance, the abolitionists had reached a turning point.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Broughton, *Long Life*, 3:305.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:302. "The surrender of Peel was the death-blow to their hopes."

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:303.

¹²⁸ Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 268. Rodgers erroneously identifies Buxton as "Charles Fowell Buxton."

**Chapter Seven:
Abolition and Its Aftermath, 1830-1838**

The abolition of slavery within the British Empire was one of the most important legislative accomplishments of the nineteenth century and the apex of Buxton's career. The British were not ignorant of this fact and sought to shape the legacy of abolition almost from the start. In 1869, William E. H. Lecky contended that British abolitionism would be remembered as one of the greatest social movements in history.

The unweary, unostentatious, and inglorious crusade of England against slavery may probably be regarded as among the three or four perfectly virtuous pages comprised in the history of nations.¹

Lecky's depiction of the anti-slavery movement as one built on altruistic motives of a saintly few doing battle against what seemed to be insurmountable odds was originally crafted by Thomas Clarkson in his work chronicling the demise of the British slave trade. "I scarcely know of any subject," Clarkson began, "the contemplation of which is more pleasing than that of the correction or of the removal of any of the acknowledged

¹ William E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals: From Augustus to Charlemagne*. 2 vols., 3 ed. rev. (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1919), 1:153.

evils of life."² In celebrating the fact that such efforts made life easier for others, Clarkson noted, we must also celebrate in knowing that "our own moral condition must have necessarily improved by the change."³ Clarkson, a Quaker, stressed the idea that the abolition movement was a product of religious fervor, a theme he emphasized in his two volume history. "If thou feelest grateful for the event," Clarkson advised readers in his conclusion, "retire within thy closet, and pour out thy thanksgivings to the Almighty for this his [sic] unspeakable act of mercy to thy oppressed fellow-creatures."⁴

Two classic interpretations of the post-slave trade abolition movement are William Law Mathieson's *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838* and Frank J. Kingberg's *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism*, both published in 1926. Coincidentally, these two seminal works appeared in the same year as the last major printing of Buxton's *Memoir*.⁵

² Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*. 2 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), 1:1.

³ *Ibid.*, 1:2.

⁴ Clarkson, *History*, 2:587.

⁵ Frank J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1926), and William Law Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838* (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Company, Limited, 1926). For a more recent treatment of this subject, see David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1865* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

Although Mathieson presented a brief history of British slavery in the Caribbean beginning around 1790, his work focused on the period beginning with Buxton's initial motion against slavery in 1823. Mathieson barely touched on the evangelical dimension of abolitionism. Instead, he narrated major events and stopped, rather abruptly, in 1839. He concluded the discussion in a second volume, *British Slave Emancipation, 1838-1849*, published in 1932.⁶ Klingberg, on the other hand, saw the British anti-slavery movement as the epitome of English humanitarianism.

Abolition was

a victory of world-wide importance in the conflict between humanity and savagery. It was a great step in the reconciliation of the white man with the colored man; the European with the non-European. . . . Britain in her slave catching was comparable to the Roman Empire many centuries before. Now in the course of a few decades the cumulative power of man's humanity to man made certain the emancipation of the black man throughout the world.⁷

By 1830, the call for reform, of which abolition was an integral part, was being made throughout Great Britain. Between 1828 and 1832, the demands for such changes as free trade, Catholic emancipation, and parliamentary reform began to make their way through Parliament. Without this

⁶ William Law Mathieson, *British Slave Emancipation, 1838-1849* (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Company, Limited, 1932).

⁷ Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 308.

new emphasis on reform, it is unlikely that Buxton and the abolitionists would have achieved their goals. The West Indian interests in the House had grown considerably in the previous thirty years. The number of MPs with ties to the West Indies had increased from about thirty in 1790 to nearly twice that number by 1828, and their growth in the House of Lords was comparable.⁸

Although he had spent much of the previous year focusing on Catholic emancipation, Buxton had not stopped in building his case for abolition. The Anti-Slavery Society continued to publish pro-abolition propaganda, keeping the issue of abolition fresh in the mind of the public.⁹ On May 15, the society held its annual meeting at Freemason's Hall. "This meeting was one of the most numerous that ever assembled at this place on any occasion," the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*. "[E]ven passage to the platform was choked up."¹⁰ Thomas Clarkson moved that Wilberforce, now retired from public life, assume the chair, and after doing so, Wilberforce called on Buxton to make the meeting's first resolution. Buxton noted that it had been seven years to the day since he

⁸ Ibid., 437.

⁹ Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 245.

¹⁰ "Proceedings of a General Meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society and its Friends, Held at the Freemasons' Hall, on Saturday the 15th of May 1830," *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* (London), June 1, 1830, 229.

originally introduced his motion to end slavery, and still Parliament had not acted. Buxton moved that the society petition Parliament to grant universal emancipation to slave children born on a certain date.¹¹ Buxton then moved that since Parliament had not acted on the 1823 motion and that the West Indian planters had repeatedly thwarted any attempt at abolition, that the society then "declare anew [its] unalterable determination to leave no proper and practicable means unattempted for effecting, at the earliest period, [slavery's] entire abolition throughout the British dominions."¹² The meeting was a rousing success.¹³

In early 1830, Robert Farquhar died, and with him the last obstruction to Parliament pursuing its investigation of Mauritius.¹⁴ It was ultimately determined that there had been an illegal trade and reparations to the victims were necessary. Murray initially agreed to a proposal of selective emancipation: any slave owner who could not establish legitimate proof of ownership would be required to manumit those slaves. Before the plan could be finalized, however, Murray was replaced as Colonial Secretary by Viscount Goderich, who mandated that the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mathieson, *British Slavery*, 195-196.

¹⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 191.

burden of proof fall on the shoulders of the slaves.¹⁵ Some slaves managed to secure their freedom, but not all, and for Buxton it was a bittersweet victory.¹⁶

The Wellington government collapsed in November 1830, and William IV chose the Whig leader, Earl Grey, to head a new government.¹⁷ The slavery question was one of the first issues with which his administration was confronted. With

¹⁵ Ibid., 192. Frederick John Robinson (1782-1859) served as prime minister for five months during 1827. See P. J. Jupp, "Robinson, Frederick John, first Viscount Goderich and first earl of Ripon (1782-1859)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23836> (accessed July 15, 2009).

¹⁶ Buxton was also distressed by problems at home. In late 1829, his son John Henry came down with an inflammation of the lungs that left him weak and with a persistent cough. In September, John Henry began to cough blood, an event Hannah took as a dark omen. "A death-stroke I knew it to be, and it is impossible to say what a night of suffering I passed!" *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 118. He seemed to improve during the winter, and in February 1830, John Henry spent a few days with relatives. On his return, however, he caught a cold that he could not seem to overcome. Ibid., 122. During his sixteenth birthday party on April 12, 1830, the boy overexerted himself while playing on the grounds with his younger guests. A violent coughing fit followed, and soon young John Henry was coughing blood. Anderson, *Northrepps Grandchildren*, 155-156. He "showed a tendency to consumption," and as his condition worsened, Buxton was beside himself in grief. The disease progressed slowly, and tending to John Henry's final days became Buxton's chief focus. By September, it was clear to the family that John Henry would not improve, and within a month he was so frail that Hannah had to move him about in a wheelchair. Buxton, *Memoirs*, 233. He died on November 18.

¹⁷ Charles Grey, Earl Grey (1764-1845) led the Whig party in Parliament from 1808 until his retirement in July 1834. Two recent biographies of Grey, E. A. Smith, *Lord Grey, 1764-1845* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), and John Derry, *Charles, Earl Grey: Aristocratic Reformer* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell, 1992), were well received, but both offered interpretations that placed more emphasis on Grey's early career at the expense of the his time as prime minister. See E. A. Smith, "Grey, Charles, second Earl Grey (1764-1845)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11526> (accessed July 8, 2009).

a new administration in place, the prospects for movement on Buxton's motion of 1823 looked good.

On December 13, 1830, the Marquis of Chandos, Richard Grenville, presented the House with a petition from the West Indian planters. The planters complained that they had been the victims of an unfair attack that involved questionable petition drives and disinformation. They also complained that they had done nothing wrong; they "acquired their property" legally, just the same "as all other classes of his Majesty's subjects." Most importantly, they tried once again to manipulate the argument by emphasizing that any act of emancipation that did not also provide the planters with economic relief and compensation was inherently wrong.¹⁸

In the debate that followed, several members suggested that an inquiry should be undertaken to determine just how much compensation the planters might claim. Buxton opposed the idea, noting that if Parliament were to conduct an inquiry each time it considered a petition from the planters, and if each inquiry delayed all other actions,

¹⁸ Hansards, 3rd ser., vol. 1, (1830), col. 1047. See F. M. L. Thompson, "Grenville, Richard Plantagenet Temple-Nugent-Brydges-Chandos-, second duke of Buckingham and Chandos (1797-1861)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11497> (accessed July 8, 2009).

then the push for abolition would founder. Charles Sidthorp, responded that the "people of England," although now supportive of abolition, would feel differently when they assumed the financial burden of any compensation. Until Parliament determined the amount and source of the funding for compensation, the discussion of emancipation was a moot one.¹⁹ George Murray complained that the debates thus far suggested that the government had done nothing to support abolition. Murray responded that he believed this lack of action was a "merit," rather than a cause for criticism. "My earnest endeavour, during; the whole of the time it became my official duty to deal with the interests of the Colonies," Murray noted, "was, to take what may be called a common-sense view of the subject."²⁰ Murray conceded that compensation was just, but it was also pointless when talking about immediate emancipation without creating some type of transitional state to prepare slaves for their freed status. It would be a "sanction to the

¹⁹ Hansards, 3rd ser., vol. 1, (1830), cols. 1059-1060. Sidthorp was known as "Colonel Sidthorp," and is listed as such in Hansards. He was noted for his extremely conservative and protectionist views. See J. A. Hamilton, "Sibthorp, Charles de Laet Waldo (1783-1855)," rev. John Wolffe, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25507> (accessed July 8, 2009).

²⁰ Hansards, 3rd ser., vol. 1, (1830), col. 1060.

commission of murder, and an encouragement to the most dreadful scenes of plunder and devastation."²¹

Daniel O'Connell opposed any type of compensation for the planters and expressed shock that members had even entertained the idea. "Good, God!" he exclaimed, "if the West-Indian slave-owner gave freedom to his slave, would he not still be enabled to procure his labour?" Emancipation would not result in a sudden state of poverty; the freemen would still need the planters for property, food, and income. For what would the planters need compensation? O'Connell blasted the idea that emancipation would undermine the existing culture of the West Indies. Courts would still stand and administer justice; the right to property would still exist. "The only change," O'Connell noted, "was that the planter would have to employ the free labourer instead of the slave."²²

On March 29, 1831, Buxton presented to the House 499 petitions from various locations in England.²³ Of particular note was one from the Society of Friends, "the very first persons in the country who had promulgated the doctrine" that slavery was anti-Christian. Quakers, Buxton continued, introduced the first petitions for abolition of

²¹ Ibid., col. 1062.

²² Ibid., cols. 1065-1066.

²³ Ibid., col. 1144.

the slave trade forty years earlier, and the first calling for the abolition of slavery itself a decade ago.²⁴ Louis Buck, another member, objected, noting that the first petitions for abolition originated in Jamaica, not within Quaker circles, but that this earlier petition had been rejected.²⁵

Two weeks later on April 15, Buxton revisited his earlier motion that the House grant abolition. As he had done previously, he tried to be conciliatory towards the West Indian planters. He noted that he did not believe them to be bad men, devoid of feeling or understanding, nor was he interested in condemning the West Indian planters to destitution or poverty. More importantly, Buxton continued, he had no intention of justifying his motion on the basis of individual acts of cruelty, although, he added, the cases he could relate would shock the sensibilities of even the most hardened member of the House. Rather, Buxton stated, his call for abolition was based on the principle that the slave population of the West Indies "are in a miserable condition."²⁶ The environment provided for these slaves was "so destructive

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., col. 1409.

of their moral and physical welfare," Buxton continued, that "it ought to be abolished."²⁷

Buxton observed that recent reports of the condition of the slaves were so contradictory that it was impossible to determine the truth without some type of measurement that was fair and impartial. In this instance, the answer could be found by examining the slave registries. "It is a doctrine admitted by all parties," Buxton said, "that under all circumstances, except those of extreme misery, population must increase."²⁸ This was natural law and one that had been demonstrated successfully over time. An increase in population could be interrupted, Buxton acknowledged, but usually such disruptions were the result of "extreme misery."²⁹ Buxton reported that of the twenty colonies in the Caribbean, only fourteen produced sugar, and according to the registries, the slave population on those islands had decreased by over 45,000 people.³⁰ On Tobago, for example, Buxton stated that the slave population numbered 15,470 in 1819. After factoring in slaves who had been imported and exported to and from the island, those who had been manumitted, and assuming that there had been no other causes for decreases, such as

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., col. 1410.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., cols. 1410-1411.

plague or natural disasters, Tobago's slave population should have been 15,415 in 1829. According to the registry, however, the slave population had decreased to 12,556, reducing the population by one-sixth.³¹

Demerara boasted a slave population of 83,373 in 1817. Buxton argued that the figure should have remained about the same in 1829, but the registry stated that there were only 69,466 slaves - a decrease of nearly 14,000. Trinidad fared no better as its 1816 slave population of 25,000 had fallen to 19,000 by 1829. "This is a rate of mortality which, in a few years, would render the crowded city of London - would render the whole world - desolate," Buxton noted.³² This was not new information to plantation owners, he continued, because they had resorted to the illegal importation of slaves to hide the problem. "Unless I have

³¹ Ibid., col. 1411. Buxton's figures are suspect. In the case of Tobago, for example, he states the following: "In the year 1819, the slave-population of Tobago was 15,470; to which must be added during, the subsequent ten years the importation, to the number of 177, and from which must be deducted the exportation, to the number of twenty-seven, and the manumissions, to the number of 172-leaving the population, supposing no decrease had taken place in 1829, at 15,415. By the returns of that year, however, it appears that the slave-population of Tobago at that time amounted only to 12,556; being a decrease, in the ten years, of 2,892, or a sixth of the whole." Hansards, 3rd ser., vol. 3, (1831), col. 1411. According to these figures, the number of slaves present in 1829 should have been 15,448, not 15,415. In other words, the decrease in slaves was greater than Buxton reported.

³² Ibid., col. 1411.

forged the documents, which I presume will not be imputed to me," Buxton added, "such are the facts."³³

Buxton estimated that since 1807, over 100,000, or one-seventh, of the total slave population in the West Indies had died as a result of their enslavement. Allowing slavery to continue would be a death sentence to those who remained. As a comparison, Buxton noted that the freeman population of Haiti in 1804 was 423,000, but by 1824 it had jumped to 935,000.³⁴ In the fourteen colonies that produced sugar, Buxton claimed, the freeman population rose while the slave population decreased.

Among the West Indian free black population, birth rates had increased significantly. Buxton reported that the free population of Demerara in 1811 was 2,980, and had grown to 4,700 by 1825. This translated into an increase of 1,282 after deducting nearly five hundred who had been freed through manumission.³⁵

When someone mentioned that Barbados did not exhibit the problems of which Buxton spoke, he noted that Barbados did not produce the same amount of sugar as Trinidad or some of the other islands.³⁶ Although Buxton tried to refrain from mentioning cruelties inflicted upon the

³³ Ibid., col. 1413.

³⁴ Ibid., col. 1414.

³⁵ Ibid., col. 1413.

³⁶ Ibid.

slaves, he did note that Trinidad, which had taken steps to improve the lives of its slaves, meted out some 11,000 plantation punishments in two years, compared to the 21,000 handed out on Demerara, which made no such improvements.³⁷

Buxton complained that the House had focused too long on the idea of slaves as property, and in doing so sacrificed the lives of 45,000 people. Being cautious about property rights was a legitimate concern, Buxton noted, but there were limits to such protections.

There is a greater consideration than the protection of property – that is, the preservation of the lives of innocent men. The men exposed to perish are British subjects, and we are bound to save them, however useful the system that would destroy them may be to individuals.³⁸

Buxton concluded by moving that since the colonial legislatures failed to act on his initial motion of May 15, 1823, the House should "proceed to consider of and adopt the best means of effecting its abolition throughout the British dominions."³⁹

The motion was seconded, but another member, Keith Douglas, rose and responded that Buxton should have called for a committee to investigate and verify his allegations. Instead, Douglas continued, Buxton chose to rely on only those figures that supported his claims. Nowhere, Douglas

³⁷ Ibid., cols. 1416-1417.

³⁸ Ibid., col. 1418.

³⁹ Ibid.

noted, did Buxton include birth rates, population totals by gender, or population based on age, for the years compared.⁴⁰ Douglas noted that with the exception of Barbados, the problem for most of the West Indian colonies was a disproportionate number of male slaves. Demerara, Mauritius, and the Cape of Good Hope had a male slave population that outnumbered the female population. In Mauritius, Douglas added, there were nearly twice as many men as women.⁴¹ William Burge, a former attorney-general for Jamaica,⁴² argued that Canning's actions in 1823 wisely empowered the colonial legislatures to decide the issue, not Parliament. If this power had been granted to Buxton and his "pseudo-zealots," Burge asked, "were the rights of the people of Jamaica to be sacrificed to comply with [the abolitionists'] wishes?"⁴³ Burge reverted to the property

⁴⁰ Ibid., col. 1422. Demographics were important to the antislavery movement. Abolitionists believed that if the planters ameliorated the conditions in which slaves lived, there should be an increase in population. The fact that the slave population was in decline, therefore, was considered evidence of mistreatment bordering on genocide. B. W. Higman argued that the slave population of the British West Indies was definitely affected by the end of the slave trade, but that "the reasons for the failure of the slave population to achieve a natural increase are not entirely clear." B. W. Higman, "Slavery and the Development of Demographic Theory in the Age of the Industrial Revolution," Walvin, *Slavery and British Society*, 166. Buxton and the abolitionists were able to manipulate the statistics to support their argument because the slave owners insisted on depicting themselves in a paternal capacity. Ibid., 185., see also David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 232-233.

⁴¹ Ibid., cols. 1422-1423.

⁴² Ibid., col. 1439-1440.

⁴³ Ibid., col. 1431.

argument. The slave was property, he stated, and he refused to accept that the owners should be compelled to surrender such property without compensation.⁴⁴ Sir Michael Stewart, a member of the West Indian faction, announced that he was willing to concede that the abolitionists were acting from an "unsullied purity" in pursuing their cause, but asked that the planters be given the same respect. Buxton was not an evil man, Stewart contended, but he felt that the timing of this latest motion was irresponsible. The nation was concerned with parliamentary reform and could not give abolition the "calm and dispassionate consideration" that was needed to bring the question to a final resolution.

Other participants in the debate included Lushington, who thought it telling that no one in the debate defended the institution of slavery, as had often been done in the past, or justified its existence by claiming it vital for national prosperity.⁴⁵ He then proceeded to support Buxton's motion and provided additional information that augmented Buxton's figures. Peel also rose to speak; he questioned Buxton's motives in making the motion. Since the matter had been turned over to the colonial

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., col. 1455.

legislatures, there was little that Parliament could do, he claimed. The most confrontational challenge came from Alexander Baring, who linked the existence of the Caribbean slave trade with Britain's national security. If the slaves were emancipated, then the safety of white colonials would be at risk because neither race could live in harmony. "[T]he whites could possess their property while the others possessed greater force," Baring warned.⁴⁶ Moreover, he contended, this disruption of the colonial environment would have a dire consequence on the British economy:

If the negroes were liberated, where were we then to get sugar? The consequence would be, that we should not only lose the capital already sunk, but our money must go to foreigners for sugar, and we should have no other sugar than that produced by slave labour; for let it be relied on, there would not be one slave the less, and we should lose that power of ameliorating the condition of the negroes we now possessed, which would be totally out of our power with respect to Cuba, the Brazils, and other colonies belonging to foreign nations.⁴⁷

According to Baring, the best thing to do under those circumstances was to renew the slave trade in order to keep pace with such nations as Spain, Portugal, and France who, despite claiming otherwise, continued to benefit from the trade in slaves.⁴⁸ Baring believed that there should be an

⁴⁶ Ibid., col. 1462.

⁴⁷ Ibid., col. 1463.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

inquiry, but that it should determine the validity of the abolitionists' claims.⁴⁹

At one point in the debate, Viscount Althorp announced that the time had come for Parliament to let the West Indian legislatures know that laws for the amelioration of the slaves' conditions were not optional.⁵⁰ If the colonial bodies would not take action on the resolutions Parliament sent to them, Althorp contended, then they should not be at all surprised when Parliament took the matter into its hands.⁵¹ Althorp's implied threat was especially offensive to the West Indians, who resented what they perceived as interference from London and those suffering from "enthusiasm." They had grown tired of the steadily increasing number of Non-conformist missionaries who preached not servility and submission, but emphasized freedom and independence. As the Smith and Shrewsbury incidents had shown, West Indian planters held missionaries

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Whig politician John Charles Spenser, Viscount Althorp (and later the third Earl of Spenser), (1782-1845), came from one of the great political families of England and served as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Whig leader in the House under the ministry of Earl Grey (1830-1834). See Ellis Archer Wasson, "Spencer, John Charles, Viscount Althorp and third Earl Spencer (1782-1845)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26133> (accessed July 9, 2009). Althorp has only been treated to two full-scale examinations since his death: Denis Le Marchant, *Memoir of John Charles, Viscount Althorp, third Earl Spencer* (London: R. Bentley, 1876), and Ellis Archer Wasson, *Whig Renaissance: Lord Althorp and the Whig Party, 1782-1845* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987).

⁵¹ Ibid., col. 1425.

responsible for most of this unrest, and failed to see their own actions as having any influence on matters. The debate was postponed but never resumed due to the dissolution of Parliament at the end of the month. Abolition, however, seemed to be one step closer to reality. When that day's session ended, Daniel O'Connell came across the House floor to greet the abolitionists. "Buxton," he said, "I see land."⁵²

Although Buxton attended Parliament regularly during the 1831 and 1832 sessions when parliamentary reform was under consideration, his focus remained on the question of abolition. "Some may be disposed to wonder that Mr. Buxton, at such a crisis, did not take an active part in the exciting discussions of the day," the *Memoirs* noted.⁵³ Buxton was interested in reform, and as he campaigned for reelection in May 1831, noted that his constituents were eager for it. "Is this unexpected?"⁵⁴ Yet Buxton was so obsessed with abolition by now that he thought of almost nothing else.⁵⁵

On January 1, 1832, Buxton assessed his life's work. He prayed for strength, guidance, and the ability to submit to the will of "that blessed Spirit" and its "still small

⁵² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 221.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

voice."⁵⁶ More importantly, he praised and thanked God for all He had done. "O Lord, how much have I had in the past year to thank thee for!" Buxton was concerned that he still had not done enough for the antislavery cause.

My great duty is the deliverance of my brethren in the West Indies from slavery both of body and soul. In the early part of the year I did in some measure faithfully discharge this. I gave my whole mind to it. I remember that I prayed for firmness and resolution to persevere, and that in spite of some formidable obstructions I was enabled to go on; but, latterly, where has my heart been? Has the bondage of my brethren engrossed my whole mind? The plain and the painful truth is that it has not. Pardon, O Lord, this neglect of the honourable service to which thou hast called me.⁵⁷

Buxton wanted "wisdom to devise, and ability to execute, and zeal and perseverance and dedication of heart."⁵⁸ To make this possible, Buxton prayed for the strength to be single-minded. He wanted nothing to obstruct him from his goal. "Bless, O Lord God, my efforts for the extinction of that cruel slavery."⁵⁹

Unbeknownst to Buxton, abolition moved closer to reality on Christmas Day 1831, when an estimated 25,000 Jamaican slaves revolted, a movement of "unprecedented scope."⁶⁰ The holiday fell on a Sunday; slaves believed they were due two days of rest whereas planters would only

⁵⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 233.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁶⁰ Blackburn, *Overthrow of Slavery*, 432.

allow one. This, coupled with the slaves' belief that the slave owners were suppressing an emancipation order, led to the uprising. Many slaves reacted by participating in work stoppages, but others resorted to violence. Fourteen whites were killed and property damage was determined to be nearly £1.2 million. It took two weeks for island authorities to regain control, and by that time 200 rebels were killed; an additional 312 were subsequently executed. Slave owners blamed the unrest on Nonconformist clergy.

The "Baptist War," as it was called, reinforced the perception among some in Britain that the West Indian slaves were not ready for emancipation. It also played into the hands of the West Indian planters, who placed the blame for the unrest squarely at the feet of the various missionaries who promoted acts of insubordination and filled the minds of slaves with unrealistic ideas.⁶¹

Three Baptist preachers are now in custody, and as we are satisfied they could not be taken into custody on slight grounds by Sir Willoughby Cotton, we hope he will award them fair and *impartial* justice. *Shooting* is, however, *too honourable a death* for men whose conduct has occasioned so much bloodshed, and the loss of so much property. There are *fine hanging* woods in St. James's and Trelawney, and we do sincerely hope that the bodies of all the Methodist preachers who may be convicted of sedition *may diversify the scene*.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid., 433.

⁶² *Jamaican Courant*, as reported in the *Liverpool Mercury*, Liverpool England, February 24, 1832, 1. (Emphasis in article.)

The planters believed that they could use the revolt on Jamaica to prove to the British public that the real problem in the West Indies was not slavery but the agitation of Non-conformist missionaries. They hoped to discredit the abolitionists and their missionary allies and further delay any discussion of emancipation. In this, however, they were sorely mistaken. As news of the barbaric manner in which the uprising had been suppressed reached England in February 1832, the smugness expressed by Jamaican publications such as the *Jamaica Courant* struck a nerve with abolitionist newspapers. Many expressed shock and outrage at the *Courant's* tone. "This man, in attempting to display his wit, proves only the depths of depravity into which the accursed system of slavery plunges its advocates," wrote the editors of the *Leeds Mercury*, indignant at "the language of the most popular newspaper among the Planters of Jamaica!"⁶³ Over the next several weeks, publications carried news of the Jamaican planters' violent response to the uprising.

The arrest of Baptist and Methodist preachers and the demolition of their chapels and schools angered many in Britain. John Dyer, secretary for the Baptist Missionary Society, sent a letter to the *Morning Chronicle* defending

⁶³ *Leeds Mercury*, Leeds, England, February 25, 1832, 3.

the actions of Baptist ministers who went to the West Indies. He blamed the planters for their continued opposition to any formal religious instruction of the slaves.⁶⁴ The insurrection "has shocked every man," the *Leeds Mercury* reported. The editors stated that their concern was not that the uprising had taken place, but that such events seem to be more frequent than in the past. The paper noted that all information detailing the event had come from either the planters or those interested in maintaining the "present atrocious system" in the West Indies.⁶⁵ The *Bristol Mercury* asserted:

There can be no doubt that the violent conduct lately shown by the planters, and their hostility shown to the measures of reform sent out by the Government, together with the insurrectionary movements on the part of the slave population, will all tend to stimulate the abolitionists in this country to increased exertions, exhibiting as they do the dreadful results which will ere long take place, if measures be not taken to secure the speedy abolition of slavery.⁶⁶

As this controversy played out in the press, Buxton was busily collecting and presenting petitions to the House and gathering any information that he could find to force a favourable resolution to his call for abolition. He amassed thousands of pages and dozens of volumes of

⁶⁴ "Letter to the Editor," *Morning Chronicle*, (London, England), February 22, 1832, 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ "Jamaica Insurrection," *Bristol Mercury* (Bristol, England), April 3, 1832, 3.

materials. Throughout the first half of 1832, Buxton made motions requesting copies of all documents regarding the West Indies and slavery. These included, for example, official correspondence with foreign powers on the slave trade as conducted after January 1831, and correspondence between government commissioners and the courts in Sierra Leone, Havana, Surinam, and Rio de Janerio on the trade conducted after January 1830.⁶⁷

In March, Buxton dined with friends to discuss future tactics, but was surprised to find that they could not agree on any one plan.⁶⁸ The abolitionists were at once astonishingly close to their goal, yet unsure of how to proceed. Buxton wanted the matter to end quickly. Speaking in Parliament in March, he shocked supporters when he admitted that he was at least willing to consider the possibility of providing the West Indian planters with some type of compensation in exchange for abolition.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Hansards, 3rd ser., vol. 10, (1832), col. 1222. Buxton also found time to present the House with two petitions from the Spitalfields and Bethnal Green areas in favor of the Factories Regulation Bill. Ibid. An excellent examination of the political maneuvering involved at this time can be found in Izhak Gross, "The Abolition of Negro Slavery and British Parliamentary Politics, 1832-3," *The Historical Journal* 23 (1980): 63-85.

⁶⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 240.

⁶⁹ Hansards, 3rd ser., vol. 11, (1832), col. 291. This differed greatly from Buxton's statement at the 1830 Anti-Slavery Society meeting when he declared that "if compensation were to be made [to the planters], the compensation was due from them to the negro-compensation for evils without number, and for years of unrewarded toil." "Proceedings of a General Meeting," *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* (London), June 1, 1830, 229.

On May 24, the Marquis of Chandos presented another petition on behalf of the West Indian interests. As with the previous document, this petition asked Parliament to recognize that the planters and others with interests in the West Indies deserved relief from what they viewed as economic hardships. The planters argued that excessive sugar duties, mortgages, and the maintenance of their slaves created economic stresses that would cause them ruin. In response, after presenting petitions for abolition from various congregations of Dissenters and the clergy from the diocese of Tuam,⁷⁰ Buxton surprised the House by requesting that his 1823 motion be amended to state,

That a Select Committee be appointed to consider and report upon the measures which it may be expedient to adopt for the purpose of effecting the extinction of slavery throughout the British dominions, at the earliest period compatible with the safety of all classes in the colonies."⁷¹

Since the slaves were causing the planters hardship, Buxton reasoned that emancipating their slaves might help alleviate their financial woes. His goal, Buxton added, was to have the House pledge itself to the adoption of the means necessary for the abolition of slavery.⁷² He clarified his earlier stance on compensation by noting that

⁷⁰ Hansards, 3rd ser., vol. 13, (1832), col. 33.

⁷¹ Ibid., col. 38.

⁷² Ibid.

if it were to be awarded to the planters, it must not come from former slaves. "Whatever the Government and country might owe the planter as a compensation," Buxton asserted, "the negro did not owe the planter anything."⁷³ Before any discussion of compensation could take place, however, "emancipation must come first."⁷⁴

Slavery, Buxton continued, was morally offensive. He reiterated the decreases in population. Buxton also presented accounts of cruelties inflicted on slaves, focusing on the use of the whip as punishment. He noted that this type of barbarity would not go unchecked. Slaves, aware of the injustice being done to them, would rise up in revolt. Buxton asked: What was the government prepared to do in the case of a general uprising? "War was to be lamented any where [sic], and under any circumstances," Buxton said, "but a war against a people struggling for their freedom and their rights, would be the falsest position . . . for England to be placed [in]."⁷⁵ This was not the ranting of an "enthusiast," Buxton noted, but the reasoned opinion of a "very different class of persons" who saw slavery as being morally incompatible with

⁷³ Ibid., col. 43.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., col. 48.

Christian values.⁷⁶ He urged the House to support his call for a Select Committee.

Some in the House spoke out against the request, arguing that changing the motion at this late date was inappropriate. Keith Douglas rose and objected to Buxton's desire to change his motion. It was impractical to do so at this point, since the government had committed itself to parts of the original measure. Amending the motion now, Douglas continued, would essentially negate all of the abolitionists' gains since 1823. That issue notwithstanding, Douglas again criticized Buxton's information, repeating as he had done before the assertion that Buxton's data was in error or misleading.

Lord Althorp disputed any claim that Buxton was changing course, by arguing that the 1823 motion was to ameliorate the conditions of the slaves, whereas Buxton's new motion called for the House to consider the manner and means by which slavery could be safely abolished.⁷⁷ Althorp suggested that Buxton's amendment be further modified to include the phrase, "a due consideration of the interests of all parties," language that appeared in a similar resolution before the House of Lords.⁷⁸ Buxton rejected

⁷⁶ Ibid., col. 49.

⁷⁷ Ibid., col. 59.

⁷⁸ Ibid., col. 60.

the additional language, saying that he was prepared to divide the House on the issue, "even if alone."⁷⁹ After others debated the measure, Althorp proposed yet another change to Buxton's amendment to make it more acceptable to the House: "and in conformity to the resolutions of this House of the 15th of May, 1823."⁸⁰

This change caused Peel to object because he wanted language inserted into the amended motion that would protect the planters' interests. The debate continued with Buxton finally observing that there were now two issues before the House: the 1823 motion on amelioration and his amendment requesting a Select Committee to consider the logistics of emancipation. He therefore proposed to offer up two separate motions, one for each issue. In addition to the 1823 motion, Buxton proposed that the second read:

That the Committee should consider and report upon the best means by which, without prejudice or delay to the emancipation of the slave-population, relief could be afforded to the West-India planters.⁸¹

A confused Althorp confessed that he did not see how the addition of a few words could be so troublesome. Althorp believed Buxton's actions to be so far off track that he could not offer his support. Althorp's amendment, "and in conformity to the resolutions of this House of the 15th of

⁷⁹ Ibid., col. 62.

⁸⁰ Ibid., col. 66.

⁸¹ Ibid., col. 96.

May, 1823," was approved. A Select Committee was appointed with Sir James Graham as its chair.⁸²

On July 2, Keith Douglas presented information on colonial goods that would be affected with the abolition of slavery. Using Haiti as his example, Douglas argued that once freedom was granted the production levels of staples such as sugar, coffee, cotton, indigo, and molasses decreased significantly. When Althorp asked him if he provided this data to justify not supporting abolition, Douglass responded that he wanted to demonstrate that interference in colonial affairs would "annihilate our colonies . . . [and] also our domestic manufactures."⁸³ Douglas also wanted to point out to those supporting abolition that should the measure pass, it would not do so without disrupting their personal comforts.

In August, a relief bill that provided £58,000 to assist the West Indies began its way through Parliament. After many parts of the bill were agreed to, Buxton asked if some means of liberating the slaves had been

⁸² Klingberg notes that this committee met from June 1 until August 11, but broke up without reaching a conclusion. Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 270. See "Report from the Select Committee on the Extinction of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions, with the Minutes of Evidence, an Index and Appendix," *Parliamentary Papers*, 1831-1832, (721) XX, 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, col. 1247.

incorporated into the package, but could not get a satisfactory answer.⁸⁴

The abolitionists believed that 1833 would be their year. The government would be reform-minded, and therefore unlikely to mount a successful defense against the abolitionist cause. The Reform Bill of 1832 brought with it a new sense of humanitarianism that was compatible with the idea of emancipation.

On February 19, 1833, Laurence Oliphant presented to the House a petition from Perth that contained nearly 4,000 signatures and demanded the end of slavery. On February 27, Richard Godson also presented a petition from James Window of Westminster, which not only called for abolition, but offered a plan through which total emancipation could be achieved with positive results for both planter and slave. The plan called for the slaves to "work out their own freedom" over a fifteen year period. A fund established by the government of £5 million would be provided for the slaves as payment for their work. In turn, they could use the money to buy their own freedom. Godson did not expect the plan to please anyone, but it was a plan that he believed to be effective and impartial.⁸⁵ In

⁸⁴ Ibid., vol. 14, (1832), cols. 1295.

⁸⁵ Ibid., col. 1179.

response, William Cobbett noted that the House could expect to see many such schemes proposed and they would probably provide "excellent amusement."⁸⁶ Any plan, he added, would contain the same conclusion - compensation for the planters - something he would never support if it took money away from the people of Great Britain. Cobbett argued that granting any compensation would set a dangerous precedent. "Establish the precedent of making the oppressed people of [Great Britain] pay the planters' portion," he noted, "then they will have to pay all." It would be a never-ending quest for money. "Indemnity to the planters, indemnity to this, that, and the other," Cobbett complained, "but all out of the pockets of the poorest of an overtaxed people."⁸⁷ After further discussion, the plan was tabled.

On March 18, John Marshall presented a petition from Leeds with 18,800 signatures, "praying for the Abolition of Slavery."⁸⁸ Cobbett responded that his constituents desired abolition as well, but before he was prepared to vote on the measure, he wanted to know if the "Negroes were fed worse or clothed worse" than his constituents.⁸⁹ He asserted that although much of the information presented in the past on the treatment of slaves was wrong, he would

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., vol. 16, col. 729.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

nevertheless support any bill for abolition, "merely to please" his constituents. He was certain, he added, that if a comparison were made between the slaves and poor Britons, the slaves would fare much better.⁹⁰

Frustrated with the lack of progress, on March 19, 1833, Buxton indicated his intention to renew his motion for the abolition of slavery, but Althorp begged him to reconsider. To do so, Althorp noted, would be "disadvantageous both to the question and to the House." It would be better if Buxton simply waited until the Colonial Secretary made the government's plan known.⁹¹ Buxton responded that he would delay his motion but only if Althorp could provide the House with an idea of what the government intended, and the date on which such a measure would be introduced. If these conditions could not be satisfied, Buxton added, he believed that he had no choice but to renew his motion.

Buxton's tactic worked. Althorp stated that he could not provide the House with any information on the government's plan but he did agree to schedule the government's presentation for April 23; this was the best he could do.⁹² Buxton replied that he only wanted the

⁹⁰ Ibid., col. 730.

⁹¹ Ibid., vol. 16, (1833), col. 826.

⁹² Ibid., col. 827.

government to commit to a date when the government would do *something*, and was content with the response.

On May 14, Buxton, along with a group of members that included George Stanley and John Russell, presented multiple petitions to the House calling for the end of slavery.⁹³ Buxton presented the "Women's Petition," which contained 187,000 signatures, and required four men to bring it into the House.⁹⁴ It was on this day that Colonial Secretary Edward Stanley finally introduced an abolition bill that sought to compensate colonial slave owners with a public loan. Stanley's original bill stated:

1. That it is the opinion of this Committee, that immediate and effectual measures be taken for the entire abolition of slavery throughout the colonies, under such provisions for regulating the condition of the negroes, as may combine their welfare with the interests of the proprietors.

2. That it is expedient that all children born after the passing of any Act, or who shall be under the age of six years at the time of passing any Act of Parliament for this purpose, shall be declared free, subject, nevertheless, to such temporary restrictions as may be deemed necessary and equitable, in consideration of their support and maintenance.

3. That all persons, now slaves, be entitled to be registered as apprenticed labourers, and acquire thereby all the restriction of labouring, under

⁹³ Over fifty members presented petitions.

⁹⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 269. For an extensive discussion of the role of British women in the abolition movement, see Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

conditions, and for a time to be fixed by Parliament, for their present owners.

4. That to provide against the risk of loss which proprietors in His Majesty's colonial possessions might sustain by the abolition of slavery, His Majesty be enabled to advance by way of loan, to be raised, from time to time, a sum not exceeding, in the whole, £15,000,000, to be repaid in such manner, and at such rate of interest, as shall be prescribed by Parliament.

5. That his Majesty be enabled to defray any such expense as he may incur in establishing an efficient stipendiary Magistracy and police in the colonies, and in aiding the Legislatures in providing for the religious and moral education of the negro population to be emancipated.⁹⁵

To ensure that the plantation owners would not suffer severe losses, former slaves, now called "apprentices," would be required to provide labour to their former owners for a period of twelve years.⁹⁶ They would also be required to buy their freedom, a move that Stanley defended, arguing that it would encourage freemen to save their wages and become financially responsible.⁹⁷ Schools and churches would be built under this plan, and the security of the colonies would fall to a group of government appointed magistrates, whose loyalty would be to the government, not the West Indians.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ibid., vol. 17, cols. 1230-1231.

⁹⁶ Ibid., vol 17, (1833), cols. 1193-1262.

⁹⁷ Ibid., col. 1227.

⁹⁸ Ibid., col. 1228-1229.

The abolitionists were not pleased with the government's plan, but they were encouraged that the government intended to resolve the matter. Meanwhile, petitions were being presented to the House on a regular basis. William Gladstone presented a petition from Portarlinton for abolition on May 17. A week later, William Roche presented five more from Wesleyan Methodists of Limerick calling for abolition. On May 30, Richard Vyvyan and Henry Goulburn presented petitions that opposed abolition on the grounds that it would cause unjust harm to the planters, the colonies, and to Great Britain. Goulburn's London petition contained 1800 signatures. In response, Buxton noted that he had 40 petitions in hand from all over Britain that were "directly opposed to the prayer of the petitions" presented by Vyvyan and Goulburn.⁹⁹

The debate over Stanley's proposals for abolition took place throughout June and early July. To some degree, the debates were pointless. The House had never truly been opposed to abolition; it questioned the manner in which slavery could be terminated. The debates, however, allowed the West Indians to make a final attempt to derail the process.

⁹⁹ Ibid., vol. 18, col. 112

On June 3, Daniel O'Connell called for the immediate emancipation of the slaves. The motion failed, and after another round of debates, it was moved to amend the government's proposal:

1. That . . . immediate and effectual measures be taken for the entire abolition of slavery throughout the colonies, under such provisions for regulating the condition of the negroes, as may combine their welfare with the interests of the proprietors. That towards the compensation of the proprietors in his Majesty's colonial possessions, his Majesty be enabled to grant to them a sum not exceeding 20,000,000*l.*, to be appropriated as Parliament shall direct. That in order to secure the success of this object, and the co-operation of the colonial Legislatures and authorities, his Majesty be enabled to advance, by way of loan, on colonial security, a further sum, not exceeding 10,000,000*l.* sterling; these payments to be made to the colonies, upon their respective authorities passing laws in conformity with this and the following Resolutions.

2. That it is expedient that all children born after the passing of any Act of Parliament for this purpose, shall be declared free, and be subject to such temporary restrictions as may be deemed necessary and equitable, in consideration of their support and maintenance.

3. That all other persons, now slaves, be registered as apprenticed labourers, and acquire thereby all rights and privileges of freemen, subject to the restriction of labouring, under conditions, and for a time to be fixed by Parliament, for their owners.

4. That his Majesty be enabled to defray any such expense as he may incur in establishing an efficient stipendiary Magistracy and police in the colonies, and in aiding the local authorities in providing further religious and moral education of the negro population to be emancipated.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., vol. 18, cols. 325.

The most notable change was the change in compensation from £15 million *loan* to a £20 million *grant*. The West Indians protesting what they saw as mistreatment by Parliament, complained that they should not lose the value of their property and have to repay an interest-bearing loan. Stanley agreed, and although he previously thought that £15 million was sufficient, he moved to amend the figure to £20 million. The bill was further amended to fix the period of apprenticeship at twelve years, which Buxton and other abolitionists opposed as unnecessary and potentially hazardous to the whole measure. Buxton could support some type of financial compensation as long as it provided for the slaves' freedom, but not if apprenticeship was attached.¹⁰¹

The bill was introduced on July 5, and debated for the next three weeks. Buxton reiterated his opposition to the apprentice clause, characterizing the whole matter as "incomprehensible."¹⁰² He further complained that any money provided by Parliament should be withheld until the colonial legislatures proved that they had abolished slavery. He feared enriching the planters in the event that the legislatures failed to embrace emancipation. He

¹⁰¹ Ibid., vol. 18, cols. 507-508.

¹⁰² Ibid., vol. 19, col. 1057.

argued again for banning the use of the whip as a means to compel work, stating that a fair wage would accomplish just as much.

On July 24, the House moved into a Committee of the Whole to consider the bill. The basic framework for abolition was complete; it had come down to resolving the details. Buxton, remained displeased with the bill because he believed it favored the planters over the slaves.¹⁰³ When Secretary Stanley seemed to suggest that Buxton might stir up rebellion in the colonies if the bill failed, Buxton protested that he found the charge "galling."¹⁰⁴ When Stanley explained there had been a misunderstanding, that he believed Buxton's obstinacy over the apprentice clause would not "produce a happy effect on the mind of the negroes,"¹⁰⁵ Buxton agreed. He noted, however, that if his was a voice that the slaves would listen to, then he would "implore" them

to do their part towards the peaceful termination of their bondage. He would say to them, "The time of your deliverance is at hand;—let that period be sacred—let it be defiled by no outrage—let it be stained by no blood. Let not the hair of the head of a single planter be touched. Make any sacrifice—bear any indignity—submit to any privation, rather than raise your hand against any white man;—continue to wait and to work patiently—trust implicitly to that great

¹⁰³ Ibid., col. 1184.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., col. 1217.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

nation and paternal Government who are labouring for your release. Preserve peace and order to the utmost of your power—obey the laws, both before and at the time of your liberation;—and, when that, period shall arrive, fulfil the expectations of your friends in England, and the promises they have made in your name, by the most orderly, diligent, and dutiful conduct.”¹⁰⁶

Buxton continued by stating that if the slaves would participate in a “peaceful emancipation,” resisting the temptation to rebel, destroy, or be idle, they would justify the beliefs of the abolitionists, confound those of their opponents and

should show by their conduct, that they were not the brutes which they had been supposed to be, but human beings, capable of being influenced by the same motives as the rest of mankind.¹⁰⁷

If the slaves could but wait a bit longer, Buxton continued, they will prove to a cautious public that they were equal. In this task, they could not fail. “The fate of five million slaves would mainly depend on the issue of this great experiment,” Buxton noted.¹⁰⁸

During the next day’s debate, Buxton attempted to get the length of the apprenticeship shortened.¹⁰⁹ Secretary Stanley had opposed the measure in private and in the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., cols. 1217-1218.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., col. 1218.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., col. 1256.

House, but after open debate it was decided to reduce the time from twelve to seven years.¹¹⁰

The discussion of the grant of £20 million and apprenticeship had a polarizing effect on Parliament. Members fell into one of two camps. On one side were Buxton and his followers, who believed that neither the grant nor apprenticeship were necessary or even required. On the other extreme were those who supported the West Indian faction and argued that £20 million was a mere pittance, covering only a fraction of what the planters would lose through emancipation. Moreover, they argued, an apprenticeship system favored the former slaves far more than it helped the now former slave owners. To support their position, petitions from the West Indies began making their way to Parliament, each expressing a reluctant support for emancipation but at a price significantly higher than what the Government was prepared to offer. On 20 July, for example, the Barbados House of Assembly issued a resolution agreeing to support the notion of abolition, but arguing that the payment of £20 million was not enough and would prove injurious to the planters and the British economy.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 1270.

¹¹¹ *Times*, 23 July 1833.

The debate over compensation and apprenticeship would split the antislavery faction into two groups: those who followed Buxton and Lushington and were willing to compromise in the interest of government action; and those who rejected any concessions.¹¹² For some, this was a betrayal of principle. This faction, containing the more militant and confrontational members of the Anti-Slavery Society, were known as the "Agency Committee." Led by George Stephen and two Quakers, Emanuel and Joseph Cooper, the Committee began aggressively campaigning for immediate emancipation. They provided literature and lecturers for any organization or community that requested them. They condemned the apprentice compromise in the press. Buxton was targeted for ridicule, as were other leading abolitionists who sided with him.¹¹³

Buxton's support of the bill, while not personally satisfying, was predicated on the idea that if the money was not spent for the liberation of those enslaved in the West Indies, then a sum even greater would be spent on the subsequent military action needed to quell anticipated disturbances. Moreover, he protested, these disturbances would be the result of ordinary men fighting solely for

¹¹² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 278.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* See also Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 274-276.

their "natural rights."¹¹⁴ The bill, Buxton acknowledged, was not perfect, and would result in additional suffering. He noted, however, that this suffering would be temporary. Had no compromise been reached, Britain risked the very real possibility of losing the West Indian colonies for good. "Were they not cheap at the price of 20 millions?" he asked.¹¹⁵

The next day, however, Buxton attempted to thwart the planters one final time. As the bill was on the verge of being submitted for its final reading, Buxton submitted a proposal that one-half of the grant be put aside until the apprenticeship period was concluded. Buxton had concocted this idea the night before, in the hopes of having the entire grant removed from the bill. This, he acknowledged, was a long shot; but with the bill's passage so near, Buxton did not believe his last-minute request would derail the measure.¹¹⁶ The government would be justified in withholding the £10 million, he argued, as it was common business practice to render partial payment until the terms of a contract were completed; this entire exchange, he argued, was in fact, a contract. The measure failed, as Buxton knew it would, although other amendments-

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ *Times*, 31 July 1833.

¹¹⁶ Priscilla Buxton to Zachary Macaulay, July 31, 1833, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

minor in scope and proposed by other members—were successful.

There is no doubt that Buxton opposed granting any funds to the West Indian planters, viewing doing so as at best a financial windfall for the planters, and at worst, nothing short of extortion. His last minute protestations against full payment of the grant, however, smacked of political opportunism. Buxton's initial support of the payment and the apprenticeship program called his antislavery credentials into question, insofar as the more vocal members of the reform movement were concerned. It is perhaps not surprising, although not admirable, that Buxton would make an effort to save face.

On July 29, Wilberforce, the father of the abolition movement and one of its driving forces, died. Surprisingly, Buxton says little about the death of the man who served as his friend, colleague, and mentor, in either the *Memoirs* or his private papers. Buxton's immediate concerns, rather, lay in trying to placate those in the reform movement who felt betrayed by his support for the apprentice clause. No one in the abolition movement was happy with the inclusion of the grant and the apprenticeship program as the price for abolition. Buxton believed that agreeing to these terms was the only way to

assure that the bill as a whole would even see the light of day.¹¹⁷ Even Joseph John Gurney, who expressed dismay over the fact that Buxton had agreed to this compromise, realized that although the measure had secured legitimate support, its success was still not assured. In a letter undated, but written within days of Wilberforce's death, Gurney urged Buxton to stay the course and see the bill through. "I beseech thee," Gurney wrote, not to throw the bill overboard."¹¹⁸

Over the course of the next month, the bill to eliminate slavery made its way through the House of Lords with only minimal resistance. By August 28, the bill had survived every attempt at alteration; the final step would be securing the king's approval, which was most certainly assured. On March 19, 1834, the king assented to the Slavery Abolition Act. Slavery would cease to exist within British dominions at midnight on August 1, 1834.

The long-anticipated arrival of emancipation symbolized not only success for the abolitionist movement in Great Britain, but also for those movements centered upon reform as a whole. The elimination of legalized slavery was a monumental accomplishment: never before in

¹¹⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 278.

¹¹⁸ Joseph John Gurney to TFB, n.d., (but during the week of 1 August 1833), *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

the history of the West had any single society so completely and utterly repudiated the institution of slavery in such an open manner.

"The extinction of British colonial slavery is a very important event," one reader wrote to the *Times*. "It is a pledge that this country will follow up the cause until slavery is finally extinct."¹¹⁹ Failure to complete this mission, the author warned, was a black mark against British civilization. "If society does not live for moral advancement, its own existence is not worth anything."¹²⁰ While recognizing the evils of slavery was one thing, destroying the slave trade once and for all was paramount to achieving any success in Africa. To do that, Europe needed to substitute one economic system for another. "The African can never be civilized until legitimate trade is substituted for the existing traffic in her sons and daughters," the *Times* observed. The only way to ensure that the promise of freedom would not be wasted was to ensure that the slave trade was replaced with "legitimate trade."¹²¹ Once native Africans had been infected with the bug of capitalism, the author reasoned, they would adopt European manners and customs, and take care of themselves.

¹¹⁹ *Times*, August 5, 1834, 3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Yet, as with any long-entrenched cultural institution, slavery and especially the attitudes towards those enslaved were a part of Britain's social fabric. Most in the antislavery camp were well aware that their political victory would not translate into immediate social, political or economic equality for freedmen. In this respect, the political victory of the reformers was only half realized. Slavery as an English institution might be dead, but the battle to incorporate into everyday life those formerly enslaved had only just begun. For the social reformers, eradication of slavery was but the first step in taking society to a higher, more moral level. In effect, those enslaved in the West Indies were not the only ones promised a better tomorrow.

Those concerned with social reform co-opted the day as a celebration of humanitarian spirit. One writer to the *Times* suggested that to commemorate this day, "[E]ach lover of liberty, who can afford the money, seek out . . . one or more poor industrious families in his neighborhood, and distribute amongst them six quartern [sic] loaves of the best wheaten bread, and, of course, as many more as he pleases."¹²² The writer also suggested that likeminded citizens could also establish a "fund to build 12

¹²² Ibid., August 1, 1834, 5.

almshouses, for poor men and women of colour, in some spot on the roadside near the metropolis."¹²³ Other Britons offered similarly humanitarian-themed notions for celebration. One congregation announced that in honor of the Great Day, it would erect a building to serve as both a schoolhouse and Sunday school for some three hundred local children, with additional provisions for a dozen alms-rooms for "12 pious people."¹²⁴

Buxton celebrated by giving a speech to the Anti-Slavery Society in London, declaring that emancipation had not come from the hand of man, but rather as the will of God.¹²⁵ Later, the family celebrated privately, presenting him with two engraved silver plates.¹²⁶ It was also the day that his eldest child, Priscilla, chose to marry fellow abolitionist and MP, Andrew Johnston.¹²⁷

Despite feeling pleased with the knowledge that emancipation was a reality, Buxton now grappled with trying to ease the transition for thousands who were slaves one day and freemen the next. Buxton was acutely aware that the problem of integrating former slaves into society was a particular problem for the antislavery and reform

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., August 6, 1834, 6.

¹²⁵ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 294.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 295-296.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 296.

movements. These groups had spent years railing about the unchristian and barbarous evils of slavery. They also promoted these newly emancipated slaves as equals in the eyes of God, having argued that with a proper religious and secular education, former slaves would become productive members of the empire. The challenge lay in proving their point.¹²⁸

Buxton now faced a complicated situation. Successfully blending former slaves into British culture as industrious and patriotic citizens was paramount to the survival of the social reform movements. If this grand social experiment failed, it would symbolize to its opponents the fallacy of social reform and reaffirm the status quo. If this exercise succeeded, on the other hand, it would legitimize the conscious redesign of society and provide future reform-minded activists with the currency needed to accomplish their goals.

During the next three years, Buxton did not rest upon his laurels. In addition to his efforts for the freemen, Buxton continued to participate in various societies concerned with the poor. Surprisingly, however, he was not particularly active when Parliament revised the poor laws

¹²⁸ Klingberg notes that since 1823, "many people had become convinced by the conduct of the colonies that there was no hope of the negroes being prepared for the enjoyment liberty while they were still slaves." Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement*, 250.

in 1834. It is possible engagement in parliamentary maneuvering now seemed mundane and ordinary, and with good reason: Buxton's success in pushing for abolition, the conversion of the West Indies from a slave-based economic system to one of free labor, and the relatively calm and quiet response of the former slaves to their new status, were achievements that would be difficult to surpass.

In the early morning hours of June 20, 1837, William IV died, leaving his nineteen-year-old niece, Victoria, as his heir. The new queen made a few immediate public appearances, praised her uncle, mourned his loss, and dissolved Parliament for new elections.

This marked a turning point for Buxton, as he faced a very hostile electorate and more challengers than he had in previous elections. The political achievements of the Whigs in the five previous years may have made them too successful and complacent, and, as such, ripe for attacks from both Tories as well as younger Whigs hoping to make names for themselves. In March, for example, the *Times* boasted that the son of Lord Wynford proposed to seek Weymouth's seat;¹²⁹ within four months, three others had announced their candidacy as well.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ *Times*, March 5, 1837, 5.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, July 3, 1837, 6.

Were he to win the contest, Buxton was prepared to pursue yet another crusade against "slavery, [the] Slave Trade, and [the] white man's cruelties."¹³¹ At the same time, however, Buxton recognized the very real possibility that his close identification with the Whig administration could cost him dearly.¹³² This pessimism extended to the Whig slate in general, as William Burdon, the other Whig member from Weymouth, also seemed to view his chances for reelection as hopeless. Burdon appeared unwilling to make any real attempt at winning the contest.

Less than a week before the election, Buxton confided to his son Charles that he was reasonably certain to lose the election—a development he was well prepared to accept with little regret. "I am confident that I shall be very thankful if I am turned out," he wrote.¹³³ Win or lose, Buxton stressed, he was content with the hand he had been dealt. As he was preparing to leave for Weymouth, an incredulous Buxton was approached by a supporter who offered a quick solution to his election jitters. If he truly wanted to win the election, the supporter told him, Buxton would have to open the public houses and "to loan

¹³¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 357.

¹³² David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

¹³³ *Ibid.*

money to the extent of £1000."¹³⁴ Buxton was astounded. "I of course declined," he later told his brother-in-law. "It might not be my duty to get into Parliament, but it could not be my duty to corrupt the electors by beer and banknotes."¹³⁵ As he had so many times before, Buxton also turned to Hannah for comfort and support, all the while making sure that she too, understood that his prospects were not great. "This day will, I expect, make an entire revolution in my vocation," he penned the night before the election. "I have no expectation of being returned."¹³⁶

Professionally, the election, held July 25, was nothing short of a disaster for Buxton. Characterized as both a radical and evangelical by the press, Buxton had to know that his reelection would be unlikely. This became exceedingly apparent during a last-minute attempt to find a suitable replacement for Burdon, who withdrew from the contest when it became clear he would not survive the nominating phase. The Whigs now needed a candidate—any candidate—that possessed a fresh face and could boast legitimate Whig credentials. As the party leadership mulled this problem, George Stephen arrived in Weymouth as a sign of support. "Unshaven [and] unbreakfasted," Buxton

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ TFB to HB, July 24, 1837, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 357.

later wrote, the hapless Stephen became the new Whig candidate.¹³⁷ If the Reform Bill of 1832 had supposedly signaled a new political era, it quickly became apparent that much of the old politics continued.¹³⁸ Corrupt electioneering tactics that had proven successful in previous elections persisted. The Tory candidates did not share Buxton's reservations about beer halls and banknotes, and by mid-morning, their "supporters" numbered not a few. The Whigs, by comparison, were able to garner substantial support, but it was not enough. By the end of the afternoon, the results were in: Buxton came in a distant third, behind Lord Villiers and G. W. Hope.¹³⁹ Content that he had given the effort his utmost, Buxton was determined to put a positive spin on the results. "Well, my dearest wife," Buxton wrote to Hannah the following morning, "your wishes are realized."¹⁴⁰

The man who had once served as the public face of abolitionism was now a part of the Old Order. For the editors of the *Times*, the defeat of reformers such as Buxton was a godsend. The citizenry of Weymouth "returned

¹³⁷ TFB to Joseph John Gurney, July 30, 1837, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 359.

¹³⁸ See Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*.

¹³⁹ According to the *Times*, Villiers received 289 votes, Hope 266, and Buxton 214. George Stephen received only 159. *London Times*, July 26, 1837, 5.

¹⁴⁰ TFB to HB, July 24, 1837, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 357.

two Conservatives in lieu of two Radicals," the paper noted.¹⁴¹ "The electors of Weymouth," it added,

have stood nobly to their colours; they have thrown off the yoke of Mr. Buxton, and have shown themselves not unmindful of the assistance their town derived from the frequent visits of George III by endeavouring by every means in their power to give stability to the throne of his granddaughter.¹⁴²

Having sat in Parliament for nearly twenty years, Buxton did not resign himself to self-pity at his sudden unemployment. "I look at myself as an old horse turned out to grass," he confided to his wife, "and it is folly to worry myself by supposing, that other and better steeds will not be found to do the work."¹⁴³ After the election, he thanked those who had supported him, doing his best to keep up their spirits. That night, he dined with his son Edward and friends at Bellfield, not once feeling regret or remorse "at the memory of my departed honours."¹⁴⁴ Now that he was emancipated from the weighty burdens of office, he could, for the first time in two decades envision enjoying a period of relaxation. Buxton had not had any major crises for quite some time; still, his health remained somewhat tenuous. "I do not by any means intend to defeat that end by dedicating myself to any other objects," he

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² *Times*, 26 July 1837, 5.

¹⁴³ TFB to HB, July 24 1837, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 357.

¹⁴⁴ TFB to Joseph John Gurney, July 30, 1837, cited in Buxton, *Memoirs*, 359.

wrote to his brother-in-law.¹⁴⁵ His plate, as it were, was clean; he had no intentions of addressing any further social ills. Rather, he was content to dream of being able "to ride, shoot, amuse myself, and grow fat and flourishing."¹⁴⁶

Buxton's dismissal by the Weymouth electorate was indicative of the public's change in attitude on other issues as well, particularly the abolition movement. Since the arrival of the Great Day in 1834, the various abolitionist groups had been basking in the glory of their accomplishment. To their consternation, some fellow citizens were beginning to feel not only betrayed by the antislavery movement, but to see it as distinctly anti-British. There was growing criticism that the Anti-Slavery Society only acted against British slavery, not slavery as an institution. In doing so, these reformers threatened the very underpinnings of the empire's economy. This argument, in and of itself, was not new-it was used during the debates over ending the slave trade in 1807. Moreover, although apprenticeship had never been fully implemented, it was still a sore point for many within the reform movement, and Parliament's failure to resolve the matter

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

only added to the discontent. In just three years following their greatest success, the Anti-Slavery Society found its most difficult battle to be the one against the public belief that the Society's mission was woefully incomplete. The slave trade and slavery survived, to the economic disadvantage of Britain, which had rejected both.

"Permit me to call your attention to the subjects of the traffic in slaves and the Anti-Slavery Society," wrote one such doubter to the *Times* in November, 1837. Taking the name "Ocellus,"¹⁴⁷ the anonymous author took the Society to task for its shortcomings:

The unregulated slave trade exists, is increasing under the measures taken for its suppression, and an abundant supply of slaves is conveyed to the foreign West Indies and the Brazils. Under these well-known facts, what do the Anti-Slavery Society perform? Are not its exertions almost exclusively directed to the extinction of British colonial slavery, while the evil at its source, is left without a remedy, if not without attention?¹⁴⁸

By not pursuing the global eradication of slavery, Ocellus continued, the society's actions left the British West Indies "unduly harassed," while foreign colonies benefited from an "almost unlimited supply of cheap

¹⁴⁷ An "ocellus" is the simple or minor eye of some insects or false eye patterns that appear on certain animals and insects as a part of their natural camouflage—for example, the eye-like markings on the tail feathers of a peacock.

¹⁴⁸ *Times*, 22 November 1837, 5.

labour."¹⁴⁹ This might seem to be a restating of the West Indian position against abolition, but this was not Ocellus' intent. Rather, he argued, the continued existence of foreign slavery was a threat to the unstable free labor system attempting to take root in the Caribbean. "It is in vain to correct an evil at the extremities," he concluded, "while it is allowed at the source to rage with unabated vigour."¹⁵⁰

Ocellus would have probably been surprised that Buxton concurred with his views. Foreign slavery was a problem not simply in economic terms, but in Christian terms. Buxton gave the issue a great deal of consideration, believing that it was necessary to take immediate action. During the two years that followed, Buxton collected as much data as he could to create a plan that he believed would end the slave trade and be Africa's salvation. In committing to such a lofty goal, however, Buxton had unwittingly set in motion a humiliating defeat.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Chapter Eight:
"A Holy Cause:" The Niger Expedition of 1841

The Niger Expedition of 1841 was to have been a major jewel in Buxton's crown of achievements, second only to his success with the Abolition Act eight years earlier. When the expedition finally set sail in April 1841, it represented what was perhaps the first significant attempt on the part of English social and moral reformers to extend their influence beyond British dominions. Whereas previous exploration in Africa relied heavily upon commercial motivation, this expedition would merge that impulse with a combination of Christian values and old-fashioned British patriotism. "A thirst for discovery, and the spirit of commercial enterprise, had stimulated all [previous] attempts to penetrate into the interior of Africa," began Captain William Allen, one of the participants in the endeavor, in his account published in 1848. "But a new and better motive now arose to produce a far greater effort."¹

The expedition had its genesis in Buxton's publication of *The African Slave Trade* in 1839. Taking full advantage of the free time that his election defeat now afforded, Buxton's initial intent was to produce a meticulous

¹ William Allen and T. R. H. Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition Sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841, Under the Command of Captain H. D. Trotter, R. N.* 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1848), 1:22.

examination of the slave trade in the wake of Britain's embrace of abolition. He envisioned a two-part study, more thorough than anything done previously. The first volume would consist solely of research and it would detail the state of the African slave trade as it existed in 1839: identifying which nations still participated in the practice, and how the institution continued to harm Africa and its populace. The second part would offer a detailed response to the problems described in the first book. Here, Buxton hoped to present a resolution that would eradicate slavery forever.

Buxton recognized from the start that his dreams of ending the slave trade and reinvigorating Africa all hinged on governmental participation. Without such assistance, any efforts to stem the trade would be weakened from the onset. In early 1838, Buxton met with cabinet members in hopes of generating support for his proposed African policies within Melbourne's government.² Happy as he was with these sessions, Buxton reluctantly accepted that the daily business of Parliament left members with little time to consider his requests.³ He commissioned an advance printing of *The African Slave Trade*, which he then

² Thomas Fowell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1840), 239.

³ *Ibid.*

distributed to the prime minister, cabinet, and influential friends on the afternoon that Parliament's 1838 session ended.⁴ During this break, the Melbourne government considered Buxton's proposals and four months later, on December 22, Buxton learned that the government was interested in certain aspects of his proposals. Despite some reservations, the government wanted "to adopt the substance of the plan."⁵

The African Slave Trade was published in February 1839 and was an immediate commercial and critical success. The work was praised as "highly important and eminently reasonable."⁶ Buxton, the review continued, "established a new claim to our gratitude by the application of his time and talents," the result of which was a book "which is not only highly credible to himself, but powerfully adapted to quicken the community at large."⁷ Another newspaper praised the book for presenting its subject in a manner "far too

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. Howard Temperley notes that despite being turned out of office, Buxton held too much political capital to have his plans summarily dismissed. Temperley adds that Buxton's proposals were not original and were rooted in earlier plans that met with limited success. When compared to the government's lack of action on the matter, however, Buxton's plans seemed significant. Moreover, fearing that an open rejection of Buxton would cause a "defection by the humanitarians," and cost them control of the government, the Whigs believed that they had no choice but to "humour" Buxton's request. Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (London: Longman, 1972), 54.

⁶ "The African Slave-Trade by Thomas Fowell Buxton," *British Emancipator, Under the Sanction of the Central Negro Emancipation Committee*, (London, England), March 20, 1839, 222; *Liverpool Mercury*, (Liverpool, England), April 5, 1839, 115.

⁷ Ibid.

clear and well-founded to admit of any doubt" that Britain's efforts in crushing the international slave trade had failed.⁸ Still a third proclaimed that the book "ought to be placed in the hands of every thinking man and woman in the United Kingdom," adding that plans had already been made for the publication of a second edition.⁹ Buxton furnished advance copies of the book to friends and fellow abolitionists who felt a combination of shock, anger, and sadness at the book's conclusions. Even Buxton admitted being surprised by what his study had ultimately demonstrated. It proved what his critics and some abolitionists had stated to him back in 1833, and to Wilberforce back in 1806: that rather than lead to the cessation of all African enslavement, British abolition had left nary a dent in the institution. The slave trade, whether conducted by Europeans or Africans, still existed; if anything, slavery had only intensified in the years since passage of the Abolition Act. Britain, according to Buxton, was the most influential power on earth; to not use that power for the betterment of civilization was, in

⁸ "African Slave Trade," *Newcastle Courant* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England), April 5, 1839, 4.

⁹ "The African Slave Trade," *Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), May 11, 1839, 7.

Buxton's eyes, a catastrophic sin. Britain had to do more.¹⁰

To accomplish this, Buxton advocated two things. First, he believed it vital to expand the role of the Royal Navy along the African coastline. He wanted the navy to act as a policing agent, with the power to stop, search, and, if necessary, confiscate, any ship engaged in the slave trade, regardless of nationality. Second, he argued that only direct diplomacy with native African powers would discourage them from selling fellow Africans. The first initiative would prove to be difficult to achieve as it would require a significant reassessment of British foreign policy. Since 1808, Britain maintained a constant naval presence along the west coast of Africa. The patrols of the "British West African Squadron" could only end when and if all involved in the slave trade agreed to ending it. Since such guarantees were not a given and unlikely to happen in the immediate future, the cost of such a policing exercise could be astronomical. The second goal was more practical, as Britain had routinely made such diplomatic entreaties with African chieftains in the past. Here again there was the possibility of unintentional conflict. The expectations of some African powers might exceed what

¹⁰ Buxton, *African Slave Trade*, xii.

Britain was prepared to grant in return for their cooperation in ending the slave trade. Buxton painted a portrait of a tragic and unholy crime that might be intractable.

The public outcry that followed the publication of *The African Slave Trade* led to the creation of yet another abolitionist organization, the "Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa," popularly known as the "African Civilization Society." Buxton was installed as its leader, despite the fact that he was not in the best of health at that time. The society proposed an expedition to:

explore that great artery of Western Africa, the river Niger; to examine the capabilities of the country along its banks; to enter into treaties with the native chiefs for the abolition of the slave-trade; to clear the road for commercial enterprise, and to afford that enterprise the security which alone seemed necessary for its development.¹¹

This expedition would be philanthropic and scientific in nature. At the same time, its members would need authorization to act in the queen's name and in the Empire's best interest. These explorers would be, in effect, Great Britain's representatives to the Great Unknown. Thus, the expedition's senior commander would also serve as its chief commissioner, empowered to

¹¹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 434.

negotiate treaties with the various African chieftains along the river. Three other commissioners were authorized: the two subordinate ship commanders and a civilian. One would have significant knowledge of Africa. Ships crews were, at least initially, to be British, but preference was to be given to black seamen. This stipulation was deliberate as it was believed that they would and could handle the African climate far better than whites.¹² Thus, the number of white crewmen was to be kept to a minimum. Additionally and somewhat related, the society insisted on hiring a compliment of medical personnel far larger than what would ordinarily be included on an exploration vessel. Finally, a group of scientists, agriculturalists, and missionaries were to be included in the endeavor, many of whom would be compensated by either the society or by Buxton and his friends. The plan, despite being hopelessly unrealistic, was exceedingly simple on paper. The society proposed to outfit a crew and several sturdy ships, all in time for a launch in late 1839. If the expedition began early enough, or so it was believed, the vessels could enter the Niger and possibly

¹² Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger 1841-1842* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 45. Temperley notes that between 1819 and 1836, "the annual average mortality rate of Europeans in Africa was 48.3 percent."

complete their mission well in advance of the hotter, and potentially more dangerous, rainy season that traditionally began during the month of June.

An investigation of the River Niger had long been on Great Britain's agenda. The potential wealth offered by the African interior could never be realized without a minimal understanding of the continent's various waterways. The Niger was believed to empty into the Nile.¹³ In 1805, Mungo Park, an intrepid Scottish explorer, embarked on a series of failed explorations in hopes of discovering the Niger's source. The endeavor ultimately proved tragic: Park and his party were killed in 1806, although their loss was not confirmed until two decades later. A subsequent expedition in 1832-34 that attempted a similar mission fared no better. Of the 39 Europeans involved, nearly eighty percent never returned. Most died from fever.¹⁴ This history made it imperative that this latest expedition be as prepared as possible.

In August 1839, a Royal Naval officer was enlisted to serve as the expedition's overall commander. Captain Henry Dundas Trotter, a thirty-seven year old career officer, proved to be an ideal choice, given his previous service.

¹³ Allen, *Narrative*, 1:15.

¹⁴ Temperley, *White Dreams*, 46.

He had served in the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, and in the West Indies, but it was his years of service with the Royal Navy's African Squadron that caught the society's attention. The fact that he gave the appearance of a young, dashing and handsome career military man did not hurt.¹⁵ The inclusion of such a prominent naval figure could only bode well for the expedition.¹⁶ Yet Captain Trotter was not the only celebrity attached to the expedition. Unlike Trotter or most of the men connected with the enterprise, Commander William Allen had actually sailed on the Niger, having mapped out a portion of it during an earlier expedition. The third officer was Commander Bird Allen, a friend of the Buxton family, and not related to William Allen. Handsome and well-liked, Bird Allen was a year younger than Captain Trotter. Like

¹⁵ Henry Dundas Trotter (1802-1859) was Royal naval officer who had strong ties to the abolitionist cause. He cemented his reputation five years earlier when, in June 1833, as a commander, he seized the *Panda*, a Spanish slaver from Havana, which had only recently attacked an American ship. Some months later, he captured the *Esperanza*, a Portuguese schooner also involved in the incident. The crewmen were turned over to the Americans, who quickly thanked Trotter for his efforts. The courts, however, ruled against him insofar as the *Esperanza* was concerned; Trotter was personally responsible for refitting the ship prior to its return to Lisbon. This was a potentially ruinous development, but public outcry was such that crews from other ships performed the necessary work for free. The Admiralty promoted him to captain two years later. See J. K. Laughton, "Trotter, Henry Dundas (1802-1859)," rev. Andrew Lambert, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27760, accessed 10 July 2008].

¹⁶ When Trotter was offered command of the expedition, he was preparing to take his ill wife to Malta for a recuperative holiday. Upon receipt of the letter, he left her and headed back to London to interview for the job. Temperley, *White Dreams*, 41-42.

Trotter and William Allen, Bird Allen had also spent a significant portion of his naval service in African waters. The civilian commissioner was William Cook, a merchant marine captain who, like the others, had made a career doing business along the African coast. The various scientists enlisted for the journey included Dr. Theodor Vogel, who served as the expedition's botanist; Charles Roscher, mineralogist and miner; and Dr. William Stanger, the mission's geologist. In addition, the society was able to enlist a draughtsman, a "practical gardener," and the Curator of the Zoological Society of London. Finally, the Church Missionary Society assigned two experienced missionaries—the Rev. Frederick Schön and Mr. (later Reverend) Samuel Crowther, an African layman—to investigate the fitness of the Niger region for future missionary activities.¹⁷

In addition to pursuing the religious interests of the CMS, the expedition would allow Buxton the opportunity to further advance a new endeavor, the Agricultural Association, which Buxton began in earnest in 1839.¹⁸ Buxton rated the teaching of agricultural self-sufficiency as the second most important gift that Britain could

¹⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 434; Temperley, *White Dreams*, 77.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

provide Africa next to that of religious instruction. The idea of creating a model farm in Africa thrilled Buxton whenever he contemplated what could be accomplished.

"There is nothing to which I attach more importance than to the Agricultural Association," he wrote to friends.¹⁹ The development of a functional model farm would serve as the first step to a much larger goal. Agricultural self-sufficiency in Africa would, in Buxton's view, ultimately lead to the development of commerce and trade, realizing Buxton's belief that Africa could one day be considered a *civilized* continent. To ensure the success of the "agricultural experiment," Buxton, his son Edward North, Samuel Gurney and five other associates, donated a total of four thousand pounds.²⁰ They also made arrangements for the purchase of a sizable tract of land near "the confluence of the Niger and Tchadda" rivers that would allow ready access.²¹

The chief problem the society had to address was securing a vessel that was capable of meeting the challenges posed by the expedition. In his first act as overall commander, Captain Trotter, accompanied by William Allen, visited all of the major ports in Great Britain, in

¹⁹ Ibid., 434.

²⁰ Ibid., 435.

²¹ Ibid.

hopes of finding a suitable ship, but this proved a vain endeavor.²² The only viable solution, Trotter concluded, was to have a ship constructed to their specifications. He believed that outfitting the expedition would cost no more than £26,000. In September 1839, Buxton received word from Lord John Russell, Secretary for War and the Colonies, that both Prime Minister Melbourne and Foreign Secretary Palmerston approved of the expedition, but they were reluctant to accept Trotter's figures.²³ Their reservations were justified. Trotter's estimate only covered the costs of constructing the ships, not the costs to hire crews, pay for supplies, and otherwise make the vessel sea-worthy. When the government later analyzed the matter, it estimated that the expedition's true costs would be closer to £50,000, nearly twice Trotter's guess. A subsequent

²² Temperly, *White Dreams*, 42.

²³ William Lamb, Viscount Melbourne (1779-1848) became prime minister after the resignation of Earl Grey in 1834. Peter Mandler, "Lamb, William, second Viscount Melbourne (1779-1848)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15920> (accessed July 10, 2009). For two essential and excellent biographies of Melbourne, see David Cecil, *Melbourne* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1954), and Philip Ziegler *Melbourne* (London: Collins, 1976).

Henry Temple, Viscount Palmerston (1784-1865), would later serve as prime minister twice during the 1850s. See David Steele, "Temple, Henry John, third Viscount Palmerston (1784-1865)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27112> (accessed July 10, 2009). The definitive biography remains Herbert C. F. Bell, *Lord Palmerston*. 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, 1936), as recent works focus almost exclusively on Palmerston's political career and legacy.

government analysis determined that even this was an unrealistic figure. By the time Palmerston was ready to request the appropriation from Parliament, the estimate had risen to nearly £100,000.²⁴

At one point, Buxton argued that the society could pay for the construction of the ships which would be then rented by the government. The society, he noted, could take the rental and reinvest it in the expedition, but this did not meet with the approval of either Melbourne or Palmerston, who believed such an arrangement might appear questionable.²⁵ Buxton, therefore, immediately began correspondence with John Laird of Birkenhead, for the construction of three steamships, "expressly for this service."²⁶ Two of the vessels were identical in design and created to house the officers and crew. The third ship was to serve as the expedition's run-about; it was thus smaller, lighter, and faster. According to William Allen, the ships were constructed in a unique fashion:

They were built of iron in order to have a [sic] greater buoyancy, and still further to enable them to

²⁴ Ibid., 42-45.

²⁵ Palmerston realized that attacking the foreign slave trade would enhance his popularity. He also saw the chance to support the Niger expedition as the "happy coincidence of humanitarianism and expediency." Kenneth Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1982), 623. See also, Roderick Braithwaite, *Palmerston and Africa, The Rio Nunez Affair: Competition, Diplomacy and Justice* (London and New York: British Academic Press, 1996), 66-68.

²⁶ Allen, *Narrative*, 1:26.

go into shallow water, they were perfectly flat-bottomed, and without the keel fore and aft, as in ordinary vessels . . . [T]wo thick boards, nearly seven feet long and five feet deep, were made to slide up and down in water-tight cases in the middle of the vessels: that is, in the line of the ordinary keel, and placed at a suitable distance from forwards and aft. These were called "sliding keels," and were intended to keep the vessels from being blown to leeward; which it is evident would be the case with flat-bottoms not provided with such a contrivance.²⁷

The ships' rudders could be raised or lowered to accommodate usage on the seas or on African rivers.

Because of the uncertainty surrounding the depths of those rivers, Laird saw to it that the three ships were equipped with water-tight compartmentalized hulls. In the event that any of the vessels sustained damage from rocks or other underwater objects, this design would reduce the likelihood that the ship would sink. Yet by solving one potential predicament, the ship builders created a new problem that was far more troublesome than the first.

The efforts to make the ships unsinkable resulted in a design that severely obstructed their internal ventilation systems. This was a huge psychological setback for the society in that it was widely held that the African air contained poisons and impurities that would kill off Europeans. Without an air purification system, it would be difficult to man the vessels with qualified crews. The

²⁷ Ibid., 1:27.

problem was solved by Dr. David Boswell Reid, an Edinburgh chemist, who had only recently installed an air purification/ventilation system in Parliament.²⁸ Dr. Reid was able to create "a system of ventilation by means of fanners, worked by the engine when in action, by the current when lying in the river, or by hand if necessary." The African air, "charged with deleterious gases," still needed to be run through a cleansing filter. To this end, Reid created a "large iron chest" on the decks of the ships. Air would pass over the chest, and "chemical and other substances placed [in the chest] was supposed to be deprived of its impurities, and in a great degree of its noxious properties."²⁹

Aside from the obvious problems this defect presented for the crew's health, both real and imagined, it also created a serious predicament for the African Civilization Society. In short, Dr. Reid's work on the ventilation system was far more expensive than anyone had anticipated; at this rate, the society ran the risk of running out of money before the ships ever left England. When Buxton subsequently learned that the cost of fitting out the ships with proper ventilation was far greater than he or the

²⁸ Temperley, *White Dreams*, 51.

²⁹ Allen, *Narrative*, 1:28-29.

committee had been led to believe, he was astounded. That was, he believed, the government's problem and its obligation to address. At the same time, nothing should be allowed to obstruct the expedition, not even its rising costs. He wrote to a fellow committee member, "[I]f they will not, we must." He ordered the improvements to be made immediately. "[I]t ought to be so proceeded with as not to delay the departure of the expedition. As far as I am concerned, I give my hearty concurrence, and will take my full share of the responsibility."³⁰

Tired and exhausted from his involvement in writing *The African Slave Trade* and organizing the Niger expedition, Buxton wrote his draft of the second book, *The Remedy*, in November 1839 as he prepared to take his family on vacation to Italy and Greece. In what was now a common occurrence (almost to the point of being comical), Buxton's health again took a downward turn. While he did his best to direct his mind towards more comforting pursuits, Buxton never lost sight of the goals he still sought to accomplish, thus rendering futile any attempts at rest. He spent a significant part of this "holiday" confirming sources and ensuring that the final galley editions were as accurate as possible, much to the frustration of his

³⁰ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 436.

daughter Priscilla, who was overseeing publication in his absence, and the printer, who wanted to finish the job.³¹

The publication of *The Remedy* in March 1840 was embraced with as much, if not more, emotion than its predecessor.³² "We earnestly recommend every one [sic] to make himself acquainted with Mr. Buxton's work," the *Leeds Mercury* noted.³³ The *Caledonian Mercury* called it an "important work, so deserving the serious and dispassionate consideration of every person capable of reflection."³⁴ Another newspaper proclaimed that *The Remedy* "should be studied by every one [sic]" who considered themselves a "friend of justice and humanity."³⁵ The *Bristol Mercury* asserted that if Buxton's views were correct, *The Remedy* would "without question, be the most important work which has ever issued from the press." The editor's praise, however, contained a note of skepticism. "When so many schemes have already tried for the suppression of this nefarious traffic, and have, one after the other, signally and lamentably failed, we may be allowed to entertain

³¹ Ibid., 391.

³² Shortly after the publication of *The Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1840), it was combined with *The African Slave Trade* to create a single volume, *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (London: John Murray, 1840).

³³ *Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), May 2, 1840, 6.

³⁴ *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh), March 30, 1840, 4.

³⁵ *Examiner* (London), March 22, 1840, 2.

doubt, as to the feasibility of at least a portion of this gentleman's plans."³⁶

Whereas Buxton's first book seemed to offer little more than darkness and defeatism, this new volume at least offered the promise of hope, but only if action was immediately taken. The outpouring of public sympathy that occurred after the publication of *The Remedy* was overwhelming, perhaps too much so for Buxton, whose health continued to deteriorate. His writings aside, he proved to be either unwilling or unable to relax. He continued his correspondence with abolitionists back home, in hopes of bringing the various antislavery groups together into one unified coalition, and worried that this would never happen. He made a point to secure an audience with the pope, and following an audience with him in December, Buxton was happy to report that at least the Catholic Church had washed its hands of slavery.³⁷ At one point, he developed difficulty with his breathing and it was believed that he was near death. Buxton's vision also troubled him; Howard Temperley speculates that Buxton may have been

³⁶ *The Bristol Mercury* (Bristol, England), March 28, 1840, 8.

³⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 388. Buxton claimed that the pope, not wanting to give the impression that he had been influenced by the English, chose to issue his bull condemning slavery through the Church's "Propaganda Society."

experiencing cardiovascular problems.³⁸ Not surprisingly, when Buxton returned to England in mid-May 1840, he was far from rested and revitalized. In short, his health was worse than it had been when he left England six months earlier, although upon arriving at his son's home in mid-May, he said he was "in tolerable health."³⁹

On June 1, 1840, it seemed as though the solutions Buxton proposed in *The Remedy* were coming to fruition. The public was to be introduced to the African Civilization Society at an Exeter Hall meeting. The hall's doors were opened at 9 a.m. and the room was filled to capacity within an hour. The procession and seating of the society's notables, noble and otherwise, continued for nearly another hour. The *Times* later sneeringly described the crammed chamber as being "suffocating," adding that the only reason for such a showing was that some wanted to see the new Prince Consort, while others were merely curious as to the meeting's goal.⁴⁰

When Prince Albert and his retinue (which included Buxton and Dr. Lushington) finally appeared, the hall thundered with applause, cheers and general celebration. From its onset, the new organization had the support of the

³⁸ Temperley, *White Dreams*, 9.

³⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 432.

⁴⁰ *Times*, June 3, 1840, 5.

royal consort, Prince Albert, who was formally offered its presidency.⁴¹ The prince, who began to speak after the national anthem was played by the hall organist, announced that he was touched by the "truly English and enthusiastic reception" he received and spoke briefly. Most of his address involved thanking the crowd—with his "slight foreign accent," but he also pointed out the obvious. England had done much to end African slavery, but all of her exertions had yet to garner the desired results. The varied members of society assembled in Exeter Hall, the prince continued, were there despite their political, social, and religious differences, in "the great interests of humanity and justice," and these included using their powers to erase the "blackest stain upon civilized Europe." His recognition that party lines had been blurred was significant. Indeed, the hall was filled with some of the most important people in Britain: The duke of Norfolk stood on the dais, as did the earls of Ripon, Chichester and Devon. Several members of the high church were represented, including the bishops of Winchester, Chichester, Exeter, Salisbury, and Norwich. Not to be outdone, the parliamentary representatives included Sir

⁴¹ This was the prince's first official public outing since his marriage to Queen Victoria on February 11, 1840.

Robert Peel, Sir George Murray, and William Gladstone. Also in attendance were Wilberforce's son Robert, now Archdeacon Wilberforce, and Samuel Gurney.

The remainder of the prince's speech combined hyperbole, history, and religious values. Theirs was a special calling, he suggested, one that would test the very mettle of their Christian beliefs. Africa was a problem that could no longer be ignored. It was the mission of those assembled to see that "so holy a cause" realized its only true solution.

After a few procedural presentations, it was Buxton's turn to speak. The welcome received by the prince paled in comparison to that for Buxton. Like the prince, Buxton was agog over the sheer size of the gathering. He was also moved that so many dared to put their professional and societal differences aside for a greater cause. When he praised the prince's call to avoid party divisions and political games, the hall erupted with enthusiastic applause. When he noted that all present were united "in one common heart, one common object, in one common bond, namely, hatred to the traffic in men," there was enthusiastic cheering. Africa, he proclaimed, was "one universal slaughterhouse . . . [its trade was] in the bodies of its inhabitants . . . its religion was human

sacrifices."⁴² It was the duty, therefore, of every Christian to see that Africa was brought into the brotherhood of civilized states.

At this point, Buxton introduced a resolution, one that would serve as the society's charter:

That notwithstanding all the measures hitherto adopted for the suppression of the foreign trade in slaves, the traffic has increased and continued to increase under circumstances of aggravated horror, and prevails to an extent which imperatively calls for the strenuous and combined exertions of the whole Christian community to effect its extinction.⁴³

Buxton's resolution was nothing short of a call for a holy crusade. Like previous such endeavors, it was born of religious fervor and aimed at a foreign and distant land. It required commitment and money. It required faith and the realization that Africa's problems could not be solved overnight. It required the assistance of everyone to make it a success. "[F]or there was not present one individual, from his Royal Highness . . . to the humblest person, who could not render some service to the cause." Buxton knew exactly what he was asking of his audience, and they were more than happy to give him their assent. He concluded his speech by having the audience embrace their patriotic heritage. "There was a road to glory more illustrious,

⁴² *Times*, June 2, 1840, 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

noble, and pure than the battles of Waterloo or Trafalgar had opened." If Africa were to succeed, it would be because the same Britons who had been so successful in freeing the world from the monster Bonaparte would see that she did.⁴⁴

The meeting ran well into the afternoon. Various churchmen and political notables spoke, all admiring the size of the crowd and expressing astonishment that politics had been avoided.⁴⁵ When the meeting concluded after a good many speeches and resolutions for future action, the mood was euphoric. Many attendees, including the prince, immediately offered donations for the cause. If Buxton had any dreams of relaxing at the meeting's conclusion, these were now hopelessly dashed.

Not everyone, however, viewed either the Exeter Hall meeting or its cause with such fervor. In the eyes of the "British African Colonization Society (BACS)," another organization that advocated the improvement of sub-Saharan

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The only distraction that occurred during Buxton's speech was the late arrival of Daniel O'Connell, who was cheered by his supporters when he entered the hall. When it became generally known why those participants had cheered, they were effectively silenced by the rest of the audience. O'Connell's presence was problematic all-around. Every time he attempted to speak to add his voice to any agreement, he was shouted down. When, at the conclusion of the meeting, supporters tried to have him recognized one last time, the organist who had been there initially to play the national anthem, began to play and the hall immediately emptied, ending any further entreaties from O'Connell's supporters.

Africa, for example, Buxton was *persona non grata*. Their anger over his willingness to agree to the apprenticeship and compensation clauses of the 1833 Abolition Act had not been sated, and was only worsened by Buxton's tendency to defer to the Colonial Office as the chief agent for improving the living conditions for Africans, aborigines, and others under Britain's colonial umbrella. As far as the BACS was concerned, this was unforgivable, especially since existing policy did not encourage actual colonization and tended to place missionaries under a proverbial secular thumb. More to the point, however, such a relationship between Buxton and the government left some abolitionists, like those with the BACS, scratching their heads in trying to determine where Buxton's loyalties lay.

As a result, the BACS had been among the very first to criticize Buxton's plans for action outlined in *The Remedy*. Their very public attack on Buxton in the press, including within their own publication *The African Colonizer*, was relentless, although with each assault they made certain to point out to readers that their criticisms were not personal.

Early in 1840, the BACS argued that the long range implications of Buxton's solution, which assumed the Niger Expedition would be a complete success, had not been

thoroughly considered.⁴⁶ To highlight this, they noted that according to Buxton, any success along the Niger was predicated upon first the acquisition, then the successful colonization of Fernando Po (the modern day island of Bioko, a part of Equatorial Guinea). Failure to accomplish either task would not doom the endeavor, but it would severely weaken the mission's effectiveness. In its criticism, the BACS observed that Buxton's professed knowledge of Fernando Po and the surrounding environs was in fact limited; that he had not, prior to formulating his "remedy," conducted any first- or second-hand investigation of the region or of its residents. Aware that since the start of the century, hundreds of Europeans had perished in the African climate for a host of reasons, the BACS argued that at the very least Buxton should have had a better understanding of a place he had made the lynchpin of his hopes.⁴⁷ "We earnestly call on *the friends of Africa* [their emphasis] to look to this," one author wrote in the *African Colonizer*. "We say not a word upon Mr. Buxton's motives in this great affair; but we maintain that his judgment ought

⁴⁶ *African Colonizer* (London), April 11, 1840, 73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Ironically, Buxton had been attempting to utilize his contacts within the various abolitionist groups to have someone physically inspect Fernando Po for its suitability as a staging point for future activities. Moreover, he was one of several abolitionists who urged the government to purchase the island from Spain. See TFB to Andrew Johnston, July 6, 1839, and TFB to Stephen Lushington, July 18, 1839, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

not to be thus implicitly relied upon at the extreme hazard of marring it."⁴⁸

Other abolitionist groups joined the BACS in its condemnation of the plan. Robert Jamieson, an "enlightened philanthropist,"⁴⁹ who made his money in business, published two public appeals to Parliament in the hope the government would abandon the project.⁵⁰ The Liverpool Anti-Slavery Society reluctantly refused to support Buxton's scheme as they saw it as a continuation of the failed policies of the African Institution, as well as being too utopian for their tastes. Buxton relied too heavily upon Christianity as the solution to the problem, the society noted in a resolution published on November 21, 1840. As the African Civilization Society lacked the means to promote religion, unlike many long-standing missionary societies, the

⁴⁸ *The African Colonizer*, May 9, 1840, 105.

⁴⁹ "Address to the Royal Geographical Society of London: Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting on the 27th of May, 1861, by Sir Roderick Impey Murchinson, Vice President," cited in *The African Repository*, vol. 38, American Colonization Society, Washington, D. C.: William Moore, June 1862, 161.

⁵⁰ Jamieson published *An Appeal to the Government and People of Great Britain, Against the Proposed Niger Expedition: A Letter, Addressed to the Right Hon. Lord John Russell, Principle Secretary of State for the Colonies* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1840), and *A Further Appeal to the Government and People of Great Britain, Against the Proposed Niger Expedition: A Letter, Addressed to the Right Hon. Lord John Russell, Principle Secretary of State for the Colonies* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1841). Both essentially argued that the proposed expedition would create long term economic problems for Africa by artificially creating a commercial environment, rather than allowing one to develop naturally.

Liverpool organization could not fathom how this expedition hoped to meet its religious goal on its own.⁵¹

Another damning critic of the scheme was the London *Times*. In assessing the Exeter meeting a short time later, the paper wrote a scathing editorial blasting the whole affair as being style over substance. Such a gathering, the editors wrote,

[I]mply that the diplomacy of the Whigs on this important question, as we have repeatedly demonstrated, has been tame, dilatory and insincere. How does it happen that in the tenth year of the reign of Liberalism the slave trade is not only *not extinguished* [their emphasis], but even now in such a state of unchecked activity, that the friends of humanity and freedom are at length obligated to organized themselves into a national association for the purpose of effecting an object which their exhausted patience can no longer intrust [sic] to the callousness and indifference of the Ministry?⁵²

The *Times*, which had never cared for Buxton or the Whigs, saw the Exeter Hall meeting as a *chimera*, cooked up in part by well-intentioned bleeding hearts. Despite protestations of bipartisanship, the affair was nonetheless a display of political idealism and a slap in the face to the government of Lord Melbourne. That was, the editors reminded their readers, the reason that the prime minister was missing from the event. The solution to any social problem was not solicitation for donations, the *Times*

⁵¹ *Times* (London), November 21, 1840, 5.

⁵² *Ibid.*, June 3, 1840, 5.

insisted. Problems like those of Africa would remain "until a Conservative Government assume [sic] permanent rule in this country." This endeavor was yet another pointless waste of both money and lives, the *Times* believed. Unless such political gamesmanship ended and a change in leadership was made, concluded the paper, "the great object of the meeting stands little chance of being satisfactorily realized."⁵³

It was against this backdrop, that talk of the Niger expedition generated widespread public interest. William Simpson, who eventually joined the expedition as a volunteer, learned of the enterprise while on a business trip to Liverpool. While taking part in a Sunday service in 1840, Simpson heard about the expedition from the church's pastor, Rev. Haldane Stewart, and was immediately struck by the mission. Fearing that those involved had less than altruistic goals, Simpson conducted research on everyone identified with the expedition, and was satisfied that they were "led to volunteer by motives of a religious and philanthropic character."⁵⁴

Three weeks after Buxton's triumphant meeting at Exeter Hall, the militant Agency Committee met with the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ William Simpson, *A Private Journal Kept During the Niger Expedition* (London: John F. Shaw, 1843), ix.

BACS. The declaration they prepared and posted on May 25 opposed what had occurred just weeks earlier. Buxton remained their villain, but, as usual, they acted "without impugning that gentleman's good intentions in the slightest degree."⁵⁵ The BACS was "by no means adverse to an expedition to the Niger, or to the greatest efforts in favour of Africa," but wanted "to ensure a good issue to both."⁵⁶ The declaration asserted that Buxton's plan was horribly flawed. The plan offered no outline for government, basic necessities or even security. The declaration continued:

this Committee desires to express its serious doubts as to the advantages of his plan, fearing that instead of benefiting Africa it will much increase the evils inflicted on the Negro by the existing system of the Colonial Office in Western Africa.⁵⁷

Notwithstanding such criticisms, preparations for the expedition continued.

Buxton's health, which was by this point already questionable, grew even worse with his new exertions. His enthusiasm for both the expedition and the agricultural development had started to take its toll and by late August, he was again resting in the country in an attempt to mitigate the damage. "I am dead beat: I do not

⁵⁵ *African Colonizer*, June 6, 1840, 144.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, June 6, 1840, 144.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

recollect ever to have felt so languid and good for nothing."⁵⁸ The work involved in making the expedition a reality proved to be the most taxing task that Buxton had yet faced. Once again, he had worked himself into a near frenzy. Even at home, Buxton continued to conduct long days of research and negotiations for supplies and money with only short nights of rest. By October, with the expedition scheduled to begin in six months, Buxton was both physically and emotionally spent. "I have no 'might nor energy,' [sic] nor pluck, nor any thing of that sort, and this kind of listlessness reaches even to my two pet pursuits, Negroes and partridges," he wrote. "In short, I feel myself changed in almost every thing."⁵⁹

By the close of 1840, the ships for the expedition neared completion. The *Soudan* was the first to set sail. It left Liverpool for the Thames three days after Christmas. It was followed by the *Albert* on January 11, 1841, and the *Wilberforce* on February 17. The trip around the southern portion of the country revealed a number of problems with the newly built vessels. In particular, the *Wilberforce* experienced repeated engine troubles and had to stop for ten days of repairs in Dublin.⁶⁰ All three ships

⁵⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 436.

⁵⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 446.

⁶⁰ Allen, *Narrative*, 1:33-34.

were in Woolwich (some ten miles from London proper) on March 4, for public display and review.⁶¹

On March 23, 1841, Buxton was a member of the society's delegation that provided a tour of the expedition's vessels to Prince Albert. Buxton was very pleased that the expedition's commander was present and in full military regalia aboard his flagship. "Trotter looked remarkably well in his uniform, and I was glad to have the opportunity of seeing him actually engaged in the command of his people."⁶² When the prince arrived, he insisted on inspecting all three ships, and having done so, presented all three captains with gold chronometer watches, all made "by the best maker."⁶³ The royal review began onboard the *Albert*, and went exceedingly well; the prince was duly impressed and "examined every thing, and seemed to take great delight in the whole concern, and to understand mechanics."⁶⁴ Of particular interest to the prince was a night rescue buoy that utilized a water-activated light. When Buxton joked about tossing a member of the delegation into the Thames to test the apparatus, he was amused that the prince "seemed half inclined" to take up the idea.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1:35.

⁶² Buxton, *Memoirs*, 443.

⁶³ *Allen Narrative*, 1:35-36.

⁶⁴ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 447.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

What happened next, however, might as well have served as a foretaste of things to come. As the tour concluded, the prince and six of his aides were knocked over when sudden, violent winds and a strong river current sent the *Albert* crashing into a nearby yacht. No one was injured in the accident, and the prince made light of his fall, but the episode left Buxton and other members of the delegation with a genuine sense of fear and foreboding.

During the next two weeks, the *Albert* and *Wilberforce* took on supplies, coal and food. On March 30, the *Soudan* was the first of the ships to leave London, en route to Devonport, where it would wait for the others before heading out to open sea. On April 14, the two larger ships, fully laden and outfitted, slowly steamed down the muddy Thames to rendezvous with their sister ship. A smaller transport, the *Harriot*, served as their escort, and would accompany them to the island of St. Vincent (now, Sao Vincente) at Cape de Verd (modern day Cape Verde).⁶⁶

Poor winds and storms, however, kept the ships at Devonport far longer than anyone had expected. When the ships finally left English waters on May 12, there was a sense of grand excitement. Buxton's dream of creating a

⁶⁶ Simpson refers to this transport as the *Harriet* (Simpson, *Private Journal*, 12), while Allen calls it the *Harriot*. Allen, *Narrative*, 1, 39.

self-sufficient Africa that fully embraced the Gospels was within reach; it all depended upon the success of the three ships that were rapidly vanishing beyond the horizon. "It need not be said that this event was one full of the deepest interest to Sir Fowell."⁶⁷ He intensified his prayers for the crews and their mission, but as was later noted in the *Memoirs*, his "unshaken confidence in the presence and providence of God did not fail him now."⁶⁸

In fact, the expedition was grossly behind schedule, and the summer African storms that Buxton had hoped the crews would avoid would be the very thing to greet them once they reached the Niger. Despite this, the various omens of the previous year were dismissed, and Buxton was hardly alone in his belief that God would bless so holy a mission. As Trotter finally led his tiny armada off into the distance away from England, Buxton felt a twinge of relief. "The departure . . . left Sir Fowell's mind comparatively disengaged," the *Memoirs* commented. "Nothing now remained but to await the issue of the undertaking."⁶⁹ Finally afforded the time to address his shattered health, Buxton immediately went to Leamington to recover under the care of his private physician. With so much riding upon

⁶⁷ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 444.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 444.

the success of Captain Trotter and his mission, it was inconceivable that anything could go amiss. "May God shower down His own spirit upon us," William Simpson wrote in his diary as he steamed away from England, "and may the unity of his spirit distinguish us!"⁷⁰

The initial reports on the expedition after its departure followed its progress along the African coast. In October, the *Times* printed the first account of Trotter's armada reaching the Niger and related reports from private letters and other papers (including one from Liberia), all of which revealed in the endeavor's good fortune. On October 11, the paper reported that recently received correspondence from Africa, dated July 28, placed the small force within days of entering the mouth of the River Niger, far later than any had anticipated.

The first hint that something had gone terribly wrong in Africa did not appear in the *Times* until November 11. Citing information published in Liverpool, the paper reported that the expedition had finally entered the mouth of the Niger in mid-August. It also reported that nine members of the crews had perished up to that point—the first report of any casualties associated with the

⁷⁰ Simpson, *Private Journal*, 4.

undertaking. The following day, however, the *Times* again printed recently received correspondence, this time contradicting the earlier story. "The news from Liverpool . . . of mortality among the persons engaged in the expedition to the Niger," the paper claimed, "proves to be greatly exaggerated."⁷¹ As proof, the paper printed excerpts from letters sent back home by unidentified members of the expedition. All reported that the venture was proceeding beyond their wildest expectations; progress was being made and of the three-hundred hands present, all were in the best of health. The same sources, however, noted that as of August 20, the only confirmed dead were "two coloured men and one European—the latter not from African fever."⁷²

Between November 12 and January 11, the *Times* continued to print accounts from the expedition as quickly as they arrived from Africa. The optimism contained in earlier letters from Africa was quickly replaced by a sense of anxiety and gloom. Difficulties in navigating the Niger were only a portion of the problems faced by Trotter; soon he and his crew were fighting for their lives. "Sickness and disease came upon us like a thunderbolt," an officer aboard the *Albert* recalled.⁷³ Trotter and Bird Allen were

⁷¹ *Times* (London), November 12, 1841, 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, January 10, 1842, 5.

initially doing well, the paper reported, but Captain William Allen had contracted fever. He appeared to be on the mend, but would be rendered incapacitated several times before the end of the year. By October, Trotter became so ill with fever that he was removed from the *Wilberforce* and taken ashore to recuperate. Bird Allen also fell prey to fever, but unlike Trotter and William Allen, did not recover. He died on October 25. Among the crew, the death toll rose sharply with each subsequent report. Between December 4 and December 6, for example, the death toll rose dramatically from three crewmen to eight to over twenty, with over a third of the expedition's company being rendered "invalids" due to fever and the inhospitable climate.⁷⁴ The model farm, perhaps the one initiative that Buxton truly counted upon, was set up at a site called Stirling Hill on September 10, and enjoyed initial success.⁷⁵ The farm, which at one point employed nearly

⁷⁴ Ibid. In his account of the Niger expedition, William Allen complained that the elaborate ventilation system, including Dr. Reid's mystical "iron chest" did not work sufficiently. "It is," he wrote some years later, "easy to pronounce judgment after experience has been gained." Allen, *Narrative*, 1:29. The apparatus took up far too much of the ship's badly-needed space. Not wanting to slight Dr. Reid, Allen gave him enthusiastic praise for his work, adding that the system was "good in theory." Moreover, the design possessed a serious flaw so obvious that it is difficult to see how the designers failed to see it: "The error," Allen noted, "was in proposing to dole out the [fresh air] by two small apertures to so many gasping throats." Ibid. In other words, the system possessed only two vents, both too small to meet the needs of the crew, thus rendering the entire scheme worthless.

⁷⁵ Allen, *Narrative*, 340.

three hundred African workers, collapsed because the expedition could no longer protect it. After sustaining repeated attacks from local African tribes who saw the experiment as a challenge to their sovereignty, the farm was abandoned in 1843.⁷⁶

While no one connected with the expedition was more demoralized and crestfallen than Buxton, it was equally hard to find any one in Britain at this time gloating louder over this setback than the editors of the *Times*. On January 22, 1842, the *Times*, with gleeful satisfaction, pronounced the expedition a failure. The "unhappy affair" had begun with much pomp and circumstance, the paper observed. Announced and promoted with speeches by Britons both high and low, it began with tremendous promises to further civilization through the dissemination of Christianity, commercial trade, and peace. It ended, the paper declared, in "nothing strange or unexpected - nothing but what might have been and was foretold, if its projectors would have listened to reason."⁷⁷ Over forty members of the expedition had died, the *Times* reported, meaning that twenty percent of those who set sail from England just eight months earlier would never return.

⁷⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 471-471.

⁷⁷ *Times* (London), January 22, 1842, 5.

Although they did not name him, it was clear that the *Times* had targeted Buxton as the cause for so much loss of life. Characterizing him and his like-minded colleagues as "smooth gentlemen," it chastised them for failing to consider the real, true value of the causes they advocated. The paper returned to earlier criticisms that the scheme Buxton proposed in the *Remedy* had been neither thoroughly considered nor properly researched. This type of social advocacy, the *Times* continued, was "quackery," and the order of the day. "Everybody must have a finger in everything," the paper lamented, "and everything must appeal to and be managed by everybody." The problem with such an arrangement was that instead of action being supported with reasoned constraint, it was bolstered by "eloquent appeals and piercing statements . . . and clap-traps for the ladies."⁷⁸ If the tragedy of the Niger Expedition offered one positive result, the *Times* observed, it would be in allowing those who recklessly supported such ventures to realize that such undertakings were a "most heavy responsibility, affecting the lives of their fellow creatures" not merely topics upon which to make "an impression on the fair auditory which surrounded them."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Despite attempts at damage control, neither Buxton nor the African Civilization Society was prepared for the sudden shift in public attitude against the expedition. Under attack from all quarters, the African Civilization Society arranged for a mid-year meeting, held at Exeter Hall on June 21, 1842. This gathering was dramatically different from the meeting conducted just two years earlier. Whereas pomp and exuberance abounded during the former conference, the notable absence of the same reflected the society's loss of prestige by the time of the 1842 meeting. Prince Albert sent his regrets, leaving the assembly to be chaired by reform advocate Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper.⁸⁰ Most of the luminaries who graced the dais in 1840 were missing as well, the most noteworthy being Buxton himself (although his son Edward attended). Buxton sent a letter calling on the society's members to remain true to the cause.⁸¹ To demonstrate his own commitment, Buxton also included £50 for further action.⁸² The official reason for the conference was the public release of the

⁸⁰ Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801-1885) was a noted philanthropist and social reformer. See John Wolffe, "Cooper, Anthony Ashley-, seventh earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6210> (accessed July 16, 2009).

⁸¹ *Report of the Committee of the African Civilization Society to the Public Meeting of the Society, Held at Exeter Hall, on Tuesday, the 21st of June 1842* (London: John Murray, 1842), 8.

⁸² *Times* (London), June 22, 1842, 5.

society's report on its activities in England and abroad, its financial statement, and its assessment of the Niger Expedition. In reality, however, the gathering was a belated attempt at damage control. The very public attacks from the *Times* and angry parliamentarians were taking a toll on the organization; it was time to put the criticisms to rest.

The meeting began by acknowledging the men who died during the Niger expedition in the society's service. Although shocked by the tragedy and the unexpected number of crewmen who died, the society asserted that those deaths had not been in vain. Contradicting its critics, the society's report praised the venture as an unqualified success. "The Expedition has considerably increased our knowledge of the navigation of the river," the report observed, "and enabled the officers on board to make a more perfect chart of its course; and it has led to a further acquaintance with the habits, dispositions, and varied dialects of the native population on its borders."⁸³ The report also praised the expedition's attempt to establish viable treaties to end the slave trade with the various African populations that resided along the coasts of the Niger, to end local domestic slavery, to end human

⁸³ *Report of the Committee of the African Civilization Society*, 21.

sacrifice within local religious practices, to introduce and protect the "open profession of Christianity," and to promote agriculture and commercial trade. "It is peculiarly gratifying, therefore . . . that with two out of three of the most powerful chiefs commanding the banks of the river, Treaties have been formed, embodying or promoting these principles."⁸⁴ Even the model farm had proven successful before its abandonment. In short, the society had nothing for which to be ashamed. "In reviewing the consequences of this Expedition," the report continued,

it is cheering to be enabled to gather, even from its difficulties, the additional benefit of a bright example set to future enterprises, of ardent zeal, of patience endurance, and exemplary conduct, in a Christian cause, under no ordinary circumstances of difficulty and trial, sickness and disappointment, entitling Captain Trotter and the brave officers and men who served under him to unqualified respect and approbation.⁸⁵

Seeking to deflect a measure of the criticism from Buxton, Lord John Russell, acknowledged to those in attendance that he had pushed for the expedition and thus deserved some of the responsibility.⁸⁶ He conceded that the death of so many connected with the endeavor was tragic but declared that those "who have endeavoured to exaggerate its

⁸⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁶ TFB to John Russell, June 21, 1842, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

extent are greatly to blame."⁸⁷ In agreeing with the report's general assessment, Russell added,

But above all, let us not despair of the ultimate accomplishment of our object. If we are defeated in one mode, let us try another, let us vary our means, let us acquire fresh information, let us consider of fresh enterprises in new directions. But, above all, let us not doubt that the spirit of universal emancipation, aided and sanctified by the spirit of the Christian religion, will ultimately attain the happiness and salvation of millions of our fellow-men.⁸⁸

Archdeacon Samuel Wilberforce reminded those in attendance, "It is not the mere discomfiture of our first endeavours, but it is that loss of life which we have sustained which weighs upon our spirits."⁸⁹ Like Russell, Wilberforce was determined to snatch victory from the very jaws of defeat. The expedition was an endeavor without precedent and the idea that mistakes would not be made was ludicrous. That said, Wilberforce added that it was impossible to reflect upon the fate of the expedition "without feeling that he treads this day, as it were, upon sacred ground; that he is, as it were, amongst the graves of the noble dead."⁹⁰ Yet whereas Russell was more conciliatory, Wilberforce lashed out at those who attacked the society and Buxton:

⁸⁷ *Report of the Committee of the African Civilization Society*, 68.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 68

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

I do therefore, my Lord, complain as one aggrieved, both for myself and for all those around me . . . these attacks which have been made upon us. It has been taken for granted, in a professed but most spurious spirit of philanthropy, that we had no feelings, that Her Majesty's late Government had no feelings for those brave men who went forth on this truly chivalrous adventure.⁹¹

Perhaps the best assessment of Buxton's responsibility for the failed expedition was provided by Thomas Binney in 1853 when he wrote "With respect to the Niger Expedition, it is enough to say, it was a great misfortune, but not a fault."⁹²

Buxton had remained secluded at Northrepps rather than attend the June conference of the African Civilization Society, a decision based in part to his declining health. In various accounts of Buxton's life, much is made of his reaction to the public fallout from the expedition. Most accounts characterize his reaction as deleterious to him both in body and spirit. This assessment is to be expected because these authors relied heavily upon the *Memoirs* written by Charles Buxton, and thus essentially repeat his interpretation of the incident. Most of his biographers have used the stress caused by the affair to explain Buxton's retreat from public life after 1842. In his sermon of March 1845, for example, John Garwood stated

⁹¹ Ibid., 71.

⁹² Binney, *Study for Young Men*, 127.

that, Buxton's health went into a noticeable decline due in large part to "the event of the failure of this expedition in an object which was so dear to his heart."⁹³ A similar sentiment was expressed by Joseph John Gurney some months later when he wrote that,

Neither this painful failure, however - deeply affecting as it was to Sir Fowell Buxton - nor the increasingly precarious state of his own health, could prevent his persevering efforts in the cause of Africa.⁹⁴

Zachary Mudge, who did not write his biography until twenty years after Buxton's death, was more direct in his assessment:

He was greatly depressed in mind also by the failure of the expedition. His keen sensibilities were burdened by the sufferings of the brave men who had attempted to carry out his plans. . . . His mental sufferings were betrayed, too, by his sad countenance, and the increased fervor with which he prayed that God would "pity poor Africa."⁹⁵

As the primary promoter of the expedition, Buxton was indeed devastated by its perceived failure. The conditions and circumstances which Trotter's crews endured caused Buxton to strongly "sympathize with the sufferings of the brave men" involved in the rigorous endeavor.⁹⁶ This sympathy seems to have manifested itself in physical ailments. He wrote Lushington in May 1842, complaining of

⁹³ Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 28.

⁹⁴ Gurney, *Brief Memoir*, 28.

⁹⁵ Mudge, *Christian Statesman*, 260-261.

⁹⁶ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 465.

exhaustion and fatigue. "I can do nothing."⁹⁷ All of these symptoms could be attributed to Buxton's reaction to the failure of the Niger Expedition. By mid-1842, Buxton was only fifty-six years old, but as the *Memoirs* lamented, "already evening was come of his day of ceaseless toil."⁹⁸ This was an understatement. The stresses involved in preparing the expedition, as well as those associated with his worry over its fate, taxed Buxton's spirit and body. Buxton believed his sudden weakness to be the accumulative effect of years of passionate overwork. He began to experience a host of physical problems, ranging from bouts of inexplicable confusion and disorientation to forgetfulness. He also experienced bodily pains and increased fatigue.

At the time when Buxton took on a more active role in the African Civilization Society and spearheaded its plans for the expedition, he was recovering from an illness that could be traced back to 1838, and one that seriously compromised his health well into late 1840. Thus, while it is true that the despair that consumed Buxton after 1842 was owed in part to his obsession with the expedition, pre-existing conditions combined with his inability to rest,

⁹⁷ TFB to Stephen Lushington, May 14, 1842, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

⁹⁸ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 465.

rendered Buxton susceptible to the ailments that plagued him from this point in his life onward.

Surprisingly, what many accounts—both positive and negative—ignore is that while Buxton was depressed over the fate of the Niger expedition, his correspondence indicates that he was hastily arranging for a second expedition to Africa to depart England within a year. He began soliciting help once again from Russell, Lushington, and his intimates, and immediately set to work on yet another plan for Africa. The government, however, still stinging from public rebuke, was slow to embrace any talk of a new plan from Buxton; the notion of a second expedition quietly faded away.

In July 1842, Buxton was informed that the Spanish government, rightful owners of Fernando Po, had expressed their unwillingness to relinquish their sovereignty over the island to Britain.⁹⁹ Without this crucial waystation under British control, Buxton's plans for Africa were nearly impossible to realize, although there remained the possibility of purchasing land on the island. In late 1842, the West African Company let it be known that it would consider selling some of its holdings on Fernando Po

⁹⁹ Robert Stokes to TFB, July 21, 1842, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

for the tidy sum of £5000. This was rejected as outrageous, given that the West African Company had purchased the land for £1000.¹⁰⁰ The question itself, despite the society's indignation, was moot. Problems with the Niger Expedition translated into a lack of general interest; subscriptions to support the African Civilization Society had fallen off dramatically since the beginning of the year. In December, Buxton had started to question the future of the society, even going so far as to ask Lushington whether it was better to simply end the society rather than to push on in its weakened state. Buxton believed that one last appeal to the public could generate some funding, and if that were successful, the society could function in a near-skeletal state.¹⁰¹ This last call for action never took place, and in mid-January 1843, the African Civilization Society-Buxton's last great humanitarian effort-was formally dissolved.

"Looking back upon this whole transaction," the *Times* wrote in the weeks before Christmas 1842, "the facts appear so marvelous, that we doubt if a more incredible narration is to be found in the pages of Gulliver or Munchausen."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ John Trew to Buxton, November 22, 1842, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁰¹ TFB to Lushington, December 30, 1842, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

¹⁰² *Times*, November 36, 1842, 5.

In its harsh condemnation of the Niger expedition, the *Times* placed virtually all of the blame for the enterprise at Buxton's feet. Being the plan's architect, Buxton became its public face, an unfortunate situation because it gave his enemies and others hostile to the enterprise the opportunity to attack his interpretation of reform and evangelical service.

Such criticism was justified because Buxton and his supporters approached the Niger expedition from an idealistic perspective. Yet what the editors of the *Times* failed to acknowledge was that the Niger expedition had achieved some, if modest, success. In a period of just three years, Thomas Fowell Buxton had almost single-handedly mobilized widespread support for a plan to end the slave trade forever and bring Africa into a modernized, Western world. This was something that even Wilberforce had not proposed. The idea of such an enterprise would have been considered insane just a decade earlier, which makes Buxton's achievement all the more significant. The lessons of the 1841 expedition were put to good use when Parliament returned to the idea of charting the Niger River in 1853 and again in 1856.¹⁰³ The British West African

¹⁰³ Unlike the 1841 expedition, the 1853 and 1856 enterprises were conducted under the auspices of the Royal Geographical Society at the urging of Sir Roderick Murchison (1792-1871). A discussion of

Squadron continued to patrol the African coast and was instrumental in preventing illegal slavers from utilizing the Niger for their activities.¹⁰⁴ More importantly, the Niger expedition reacquainted Britons with the idea of Africa as a vast frontier.

If the Niger expedition can be characterized as a failure, it was not because of the loss of life or property. Rather, the expedition failed because of the public's unrealistic expectations for results that were immediate and definitive. Buxton bears a significant part of the blame for this. First, it was his scheme and one he presented as the only viable option. Second, and perhaps more important, Buxton was not an ideal candidate to

Murchison's focus on West Africa can be found in Robert Stafford, *Scientist of Empire: Sir Roderick Murchison, Scientific Exploration and Victorian Imperialism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990). See also

T. G. Bonney, "Murchison, Sir Roderick Impey, baronet (1792-1871)," rev. Robert A. Stafford, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19555> (accessed July 10, 2009).

¹⁰⁴ Although not a direct result of the 1841 Niger expedition, the British West African Squadron (BWAS) was later assisted in its patrolling duties by the United States navy. For a recent discussion of the BWAS, see Sian Rees, *Sweet Water and Bitter: The Ships that Stopped the Slave Trade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009). Rees notes that while the BWAS was rooted in philanthropic interests, it inadvertently set the stage for Britain's colonialization of Africa by the end of the century. For a discussion on the United States' actions off the African coasts, see Donald L. Canney, *The African Squadron: The U. S. Navy and the Slave Trade, 1842-1861* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc., 2006). A first-hand account of the conditions and nature of the mission involved during this episode can be found in John C. Lawrence, *Voyage to a Thousand Cares: Master's Mate Lawrence with the African Squadron, 1844-1846*. C. Herbert Gilliland, ed. (Annapolis, MD.: Naval Institute Press, 2004).

develop the undertaking. As the BACS repeatedly emphasized, Buxton had little knowledge of how to conduct such an enterprise and no first-hand experience of Africa. Even worse, Buxton knew that he lacked the strength and stamina needed to oversee such a massive project. Where he had previously relied heavily on the support of others who could press the cause in his absence, this time Buxton found himself alone at the helm and in poor health.

Chapter Nine: The Elephant in Winter

In February 1843, Buxton was invited to Windsor Castle to discuss the future of Africa with Prince Albert. Hannah was convinced that the journey would be ruinous to Buxton's flagging health, so she insisted on accompanying him.¹ The pair left Northrepps amid poor weather. The journey proved to be just as difficult for Buxton as his wife anticipated. When they arrived at the castle, Buxton was kindly received by the prince. During the private meeting that followed, Buxton discussed the possibility of a second expedition into Africa, but there was no enthusiasm for another endeavor. Public support of the African Civilization Society fell off significantly during 1842, and by January 1843, its directors had no choice but to suspend operations indefinitely. The prince counseled patience. Effectively, the meeting marked the end of Buxton's public life.

For Buxton, the end of his career as one of Great Britain's leading social reformers brought some benefits. Much as he did when he lost his seat in Parliament six years earlier, Buxton looked at his sudden idleness as God's will. His attention now turned toward the pursuit of personal interests. No longer able to engage in such

¹ *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 164.

strenuous activities as hunting or shooting, Buxton focused on agricultural experimentation, reflected earlier in his support for the model farm in Africa. He also resumed his earlier philanthropic assistance to the poor. While continuing to lament the pitiful state of Africa, he now focused on helping the underprivileged who lived in the communities adjacent to Northrepps. In returning to assisting the poor, Buxton's life had come full circle. He sponsored the distribution of soup and bread to those families in need during the winter, as well as allowing them to utilize small tracts of his lands for vegetable gardens.

Buxton's fragile health further deteriorated in late 1843. For much of the next year, he was either bedridden or bound close to home. On November 17, 1844, Buxton was well enough to attend church services at Cromer. He participated in the service as actively as his health would allow. Reverend Garwood reported that Buxton "gave out the hymns which were sung verse by verse, as was frequently his custom."² His personal selection was one particular hymn – "that truly beautiful one" that began "*All hail, the power of Jesu's name.*"³ Buxton's energetic and enthusiastic

² Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 28.

³ *Ibid.*

singing impressed many present but did not prevent them from taking note of his frail and weakened condition. "As soon as [Buxton's minister] reached home, he said to his wife, 'We have now heard his voice for the last time.'"⁴ This was indeed the last time Buxton attended services outside his home.

One month later, on December 15, 1844, Buxton suffered "a severe spasm on the chest,"⁵ which was probably a heart attack. Improvement seemed unlikely over the course of the subsequent two weeks, and his family was certain that he would not survive the year. As was the case so many times before, however, his ailments gradually eased and his condition improved, but it was evident that this was only temporary. This stressful realization was difficult for Hannah, but for the time being she was content that her husband was at least alive—yet another blessing from God. "I cannot return to the sorrow and alarm of the illness," she confessed to a friend. "[W]e have him back, received from the Lord."⁶ Given Buxton's precarious situation, Hannah began to prepare herself for the worst, but she also realized that life without her husband would be difficult. For solace from this grim prospect, Hannah turned to her

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 495.

⁶ *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 166.

children, especially her son Edward North and his wife Catherine, as well as her remaining family and friends. "I have dutiful, loving children," she wrote to Catherine Buxton, "and what a mercy is this."⁷ She also gained comfort reflecting on her lifetime of experiences with Buxton. "I shall not be left alone, as some are, in the wilderness of this troublesome world, but what a season is this come to!"⁸

Buxton did not help matters. As his strength slowly returned, he began to obsess over his family, friends, and neighbors. In fact, he became so fixated that "it was necessary to avoid mentioning cases of sorrow or suffering" for fear that it would upset him further.⁹ As the January weather turned cold and brutal, Buxton insisted that local villagers in the lands surrounding his home be provided with soup, bread, and other necessities. "Never did his countenance brighten up with more satisfaction," according to *Memoirs*, "than when he caught a view, from his bed, of the train of women and children walking home over the grass with their steaming cans and pitchers."¹⁰

In February 1845, Buxton suffered what may have been a second, milder heart attack. As noted in the *Memoirs*, on

⁷ Ibid., 168.

⁸ Ibid., 168.

⁹ Buxton, *Memoirs*, 496.

¹⁰ Ibid.

February 6, Buxton "had a painful return of oppression on his breath," that he "bore . . . with entire patience and submission."¹¹ The episode further weakened him. By now, even Buxton believed that he was dying and wrote as much to Elizabeth Fry, who was also in ill health. He was well enough to receive Holy Communion along with his family three days later, but from that point forward he was physically drained and exhausted. The weakness of his body, however, did not seem to affect his mind. Even in his dreams, Buxton continued to express concern for Africa, even calling out various plans and goals while he slept.¹²

News of Buxton's deteriorating condition circulated quickly, and within days he was visited by old friends and acquaintances, all wanting to pay their respects and to make their farewells. Around February 11, a still bedridden Buxton was visited by Joseph John Gurney. Accompanied by Hannah, Gurney went to his brother-in-law's bedside to read scripture and pray. Although extremely weak at this point, Buxton remained "awake, his eyes open, his countenance fine."¹³ When the visit concluded, the two men shared a final handshake. "My dearest," Hannah wrote,

¹¹ Ibid., 497.

¹² *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 168.

¹³ Ibid.

"most warmly squeezed and held his hand for some time, and . . . looked affected."¹⁴

In the days immediately following Gurney's visit, Buxton's health seemed to stabilize, but by February 16, he suffered yet another "attack of spasm in the chest" while in prayer.¹⁵ Joseph John Gurney reports that after this last attack, Buxton "fell into a deep . . . gentle slumber."¹⁶ On the morning of February 19, it became obvious to those present that Buxton's final minutes were at hand. He was surrounded by several family members, including Hannah, who engaged in prayer and quiet meditation. In the early afternoon, his breathing grew increasingly labored, and was further complicated by sharp pains he felt in his chest. By early evening, these difficulties passed and, according to his daughter Priscilla, her father was in a state of "perfect stillness." During this tranquil period Thomas Fowell Buxton quietly passed. Priscilla noted that "none could

¹⁴ Ibid. In his *Brief Memoir*, Gurney describes this incident with more colorful imagery. After asking the bedridden Buxton if his faith was still sound, Gurney quoted scripture addressing Buxton's pending heavenly rewards. "[A]nd when a blessed assurance was expressed that these things were laid up for him-even for *him* (Gurney's emphasis),-he grasped the hand of the brother who had so addressed him, in token of his cordial assent, and his countenance became illuminated with such a heavenly smile, as bespoke more powerfully than any words could have done, the joyful serenity of his soul." Gurney, *Brief Memoir*, 30.

¹⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

say when the last soft breath was drawn."¹⁷ He died just six weeks shy of his fifty-ninth birthday.

"Our precious, honoured, beloved father is gone!" Priscilla wrote to her Aunt Richenda the following morning. "He died in perfect peace around ten o'clock last night."¹⁸ Despite her efforts to prepare herself for the inevitable, Hannah took her husband's death hard. She turned to her children, most notably Edward North, as a source of strength. Catherine also proved to be of vital support: "I want to write to dearest Aunt Fry and thy mother, whose letters of love and sympathy and personal, individual sorrow, I know and deeply value, but I cannot write to-day, so thee must convey a message of nearest love and gratitude from thy sorrowing but comforted mother."¹⁹

¹⁷ Priscilla Johnston to Richenda Cunningham, February 20, 1845, cited in *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 169. "My mother, Chenda, Edward and Charles on the fire side of the bed; [Thomas] Fowell and Rachel and Anna Gurney at the foot; Andrew (Priscilla's husband) lying by him on the window side, and I kneeling next to him." Priscilla Johnston to Richenda Cunningham, February 20, 1845. In the account he published in the *Memoirs*, Charles Buxton states that Buxton passed at 9:45 P.M.

Joseph John Gurney's account of a final "attack of spasm in the chest" on or about February 16 mentioned above may in fact be referring to the difficulties Buxton suffered on February 19. None of the primary accounts of Buxton's final days are particularly helpful on this matter: The *Memoirs* is surprisingly vague about Buxton's final days. Gurney's *Brief Memoir* appeared in late 1845, but is also shockingly general in its account. The *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton* did not appear until 1872, and were heavily edited. As a result, I have treated the described attacks as two separate events.

¹⁸ Priscilla Johnston to Richenda Cunningham, February 20, 1845, cited in *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 169.

¹⁹ HB to Catherine Buxton, February 22, 1845, cited in *Memorials of Hannah Lady Buxton*, 169.

Buxton was buried "in the ruined chancel at Overstrand."²⁰ The funeral was simple and short, but the roads leading to the burial plot were lined with local villagers and curiosity seekers, all "deeply interested."²¹ Out of respect, the principle shops in Cromer closed for the day; nearly all business transactions were suspended.²² At Weymouth, the area Buxton represented so faithfully for nearly nineteen years, similar measures took place; churches were draped in black, sermons were given in his honor, and many ships in the harbor "were seen with their colours hoisted half-mast high."²³ Joseph John Gurney was surprised at the crowd's "quietness and solemnity" as the internment took place, an act he saw as both respectful and symbolic. "Thousands of the sable children of Africa would, if they could," he believed,

have followed him with tears to the grave: and may we not reverently believe, that an infinitely more numerous company of angels, have bid him welcome to the mansions of rest and glory?²⁴

On February 22, 1845, the editors of the *Times* published Buxton's obituary. Not surprisingly, the lengthy

²⁰ Gurney, *Brief Memoir*, 31.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Garwood, *Funeral Sermon*, 29.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

piece reflected the newspaper's unrelenting anger at the failures at the Niger expedition, attacking Buxton as a man

of moderate information, of no great reach of intellect, and wholly destitute of that animation and fervor without which it is impossible to become an orator. . . . [H]e was a lumbering, prosaic speaker; his style, like his delivery, was heavy and monotonous; his reasonings had nothing in them of freshness or ingenuity; and though his doctrines might have had their origin in a spirit of philanthropy and religion, they bore no stamp of genius—no mark of that high intellectual power which qualifies a man to undertake the task of remodeling any portion of human society.²⁵

The editors added that Buxton's legacy consisted of a "name not very remarkable for wisdom or ability."²⁶

In response, on March 4 the *Morning Chronicle* attempted to refute the *Times* article. "It was without surprise, but not without pain mingled with disgust," the editors began, "that we read in the *Times* of the 22d instant a biographical notice of Sir Fowell Buxton, not less remarkable for its inaccuracy than for its bitter and illiberal spirit."²⁷ The *Chronicle* published a favorable biographical sketch of Buxton that highlighted his accomplishments, but also acknowledged the failed Niger expedition, adding that it "preyed, there is reason to fear, on his spirits and on his health." The article praised his humanitarianism and philanthropy. "We have

²⁵ *Times*, Febraury 22, 1845, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Morning Chronicle* (London), March 4, 1845, 5.

said enough to record his worth," the *Chronicle* concluded, "but if we were to extend our notice to much greater length, we should still fail of doing justice to our own feelings, or to those of multitudes who loved him when alive, and now revere his memory."²⁸ As to the *Times'* "sneering and splenetic tone," the *Chronicle* concluded:

Buxton was constant in his political attachments—Buxton was immovable in principles of honour and religion—Buxton, to his dying hour, enjoyed the love and unqualified respect of good and honest men, and therefore Buxton was no favourite with the *Times*.²⁹

In abolitionist circles, Buxton remained, despite the Niger expedition, highly regarded. Many papers that supported Buxton's efforts carried a standard eulogy.³⁰ "This distinguished man first became known by his exertions to diminish the sufferings of those at home," noted the *Examiner*. He was a politician whose humanitarian career improved the lives of millions. History would "always associate his name with the abolition of slavery in the West Indies, and most active endeavors for the abolition of the slave trade."³¹ Another paper noted that "In the relations of private life the deceased Baronet was as

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Morning Chronicle* (London), March 4, 1845, 5.

³⁰ See, for example, *The Belfast News-Letter*, February 25, 1845, 2; *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), February 24, 1845, 2; *Morning Chronicle* (London), February 22, 1845, 6.

³¹ *Examiner* (London), February 22, 1845, 4.

exemplary as his public life was philanthropic."³² Few publications chose to remember the Niger expedition, and as with the *Morning Chronicle*, those that did approached the issue with tact and sensitivity. "He was the main originator of that grievous mistake the Niger expedition," another newspaper noted, "but he meant well, and his errors perish with him."³³

³² Glasgow Herald (Glasgow, Scotland), February 24, 1845, 2.

³³ *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post or Plymouth and Cornish Advertiser* (Exeter, England), February 27, 1845, 2.

Conclusion

In January 1815, Thomas Fowell Buxton assessed his life. It had been nearly two years since battling the illness that left him near death. The incident still affected him deeply; he was understandably anxious about how close he had come to losing his life. That death could come so suddenly left Buxton perplexed and frustrated, in part because he recognized that he had done so little with his life. "If time has been misspent," he asked, "is this not a reason for increased and redoubled diligence?"¹ This question provides insight into the motives of Thomas Fowell Buxton. He believed that an honest review of his accomplishments and failures would justify the sense of purpose that he expressed as he regained his health.

As a member of the gentry, Buxton could have embraced a life far different from the one he chose. With a loving wife and family, Buxton could have limited himself to a partnership in Sampson Hanbury's brewery. Yet, as Buxton noted many times in *The Memoirs*, his life was shaped by random incidents that required him to reconsider his path in life. In short, Buxton benefited greatly from providential encounters. Most of the endeavors championed

¹ Notebook Journal, January 1, 1815, *Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton*.

by Buxton began by happenstance. A chance visit to Earlham in 1801 introduced him to his future wife and partner, Hannah Gurney. An arbitrary walk through Spitalfields introduced him to the horrors of abject poverty, while another stroll near Newgate Gaol caused him to reflect on penal discipline. His efforts on behalf of poor relief in Spitalfields and prison reform brought him to the attention of William Wilberforce, who familiarized Buxton with the cause of abolition.

Buxton's passion for self improvement likewise provides us with a glimpse into the motives behind his public service. Buxton believed that he was never good enough to receive God's grace, a theme that he repeated in his private journals and letters to family and friends. It was only through improvement that one could hope to find salvation. It is not surprising, therefore, that Buxton spent his life trying to improve society by focusing on its weakest members. Bringing attention to the Spitalfields' poor, saving the lives of Hindu widows, or emancipating slaves were not works of "enthusiasm" as his critics characterized them, but deliberately calculated acts to gain divine favor.

To achieve his goals, Buxton early recognized that were he to prevail in any discussion, he needed to convince

his audience with facts, and not rely on emotionalism. To accomplish this, he mastered a style of research and presentation that was thoroughly scientific and anticipated the methodology of modern social researchers. Not content to argue a point, Buxton believed it necessary to inundate his audience with statistics and first-hand accounts from sources that were often unimpeachable.

Yet this fervor reflected a dark, obsessive side. Buxton disregarded his health, often working until exhaustion or physical collapse forced him to stop. Although a loving husband and father, Buxton often left his family for weeks at a time to pursue legislative or social initiatives. As unrelenting as he was in his efforts to improve the lives of the poor and oppressed, Buxton did, on occasion, allow his idealism to extend too far. For all of its good intentions, the Niger expedition remained Buxton's one true failure. Buxton's hubris as a consequence of the successful campaign to abolish slavery is reflected in his conviction that his was the only viable plan for the development of Africa. Basing nearly all of his research on second and third party accounts, this conceit misled him into believing that he could organize and spearhead a major national effort, despite his near mental and physical exhaustion.

These flaws notwithstanding, Thomas Fowell Buxton remains a man worthy of respect and emulation; his reputation as a Christian reformer and evangelical leader is well deserved. Buxton's life embodied the idea that Christianity was a not simply a religious category, but a way of life. His determination and ability to meld public service with Christian duty caused him to help bring about the emancipation of Britain's slaves, the first step in ending that institution in the West. Despite the criticism of his later actions, at least one newspaper recognized that Buxton's efforts on behalf of Africa offered promise. "Though he did not live to see all affected with regard to negro slavery that he wished, he nevertheless had great reason to rejoice that much has been effected, and a train laid for further advance in the same direction."² For the historian, Buxton provides an instructive example of the merger of evangelicalism and the emerging social science mindset in the "age of improvement."³ He also affords an intriguing insight into the mindset of those who devote their lives to a cause greater than themselves.

² Glasgow Herald (Glasgow, Scotland), February 24, 1845, 2.

³ In *The Age of Improvement*, Asa Briggs notes that as the nineteenth century began, a new relationship existed between "man and nature . . . the rise of a new class structure . . . and a transformation of politics and administration" helped generate an obsession with reform. Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (Harlow, England, and New York: Longmans, 2000), 4.

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