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WILFRID LAWSON:
ATTITUDES & OPINIONS ON BRITAIN'S IMPERIAL &
FOREIGN POLICY (1868-1892)

TERRY CARRICK



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WILFRID LAWSON:
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(1868-1892)

TERRY CARRICK

This thesis is concerned with a very important aspect of the political life of one of the most neglected figures of nineteenth century British political history, Sir Wilfrid Lawson (1829-1906). Lawson, an extreme radical entered Parliament in 1859, where he remained almost continuously until his death. Today Lawson's name is rarely recalled, except for his work on temperance reform, where his critics continue to describe him as a temperance fanatic and a 'one idea man'. The reality of the situation is quite the reverse; Lawson was a man with undeviating radical principles, with plenty to say on an endless stream of subjects.

Lawson was perhaps the most Cobdenite of the Cobdenites, especially in the matter of Britain's imperial and foreign policy, which is the main focus of this thesis. As such he campaigned against loans for standing armaments and all forms of aggressive warfare. When war finally came, as was often the case, Lawson vehemently opposed it, and supported a series of defiant parliamentary battles against government interventionist policies. Lawson had no enthusiasm for British expansion or for the pursuit of imperial glory, or any interest in promoting its civilising mission abroad, which he considered a distraction, supported by the ruling aristocracy, as a means of delaying the advance of much needed home reforms.

I have structured the thesis around a number of key events in the development of British foreign and imperial policy in the period 1870 to 1892, primarily the expansionist programme promoted by Lord Beaconsfield, Gladstone's intervention in Egypt, and the affairs of Ireland and Home Rule. All were of major significance at the time and Lawson was heavily involved in the debates surrounding them.

Introduction

If a group of modern day historians were to discuss the merits, the policies, and the contribution made by Sir Wilfrid Lawson to Victorian political history; they would probably confirm Lawson's adherence to radicalism and strongly overstate the words 'faddist' and 'temperance'. This response is understandable but I doubt if many would overstate Lawson's attitudes towards, or indeed his reactions against, Britain's Foreign and Imperial policy. The new revised Oxford Dictionary of National Biography dedicates over five columns to Lawson, and yet his opposition to Britain's occupation of Egypt merits less than two lines, while other anti-imperialist concerns fare little better.¹ This is rather surprising, for Lawson was a very prominent left-liberal politician who attended the House of Commons for almost forty-five years, throughout a period, which many historians consider the most interesting phase of British Imperial expansion.² One reason for this anomaly is the lack of modern biographies of Lawson. In 1909, fellow parliamentarian and friend, G. W. E. Russell, edited a posthumous collection of Lawson's parliamentary, rather banal, reminiscences, accumulated by the author during his parliamentary career.³ Notwithstanding its social and political appeal, Lawson's personal attributions play only a complementary role compared to the anecdotal antics of selected colleagues. The only other printed biographical source is an obscure and virtually forgotten volume written in 1900 by W. B. Luke.⁴ Although a useful document it predominantly discusses Lawson's temperance activities and is of limited value to would-be students of British imperialism. There are two other published resources of primary source material, one a collection of speeches, chiefly on temperance and prohibition,⁵

¹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 32, (Oxford, 2004), pp. 906-908.

² Empire and Imperialism: The Debate of the 1870's, P. J. Cain, (ed.), (Indiana, 1999), pp. 3-19.

³ Sir Wilfrid Lawson: A Memoir, G. W. E. Russell, (London, 1909).

⁴ Sir Wilfrid Lawson, W. B. Luke, (London, 1900).

⁵ Wisdom Grave and Gay: Selected Speeches of Sir Wilfrid Lawson, (London, 1889).

and a collection of poetry with related illustrations by F. Carruthers Gould,⁶ whereas many of the poems in this volume project an anti-imperialist viewpoint, they concern the latter period of Lawson's life and lie outside the limits of this project.

Notwithstanding my extensive research into the huge catalogue of available scholarly material associated with British Imperial and Foreign policy I have yet to uncover any work which does justice to Lawson's contribution relating to the period under review; with few exceptions his name merits no more than a fleeting footnote. Perhaps this is because in 1918 a great fire razed the Lawson family mansion in Cumberland, destroying all of Lawson's private and public correspondence, an event which may have impacted upon, and hindered any would-be historian contemplating research into the subject. Although Lawson did correspond with Gladstone, Harcourt, Bright and others, their individual collections do not record many communications from Lawson and what does exist appears to largely embrace temperance issues.

Lawson was not a pamphleteer or an essayist, nor was he the owner of a newspaper or a periodical like his radical colleagues, Joseph Cowen and Henry Labouchere. His strength of argument came from his unique way of transmitting the spoken word. Lawson was a member of innumerable societies and pressure groups, and made many political speeches throughout his life on a wide variety of subjects and related incidents. Although widely reported and published in the newspapers, these verbatim speeches were cumbersome and may have discouraged any would-be researcher. Another major factor was Lawson's commitment to the lost cause of temperance reform and the misconception that he cared about little else, when temperance was only one strand of a very complex set of ideas he espoused. One of the aims of this thesis is to explore and correct the misconception that Lawson was first and foremost a temperance reformer. Lawson was in fact, the most Cobdenite of the Cobdenites and my aim is to investigate his contribution to the debate on foreign and colonial policy in the context of his radical philosophy as a whole. Lawson was a full-blooded radical, whose views covered a wide range and were almost always, very extreme. If the

⁶ Cartoons in Rhyme and Line: Sir Wilfrid Lawson Bart., M.P. and F. Carruthers Gould,

voting habits of an individual Member of Parliament can be used to place that person along the radical spectrum then Lawson belongs on the outer fringes, for it is doubtful if any member of any party or of any time in the history of the modern British parliamentary system, has ever voted in as many minority divisions as Lawson.⁷

In developing this study, I have constructed my arguments through tracing Lawson's reaction to some major imperial events that occurred in the 1870s and 1880s. I have deliberately chosen to investigate these decades because I believe they matter the most because they happen at a time when Lawson was developing his opinions, and also that especially in the case of Egypt, he had a leading role to perform. In a much later period, during the Boer war of 1899-1902 for example, Lawson was much less prominent, and his views were very similar to those expressed earlier in his career. To complement the two early biographies I have predominantly used three additional primary sources: parliamentary debates in the form of Hansard; contemporary newspaper articles; and contemporary books. At his peak, Lawson made public addresses on a regular basis, many contained an anti imperialist flavour and were reported in the newspapers and commented on in contemporary journals; Secondary source material comprise a wide range of scholarly written work, covering the period and the subject matter under review.

Early Influences

In 1812, a ship sank off the coast of Madeira, causing the premature death of Thomas Lawson, formerly Wybergh, of Brayton House in the county of Cumberland.⁸ The unfortunate young man belonged to a long established

(London, 1905).

⁷ This situation was recognised by critics early in Lawson's career. In 1866 the Conservative Irish Secretary, Lord Naas described Lawson's political principles as 'utterly detestable', which if brought into execution would abolish all of the country's major institutions, which if carried out would Americanise our way of life and would be incompatible with the stability of the throne, and the maintenance of strong government. "There was," Naas declared, "never a small minority of views or extreme measure that Lawson would not support." The Carlisle Journal, 13 July 1866.

⁸ The Cumberland Paquet, 14 July 1812.

family from Clifton Hall, Westmorland.⁹ Thomas had adopted the name of his uncle, Sir Wilfrid Lawson,¹⁰ who dying six years earlier without issue had bequeathed his estate to the heirs of the Wybergh family.¹¹ The estate now passed to Thomas's younger brother Wilfrid, the father of the subject of this study. The elder Wilfrid, born on 5 October 1795, also accepted the instructions of the will and likewise assumed the name and arms¹² of the Lawson family. In 1821, he married Caroline Graham,¹³ sister to the Peelite Whig statesman, Sir James Graham.¹⁴ Their marriage produced eight children, four boys, Wilfrid, Gilfrid, William and Alfred; and four daughters, Caroline, Elizabeth, Catherine and Maria.¹⁵

Throughout his life Lawson senior took an active role in politics, where he championed the Whig cause. Not the politics of the Conservative Whigs as exemplified in the philosophy of Lord Melbourne, who firmly believed in aristocratic government and held little tolerance for middle-class economic reforms. No, Lawson senior supported the extreme radical wing, he was what he called a 'true blue'¹⁶ a passionate supporter of the political philosophy of Charles James Fox, the constitutional republicanism of John Wilkes and in

⁹ Topographical and Historical Account of the County of Cumberland, Lysons, D. & S., (London, 1815), p. IXXIX.

¹⁰ The Lawson family could trace their descent to the first year of the reign of Henry III, (1216). They were obviously well connected and regularly represented their neighbours in both Parliament and the office of county sheriff. Cumberland and Westmorland Members of Parliament, R. S. Fergusson, (London, 1871), pp. 459-478.

¹¹ In 1806 the baronet's patent purchased months before the Glorious Revolution (1688) expired with the death of the tenth baronet. Historical Account of the County of Cumberland, Lysons, p. 120.

¹² *Ibid*, p. IXXIX.

¹³ Carlisle Journal, 14 June 1867.

¹⁴ Sir James Robert George Graham 2nd Baronet (1792-1861) entered Parliament in 1818 for the Hull constituency on behalf of the Whigs. After a lapse from politics he became the member for Carlisle in 1826 and four years later entered the Cabinet as first lord of the admiralty. He also became one of the committee of four responsible for drafting the 1832 reform bill. In 1837 he joined Peel's conservatives and became Home Secretary in 1841. After representing Dorchester and Ripon he returned to Carlisle in 1852, now an anti-protectionist, where he continued to represent the city until his death in 1861. Sir James Graham, J. T. Ward, (London, 1967). Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 23, pp. 204-210. see also Graham's obituary in The Carlisle Patriot, 20 October 1861.

¹⁵ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 32, pp. 906-908.

¹⁶ In 1784, at a celebratory dinner in honour of the victory of Charles James Fox (1749-1806) at the election for the Westminster constituency, where all of those present were habited in either blue or buff, the Prince of Wales, delivered a victory toast consisting of the words 'True blue and Mrs. Crewe,' (the hostess) which was received with rapture, the lady rose and proposed another health, expressive of her gratitude, and not less laconic, namely, 'Buff and blue, and all of you.'" (buff and blue were the Whig colours). Grosvenor Square and its

time the social reforming of Richard Cobden and John Bright; a Whig yes but a most unusual member of that grouping. The Lawsons, as we shall see did not fit comfortably into most political models. Lawson senior always remained a constitutionalist, unmoved by the divinity of monarchy. Not only did he wish to extend the franchise to include the masses, but he practised what he preached in the family household where he passionately resented the class structure. Although his name is intimately associated with some of the most stirring political contests before the franchise reforms, he only stood in one election. This occurred in 1827, when in opposition to Colonel Lushington, he stood as a parliamentary candidate for the representation of Carlisle. His manifesto read as follows:

That it is essential to the general interest of the nation that the people should be free, and that it is the duty of their representatives to assert the rights of the people, redress their grievance and watch over the expenditure of public money.¹⁷

The fight for political freedom is the common theme that unites Lawson's manifesto and accompanying political squibs; for radicals, freedom from obligation was a precondition for political citizenship; freedom was their antidote to slavery. Lawson was emphasising that parliament could only represent the people if the electorate were given the opportunity to elect representatives freely. Although he advocated reforms, Lawson senior was more of a radical in the Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844) tradition than a reformer, an advocate of 'going back to the roots'. As Matthew McCormack differentiates; the reformer sought to remove abuses as a means of preserving the system, whereas the radical insisted upon the necessity of a more fundamental change.¹⁸ Lawson later claimed that his father's neighbours and fellow-landowners, who in private remained on intimate terms with him,

Neighbourhood: Old and New London, Vol. 4, Walter Thornbury, (London, 1878), pp.. 338-45..

¹⁷ Lawson retired from the contest when his opponent held 362 votes to his 323. Carlisle Journal, 21 June 1867.

¹⁸ Metropolitan 'Radicalism' and Electoral Independence: 1760-1820, Matthew McCormack: from London Politics, Matthew Cragoe and Anthony Taylor, (eds.), (London, 2005), p. 21.

would, when they met in the streets of Carlisle, walk out of their way rather than be seen discussing issues with a man of such character.¹⁹

A measure of Lawson senior's radicalism can be gauged from his sobriquet, the 'King Killing Baronet', which he acquired after proposing a rebellious toast during Sir James Graham's nomination dinner, when he advocated: "That the heads of Don Miguel, King Ferdinand and Charles Capet, be severed from their bodies and rolled in the dust - and the more speedily the better."²⁰ On 1 September 1831, acting upon the advice and influence of Graham,²¹ King William IV restored the baronetage to the Lawson family.²² Sir Wilfrid never allowed family connections to impede his judgement, such that when in 1835 Graham abandoned his liberal principles and joined the Tory party,²³ Lawson became the first in the corresponding General Election to record his anti-Graham vote.²⁴

In 1834, after falling dangerously ill, Sir Wilfrid turned to religion for guidance, not the sporting parsons who promoted the established church, but a humble Presbyterian minister from one of the neighbouring villages.²⁵ Recovery brought enlightenment, he became a philanthropist and a practicing Christian, determined to spread his new-found faith and assist the needs of his neighbours. Some months later, his conversion was complete. The incident attracted the attention of the Parliamentary Review.

Sir Wilfrid Lawson of Brayton Hall, Cumberland, is said to have been so strongly impressed by the arguments of Mr Pollard,²⁶ who is lecturing

¹⁹ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 71.

²⁰ On the eve of the 1830, General Election, several of the Freeholders of the county, decided to offer Sir James Graham a testimony of their approbation of his conduct in Parliament. About 600 people attended what later became known as the 'celebrated Dalston Dinner'. After Sir James, eulogised about the right and duty of the people to resist despotic powers, he concluded with the rallying call which later returned to haunt him. "I became a Blue (Whig), Blue I am, Blue I always have been, and Blue I trust I shall ever continue to be; I am not ashamed to own it, and God forbid the Blues should ever have cause to be ashamed of me." Carlisle Journal, 14 June 1867.

²¹ Sir James Graham was the then First Lord of the Admiralty.

²² Sir James Graham, J. T. Ward, (London, 1967), p. 113.

²³ *Ibid*, Chapters 6 & 7, pp. 130-183.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 159.

²⁵ A Presbyterian minister named Walton, from the neighbouring village of Blennerhasset.

²⁶ William Pollard, Wesleyan temperance advocate from Manchester, whose speeches 'almost electrified the audience for a considerable time. Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872, Brian Harrison, (London, 1971), p. 120.

on behalf of Temperance Societies throughout the county, that he has had the whole of his Brandy, Rum, Gin and Whisky taken from his cellars at the back of the Hall, and destroyed by fire in his own presence.²⁷

As a means of ridiculing the later concerns of his son several modified versions of this incident²⁸ periodically recurred in the newspapers. Lawson later founded a Home Mission station in the village of Aspatria, and, through his endeavours to promote the doctrines of the Evangelical Union he became the principal proprietor of the Christian News.²⁹ Although previous generations had increased the Lawson estate through judicious marriages and careful purchases, this Sir Wilfrid was what Cain and Hopkins would later describe as a 'gentleman capitalist', a formidable mix of the old and the new;³⁰ he exploited the spirit of the new industrial age, becoming an ardent supporter and early investor in the growth of railways. He was the principal shareholder and personality behind the Maryport and Carlisle Railway Company, and held an impressive portfolio of shares in other railroads, in large hotels and numerous turnpike trusts.³¹ Through his business acumen, he became a man of considerable wealth, who bequeathed to his eldest son a large estate and a sum in excess of £300,000.³²

Wilfrid, the subject of this study was born at Brayton, on 4 September 1829. Since his parents preferred a simple sporting life, they encouraged their children to appreciate and enjoy the simple delights of country living, providing access to a string of outdoor pursuits, including fishing, shooting, skating,

²⁷ The Parliamentary Review, 26 July 1834. Also Chambers Historic Newspapers, August 1834.

²⁸ All of the modified versions relate to the deposit of drink in a small pond at the rear of the house, which locals today refer to as the 'Whisky Pond'.

²⁹ Carlisle Journal, 14 June 1867. The Christian News was the organ of the Scottish denomination known also as the Evangelical Union.

³⁰ "Gentlemanly Capitalism and the British Expansion Overseas 1: The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850", Economic History Review, Second Series, Vol. XXXIX, No 4, Nov 1986, P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins.

³¹ The London and South-Western; the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire; the Great Western; the North Eastern; Cockermouth and Workington; London Bridge and Charing Cross; Great North of England; Darlington and Barnard Castle; Stockton and Darlington; South Durham; Lancashire; Forth and Clyde Junction. He also held overseas investments, in the Liege and Namur railways. Carlisle Journal, 2 August 1867.

cricket and the family obsession, foxhunting.³³ From early childhood he developed an exceptional talent for mimicry, which he often reproduced, exposing the oddities, and whimsicalities, encountered in the pursuit of business and leisure. He also displayed a talent for writing rapid, fluent, and vigorous verse, which would play so conspicuous a part in the serious correspondence of his mature life.

Lawson senior, having received his education from a Yorkshire Grammar School, before becoming a Fellow Commoner at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, had formed an unfavourable opinion of the moral and intellectual discipline of such institutions. He appointed John Oswald Jackson, a Congregational minister of some repute,³⁴ as home tutor.³⁵ In later life, both Lawson and his celebrated brother William³⁶ openly declared their lack of formal education.³⁷ Jackson predominantly taught his pupils Greek and Latin prose, complemented with mathematics, natural sciences, political economy, English and foreign history, with the elements of rhetoric and logic to enhance the curriculum.³⁸ Lawson also gained a fondness for poetry, in particular the works of Lord Byron, whose lines often adorned his speeches.³⁹

With limited access to his intellectual peers, Lawson received his political convictions from his father, his tutor, and a constant stream of radical freethinking household guests. In 1840, the family explored the consequences

³² The Will of Sir Wilfrid Lawson. Ibid.

³³ The famous John Peel, who is kenn'd all over the English speaking world, was a Master of Foxhounds, who hunted in Cumberland for upwards of forty-six years. When he died in 1854, Lawson, then twenty-five years of age, bought Peel's hounds, amalgamated them with a small pack, already in his possession, and became Master of the Cumberland Foxhounds. Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 9. Lawson shared the same hostilities as urban radicals against the great territorial landowners, aristocratic privileges and hereditary legislators at court and in the House of Lords; and although he passionately supported the reform of the game laws he differed in his love of foxhunting and other related field sports. Lords of Misrule: Hostility to Aristocracy in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Britain, Anthony Taylor, (London, 2004), pp. 73-96.

³⁴ John Oswald Jackson was a prolific writer on religious subjects; the British Library catalogue includes ten books published between the years 1845-94.

³⁵ Some Notable Cumbrians, Sir F. Chance, (London, 1931), p. 60.

³⁶ Ten Years of Gentleman Farming at Blennerhasset, with Co-operative Objects, William Lawson and Charles D. Hunter, (London, 1874), p. 14.

³⁷ In defence Jackson compiled for the benefit of posterity a statement relating to the educational methods he pursued. Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 297-302.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 56-57.

³⁹ Bright was also a lover of the works of Byron, and it was said that his speeches were often 'Byron in solution, so close was his reading of the poet'. An Orator's Library: John Bright and His Books, J. Travis Mills, (London, 1946).

of adopting free trade and the repeal of the iniquitous Corn Laws.⁴⁰ They eagerly digested the speeches of Granby, Disraeli, and the Duke of Richmond on one side and of Cobden, Bright and Villiers on the other, with the caricatured comments of Mr. Punch, to enrich the subject. The Lawson's shared the opinions of radicals, who argued that aristocrats were parasites on the state raising the price of the people's bread as a means of helping the landed interests and to add revenue to the state coffers which could be used for the anti-Christian purposes of corruption and foreign war.⁴¹ In 1843, after attending a series of travelling lectures given by Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) and Robert Smith Candlish (1806-1873), they re-enacted the prominent debates relating to the question of Church and State and discussed the Scottish church and its recent schism, when 451 ministers seceded, leaving the Kirk to form the Free Church of Scotland.⁴² In 1843, they debated the riots in Wales; and after O'Connell electrified Ireland with his desire to repeal the union they consumed endless hours debating the everlasting Irish Question. In 1848, they contemplated the events surrounding revolution, when the morning newspapers reported some fresh upheaval, spreading relentlessly across Europe, shaking kingdoms and thrones, causing terrific slaughter in France, provoking Chartist riots in England, and bringing home lessons of deep political importance. Throughout the 1840's, they debated the morality of war, with particular reference to the Afghan and the Chinese Opium wars. As the wars concluded the question of peace came to the fore. The leaflets of the American peace campaigner Elihu Burritt (1810-1879) were awaited and absorbed on publication, while another apostle of peace, Henry Richard (1812-1888) made a lecturing visit to Brayton. Lawson completed his education by reading the Nonconformist, edited by Edward Miall. Many of these early radical refrains forged his character and formed his opinions and

⁴⁰ Cobden believed that the Corn Laws (introduced in 1815) stood in the way of increased industrial exports, by increasing industrial costs and by making it difficult for foreign countries to find sterling with which to buy British commodities. "Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden," British Journal of International Studies, Vol. 5, October 1979, P. J. Cain, pp. 229-247.

⁴¹ The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain, Jonathon Parry, (Yale, 1993), p. 163.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 160-1.

convictions pushing him along a path that led from romanticism and Evangelicalism to Cobdenism.

The Politician

After Lord Palmerston dissolved Parliament in 1857,⁴³ Lawson came forward as a radical to contest the West Cumberland stronghold 'owned' by the Lowther family. The Lawson's were obsessed with the concept of political freedom and since the constituency had for over twenty years been denied the opportunity to select a representative Lawson senior was determined, at personal expense,⁴⁴ to offer the electorate a choice. Victorian elections were violent affairs, held against a backdrop of heavy drinking, mob influence, bribery, and a judicious application of gross intimidation from landlords, employers and other vested interests.⁴⁵ With the exception of the Maryport Advertiser⁴⁶ the newspapers opposed him. Lawson recalled that whereas many candidates elected to fight on the common doctrine, 'My Country right or wrong', with 'Rule Britannia haunting the backdrop',⁴⁷ he proudly stood as a 'Little Englander',⁴⁸ with a radical programme, hoisting a banner endorsing the famous Liberal watchwords, Peace, Retrenchment and Reform.

⁴³ In October 1856, the Chinese authorities at Canton, boarded the 'Arrow', a British ship registered in Hong Kong, claiming the vessel was crewed by pirates. After failing to secure an apology a British naval squadron bombarded Chinese forts in the Canton River. On 28 February 1857, Cobden introduced a hostile but moderately worded Vote of Censure against Palmerston's 'gun boat diplomacy'. Cobden's principal objection was that the Chinese deserved respect and fair dealings, and, that eventually the episode would damage Britain's trade. Gladstone later declared that a snap division would have crippled Palmerston, however, after four days of intensive debate the margin shrunk to fourteen votes. The ensuing General Election was conducted around the cry, 'For or against Palmerston', hardly complementary for an emerging young radical, contesting a 'Lowther' controlled seat. Cobden and Bright, A Victorian Political Partnership, Donald Read, (London, 1967), p. 134. Also Richard Cobden, A Victorian Outsider, Wendy Hinde, (London, 1987), p. 266.

⁴⁴ The contest probably cost Lawson senior a sum in excess of £3,000. Carlisle Patriot, 10 April 1857.

⁴⁵ The Making of Modern Britain, Martin Pugh, (London, 1993), p. 10.

⁴⁶ The issue carried the following slogan. "Electors of West Cumberland! Vote honestly for Lawson, fearless of threats, a fund is ready to reimburse your loss." Maryport Advertiser, 3 April 1857.

⁴⁷ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 12.

⁴⁸ The term 'Little Englander' was a term of derision, applied to political opponents, never a rallying cry warmly embraced. England's Mission: The Imperial Idea in the Age of Gladstone and Disraeli, 1868-1880, C. C. Eldridge, (London, 1973), p. 31.

The slogan, Peace Retrenchment and Reform is worthy of closer examination for it became Lawson's watchword, one he continued to use regardless of its unpopularity. Like Cobden, he saw the three strands united through Free Trade, which he considered an integral part of freedom for it permitted men to make the most of their powers of production.⁴⁹ Peace was essential to retrenchment because it led to cuts in military expenditure and so was reform, which empowered those with an interest in keeping taxation low. Free Trade would secure cheap food and encourage nations to become more interdependent and as a result reduce the chances of war and military expansion. In consequence, less war resulted in less Government expenditure and in effect the security of Free Trade. To radicals protection was a prime example of privilege and if reintroduced as an excuse to raise funds for extravagant spending could threaten Free Trade. Peel and Cobden supported income tax insofar as it replaced tariffs for revenue and because paying taxes directly made voters more responsible.⁵⁰

Lawson associated with the 'Manchester School'⁵¹ of politics and consistently advocated their principles, particularly in response to conflict undertaken to promote selfish British interests. He defined peace as the amicable settlement of international affairs and disputes between unfriendly foreign nations through the application of arbitration and reason. He never believed in peace-at-any-price or peace at the price of war,⁵² and considered going to war to make peace an absurd insinuation.⁵³ Like Cobden, Lawson was not a pacifist in the Quaker sense; he saw that wars arose because of the existence of certain conditions, such as protectionism, and an uncontrolled growth in armaments which those working for peace should seek to remove.⁵⁴ He accepted the use of force for self-defence, and applauded those nations who went to war to protect their independence. On this basis he was ready to

⁴⁹ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 32-33.

⁵⁰ "Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden", Cain, pp. 229-247.

⁵¹ The Manchester School of Economics, W. D. Grampp, (London, 1960).

⁵² The Northern Pioneer, 28 February 1882. Also The Maryport Advertiser, 3 March 1882.

⁵³ Carlisle Journal, 16 January 1874.

⁵⁴ Victorian People, Asa Briggs, (London, 1965), p. 221. George Herbert Perris 1866-1920: The Life and Times of a Radical, Robert Gomme, (Oxford, 2003), pp. 108-112.

support the existence of a small professional army and a strong navy.⁵⁵ He had no interest in 'empire' and disapproved of all aggressive conflict, believing that every statesman had a moral obligation to settle disputes honourably.

A statesman who involves his country in war is acting either wickedly or foolishly. He is acting wickedly if he draws the sword before using every possible means to prevent that catastrophe from happening; and acting foolishly if unable to find the means.⁵⁶

Lawson continuously stressed the need to reduce Government expenditure and almost always associated retrenchment with peace. The perpetuation of a policy of peace would reduce the size of the armed forces and subsequently reduce Government expenditure and limit the need for taxation. He understood that Radicals would only realise retrenchment from a Parliament committed accordingly, not by one prepared to seize every excuse for a re-armament scheme to augment the expenditure. He maintained that the Government's primary function was to protect the people from internal and external disturbances. He considered financial and parliamentary reform as a means of ending privilege and a government legislative tool for use in abolishing abuses. In his opinion, only men with steadfast feelings and sympathies could secure peace, retrenchment and reform.

Lawson's radical manifesto requires little interpretation:

If you want Extension of Suffrage,
Vote by Ballot,
Reduction of Taxes, Religious Freedom,
Cheap Food, and Good Situation,
Vote a Plumper for Lawson,⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Carlisle Journal, 13 July 1866. Like many radicals, Lawson made a distinction between the army and the navy. Radicals saw the army as 'repressive at home and abroad', which was a 'great burden on the taxpayers to the benefit of their aristocratic offspring's'; whereas the navy 'enjoyed the freedom of the seas and inculcated a liberal patriotism in the servicemen, who carried British values (and goods in the form of mercantile marine) all over the world. The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government, Parry, p. 187.

⁵⁶ Carlisle Journal, 16 January 1874.

⁵⁷ Carlisle Patriot, 10 April 1857.

Lawson promoted his extreme radical programme using simple bullet statements, a young man's vision, perhaps, but fifty years later he retained identical convictions. Although he welcomed minor reforms, he never advocated cautious change; to him taxation and representation went hand in hand, an extension of the franchise meant universal suffrage, to encompass men and women from all walks of life.⁵⁸ As early as 1871, he was, said one newspaper editor: "one of the ungallant minorities who wished to force upon a certain number of women a responsibility that they do not desire, and that they would find very inconvenient and perplexing to exercise."⁵⁹ Lawson saw religious freedom as the right to believe or disbelieve in any form of instruction, without monetary penalty to the individual. Cheap food emphasised his anti-protectionist commitment to Free Trade. 'Good situation' although more difficult to define probably includes, the restriction of abuses, the abolition of privilege and the curtailment of intemperance.

Although Lawson lost the election,⁶⁰ the 'Manchester School' in the form of Bright, Cobden, Miall, Milner Gibson, Fox and Layard all lost their seats.⁶¹ Lawson continued his apprenticeship, addressing audiences in public halls, village schools and even haylofts; and received his reward in 1859, when after Lord Derby dissolved Parliament, he was invited by over 1,000 Carlisle constituents to stand with his uncle, Sir James Graham. In his acceptance, Lawson submitted a short but precise election address:

In my opinion the Country requires a very different measure of Reform to that which was proposed by Lord Derby's Government. Any Reform Bill to be acceptable to the Public must not only considerably extend the Borough franchise, but also make provision for the disfranchisement of the very small boroughs.⁶²

⁵⁸ The West Cumberland Times, 5 April 1882.

⁵⁹ Carlisle Journal, 20 January 1871.

⁶⁰ By the close of the poll, Wyndham had 1,848 votes, Lowther 1,825, Lawson trailed a disappointing third with 1,554 votes. Carlisle Patriot, 10 April 1857.

⁶¹ Richard Cobden, Hinde, p. 268. Also England's Mission, Eldridge, pp. 30-31. The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government, Parry, Chapters 8 & 9.

⁶² Carlisle Patriot, 10 April 1859.

Graham's address was moderate; he condemned Disraeli's Bill of Reform and opposed the Ballot. Under pressure from a group of radicals, he informed his agent, "Lawson and his father sincerely entertain extreme opinions, and may be considered partisans of Mr Bright. Lawson would go the whole length, would pledge himself to the ballot, and would go ahead of me."⁶³ Lawson concurred; "I may honestly confess I am rather more of a radical than he (Graham)."⁶⁴ In response to those who accused him of holding revolutionary tendencies, Lawson unequivocally replied:

My idea of a revolutionist is one who endeavours to destroy the institutions of his country. My idea of a reformer is one who endeavours to improve them. And I believe that those who really love that glorious constitution under which we live, and which has made old England the greatest and happiest country in the world, will not be afraid of seeing the honest and industrious classes of the country admitted within its pale. They will not think that such a step tends to the overthrow and destruction of the institutions and safeguards of this country: but will rather look upon it as an additional safeguard that will add to their performance and stability.⁶⁵

Lawson used the traditional radical argument 'that to opposes the vote for working men was to deny their morality', when endorsing the enfranchisement of the working classes.⁶⁶

We very often hear from the platform and at public meetings that the working men are intelligent, public spirited, well educated, and in short all that is good. However, when it comes to the question of giving them the vote we are told, oh no, they cannot have votes, they know nothing of politics. They may be philosophers, astronomers, they may be acquainted with all sorts of science according to the accounts these

⁶³ Life and Letters of Sir James Graham, 1792-1861, Vol. 2, Charles Stuart Parker, (London, 1907), pp. 379-380.

⁶⁴ Carlisle Patriot, 16 April 1859.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 16 April 1859.

orators give, but are totally unacquainted with politics. Now I should think that the proper definition of politics is how to conduct the business of the nation, of which the working classes form a large part. So politics should be the business of everyone.⁶⁷

When questioned on the lengths he would go in lowering the franchise, Lawson replied, "As far as any proposition is likely to be brought into Parliament, which has the least chance of success."⁶⁸ Brian Harrison misinterprets Lawson's enthusiasm for franchise reform, considering it an offshoot of his temperance aspirations.⁶⁹ This is an unfair judgement. Temperance reform did not feature in Lawson's early election campaigns; his major preoccupation was to secure franchise reforms and the ballot.⁷⁰ Harrison could have equally, wrongly concluded that Lawson supported temperance measures as a means of forcing those who favoured increased military expenditure to consider the impact of raising the necessary finances from direct and not indirect taxation.

When the poll closed Graham stood at its head with 538 votes, his nephew trailed by 22 votes, 40 votes ahead of his Conservative rival. Speaking from the hustings, the old campaigner honoured his nephew. "I understand that Mr Lawson has been spoken of as 'the young cock'. Well I think he fights well: I think he is a hard hitter; and I hope he will fight another day, when I - the old cock - am gone and laid low!"⁷¹ Lawson expressed his gratitude.

In this country, the Queen is the fountain of honour. She can bestow rank and title. But there is one honour that she cannot bestow. The esteem and respect of our fellow-countrymen are theirs alone to give. I

⁶⁶ Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class 1840-1914, Patrick Joyce, (London, 1993), pp. 44-46.

⁶⁷ Carlisle Patriot, 16 April 1859.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 16 April 1859.

⁶⁹ Drink and the Victorians, Harrison, p. 253.

⁷⁰ Although Ballot Committees and Ballot Societies had existed since 1832, the Liberal party and their leadership expressed limited commitment until after the year 1870.

⁷¹ Lawson, Luke, p. 17.

shall endeavour to act so that my supporters may be able to think of me as one: -

Who broke no promise, served no private end,
Who gained no title, and who lost no friend!⁷²

Despite gaining thirty seats the Conservative's remained in a minority. By 26 May 1859, the popular politician Charles Greville invited Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell to bury their differences and arrive at a mutual understanding. On 6 June, Palmerston agreed to a meeting of Liberal sympathisers and Lawson in conjunction with 273 parliamentarians attended the famous gathering in Willis's Room's, where a combination of Whig, Peelite and Radicals, drawn together by a common sympathy for the Italian Risorgimento, conspired to expel Lord Derby's Government.⁷³ The meeting was later hailed as the origin of the Liberal party. On 7 June, Lawson took his seat on the Speaker's left, sitting on the opposition benches below the gangway. The 'gangway' was the little passage running between the Treasury and the opposition benches, cutting them in two. He would later state that those who sat below the gangway were generally those at odds with their own party.⁷⁴ Within a week, he had voted in his first parliamentary division, where, by a majority of twelve, the opposition overturned Derby and installed a Palmerston Government. "That was the first vote I gave in the House of Commons," he later recalled, "and precious little good it did. We got rid of Lord Derby, but went over to Lord Palmerston, one the avowed enemy of reform, the other the concealed enemy."⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid, p. 17. The last two lines are a direct quote taken from a poem by Alexander Pope, a phrase extensively used by statesmen over the years. www.WorldofQuotes.com.

⁷³ The Risorgimento in their fight to free Italy from Austrian control held all the prerequisites for reviving the popular Whig sympathy for peoples fighting for national independence and constitutional liberty; and in Giuseppe Garibaldi a charismatic leader. Garibaldi and the Thousands, G. M. Trevelyan, (London, 1965). In 1864, Lawson was a member of a delegation of radicals who met with and tried to persuade Gladstone to allow Garibaldi to travel to the North of England, he also met Garibaldi during that visit. Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 63-64.

⁷⁴ West Cumberland Times, 13 January 1883.

Although Lawson was an adherent of the Liberal party, he was first and foremost independent, answerable to his conscience and his constituents respectively. Whereas he found little to differentiate between the forward policies of certain individual members who belonged to each political party he recognised the insurmountable gulf that divided the fundamental principles of each organisation. His experience of politics had taught him that, whereas “a Tory may steal a horse, a Liberal may not look over the hedge.”⁷⁶ He once described ‘Toryism’, as a philosophy that “put money above people, privilege above right, and the advantage of the few at the cost to the many.”⁷⁷ The policy of the Liberal party was he said trust in the people, tempered with prudence; the policy of the Conservative party was distrust of the people tempered with fear, in other words the Conservative party was in favour of government for the people, while his Liberal party favoured government by the people.⁷⁸ Lawson’s Liberals were always acting while the Conservatives were always re-acting; his Liberals were always moving, while the Tories stood still: his Liberals were always pushing while the Tories were obstructing.⁷⁹ One he said was the party of prejudice, the other, of argument and reason; one supported feudalism, the other justice; one preserved obsolete privileges while the other favoured freedom of expression.⁸⁰

The parliamentary Liberal party that Lawson entered in 1859 bore little resemblance to that of later years. It was what John Vincent later described as a merger of several influential groups, large landowners, gentlemen of leisure, lawyers, radicals, big businessmen, local businessmen and militant businessmen and not what popular belief would suggest, a coalition of two large groupings of Whigs and Radicals.⁸¹ It was a party still widely tied to the land, the established church and the armed service. One in every ten members were patrons of livings; over one quarter held or had held rank in

⁷⁵ Lawson, Luke, p. 21.

⁷⁶ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 46.

⁷⁷ West Cumberland Times, 27 November 1872.

⁷⁸ Carlisle Journal, 30 June 1865.

⁷⁹ West Cumberland Times, 3 February 1877.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 28 January 1888.

⁸¹ The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857-1968, John Vincent, (London, 1966), p. 3.

the services or the militia,⁸² while over half were men of property, resulting in the party holding a massive and homogeneous right, and right of centre wing to frustrate the small band of radicals. Although those in the centre had no direct territorial connections to the aristocracy, this did not mean they were allies of the radicals. A large proportion of lawyers and big businessmen were in Vincent's words "...a random collection of residual elements loosely connected by their landlessness."⁸³ The Whigs, the wealthy aristocratic landowners, numbering no more than thirty, remained suspicious of everything and everyone they failed to understand. Their wealth, although they seldom bankrolled the party, and their traditional standing as landowners gave them a status and a prestige which made them a dominating influence far beyond their numbers and ensured they had a strong position in Liberal Governments even after the 1867 franchise reforms.⁸⁴ Lord Hartington later declared that the Whigs had little enthusiasm for reform; their function was to accept reform in time and to prevent it from being too abrupt or violent.⁸⁵ The Radicals were also a small group, numbering no more than fifty, primarily composed of nonconformist industrialists, and gentlemen of independent means like Lawson. The radicals were the advanced guard of the Victorian Liberal party, who by their actions gave the party its cutting edge and set the agenda for political reform. They were the only grouping to lend their support to a consistent policy of change and to challenge the established order of church and state. To the Whigs, men like Lawson were dangerous because they incited the discontented to demand wild and mischievous reforms.

Regarding Lawson's own personal comfort and enjoyment there were very few laws requiring revision, however, he had entered politics to promote the general good and the highest welfare of the masses; as such he never understood how anyone was satisfied with the sight of a vast army of out-of-work husbands and starving wives, preparing their ragged children for the

⁸² In 1898, Lawson criticised the House of Commons, which he claimed had degenerated into an Army and Navy Stores, whose main purpose was voting whatever supplies might be asked for, and to ratify and register the results of mysterious campaigns. The Imperial Idea and its Enemies: A Study in British Power, A. P. Thornton, (London, 1959) p. 98.

⁸³ Formation of the Liberal Party, Vincent, p. 26.

⁸⁴ The Passing of the Whigs 1832-1886, Donald Southgate, (London, 1965).

⁸⁵ The Annual Register: A Public Review of Events at Home and Abroad for the Year 1883, Author not named, (London, 1883), p. 184.

workhouse, or the gallows.⁸⁶ Lawson was a man with undeviating radical principles who had plenty to say on an endless stream of subjects. He held a somewhat simplistic approach to party politics. To him, policy was either black or white, and the purpose of the members including the leadership was to support an endless stream of reforms. Lawson was a man who not only despised Conservatives but also attacked his own party when they deviated from his Cobdenite principles; he not only talked about independence⁸⁷ but acted independently, he was an independent member, from whom the leadership could expect no loyalty.⁸⁸ When accused of voting with the Conservatives, as he occasionally did, he replied, "No! The Tories are going to vote with me; if they choose to play a shabby game and cross over to vote for my principle that is no reason why I should leave my principles in the lurch."⁸⁹ He excused his conduct when voting against his own party in censure motions by arguing that if the matter was of vital importance he had a responsibility to vote for what he considered right, alternatively if the matter was of secondary importance, what fools the Government was to make it important.⁹⁰ He never speculated on the amount of support he would receive when he promoted a resolution, questions were about matters of principle, rather than expediency.⁹¹

Lawson did not want the Liberal party to "confine itself to any particular time, or place, or any particular class of individual but to consist of that great company of faithful men, who in all ages had struggled and continued to struggle to remove those obstacles which impede the progress of their fellow-men towards freedom, happiness and virtue."⁹² Lawson is emblematic of a generation of figures who staked out a territory within the Liberal party, which they then used as a vehicle for promoting their own faddist concerns. Lawson is a figure not unlike J. E. Thorold Rogers (1823-1890), who used agriculture and land issues to radicalise Cobdenism and extend its reach into a broader

⁸⁶ Carlisle Journal, 20 June 1873.

⁸⁷ For an understanding of the Whig interpretation of the concept of independence, see Electoral Independence, McCormack: from London Politics, Cragoe and Taylor, (eds.), pp. 22-27.

⁸⁸ Carlisle Journal, 1 September 1868.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 21 November 1871.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 21 November 1871.

⁹¹ Hansard, 3rd ser., vol. 276, col. 1302, 19 February 1883.

⁹² Carlisle Journal, 21 November 1871.

constituency, often in the hope of neutralising more extreme radicals like the Chartists. As such Lawson aligned himself to the small group of secular radicals who had each entered Parliament through their identification with a series of radical tenets. They never claimed to belong to any inner caucus nor did they identify themselves with a common leader, they were divided by generation and by background and each background and each generation was divided by a diversity of opinion.⁹³ As Joseph Chamberlain later acknowledged:

There is no party of radicals below the gangway; their only point of agreement is the fact that each one differs in some respect or another from the leaders; but their differences among themselves are really greater than those which separate them from the front bench.⁹⁴

The traditional views of Vincent and Hamer have since been revised by modern historians; Biagini refutes these claims, he sees the faddists holding a remarkable cohesion to the extent that those who supported one radical cause also tended to uphold many of the others, as shown by the fact that the membership of these associations tended to overlap; and this opinion is largely substantiated in the case of Lawson.⁹⁵

Cobdenism

It is impossible to do justice to Lawson's career without recognising his close adherence to the principles of his political mentor, Richard Cobden, especially in the matter of Britain's imperial and foreign policy. Cobden held a life-long hostility towards the British landed aristocracy. He saw them as the centre of privilege and monopoly in British life, and condemned the harm they could do through their exaction of rents and their control of the state and of taxation to the 'producing classes', capitalists and workers alike. Cobden

⁹³ Formation of the Liberal Party, Vincent, p. 29.

⁹⁴ Politics in the age of Gladstone and Rosebery: A Study in Leadership and Policy, D. A. Hamer, (London, 1972), p. 55.

⁹⁵ Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone 1860-1880, Eugenio Biagini, (Cambridge, 1992), p. 4.

thought of war and imperialism as natural manifestations of the aristocracy. Imperialism brought, in Bright's famous words, 'poor relief' for the upper classes via job creation and military expansion and diverted people's attention from domestic concerns.⁹⁶ It added to taxation and thus slowed down capitalist accumulation, which Cobden saw as the key to both moral and material progress in Britain. It also gave the landed class the excuse to maintain protection and the reviled Corn Laws for so long. Cobden had targeted the Corn Laws as the chief iniquity because of their effects upon industrial costs and because they prevented the growth of economic interdependence through foreign trade, which Cobden ardently believed would eventually make warfare between nations impossible and would therefore lead to the 'withering away' of the state to a large degree in the future.⁹⁷

To ensure international prosperity and render Empire redundant Cobden assumed that free trade was all that was necessary. Cobden was the inspiration behind the 'Manchester School' of politics, and he set out his political agenda in two early pamphlets, England, Ireland and America (1835) and Russia (1836).⁹⁸ These ideals became the foundation of Cobden's political philosophy, and had a huge influence on the emerging Lawson. Cobden was first and foremost an internationalist and deplored Britain's traditional diplomatic stance of supporting Turkey at the expense of Russia, and advocated Russian expansion into the Ottoman Empire as beneficial to both commerce and civilisation. To Cobden, supporting Turkey against Russia for imperial designs was meaningless; Russia would never pose a serious threat to Europe because of its immense size, its geographical remoteness and the backwardness of its economy and people.⁹⁹ After the repeal of the Corn Laws, Cobden devoted the remainder of his short life to the service of reform, peace and international co-operation. He emphasised that the armed

⁹⁶ It was Bright's theory that the aristocrats had got hold of the power in 1689, and by devolving some of the prestige on to the classes beneath them, had contrived to contain it. The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government, Parry, p. 186.

⁹⁷ Splendid Isolation? Britain and the Balance of Power 1874-1914, John Charmley, (London, 1999), p. 23. "Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden", Cain, pp. 229-247.

⁹⁸ The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, published in 2 volumes, Richard Cobden, (London, 1867).

⁹⁹ Richard Cobden, Hinde, p. 248.

services were primarily responsible for the increase in national spending, and noted, that although taxes increased in response to successive foreign crisis they seldom reduced after the relaxation of the crisis. Cobden campaigned against loans for standing armaments and with his profound distrust of government intervention, urged the Commons to approve a plan for bilateral arbitration treaties; he wanted to make it obligatory, not an occasional procedure that all parties would commit themselves to refer any dispute to arbitration before resorting to war. When war finally came, as was the case in the Crimea, Cobden opposed it, and led a defiant, albeit futile, parliamentary battle against Palmerston's interventionist policies.¹⁰⁰

Notwithstanding Cobden's status in the Liberal party, his views on non-interventionism were never popular and as such were difficult to swallow, even for some of the advanced radicals, never mind the more mainstream members of the party, who felt it right to intervene against 'barbarism' in the interests of 'civilisation, christianisation, and commerce'. Lawson however, remained a strict adherent to Cobden's principles and in this sense thoroughly warranted Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith's obituary quote.¹⁰¹

Wherever he (Lawson) could see, wherever his eyes could discern, a minority that was being oppressed; wherever he could see the first faint glimpse of freedom struggling into the light of day; there he, a Cobdenite of the Cobdenites, a man of peace, and a hater of aggression, was ready to draw his sword and place it at the disposal of such a cause.¹⁰²

Like Cobden, Lawson grew to despise colonial expansion and the association of the British Empire with glory, a theme which became one of his most cherished concerns and in which he took an abiding critical interest. In his view Britain had sufficient distractions in the vast stretches of 'barbarian territory' already in her possession, and objected, while his own countrymen remained steeped in 'ignorance and vice', to the administration of fresh

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 243-49.

¹⁰¹ On 20 July 1909, Herbert Asquith unveiled a life-size statue, in the likeness of Lawson in the Embankment Gardens, close to Cleopatra's Needle. The Times, 21 July 1909.

hordes of 'barbarians' in Africa or Asia.¹⁰³ Lawson was a separatist, who regarded colonies as a costly burden whose defence could involve Britain in war and which only offered benefits to the privileged minority who exploited the jobs and patronage that colonies generated. He developed a complex approach to Imperial issues which, whilst authentically radical was given a novel emphasis by the importance he attached throughout his career to what he called 'waste'. He abhorred waste of every description, waste of resources (expenditure on the army), waste of time (privilege including parliamentary adjournments for the Derby), waste of human life (war, drink and opium) waste of opportunity (alcohol), waste of effort (The House of Lords) and waste of money (expenditure on the immediate members of the royal family). He wanted Britain to be great, not through the exploits of her generals, and admirals, but through the skills and aspirations of her people. In simplistic terms he considered the expansion of the empire as a distraction supported by the ruling aristocracy as a means of delaying the advance of much needed reforms at home. He saw the plight of the lower classes, particularly in Ireland, as a direct parallel to the plight of the native population in foreign countries abroad. He stood for religious liberty all over the world, and despised the landed aristocracy as a class, with their inherent warlike propensities. He endeavoured to persuade the British government and its people to adopt a passive, as opposed to, an active foreign policy, to not only limit the size of the armed forces, but to simultaneously abolish the militia. Indeed one of his earliest parliamentary crusades was a proposal to drastically reduce the annual yeomanry estimate.¹⁰⁴ He abhorred the British Government's practice of defending Turkey against Russia, and emphatically believed in international arbitration as a means of settling conflict. He always strove to promote the welfare of his fellow-countrymen, particularly in Ireland, and ridiculed Britain's preoccupation with the plight of foreigners. He shared similar aims as Cobden in striving for a political economy, based upon Free Trade and *laissez-faire* and tirelessly strove to defend these principles.

¹⁰² Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 382-383.

¹⁰³ Lawson, Luke, p. 109.

¹⁰⁴ Hansard, vol. 175, cols. 42-44, 5 May 1864. Ibid, vol. 177, cols. 1981-82, 20 March 1865. The Militia were a branch of the British military service formerly raised from the community by

Lawson shared Cobden's love for America,¹⁰⁵ with its free institutions and absence of aristocratic control, and although unpopular at home, he likewise supported the Northern states during the American Civil war.¹⁰⁶ When Lawson took the chair at a travelling lecture given by the American temperance reformer and literary figure John B. Gough, he charged his guest with the task of relaying a message of unity and peace to his countrymen.

The only strife between us shall be a generous rivalry as to which country shall first overthrow that foul and degraded system, based on prejudice, on tyrannous custom, or unjust laws, which at present is the greatest hindrance in all the paths of true glory, which yet blocks the way of the two greatest nations of the world.¹⁰⁷

Although by definition a Little Englander, Lawson was in several respects removed from that grouping; he favoured closer links with Europe¹⁰⁸ and spoke in favour of the proposed construction of the Channel Tunnel.¹⁰⁹ He was an internationalist, and once interrupted fellow radical Joseph Cowen, when he preached on the doctrine 'my country right or my country wrong'. For Lawson had a mightier country than Cowen, "The Globe," was Lawson's country and "...its entire inhabitants were his countrymen; eternal justice was the interest which he desired to see conserved."¹¹⁰ He admired the political and economic principles of Adam Smith, whose Wealth of Nations, Lawson acknowledged as, "one of the really great books of the world, all I know I learned from it."¹¹¹ From Smith, Lawson learned that the traditional idea of the balance of trade was fallacious; the wealth derived from foreign trade did not

volunteer enlistment; whereas the Yeomanry were traditionally a volunteer Cavalry formed from landowners and farmers.

¹⁰⁵ Although Lawson never visited America (Cobden did in 1835) his brother William settled in Colorado after the failure of his experimental farm in 1871.

¹⁰⁶ In August 1865, Lawson told his constituents that "During the great American struggle, it was a joke that all of us in the House of Commons who sympathised with the North might have been carried away in a omnibus and even that was stretching a point, because I think with close packing we might have gone in a Hansom cab." Carlisle Journal, 4 August 1865.

¹⁰⁷ Lawson, Luke, pp. 75-76.

¹⁰⁸ Lawson even suggested the future establishment of a United States of Europe. Maryport Advertiser, 3 March 1882.

¹⁰⁹ Hansard, vol. 277, col. 1380, 3 April 1883. Ibid, vol. 278, col. 400, 17 April 1883. Ibid, vol. 318, col. 1060, 3 August 1887.

¹¹⁰ Northern Pioneer, 28 February 1882. Also Maryport Advertiser, 3 March 1882.

come from the accumulation of precious metals or the possession of territory but from the actual exchange of goods. Smith postulated that 'mercantilism' would die a lingering death and colonies would become a burden, not only would their possession add nothing to the British economy, but the cost of administration and protection would become a drain on the British exchequer.¹¹²

Lawson regarded the abolition of war as the key to all social, political and economic improvements. He was the very incarnation of the righteous spirit of anti-jingoism, and considered war contrary to the true principles of Liberalism and a diversion emanating from what he described as class legislation. He once sarcastically commented that a rich man could get more easily into heaven than a Liberal could reach a high post in the Army.¹¹³ Whereas war inflicted great injury on the common soldier few benefited except the military class, who through conflict gained promotion and higher remuneration. "When Colonels were killed, Captains replaced them, and when Generals died Colonels benefited, implying, all were promoted except those who were killed."¹¹⁴ He deplored a system which allowed successful commanding officers to gain perpetual pensions and peerages in return for committing murder. He saw militarism spreading like a spider's web, entangling all nations, recognising a situation where millions of men, could, at a moments notice, rush out and make the world a living hell.¹¹⁵ Lawson refused to partake in the ritual exaltation that followed declarations of slaughter and imperial victory and used numerous analogies to describe the absurdity of war. He challenged Disraeli's submission that 'the great battles in history settled nothing', for as Lawson noted, "They settled a great many people who took part in them."¹¹⁶ He rejected every excuse used to justify the killing of men in battle; to him war was a hypocritical crime and nothing less than murder. He strove to dismantle the old system of aristocratic government, where the prime purpose of a national organisation was to

¹¹¹ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 8.

¹¹² Victorian Imperialism, C.C. Eldridge, (London, 1978), pp. 6, 29. Adam Smith was also Cobden's intellectual mentor.

¹¹³ Imperial Idea and its Enemies, Thornton, p. 95.

¹¹⁴ West Cumberland Times, 16 February 1888. Times, 14 July 1887.

¹¹⁵ West Cumberland Times, 25 November 1889.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

engage in pointless wars, which through their occurrence naturally entailed all manner of mischief and deterred reforms. Lawson was not a full-blooded republican; however he did support Dilke when he was censured by Parliament on that matter.¹¹⁷ Although in public he always played up the theme of the 'people's queen' he was quick to argue and vote against the tax burden created through the maintenance of the civil list; he also criticised their apparent lack of industry.¹¹⁸

Lawson's simplistic philosophy moved one stage further than the opinions held by Cobden when he identified the close correlation between Government military expenditure and the income received from the trade in alcohol.¹¹⁹ Although Lawson senior was a founding member and principal

¹¹⁷ Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke (1843-1911), Radical M.P. for Chelsea, from 1868-86; infamous for his republican views; Dilke became the subject of one of Lawson's more infamous claims to fame. At a meeting, held in Newcastle, on 6 November 1870, Dilke accused Queen Victoria of dereliction of duty, and through his words stood accused of inciting the audience to establish a Republic. When Parliament reconvened he attempted to bring the question of Royal grants before the House. Today's population would consider his motion mere bagatelle; in its terms he merely asked for returns showing the income and expenditure of the Civil Lists from the period commencing with the accession of the Queen. Including the upkeep of the royal yachts, and the total sum derived from the Duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall. Gladstone, under pressure from the Queen refused to supply the information and by force of argument accused, any would be Dilke supporter of disloyalty and a friend to republicanism. The argument raged for a considerable time and created an amazing demonstration, with the excitement surpassing that of elections in former days. Gladstone's remarks and the antics of the scene (the debate was interrupted by Lord Bentinck and leading Tories in cock-crowing imitations, perhaps because Lawson was known at the time as the 'young cock') certainly had an affect upon the attitude of many of Dilke's personal colleagues; as did the interim recovery of the Prince of Wales, from Typhoid fever and a sixth attempt on the Queen's life. However, upon the division, Dilke's friends deserted him; his confederate George Dixon, who had promised support did nothing; nor did George Trevelyan, or Joseph Cowen, who had chaired the Newcastle meeting. Fawcett even spoke against the motion, leaving only Lawson and George Anderson, one of the Glasgow members to support the malcontent. The Life of the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Dilke, Stephen Gwyn and Gertrude M. Tuckwell, Volume 1, (London, 1917), pp. 149-51: The Lost Prime Minister: A Life of Sir Charles Dilke, David Nicholls, (London, 1995) p. 56.

¹¹⁸ Hansard, vol. 208, col. 784, 3 August 1871 (Prince Arthur's Annuity Bill). During this speech, Lawson declared: "that the country did not get its money's worth for what it had given." Ibid, vol. 225, cols. 1501-1507, 31 July 1875 (Prince of Wales Visit to India).

¹¹⁹ One reason given for the hostility attracted by his Permissive Bill related to the character of the primary user, the masses rather than the classes. Lawson saw alcohol as a corrupt and degrading habit in which the poor man supplemented the rich man's taxation. The Government fully understood the disastrous effects, commercial and fiscal that would follow any sudden interference in a trade that concerned so many people, and was closely aligned to the national revenue. The Exchequer's annual return from the sale of alcohol was between £25,000,000 and £30,000,000, from a trade worth £120,000,000. West Cumberland Times, 10 May 1879. By coincidence a sum equal to that required to finance the armed forces. As Lawson insinuated, the sums balance nicely. "We raise thirty million pounds by killing our own people at home with alcohol, and expend the same money on gunpowder to kill people abroad." Ibid, 1 May 1883.

subscribers to the United Kingdom Alliance¹²⁰ his son did not enter Parliament on their behalf. The question arises why did he become their champion? Disillusioned with Palmerston's negative response towards reform, a prolonged period of international peace, and a lull in imperial expansion, there was little to occupy a radical backbencher, who had entered Parliament to improve the quality of life and relieve the suffering of ordinary people. "The Liberal party," Lawson said "needed a Cry."

Why go into the wilderness of conflicting theories for a cry, when they found pauperism and drunkenness prevailing in the land! Was there not a cry of sorrow - of suffering wives and neglected children - and was this not far more urgent than any question that had ever come before the Liberal party.¹²¹

When Lawson contemplated the introduction of the Permissive Bill,¹²² his one and only attempt at legislation, he struggled to find anyone to second the motion. This was not because he presented himself as a maverick; there were at that time (1864) at least fifty, cross-party Members, who all sought some form of change to the licensing system of liquor control. Outside Parliament, in the country, there was a tremendous groundswell of strong public support for the policy, particularly among the regional working classes and the nonconformist sections of society. However, until Lawson emerged to

¹²⁰ Formed from a combination of Temperance movements on 1 June 1853, the United Kingdom Alliance became the principal, but not sole body of temperance objection. Formed, from a cross party, cross religious amalgamation of like-minded people, combined to fulfil a common objective. Their founders included the Irish catholic priest Father Mathew, Mr James Silk Buckingham, William Tweddle, Samuel Bowly, Joseph Cowen, and the elder Sir Wilfrid Lawson. Despite its influence the Alliance was never widely supported by the wealthy or the wellborn. Drink and the Victorians, Harrison, p. 288. During the 1860's Lawson senior regularly donated an annual sum of £500 a significant proportion of the organisation's income. Lawson himself became President of the movement in April 1879. Carlisle Journal, 6 June 1906.

¹²¹ Lawson, Luke, p. 87.

¹²² The aims of the United Kingdom Alliance demanded the total and immediate suppression of the trade in intoxicants. Lawson may have shared these objectives but he pursued a practical, pragmatic, democratic course, preferring to allow local people the right to make the ultimate choice. What Lawson brought to the temperance movement was a stubborn unselfish political commitment and personal self-sacrifice that overrode any form of individual political gain. It is certain that no ambitious political figure would have become completely involved in what became a fruitless venture but he had no axe to grind and nothing in the world to gain

champion the cause there was little synergy between the advocates of reform. There were those like John Bright, who saw education not legislation as the provider of the means of suppressing the 'demon drink', while others feared the wrath of the brewing and distilling interest, hereafter referred to as the 'Trade'. The Trade, in conjunction with the Military were unquestionably the strongest parliamentary lobby. Although at times extremely unpopular, Lawson's agitation against the Trade, served him well, and offered him a platform and a backdrop of support from which to launch an extreme form of agitation in favour of his anti-imperialistic concerns. Before the emergence of Lawson, many politicians had thrown their support behind the promotion of minor liquor reforms. However, no politician before Lawson had supported a mandate for local prohibition. When Lawson endorsed the Permissive Bill, he moved ahead of Cobden¹²³ and Bright. Although they both recognised the 'evils' caused through alcoholic abuse neither supported Lawson's Bill; Cobden abstained, while Bright voted and spoke against it.¹²⁴

Many contemporaries would have recognised the futility of the scheme, and weakened under the ignominy of rejection. However, Lawson was made of sterner stuff. "I am not one of your 'Oh! Be joyful' men," he declared; "I am not much accustomed to sing *Te Deums*. My position in the political world is to sound an alarm, to call the good men and true on to battle, even when the

from politics, and it seemed right to him to support any policy that provided the greatest good for the greatest portion of the community.

¹²³ Cobden himself had declared, "Every days experience tends more to confirm me in my opinion that the Temperance movement lies at the foundation of every social and political reform." Letter written to a Mr Livesey, 10 October 1849. The Life of Cobden, Vol. 2, John Morley, (London, 1908), p. 25. On another occasion Cobden argued: "The moral force of the masses lies in the Temperance movement, and I confess I have no faith in anything apart from that movement for the elevation of the working classes." Letter written to a Mr Ashworth, 13 December 1849. Ibid, p. 28. Above all Cobden recognised the debt the party owed during elections to the industry of the teetotallers, in direct contrast to the Conservatives who relied heavily upon the drinkers. Letter written to a Mr Ashworth, 13 December 1849. Ibid, p. 29. Lawson accepted these views emphatically, and although he used these quotations, he never questioned his own interpretation, and as such laid himself open to claims of misinterpretation. Modern historians have largely ignored Cobden's views on the temperance subject, perhaps because, as Brian Harrison explains, Cobden's thoughts were inconsistent and greatly modified with age. Drink and the Victorians, Harrison, p. 288. Cobden may have acknowledged that temperance would civilise and assimilate working men, and enable them to accumulate capital and acquire property but he was extremely reluctant to support sumptuary laws. Abstinence was a personal choice and must proceed through the education of the citizens.

¹²⁴ It should not come as a surprise that Bright chose to ignore such a democratic proposal, since he continuously rejected the term when it was applied to him. Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England, Patrick Joyce, (Cambridge, 1994) p. 110.

battle looks like a forlorn hope."¹²⁵ Henceforth Lawson's character became one of the most abused in England. The invention of epithets and nicknames expressive of his critics hatred was immense. The publicans called him a fanatic, a puritan a one-idea man; while the columnist 'Humbug' called him a 'Political Ishmael'. He was at one time or another referred too as, a 'Confiscatory Molly Coddle', at another a 'Peregrinating Pump Handle', or 'that old cracked teapot', a 'Maudlin Mountebank', a 'Washed-out Water Party', a 'Pop-bottle Pump Orator', the 'Apostle of slops', or simply 'that buffoon'.¹²⁶ He would later consider himself the 'best', and perhaps the most 'abused man in England'. He once paid a guinea to an association who offered to supply him with two hundred newspaper articles relating to his character. Within days he received a package with a request for a further payment. Lawson replied, "You have sent me over one hundred and fifty cuttings and every one abusive to me, with not one single compliment." Not that he was displeased: he believed that when abused by the media he was on the right track, "It does not follow that you must be right if you are abused, but in public life you cannot be right unless you are abused."¹²⁷ Temperance reform was always important but was never paramount; peace and reform were equal partners. He despised war more than he despised alcohol. He once corrected the Duke of Albany, who asserted that drink was the only enemy England had to fear, for he considered militarism a greater enemy.¹²⁸ Lawson was in the words of the Times, "a master of the art of fighting without making enemies."¹²⁹

The Political Reformer

When Lawson entered parliament he concentrated his early concerns into securing Franchise Reforms, with particular reference to the Secret Ballot.¹³⁰ On 20 March 1860, in his introduction of the Ballot bill, Henry

¹²⁵ Lawson, Luke, p. 51.

¹²⁶ Ibid, pp. 53-54.

¹²⁷ West Cumberland Times, 7 January 1888.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 27 November 1889.

¹²⁹ Times, 2 July 1906.

¹³⁰ At a public dinner at Salford on 6 September 1837, Cobden showed how different the election results might have been if the voters had exercised their right without fear or favour,

Berkeley alluded to the opposition of Sir James Graham, whom he hoped, "would be found in the same lobby, with his able and popular nephew and colleague."¹³¹ With this introduction, Lawson made his maiden speech. Like Cicero, he considered the Ballot, 'the silent assertor of freedom', and the greatest of all reforms to pursue.¹³² Lawson claimed its opponents were hostile because the bill struck a blow at the root of the monopoly of political power.¹³³ Bribery and intimidation had not decreased since the passing of the 1832 Reform Bill, and whereas he championed franchise reform he prioritised the ballot, and seldom spoke at a political gathering without advocating its merits. "Give us the Ballot without the Bill, rather than the Bill without the Ballot."¹³⁴ He had personal knowledge, relating to the success of the secret ballot, first introduced for the election of municipal officers¹³⁵ into his wife's hometown of Maryport, where staunch Tories, "...innate and invisible, could not do without the Ballot."¹³⁶

Lawson accepted any progression in the direction of reform however small, as a stepping-stone towards his ultimate goal. He asked people to, "Consider political questions as ones of right and wrong without fearing the thin edge of any wedge, that if you do this, you will have to do that; that by doing justice a revolution will follow."¹³⁷ He vowed never to become a statesman, but to aspire to a role of political pathfinder, one who declared a principle, proclaimed, reiterated and reinforced that principle, before passing it

referring to a Mr Trafford who brought a hundred tenants to vote, like cattle to a market. Richard Cobden, Hinde, p. 266.

¹³¹ Hansard, vol. 157, col. 940, 20 March 1860. Times, 21 March 1860.

¹³² West Cumberland Times, 8 January 1888.

¹³³ Carlisle Journal, 13 September 1867.

¹³⁴ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 36.

¹³⁵ In 1838, the small Cumbrian coastal town of Maryport became the first town in Britain and perhaps in the world to elect municipal officers by secret ballot. The first secret vote actually took place in 1833 but was too badly managed to be truly secret. The Solway Firth, Brian Blake, (London, 1982), pp. 84-85.

¹³⁶ Hansard, vol. 199, col 281, 14 February 1870. Also Maryport Advertiser, 18 February 1870. Unfortunately, Lawson chose an inappropriate time to speak, for dinner awaited and he was met with a barrage of hostility from his hungry comrades. Lawson later described the incident with reserved passion. "After I had spoken for two or three minutes, they began to murmur, then to cry 'Divide', and then to yell in lusty chorus. However I struggled on and said what little I had to say; the performance lasting I fancy some fifteen or twenty minutes." Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 36. Thirty-seven years later William White, the doorkeeper of the House, considered the incident significantly important enough to affectionately recall the intricate details. The Inner Life of the House of Commons, William White, (London, 1898), pp. 139-141. The author's recollections are far more informative and interesting than those recalled by Lawson.

on to statesmen, to fashion into law.¹³⁸ He often dilated upon his 'crotchets', describing them as opinions held by a minority; his argument was that once those views progressed they would become great principles accepted by the majority. He supported universal suffrage, because he agreed with the working classes attending, and eventually dominating Parliament.¹³⁹ By supporting the great questions of the day the workingmen had demonstrated their political credentials and after they gained the franchise they would form a broad-based liberal alliance in support of non-intervention and retrenchment. Lawson shared Bright's view that it was no less immoral for the people to use force as a last resort to obtain and secure freedom, as it was for the government to use force to suppress and deny that freedom.¹⁴⁰ This on occasions made him extremely militant; he once urged the electorate to ignore their fears of open voting and to combine to maintain their political rights. "Let it be a rule in every workshop or colliery that no man shall lose his work for his political opinion, and if any man should lose his work, strike to a man."¹⁴¹

In 1868, notwithstanding Lawson's erratic opinions the recently enfranchised electorate of Carlisle returned him to parliament.¹⁴² Few doubted his independence or commitment; the Liberal party was he said, a thinking party, unlike their Conservative counterparts. "The Tories may concur to a man but it is unusual to find two Liberals agreeing on a principle."¹⁴³ He refused to compromise the truth, or shrink from declaring his views without regard to party politics. "It is better to be honest than to have any concealment that may lead to subsequent confusion and misrepresentation, I am my own responsibility and I paddle my own canoe."¹⁴⁴ Furthermore Lawson emphasised that he was not supported by any power or connection, harking back to the stance taken by independent candidates in the early century,¹⁴⁵ thus opposing what he described as the 'abominable' system of canvassing.

¹³⁷ Carlisle Journal, 17 November 1868.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 16 October 1868.

¹³⁹ West Cumberland Times, 25 November 1889.

¹⁴⁰ Visions of the People, Joyce, p. 48.

¹⁴¹ Carlisle Journal, 16 October 1868.

¹⁴² Ibid, 20 November 1868.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 16 October 1868.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 1 September 1868.

¹⁴⁵ Electoral Independence, McCormack, pp. 22-27.

I will have no paid agents and no committee paid by myself; I shall pay nothing at this election except my legal expenses. I believe this is the most honourable way of conducting an election I shall calculate their value and not pay a farthing more. I shall not sanction a system by which rich men alone can obtain seats in Parliament, where poor men are excluded from entering the contest. I will ask no man for his vote. If a man does not think I am a good candidate let him vote against me. I honour far more the honest man who votes against me than the humbug who votes with me.¹⁴⁶

Nationally the 1868 General Election produced a landslide Liberal victory with a majority of more than one hundred. Back in Parliament, Lawson continued with his crotchets, beginning with a personal crusade against the Opium traffic, which he argued was a battle between Christianity and civilisation.¹⁴⁷ “We poison the Chinese with opium as we do our own people with alcohol.”¹⁴⁸ He also became the principal critic of the practice of adjourning the House of Commons on Derby Day.¹⁴⁹ He became a founder

¹⁴⁶ Carlisle Journal, 8 September 1868.

¹⁴⁷ Lawson began to agitate against the opium trade in July 1869, when, during a debate to approve the Indian revenue budget, he asked Grant McDuff, the Under Secretary of State for India to justify the increase in opium production. Hansard, vol. 198, col. 449, 3 August 1869. On 10 May 1870 Lawson moved a resolution condemning both the opium traffic and the opium revenue the first on the subject for 27 years, proposing the Government adopt into a parliamentary act. Ibid, vol. 201, col. 494, 10 May 1870. After losing the division by 150 votes to 46, Lawson curtailed his parliamentary activities on the subject. However, he had succeeded in rousing interest among a group of evangelic and Quaker faddist reformers. In 1874, the Anti Opium Society was established, and whereas Lawson remained a leading personality the leadership fell to Sir Joseph Pease, a Quaker industrialist and Member of Parliament, who in conjunction with his brother Arthur, unsuccessfully moved extensive national and parliamentary protest against the practice in 1875, 1883, 1886, and 1891. In 1893 Parliament endorsed a Royal Commission, which recommended the end of India's export trade to China and the prohibition of poppy growing and consumption in India except on medical grounds. Great Britain. Sessional Papers of the House of Commons, 1895 XLII, Final Report of the Royal Commission on Opium, p. 94.

¹⁴⁸ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 86.

¹⁴⁹ In 1875, Lawson made his opening speech against the ‘usual annual’ motion in favour of adjourning Parliament for members to attend the Derby. In that speech he pertinently asked where the nobility was “in going down to Epsom and seeing twenty jockeys spurring twenty horses – all for the sake of putting money into their pockets, or into those of their employers.” ‘The Turf’, he continued was nothing but a scene of gambling and demoralisation. Yet we have my right hon. Friend (Disraeli) backed by the whole of the Conservative party, who came in to sustain the National Church adjourning the House for only two hours on Ascension day, and for the whole of the Derby Day!” Every year for the next eight years Lawson brought forward his ‘hardy annual’ and in 1883 he succeeded in terminating a practice began by Palmerston. Hansard, vol. 224, col. 867, 25 May 1875. Ibid, vol. 279, col. 711, 22 May 1883.

member of the Reform League, a member of the Peace Society, and supported payment for members of Parliament. Ultimately he turned his attention towards the Government's foreign and imperial policy.

Lawson's Parliamentary Style and Ability as an Orator

In his lifetime Lawson was one of Britain's most celebrated and popular political figures whose importance deserves both recognition and appreciation. His speeches, which more people read than heard, seldom lacked qualities of humour or entertainment such that his precise, logical, well-balanced arguments ranked high, when compared to contemporary political orators. Highly persuasive and captivating, forceful in attack and totally free of bitterness, his simple but effective language was accessible to all.¹⁵⁰ He never talked down but always up to his audience, and carried the charisma to communicate in a language readily understood.¹⁵¹

Lawson had a particular novel approach when moving his point at political meetings. Before tabling a resolution or amendment, he researched his subject in intricate detail, gathering evidence from a variety of sources, Blue Books, parliamentary debates, newspaper articles and political pamphlets.¹⁵² He began the serious part of his argument, proposing a resolution associated with the theme of the meeting, basing his arguments wherever possible around some previous, perhaps obscure even abstract, statement from the pen or mouth of one of his adversaries, supposedly supporting his proposed policy. Then using a logical disciplined line of reasoning he systematically turned the argument around and soon had the

¹⁵⁰ Although Lawson spoke to audiences in all parts of the United Kingdom, he was equally at home using a rough Cumberland dialect.

¹⁵¹ Since there was no technology for recording performances in Lawson's day we cannot appreciate the exact methods used. This subject has been investigated recently by modern historians and for those wishing to gain a greater understanding of that subject I suggest Democratic Subjects, Joyce, Chapters 2 & 3.

¹⁵² A visitor to Brayton in 1879 gave the following description of Lawson's study: "On the table lies a vast number of books of every kind; the speeches of Cobden being as great favourites as the works of Byron or the novels of Lord Beaconsfield. Each in turn is carefully read, the salient passages are marked and perhaps committed to memory, and the book goes to swell the ever-increasing pile that not un-fittingly represents the solid stores of an active and practical

crowd eating out of his hand, and enthusiastically cheering even when their natural reaction was to oppose the contention.

Lawson's style was modelled on that of Bright,¹⁵³ whose passionate rhetoric managed to consolidate a remarkable consensus throughout the country by promoting the cause of the working classes, not as one class against another but the cause of freedom, humanity and justice, against barbarity and despotism.¹⁵⁴ A style he mixed with the familiar and venerating style of Gladstone,¹⁵⁵ the 'people's William', who stood for the principle of promotion through merit and capacity rather than privilege. Gladstone also had the advantage, through his eminently respectable muscular tree-felling activities of representing an image of being 'one of us'. Gladstone's style was perhaps best described by the newspaper proprietor W. T. Stead, who wrote:

Gladstone's charisma was based on the musicality of his powerful voice, on the use of rhythmic propositions, on the eloquence of gesticulation and the movement of the whole chest, when from time to time the whole energy of the man concentrated into a single act.¹⁵⁶

However unlike Bright whose pedigree was drawn from a Quaker industrial background, Lawson had to contend with the realisation that he was connected with the landed gentry, the very group despised by his great mentors, Cobden and Bright.

In the House of Commons Lawson found genial satire the most effective weapon in his intellectual armoury; a quality recognised or perhaps ridiculed by Disraeli¹⁵⁷ who acknowledged "the gay wisdom which is the

mind. On other tables are piled whole hosts of papers, documents and pamphlets, treatises, and essays on political matters. Carlisle Journal, 21 May 1879.

¹⁵³ Visions of the People, Joyce, pp. 48-51. Democratic Subjects, Joyce, p. 110.

¹⁵⁴ Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform, Biagini, pp. 375-8.

¹⁵⁵ Visions of the People, Joyce, Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁶ Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform, Biagini, p. 390.

¹⁵⁷ Although long considered a compliment this may not have been the case. According to Parry, Disraeli took great pleasure in exposing the humbug of opponents who disingenuously paraded their virtue. "Disraeli And England", J. P. Parry, Historical Journal, Vol. 43, issue 3 (2000), pp. 703.

baronet's chief characteristic."¹⁵⁸ The phrase stuck and his charismatic style of speaking was thereafter accredited with that name. Lawson recognised that the best cause was often hindered or at least delayed, if its principal spokesman, however sincere and able, was unfortunately in the habit of making himself a bore. He never preached or delivered a solemn lecture on any subject. The House of Commons was always very fond of its members amusing it. This should be no surprise for the members had to tolerate a great deal that was boring. Hours of dullness were frequent, whereas the bright moments of amusement were rare. Little wonder that the House welcomed a man like Lawson, who could take up a lacklustre subject, like temperance, and transform it with flashes of wit and humour to make even the most incorrigible enemy of it shake his sides with delighted laughter. Whereas others could write far better and wiser essays on related subjects, Lawson filled the Commons because he had the ability, time after time to amuse it, thus encouraging more people to reach a greater understanding of the arguments. He made good jokes; he delighted in unexpected turns of thought and expression, and was always witty in his illustrations and anecdotes. Although his spontaneous humour was always easy to follow, there was always a kernel of wisdom in his wit. His most unsympathetic audience had to accept both, for he never rose above the understandings of his listeners. Many of his anecdotes, amusing sayings, funny stories and light-hearted illustrations have withstood the test of time. Few critics would dare say this about the vast majority of his contemporaries.

Lawson became the chief jester to the House of Commons, where he contributed a rich, racy style to debates, earning him the epithet, the 'witty baronet'. As the political journalist Henry W. Lucy records:

Wilfrid Lawson is often humorous and almost always witty, being gifted with a large fund of Commonsense, notwithstanding his prevailing crazes, and has flashing through his mind those bright lights which reveal hidden points of resemblance between apparent incongruities,

¹⁵⁸ Hansard, vol. 222, col. 185, 9 February 1875. Also A Diary of Two Parliaments. The Disraeli Parliament 1874-1880, H. W. Lucy, (London, 1885), pp. 100-101. Also Lawson, Luke, p. 63.

the sudden making clear of which mainly constitutes what we call humour. He not only thinks of good things to say but he says them well. Nothing is more obvious than that his *bon mots* are carefully prepared at home and brought down to the House on a slip of paper. There is the slip of paper held in his hand. Members can see him glancing at it, and by certain mannerisms of the voice have learnt to anticipate by some seconds the precise stage in his speech at which a joke is to be used. But notwithstanding the habit, which falls short of the highest style of humorous speech, Lawson is most successful in the delivery of his preserved jokes. He does not hurry over their utterance as if he were afraid they were going to misfire, as Lowe (Robert Lowe 1811-92) does; nor does he hug them with grand maternal affection. He makes his point well and coolly in easy conversational style best suited to their genus.¹⁵⁹

As to the value of Lawson's witticism, the repeated cheers, punctuated with an almost constant laughter, amply demonstrate the appreciation with which his audiences received them. Whereas high authorities crowned him the greatest wit in Parliament, critics accused him of not displaying due gravity and seriousness in matters associated with important national difficulties. The major part of most of his speeches expressed a mixture of genuine patriotism, pacific philanthropy, and solemn sentiments. As displayed in one of Lawson's more hackneyed phrases, "It is in the interest of England to have freedom spread all over the world."¹⁶⁰ A nobler, more philanthropic definition of British interests was never stated.

Lawson's Attitude to Foreign Policy under Gladstone 1868-74

Towards the end of the mid-Victorian period, Lawson began to deviate from his franchise and temperance concerns and, through the promotion of the Cobdenite doctrine of non-intervention, to seriously challenge those who

¹⁵⁹ Disraeli's Parliament 1874-1880, Lucy, p. 100-1. Also Lawson, Luke, pp. 85-86.

endorsed forward foreign and colonial expansion. This should not suggest that he experienced a rapid conversion, for if Koeber and Schmidt are correct that in 1868, "...there was little evidence that the unity and integrity of the British Empire was a cause which could count on many supporters,"¹⁶¹ then Lawson's indifference is not unusual. Having long considered war an inexcusable horror and a disgrace to Christianity he had proposed and supported non-interventionist resolutions at numerous peace conventions, condemned the erection of fortifications¹⁶² and consistently challenged annual increases in the military estimates.¹⁶³ His argument was that since Parliament's first business was to grant Supply to the crown it was the duty of its members to enquire into the purpose of that Supply, in what manner they would expend that Supply, and by what methods they would raise that Supply. Since he believed that statesmen should make every effort to prevent war breaking out, he championed universal disarmament and arbitration as a means of resolving international disputes.¹⁶⁴

Everything changed in 1870 when France declared war on Prussia.¹⁶⁵ After rejecting Disraeli's call for an 'armed neutrality' Gladstone, without parliamentary consultation,¹⁶⁶ entered into a 'defensive neutrality' initiating two separate but identical treaties with France and Prussia, whereby each belligerent agreed to respect Belgian neutrality, on condition that Britain would guarantee an armed co-operation against the other, should either aggressor violate Belgian territory with a view to conquest. The policy was a triumph for

¹⁶⁰ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882.

¹⁶¹ Imperialism, The Story and Significance of a Political Word 1840-1960, R. Koeber and H. D. Schmidt, (Cambridge, 1965), p. 90. This was also the opinion of Gladstone, who in 1870 stated: "the period of time since taking up office had been one of universal and almost silence in the House of Commons with regard to foreign affairs." Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865-1898, Richard Shannon, (London, 1999), p. 87.

¹⁶² Hansard, vol. 198, col. 1007, 30 July 1869.

¹⁶³ Ibid, vol. 203, col. 1441, 2 August 1870.

¹⁶⁴ Arbitration as a means of solving international disputes had first gained ground in the 1820's and with that came ideas of an international court to settle cases and build up a system of case law. George Herbert Perris, Gomme, pp. 108-112.

¹⁶⁵ In 1870, the matter of the Spanish Succession came to the fore. Notwithstanding French protests, Prussia endorsed Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern. After Gladstone declared Britain's neutrality, the Prussians withdrew their candidature. This should have settled the dispute but Napoleon III determined to humiliate Prussia even at the risk of war, demanded that Prussia give a solemn promise to relinquish all future claims. Europe in the Nineteenth Century (1830-80), Harry Hearder, (London, 1988), pp. 170-173.

Gladstone; both countries maintained the agreement, Belgian neutrality was preserved and an important British interest, conserved.¹⁶⁷ Gladstone's reasoning was twofold: first, he was projecting Britain into the frame of European power politics, the frame being a 'concert of Europe'; secondly, he was considering the question of Belgian integrity and neutrality as guaranteed by the Great Powers in London in 1839.¹⁶⁸

On 2 August 1870, while the Cabinet contemplated sending troops to Antwerp,¹⁶⁹ Gladstone renounced his retrenchment commitments,¹⁷⁰ by initiating a Vote of Credit to increase the army estimates by £2,000,000 and 20,000 men.¹⁷¹ After what Lawson described as the abdication of the official opposition, and after receiving Government reassurances relating to the strength of Britain's defences, he felt duty bound to ignore the Government call, 'to restore public confidence'. From his simple viewpoint, it was illogical to suppose that Britain could face danger, from either of her two traditional enemies, who while he spoke, were destroying each other. Compared to future agitations against military intervention, his criticism was moderate. He raised no objection to the Government exercising responsibility relating to money voted, and declared that should war break out he would entrust the Cabinet with the responsibility of conducting the business; however, he saw the vote as a danger to Britain and represented the first step in a direction away from a policy of non-intervention, war when not a necessity, was he

¹⁶⁶ Parliament was informed by Gladstone of these treaties involving possible belligerence in the last minute of the last day of the session. Hansard, vol. 203, cols. 1776-89, 10 August 1870.

¹⁶⁷ Both treaties were concluded in London, the one with Prussia on 9 August 1870, and the one with France two days later. Since the Peace of Frankfurt concluded the war on 10 May 1871, both treaties expired in May 1872, and thereafter the five nations theoretically reverted to the original 1839 negotiation. The Neutrality of Belgium: A Study of the Belgium Case Under its Aspects in Political History and International Law, Alexander Fuehr, Chapter 3. The Treaties of 1870 (New York, 1915). "England's Mission", W. E. Gladstone, Nineteenth Century, Vol. 4, (1878), pp. 573-574.

¹⁶⁸ In 1831, the Duke of Wellington initiated a conference in London where the plenipotentiaries of England, France, Russia, Prussia and Austria agreed to settle both the Greek Question and the affairs of Holland and Belgium. The final settlement of the Belgium Question took place six years later, when the representatives of the five fore mentioned Powers together with Belgium and Holland met in London on 19 April 1839 to sign what became known as the Quintuple agreement. By this treaty the five Powers guaranteed the existence of the Belgian Kingdom by declaring that under no circumstance would they invade or occupy Belgium without the consent of the others, likewise guaranteeing Holland against a Belgian invasion. The Neutrality of Belgium, Fuehr, Chapter 2.

¹⁶⁹ Gladstone, Roy Jenkins, (London, 1995), p. 328.

¹⁷⁰ Heroic Minister, Shannon, p. 87.

emphasised, a crime and no war was justified unless strictly defensive. Although he threatened to walk through the lobbies unattended he received support from six radicals.¹⁷²

Lawson respected the sanctity of Parliament and remained vigilant during the parliamentary recess,¹⁷³ “when the Cabinet or some unscrupulous Minister intent on declaring a war on the premise of honouring a treaty, had uncontrollable authority to use the vast military power of the state, without reference to the legislature.”¹⁷⁴ Aware of his limited influence over the warlike attitudes of his adversaries’, Lawson strove to generate a serious debate whenever a military adventurer threatened the stability of peace. He despised hypocrisy and saw a glaring example unfold in the ambiguous wording of the Royal Address, where after repeated assurances of friendship from all foreign sovereigns, the Minister for War demanded military increases.¹⁷⁵ It was always difficult for maverick radicals to receive a fair hearing from opponents committed to the cause of military and imperial matters. The time to voice unpopular views was never right. In the early stages of treaty negotiations, Ministers would use parliamentary procedure to deter would-be objectors from raising contentious issues, arguing that it was premature to discuss the events. When negotiations entered their final phase, the Government asked would-be objectors to refrain from interfering with the satisfactory progress of the negotiations, before accusing critics of wasting parliamentary time after the event.

Prussia’s crushing defeat of Napoleon followed by the declaration of a Republic on 1 September, produced waves of sympathy and further demands for intervention on France’s behalf. The war continued until 28 January 1871, when the victorious Germans annexed Alsace-Lorraine as part of their reparations.¹⁷⁶ Gladstone rightly assumed that this, “violent laceration and

¹⁷¹ Gladstone 1809-74, H. C. G. Mathew, (London, 1986), p. 184.

¹⁷² *Hansard*, vol. 203, col. 1441, 2 August 1870. The six members were: George Potter, the founder of the Cobden Club, MP for Rochdale; Peter Rylands; Mr Anderson, MP for Glasgow; Henry Richard; Sir Charles Reed, MP for Hackney; and Alfred Illingworth.

¹⁷³ In the nineteenth century the parliamentary recess lasted from August until January in the following year.

¹⁷⁴ *Hansard*, vol. 214, col. 481, 14 February 1873.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, vol. 205, col. 527, 23 March 1871.

¹⁷⁶ *Europe Since Napoleon*, David Thomson, (London, 1972), p. 317.

transfer of land is to lead us from bad to worse, and to be the beginning of a new series of complications.”¹⁷⁷

During the conflict Lawson responded to an article written by the pro-French positivist Frederic Harrison, who described the advocates of non-intervention as, “the tail of a party, only now supported by a few psalm-singing fanatics.”

I would rather be the lowest and humblest joint in the tail of such a party as that, a party favoured by Cobden and lead by John Bright, a party whose policy has conferred unnumbered blessings on my fellow countrymen, than the proudest and most admired leader of a party bringing on my fellow-countrymen indescribable villainies and miseries. ...if you wish for peace prepare for war, what nonsense that is! Look at these nations of the continent, they have spent their whole time in preparing for war, and the natural consequence is they carry on war.¹⁷⁸

Lawson rejected the assertion that only military strength could guarantee Britain a seat at the table beside the principal powers. If that was so, he would rather belong to a tenth rate power if it refrained from interfering in other nation’s affairs. His argument was that they should judge a first rate power in the “noble field of the material prosperity of her people, in their contentment and order, in the great morality of her rising generations, and above all in the wisdom and justice of her laws.”¹⁷⁹

Lawson criticised those newspaper editors and trade union activists who demanded Government intervention on behalf of France:

If we are to go to war, which God forbid! Let some of those people who write so well about it go themselves. Now I would suggest that the government charter a ship. I would give the command to Earl Russell, and have it manned by diplomats, who cost us hundreds of thousands a year to keep the peace, and know no more of what is going on than

¹⁷⁷ Gladstone and Disraeli, B.H. Abbott, (London, 1972), p. 89.

¹⁷⁸ *Carlisle Journal*, 20 January 1871.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 21 November 1871.

we do ourselves, and who cannot keep us out of war. Then I would have a lot of warlike newspaper editors. Mr Odger should be a passenger, and I would have a sprinkling of Bishops. Well my ship might go into battle. I should be very sorry indeed if any of them came to grief, but I should not be sorry if they were all captured and detained in some foreign land.¹⁸⁰

Whenever Britain's peace was threatened questions relating to the validity of treaties occasionally arose, such that a groundswell of public reaction stimulated public debate relating to the exact terms and consequences of Britain's obligations. Those favouring the formulation of such treaties saw in them a restraining force, which permitted each participating agent the right to enforce their desires by proceeding to the extremity of war, without offending the remaining signatories. Advocates argued that without such treaties, no country had a right of complaint if an offending nation prosecuted their will without reference to the opinions of others. This in theory allowed the remaining unoffending signatories, when one or more nations broke with the agreed protocol, to band together and issue threats of reprobation, and possible retribution. Opponents like Lawson considered contrary arguments and looked at treaties from a position of weakness rather than strength. Their argument was that a wide range of circumstances affected treaty obligations and through the nature of those changing circumstances the obligations also changed. When such a change occurred it became indefensible for any Power to insist upon the continuation of those obligations.

Lawson preached on the subject of non-intervention in the affairs of other nations incessantly, considering the formation of entangling pacts, covenants, alliances and treaties as a great danger to prolonged international peace. The Treaty of 1839, guaranteeing Belgian neutrality, caused Lawson great anxiety. His argument was that should Britain support Belgium it would:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 21 November 1871. Lawson was referring to the antics of a group of people which included the Trade Union leader George Odger (1820-1877) and other crusaders, who demanded Britain use troops to force Prussia to make peace on reasonable terms, which did not involve the seizure of French territory. The British Peace Movement 1870-1914, Paul Laity, (Oxford, 2001), pp. 41-44.

“be an act of simple madness that might lead into the greatest troubles, dangers and disasters.”¹⁸¹ He accepted the facts: “Britain had entered into a treaty in 1839 but there were a variety of opinions as to the extent to which Britain was bound by it; and that it was only bound collectively, and not separately, to interfere in the affairs of Belgium.”¹⁸² He wanted the new obligations to receive a meaningful interpretation, and indicated that although in effect the revision bound Britain more absolutely than did the old treaty it confined Britain’s operation to defending Belgium and nothing more. John Bright’s brother, Jacob, expressed similar concerns. He feared that others could coax England into entering a continental war, which would have immediate repercussions throughout the Empire, and “...be felt in Canada, on the shores of Asia, Africa, and Australia.”¹⁸³

Lawson emphasised that the Government was deluding not only the British public but also the guaranteed nations, leading them to believe that Britain could protect their territory with a fraction of the strength of either warring power. Lawson proposed they put the necessary expenditure to better use and suggested they reduce the number of armed forces by 10,000 men, arguing that, “...those who were currently engaged in fighting would have less opportunity to promote an invasion.”¹⁸⁴ A theme, he later endorsed outside Parliament.

It should never be the policy of this country to spill its blood and spend its treasures in quarrels in which we are not directly involved. I do not believe there is any fear of attack. We have in this country a multitude of paupers and criminals, and a multitude again on the verge of pauperism and crime; and while they have misery in the streets and wretchedness in their dwelling places, it is our duty to look at those matters and set them right before we go crusading around the world avenging the wrongs of France, settling the affairs of Russia or dealing with Prussia or Turkey.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Carlisle Journal, 21 November 1871.

¹⁸² Hansard, vol. 203, col. 1740, 9 August 1870.

¹⁸³ Ibid, col. 1739.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Carlisle Journal, 3 February 1871.

Although Lawson opposed Gladstone's policy relating to Belgian neutrality he supported the government on two arbitration issues. In November 1870 the Russians took advantage of the continental instability to repudiate the clauses in the treaty of Paris of 1856 forbidding them to maintain a war fleet in the Black Sea.¹⁸⁶ Lawson praised the British government's reaction when, instead of resorting to force to avenge an obvious insult they settled the dispute through arbitration.¹⁸⁷ If A. J. P. Taylor is correct then Lawson had every reason to applaud this initiative, for Taylor argues, "that because the parties signed the agreement in good faith, Russia was prepared, seven years later to submit the Treaty of San Stefano to international examination at the Congress of Berlin."¹⁸⁸

During the American Civil war, an ironclad cruiser, the Alabama left her Merseyside port, with British approval and a British crew to wreak havoc on the high seas, to the detriment of Northern shipping. After the cessation of the war, the arguments raged for almost six years, with the realigned United States demanding extraordinary claims of compensation, including a sum equivalent to half the cost of the war, and at one stage the cession of Canada. On 8 May 1871, the United States and Great Britain agreed to submit all of their disputes, including boundary disputes, fishery issues and the question of claims to binding arbitration.¹⁸⁹ In consequence, Gladstone acknowledged the findings of the international board of arbitration, and made a one-off payment of £3,250,000, which brought about a steady improvement in Anglo-American relations. Unlike critics who viewed the resolution as one further example of Liberal weakness in foreign policy,¹⁹⁰ Lawson praised the embodiment of the

¹⁸⁶ On 31 October 1870, four months after France declared war on Prussia, the Tsar, spurred on by Bismarck, announced through a protocol known as Prince Gortchakoff's circular Note that in future Russia would patrol the Black Sea with her fleet, build bases and fortify her coastline thus ignoring the Black Sea clauses enshrined in the 1856 Treaty of Paris. Although Russia never consolidated the threat, the annulment of one of the major advantages gained from the Crimean war, excited the British public and increased Gladstone's unpopularity. Lord Palmerston, Jasper Ridley, (London, 1970), pp. 449-453. The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915, Richard Shannon, (London, 1976), pp. 50-51.

¹⁸⁷ Carlisle Journal, 21 November 1871.

¹⁸⁸ The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, A. J. P. Taylor, (London, 1969), p. 216.

¹⁸⁹ Crisis of Imperialism, Shannon, p. 52.

¹⁹⁰ Although the United States received compensation they had to pay Canada half the amount received for damage incurred to Canadian trade. Modern British Foreign Policy: The Nineteenth Century 1814-80, Paul Hayes, (London, 1975), p. 231.

settlement,¹⁹¹ as "...a question of American attorneyship against English statesmanship, in which English statesmanship triumphed."¹⁹² As he later informed his constituents:

I know perfectly well that peace is a pleasing vision that all too soon may be rudely dispelled, and before many years are over even the English people, led on by scheming politicians, or influenced by all the worst passion of human nature, may again pour out the blood of human nature, may again pour out the blood of her sons like water in some senseless and wicked quarrel. Too well I know that that may be the case; but even if it is so, eternal honour will attach to the name of those statesmen, who in spite of opposition and ridicule and hostility, did all they could to make the vision a reality, and improve the future of mankind.¹⁹³

Lawson accepted the penalty imposed by the international court as a trifling price to pay for avoiding the incalculable consequences of a war between two of the world's foremost civilised nations; "he would rather pay ten times many millions than sacrifice the lives of his fellow countrymen."¹⁹⁴ He would later claimed that "possibly one blood page in the history of the world has closed, and that we may look forward to a future, where reason, argument and justice will take the place of rapine, brute force, and destruction."¹⁹⁵ Notwithstanding its unpopularity,¹⁹⁶ Lawson believed that the day would come when posterity would praise the actions of, "Lord Granville and Mr Gladstone for their noble statesmanlike and patriotic conduct on that

¹⁹¹ The Treaty of Washington signed in May 1871 suggested methods for the settlement of the various disputes, disrupting relations between Britain, Canada and the United States. "The Alabama Claims and the Anglo-American Reconciliation, 1865-71", Maureen M. Robson Canadian Historical Review, Volume XLII No 1, March 1961, pp. 1-22.

¹⁹² Carlisle Journal, 29 November 1872. Lawson was referring to Gladstone's moral stand, when Gladstone had converted an acrimonious bilateral negotiation on to a higher plane of international arbitration as an example to a civilised world. Heroic Minister, Shannon, p. 75.

¹⁹³ Carlisle Journal, 29 November 1872.

¹⁹⁴ Hansard, vol. 218, col. 456, 20 March 1874.

¹⁹⁵ Carlisle Journal, 29 November 1872

¹⁹⁶ Shortly afterwards, during a thanksgiving service given to commemorate the recovery of the Prince of Wales from typhoid fever, Gladstone was booed as he entered St Paul's cathedral whereas Disraeli was greeted with tumultuous cheers.

occasion.”¹⁹⁷ As late as 1881, he was praising Gladstone for settling the question with real nobility, which would redound more to Britain’s credit than the slaughter in battle of any number of men opposed to us.”¹⁹⁸ Although the settlement underlined the future possibilities of establishing a permanent international system for settling disputes, in later life Lawson’s optimism faded and he concurred with John Bright, who after opposing the initiative told him: “It will be long before it bears much fruit.”¹⁹⁹

The settlement of the Alabama claims stimulated interest in International law and enlivened the campaign of those peace activists who sought a codification of international law and a permanent court to apply such a code. In the summer of 1873, Lawson supported a motion moved by the Sheffield MP John Mundella, urging Parliament to enter into meaningful negotiations with other nations to inaugurate a Code of International Law which would act as a tribunal or High Court of Nations to administer that law.²⁰⁰ Lawson hoped that the regularisation of international law in a code would make it clear that even the most serious disputes could be resolved in such a way. He saw Europe sitting on the brink of a mine, with Prussia and France ready to explode on the shortest possible fuse. Lawson argued that the failure of the established system for settling disputes by war had delivered a sense of insecurity to the British people. He was not advocating a defenceless Britain only an alternative way of defending Britain. Britain, he said, could only achieve the honour he sought by promoting the settlement of international disputes by force of words. He saw International law languishing in a state of international anarchy, with each nation embracing independent laws with no overruling law to determine right from wrong; a system whereby each country in each case was its own judge, jury, and executioner. In Lawson’s opinion, dishonour would not fall upon those who made rational propositions towards international law but on those who refused to accede to those laws. He suggested that international public opinion would eventually break down the barriers that stood in the way of a congress of united nations

¹⁹⁷ West Cumberland Times, 15 May 1879.

¹⁹⁸ Hansard, vol. 260, col. 1859, 5 May 1881.

¹⁹⁹ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 92.

required to enforce the decrees of arbitrators. If public opinion in Britain could instigate the great reforms of the previous two decades, then he saw no reason why international public opinion could not foster international arbitration, and empower those Europeans, who preferred peace to war. Having settled the Alabama claims from a position of weakness, he considered Britain ideally placed to promote an arbitration scheme.²⁰¹

Although Gladstone eulogised over the Alabama precedent, and spoke favourably towards the motion, he voted against Mundella's resolution. His argument was that historic contact and previous associations created an enormous rift between insular and continental powers, in terms of settling international disputes. "Providence," he said "...had endowed England and America with immense advantages and facilities for the propagation of the principles of arbitration, which were more difficult to apply among continental nations."²⁰² Gladstone was convinced they would never make practical progress unless the Powers adopted the principles of governing their own population with justice and moderation, and by taking every opportunity to recommend the peaceful settlement of disputes between nations. Notwithstanding this opposition and because the attendance of the House was small the motion was carried by ten votes (98-88), thus bringing about a minor but nevertheless embarrassing defeat of Gladstone's ministry.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ British radicals had long campaigned for the legal settlement of disputes between nations, and the Geneva tribunal was eventually composed in much the same manner as they suggested. "The Alabama Claims", Robson, p. 14.

²⁰¹ Hansard, vol. 217, cols 82-88, 8 July 1873.

²⁰² Ibid, vol. 217, col. 79, 8 July 1873.

²⁰³ British Peace Movement, Laity, pp. 51-60.

Introduction

Disraeli's attempt, during his ministry of 1874-80, to persuade the British public that Empire was the foundation of the nation's greatness proved very controversial at the time. It sparked a strong reaction amongst radicals, led by Gladstone, against what they saw as 'Imperialism', defined as an aggressive policy aimed at aligning the elite elements in society with the 'mob' in enthusiasm for overseas expansion and war, and intended to glorify monarchy and bypass Parliament. It was in the course of this radical campaign that Lawson emerged as a significant anti-imperialist figure on the Liberal backbenches. Disraeli, who had been Prime Minister for a brief period in 1868, led the Conservatives to a decisive election victory in 1874, the first in a generation.¹ He was an advocate of both privilege and tradition, and strove to make England a great nation again by preserving long established institutions particularly the monarchy, to reunite her church, to resolve tension in her great landed interests, to realise her national role in the world, and to save her empire.² Unlike many of the political elite before the 1870s, including members of his own party, Disraeli strove to persuade the British electorate that the empire, especially India was crucial to Britain's future strength and would contribute towards Britain's power and prestige in the eyes of competing nations. His Suez and Indian policies including the acquisition of Cyprus, his attitude towards Turkey and Russia and his acquiescence in forward policies in South Africa and Afghanistan are all examples of that aim. Through imperialism, Britain would transfer civilisation, religion, law and respect for national rights, and in return receive aid, sources of raw materials, markets for Britain's manufactured goods and troops in times of war. As such he was indifferent to the parochial problems of individual colonies; it was the

¹ Between 1830 and 1886, a coalition of anti-Conservatives known at various times as Whigs, Reformers and Liberals was out of office for scarcely a dozen years and lost only two of fourteen general elections. The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government, Parry, p. 1.

² "Disraeli and England", J. P. Parry, Historical Journal, Vol. 43, issue 3, (2000), pp. 699-728.

part that possession of Empire could play in assisting Britain's role in world affairs that aroused his attention, and he was determined that this advantage should not be frittered away by misguided Liberals.³

Disraeli seldom confronted mass audiences, however at the Crystal Palace in June 1872, he expressed a long held conviction about the importance of empire, presenting the British public with a romantic image, which, he combined with the English constitution and declared the defence of the 'Empire of England' as the foundation of Conservative policy.⁴ This he compared to 'continental' or 'cosmopolitan' Liberalism,⁵ arguing that there had been "no effort so continuous, so subtle, and supported by so much energy, as the attempts of Liberalism to bring about the disintegration of the Empire."⁶ Disraeli emphasised Liberalism rather than the Liberal party because he knew that his own party had held similar relaxed views towards empire before his premiership, though as a clever politician he was also aware that the mud he threw would stick to the Liberal party especially after Gladstone cut the colonial and defence budget.

Disraeli charmed the public, who in return backed his imperial policies, ('Beaconsfieldism') even when they led to bloodshed. Punch and the Times both shared his imperial dream, the Queen loved and cherished her Empire, churchmen wrote adulating sermons, and the public sang patriotic songs, waved flags and embraced their national identity. According to Gladstone, by 1877, Disraeli's aggressive overseas policy had the support of 'the clubs', the London press, the majority of both Houses of Parliament, and five sixths of the plutocracy.⁷ Disraeli's two most notable successes symbolised Britain's determination to assert her imperial interests internationally. The contentious Royal Titles Act, which made Victoria Empress of India, elevated the British monarchy onto a plateau equivalent to that of the three European emperors. While critics viewed the famed acquisition of the Khedive's Suez Canal shares, which effectively committed Parliament without prior consultation, as a

³ Victorian Imperialism, Eldridge, p. 104.

⁴ Times, 25 June 1872.

⁵ By Cosmopolitanism, Disraeli meant various abstractions not rooted in English social realities, either constitutional or ideological. "Disraeli and England", Parry, pp. 699-707.

⁶ Gladstone, Disraeli and Later Victorians, Paul Adelman, (London, 1976), pp. 88-89.

⁷ Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress, James Morris, (London, 1979), p. 388. Also The Trouble Makers: Dissent over Foreign Policy 1792-1939, A. J. P. Taylor, (London, 1969), p. 64.

potential threat to representative government. Gladstone failed to share Disraeli's enthusiasm, calling the exchange a 'ruinous and mischievous misdeed'. Gladstone predicted that it would result in the occupation of Egypt, a concern that later proved correct.⁸ Lawson shared many of Gladstone's concerns over the share transaction but in later life, although he never explained his reasons, he did admit that the results were a credit to Disraeli's astuteness.⁹

As time went by Disraeli's policies became more and more associated with overseas possessions and with conquests in Africa, the Pacific, and in Asia. The aggressive pursuit of forward policies were not always popular with members of his Government, especially Lord's Derby and Carnarvon, causing not only a disunited but at times contradictory Cabinet, made worse by Disraeli, who sanctioned the appointments of flamboyant proconsuls who got Britain into trouble on difficult frontiers. Although Disraeli's personal responsibilities for these setbacks was minimal, he had appointed forceful men on the spot who favoured an expansionist policy, who 'imposed their own interpretation and perspective on his imperial policy', which led indirectly to disaster abroad and unpopularity at home.¹⁰ It was appointments like those of Jervois in Malaya; Goodenough in Fiji; Glover, Wolseley and Stratham in West Africa, which actually determined British policy.¹¹ Moreover, the elevation of the restless and flamboyant Lord Lytton from a diplomat in Lisbon to Viceroy of India, and the appointment of Sir Bartle Frere to the post of Governor of the Cape Colony and High Commissioner for South Africa led Britain into a series of expensive wars. Although Disraeli expressed anger,¹² "...when V-Roys and Comms-in-Chiefs disobey orders," and said, "...they ought to be sure of success in their mutiny," the damage was done.¹³ Disraeli's career climaxed at the conclusion of the Congress of Berlin; from his

⁸ "Aggression on Egypt and Freedom in the East", W. E. Gladstone, Nineteenth Century, Vol. 2, (August, 1877), pp. 149-66.

⁹ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 121.

¹⁰ "A Two Edged Sword: The Liberal Attack on Disraelian Imperialism", P. J. Durrans, Journal of Commonwealth History, Vol. X, (1982), p. 263.

¹¹ England's Mission, Eldridge, p. 169.

¹² As Prime Minister, Disraeli had shown little interest in the Colonial Office's South African federation scheme until the disaster at Isandhlwana; his anger erupted because it would 'reduce our continental influence and embarrass our finances'. "Disraeli and England", Parry, p. 718.

¹³ Disraeli, Robert Blake, (London, 1969), p. 662.

return, to the time of his death his popularity ebbed. To supplement a deepening agricultural, commercial and industrial depression at home were two serious international confrontations abroad, the disaster at Isandhlwana and the massacre of the British mission at Kabul.

After the Conservatives came to power in 1874, Lawson recognised the enormity of the task ahead. In a parliamentary statement he confessed: "The Liberal party had suffered a great disaster, and although shipwrecked, some of the crew had saved their lives and their principles and it is in them we must place our trust."¹⁴ Matters were made worse for Lawson when Gladstone resigned the Liberal leadership in 1875 to be succeeded by Lord Hartington, a leading Whig politician. Lawson's view was expressed in verse:

Hartington if you prefer him, -
Self-possessed, and cool and calm -
No impetuous motives stir him,
He'll do neither good nor harm.¹⁵

When Hartington became leader, Lawson described him as "lethargic and unemotional, a nobleman and a gentleman, with a straightforward independent character, who refused to consent to subterfuge; a man with a reputation for saying what he meant, and meaning what he said."¹⁶ From Lawson's perspective, Hartington's policies stood for very little, for he seldom attacked his opponents, nor supported controversial measures.¹⁷

Imperialism eventually spilled over into the Liberal party, where prominent Liberals, including Hartington were often supportive of Disraeli's aims, especially when confronting Russia, although they might disagree on particular policies. What later became known as Liberal Imperialism was very much alive in the 1870s. Although Hartington advocated the recall of Lord

¹⁴ Hansard, vol. 218, col. 457, 30 March 1874.

¹⁵ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 109.

¹⁶ West Cumberland Times, 19 January 1876.

¹⁷ Jonathan Parry promotes a contrasting view, describing Hartington as a man "who strove to maintain the Liberal party as the country's natural ruling body and the Whig aristocracy as its leaders. His aim was to retain enough support from the gentry, the rising plutocracy and the propertied middle classes to secure a permanent electoral majority for the party and to marginalise radicals who might threaten the rule of property and law." The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government, Parry, p. 260.

Lytton during the war in Afghanistan, and declared the Government policy wrong, he condemned Lawson's attempt to withhold the means of carrying out that war.¹⁸ When Hartington approached Lawson with a request to dilute his anti-imperialist views, Lawson's response was predictable: "he would rather be the nuisance of the party than its Solicitor General."¹⁹ He had no desire to see the Liberal party creep into office through the backdoor, unmerited, through Conservative failures. "Are we to return to office by proclaiming no principle, suggesting no measures, and making no attack on our opponents?" "If that be so," he said, "we may wait until Doomsday before the Liberal party is regenerated."²⁰ Lawson noted that Hartington alone, among all his Liberal contemporaries never once supported any of his resolutions or causes.²¹ When Lawson compared the threatening affects of Disraeli's Tory imperialism with the ineptitude of a Liberal Whig alternative he became fearful of a reversal of that long march towards liberty and morality which he so passionately supported. It's not surprising that he longed for Gladstone's return. As he accurately predicted in a speech to his constituents:

Formerly we had a leader and although we have lost him for a time, I am not without hope that he may return when he sees that he can be useful to his fellow countrymen and lead them on to triumph in the cause of progress and freedom.²²

Lawson opposed overseas interference on five accounts each connected to a common thread that ran throughout his political career. Firstly he saw the associated expenditure as an economic burden, draining and dissipating the resources of the British taxpayer; secondly, the waste of human life; thirdly, the neglect of domestic policies which accompanied the emphasis placed on external affairs; fourthly, he saw imperialism reintroducing elitist rule into Britain and thus depreciating the role of Parliament; and fifthly because 'Christianising and civilising with the sword'

¹⁸ Hansard, vol. 243, col. 1004, 17 December 1878.

¹⁹ West Cumberland Times, 19 January 1876.

²⁰ Ibid, 5 February 1876.

²¹ Ibid, 20 December 1891.

²² Ibid, 19 January 1876.

had a long history of debasing native culture, and introducing alcohol and other debilitating practices into an otherwise alcohol free society. Lawson's complaints that the Government were allowing policy to determine expenditure were well-founded; by 1878 a surplus of over £6,000,000 left by the outgoing Liberal Government had become a deficit equating to a similar amount.²³

As Lawson had hoped the radical attack on Disraeli was crucially reinforced from 1876 by Gladstone who ferociously attacked 'Imperialism' a word which originally denoted Napoleonic policies, including the recent example of Napoleon III. Notwithstanding Gladstone's Peelite-Conservative background, he held a long record of hostility towards imperial expansion. Gladstone was the antithesis of Disraeli; he disagreed with the imperialising concept because it interfered with the rights and freedoms of native people. Its defence he argued would prove expensive, and a drain on Britain's wealth, manpower and resources. Gladstone did not want to acquire any more colonies and sometimes regretted their ownership, however, he did insist that India and other 'backward' areas had to be governed and 'civilised' in the process. To leave would result in anarchy.²⁴ In 1872, Gladstone allowed the Cape of Good Hope to establish a responsible government,²⁵ while other 'white' colonies that already possessed such institutions had them strengthened and extended. Gladstone feared the birth of a new concept of empire, a trend he increasingly associated with military and political power over vast alien populations.²⁶ When it came to imperial expansion, Gladstone argued that Britain's chief duty was to develop the lands already in her possession and to "take care of her own children within her own shores."²⁷ Notwithstanding these declarations, some of Disraeli's 'imperialism', especially in West Africa, Malaya, and Fiji was the culmination of frontier problems which began during Gladstone's premiership and which Gladstone might have had to deal with in a similar way had the country re-elected him in 1874. Gladstone

²³ "A Two Edged Sword", Durrans, p. 266.

²⁴ Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Policy, Paul Knaplund, (London, 1927), p. 193.

²⁵ Responsible Government was not a 'separatist device' but simply a change from direct to indirect methods of maintaining British interests. "The Imperialism of Free Trade", J. Gallagher and R. E. Robinson, Economic History Review, Vol. 4, (1953-4), pp. 1-15.

²⁶ England's Mission, Eldridge, p. 219.

²⁷ "England's Mission", W. E. Gladstone, Nineteenth Century, Vol. 4, (September 1878), pp. 560-584.

himself admitted that some of Disraeli's acquisitions were unavoidable although he may not have dealt with them in the same aggressive way.²⁸

In anti-imperial matters, Lawson stood shoulder to shoulder with Gladstone and reinforced Gladstone's anti-imperialist concerns on every occasion. However, Gladstone had an extremely complex character, which often obscured his own position. When he deviated from the views he expressed so forcefully during the Midlothian campaign, and this happened frequently, Lawson emphasised these inconsistencies. During Midlothian, Gladstone insisted that the strength of Great Britain lay within the shores of the United Kingdom, not in ever increasing dominion overseas.²⁹ Lawson singled out such statements and interpreted them to mean an economic approach to government at home and a return to the tradition of non-intervention and minimum responsibility abroad.³⁰

Whereas Lawson had firm, fixed and extremely consistent ideals relating to foreign and imperial policy, Gladstone's policies were flawed with inconsistencies, contradictions and self-doubts. Gladstone had a history of saying one thing in opposition and another in Government, a situation recognised by A. J. P. Taylor:

Gladstone was the champion of dissent, and also its ruin; a dissenter who was always explaining away his dissent, though still more his agreement; a radical who preferred the company of aristocrats; an enemy of power who loved to wield it.³¹

Whereas Gladstone's enthusiasm for political economy inclined him towards Cobden's views his moral passion drove him towards universal interference.³² Unlike Disraeli, Gladstone had no desire for Britain to act alone; he had a greater vision, which incorporated the concept of the 'Concert of Europe', an opinion that Britain should act in accordance with other Powers and exercise

²⁸ Midlothian Speeches: 1879, W. E. Gladstone, (New York, 1971).

²⁹ England's Mission, Eldridge, p. 228.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 243.

³¹ Trouble Makers, Taylor, p. 63.

³² Ibid, p. 52.

foreign influence as a member of the great community of Christendom.³³ Follow Lawson's policy to its conclusion and it led to isolation and inaction, except in cases of self-defence; follow Gladstone's doctrine to its conclusion and it led to universal interference.

The collection of case studies relating to British foreign and colonial policy discussed below trace Lawson's steps as he transforms from an almost obscure backbencher into a serious radical anti-imperialist politician and highlight how his changing style cultivated the listener and enhanced his own reputation and popularity. Lawson had no desire to become a leader of a cause and as such he underlines a vital point that a good sense of humour ill accords with a sense of 'self-appointed mission'.³⁴ Although the Asante war and the annexation of the Fiji islands were serious issues, and Lawson's personal concerns were equally serious, his style of attack appeared flippant and insensitive. We can never say with any certainty why he chose this path, however his experience in moving forward a lack-lustre subject like temperance reform had highlighted that the best way to gain public attention and sympathy was to entertain both the listener and the enlarged readership. Lawson rarely made a speech without evoking numerous anecdotal jokes and funny stories and his speeches both inside and outside parliament during the period under review are crammed with glaring examples. When he confronted matters relating to the Eastern Question, he adopted a different style, as he tried to overcome the image he still had amongst some MPs of a buffoon, whose remarks no sensible man could take seriously. Whereas much of the humour remains, it is greatly overshadowed by the serious side of his arguments. On matters relating to the Turko-Russian war we find Lawson elevated to a higher plateau as he endeavours to find a way to counteract the public clamour for war. His arguments against the vote of credit, the Easter recess, the calling out of the reserves, and the movement of Indian troops into a European theatre of war may at times appear irrational but even his sternest critics would never call them insensitive or indifferent. When Lawson raged against the Afghan wars he assumed an anti-British stance, although his

³³ "England's Mission", Gladstone, pp. 560-584.

³⁴ The Imperial Idea and its Enemies: A Study in British Power, A. P. Thornton, (London, 1959), p. 88.

agitation had little impact. Like Cobden his critics could describe Lawson as an 'extreme type of the anti-English Englishman, whose charity always began abroad but rarely reached home'.³⁵ In South Africa he was anti British when Britain confronted the Zulu and although the Boers had subjugated the Zulus he became a pro-Boer when Britain began to fight the Boers. Although the measure of success is open to conjecture he did increase his popularity as recognised in 1878 when his replica image was exhibited in Madame Tussaud's³⁶

SECTION 1

THE ASANTE PROTECTORATE

Britain developed her interests with the Gold Coast through unofficial sources; a combination of humanitarians determined to end slavery and spread Christianity, and speculative merchants interested in trade,³⁷ however small the volume.³⁸ The region comprised two tribal federations with a history of mutual confrontation and recurring warfare. Closest to the coast and most heavily engaged in European trade were the Fante tribes. In the interior, almost unknown to Europeans lived the powerful warlike pagan Asante. In the 1860s a Parliamentary Select Committee had recommended:

All further extensions of territory, assumptions of government, any new treaty, or offers of protection to the native tribes, would be inexpedient, and that we should begin to exercise those qualities which would fit

³⁵ "Cobden and Cobdenism", Leopold J. Maxse, National Review, Vol. 43, July 1904, pp. 43-52.

³⁶ Times, 23 April 1878.

³⁷ Trade first brought the Europeans to Africa in the fifteenth century and trade remained the basis of their relations with the continent from then onwards. An Economic History of West Africa, A. G. Hopkins, (London, 1973), p. 164.

³⁸ For an explanation as to why 'free trade' small as it was in West Africa required protection for fiscal reasons see: "Victorians Republicans and the Partition of West Africa", C. W. Newbury, Journal Of African History, 111, 3, (1962), pp. 493-501.

them for self-government with a view to our ultimate retirement from the coast.³⁹

Contrary to this recommendation, Britain purchased additional territory, fought a fifth war with the neighbouring Asante and turned the Gold Coast Protectorate into a full-fledged Crown Colony. It was never easy to discard a colony, for the slightest suggestion always awakened humanitarian and commercial pressure groups. In 1867, the situation further deteriorated after Kofi Karikari (King Coffee) ascended to the Golden Stool at Kumasi, a fetish washed with the blood of human sacrifice.⁴⁰

Notwithstanding warnings, the Gold Coast became the scene of some of the most notable territorial occupations in the period under review. In 1850, Britain bought out the Danish holdings for a trifling sum of £10,000. In 1872 they exchanged territory with the Dutch,⁴¹ a transaction that failed to attract universal approval, Lord Derby for one expressed grave reservations, and "...greatly doubted whether any man in or out of the Colonial Office exactly knows or could define the limits of our authority and of our responsibility in regard to the tribes included within the protected region."⁴² Lord Kimberley held similar views, and later admitted that knowing nothing of the Gold Coast; he had neglected the possibility of trouble with the Asante arising out of the agreement.⁴³ The switch affected the stability of the region, and provoked the chiefs of the former Dutch colony to openly register their resistance to 'become English'.⁴⁴ The exchange also provoked the Asante,⁴⁵ who claimed the coastal region as part of their domain, and saw the forts as mere trading

³⁹ Hansard, vol. 220, col. 465, 25 June 1874.

⁴⁰ Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa: 1830-1914, Bruce Vandervort, (Indiana, 1998), pp. 85-101.

⁴¹ Lawson was quick to emphasise the nature of the exchange: "the Dutch had been fighting in the country we had yielded them and we had been fighting in the country we had received from the Dutch, a bargain that appeared injurious to both parties." Hansard, vol. 218, col. 1599, 4 May 1874.

⁴² According to Lawson, Lord Derby made this observation in the autumn of the previous year, when he was the Conservative spokesman on foreign affairs. *Ibid*, col. 1598.

⁴³ The Cambridge History of the British Empire: Vol. 3: The Empire Commonwealth 1870-1919, E. A. Benians (ed.), (Cambridge, 1967), p. 35.

⁴⁴ Hansard, vol. 218, col. 1600, 4 May 1874. Also A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti, Vol. 1, W. Walton Claridge, (London, 1964), pp. 604-606.

⁴⁵ For further details of the Asantee claim, see the contents of a letter from the King of Asantee to Colonel Hartley, dated 20 March 1873. Records Relating to the Gold Coast Settlements from 1750 To 1874, J. J. Crooks, (London, 1973), pp. 439-40.

posts operated at their sufferance, a position which the Dutch had accepted.⁴⁶ With their access to the coast and their trade routes threatened, the Asante now became an irritant to the British Empire.

In January 1873, Kofi dispatched his armies across the Prah River, where, after routing the Fante they advanced to within striking distance of the British headquarters. In August, after inheriting a mixed bag of frontier problems, and notwithstanding his Greenwich declaration, "...that although it was necessary to sustain the honour of England with regard to the Asante expedition, it should be a lesson to get rid of all entangling engagements of that nature,"⁴⁷ Gladstone was persuaded by the Colonial Secretary Lord Kimberley, and Edward Cardwell at the War Office to authorise a military expedition under the brilliant strategist, Major General, Sir Garnet Wolseley. Wolseley's orders were quite specific. He was to proceed to the Gold Coast, raise a local militia to combat Asante, obtain a treaty with Kofi, and to avoid measures, which might bring on "...a complete break up of the King's Government and Power." He was to smite them a Palmerstonian blow, to chastise the unruly, but leave their political organisation independent and intact. The natives were to keep their territory and allow trade to continue.⁴⁸

Worseley quickly recognised a need for British troops, and on 6 January 1874, 2,400 white troops arrived, heavily dosed with quinine. On 31 January, the confronting armies met in the jungle where the reckless bravery and the antiquated muskets of the defenders were a poor substitute to the disciplined firepower of the British. Five days later Wolseley reached the Asante capital, Kumasi, where he encountered the sacrificial remains of several thousand victims, murdered to conciliate angry Gods. Fearing the oncoming rains Wolseley placed a torch to the city and returned to the coast carrying the wealth of the royal jewellery.⁴⁹ On 13 February the Asante

⁴⁶ The King of Elmina paid an annual tribute equivalent to £80. When the Dutch annexed the Protectorate they continued the practice, calling the award a stipend. King Kofi had demanded British recognition of Asante sovereignty over the coastal enclaves and the continuation of an annual rent. A History of the Gold Coast, Vol. 1, Claridge, pp. 601-606.

⁴⁷ Hansard, vol. 218, col. 1598, 4 May 1874.

⁴⁸ Letter from Earl of Kimberley to Sir Garnet Wolseley, dated 10 September 1873. Records Relating to the Gold Coast Settlements, Crooks, pp. 463-466. Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 31.

⁴⁹ For a good description of the Imperial Palace and the royal jewellery, see a letter written by Wolseley to his wife. Imperial Echoes: Eye Witness Accounts of Victoria's Little Wars, Robert

accepted a peace treaty,⁵⁰ whereby they promised to outlaw human sacrifice; cede territory; maintain the trade routes and pay an unrealistic indemnity.⁵¹ Wolseley had overstepped his instructions; he had destroyed the Asante confederation and created regional anarchy.⁵²

Lawson began his sustained attack upon what later became known as 'Beaconsfieldism', a respectable name for Jingoism,⁵³ in the autumn of 1873, when he challenged Gladstone's decision to curb the ambitions of the militaristic Asante. However, after colleagues accused him of hampering a commander in the field and of endangering the success of the expedition he withdrew his demands for information relating to the cause of the confrontation⁵⁴ but not before he pressed John Bright⁵⁵ to resign his Cabinet position and to use his influence within the party to demand the recall of British troops.⁵⁶ As the campaign progressed Lawson became convinced that the Government's mischievous expansionist policy would not only prove disastrous but would sow the seeds of an African Empire.⁵⁷ He returned to this theme during the 1874 General Election when notwithstanding the Liberal party's reluctance to become embroiled in the conflict, he recommended a swift withdrawal as an alternative to the inauguration of a permanent sovereignty and empire over the indigenous people. In mischievous mood he attached his unpopular message to the back of several contemporary jokes and propelled them towards the electorate. Referring to newspaper reports, he described the conflict as a 'curious war carried out in a curious way'. Acknowledging that hundreds of female Asante warriors had fallen in the

Giddings, (London, 1996), pp. 153-160. Also Sagrenti War: An illustrated History of the Asante Campaign 1873-1874, J. E. Condua-Harley, (London, 1974), p. 32.

⁵⁰ Dispatch from Sir Garnet Wolseley to the Colonial Office, dated 13 February 1874, explaining the 'Terms of Treaty of Peace'. Records Relating to the Gold Coast Settlements, Crooks, p. 521.

⁵¹ The Ruler's of British Africa 1870-1914, L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, (London, 1978) p. 105.

⁵² The Asante were most probably punished for 'crimes' that ranged far beyond the current invasion of the Gold Coast Protectorate. Two old wounds required healing, McCarthy's defeat and decapitation in 1823, and a more recent humiliation in 1864. Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, Vandervort, p. 92.

⁵³ Splendid Isolation?, Charmley, p. 165.

⁵⁴ Hansard, vol. 218, col. 455, 30 March 1874.

⁵⁵ When the Conservative's came to power in 1874, Bright argued vigorously for a swift withdrawal. The Imperial Frontiers in the Tropics 1865-75, W. D. McIntyre, (London, 1967), p. 279.

⁵⁶ Carlisle Journal, 16 January 1874.

⁵⁷ Hansard, vol. 220, col. 469, 25 June 1874.

battle he emphasised the righteousness of his commitment to the cause of female suffrage.⁵⁸ He also alluded to the alleged cannibalistic habits of some of Britain's West African allies who allegedly ate the prisoners they took in battle. If correct, Lawson facetiously remarked, it would greatly reduce the cost of provisioning the troops. Having always despised religious hypocrisy he advised the returning troops to donate their memento warrior skulls to the Dean of Carlisle, which he could use to adorn the Cathedral alongside his deity, the God of Battles.⁵⁹ After gaining the sympathy of the electorate, Lawson confronted more serious issues. He repudiated the claim that Britain was opening out Africa to 'progress, civilisation and religion', which he associated with 'rum and missionaries'. There was some foundation in Lawson's remarks; in 1872, the value of imports into the Gold Coast was £260,000 of which rum accounted for 30 per cent.⁶⁰

In his thank you speech to the returning troops on 30 March 1874, Disraeli gave a lengthy detailed account of the operations; separating the actions of a recently decorated Wolseley,⁶¹ whom he eulogized, from the actions of Gladstone who had selected the general to lead the campaign. According to the parliamentary correspondent Henry W. Lucy, the members were aroused from the slumbers of a dreary debate by the lively talk of Lawson, who immediately proceeded to move a resolution demanding a reduction in the army estimates of 10,000 men.⁶² His argument was that "Britain had concluded a war, where she had shed her blood and treasures,

⁵⁸ Lawson had long called for changes in the franchise legislation to include women. In 1870 he supported Jacob Bright's unsuccessful bill to give qualified women the right to vote. Lawson described the bill as "sound, sensible, just and absolutely logical." Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 86.

⁵⁹ Carlisle Journal, 16 January 1874.

⁶⁰ Hansard, vol. 218, col. 1658, 4 May 1874.

⁶¹ In addition to receiving the nation's gift of £25,000, Wolseley was created a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George. He also received the Knight Commandership of Bath, and several honorary degrees. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 60, pp. 7-14.

⁶² The proposal was not as radical as it first appears, in 1867, following a recommendation from a Royal Commission on recruitment. Edward Cardwell had, through the execution of his army reforms proposed a reduction in the imperial troops stationed in the scattered settlements and colonies, from 50,000 to 26,000, thus generating he hoped a spirit of British energy and self reliance. Victorian Imperialism, Eldridge, p. 93. Disraeli's Parliament 1874-1880, Lucy, p. 9.

and all he could find in the way of benefit was an old umbrella,⁶³ and a treaty.” After his colleagues reminded him of the absence of a treaty,⁶⁴ he sarcastically replied: “Well I do not regret that there is no treaty, for a treaty would be as worthless as the umbrella.”⁶⁵ Laughter reverberated around the assembly, for as he spoke, the Asante State umbrella along with other treasures and mementoes constituted the most popular exhibition in London. When asked by the Minister for War why he had moved a specific reduction, he expressed his indifference; his major concern was to protest against the size of the armed forces, which when combined with the navy and the auxiliary forces were sufficient to counteract a foreign invasion. He never expected to carry the motion: “when he reflected upon previous divisions he found that the scale of the proposed reductions had no affect upon the outcome, for the military interest always reigned supreme.”⁶⁶

On 4 May 1874, Lawson criticised the Conservative policy, which was dazzling the public with military glory.⁶⁷ After the Conservative Member for Tamworth, Robert Hanbury, proposed that Britain continue to administer the region in the ‘interests of civilisation and commerce’. Lawson urged they abandon the Gold Coast, and questioned the wisdom of the march to Kumasi. His argument was that having repelled the native invasion Wolseley should have obeyed orders and ended the conflict; but England he explained: “had become so eager for conflict that the idea for desisting from the war merely because the war had ceased to be necessary was not tolerable to the public.”⁶⁸

Lawson reinforced the radical stance that the military and diplomatic cost of empire was once again exceeding the economic benefits. Using official returns, he emphasised the unprofitable nature of trade transactions between the two participants. His argument was that during the previous twenty years, the British exchequer had spent £2,000,000 administering the Gold Coast,

⁶³ The state umbrellas were the centre piece of the Royal Palace; one was brought back with the troops and was placed in the United Services Institute Museum. A History of the Gold Coast, Vol. 2, Claridge, p. 142.

⁶⁴ The Treaty of Fomana was not formerly signed until 14 March 1874, after Wolseley had left for England. Ibid pp. 152-155.

⁶⁵ Hansard, vol. 218, col. 455, 30 March 1874.

⁶⁶ Ibid, col. 457.

⁶⁷ Ibid, col. 1603, 4 May 1874.

⁶⁸ Ibid, col. 1600.

and received in return £2,300,000, a balance considerably depreciated by the cost of two wars.⁶⁹ Furthermore, he emphasised that although Britain financed the administration and protected the commercial interests, the majority of the aforementioned commercial profits went into the pockets of resident merchants.⁷⁰ Britain, he taunted had no obligation to protect unscrupulous merchants who traded rum and munitions to Britain's enemies. As he sarcastically observed: "had they fought the war to protect commerce, then the killing of one's customers was an extraordinary method of conducting business,"⁷¹ even Britain's publicans, he jibed, "did not kill their customers intentionally, but kept them going as long as possible."⁷²

Lawson also rejected Government claims that the war had corrected cannibalism and barbarous ceremonies: "Assuming the Asante was as wicked as described; the intent to end cannibalism was an afterthought, for the existence of similar customs was never a pretext for waging war with the King of Dahomey."⁷³ His argument was that "should England go to war with every country that committed a wrong she would never have peace."⁷⁴ He challenged the claim that western civilisation was 'improving the savage', for all they ever achieved was to "improve him off the face of the earth." Lawson's argument was that Britain had oppressed, enslaved and exterminated natives, but had never civilised them. That role, he insisted, belonged to missionary agencies.

⁶⁹ Ibid, col. 1602.

⁷⁰ This was a point which occupied a significant portion of the 1865 Parliamentary Select Committee Report, which recommended the withdrawal from the Gold Coast. A major opponent of British withdrawal was Andrew Swanzy, a trader in palm oil, gold and ivory, who made huge profits from his transactions, while the British government bore the administration expenses. Parliamentary Papers, vol. 412, 1865, pp. 193-199.

⁷¹ This was an expression used by Lawson on many occasions, an example: "They called Britain the workshop of the world, and yet her people were called upon to pay £28,000,000 each year to maintain the army and the navy, which they used to kill their customers." West Cumberland Times, 10 December 1889.

⁷² Hansard, vol. 218, cols. 1600-01, 4 May 1874.

⁷³ Ibid. The rule of the Kings of Dahomey was absolute, his appointed officials, were feared as bloodthirsty potentates, who enforced their authority through a network of spies. He also held a highly disciplined standing army, and employed hosts of executioners.

⁷⁴ Ibid, vol. 257, col. 1166, 21 March 1881.

Lawson seldom missed an opportunity to expose the hypocrisy of those who associated war with Christian values.⁷⁵ Had the war, he asked, been fought, for the reasons suggested by one army chaplain?

The British soldiers went out to fight for a sense of duty, without pausing to make any comparisons between their strength and that of the foe. When the English army witnessed the superstitions, which had been committed in that city of murder, they must have felt like David, that it was God's battle they were fighting, and that the Lord of the whole earth must necessarily conquer. In burning Kumasi they overthrew one of the strongholds of the devil, and opened a channel for the inroads of Christianity.⁷⁶

If the Government endorsed this attitude, Lawson concluded, "Then it was alarming, for should they attack all the strongholds of Satan, supplementary estimates of an enormous amount would have to be called for."⁷⁷ According to Lawson's biographer this was the only occasion when Disraeli openly laughed during a parliamentary debate.⁷⁸ Lawson continued to exploit the religious theme:

If a native of a foreign land tried to impress me with the truths of his religion, was to commence by invading my country, burning down my capital, firing upon and killing my friends and relatives, and ultimately driving me naked into the jungle, I should not be prepossessed by the man's religious views; and if he told me afterwards that his religion was one of peace and brotherly love, I should not only tell him I considered him a scoundrel, but a most hypocritical scoundrel into the bargain.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Before the troops embarked from England, Wolseley had prepared and issued a pamphlet of instructions, part of which stated that God had given the white man the edge over Africans on the battlefield. *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa*, Vandervort, p. 93.

⁷⁶ Extract from a sermon delivered by the Revd. Short, of the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich at a Thanksgiving Service to commemorate the role of the troops in the Asante war. *Hansard*, vol. 218, col. 1602, 4 May 1874.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, col. 1601.

⁷⁸ *Lawson: A Memoir*, Russell, p. 33.

⁷⁹ *Hansard*, vol. 218, col. 1602, 4 May 1874.

Lawson alluded to Wolseley's 'dishonourable' insubordination:

If the honour of England is raised and magnified by setting one tribe of savages, to fight against another; by collecting all the refuge and scum of Africa to fight against Asante, thus upsetting the only strong government in that part of the world, and teaching them the art of war so that the next time they fight they will use Snyder rifles and bullets, instead of old guns and slugs, then that was the prestige of fools.⁸⁰

Lawson' was not alone when referring to the 'scum and refuge of Africa'. Wolseley respected the fighting heroics of the Asante but criticised the actions of his allies; the Hausa's, he called erratic, while the Fante were, "...cowardly lazy fellows into whom courage could only be instilled by a dread of bodily punishment."⁸¹

Lawson urged those who criticised his views to read an eyewitness account published in the Colonial Intelligencer, describing slave owners dragging shrieking women, bound hand and foot from the decks of English vessels moored in the harbour.⁸² Lawson hoped to embarrass those indifferent politicians, who ignored the practice and called the procedure, 'internal domestic slavery'. As Lawson said, "you will never end slavery by adding an adjective."⁸³ Slavery, he maintained, was rampant in the region and comprised two forms; natives captured from the interior and natives who pawned themselves into the practice.⁸⁴

On 12 May 1874, Lord Carnarvon announced his new policy to a crowded House of Lords; although he did not extend British sovereignty to incorporate the Asante, he combined the Gold Coast forts to form a new Crown Colony on the model of the Straits Settlement.⁸⁵ For the remainder of

⁸⁰ Ibid, cols. 1602-03.

⁸¹ Sir Garnet Wolseley: Victorian Hero, Halik Kockanski, (London, 1999), p. 65.

⁸² Hansard, vol. 220, col. 468, 25 June 1874.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ A History of the Gold Coast, Vol. 2, Claridge, pp. 177-179.

⁸⁵ Carnarvon promoted a 'paternalistic' view, he argued that the Fante had learned to lean upon Britain and therefore Britain had an obligation to reward that Fante trust, despite the fact that many Fante wished Britain to grant absolute sovereignty or leave. "If we abandon them (Fante) at this moment," Carnarvon said, "the probability is that the Ashantee Power would spread itself over the Protectorate." Hansard, vol. 218, cols. 156-58, 12 May 1874.

the century, relations between Britain and the Asante remained strained. After two further wars in 1896 and 1902 Britain established a protectorate over the Northern territories.⁸⁶ Although to some extent the Asante campaign remains one of Victoria's forgotten wars it holds strategic importance for it was the forerunner to what became a familiar and recurrent procedure of disrupting African society to impose protectorates, annexations and colonial control throughout Africa.⁸⁷ Furthermore, a remarkable clique of young enthusiastic officers, later dubbed the Wolseley or Asante ring, served with military distinction, and impacted upon the remainder of Britain's imperialist story.⁸⁸

Lawson followed his Cobdenite instincts and reacted against the war and although he sought a means to discuss the causes of the war⁸⁹ he never actually got to grips or tried to explain what those causes were. After discounting economic reasons, he laid the blame squarely on the Asante's response to the exchange of territory, while he blamed Wolseley's insubordination for the outcome of the war. Lawson's opinions are more sympathetic to the later theories put forward by Robinson and Gallagher, who suggest that the type of imperialism that occurred in West Africa was economically driven by an imperialism of 'free trade'; with Britain wielding influence not simply with military force but also with money and occurred despite the determination of the imperial authorities to avoid extending their rule, thus gravitating towards continued expansion and culminating in formal imperialism. Although this occurred on the 'turbulent frontier', Britain did not expand her empire into the Asante territory until the twentieth century and even then it took two further serious confrontations to force Britain's hand. In consequence Lawson detracts from Cain and Hopkins alternative argument

⁸⁶ Colonisation and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies 1850-1960, Michael Havinden and David Meredith, (London, 1993), p. 76.

⁸⁷ Marching Over Africa: Letters from Victorian Soldiers, Frank Emery, (London, 1986), pp. 42-50.

⁸⁸ Among the 'ringers' who served with Wolseley were, major, afterwards Major-General Sir George Colley; lieutenant-colonel, afterwards Field-Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood, VC; captain, afterwards General the Right Hon. Sir Redvers Buller, VC; lieutenant-colonel, afterwards Sir John McNeil, VC; major, afterwards General Sir George Greaves; major, afterwards General Sir Baker Russell; major, afterwards General Sir Thomas Baker; lieutenant, afterwards Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice; and captain, afterwards General Sir Henry Brackenbury. The Drums of Kumasi: The Story of the Asante Wars, Alan Lloyd, (London, 1964), p. 66.

⁸⁹ Hansard, vol. 218, col. 1599, 4 May 1874.

that 'gentleman capitalists' successfully pressurised the British government for expansion.⁹⁰

THE ANNEXATION OF THE FIJI ISLANDS

The annexation of the Fiji Islands is a typical example of a process, which in the latter half of Victoria's reign forced the hands of the British Government; where adventurers of poor character created an impossible situation, leaving few available solutions. As early as 1855, Thakombau or Cakobau by name, the leading native chief, acting under the advice of Wesleyan missionaries, sought annexation from Queen Victoria. Although welcomed in both Australia and New Zealand,⁹¹ and strongly supported by the Manchester Cotton Supply Association,⁹² the British Government unreservedly rejected the approach.⁹³ As Professor McIntyre shows, the foundation of British policy in the South Pacific was dependent upon three closely related themes: Britain's response to a succession of changes within the Fiji Islands after the year 1855; her attempts to regulate the labour traffic; and a gradual realisation of international rivalry in the Pacific.⁹⁴ By 1870, the Fiji islands, formerly described as the 'Cannibal Islands', comprised a population of 150,000 aboriginal inhabitants, and 2,000 Europeans, mostly escaped convicts, sarcastically described by Lawson as: "the pious founders of the new Crown Colony."⁹⁵

⁹⁰ "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism 1850-1945", P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser., XL, 1, (1987), pp. 1-26.

⁹¹ At a conference in Melbourne in 1870, the representatives from each of the Australian colonies demanded a British protectorate over the archipelago, which they considered strategically important. They also feared control by a foreign power which they foresaw as "...prejudicial commercially" and "...might be dangerous in times of war." *Hansard*, vol. 221, col. 1371, 4 August 1874.

⁹² After 1850 the traditional sugar growing British and Australian planters, began to cultivate coffee and the cotton tree, an indigenous species, which should not to be confused with the American cotton plant. *England's Mission*, Eldridge, p. 148.

⁹³ *The British Overseas, Exploits of a Nation of Shopkeepers*, C. E. Carrington., (Cambridge, 1950), p. 788.

⁹⁴ *Imperial Frontiers in the Tropics*, McIntyre, p. 212.

⁹⁵ *Hansard*, vol. 221, col. 1297, 4 August 1874.

In 1871, Fiji became associated with native kidnapping in the Pacific.⁹⁶ Although Lawson was not affiliated to the various evangelical, humanitarian or philanthropic pressure groups, which combined with the commercial and colonial interests to lobby Parliament in favour of annexation, he would later associate with many of these Quakers, pacifists, teetotallers and non-conformists to agitate against a wide range of controversial issues. These societies were numerous and included the Anti-Slavery Society, the Anti-Opium Society, the Aborigines' Protection Society, the Wesleyan Missionary Society, and a host of other religious based institutions.⁹⁷

Although Gladstone had stated in 1870 that Britain should not add Fiji to "this overdone and over-burdened Government and Empire,"⁹⁸ he reneged somewhat three years later when he ordered Lord Kimberley to institute a new Commission of Inquiry. The commission was instructed to consider four options: one, the investiture of magisterial power to the British Consul; two, the recognition of the Government of Thakombau; three, the establishment of a Protectorate; and fourthly, the institution of a Crown Colony.⁹⁹ Unfortunately the Commissioners exceeded their brief, repudiated the first three options and without authority proclaimed the fourth.¹⁰⁰

In the meantime a Conservative Government came into office, and without parliamentary consultation, Lord Carnarvon incorporated Fiji into the British Empire.¹⁰¹ Disraeli was impressed, "Carnarvon seems very busy annexing provinces to the Empire," he told one confidant.¹⁰² On 10 October 1874, Great Britain embarked upon an empire in the central Pacific, which

⁹⁶ The practice of kidnapping Polynesians (blackbirding), mostly young males, to provide slave labour for the sugar and cotton plantations of Australia and the South Pacific Islands; and for collecting guano in Peru. Although legislation was passed in both Australia and Great Britain to curtail the trade it was largely ineffective, and the trade only ended over the nagging moral objections in the early years of the twentieth century. Although Britain, through the passage of the Pacific Islands Protectorate Act (1872), tried to regulate against the transportation of natives in British ships, Fiji lay outside her jurisdiction, which in turn led to fresh demands for annexation. *England's Mission*, Eldridge, pp. 148-56.

⁹⁷ Many pressure groups were formed in response to the murder of Dr J. C. Patterson, the Bishop of Melanesia, in reprisal for a 'blackbirding' raid on the Santa Cruz Islands. Many labour recruiters operated from bases in Fiji, from where they raided neighboring islands and kidnapped natives to cultivate cotton in Fiji. *Ibid*, pp. 148-56.

⁹⁸ Gladstone was primarily concerned with the cost of maintaining a military presence on the Islands, Gladstone to Kimberley, 26 February 1873. *Ibid*, p. 153.

⁹⁹ *Hansard*, vol. 221, col. 1293, 4 August 1874.

¹⁰⁰ *Imperial Frontiers in the Tropics*, McIntyre, pp. 327-336.

¹⁰¹ *Hansard*, vol. 226, col. 571, 5 August 1875.

¹⁰² *Imperial Frontiers in the Tropics*, McIntyre, p. 335.

eventually included the Cook Islands, the Gilbert and Ellis Islands, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Ocean Islands and hundreds of lesser known reefs, atolls and archipelagos. In return, Thakombau suitably garbed in his magnificence handed over his royal war club to Queen Victoria.¹⁰³ The formal Opposition raised few objections; indeed both Lord Kimberley and the Liberal imperialist and former Under Secretary for the Colonies, Edward Knatchbull-Huggessen considered their own approaches vindicated.¹⁰⁴

On 4 August 1874, the Conservative Member for Lambeth, and chief advocate of Fijian annexation, William McArthur, initiated a parliamentary debate, which effectively sealed the fate of the islands. Lawson disparagingly referred to McArthur as the patron saint of the Fiji Islands and the confederate of Her Majesty's Ministers,¹⁰⁵ Only nine members spoke, five in favour of annexation, two of whom were Liberals, and four against.¹⁰⁶ Those in favour looked primarily towards the advantages derived from such acquisitions in the way of increased trade, extended commerce, the development of resources, and the consolidation of Britain's Colonial Empire. Those opposed discussed the undesirability of supporting slavery; speculated over the cost to the British taxpayer; contemplated the possible implications from misunderstanding the interrelationships between the white settlers and the native tribes; the undesirability of increasing Britain's responsibilities; the complications surrounding the ownership of land; and the creation of incidents to promote future confrontations.

In his glorification of empire, McArthur congratulated the Government for yielding to the unanimous requests of the native population and the white settlers', and for directing the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Hercules Robinson to proceed to Fiji to conclude the annexation of the islands. He argued that:

No Minister in this country will do his duty who neglects any opportunity of re-constructing, as much as possible, our Colonial Empire and of

¹⁰³ Report of the annexation of Fiji. *Times*, 21 November 1874.

¹⁰⁴ *Imperial Frontiers in the Tropics*, McIntyre, p. 335.

¹⁰⁵ *Hansard*, vol. 221, col. 1296, 4 August 1874.

¹⁰⁶ The five speakers in favour of annexation were William McArthur, Baillie Cochrane, James Lowther, Edward Knatchbull-Huggessen and John Mundella. Those opposed were Dilke, Gladstone, Sir Francis Goldsmid and Lawson. *Ibid*, cols. 1264-1301.

responding to those distant sympathies which may become a source of incalculable strength and happiness to this land.¹⁰⁷

A second advocate, the Conservative Baillie Cochrane asked those favouring retrenchments, to consider the broader picture and to refrain from speculating over the possible expenditure. Sir Charles Dilke raised three primary objections. Firstly, he identified a debt; secondly the existence of domestic slavery; and thirdly, the need to subjugate and remove 20,000 'ferocious cannibal mountaineers'. He urged great caution, and drew attention to the reckless financial administration of the Fijian Government, which having squandered £124,000 in the preceding two-years, had accumulated an additional debt of £87,000,¹⁰⁸ secured with guarantees, backed by land they did not own. Dilke emphasised the Commissioner's acknowledgement that "the natives were already, in many cases the temporary slaves of English Planters, and habitually in the relation of domestic slaves to the Chiefs."¹⁰⁹ Gladstone saw, "...disagreeable and distorted phantoms stalking across the stage of the House before his eyes." He envisaged, "...new Votes in the Estimates, new Votes for future wars in Fiji, new Votes for future engagements, and a reproduction in aggravated forms of all we have had to lament in New Zealand."¹¹⁰ James Lowther, the colonial Under Secretary, devalued the prevailing (slave like) customs, describing them as: "local taxation paid in kind,"¹¹¹ and boasted that "Britain would never abandon her colonies or colonisation, for abandonment would result in national decay."¹¹² Edward Knatchbull-Hugessen, shared Lowther's enthusiasm for conquering new territory, and trusted that "...any Government comprised of British gentleman would act wisely and justly, on such occasions."¹¹³

Lawson, having read the Commissioner's report, was, in the words of the Spectator, "seldom more gravely entertaining then he was in his attack on

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, col. 1271.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, col. 1275.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, cols. 1274-79.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, col. 1287. Gladstone stopped his agitation when he discovered that his friend and former secretary, Sir Arthur Gordon, had accepted the governorship. Imperial Frontiers in the Tropics, McIntyre, p. 336.

¹¹¹ Hansard, vol. 221, col. 1288, 4 August 1874.

¹¹² Ibid, col. 1292.

¹¹³ Ibid, cols. 1292-95.

that occasion.”¹¹⁴ Lawson regretted that such a great question, had not appeared until the ‘fag end of the session’, when the members were

exhausted after correcting many harassed and worried classes, individuals and trades; moving legislation against enthusiastic Ritualists, plundering publicans, indiscreet Bishops, aggrieved Commissioners and bona fide drunkards.¹¹⁵

He reminded James Lowther that the question had nothing to do with the advisability of adopting a policy of abandonment, but of England sanctioning a policy of annexation. Having listened intently to the previous speakers, Lawson expressed amazement at his colleagues’ indifference to the needs of the indigenous population, whose culture and habits were apparently unknown. It was, he said, almost impossible for any two gentlemen to discuss the subject without diametrically contradicting one another. He amplified his concerns by identifying fifteen different pronunciations of the islands geographical name, whereas Disraeli called them the Fi-ji islands, he pronounced them Fee-gee.¹¹⁶ Whereas he praised the missionaries for converting 100,000 natives from pagans into Christians without the corrupting influence of alcohol, he criticised the European settlers who had begun to use rum to destroy the islanders’ primitive innocence.¹¹⁷

He drew a ludicrous caricature of the 20,000 remaining ‘pagan mountaineers’, whom humanitarians feared would descend from their mountainous retreat and consume the Methodists. He derided the Commissioners proposed solution of dispatching a company of the British army and a few teachers to coax them away from their former vices.

¹¹⁴ Spectator, 19 June 1875.

¹¹⁵ A reference to Disraeli’s, Public Worship Regulation Bill, and a bill to alter the laws relating to the Established Liquor Trade; both bills had taken up a significant portion of parliamentary time during that session. Lawson referred to the passing of the two bills as a ‘Spiritual and Spirituous session. Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 104.

¹¹⁶ Today this concern has lost its significance but at that time their orthography was less than explanatory B is pronounced MB, Q is pronounced NGG while C is pronounced TH. Many people failed to understand that Cakobau and Thakombau were one of the same King or that Beqa and Mbengga was the same island.

¹¹⁷ Hansard, vol. 226, col. 570, 5 August 1875.

First, we were to kill them and burn their villages, then to send in teachers, to preach the Gospel of Peace, probably on the understanding that the British army was one of the branches of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.¹¹⁸

Lawson criticised the composition of the Fijian Government, comprised of white settlers:

Worthless adventurers driven from other countries by their evil habits and other faults, have sought a refuge among these islands in numbers out of all proportion to the rest of the settlers, and by their example and influence too often lead their weaker minded neighbours in their footsteps.¹¹⁹

Modern historians have largely supported Lawson's derogatory terminology; Bernard Porter for example describes the European settlers as:

A rag-bag, cosmopolitan society of aliens, a rakish, under the counter, no questions asked society, a haven for the beachcomber with the forgotten past, the easy-profit trader, the 'blackbirder' supplying plantation labour by methods not very different from slaving.¹²⁰

Lawson warned his colleagues that unless they reversed their forward policy their actions would overshadow their Gold Coast experiences, where notwithstanding economic warnings the Government's expansionist programme had cost the Exchequer over £1,000,000.

He shuddered when he heard of an adventurer or a geographer going hunting about the world and discovering a fresh island in some

¹¹⁸ Ibid, vol. 221, col. 1297, 4 August 1874.

¹¹⁹ Lawson was paraphrasing a statement made by a junior member of the Admiralty, Sir James Elphinstone. Ibid.

¹²⁰ The Lion's Share, A Short History of British Imperialism, (Third Edition), Bernard Porter, (London, 1996), p. 64.

barbarous sea, for that meant, sooner or later, the establishment of a Crown Colony, with the imposition of fresh taxes.¹²¹

He claimed that the British Government was confusing philanthropy with business, as they did in New Zealand, where misinterpretations of local customs led to an expensive war. Lawson drew attention to past irregularities, relating to land transactions convened between white purchasers and native vendors. He decried the actions of one American Consul who drew up his own land title deeds and officially registered them with himself, and criticised another white settler who bought 200,000 acres of land at an unrealistically low price. Lawson emphasised the difficulty of understanding the inextricably confusing systems of land ownership, where no single proprietor could substantiate his claim, where different sets of natives simultaneously held the rights to the same soil, and where the rights of families intermingled with the rights of chiefs. Lowther, he said, had let the cat out of the bag when he predicted that land values would quadruple after they established English sovereignty. Lawson's solution was simple, Britain he said, should "Commission a fleet of ships to transport the 2,000 sufferers from '*delirium tremens*', and leave the Methodists and the cannibals to fight it out." The European settlers, he insisted, had "merely succeeded in introducing the principle of selectivity into Fijian eating habits." "The cannibals," he said, "only ate their enemies now."¹²²

Lawson warned those seeking to spread British civilisation overseas that the traditional methods normally resulted in native extermination.¹²³ He drew attention to Britain's overcrowded gaols and her multitude of paupers, which he urged the Government address before annexing colonies. He reminded the House of the source of military funding: "We raise £30,000,000 by encouraging people to drink, and then spend a similar amount on

¹²¹ The Commissioner's also suggested that the British Government 'buy over the chiefs' and elevate them into colonial officers, in the pay of the British Government.

¹²² Hansard, vol. 221, cols 1295-9, 4 August 1874.

¹²³ To emphasise his point Lawson related a witty story: "He had heard lately of a tribe of North American Indians. It was once a noble tribe, but was now almost extinct, for nothing remained but one old chief, two worn out horses, and three gallons of whiskey; and as when last seen the chief was engaged in drinking the whiskey, it was believed that shortly nothing would be left." *Ibid.*

weapons, men and war. Our Gods are Bacchus and Mars, the God of bottles and the God of battles.”¹²⁴

After the annexation Lawson continued to monitor the administrative expenditure. On 5 August 1875, he registered his opposition to a parliamentary grant of £40,000 required to improve the islands infrastructure,¹²⁵ drawing attention to the sentiments expressed in Disraeli’s Mansion House speech, which urged England to “assimilate not only her interests but her sympathies to the Mother Country;” which in return would “prove ultimately a source, not of weakness and embarrassment but of strength and splendour to the Empire.”¹²⁶ Lawson advocated retrenchment. Britain he said, had inherited a considerable debt, which would have otherwise gone unpaid; she had pensioned off the King, given the natives the measles and received in return, a war club.¹²⁷ Having begun a connection with the islands of the Pacific, he feared there would be no limit to the extension of our Empire in that quarter of the globe that, “whenever two or three hundred unmitigating ruffians settled down, Britain would after a period of time finance an expansive administration.”¹²⁸ He questioned the value of the war club, and suggested they negate the grant. During the debate, Dr Kennealy, applauded Lawson’s initiative, “having engaged in a crusade of the most glorious and honourable description, he (Lawson) would add to his universal respect if he adopted in his programme of reforms, a resolution against the system of taking possession of islands like Fiji.”¹²⁹

SOUTH AFRICA: ZULUS, BONAPARTES & BOERS

Before the 1870s Britain had no conscious, active or positive desire to become embroiled in a colonial empire in Africa, except perhaps in South Africa, where from the end of the Napoleonic wars, Britain recognised the

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid, vol. 226, col. 571, 5 August 1875.

¹²⁶ Ibid, col. 570.

¹²⁷ Shortly after annexation, an epidemic of measles caused the death of many of the natives.

Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid, col. 572.

strategic importance of the Cape, whose port was paramount to the security of India and the trading routes to Asia. Initially, Britain's ambitions were limited to Cape Colony, the coastal enclaves, and an ill-defined trusteeship for natives and other groups residing within the frontier settlements. After 1870, imperial economy and economic imperialism gave way to a forward policy, abandoning the Palmerstonian doctrine of informal empire,¹³⁰ and imposing an authority over the independent Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, and suppressing the Bantu military power of the Sotho, Zulu and Matabele. Lawson would attribute the violence that followed to both the assertive policies of the Conservative Government, and the Liberal Cabinet's reluctance to rectify a situation aggravated by the insubordination of local representatives.

In 1874, Lord Carnarvon, became Colonial Secretary, having gained a reputation for steering the British North American Act (1867) through Parliament, enabling Canada to become a self-governing confederation under the Crown. He now tried to re-establish the precedent by amalgamating the scattered colonies and related homelands of Southern Africa, thus expanding the Empire by pushing back the frontiers 1,000 miles northwards to the Zambesi. It was a radical decision, unlike Canada, where the British outnumbered the French by two to one, in South Africa, the blacks greatly outnumbered the whites, while two thirds of the white population were Boers. It was also a very complex confederation: South Africa offered the cultural problems of Canada, the race problems of New Zealand, the economic problems of Australia, and the political explosive problems of administering Ireland.¹³¹

In August 1876, Jan Hendrik Brand, the president of the Orange Free State, and John Molteno, the Cape Prime Minister, attended a conference in London where Carnarvon strove to win support from a gathering that had neither power nor desire to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.¹³² Carnarvon was endeavouring to promote a situation whereby Britain could honourably withdraw from a land in which co-operation and a common understanding

¹³⁰ The Scramble for Southern Africa, 1877-1895: The Politics of Partition Reappraised, D. M. Schreuder, (Cambridge, 1980), p. 80.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹³² Imperial Factor in South Africa, D. E. Kiewiet, (Cambridge, 1937), p. 90.

between the various communities would replace the confusion of the ambitions of the separate conflicting states.¹³³ Although he recognised that the consent of the republics, rather than their coercion was the appropriate way to achieve federation, his determination to create an orderly political and economic arrangement in South Africa brought about the annexation of the Transvaal. Moreover the federation proposals, involving native suppression and Boer annexation, marked the beginning not of peace but of turmoil. In retrospect the failure of Carnarvon's policy was not a failure of confederation but a failure to win for the natives a higher and better place in the future of the land they occupied.¹³⁴

The Zulu War

In parallel to the wars in Afghanistan, Disraeli's Government became embroiled in an unnecessary war against the Zulu. Ever since the Great Trek of the Afrikaner Boers out of the Cape, British policy had wavered between ignoring and securing the hinterland. After the diamond finds at Kimberley in 1871,¹³⁵ the pendulum swung towards the latter argument, and the emphasis fell on the two independent Boer republics whose territory had rapidly expanded at the expense of indigenous tribes.¹³⁶ By 1876, the problem of black versus white approached a crisis in Zululand,¹³⁷ whose King, Cetshwayo, maintained a disciplined army of 40,000 celibate athlete warriors. The Bantu military monarchy had expanded during the previous fifty-year under his grandfather's (Shaka's) policy of incessant tribal aggression. The whites recognised that an independent Zululand not only threatened their struggling

¹³³ Ibid, p. 27.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

¹³⁵ After the diamond finds, Britain annexed Griqualand West on behalf of the Cape, thus preventing the diamond fields falling under the influence of either of the Boer republics, a move which, preserved the Cape's preponderance over the republics and made responsible government financially feasible. *Africa and the Victorians*, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 57.

¹³⁶ The Orange Free State and the Transvaal had received their independence by the Bloemfontein Convention of 1854 and the Sand River Convention of 1852, on condition that they would repudiate slavery. For a summarised version of these Treaties, see a speech by Peter Rylands, on the subject of the Annexation of the Transvaal. *Hansard*, vol. 257, cols. 1110-1111, 21 January 1881.

¹³⁷ The heartland of the Zulu kingdom ran parallel to the eastern seaboard, north of the British colony of Natal.

colonies but also inspired the natives living under their rule. The two most threatened republics were Natal and the Transvaal, and whereas the former was unquestionably British, the latter, a territory the size of France, was a fundamentalist state with ill-defined frontiers, a rudimentary administration, with a white population numbering about 40,000 Calvinists of Dutch descent, violently opposed to British rule.¹³⁸

In the meantime, the encroachment of individual farms on native lands led to frequent fighting. In September 1876, Carnarvon instructed Sir Theophilus Shepstone to confer with Thomas Burgers, the president of the Transvaal, to discuss confederation, and to arrange the terms of annexation. In Pretoria, Shepstone found the administration in a desperate state with neither the power nor the resources to maintain their independence. On 12 April 1877, fully aware that the vast majority of his people opposed annexation,¹³⁹ Burger's reluctantly agreed to Shepstone's request. Back in London notwithstanding strong criticism,¹⁴⁰ the British Government transferred £100,000 into the Transvaal Exchequer.¹⁴¹

Two weeks before Shepstone announced the annexation, Carnarvon appointed Sir Bartle Frere, to the post of High Commissioner to the Cape. When he arrived, Frere held the trust of the Imperial Government and the contempt of the colonists; a situation that would reverse before his departure. Frere's experiences in India had taught him that while there remained independent African societies strong enough to oppose white settlements they could not progress towards a white federal dominion.¹⁴² Frere resolved to crush the power of the native and in a misguided attempt to intervene in a land dispute between neighbouring natives he drifted into the last in a long

¹³⁸ Heavens Command, Morris, p. 426.

¹³⁹ Burgers acted without the actual assent of the nominal Government or of the Boer Parliament. Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1112, 21 January 1881.

¹⁴⁰ On 26 November 1879 at the Forsters Hall, Dalkeith, Gladstone said: "...the Government had acted unwisely if not insanely when placing ourselves in the strange predicament of the free subjects of a monarchy, going to coerce the free subjects of a republic." Heavens Command, Morris, p. 428.

¹⁴¹ The grant endowed to the Transvaal of £100,000 was neither meagre nor munificent, for the debt was close to £300,000 and the immediate revenue was far from certain. Before the annexation was revoked four years later the Boers received further sums totalling £140,000. Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1135, 21 January 1881.

¹⁴² Scramble for Southern Africa, Schreuder, p. 71.

series of Kaffir wars.¹⁴³ When Molteno, the Cape Prime Minister opposed Frere's policy, he was replaced with an untried yes-man, Gordon Sprigg.¹⁴⁴

In 1878, Frere resolved a long-standing boundary dispute between the Zulu and a group of Transvaal Boers. Although the three English arbiters unanimously ruled in favour of Cetywayo,¹⁴⁵ Frere attached conditions to the award that he knew the Zulus could never accept; prominent among them was an ultimatum giving Cetywayo thirty days to disband his army.¹⁴⁶ By this action, Frere committed Britain to a serious war, without leave, and contrary to Government knowledge or instruction. Frere promoted the war in the belief that the Zulu army, armed with inferior weapons would quickly succumb to British imperial might. Although infuriated, Disraeli accepted advice from the Queen and his colonial secretary Sir Michael Hicks Beach and steadfastly defended the High Commissioner.

When the ultimatum expired on 12 January 1879, Lord Chelmsford marched 16,000 troops into Zululand, and ten days later, came the disaster at Isandhlwana. On the following day, Britain regained a measure of pride at Rorke's Drift, after a small detachment inflicted heavy losses on a large force of Zulu warriors.¹⁴⁷ The news of the catastrophe reached London on 11 February and while Disraeli took to his bed the Cabinet sent sufficient forces to wage a serious campaign.¹⁴⁸ In June, the Cabinet dispatched Wolseley,

¹⁴³ The Galeka and the Fingos represented the opposing poles of frontier policy, the former were the favourites of the Government, praised for their prosperity and industry, while the latter were despised for their indolence. After failing to convince the Galeka chief into submitting to Cape authority, Frere declared the chief deposed and sent troops to do battle with the Galekas, a conflict which eventually united all of the tribes of the Transkei. Scramble for Africa: The Great Trek to the Boer War, Anthony Nutting, (London, 1970), pp. 93-94.

¹⁴⁴ Frere's dismissal of the ministry, although technically correct and later endorsed by the remaining members of the Cape Parliament was an act almost unique in the constitutional history of the British Empire. *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ The evidence shows that the "so-called 'disputed territory' had never been occupied by the Boers, but had always been inhabited by the border clans, who had never moved their Kraals, and that the only use ever made of the land by the Boers had been for grazing purposes, which in itself proved nothing." Imperial Factor in South Africa, Kiewiet, p. 225.

¹⁴⁶ Given the centrality of the army to Zulu society, the requirement was tantamount to demanding that the Zulu abandon their culture. Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, Vandervort, p. 105.

¹⁴⁷ Notwithstanding this victory, Chelmsford had to beat a perilous retreat and four calendar months elapsed before he returned to bury the bones of his dead. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁴⁸ The defeat at Isandhlwana caused a public outcry with inordinate demands for the recall of both Frere and Chelmsford. Although ill served by both men on the spot, Beaconsfield, who privately favoured Frere's impeachment, neither backed his men nor sacked them. Instead of supporting the perpetrators to the full, and allowing them the opportunity to redeem their past blunders, or bowing to the storm of anti opinion and agreeing to their removal, he heeded the

with the rank of Commander in Chief and High Commissioner to Natal.¹⁴⁹ However, he arrived too late to witness Chelmsford's destruction of the Zulu army, and after capturing Cetwywayo he fragmented the vanquished kingdom into thirteen chieftaincies, under British suzerainty.¹⁵⁰

At first Lawson mistakenly identified the war as one more example of Disraeli's forward policy and of wanton aggression against the native. He was wrong on both accounts. The Zulu did pose a permanent military threat to regional white settlement; while Frere was a provocative opportunist who acted without prime-ministerial approval.¹⁵¹ Far too often officials in Whitehall could do no more than condone actions already taken, the men on the turbulent frontier proved a constant headache, and a kind of sub imperialism often developed which the authorities found difficult to suppress.¹⁵² If Britain had fought the war to gain the gratitude of the Transvaal Boers it had an adverse effect: with Cetwywayo defeated, the Boers had no further need of British protection. Had Britain offered the Boer a constitution, similar to that awarded to the Cape Colony, they may have avoided a successful revolt and subsequent humiliation.¹⁵³

Lawson held a simplistic approach to wars in general, his argument was that when desired any pretext was sufficient, but when not desired no amount of provocation was enough.¹⁵⁴ Whereas he sympathised with those Conservatives who disclaimed responsibility for the war his argument was: "If not responsible for its commencement, they were certainly responsible for every moment it continued."¹⁵⁵ Lawson considered the Zulu war unique when compared to other wars involving Britain. His argument was that past authorities had excused their actions by declaring the war in question 'just and

remonstrations of the Queen and Sir Michael Hicks Beech and persuaded the Cabinet to continue with Frere's commission. To make matters worse, the Cabinet compiled a double-faced document, later published, which not only reprimanded the administrator but also suggested that they (the Cabinet) had, "no desire to withdraw in present crisis of affairs the confidence hitherto reposed in you." Disraeli, Blake, pp. 671-2.

¹⁴⁹ Wolseley's instructions were clear, he was to make peace with the Zulus, and safeguard British territories; no annexation was planned. Sir Garnet Wolseley, Kochanski, p. 98.

¹⁵⁰ In the settlement lay the seeds of the next phase of disturbances; a movement towards anarchy; a Zulu civil war, and the inevitable and eventual Boers invasion Scramble for Southern Africa, Schreuder, p. 77.

¹⁵¹ Disraeli, Blake, pp. 667-73.

¹⁵² England's Mission, Eldridge, p. 18.

¹⁵³ Imperial Factor in South Africa, Kiewiet, pp. 122-124.

¹⁵⁴ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 142.

¹⁵⁵ West Cumberland Times, 10 July 1879.

necessary', a means of supporting some noble purpose, or in defence of British interests; whereas on this occasion a significant number of Government supporters agreed with the accusations made by their opponents.¹⁵⁶ When the Government released dispatches condemning the act of Sir Bartle Frere in causing the war, Lawson considered his remarks justified.¹⁵⁷

Lawson considered many of the justifications given by military supporters, as preposterous, unreasonable and hypocritical. Some, like Hicks Beach advocated the disbandment of Cetywayo's army because: "...they could not expect a savage despot to be restrained by those feelings by which rulers nearer home who maintained large armies are influenced."¹⁵⁸ Frere was adamant that the Zulu system would create future quarrels with England, and insisted that war was both a precaution against attack and a means of saving the Zulu people from their tyrannical leaders,¹⁵⁹ a view endorsed by Sir Theophilus Shepstone, who long sought to release the Zulu from the pure military despotism of Cetywayo.¹⁶⁰ Another reason given was that Cetywayo kept a large standing army, whose members could not marry until they attained the age of forty. Lawson reminded his colleagues:

England also worshipped a standing army, and spent night after night discussing it in all its details and in providing for its perfection. They had two-hundred Members in the House with connections to the army, who proved by their conduct that the country was made for the army, and not the army for the country.¹⁶¹

Lawson criticised those who applauded the 'Christian slaughter of savages' with tremendous cheering,¹⁶² emphasising the inconsistencies in British

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 10 May 1879.

¹⁵⁷ Lawson was referring to a published dispatch from the Cabinet to Frere, sharply reprimanding his actions. Disraeli, Blake, pp. 669-72.

¹⁵⁸ Hansard, vol. 244, cols 1916-39, 27 March 1879. Shepstone held similar views, declaring that Cetywayo was after all a savage, who they could not expect to yield, as might a civilised ruler, to diplomatic suasion. Imperial Factor in South Africa, Kiewiet, p. 215.

¹⁵⁹ Hansard, vol. 244, cols. 1906-1915, 27 March 1879.

¹⁶⁰ Scramble for Southern Africa, Schreuder, pp. 74-75.

¹⁶¹ Hansard, vol. 249, col. 152, 4 August 1879.

¹⁶² Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 145.

policy. "How" he asked, "could a nation who held freedom and liberty in such high esteem who sympathised with Poles and Hungarians in their struggle for emancipation applaud an army which crushed the liberties of a native race?"¹⁶³ He compared the iniquities committed in Zululand with those perpetrated in Bulgaria and questioned why European citizens did not "hold meetings and make speeches in the name of humanity, against British atrocities in South Africa."¹⁶⁴ He even suggested that the events undertaken in Zululand were more lamentable than those perpetrated in Eastern Europe. His argument was that whereas in Europe one could find an albeit unjustifiable pretext, in the form of an intended rebellion, there was no such precedence to justify the iniquities perpetrated in Zululand.¹⁶⁵

The Government's reluctance to release official statements of information was a common thread that ran through the diplomatic and political procedures of warfare, leaving those with an interest two alternative source of information. Firstly, the official dispatches when eventually released in the form of Blue Books, or secondly to seek official confirmation of events depicted in national newspapers. Although inherently biased most newspaper editors' did have access to correspondents on the spot, whose reports increased public awareness relating to the conduct of war. In his search for 'truth and justice', Lawson adopted Parnell's obstructionist tactics to generate parliamentary questions relating to the conduct of the war, hoping to use ministerial responses to open up the debate and hence thwart British Imperialism.

On 27 May 1879, Lawson asked the Secretary of State for War (Colonel Stanley), to publish the number of Britain's war casualties, in the hope that when released the high number of fatalities from disease (86) and battle (1,186) would horrify the public and stimulate agitation.¹⁶⁶ On 13 June, Lawson pressed the colonial secretary (Sir Michael Hicks Beach), to release transcripts relating to the overtures for peace made by Cetuywayo.¹⁶⁷ In the

¹⁶³ Hansard, vol. 249, col. 153, 4 August 1879.

¹⁶⁴ European indifference should not have surprised Lawson. At the time of the Bulgarian atrocities the vast majority of Europeans failed to support the agitation. Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876, R. T. Shannon, (London, 1963), p. 26.

¹⁶⁵ West Cumberland Times, 10 May 1879.

¹⁶⁶ Hansard, vol. 246, col. 1352, 27 May 1879.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, col. 1810, 13 June 1879.

same speech he also drew attention to a newspaper article, portraying British soldiers burning Kraals and driving natives onto the plains where vast numbers later perished. Lawson converted the editor's image of a 'glorious war', into a horrendous nightmare, where Britain was engaged in an indefensible invasion.¹⁶⁸ "You have read," he informed a Cockermouth audience:

How the Zulus came down and slaughtered the men who had invaded their country. The editors called the battle of Isandhlwana a massacre, but supposing those poor Zulus had been Poles or Hungarians, or Swiss, or even Turks fighting against Russia, why they would have praised the defenders calling them patriots and heroes, and describing the gallant way in which they sacrificed their lives.¹⁶⁹

Although he applauded the gallantry of the native defenders, he also sympathised with the consequential British losses.

At this moment, since the battle of Isandhlwana, there are the graves of many a true-hearted Englishman. Their bones are whitening the plains beneath an African sun. Think of what all that means. Each one of them was the centre of some bright hope and warm affection, and each one of them has left behind him in England some broken heart, some blighted life, some home in which the sun of happiness has gone down for ever. I want to know whether you people of England wish those horrible monstrosities and those monstrous horrors to be continued one day longer.¹⁷⁰

The Blue Books were often hurriedly compiled and edited to shield Britain and discredit her enemies; and although factual the contents were often contentious and open to interpretation. Lawson saw in this scripted chaos a pre-determination on Frere's part to force a war and destroy the Zulu

¹⁶⁸ West Cumberland Times, 6 December 1879.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 19 April 1879.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*. This type of rhetoric was similar to some of Gladstone's oratory during his Midlothian campaign.

nation. In his dispatches, Frere painted each native act of violence in the blackest colours, while the cruellest actions of the settlers went almost unnoticed. In one dispatch, Frere described Cetywayo's army as "...celibate man destroying gladiators" who "...washed their spears in the blood of their victims." Although Lawson acknowledged the correctness of the accusation, he saw Frere painting a sinister picture, using phrases, which could equally describe Britain's standing army.¹⁷¹

Prince Louis Napoleon

One surprising casualty of the Zulu war was Prince Louis Napoleon,¹⁷² the exiled pretender to the French throne; who after graduating from the military academy at Woolwich, volunteered amidst a flourish of trumpets from French Imperialists to join the expeditionary force, on the understanding that the experience could one day help him recapture his father's throne.¹⁷³ On 1 June 1879, he contrived his inclusion on a reconnaissance patrol and was hacked to death by a band of Zulus.¹⁷⁴ The incident caused great excitement throughout Britain and a further slump in Government prestige.¹⁷⁵ The catastrophe became the biggest story of the year and exceeded the coverage of both the defeat at Isandhwana and the glorious defence of Rorke's Drift.¹⁷⁶ A point noted by Lawson, who accused newspaper editors of: "venerating the Prince's life and death and of embroidering his fate with ridiculous

¹⁷¹ Hansard, vol. 249, cols. 1657-1662, 25 March 1879.

¹⁷² The young Bonaparte, an amiable character of high spirit and a purveyor of practical jokes, captured the nation's hearts, after fleeing to England with his mother, the Empress Eugenie. Ibid, cols. 531-536, 8 August 1880.

¹⁷³ After an initial rejection, the Duke of Cambridge in collaboration with the Queen and the Empress arranged the matter above the head of the prime minister. Disraeli, fearful of offending France, by appearing to consent to the Prince's wishes, disapproved, but allowed him to go, on the understanding that he remained an observer. Disraeli, Blake, p. 670.

¹⁷⁴ For a full biography, see The Washing of the Spears, Donald R. Morris, (London, 1976), pp. 510-544. Also The War Correspondent: The Anglo Zulu War, Professor John Laband and Ian Knight, (London, 1996), pp. 118-128. Also Brave Men's Blood: The Epic of the Zulu War, Ian Knight, (London, 1990), pp. 154-164.

¹⁷⁵ The news reached Balmoral Castle where the Queen was preparing to celebrate the forty-second anniversary of her accession to the throne. Victoria held a fondness for foreign exiles and with her daughter Beatrice and four royal Dukes at her side she led a procession of 40,000 mourners through the rain-soaked streets of Chislehurst, Kent, when the prince was laid to rest beside his father. Washing of the Spears, Morris, p. 538.

¹⁷⁶ Queen Victoria's Little Wars, Byron Farwell, (London, 1999), p. 239.

exaggerated language, recalling to English minds the beautiful existence of a Philip Sidney or a Falkland.”¹⁷⁷ Shortly afterwards, some ill-advised personage in the realm, proposed they commemorate his memory by erecting a monument in Westminster Abbey, sarcastically described by Lawson as “that great temple of silence and reconciliation, the place reserved for the nation’s mighty dead.”¹⁷⁸ Both Disraeli and Arthur Stanley, the Dean of Westminster immediately agreed, subject to the monarch’s approval.

Lawson’s primary objection was that any national memorial would confer credibility on what he, and an increasing number of the public, considered an unjust war. His argument was that since the prince was not a combatant and had lost his life under conditions outside the rules of war, any such memorial would constitute a national endorsement of unauthorised war. He also maintained that the apparent recognition of foreign dynastic claims, which such a memorial would involve, would be highly objectionable to republican France.¹⁷⁹ In Lawson’s opinion, the prince had thrown away his life in a needless quarrel, which brought no honour, and for a motive, which was neither magnanimous nor exalted. Unable to arouse a parliamentary debate,¹⁸⁰ Lawson agitated outside Parliament, where he repeatedly stated “that since the Prince had rendered no great or glorious service to England, he had fewer claims to a memorial than either of the two troopers slain by his side, or the 10,000 Zulu warriors slain in the undertaking.”¹⁸¹ In Lawson’s view, the Prince, by continually challenging the existence of a friendly French republican Government had contravened the terms of his asylum. Lawson questioned if the son of one of Europe’s greatest criminals, whose aim was to instil among the French a love of military life, and to deprive them of their constitutional liberties was entitled to a niche in Westminster Abbey.¹⁸² He maligned the Bonaparte family, emphasising, “the first was the scourge of the

¹⁷⁷ Hansard, vol. 249, col. 533, 8 August 1880.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. Also Times, 24 June 1879.

¹⁷⁹ Times, 3 March 1879. Ibid., 16 July 1880.

¹⁸⁰ The news of the prince’s death was received with much sadness at the meeting of the Cobden Club, where the Chairman remarked that: “All we can say is that while the memory of those who have fallen at Isandhlwana and Rorke’s Drift will always be dear to the people of England, the memory of Prince Louis Napoleon will live long with everything that is most noble and gallant in connection with our best soldiers.” Ibid., 23 June 1879.

¹⁸¹ Lawson, Luke, p. 112.

¹⁸² Times, 16 July 1880.

world; the second died before he could commit the crimes of others of his race, and the third, was born and bred a corrupter.”¹⁸³ Lawson spoke of the prince “assisting English savages in an unjust South African war for the purpose of preparing himself for a descent upon France to uproot the young republic.”¹⁸⁴

In August 1879, Stanley wrote to a national newspaper,¹⁸⁵ claiming that since he was a servant of the state, he had every right should the Crown, Parliament, and the people not intervene to act in accordance with his trust.¹⁸⁶ When Lawson reintroduced the argument into the Commons; he made it clear, he did not object to the friends of the prince collecting subscriptions to erect a monument at Woolwich, or any suitable location in the Queen’s dominion but based his objection upon the erection of a memorial in Westminster Abbey, a national building, which in the eyes of the world ordained the beholder with a national character. His well-timed interruption encouraged a lively debate. Edward Jenkins, the radical republican member for Dundee, questioned the right of the Dean to, “...bury whom he liked in the Abbey.”¹⁸⁷ The Morpeth miner’s representative, Thomas Burt,¹⁸⁸ would have favoured the proposal had the Prince been a Garibaldi striving to emancipate an oppressed nation, but he would not condone an oppressor who oppressed those already suppressed.¹⁸⁹ For once Lawson’s humour was upstaged when

¹⁸³ This phrase was a reference taken from an unnamed contemporary biography on Prince Albert. Lawson would use this again when recalling the Crimean war at the height of the Egyptian crisis. West Cumberland Times, 12 September 1882. Also Hansard, vol. 249, col. 534, 8 August 1879.

¹⁸⁴ Times, 16 July 1880.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ During a debate to adopt the ‘Report of Supply’, Lawson chose a most extraordinary method of airing his views, and upon rising was interrupted by Henry Drummond Wolff, who using the ‘Forms of the House’ questioned the validity of the motion. The Speaker concurred but agreed to allow Lawson to proceed under the guise of an observation. Lawson had adopted that method because as he later explained, he had served ‘Notice of a Motion’, because he could find no other legitimate method of bringing the matter to the attention of the House. Hansard, vol. 249, col. 531, 8 August 1879.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., col. 537.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Burt (1837-1922), received little formal education, but became an avid reader during his late teenage years; began work underground at the age of ten, first as a trapper and then as a pony driver; became a hewer at various collieries in Northumberland; became involved in trade unionism from the age of about sixteen; entered Parliament as Liberal MP for Morpeth (1873) retaining the seat for forty-four years; supported issues such as Irish home rule, household suffrage, the reform of trade union law, and the disestablishment of the Church of England. Burt became one of Lawson’s closest allies. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 9, pp. 7-8.

¹⁸⁹ Hansard, vol. 249, col. 544, 8 August 1879.

an Irish Home-Ruler named Finnegan, declared, that if the House was intent upon turning Westminster Abbey into a second Madame Tussaud's, they would not find him an obstacle.¹⁹⁰

The General Election overtook the agitation, where thousands of people signed petitions against the commemorative scheme. In July 1880, on the eve of a parliamentary debate, Lawson chaired a crowded public meeting in St James Hall, where he declared, that although he raised no objection to the commemoration of those who strove to leave the world a better and wiser place than when they joined it, their purpose that evening, was "...to preserve one of Britain's most noble national buildings for the sole commemoration of a national, or if they preferred international character and nothing else."¹⁹¹ Lawson declared his sympathy, "not for the prince but the 10,000 warriors, slain in one of Britain's more wicked wars." In response to the Dean's plea that Westminster Abbey "...had a heart as well as a head," Lawson declared, "English people also have a heart as well as a head in small matters as well as in great; and though their hearts might be dazzled at times by the guilty glare of military glory, their hearts beat on the side of humanity, peace and freedom."¹⁹²

Lawson never courted public limelight when others more competent accepted the leading role. As public opinion swung in his favour he relaxed, and contributed little towards the subsequent parliamentary debate. Although the Cabinet acquiesced out of deference to the Queen, the Liberal rank and file failed to carry that deference into the Division. Gladstone, Hartington and Northcote voted in a largely Conservative lobby with only eight other Liberals.¹⁹³ In private Gladstone's opinions were not so strong. His diaries that day record, a 'weary day', and then add "our defeat on the Monument issue was on the whole a public good."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, col. 539.

¹⁹¹ Lawson, Luke, p. 113.

¹⁹² Times, 16 July 1880.

¹⁹³ Gladstone, Roy Jenkins, (London, 1995), p. 447.

¹⁹⁴ The Gladstone Diaries, Vol. IX, Edited by H.C.G. Matthew.

SECTION 2

LAWSON'S APPROACH TO THE EASTERN QUESTION

Introduction

The Treaty of Paris (1856), which ended the Crimean war should have resolved the long standing Eastern Question. However, around 1870, three international events began to impact upon the region: Russia announced she no longer felt bound by the Black Sea Clauses; Turkey ignored her promised reforms and continued to persecute her Balkan citizens; and the Sultan under pressure from Russia allowed the Bulgars to have a religious head of their own, as an alternative to the Greek patriarch at Constantinople.¹⁹⁵ Through this latter action, they stimulated a sense of nationalism, which led, in 1875, to a further escalating crisis.¹⁹⁶ The Turkish Empire, described by Lawson as "...a festering mass of cruelty and corruption,"¹⁹⁷ included most of the Balkan peninsula, and her Christian population comprised Greeks, Serbs, Rumanian's and Bulgars, all loosely connected by their common detestation of Ottoman rule. During that summer the Serb peasants of Herzegovina and Bosnia, aided by volunteer Serbs from the autonomous principality of Montenegro, rose in rebellion against unfair taxes, and within weeks, the uprising spread throughout Bosnia.¹⁹⁸

In response, the three Eastern Powers, Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia conferred in Vienna.¹⁹⁹ Britain was not invited but her pro Turkish Ambassador, Sir Henry Elliot, formulated an independent parallel policy. In the interim Disraeli announced that Britain's interest in the Eastern Question

¹⁹⁵ England, 1870-1914, Robert Ensor, (London, 1992), pp. 40-41.

¹⁹⁶ Gladstone 1874-1898, H. C. G. Matthew, (London, 1995), p. 25.

¹⁹⁷ West Cumberland Times, 20 March 1880.

¹⁹⁸ Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, Shannon, p. 22.

¹⁹⁹ Bismarck's plan for stability in Eastern Europe hinged upon the isolation of France and the alignment of Russia and Austria-Hungary with Germany. In 1895, this strategy was jeopardised by the events that unfolded within the Ottoman Empire.

“were not less important than the three Eastern Powers.”²⁰⁰ In early December, the Sultan sanctioned a series of reforms demanded by the insurgents; these included, security of property and persons, religious freedom, fair taxation, and limited autonomy. On 30 December 1875, Count Andrassy, the Austrian Foreign Minister, issued, on behalf of the Eastern Powers a Note, reminding the Sultan of his unfulfilled promises, and expressing a fear that Bulgaria would rise in the spring.²⁰¹ Lawson, a fierce critic of the Crimean war, feared a repeat; he believed the only outcome of that war was to “keep an old swindler on his legs for a further twenty years,” and regretted that “England, had supposedly agreed with the other Powers to interfere with the Christian provinces of Turkey, a fixation most diametrically opposed to the conduct of the Turkish treaty.”²⁰²

On 6 May 1876, a Muslim mob murdered the German and French consuls at Salonica. In response the three Eastern Powers issued the ‘Berlin Memorandum’, proposing that the Porte, the name commonly given to the Turkish Government, conclude an armistice with the rebels and inaugurate the promised reforms. Although agreed to by the three Emperors and assented to by France and Italy, the Memorandum achieved little, primarily because the chaos in the Turkish Government made it unworkable, and because Disraeli rejected it with “...curtness and disrespect,”²⁰³ leaving the British Government isolated from the rest of Europe. Disraeli despised Balkan nationalism and had little sympathy with their struggle for independence, and fearing Russian intrigue he took the orthodox Palmerston path and supported Turkey.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Times, 10 November 1875. The marginalisation of Britain was unacceptable to Disraeli for it raised the possibility that Russia and Austria would be unable to resist the opportunity to partition the Ottoman Empire. “Disraeli and England”, Parry, p. 721.

²⁰¹ The ‘Andrassy Note’ was dated Buda-Pest, 30 December 1875, it was communicated to Lord Derby on 3 January 1876, and appeared in the English newspapers two days later. Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield 1875-1880, George Carslake Thompson, Vol. 1, (London, 1886), pp. 256-57.

²⁰² West Cumberland Times, 19 January 1876.

²⁰³ Hansard, vol. 237, col. 1252, 7 February 1878. Also Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question, A Study in Diplomacy and Party Politics, R. W. Seton-Watson, (London, 1971), pp. 32-35.

²⁰⁴ According to Palmerston’s criteria, Britain would best serve her interests by fulfilling certain objectives. The first required the containment of Russia, the dual threat to European peace and Britain’s hold over India. Palmerston achieved this by bolstering up two fading autocracies, Austria and Turkey. Austria was also an important consideration for those who sought to maintain a ‘balance of power’ in Europe, dependant upon the curtailment of the ambitions of large and strong states, bolstered by small and weak ones, thus preventing their absorption. Although Palmerston had no ambition to expand Britain’s empire by acquiring

On 24 May, although condemned by both France and the Liberal opposition, Disraeli, on the premise of protecting British life and property, ordered the Mediterranean Fleet to Besika Bay at the mouth of the Dardanelles.²⁰⁵ In early June he made secret, fruitless overtures to Russia, seeking a joint agreement.²⁰⁶ Eventually the Porte deposed their leader, the Sultan Abdul Aziz, who, in a fit of despair killed himself with a pair of scissors.²⁰⁷ Disraeli intended to exert a Palmerstonian influence, with Britain as the focal point of diplomacy, hoping to seize any opportunity to pursue Britain's interests. He viewed Europe with suspicion and found no underlying moral principle to observe or values to uphold.²⁰⁸ There were several reasons why Disraeli rejected the protocol. Firstly, he saw a dangerous breach in the spirit and letter of the Treaty of Paris and thereby called into question the Crimean system. Secondly, he mistrusted the motives and intentions of Russia; should she interfere to aid the Christians, the whole of the region, including perhaps Constantinople and the Dardanelles might fall under her control. Thirdly, he noted the joint aspirations of Austria and Germany, whom he saw conspiring with Russia to carve up the Ottoman Empire. Fourthly, he understood the possible Irish implications of any progressive policy, with the controversial issues of Home Rule and tenants rights looming in the domestic background. Disraeli held deep reservations towards the programme pursued by the Christian population, in which land reform figured prominently, and hoped to avoid a precedent to compare with Irish land issues.²⁰⁹ With his passionate obsession with India and the recently acquired shares in the Suez Canal, Disraeli saw Turkey as a bulwark, preventing Russian expansion and Turkey's preservation as the best way to safeguard British interests in the

additional colonies, he had no intention of allowing other countries to expand theirs. "Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden," P. J. Cain, British Journal of International Studies, Vol. 5, October 1979, pp. 229-247. Splendid Isolation?, Charmley, pp. 25-27.

²⁰⁵ This was intended to send out a message to both Turkey and the remainder of Europe that Britain would not contemplate the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire. In 1849, Palmerston had sent the fleet to Besika Bay at the time of the Austrian and Russian ultimatum over the Hungarian refugees. He had also sent it there in 1853, to emphasise Britain's support for Turkey at the commencement of the Crimean war. Struggle for Mastery in Europe, Taylor, p. 34.

²⁰⁶ England 1870-1914, Ensor, p. 43.

²⁰⁷ The Crisis of Imperialism, Shannon, pp. 124-126.

²⁰⁸ Aspects of British Political History, Stephen J. Lee, (London, 1994), p. 181.

²⁰⁹ Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question, Seton-Watson, p. 22.

Near East. However, by refusing to recognise the Berlin Memorandum and by dispatching the fleet, he inadvertently encouraged the Porte to suppose they could rely on British support whatever the outcome.²¹⁰

In July, the armies of Serbia and Montenegro declared war on Turkey, and although they were quickly overrun, Russian intervention prevented annihilation. As the crisis deepened, Lord Derby warned the Porte that Britain would withdraw her support should their representatives snub a proposed conference of the Powers at Constantinople. On 12 December 1876, after Turkey granted an armistice to Serbia, the conference began, attended on Britain's behalf, by Lord Salisbury and Sir Henry Elliot. Since Disraeli and Derby opposed the Concert of Europe they sabotaged the proceedings, resulting in the failure of the Powers to force Turkey to accept the programme of reforms. On 20 January 1877, the conference broke up in inconclusive disorder, however the British Ambassador remained behind offering encouraging words, leading the Turks to believe that despite Salisbury's earlier threats Britain would protect her independence.

In the meantime, Muslim irregular troops known as Bashi-Basouks, suppressed an armed uprising, committing terrible acts of oppression. In one administrative district alone, they massacred twelve thousand Christians of both sexes and all ages.²¹¹ During the incubation period the volume of public opinion was comparatively small, however, on 23 June 1876, the Daily News, published a horrifying official account, reporting that the more reliable estimates of men, women and children massacred ranged from eighteen to thirty thousand, with upwards of a hundred villages destroyed,²¹² an account disgracefully belittled by Disraeli, as 'coffee house babble'.²¹³ Although not unique, and on a much smaller scale than the slaughter of Armenians in 1916, these outrages provoked a moral outburst of public reaction in Britain, unsurpassed in intensity.²¹⁴ Nationwide, hundreds of anti-Turkish public meetings demanded Government support for Christian and national freedom. The crime of the Bulgarian massacres was committed at a time when public

²¹⁰ The Crisis of Imperialism, Shannon, p. 118.

²¹¹ Daily News, 16 August 1876.

²¹² Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, Shannon, p. 39.

²¹³ Hansard, vol. 231, col. 203, 3 August 1876.

²¹⁴ Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, Shannon, pp. 13-26.

capacity for moral dissent was at its maximum in terms of both volume and refinement of sensibility.²¹⁵

The Atrocities Campaign

The agitation in the Liberal party came from below not from above, such that by the end of the 1876 parliamentary session a small group of radicals formed a quasi-corporate committee under the name of the Eastern Question Association, inaugurated to monitor the position in the Balkans, to rouse public attention and to force both the Government and the Liberal party to positively respond to the atrocities in Bulgaria.²¹⁶ The committee included Lawson, John Mundella, J. Holmes, Evelyn Ashley, Henry Richard, Jacob Bright, Henry Fawcett and the two secretaries, Auberon Herbert and F. W. Chesson. This committee, according to Shannon, was important

as evidence of a consistent and continuing parliamentary concern with the atrocities issue, linking the earlier proposals for a demonstration after the debate of 10 July which led eventually to the Willis's Rooms meeting²¹⁷ to the later development of the St James Hall Conference.²¹⁸

Lawson travelled to Cumberland, on 10 August 1876, the day before Disraeli made his final speech in the House of Commons. The next morning the newspapers announced that he had assumed the title of Earl of Beaconsfield, and in Lawson's words: "gone to that borne from where no

²¹⁵ The Crisis of Imperialism, Shannon, p. 125.

²¹⁶ Britain and the Eastern Question 1875-78, Richard Millman, (Oxford, 1979), p. 236.

²¹⁷ On 27 July 1876 a meeting took place in Willis's Rooms which endorsed the principle of full autonomy for the Christians in Turkey. Times, 28 July 1876.

²¹⁸ The Conference or public demonstration of the newly formed Eastern Question Association, which the Herald of Peace called 'the grandest public meeting of modern times' was convened on 8 December 1876, its purpose to influence the course of the Eastern Question. The assembly of the twelve hundred delegates was timed to coincide with the international conference in Constantinople. Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, Shannon, p. 58. There were two general positions taken up by those who spoke at the meeting. Firstly that under no conditions should Britain fight on behalf of Turkey, and secondly that the Government should co-operate with Russia to reform Turkey. Times, 9 December 1876. British Peace Movement, Laity, p. 67.

politician returns" a reference to the House of Lords.²¹⁹ In his farewell speech Disraeli spoke for the most part with banter and ridicule directed against the agitators. In his concluding remarks he struck a chord referring to the Government strategy as an imperial policy. "What our duty is at this critical moment," he announced, "is to maintain the empire of England. Nor will we ever agree to any step that hazards the existence of that Empire."²²⁰ The Balkans crisis of 1875-78 was once again about to make foreign policy a burning issue in the minds of the British people.

During the conflict, Gladstone abandoned polemics and criticism, and flung himself into the agitation, publishing on 5 September 1876, a pamphlet, entitled, The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East. The Queen, London society, the London mob, and a large proportion, of the Liberal party opposed him.²²¹ The radical opposition immediately fragmented. A small but growing band offered Gladstone unreserved support, some like the Russophobe Joseph Cowen²²² opposed him,²²³ while Lawson and others tried to enforce their Cobdenite principles of non-intervention. Notwithstanding the immensity of these drawbacks Gladstone's passionate crusade triumphed. From that moment until the final consummation in the summer of 1879, he made the Eastern Question the main concern of his life. Public opinion immediately crystallised around the personalities of the two old rivals, and the country became divided into pro-Turk and pro-Russian camps where reason

²¹⁹ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p.125.

²²⁰ Selected Speeches of the Late Honourable The Earl of Beaconsfield, Vol. 2, T. E. Kebbel, (London, 1982), p. 160.

²²¹ Letter to Nme Novikov in May 1877. Trouble Makers, Taylor, p. 64.

²²² Joseph Cowen (1829-1900), son of Sir Joseph Cowen MP for Newcastle 1865-73; educated at Edinburgh University; became interested in European revolutionary movements and numbered among his guests and friends Mazzini, Garibaldi, Kossoth, Louis Blanc and Ledru-Rollin, as well as Herzen and Bakunin. His purse offered assistance and his pen advocated their cause. Cowen from boyhood was a contributor to the Newcastle Chronicle, of which he became the proprietor and editor in 1862. He also founded the Tyne Theatre and Opera House in Newcastle in 1867. Cowen became Liberal MP for Newcastle in 1873 and was complimented on his maiden speech by Disraeli. Gladstone however, thought Cowen's style too rhetorical, smacking of Macaulay. Cowen did not disguise his accent in parliament, and this endeared him to his constituents. He dressed like a North East miner in his Sunday best, a novelty then in the House of Commons. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 13, pp. 780-782.

²²³ J. Morison Davidson, remarked that only Cowen's life long dedication to the cause of Poland could account for the deplorable action he took in supporting the Eastern policy of Disraeli. Eminent Radicals in and out of Parliament, J. Morison Davidson, (London, 1880), p. 51.

vanished and passion prevailed.²²⁴ Whereas Disraeli stood for maintaining Turkey as a barrier against Russia at all risks, Gladstone wished to renounce all past protocols and take the consequences. For Gladstone the Eastern Question became a moral issue, and the Russian threat paled into insignificance when compared to the appalling massacre of innocent Christians.

The pamphlet, designed for a working-class readership, sold over 40,000 copies within a few days, and 200,000 within a month. It called upon all lovers of humanity to make an effectual protest against deeds, which Gladstone argued, alarmed Christendom. Gladstone hoped the Turks would: "one and all, bag and baggage, clear out of the province they have desolated and profaned." He urged the 'Concert of Europe' to force Turkey into making concessions and called upon Russia to intervene and drive Turkey from Bulgaria. As the crisis deepened Gladstone saw Britain in a multilateral perspective, exercising foreign influence as a member of the great community of Christendom, which he hoped to revive. British interests, he argued, were subordinate to international law, and the rights of all nations should be upheld by carefully planned collective action rather than the opportunist intervention preferred by Disraeli. Gladstone claimed that by entering into a single-handed convention with the Porte the Conservatives had flagrantly broke European law.²²⁵

As a humanitarian, Lawson, was profoundly shocked by the use of genocide as an instrument of repression:

The events happening in the East of Europe are almost too terrible to be discussed calmly. When I read of the devilish deeds now being enacted wholesale in that region I sometimes feel almost inclined to regret that the world was ever saved at the time of the flood.²²⁶

Although Lawson applauded Gladstone's moral intervention and shared his resentment towards the Porte, his opinions and solutions, differed

²²⁴ Disraeli, Blake, p. 603.

²²⁵ "England's Mission", Gladstone, pp. 560-584.

²²⁶ Lawson, Luke, p. 90.

considerably. Lawson was prepared to resist until the last any attempt to involve Britain in war. He wanted Britain to remain a passive spectator to the unfolding events, and argued that under no circumstances should Britain become embroiled in any settlement of the Eastern Question, which might involve an appeal to force.²²⁷ He withdrew from the region of international law, believing that Britain's involvement in an Eastern war would not only be a mistake but above all a sin. There were also marked constitutional differences, whereas Gladstone approved of the formal secretive methods of conducting parliamentary business during a crisis, Lawson argued for an open forum where the Government would take the public into its confidence at every stage of foreign negotiations. As a disciple of non-intervention, Lawson remained sceptical, in relation to Gladstone's pious interventionism, arguing that even if the 'Concert of Europe' agreed to enact the proposed policies the Turks would fight with the same dogged obstinacy whoever the invader and, if pushed too hard could raise a Jihad.²²⁸

What would have been our feelings if we had been fighting on either side in this wretched war. If our countrymen had been shooting down Russians who had gone to liberate slaves from oppression, or had been shooting down Turks, who despite their faults, were fighting with patriotism against the invader of their country.²²⁹

Lawson saw the struggle as a fight between rival races and contending creeds, Christian against Muslim, and although he sympathised with the beleaguered population, his main concern was to find a means of preventing Britain from interfering militarily in a rapidly approaching catastrophe. "The condition of the world after eighteen centuries of Christianity (he mourned) is horrible and heartrending; all parts of Europe are filled with murder or preparation for murder."²³⁰

During the controversy the phrase 'British interests' took on a new significance; Disraeli saw Britain as a great military, and chiefly as a great

²²⁷ Times, 29 September 1877.

²²⁸ Hansard, vol. 239, col. 895, 8 April 1878.

²²⁹ West Cumberland Times, 17 October 1877.

²³⁰ Lawson, Luke, p. 90.

Asiatic power, not as an Island or group of English speaking colonies whose interests were provincial. This created an extreme form of nationalism, described by Lawson as 'jingoism in a fancy dress'. Lawson reconciled morality with British interests; he supported Lord Derby's famous dictum that the greatest of all British interests was the interest of peace,²³¹ and emphasised that the benefits of Free Trade would promote international harmony. He added that since Britain's main interest was to see freedom and good government secured in those provinces under insurrection: "It was in the interests of England to see freedom spread across the world, for in free countries trade and commerce flourish, from which few benefit more than Britain."²³²

Unlike Gladstone, Lawson never saw Britain acting as a moral policeman redressing acts of injustice and oppression all over the world. The only British interests he sought to preserve were those of the thirty million inhabitants of his own islands.²³³ Lawson feared that militarism abroad would encourage similar attitudes in Britain. When he learned that Europe had over 12,000,000 men under arms, he realised that a 'real' British imperialist policy rather than a 'sham' one would require a rapid increase in armament expenditure, an introduction of conscription into the British army, and an increase burden on the British taxpayer. He considered it imperative that Britain take the lead and show that in this great assembly of dangerous lunatics there was at least one sane nation. His point was that to re-arm would eventually lead to certain calamity, as illustrated in a story he often told about an African Chief who went to war because he had a barrel of gunpowder and it was spoiling.²³⁴

With no authority and limited support, Lawson tried to rally, attack and frustrate Disraeli's imperial designs. Having learned his non-intervention principles from Cobden, he took his lead from Parnell and Biggar and employed their obstructionist tactics to great affect. He prevented the withdrawal of resolutions, insisted upon divisions, and generally made a nuisance of himself to both the Government and the 'respectable' members of

²³¹ Hansard, vol. 239, col. 895, 8 April 1878.

²³² West Cumberland Times, 22 February 1878.

²³³ Hansard, vol. 239, col. 898, 8 April 1878.

²³⁴ West Cumberland Times, 5 February 1878.

his own party.²³⁵ To those who verbally abused him, and called him an isolationist and a selfish little Englander, he answered unreservedly. He believed in looking after one's own affairs and leaving other nations to look after theirs. He further acknowledged that when the sounds of war drummed in their ears, the hawks on his side of the House were equal to those on the other.²³⁶

It is questionable whether Gladstone intended to challenge the Government directly on the issue of the atrocities; his main concern was that they should remain in the public domain during the long parliamentary recess.²³⁷ Between September and February, on the spot reports and Gladstone's speeches continued to excite the British public. In early September an official report by Walter Baring,²³⁸ unearthed the depth of horrors beyond dispute, thus finally destroying the public's earlier sympathy with Turkey. In March, Russia declared war on Turkey, having effectively neutralised Austria by promising her Bosnia-Herzegovina. Russia also expressed her intention to respect Britain's interest in India, Egypt and the Suez Canal.²³⁹

Disraeli's support for Turkey brought about a nationwide renewal of the agitation. On 30 April 1877, Gladstone tabled five resolutions, which called in effect for military intervention in the name of international law.²⁴⁰ The first two negated the policy of supporting Turkey, and the remaining three affirmed the policy of emancipation, and called for intervention with Russia in collaboration with the 'Concert of Europe'.²⁴¹ The resolutions included a declaration that until guarantees on behalf of the subject population of the Porte was forthcoming they would assume that Turkey had lost all claims to receive either the material or moral support of the British Crown.²⁴² The movement on the part of Gladstone greatly angered many radicals, whose natural reaction

²³⁵ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p.137.

²³⁶ Lawson, Luke, p. 93.

²³⁷ Gladstone to Granville, 6 August 1879. The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, Vol. 2, John. Morley, (London, 1908), p. 195.

²³⁸ Bearing's report, although delayed was finally published in London Gazette, 19 September 1876.

²³⁹ England 1870-1914, Ensor, pp. 46-47.

²⁴⁰ Gladstone: Heroic Minister, Shannon, pp. 200-1.

²⁴¹ Gladstone 1874-1898, Matthew, p. 18.

²⁴² Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question, Seton-Watson, pp. 181-184.

was to support neutrality. Lawson opposed the resolutions, which he said “vaguely and indistinctly pointed to ‘something’ which it was not right or prudent to announce straightforwardly; the ‘something’ was that England was prepared to go to war to make Turkey rule Bulgaria decently.”²⁴³ In coming forward as an independent member, Gladstone had acted in parallel but not in concord with the recognised leadership of the Opposition, an action which threatened the stability of the parliamentary Liberal party.²⁴⁴ In the course of what later became known as the Five Nights debate, Gladstone, under leadership pressure, withdrew and although he ranged over all five of his resolutions he moved only the first, which he failed to secure. Lawson’s profile was moving to the fore, a circumstance recognised by the Arbitrator: “It would have been a shame had Gladstone gone into one lobby, and Mr Bright, Mr Forster Mr Richard and Sir Wilfrid Lawson into the other.”²⁴⁵

In Parliament, Lawson remained vigilant. He analysed the Government’s foreign policy using the official information published in the Blue Books.²⁴⁶ He listened intently to the many debates, assessed the opinions expressed in the national and international newspapers, discussed the question at various levels and finding nothing contentious, he, like the vast majority of the population remained silent. As matters progressed he received further reassurances in the responsive rhetoric of some Government Ministers. The moderate language expressed by Lord Salisbury,²⁴⁷ Lord Carnarvon, Richard Assheton Cross,²⁴⁸ Lord Derby²⁴⁹ and Gathorne Hardy all impressed him.²⁵⁰ The Minister for War (Hardy) earned his outright respect after he condemned Lord Hartington’s supposition “That only a European

²⁴³ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 128. Also Hansard, vol. 256, col. 1122, 2 September 1880.

²⁴⁴ Britain and the Eastern Question, Millman, p. 288.

²⁴⁵ British Peace Movement, Laity, p. 68.

²⁴⁶ The Blue Books referred to were published on 21 July 1876. It as since been shown that the Blue Books were carefully edited for public consumption to give as favourable a picture of the Turks, and a conversely unfavourable one of Christian insurgents. Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, Shannon, p. 18.

²⁴⁷ Lord Salisbury’s Mansion House speech. Times, 4 August 1876.

²⁴⁸ For Cross’s reference speech. *Ibid*, 27 October 1876.

²⁴⁹ The threat of war was brought to an abrupt end on 14 July 1876 by a reassuring speech delivered by Lord Derby at the Foreign Office. On that day Derby received a deputation from John Bright, who presented a memorial signed by forty Members of Parliament (including Lawson), and 570 other eminent gentleman from all parts of Great Britain. In his reply Derby assured Bright and his supporters that he absolutely and entirely shared their desire that the Government should observe a policy of strict neutrality. The full text of Lord Derby’s speech can be found in Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield, Vol. 1, Thompson, pp. 347-350.

²⁵⁰ Hansard, vol. 235, col. 915, 6 July 1877.

Concert in arms could effectively bring the crisis to a conclusion by redressing the grievances of the Christians.” In a speech littered with Lawsonian sentiments, the Minister rejected any proposed military interference by the Concert.

Good Government for the Christian by European concert is a peaceable one, a persuasive one; not going to its object through bloodshed, and so raising up enemies in every path, and enemies among themselves also; by an agreement in peace, and never by an agreement in time of war.²⁵¹

Such seemingly non-interventionist speeches impressed Lawson, who found himself stumping the country moving resolutions favouring the Government; shouting for ‘Salisbury and Common sense’, and ‘Northcote and neutrality’.²⁵²

It was the obstructionist tactics of Britain’s representatives at the Constantinople conference, calls for a British military crusade against Turkey, and the immediate relocation of the Mediterranean squadron to Besika Bay that forced Lawson to cross the Rubicon. On 8 July 1877, having sat through a lengthy discussion on the construction of ships, Lawson, who was quickly becoming one of the most vigorous opponents of Disraeli’s policy, sought reasons for their deployment.²⁵³ The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Stafford Northcote, revealed that the flotilla comprised seven ironclads and one unarmoured frigate, lying at anchor, “...centrally situated at a convenient station to enable the admiralty to communicate with rapidity if necessary, with the British Government and her Ambassador at Constantinople.”²⁵⁴ Having accepted Lord Derby’s earlier explanation²⁵⁵ that he had moved the fleet to protect the Christian population, Lawson thought the new procedure,

²⁵¹ Ibid, vol. 233 cols 1106-1110, 13 April 1877, (Gathorne Hardy).

²⁵² Ibid, vol. 237, cols 768, 31 January 1878. At Edinburgh, on 16 September 1876, Northcote stated that the Government was doing its utmost in promoting the welfare of the people who have been the victims of the late barbarities. Times, 17 September 1876.

²⁵³ Lawson was referring to a parliamentary debate on the Naval estimates. Hansard, vol. 235, col. 913, 6 July 1877. –

²⁵⁴ Ibid, col. 886.

²⁵⁵ Lord Salisbury had ordered the withdrawal of the fleet from Besika Bay, during the progress of the Conference in order that the Turks might not by its presence be induced to place undue reliance on the assistance of England. Ibid, col. 915.

“...aroused new anxiety in the present disturbed state of Europe, which might be misinterpreted by both contending Powers, and produce an impression that the Minister’s (Northcote) explanation contained something more sinister.”²⁵⁶ Perhaps, Lawson’s suspicions had some foundation. The Royal Address closed with a clause linking the Eastern Question to the fate of the British Empire. “If in the course of the contest, the rights of my Empire should be assailed or endangered, I should confidently rely on your help to vindicate and maintain them.”²⁵⁷ The Daily Telegraph maintained that the fleet had gone to Besika Bay because the Russian army had crossed the Danube without giving a clear pledge not to advance on Constantinople.²⁵⁸ In October, Lawson informed his constituents that although he found little fault with the conduct of some Ministers, Disraeli’s rowdy pro-Turkey gunboat rhetoric was “...unworthy of Britain and anyone calling himself a statesman.”²⁵⁹

Fighting between Russia and Turkey continued until 31 January 1878, when both parties signed the armistice of Adrianople. In the early stages, the Russians made swift advances and looked like capturing Constantinople. Disraeli considered sending troops to neighbouring Armenia and Georgia to encourage the beleaguered defenders, however, the Turkish stand at Plevna delayed and eventually thwarted that initiative.²⁶⁰ In England the gallantry of the Turks obliterated the memory of the Bulgarian horrors and transformed the beleaguered defenders into heroes.²⁶¹ Almost at once, British public opinion fractured into two excited camps, the progressive Liberals continued to demand the expulsion of Turkey from Europe, while those who feared the prominence of Russia came to Turkey’s defence. The controversy rose to an incredible height, and the word ‘Jingo’, (described by Lawson as an irresponsible, impulsive, ignorant, shouter for war,²⁶² crept into the nation’s

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ The Story and Significance of Imperialism: A Political Word 1840-1960, R. Koeber and H. D. Schmidt, (London, 1965), p. 130-31. Also, Hansard, vol. 236, col. 820, 31 January 1878.

²⁵⁸ Daily Telegraph, 19 July 1877.

²⁵⁹ West Cumberland Times, 17 October 1877. Also Times, 18 October 1877.

²⁶⁰ The fortress of Plevna, south of the Danube was defended from 20 July to 11 December 1877, and only fell after Russia brought in Todleben, the veteran defender of Sebastopol, and persuaded the Romanians to bolster their assault, with an additional 35,000 troops. Britain and the Eastern Question: Missolonghi to Gallipoli, G. D. Clayton, (London, 1971), p. 140.

²⁶¹ Struggle for Mastery in Europe, Taylor, p. 245.

²⁶² Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 134.

vocabulary.²⁶³ Gladstone, who saw the Jingo's as "a stirring up of all the foul dregs of the coarsest and rankest material among us,"²⁶⁴ bore the bulk of the abuse. In addition to the wrath of the Music Hall, he endured an unruly mob, who, after disrupting a public meeting; descended upon Gladstone's house and smashed his windows.²⁶⁵ Disraeli, with monarchical approval, assumed the initiative; although he fell short of offering Turkey armed support he offered verbal encouragement, and simultaneously stirred British public opinion into fearing a Russian presence in the heart of the Balkans. Facing starvation, Plevna finally capitulated on 10 December 1877, and while the Porte sued for an armistice, the Tsar's troops confronted Constantinople.²⁶⁶

We can contemplate Lawson's distress from the contents of an oration delivered to a gathering at Spurgeon's tabernacle.²⁶⁷

I am in the habit, about five times a week, of attending a meeting which is held at St. Stephen's, and I assure you I do not attend it with much pleasure. For the business we are engaged in, in that great assembly is one that is enough to wound the heart of any man of feeling. There we are, day by day and night by night, devising means for the torture and the slaughter of our fellow men.²⁶⁸

The Vote of Credit

The Cabinet met on 14 December 1877, and five days later the morning papers²⁶⁹ announced that Parliament would reconvene on 17

²⁶³ The word 'Jingo' quickly passed into currency. At first it denoted those who were passionately devoted to Turkey abroad and to Lord Beaconsfield at home. "A Two Edged Sword", Durrans, pp. 262-284.

²⁶⁴ Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield, Vol. 2, Thompson, p. 59.

²⁶⁵ Hansard, vol. 239 col. 894, 8 April 1878.

²⁶⁶ England 1870-1914, Ensor, pp. 47-48.

²⁶⁷ The Tabernacle Fellowship is an independent Baptist church established by Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892); he began preaching in 1853 at the tabernacle then situated in the Royal Surrey Gardens Music Hall, where up to 10,000 people assembled. Spurgeon pastored the church for 38 years, founding a pastors' college, an orphanage, a Christian literature society and The Sword and the Trowel magazine. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 52, pp. 6-10.

²⁶⁸ Lawson, Luke, p. 92.

²⁶⁹ Times, 19 December 1877.

January, three weeks earlier than scheduled. The Eastern Question Association immediately issued a signed circular calling upon their supporters to strengthen the hands of the Government should they adhere to the policy of neutrality in the war between Russia and Turkey, or to weaken the hands of the Government should they deviate from that policy.²⁷⁰ The Royal Address acknowledged the continuation of Britain's neutrality and hoped that her Government's initiative would result in peace. It also warned that should some 'unexpected occurrence' arise the Government would take precautionary measures.²⁷¹ The National Federation of Liberal Associations also issued a circular instructing their supporters to oppose any war credit.²⁷² On 20 January the Government introduced a Vote of Credit, proposing an increase in the military estimates of £6,000,000. Their reasons were threefold; one, to offer advice and assistance; two, to protect British interests; and three, to add strength to her representatives at the forthcoming international peace congress. It was a novel request; Northcote admitted that although he did not intend to draw on the money or to use force he sought a vote of confidence, to show Europe that Britain spoke with authority at the council of Europe.²⁷³ A statement ridiculed by John Bright, who saw Britain going into the Conference with "shotted cannons and revolvers."²⁷⁴ Gladstone also opposed the vote for reasons explained in a speech at Oxford. "If the House of Commons is to make large votes of millions of money without proof of the necessity of the charge your liberties are gone."²⁷⁵ W. E. Forster led the resistance; stating that since neither belligerent engaged in the war had infringed Britain's neutrality, there was no reason to add to the burdens of the British people, by voting unnecessary supplies.²⁷⁶ Forster considered the permanent occupation of Constantinople as an Austrian interest, and found nothing in the list of conditions offered by Russia to arouse suspicions.

Lawson feared that Britain's long reign of peace and non-intervention was over. He did not view the supplementary vote as a defensive measure but

²⁷⁰ Spectator, 29 December 1877.

²⁷¹ Times, 18 January 1878.

²⁷² Ibid, 25 January 1878.

²⁷³ Ibid, 29 January 1878.

²⁷⁴ Hansard, vol. 237, col. 769, 28 January 1878.

²⁷⁵ On 30 January 1878, Gladstone spoke at the opening of the Palmerston Liberal Club at Oxford, and addressed a public meeting in the evening. Times, 31 January 1878.

²⁷⁶ Hansard, vol. 237, col. 767, January 31 1878.

an announcement that Britain had emerged from her isolation to take a more constructive role in the affairs of the Balkans, and would contemplate war as a means of enforcing that policy. He maintained that by refusing to divulge important information earlier the Government had treated Parliament with contempt,²⁷⁷ her only receipt, he declared, "...was sounding platitudes full of wind and fury that signified nothing."²⁷⁸ This was a common theme among Liberal critics who saw the Conservatives abusing the powers of Parliament and circumventing its authority as a necessary prelude to the establishment of a more autocratic form of Government.²⁷⁹

Lawson ridiculed Northcote's reference to a united nation, by referring to a divided Cabinet, which, fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions, seldom spoke with a common voice. It was, said Lawson, a Janus-faced Government, which sang with the voice of a two-toned nightingale.²⁸⁰ In the morning Disraeli, the very "...bombastes furioso of politics, at some banquet of London Aldermen²⁸¹ or Aylesbury farmers,²⁸² breathing out threatening slaughter against Russia;"²⁸³ in the afternoon "...Lord Derby, warbling a strain so sensible that it delighted them all;" in the evening, "...Lord Carnarvon, merrily singing words of common sense and peace;" then at night, Lord John Manners,²⁸⁴ shrieking, "...swords, laurels and lilies."²⁸⁵ Disraeli recognised this

²⁷⁷ Ibid, vol. 242, col. 1093, 2 August 1878.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, vol. 239, col. 1378, 16 April 1878.

²⁷⁹ "A Two Edged Sword", Durrans, pp. 262-284.

²⁸⁰ During the debate, Cross, referred to Government critics who he claimed, "spoke with two voices, which from the same source had flowed both sweet and bitter." John Bright also drew attention to the difference of tone between the speeches of Carnarvon, Derby and Disraeli.

²⁸¹ A reference to Disraeli's speech delivered at the Lord Mayors banquet at the Guildhall. *Times*, 10 November 1876.

²⁸² On 20 September 1876, Disraeli delivered a speech to the Buckinghamshire Agricultural Association, at Aylesbury, in which he sharply distinguished between the aims of the Government and the aims of the great movement of agitation against Turkey that was currently taking place. Ibid, 21 September 1876.

²⁸³ Although Lawson considered the sentiment expressed in both of these speeches as a defiance of public opinion, his chief criticism was Disraeli's position, which was at a variance to that of his Cabinet colleagues.

²⁸⁴ John James Robert Manners, 7th Duke of Rutland (1818-1906), was Disraeli's oldest political friend. On 14 July 1877, he proposed that a Russian occupation of Constantinople would be an event used to start a war. One week later Manners threatened to resign from the Cabinet if action was not taken to discourage Russia. *Splendid Isolation?*, Charmley, pp. 85-86. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 36, pp. 469-472.

²⁸⁵ This quote was delivered by Lawson at Carlisle in January 1878. He delivered an alternative version at Cockermouth some days later when he suggested that Parliament should have opened their proceedings with the following announcement: "Grand Theatrical Performance" The piece called 'British Interests' will be played every night for the next two weeks by Her Majesty's servants. The First Lord of the admiralty, Mr W. H. Smith will sing

charge and reported to the Queen that he discerned seven distinct parties in the Cabinet, while Carnarvon expressed exasperation at the Government failure to pursue a common policy.²⁸⁶

Lawson drew attention to a report in the Morning Post, which accused non-interventionists of being the agents of Russia, intent on prolonging the debate to allow Russia time to affect her purpose.²⁸⁷ During the winter of 1877-8 this was a common call from those who had become familiarised with the notion of a war with Russia. A group, Lawson said, was comprised of “medical students, Whitechapel roughs and Lord Mayors.” Lawson was referring to groups of rowdy, well-dressed, ‘swells and roughs’ occasionally led by the Lord Mayor of London who continuously advertised their willingness to go to war.²⁸⁸ Full of mischief, having earlier said “he would rather see the Russians in Constantinople than the horrid murderous Turks,”²⁸⁹ Lawson rejected the Government’s preoccupation and their ‘nagging policy’ towards Russia, they were “never satisfied, always distrustful, always finding fault, and always finding some shade of inaccuracy.”²⁹⁰ He referred to current events in South Africa and accused the Government of hypocrisy, “...for while one nation (Britain) may annex the Transvaal another (Russia) might not look over the Balkans.”²⁹¹ After repeatedly listening to the Home Secretary, (Cross), declare that the Russians were advancing on Constantinople,²⁹² Lawson expressed, “almost as much alarm, as he would have expressed had Mr

‘Hearts of Oak (laughter); Lord John Manners, crowned with laurels and lilies, will perform the sword exercise (renewed laughter); Mr Cross will dance the war-dance (loud laughter); Mr Cavendish Bentinck will appear in the character of a Bashi-Bazouk (much laughter); Lord Beaconsfield will poke up the British Lion till he roars again; the Chancellor of the Exchequer will take the money at the door (roars of laughter); the band will play ‘Rule Britannia’ the whole time; and the proceedings will conclude with a panorama in which will be seen in the background the British Fleet sailing up and down the Dardanelles, the enemy singing in chorus, - “Here we go up, up, up, Here we go down, down, down, Here we go round, round, round. Times, 22 February 1878.

²⁸⁶ “A Two Edged Sword”, Durrans, pp. 274.

²⁸⁷ Hansard, vol. 237, col. 768, 31 January 1878.

²⁸⁸ Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield, Vol. 2, Thompson, pp. 332-375.

²⁸⁹ Lawson exchanged these views in conversation with Joseph Cowen, who openly detested the Russian Government. Cowen met Lawson’s opinions with ‘mingled fury and contempt’. Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 135.

²⁹⁰ Hansard, vol. 239, col. 898, 8 April 1878.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² In his speech, Cross detailed the progress of events from the first talk of an armistice, repeating at every stage, “The Russians were still advancing.” Cross, claimed that the slower the progress of the negotiations the more rapid the Russian advance. Ibid., vol. 237, col 767, January 31 1878.

Newdegate²⁹³ told him that the Jesuits were in the cellars beneath the House of Commons.”²⁹⁴ He urged Disraeli to dissolve Parliament and make a direct appeal to the country before voting supplies to support a decaying despotism. Taking inspiration from recent bye-election successes at Perth, Leith and Greenock, where the electorate had returned candidates opposed to the Government policy with huge majorities,²⁹⁵ Lawson said “no-one should assume that with regard to the Eastern Question that the then House of Commons was currently in harmony with the opinions of the country.”²⁹⁶

Lawson ridiculed the Prime Minister’s ‘vulgar’ insinuation that he required the money to give Britain greater weight at the forthcoming international conference.

If a man shook a naked sword in my face, I would call him a barbarian; if he shook his fist in my face, I would call him a bully; but if he shook his purse in my face, I would call him a snob, and Britain by her actions would become the snobs of Europe.

In Lawson’s opinion the vote of credit was a vote for war, and since Russia had “...virtually and finally crushed Turkey” he could not foresee any circumstances where Britain should go to war on Turkey’s behalf. He pressed the Prime Minister, “...to be bold, and throw aside all equivocations, and to categorically state whether or not, he intended to drive Russia out of Constantinople.” He reminded his colleagues of events preceding the Crimean war when Government action had convinced Russia that England was determined to humiliate her and thus war became inevitable.²⁹⁷ He promised that unless the Government put the matter fairly and distinctly before the

²⁹³ Charles Newdegate (1816-1887), Conservative Member of Parliament for North Warwickshire, and owner of the Griff Coal Mine in Nuneaton. Newdegate believed that the duty of every true Englishman was to resist the encroachments and to detect and defy the emissaries (particularly Jesuits) of the Church of Rome. He brought in an annual motion for a periodical inspection, under State authority, of all Nunneries and Convents in Great Britain and Ireland, which never received anything other than half-hearted support. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 40, pp. 606-608.

²⁹⁴ Hansard, vol. 237, col. 769, 31 January 1878.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, cols 767-771.

²⁹⁶ Notwithstanding this clarion call, Lawson had no desire to see Parliament dissolved; he wanted it to run its full course, where he believed the Liberal party would triumph; Forster’s amendment made a similar call.

²⁹⁷ Hansard, vol. 239, col.. 896, 8 April 1878.

people he for one would use every means to prevent them acquiring one single penny.²⁹⁸ Lawson further enriched the argument with the aid of a contemporary couplet, inviting Northcote to explain why he had not wound up his speech with a recitation of the popular Music Hall song,

We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do

We've got the ships, we've got the men and we've got the money too.²⁹⁹

Gladstone concurred, "...this demand was the most indefensible proposition that had, in his time ever been submitted to Parliament."³⁰⁰ On 14 February, two weeks after the signing of the armistice, Parliament grudgingly granted the money. In a speech to the West Cumberland Liberal Association, Lawson summarised the Government's past procedure and their predicament.

There have been storms and calms; wars and rumours of war-(laughter)-promises of peace and threats of war; telegrams telling lies, and telegrams contradicting them (Much laughter); alternatively hot and cold; in a rage and in a state of terror. They had had amendments moved and amendments withdrawn: we have had noble Lords and hon. Gentlemen walking into the House and walking out again. (Laughter.)³⁰¹

On 15 February 1877, members of the Workingmen's Neutrality Committee invited both Lawson and Gladstone to speak in the Agricultural Hall, Islington, against the 'warlike designs of the Government'.³⁰² Although scheduled to take place within one week the committee postponed the

²⁹⁸ Ibid, vol. 237, col. 1647, 14 February 1878.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, col. 769, 31 January 1878. An unnamed friend of Lawson's corrupted the last line to read. "We'll get a shilling income tax, and a thundering licking too." The Spectator also wrote in reference to bringing native troops from India to Malta. "We wont go to the front ourselves, we'll send the mild Hindoo." *Lawson: A Memoir*, Russell. p.

³⁰⁰ *Times*, 31 January 1878.

³⁰¹ *West Cumberland Times*, 22 February 1878.

³⁰² *Times*, 16 February 1878.

meeting because of concerns about the consequences of a threatened disturbance in such a large gathering.³⁰³

The Treaty of San Stefano

In the meantime Russian troops advanced on San Stefano, on the outskirts of Constantinople. Disraeli issued a warning that continuation meant war. On 24 January, spurred on by the Queen, the First Lord of the Admiralty, W. H. Smith,³⁰⁴ ordered the fleet to steam through the Dardanelles. The Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, immediately resigned. Lord Derby was anxious to follow; however, under Cabinet pressure he withdrew his resignation.³⁰⁵ After Northcote informed Parliament that the fleet had steamed through the Dardanelles, "...to keep open the waterway and protect British life and property,"³⁰⁶ the Conservatives waved their order papers and cheered approvingly. However, in the next breath the Chancellor added that in consequence of communications received (relating to the Russian terms) they had sent a second telegram countermanding the previous order, the pacific opposition swiftly overwhelmed the subdued cheering.³⁰⁷ Shortly afterwards Lawson circulated an epigrammatic note illustrating the incident:

When the government ordered the fleet to the Straits
They surely encountered the hardest of fates;
For the order scarce given, at once was recalled,
And the Russians were not in the slightest appalled.
And everyone says, who has heard the debates,

³⁰³ It was rumoured that a significant number of employees from the Woolwich Arsenal were coming to break up the meeting. A notice had also been posted in a number of hospitals, requesting all medical students to meet in Trafalgar Square before marching with bands and flying colours to the Agricultural Hall to hoot down Gladstone. Daily News, 21 February 1878.

³⁰⁴ William Henry Smith (1825-1891). Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 51, pp. 381-385.

³⁰⁵ Disraeli, Gladstone and the Eastern Question, Seton-Watson, pp. 297-301. Also Splendid Isolation?, Charmley, pp. 113-127.

³⁰⁶ Quoted by Northcote in the House of Commons Hansard, vol. 237, col. 468, 25 January 1878.

³⁰⁷ Times, 26 January 1878.

"It's the Cabinet now, not the fleet, that's in straits."³⁰⁸

The excitement reached its zenith at the beginning of March 1878, after Russia forced Turkey to accept the Treaty of San Stefano. Although the treaty offered the indigenous Christian population greater autonomy, Russia, through her influence over Albania and an enlarged Bulgaria, was to become a Mediterranean power. The virtual abolition of Turkey in Europe drew fierce protests from interested parties. On 1 April, Disraeli called up the Reserves, on the pretext that Russia had contravened the Treaty of Paris, thus signalling to the world that Britain would maintain the Turkish Empire. Seven days later both Houses moved condemnations against Disraeli's actions. In the Lords, Derby, having finally resigned his ministerial position, asked the Government to clarify and define the emergency.³⁰⁹ The content of his speech so impressed the editor of the Spectator that he advised pacifists to circulate it widely.³¹⁰ In the Commons, Lawson disobeyed Hartington's instructions and moved a potent amendment.

Considering that no great emergency has been shown to exist, such that the calling out of the Reserves is neither prudent in the interests of European peace, necessary for the safety of the country, nor warranted by the state of matters abroad.³¹¹

Lawson was both discouraged and perplexed by the prolonged silence and the ineffectual behaviour of the Liberal leadership; in response he raised his voice against Britain's possible entry into an unjust and unnecessary war.³¹² He emphasised that he alone was responsible for his amendment, and if successful, those who gave it support would receive the credit, whereas if defeated he alone would bear the reproach.³¹³ Lawson equated the instruction to call out the reserves with an act of dishonour, "they were offering Russia a

³⁰⁸ Later Peeps at Parliament Taken from Behind the Speakers Chair, H. W. Lucy, (London, 1895), p. 504. Also Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 135.

³⁰⁹ Times, 9 April 1878.

³¹⁰ Spectator, 13 April 1878.

³¹¹ Hansard, vol. 239, col. 893, 8 April 1878.

³¹² Ibid, col. 894.

³¹³ Ibid.

petty, paltry, and pitiable provocation, which was unworthy of the British nation and its Government.”³¹⁴ Hartington argued that since the Government were sure to gain a large majority; that majority would be used by the war party to represent a majority in favour of a warlike policy. While every vote in the minority might be construed by the Russian Government as proof that there was a party in England that might back them up against the British Government. Lawson disagreed and urged Hartington to support his amendment and greatly increase the minority.³¹⁵ The morning papers gave a mixed response. Having repeatedly censured Lawson for taking a frivolous approach to serious questions he was now criticised for delivering a humourless speech.

There were very few quips, in the way of wit or humour, and although it might be made good in some measure by serious argument, marked by common sense, this is not what we expect from Sir Wilfrid. He has been wont to convey wisdom to us in an envelope of wit, and we look for the envelope as well as for the contents.³¹⁶

On the following evening Lawson led a minority through the Lobby, with Joseph Chamberlain accompanying as Teller. Though defeated by 319 votes to 64, the minority included several leading Liberals, including John Bright, Sir Charles Dilke and Gladstone.³¹⁷ Hartington, Forster and Goschen abstained while 29 Liberals voted with the Government, some fearing for their seats and others not wishing to encourage Russia.³¹⁸ The utter confusion puzzled Lord Granville and although he acknowledged that Lawson’s insubordination was fatal to party discipline, he was unable to enforce it.³¹⁹ In a letter to Hartington, Granville said, he considered “the proceedings last night as one of the heaviest possible blows to the discipline of a party I have ever

³¹⁴ Ibid, col. 899.

³¹⁵ Ibid, Vol. 239, col. 894.

³¹⁶ Manchester Examiner, 9 April 1878.

³¹⁷ During the debate, Gladstone gave strong reasons why he objected to the amendment.

³¹⁸ Britain and the Eastern Question, Millman, pp. 420-21.

³¹⁹ Since Gladstone regarded MPs in general unleadable in 1868, as did Hartington in 1874, Lawson insubordination should not have come as any surprise to the Liberal leadership in 1878. The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government, Parry, p. 2.

remembered.”³²⁰ Granville asked Gladstone how a ‘crotchety’ member had the power to compel the majority of their party to vote, some one way, some another.³²¹ On the following evening, Gladstone, addressed a meeting of the Workers Peace Association, where the mere mention of Lawson’s name brought a cacophony of applause from an excited audience. When the Times reported that Gladstone favoured the “...castigation of the rebel,”³²² Granville approvingly picked up on the threat.

Especially after having established the principle invaluable to a crotchety man, but destructive to the unity and influence of a party, that although a particular amendment is disapproved by large majorities of every section of the party, yet some of the best men in it, concurring in the objection, feel a personal obligation to vote for it, because it contains a sentiment in which they agree.”...“Is not Lawson in the position of an Old Bailey lawyer, who successfully insists on a witness answering yes or no to a catch question.”³²³

Gladstone excused his own behaviour.

On this occasion (as I told Hartington) I was by no means led into the Lobby by my mere concurrence with Lawson’s words, but by my relation to the mass of feeling & opinion out of doors, in concert with which I have worked all along, & which would have been utterly bewildered by my not voting.³²⁴

The Cabinet, having called out the Reserves on the pretext of an emergency, delayed the enactment for a further four days, which Lawson associated with the demand for a Vote of Credit in preparation for an unexpected event. “How extraordinary,” he declared, “a Government, which

³²⁰ Granville to Hartington, 10 April 1878. Disraeli. Gladstone and the Eastern Question, Seton-Watson, p. 389

³²¹ The Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville (1876-1886), A Ramm (ed.), (London, 1962), (Letter 106, dated, 9 April 1878); p. 69.

³²² Times, 11 April 1878.

³²³ The Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville, Ramm, (Letter 107, dated, 11 April 1878), p. 70.

³²⁴ Ibid, (Letter 108, dated, 12 April 1878), p. 70..

prepared for an unexpected event and postponed a great emergency.” In a memorable speech that filled eight columns of Hansard, he reminded the Government that “in the eyes of the public their position had somewhat changed from the one in place at the start of the Parliament.”³²⁵ Lawson was referring to the Cabinet resignations, the hardening of ministerial opinion, and Conservative party bye-election failures. While applauding Lord Derby's dispatches,³²⁶ he questioned the source of Britain's support; his argument was that Bismarck was laughing with contempt at the feeble fidgeting of Britain's diplomacy, and thinking, “What fools those Englishman are to place their paws in the fire to pull out our chestnuts.”³²⁷

On 15 April, after informing Parliament that the emergency had neither increased nor decreased, Northcote made arrangements for the Easter recess while assuring the House that he did so ‘with no concealed designs or any intentions of a mischievous character’.³²⁸ When Lawson learned that the adjournment was to last one-day short of three weeks, and almost two weeks longer than that of the previous year, he accused the Government of flagrant hypocrisy. The notion of enforcing an extended holiday at a time of crisis was an extraordinary request; had not his motion eight days earlier criticising the deployment of the Reserves met disapproval from more than half of their number, on the premise that Britain faced a great emergency?³²⁹ The division (168 votes to 10) favouring the recess, expressed the general acquiescence of the House, and Parliament separated under a conviction that the emergency was no greater than before.

The Times described Lawson as utterly out of harmony with the sentiment of the House.³³⁰ The Daily News was more cautious, under the heading, “The first gun may be fired at any moment,” and questioned the

³²⁵ In January 1878, Lord Cararvon resigned as Colonial Secretary; Sir Michael Hicks-Beach replaced him. In April 1878, Lord Salisbury replaced Lord Derby, who resigned from the post of Foreign Secretary, after withdrawing his previous resignation upon the recall of the fleet. The vacancy at the Indian office was filled by Granthorne Hardy who afterwards became Viscount Cranbrook.

³²⁶ During the debate, Derby had named the calling out of the Reserves, as one but not the only reason for his resignation. Hansard, vol. 239, cols. 760-853.

³²⁷ On 4 September 1876, Disraeli told Derby that his first preference was for Bismarck to pluck British chestnuts out of the fire by convening a European congress to solve the Eastern Question. Splendid Isolation?, Charmley, p. 45.

³²⁸ Hansard, vol. 239, cols. 1391-92, 16 April 1878.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, col. 1376.

³³⁰ Times, 17 April 1878.

Government's judgement in dispersing Parliament without precautionary reassurances from the European Powers.³³¹ On the following day the Government let slip that 7,000 Indian troops would disembark for Malta, thus fulfilling Disraeli's vision of the empire as a consolidated military force.³³² A group Lawson described as: "All the Savages and Cut-throats of India."³³³ A rather harsh description, perhaps, but Lawson was not alone in the language of his condemnation. At Briery Hall on 30 April, Chamberlain spoke of, "the half civilised troops of the Empress of India, coming to the assistance of the Queen of England;"³³⁴ the radical free-thinker Goldwin Smith, complained that, "A body of barbarian mercenaries has appeared upon the European scene as an integral part of the British army;"³³⁵ while John Bright "deplored the use of half-savage Muslims from India, against Russian Christians."³³⁶ Whereas the Daily News enquired if the announcement was consistent with the assurances given to Lawson on the previous day,³³⁷ the Daily Telegraph, praised the decision.

By summoning her Indian children to stand by the policy of England in the western hemisphere, the Queen proclaims the unity of the Empire, and consecrates the principle that henceforward there shall be no disintegration of either the interests, the rights, or the resources of the British realm and its possessions.³³⁸

Critics deemed the Conservative action as unconstitutional and their policy of riding roughshod over the rights of Parliament forced a vigorous three-day debate in the Commons.³³⁹ In answer to a request from Hartington, Northcote claimed the decision to send Indian troops to Malta did come within

³³¹ Daily News, 16 April 1878.

³³² The force comprised two regiments of Indian cavalry, six regiments of Native Infantry, two field Batteries of Artillery, and a number of Sappers and Miners. Times, 18 April 1878.

³³³ Hansard, vol. 242, col. 1093, 2 August 1878.

³³⁴ Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield, Vol. 2, Thompson, p. 417.

³³⁵ "The Greatness of England", Goldwin Smith, Contemporary Review, January 18, 1879, p. 18.

³³⁶ Britain and the Eastern Question, Millman, p. 430.

³³⁷ Daily News, 18 April 1878. During the Commons debate, the Colonial secretary, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach retired behind the constitutional plea of 'emergency'. "A Two Edged Sword", Durrans, p. 269.

³³⁸ Daily Telegraph, 19 April 1878.

³³⁹ Hansard, vol. 240, col. 544, 23 May 1878.

the constitutional prerogative of the Crown³⁴⁰ and as such did not require parliamentary approval.³⁴¹ Lawson's argument was that by rejecting his earlier request to shorten the proposed recess on the grounds that their policy remained unchanged, the Government had misled the House. His complaint was that while the home Parliament controlled the size of the standing British army, there was no limit to the number or size of the Indian equivalent. As he emphasised, they might have 200,000 men in the Indian army one year and 500,000 the next, giving the Government the right to move 70,000 troops into a European arena without reference to Parliament. However despite this criticism the movement of Indian troops to Europe was the most imperial, and one of the most popular, of all of the Government's actions and one which appeared to promote the centralised concept of Empire.³⁴²

The Congress of Berlin

In the meantime, the interested parties attended a conference in Berlin, under the chairmanship of Bismarck. However before the conference began, secret negotiation involving the major parties had already determined the outcome. Britain signed three agreements, with Russia on 30 May, with Austria on 6 June, and with Turkey on 4 June. In the latter, Disraeli promised that in return for the island of Cyprus, Britain would provide military advisors and guarantee the defence of Armenia, Syria and Asia Minor against Russian aggression. The occupation of Cyprus effectively recognised that Turkey might shortly become incapable of defending her crumbling empire, and also that Britain was prepared to take part in its subsequent division.³⁴³ During Midlothian, Gladstone argued against this acquisition. There was he said, "No greater folly than to suppose that, by multiplying their garrisons and islands,

³⁴⁰ Under Section 55 of the Government of India Act of 1858, the revenues of India could not be used to defray the expenses of any military operation beyond the frontiers of that country without the consent of Parliament. The clause had been inserted so that India should not be used as an Eastern barrack in the oriental seas from which we may draw any number of troops without paying for them. *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, Thornton, p. 97.

³⁴¹ *Britain and the Eastern Question*, Millman, p. 431.

³⁴² "A Two Edged Sword", Durrans, pp. 262-284.

³⁴³ *Later Victorian Britain (1867-1900)*, Paul Hayes, (London, 1988), p. 157.

they could guard the road to India. The road to India was perfectly safe as long as they retained command of the sea."³⁴⁴

The conference disposed of the San Stefano Treaty and replaced it with a European settlement, which reduced the size of Bulgaria. They returned the Macedonian vilayets to Turkey, made the northern tracts a dependency of Russia, while the central tract became a special Turkish province, under a Christian governor. Austria controlled Bosnia and Herzegovina, France took Tunis, and the Porte promised once more to respect her subjects in accordance with Christian principles. Salisbury also announced a reinterpretation of the Straits Convention, asserting that Britain could legitimately force the Straits should the Sultan become subservient to Russia. After their success, the British representatives returned in a blaze of triumph to admiring crowds, and an applauding Commons, bearing a standard marked 'peace with honour', described by a disgusted Gladstone as "...most musical, most attractive words,"³⁴⁵ and parodied by Lawson, as, "Peace with Honours."³⁴⁶

Through this settlement Lawson emphasised that Disraeli and Salisbury, the two British plenipotentiaries had prevented the oppressed nations gaining freedom.³⁴⁷ He condemned both the pre-arranged negotiations and the acquisition through stealth of Cyprus, describing the secret treaties as "one of the most humiliating methods ever conceived of conducting treaty negotiations." He observed that while one of the British plenipotentiaries excited Parliament by relaying the progress of the congress the other representative concealed the treaties in his pocket. Lawson was again drawing attention to a policy which diminished the influence of Parliament by concealing policy decisions until an appropriate time, then expecting Parliament to sanction events concluded. He warned the Government that although the pacifist protest had failed, the Opposition would not capitulate at the General Election, where the public would view the transactions in a different light.

³⁴⁴ Hansard, vol. 277, col. 680, 15 March 1883.

³⁴⁵ "England's Mission", Gladstone, p. 560.

³⁴⁶ West Cumberland Times, 14 September 1878. In recognition of their actions both Disraeli and Lord Salisbury became Knights of the Garter, and Freemen of the City of London.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 19 April 1879.

The Ministry, by their torturous foreign policy had damaged the fair name of English statesmanship, and had laid a heavy burden unnecessarily upon a people already heavily taxed, which although not severely felt would become a grievous burden in times to follow.³⁴⁸

His attitude to Cyprus was expressed in verse.

About Cyprus we scarce know what language to speak,
Whether English, or Turkish, or Russian, or Greek;
There's only one language we can't speak, forsooth—
When Cyprus is mentioned we never speak truth.³⁴⁹

At the end of the conflict the Secretary of War (Colonel Stanley) and the First Lord of the Admiralty (W. H. Smith) visited Britain's new possessions in the Mediterranean, provoking Lawson to record.

The Head of the Army and the Chief of the Fleet
Went out on a visit to Cyprus and Crete.
The natives received them with joyous hurrahs,
Called one of them Neptune, the other one Mars.
They ran up an altar to Stanley forthwith,
And opened up a bookstall for W. H. Smith.³⁵⁰

Since the Liberal party had no formal structure before 1880 and barely any formal rules it is difficult to condone, criticise or to justify Lawson's behaviour. He intervened in these debates because he considered Hartington, lethargic, unemotional, weak and ineffectual; and he had no enthusiasm for Gladstone's methods of finding a solution. During this period, Lawson believed that through the Government's aggressive policy Britain faced real

³⁴⁸ Hansard, vol. 242, cols. 1091-1094, 2 August 1878.

³⁴⁹ Northern Pioneer, 28 February 1882. Maryport Advertiser, 3 March 1882.

³⁵⁰ Lawson, Luke, p. 157.

danger that “the steps of bluster and brag taken by both parties were leading the country nearer to the precipice, which must at length create a war.”³⁵¹ He feared a repeat of the Crimean war, a war which cost Britain 23,000 men and £50,000,000,³⁵² and sought ministerial assurances that they would take no decisive or irrevocable step to cause a repeat. The Conservative Government did little to allay this feeling of alarm; they perpetrated war-like measures, dispatched the fleet, held a Vote of Credit, called out the Reserves, and moved troops from India to Malta. Moreover, Lord Derby, upon leaving office had declared that the Government policy was a policy not of “...drifting, but rushing into war,” a war he described as, “...almost irrevocable.”³⁵³ Furthermore, Lawson believed that the Conservative Government had created an emergency through obstinate stupidity and had resisted the means of accommodation.

THE AFGHANISTAN CONFLICT

Britain valued India, a country the size of Europe, with an estimated population of three hundred million people, more highly than any other imperial possession. To lose India, with its inexhaustible supply of troops to the British army,³⁵⁴ and its lucrative opportunities for trade and investment, would it was argued ruin the reputation for invincibility, on which Britain's imperial status depended. In India, Britain defended a land frontier almost 2,000 miles in length. Whereas the Northeast frontier with China was secure, the Northwest faced Russia, whose strength was uncertain, whose intentions were mysterious, and whose Asian empire had expanded rapidly.³⁵⁵ In

³⁵¹ Hansard, vol. 239, col. 899, 8 April 1878.

³⁵² Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Partnership, Read, p. 121.

³⁵³ Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield, Vol. 2, Thompson, p. 412.

³⁵⁴ At various times in the nineteenth century, Britain used the Indian army to settle disputes in China, Persia, Abyssinia, Egypt, Afghanistan, Burma, the Sudan, Nyasaland, Uganda, Hong Kong and Singapore; the use of these troops was largely beyond the control of the British Parliament.

³⁵⁵ Those who believed that Russia posed a serious threat to India had some justification; the gap between the frontiers of the two nations had gradually reduced from 4,000 miles in the early 18th century, to about 1,000 miles by 1850. Between 1860 and 1869, Russia annexed the independent Khantates of Turkestan, Tchimkent, Tashkent, Samarkand and

consequence both countries became intrigued with the buffer states that ran round India's northern crescent. Russia was aware of Britain's sensitivity and used the threat of their encroachment on India as a bargaining power, particularly in their militaristic machinations in the affairs of countries in the Near East. The British feared that Russia might establish an influence in Afghanistan and stir up a rebellion that would migrate across the Northwest Frontier and induce the Muslim population to enter into a jihad or Holy war against the infidels. In consequence, the northwest corner of India became the most vulnerable part of the British Empire, and it was here that both countries contested what generally became known as the 'Great Game'. Whereas Turkey, Persia, Egypt and the Balkans occasionally became the key to India, the real key lay in the mountain kingdom of Afghanistan, where Britain fought the second and third Afghan wars (1878-80) to secure India's borders. In 1878, although Britain avoided direct conflict over the Eastern crisis in Europe the actual and immediate result of their interference was two Afghan wars.

In Britain, the 'Great Game' also represented the swing of the pendulum between the two political parties. Lawson, like Cobden believed that Britain should protect India using the least expensive solution, namely her natural geographical barriers. In contrast, Conservatives recognised that should Britain detract from her imperial responsibilities and fail to assert her influence over the central Asian kingdom they would create a vacuum for Russia to fill. In October 1879, Disraeli declared that the twin themes of Conservative foreign policy were the maintenance of our Empire, and hostility towards Russia.³⁵⁶ For the Conservatives to succeed at home they had to entice the newly enfranchised working classes to vote for a party which traditionally identified with the landed gentry. Disraeli chose patriotism as the way to harvest the electorate and through the proliferation of small wars furthered the glory of the British Empire.³⁵⁷

The explanations offered to justify the second Afghan war, ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. At the Guildhall banquet on 9 November 1878,

Krasnovodsk. "The Great Game", British Empire, David Dilke and Roy Bridge, (London, 1970), Vol. 4, p. 310.

³⁵⁶ Splendid Isolation?, Charmley, p. 165.

³⁵⁷ Imperial Britain, D. Southgate; in Britain Pre-eminent: Studies in British World Influence in The Nineteenth Century, C. J. Bartlett (ed.), (London, 1969), p. 162.

Disraeli described India's north western frontier as a 'haphazard and not a scientific frontier', and hinted that he would take steps to terminate all this inconvenience,³⁵⁸ a phrase Lawson interpreted to mean war and the annexation of Afghan territory, prompting him to associate the ensuing conflict with the biblical story of Ahab stealing his neighbour's vineyard.³⁵⁹ Sir Stafford Northcote argued that Britain had responded to an insult from the Amir after he had refused to receive a mission of friendship. If so Lawson said, it was a war of revenge.³⁶⁰ The member for Sunderland, Sir Henry Havelock, claimed that victory in Afghanistan would promote Baptist missions.³⁶¹ Religion became a prominent theme. In a letter published in the Echo³⁶² the Bishop of Gloucester, said he supported the slaughter of Afghans because Britain would execute the 'propagation of the Gospel' better than Russia. This provoked a response from Lawson: "Does that means that all the border chiefs who have become our friends and all the wild tribes are simply further branches of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts?"³⁶³ Lawson's explanation, although equally absurd had a measure of foundation. He claimed the Government wanted to fight Russia but were afraid and as such chose to fight Afghanistan, a much smaller nation.³⁶⁴ Lawson was suggesting that Disraeli had neither the will nor the courage to pursue a real Imperial policy but was merely playing at the Imperial game. He was also emphasising that even Britain's greatest panic mongers could not fear action taken by Afghanistan, and as such Russia was the real enemy. He saw Britain engaged in a

³⁵⁸ Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield, Vol. 2, Thompson, p. 500. Also Disraeli, Blake, p. 662.

³⁵⁹ Lawson made a habit of employing religious terminology in his speeches. Hansard, vol. 243, col. 1003, 17 December 1878.

³⁶⁰ Ibid, vol. 249, col. 81, 4 August 1879. Although this became the official Government position the Peace Society were quick to emphasise that in the 'authentic' report the officer of the Amir had declined to permit the entry of the British mission in a manner perfectly courteous and respectful. Times, 22 October 1878.

³⁶¹ Hansard, vol. 249, cols. 80-81, 4 August 1879.

³⁶² Echo, 17 December 1878.

³⁶³ Hansard, vol. 243, col. 1000, 17 December 1878. The Society whose object was the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was a missionary organisation founded in 1702 to send priests and schoolteachers into foreign places where British migrants were not present in large numbers. <http://www.mundus.ac.uk>

³⁶⁴ Hansard, vol. 243, col. 1000, 17 December 1878. Also Ibid, vol. 249, cols. 80-81, 4 August 1879.

“cowardly, cruel contemptible war against an independent free nation, which had never threatened Britain except in defensive circumstances.”³⁶⁵

Whereas Gladstone advocated diplomatic negotiations, Disraeli adopted a harder line. Having named Victoria, Empress of India, he was determined that Britain would hold the subcontinent. In 1874, Lord Salisbury, the Secretary of State for India, appointed Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India, a diplomat whose aggressive imperialistic articles were well known.³⁶⁶ In return for the presence of a permanent British mission Lytton offered the Amir, subsidies and material assistance against unprovoked Russian aggression. In July 1878, the Amir received a Russian mission with full diplomatic honours. Lytton was furious and immediately demanded Russian expulsion and the installation of a British counterpart. Fortunately the Congress of Berlin ended before Russia could enforce her plans, and their emissary was ordered to avoid a commitment to war. On 9 September, Disraeli, now aware of Lytton’s unapproved plans, ordered his envoy to await an official response from the Russian capital.³⁶⁷ However, Lytton, who considered Ali an unreliable savage, ignored his instructions and ordered an invasion through the unauthorised route, via the Khyber Pass.³⁶⁸

On 20 November 1878, while three columns of combined British forces approached Afghanistan, Russia withdrew and the Amir fled to Turkestan, leaving his son Yakub Khan as successor. In May 1879, the war ended with Khan signing the treaty of Gandamak whereby he agreed to accept British military control over the passes leading to India; British control of Afghan foreign policy; and a permanent British envoy at Kabul. Russia’s withdrawal vindicated Lytton’s insubordination and Disraeli gave no hint that the Viceroy’s disobedience had caused any disapproval. However, on 5 September, three

³⁶⁵ Ibid, vol. 243, col. 1000, 17 December 1878.

³⁶⁶ Splendid Isolation?, Charmley, pp. 166-7.

³⁶⁷ Unknown to Lytton, discussions took place in London between Beaconsfield, Salisbury and Cranbrook, which resulted in the dispatch on 19 August of a diplomatic protest to St. Petersburg. England’s Mission, Eldridge, pp. 200-204.

³⁶⁸ At the frontier, the commander sent forward a small detachment to negotiate entry with the tribesmen. The failure of these negotiations, coupled with the continuation of the Russian stay in Kabul, moved Lytton to assemble a military force, in the hope that the Amir would apologise and receive a permanent mission. In a letter written to Cranbrook on 26 September 1878, Beaconsfield hinted at a possible endorsement. “These are times for actions we must control and even create events... what we want is to prove our ascendancy in Afghanistan and to accomplish that we must not stick at trifles.” Ibid, p. 204.

mutinous Afghan regiments sacked the British delegation and massacred the staff. On 13 October, after executing a brilliant forced march to Kabul, the British commander, Lord Roberts deposed the treacherous Yakub Khan and placed garrisons in each of the major towns.

On 11 December 1878, Parliament reconvened to fulfil its statutory obligation and approve the expenditure required to finance the military expedition. Although radicals resented such demands the troops were already in the field, consuming food and expending bullets that had to be replaced, and as such their hands were tied.³⁶⁹ However, when the Royal Address made reference to Parliament opening under 'very happy auspicious circumstances'; and offered to give full deliberation to the Afghan war,³⁷⁰ it provoked Lawson to demand a debate relating to the need for such an increase. In reference to the 'happy auspices circumstances', he alluded to the depressing state of the British economy, reminding his colleagues that "Banks were breaking, Mills were closing, Masters were failing and men were starving," declaring that "Parliament had never met under more gloomy, humiliating, depressing and disastrous circumstances."³⁷¹

Unlike Gladstone, who criticised the methods employed to declare war, Lawson opposed the conflict on the principle of honour, morality and justice. Referring to a battle of 'slaughter and disaster',³⁷² in which more than fifty British soldiers and a large contingent of Afghans had died, he accused Conservatives of openly endorsing the establishment of pro-war patriotic societies, whose actions were sponsoring a reign of terror. "They had propagated public opinion and counteracted contrary expression, hurled sneers and abuses at the peacemakers, and on occasions assailed them with sticks and threats of violence."³⁷³ Patriotism to Lawson did not consist of:

Singing 'Rule Britannia' from morning until evening, or in flinging dead cats, or sitting in a snug newspaper editor's room, writing leading articles encouraging their countrymen to endorse a slaughter they

³⁶⁹ The Imperial Idea and its Enemies, Thornton, p. 88.

³⁷⁰ Hansard, vol. 243, col. 999, 17 December 1878.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² On 2 December 1878, the Kurran Valley Field Force won a decisive battle at Peiwar Kotal.

³⁷³ Hansard, vol. 243 col. 999, 17 December 1878.

themselves wished to avoid. A true patriot did not sing Jingo songs, but stood by the truth, even when advocating an unpopular cause.³⁷⁴

To Lawson the war was: "hypocritical, cowardly, cruel and contemptible, created by a Government whose representatives had returned from Berlin with a flourish of trumpets waving a banner proclaiming peace with honour."³⁷⁵ His argument was that since there was no peace there could be no honour.

What would have been our response, had Russia not Britain been the tyrants and oppressors. What articles we should have seen in the Daily Telegraph and Times, calling upon the population to succour those patriots defending their mountain homes.³⁷⁶

Using information published in the 'Blue Books', Lawson showed that the Government had "invented pretexts, created opportunities, and took advantage of a 'war with dishonour', a dishonour that would long adhere to the name of England." After demanding Lytton's recall, Lawson tried to make the British Government financially accountable for the war: "Her Majesty's Government are responsible for the war, and since the British people elected a Conservative Government, the electors should finance the mischief." Four days later Lawson censured Lord Cranbrook, the Indian Secretary who had used the Indian revenue, partly derived from the sale of opium to finance the war: "We get money from poisoning the Chinese and expend it killing Afghans."³⁷⁷ This was yet another occasion when Lawson criticised the Government's constitutional right to raise troops throughout the Empire, without reference to the Imperial Parliament, unless the Imperial Parliament was expected to foot the bill. He also criticised those newspaper editors who published gruesome accounts describing British troops "massacring wretched savages, leaving the sandy plains black with the bodies of the slain." Lawson urged the Government to put the money to better purpose:

³⁷⁴ Ibid, col. 1000.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, col. 1001.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, col. 1002.

Through the annexation of Afghanistan, we should have nothing but rocks and ruffians, stones and savages. Could not the expenditure be better spent on increasing the welfare of our fellow-countrymen, than to struggle for mighty prestige, and to strive to gratify what are called, Imperial instincts?³⁷⁸

Simultaneous to the discussions in the Commons was a vote in the Lord's where, to Lawson's annoyance, eight Episcopal bishops supported the Government action.³⁷⁹ Rumour suggested that one of their numbers had his eye on the vacant Bishopric of Durham. When this particular bishop failed to receive the nomination, Lawson circulated the following rhyme:

You've made a mistake in your atlas, my man,
You can't get to Durham through Afghanistan.³⁸⁰

Lawson disapproved of such intrigue, as he explained to an audience at Whitehaven.

I don't think the way to convert one nation is to cut the throats of its people. There seems to me about the vote of the eight bishops, in favour of this war, there was something very extraordinary. I think in my time there has been nothing more grotesquely horrible, or more horribly grotesque, than to see these ecclesiastics, who seem to me to be a cross between savages and saints, who one day appear in the house of God as the ministers of peace, and the next day in the House of Lords voting for an unjust and unnecessary war. I know not how this matter may stand in the great 'Hereafter', when infinite justice shall strike the balance of all human accounts, but I think there are some of us who would then rather stand in the position of the untutored Afghan killed in the defence of his life, his home, his liberty, his country, than in

³⁷⁸ Lawson, Luke, p. 93.

³⁷⁹ On 10 December in the House of Lords on an amendment moved by Lord Halifax, to the motion for charging the cost of the war on the revenues of India, the amendment was defeated by 136 votes. Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield, Vol. 2, Thompson, p. 502.

³⁸⁰ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 138.

that of erudite and enlightened ecclesiastic, who from his place of pomp and power, has cried havoc and let slip the dogs of war on a mission of rapine, revenge and cruelty.³⁸¹

Shortly afterwards Lawson advised one clergyman: "When you preach about St. John, explain that it is only 'children' who are to 'love one another'; adults are to spend their lives preparing machines and armies to kill people with whom they have a difference of opinion."³⁸²

On 4 August 1879, shortly after Roberts's arrival in Kabul, Parliament awarded a Vote of Thanks to Lord Lytton, who Lawson maintained had promoted a war which more than one third of his parliamentary colleagues had previously disapproved.³⁸³ Since Lawson considered Votes of Thanks as votes for distinguished service, he enquired into the nature of the 'great glorious battles' where an overwhelming numbers of trained men had massacred hundreds of natives armed with inferior weapons.³⁸⁴ Although he considered war a crime against both morality and justice he did not apportion blame on those soldiers who had obeyed orders. Lawson blamed Parliament; his argument was that soldiers deserved no more thanks for doing their duty than Judges, Bishops, Policemen, or Civil Servants. The system he said was one means of glorifying "...might against right."³⁸⁵ Lawson's comparison is somewhat amusing; "the soldier is charged to break the peace whereas a policeman is charged to uphold the peace."³⁸⁶ Lawson would return to this theme on numerous occasions. He once described a soldier as:

A man who made a contract with his country to kill anybody whom the country wished him to kill, anybody whom the country wished to

³⁸¹ West Cumberland Times, January 1879.

³⁸² Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 323.

³⁸³ The Division in the House of Commons taken on the subject of the war was supported by a majority of 328; however, there was a large and influential minority of 227 who opposed the war. Hence in Lawson's opinion it was not a 'national war'. Hansard, vol. 249, cols. 80-81, 4 August 1879.

³⁸⁴ On the subject of 'glorious victories' and 'distinguished service' Lawson made reference to the fight at 'Mhoutan' described by one officer as "one of the most gallant episodes in cavalry warfare," where twenty bodies of the enemy were found dead, while Britain's losses out of a force of 2,000 was two. *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 162.

³⁸⁶ Hansard, vol. 260, col. 1859, 5 May 1881.

destroy; to destroy people's property, burn their homes and inflict untold misery upon them, regardless, whether it was right or wrong; a mere animated machine. It was not for a soldier to reason but to act.³⁸⁷

SECTION 3

THE RETURN OF GLADSTONE

Upon returning to power in 1880, Gladstone inherited an imperial legacy that in opposition he had publicly condemned. After Midlothian, radicals, including Lawson, had with some justification expected Gladstone to abandon Disraelian imperialism, leave international engagements to more meddlesome nations and concentrate on much needed home reforms. In Afghanistan, Gladstone withdrew the troops from Kandahar, and for the next twenty years a 'friendly' Amir, who owed his position to Lord Roberts ruled Afghanistan; while Russia, except for the incident at Penjdeh in 1885,³⁸⁸ refrained from interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Conservatives, who viewed Russia as an encroaching power, fiercely opposed the decision, which they argued further weakened British influence. Lawson approved, he tried to contextualise the argument, emphasising that whereas during the period following the Crimean war, Russia had annexed 400,000 square miles of territory and three million inhabitants, Britain had annexed 868,000 square miles and subjugated twelve million people.³⁸⁹

In South Africa where the Afrikaner Boers of the annexed Transvaal had hoped to be released from their captive state; Gladstone, who considered federation a policy worth pursuing, had already determined to allow the status quo to prevail and to extend the tenure of the meddlesome proconsul Sir Bartle Frere. After Gladstone publicly denounced Frere during his Midlothian

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ On 30 March 1885, encouraged by the death of Gordon, Russia seized the Afghan village of Penjdeh. Gladstone warned Russia that Britain would not tolerate the situation, and called up the reserves to show his resolve. Russia withdrew her forces after it was agreed to refer the case to arbitration. The village was eventually ceded to Russia.

³⁸⁹ West Cumberland Times, 20 March 1880.

campaign,³⁹⁰ Lawson conveyed a congratulatory note which received the following complementary response: "Although I greatly respect Sir Bartle Frere, I never gave a vote with more full conviction in my life."³⁹¹ Since Lawson considered the new Parliament of Gladstone's making, the Liberal party having secured their majority through his marvellous oratorical powers directed against Disraeli's foreign and imperial policy, he expected Frere, whom he described as a despotic public servant acting "not like the Governor, but as a Government carrying out his own policy,"³⁹² be sacked and the Transvaal abandoned. When Gladstone appeared to renege on his previous commitment, Lawson, after demanding the proconsul's recall, received a verbal reprimand from John Bright, now a Cabinet Minister. Although Bright reproached Lawson for attacking the Government, Lawson who held Bright in high esteem remained calm throughout the confrontation. The next morning Lawson received a note, in which Bright disclosed

If it were an enemy, I could have borne it, but for a friend to break out into opposition to the Government of his own making, only two days after its appearance in the House, is a measure of party tactics, I fancy, wholly without previous example. If no particle of confidence is to be placed in a Government, if any accidental difference on a question in which no great principle is involved is to justify an immediate attempt to destroy it, we may bid farewell to any permanent Liberal Administration in this country, and must become as Italy now is, or suffer the blessings of another long Conservative reign.

After urging Lawson to put his trust in Gladstone, Bright continued,

³⁹⁰ Gladstone described Frere as the instigator of a foreign policy which was 'wicked and aggressive', as depraving the morality, and ruining the finances, of England. In 1881, Frere publicly responded. Afghanistan and South Africa: Letters to the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, Sir Bartle Frere, (London, 1881), pp. 5-26.

³⁹¹ West Cumberland Times, 19 April 1879.

³⁹² Hansard, vol. 249, col. 151, 4 August 1879.

It may be better for the country and for the colony to do what the Government is doing, than to gratify our anxiety to punish Frere and the Government is only earnest on behalf of the country and the colony.³⁹³

To Lawson, the note emphasised the different views, taken by a Minister and an independent member on a question, in which they both shared a similarity of principle. Lawson introduced the matter of Frere's incompetence on ten further occasions and on every occasion he failed to generate a parliamentary debate. On one occasion he asked the Colonial Under Secretary to nominate a date for Parliament to discuss: "The propriety or impropriety of the action of the Liberal Government in not immediately recalling Sir Bartle Frere."³⁹⁴

On the subject of loyalty, Lawson remained loyal to those principles and policies which he unequivocally considered correct: party and friends always came second. He despised humbug and seldom stood back when an opportunity arose to score a point in favour of his fads or crotchets. He once censured W. E. Forster, after Forster questioned the character of Sir Bartle Frere and his relationship with the Conservative party:

They (the Conservatives) knew who he (Frere) was, and what a remarkable combination of strength, of will and of power of being misled by his own imagination, at the same time, of sincerity of purpose, and yet of a possibility of absolutely defying them in any instruction given to him.³⁹⁵

Although evoking similar views, Lawson reminded Forster of the changing character of his opinions, when upon Frere's appointment Forster had urged a Conservative Government to strengthen Frere's hand.

We have certainly in the Governor of the principal colony a man whom we can entirely trust, for motive, for sense, and for ability in the most difficult manner. I think we might search the whole of our Public Service

³⁹³ Lawson: *A Memoir*, Russell, pp. 152-153.

³⁹⁴ *Hansard*, vol. 252, col. 1620, 10 June 1880.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, vol. 249, col. 148, 4 August 1879. (W. E. Forster.)

and with difficulty find any man who has that combination of feelings of justice and firmness of character which fits him to deal with the most difficult question.³⁹⁶

In August 1881, the Government finally recalled Frere; he died three years later aged sixty-nine, a broken man, with discredited policies.

In 1882, Lawson reminded his neighbours of the futility of the Zulu war:

We killed ten thousand Zulus, and everybody said how brave our troops were. They went out with all the machinery of destruction they had been preparing for some years, and mowed down those naked savages as you mow down corn in your harvest field, and our generals came home and got swords of honour, and were greatly admired for all they had done. And what was it all for? Why to break the power of Cetawayo. Why, later we had him over in London for two or three weeks, and the ladies were running after him with baskets of grapes and peaches to give him, and he sailed two or three weeks ago back to his own country. What was the good of the ten thousand Zulus we cut down with our Gattling guns?³⁹⁷

Shortly after returning to office, Gladstone declared his intention to fulfil the Treaty of Berlin with respect to effectual reforms and equal laws in Turkey, as well as frontier rectifications in favour of Montenegro and Greece.³⁹⁸ He was also determined to promote the Concert of Europe as a valuable and important instrument for settling international affairs. In opposition, he had predicted 'grave consequences' if the purchase of shares in the Suez Canal were not carried out in concert with Europe.³⁹⁹ He had also called the Government to task for preventing the Congress at Berlin from handing over

³⁹⁶ Ibid, vol. 242 col. 474, (W. E. Forster), 26 July 1878. Ibid, vol. 249 col. 150, (Lawson), 4 August 1879.

³⁹⁷ West Cumberland, Times, 15 September 1882. On the value of Gattling guns in African warfare see Campaigning in West Africa, The Ashante Invasion, E. Rogers, (London, 1874), p. 78.

³⁹⁸ Gladstone: Heroic Minister, Shannon, p. 255.

³⁹⁹ Gladstone 1874-1898, Matthew, p. 14.

the whole of Thessaly and Epirus to Greece.⁴⁰⁰ To show the Turks that he meant business, Gladstone proposed a combined naval demonstration off Dulcigno on the Albanian coast, in concert with the five European signatories of the treaty, which according to Dilke would show "Turkey the ocular proof of the absolute agreement of the powers" and by so doing "...exercise pressure on the Porte."⁴⁰¹ Although Gladstone firmly believed that the Powers could compel Turkey to bow to Europe's will, he became disillusioned after Austria, Germany and France declared that under no circumstances would they open fire. This lack of commitment on behalf of the 'Concert' convinced Gladstone that Britain would only overcome Turkish obduracy by force, the question was how to apply coercion without risk to the frail peace.⁴⁰² Although the threat of coercion came to nothing the Sultan agreed to cede Dulcigno to Montenegro, and extend the Hellenic frontier to something approaching Homeric Greece.⁴⁰³

On 2 September 1880, with the prorogation of Parliament fast approaching and newspaper reports warning of forthcoming military operations, Lawson asked the Government to state the nature of their coercion undertakings.⁴⁰⁴ His primary concern was to ensure that the Cabinet did not abuse their authority over the vast military and naval power of the state, without reference to Parliament. He also reminded Lord Hartington of his previous stipulation that the Crown could not raise or deploy Indian troops as an integral part of the British army in times of peace without parliamentary approval.⁴⁰⁵ Lawson rejected Government claims that the provisions of the Anglo-Turkish Treaty bound Britain to interfere in the affairs of Turkey. He based his contrary argument on a response given by Gladstone in 1872, when Gladstone had said "treaty recognition and fulfilment depended very much on the national opinion at the time." In accordance with guarantees Gladstone had also stated that "whereas we had a right to interfere that did not constitute in itself an obligation to interfere."⁴⁰⁶ Lawson argued that if guarantees depended upon the national opinion of the time, the Government, before

⁴⁰⁰ "England's Mission", Gladstone, p. 562. Hansard, vol. 256, col. 1146, 2 September 1880.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid, vol. 256, col. 1138, 2 September 1880.

⁴⁰² Life of Gladstone, Vol. 2, Morley, pp. 185-187.

⁴⁰³ Gladstone: Heroic Minister, Shannon, pp. 266-7. Life of Gladstone, Vol. 2, Morley, p. 186.

⁴⁰⁴ Hansard, vol. 256, col. 1121, 2 September 1880.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, col. 1120.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, vol. 210, col. 1178, 12 April 1872.

taking military action had an obligation to consult Members of the House of Commons, which represented public opinion.⁴⁰⁷ When the Government declared their intention to “strengthen and not to embarrass the Turkish Empire, to secure European peace, and to preserve the power of the Porte;” Lawson considered it a reinforcement of the balance of power in Europe, which he described as “an ancient fetish costing millions of lives.”⁴⁰⁸

During the debate Lawson’s critical approach attracted praise from a number of sources; James Bryce⁴⁰⁹ acknowledged Lawson’s popularity and urged the Cabinet to respect his “rigid consistency and motives of humanity.”⁴¹⁰ Joseph Cowen also applauded Lawson’s “integrity and consistent approach to matters irrespective of the shade of the Government in power,” then added facetiously, “...he is opposed to drinking and opposed to fighting.”⁴¹¹ In 1882, Chamberlain compared the sending of the fleet to Dulcigno as a precedent for the course the Government took at Alexandria, and added: “As far as he could recollect there was not on that occasion a single rumour of dissent even from Sir Wilfrid Lawson.”⁴¹² Lawson responded; in a letter to The Times he referred to a speech where he told his constituents: “I must say I condemn all these proceedings...It was a policy of war that cannot be denied...Whenever a Liberal Government goes in for a war policy, I for one will oppose it, just as if it came from a Tory Government.”⁴¹³

On reflection, it may seem difficult to justify Lawson’s hostility towards the settlement of international disputes through the Concert of Europe. Having previously applauded Gladstone’s initiative in using arbitration to resolve the Alabama claims, his critics, with some justification, accused him of inconsistency. But the idea of England striving to enforce good government and wise laws in concurrence with the European Powers was anathema to his principles.⁴¹⁴ Gladstone had reconciled the Alabama claims by peaceful fiscal agreement, involving two advanced Christian nations, sharing a common ancestry, a common commitment to trade and a geographical detachment of

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, vol. 256, col. 1123, 2 September 1880.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, col. 1313, 4 September 1880.

⁴⁰⁹ James Bryce (1838-1922), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 8, pp. 404-412

⁴¹⁰ Hansard, vol. 256, col. 1148, 2 September 1880.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, col. 1301, 4 September 1880.

⁴¹² Times, 20 December 1882.

⁴¹³ Ibid, 23 December 1882.

⁴¹⁴ Hansard, vol. 256, col. 1123, 2 September 1880.

three thousand miles. To Lawson, Gladstone was setting himself an impossible task, the enforcement of the Treaty of Berlin, involved a naval demonstration, a threat of coercion and an agreement between seven neighbouring countries, each with a history of mistrust and aggression towards each other. He doubted if the combined military Empires could force any country to redistribute territory by exerting pressure, and argued against the deployment of one British soldier or one British ship. His argument was that although the Turks were fanatical, unjust and extortionate, they did not stand alone; for Russia, he insisted, treated her own population little better. History had taught him that threats of force would never compel a tyrannical government into governing their subjects fairly but would:

Strengthen a Government, on the understanding that the more one foreign power abused another the more likely were the subjects of the latter to overlook the evils from which they suffered in the endeavour to oppose foreign combinations.⁴¹⁵

After Midlothian the Transvaal Boers assumed, with some justification, that a change of British Government would restore their independence⁴¹⁶ but once in office Gladstone had other priorities. Both Ireland and the Cabinet were drifting into civil war, with Whigs supporting Irish landlords, radicals supporting Irish tenants, and Charles Stuart Parnell threatening to obstruct all parliamentary business. Lawson also acknowledged an Irish connection and demanded justice for the Boers because otherwise Irish constituents would never accept they could obtain justice from the imperial Parliament.⁴¹⁷

The crisis in the Transvaal occurred because the British Government considered itself the supreme authority in South Africa, a claim rejected by the Boers. In many respects Britain allowed the Boers their independence with one hand but by enveloping them in a landlocked state held their destiny with

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, cols 1119-1124.

⁴¹⁶ During the Midlothian campaign Gladstone had recognised Boer resentment and after singling out annexation as a "...reprehensible act of condemnation" led the Boers to believe that independence would be forthcoming. *Life of Gladstone*, Vol. 2, Morley, pp. 202-202.

⁴¹⁷ *Hansard*, vol. 257, col. 1066. *Henry Labouchere and the Empire 1880-1905*, R. J. Hind, (London, 1972), p. 193.

the other.⁴¹⁸ On 12 May 1880, Gladstone rejected the Transvaal's request with an announcement that "the Queen cannot be allowed to relinquish her sovereignty over the Transvaal."⁴¹⁹ In December the Boers rose to arms, rejected their taxes and laid siege to several British garrisons.⁴²⁰

On 6 January 1881, the 'Royal Address' referred to a rising in the Transvaal which imposed upon the Government a duty to take military measures to vindicate their authority. It also stated "the rising in the Transvaal has of necessity set aside for the time any plan for securing to the European settlers full control over their own local affairs."⁴²¹ In opposition, Gladstone had thundered against annexation, now in government "...confederation was eclipsing and absorbing every other consideration."⁴²² Later that month the Peace Society assembled a large and influential deputation to present an objection on the issue to the Colonial Minister, Lord Kimberley; twenty MPs were present including Lawson. The Transvaal Independence Committee was formed on 18 January; Lawson became a leading spokesman,⁴²³ and within weeks hundreds of protest meetings were held throughout the country.

On 21 January, the MP for Burnley, Peter Rylands launched a blistering attack on the Government's colonial policy, which was enforcing her supremacy over a people, who had justifiably claimed their independence.⁴²⁴ Sir Henry Holland (later became Viscount Knutsford) replied on behalf of many Conservatives when he entreated the Government to uphold the country's honour and subjugate the rebel insurrection. "The House," he assumed, "...with the exception of Sir Wilfrid Lawson, all must agree, that in the first place, the uprising must be put down, and Her Majesty's supremacy re-asserted."⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁸ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 55.

⁴¹⁹ Gladstone, 1874-98, Matthew, p. 154.

⁴²⁰ Fighting began at Bronkhorstspuit on 20 December 1880, after a British commander refused to obey a Boer ultimatum. The accuracy of the Boer's firepower was devastating, within minutes, fifty-seven British troops lay dead with over one hundred wounded, twenty of them mortally. The Boers had annihilated one eighth of the British forces in the Transvaal. Imperial Factor in South Africa, Kiewiet, pp. 276-77.

⁴²¹ Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1143, 21 January 1881.

⁴²² Heavens Command, Morris, p. 439.

⁴²³ The Arbitrator, January 1881.

⁴²⁴ Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1109, 21 January 1881.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, col. 1157.

When Lawson demanded the withdrawal of British troops he reminded those who criticised the brutality of the Boers that atrocities committed by British troops were equally apparent. His argument was that the annexation of the Transvaal had led directly to the Zulu war. Britain had destroyed the Zulu to protect the Boer, and now dissatisfied with the outcome was about to murder the Boer to uphold her own jurisdiction. He drew attention to Gladstone's inconsistencies, and accused the prime minister of holding one set of principles to address his constituents and another to address Parliament. Gladstone excused his behaviour "To disapprove the annexation of a country is one thing; to abandon that annexation is another. Whatever we do, we must not blind ourselves to the legitimate consequences of facts. By the annexation of the Transvaal we contracted new obligations."⁴²⁶ In Parliament, Lawson tabled another example of Gladstone's ambiguity:

We shall, with earnestness, with temper, and I hope with firmness and decision, pursue the course that we have marked out for ourselves - namely, resolutely, and let me add also, as promptly as possible, to re-establish the authority of the Crown; and having re-established the authority of the Crown, to pursue such a policy for the full settlement of the question as will deserve and receive the approval of the House and the country.⁴²⁷

Lawson's interpretation of Gladstone's vague and predominantly unsatisfactory response was twofold. Gladstone was saying: Britain should satisfactorily conclude what Lawson considered an unjust war and then and only then grant the Boers a satisfactory settlement. Lawson found it astonishing that Britain was to pursue a policy, which demanded the murder of an injured party as a prerequisite to offering justice.⁴²⁸ Lawson viewed the proceedings as one more example of British interests overriding British honour. "What interest could there be" he asked, "in expending millions of money and sacrificing thousands of lives to rule over a people who

⁴²⁶ Ibid, col. 1141.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, col. 1147.

⁴²⁸ Ibid, col. 1166.

continuously refused to be our subjects."⁴²⁹ Honour was sacrosanct to Lawson; having taken a territory by fraud and maintained it with coercion, Gladstone should acknowledge Disraeli's mistakes and overturn his policy.

Lawson later became embroiled in a parliamentary exchange that questioned the treatment of possible Boer prisoners. "Would prisoners be granted belligerent status and as such treated according to the rules of international warfare, or would they be classified as rebels and executed accordingly?" Following intense pressure, Lawson secured a commitment that prisoners would receive belligerent status.⁴³⁰ On 16 February 1881, after rejecting Lawson's earlier request for information relating to the proposed peace arrangements,⁴³¹ ministers finally released the somewhat ambiguous instructions given to General Sir George Pomeroy Colley, whose discretion they did not bind, but who was to "make arrangements and try and avoid the effusion of blood."⁴³² Such instructions, Lawson believed, invited insubordination.

The first Boer war which had begun in dramatic circumstances now ended equally sensational. On 22 February in little more than thirty minutes, the Boers annihilated a force of 600 British troops on the peak of Majuba Hill.⁴³³ When the news reached London via a new submarine cable, the War Office made immediate arrangements to dispatch a force of 10,000 men under the command of Sir Frederick Roberts.

Lawson viewed the disaster at Majuba as one more example of diplomatic and military incompetence. On 1 March, he asked the Government to release information passed between Colley and the Boers. He also asked Hugh Childers, the Secretary for War, if he had issued orders to restrain

⁴²⁹ Ibid, vol. 263, col. 1839, 25 July 1881.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, vol. 257, cols. 1635-38, 29 January 1881.

⁴³¹ Ibid, vol. 258, col. 629, 26 January 1881. The day before the first of Colley's battles, Lord Kimberley sent a telegram to Sir Hercule Robinson, which contained the following words. "I have to instruct you to inform President Brand that if armed opposition should at once cease, Her Majesty's Government would thereupon endeavour to frame such a scheme as in their belief would satisfy all intelligent friends of the Transvaal. Ibid, vol. 263, col. 1848, 25 July 1881.

⁴³² Ibid, vol. 259, col. 429, 7 March 1881.

⁴³³ The Boers lost one man killed and five wounded; the British losses were high, ninety-two killed including Colley, one hundred and fifty-five badly wounded, and fifty-three taken prisoner.

British troops, a request that went unanswered.⁴³⁴ On 4 March, Lawson asked Sir Evelyn Ashley, the Secretary of the Board of Trade if he had spoken on behalf of the Government when he informed his constituents that England would not negotiate with the Boers until they received an unconditional surrender.⁴³⁵ In response Ashley criticised Lawson's methods of cross-examination accusing him of, "...conceiving a new terror in political life," Ashley strongly objected to Lawson furthering his own claim by isolating an abstract sentence from a speech addressed to his constituents.⁴³⁶ On 15 March, Lawson addressed a very large meeting in Liverpool, where he said, "If self-defence were right in war, then the Boers were right and we were wrong, for we were attacking them, and they were defending themselves."⁴³⁷

During the Transvaal controversy, George Howard (later became 9th Earl of Carlisle), one of Lawson's long standing friends, opposed James Lowther in a bye-election for the East Cumberland constituency. Under normal circumstances Lawson would have stood shoulder to shoulder with his colleague; however, after Howard refused to publicly condemn Gladstone's Transvaal policy, Lawson withdrew his support. As he later explained, he was not prepared to give annexation even mild sanction, and therefore did nothing other than register a favourable vote.⁴³⁸

Throughout the period under review, Lawson had to confront heavy criticism from those who accused him of condoning slavery. Although his anti-slavery opinions were well-documented and his views on the subject beyond reproach his opinions differed somewhat from many of those who subscribed to the Anti Slavery Society. Lawson refused to connect the suppression of slavery with an expansion of the British Empire and repudiated all benevolent proposals put forward as a pretext for annexing territory. Lawson reminded the House, that although the Boers had faced many charges of promoting slavery, the accusations remained unsubstantiated. "The idea of supporting philanthropy," he said, "was a misconception, if the Boers were a slave-holding, slave-trading race and Britain had carried out the annexation to

⁴³⁴ Hansard, vol. 258, col. 1949, 1 March 1881.

⁴³⁵ Times, 4 March 1881.

⁴³⁶ Hansard, vol. 259, col. 326, 4 March 1881.

⁴³⁷ Times, 16 March 1881.

⁴³⁸ Howard was elected by a small majority of thirty. Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 158.

abolish that practice, where were the emancipated slaves? In 1881, he published an open letter in The Times newspaper, offering a sum of £10, to any person who could produce evidence to show the existence of slavery in the Transvaal.⁴³⁹ Although the prize went uncollected, he received public endorsement. F. W. Chesson, the Secretary to the Aboriginal Protection Society, claimed that during the occupation, Britain had refused to interfere with the domestic customs of the Boers. The Bishop of Natal, John William Colenso, the influential anthropologist, and authority on South African tribal customs, declared that slave ownership by Boers was nonsense.⁴⁴⁰

After Majuba, Gladstone came under intense pressure to punish the Boers. Aware that critics would mistake conciliation for capitulation, he opened peace negotiations, provoking the contempt of the Conservative party, and the consternation of Queen Victoria. Gladstone's reversal had little to do with Lawson's agitation; his natural instincts were to withdraw directly from the administration of the Transvaal and to do justice to the Boers. Lawson simply reinforced these responsibilities. Eventually the Cabinet adopted a pragmatic approach and considered the consequences for the whole of South Africa, should they subjugate the Transvaal. Gladstone was aware of the empathy between the Boer residents at the Cape and those residing in the two Boer republics, sentiments endorsed by one Cape administrator who said: "Every shot fired in the Transvaal will find an echo down here in the Cape Colony; every drop of blood shed in the Transvaal will show those bitter feelings, which had almost died away between the Dutch and the English."⁴⁴¹ The Cabinet inaugurated an enquiry, which through the Pretoria conference of 1881 granted the Boers' freedom and independence under the 'suzerainty of the British Crown'.⁴⁴² Gladstone was unrepentant; in an endeavour to avoid an expensive colonial war, he awarded the Boers a settlement, which retained

⁴³⁹ Times, 15 February 1881.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 27 June 1881. In a letter to F. W. Chesson, Bishop Colenso said: "I have argued that the simple fact that 800,000 natives were living under the Boer Government without taking to flight and running over to Natal for protection, is enough to show that the accusation against the Boers of ill-treating the natives under their rule must be grossly exaggerated, and that, to all appearance, they even prefer the Boer rule to our own."

⁴⁴¹ Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1117, 21 January 1881.

⁴⁴² The status of a Suzerain State brought about not the total relinquishment and abdication of sovereignty, but only a partial restriction of it. Although not an English legal term, it allowed the British Government to give the Boers their independence while retaining their subjection.

them in a landlocked state.⁴⁴³ The first Boer war was important, because it was the only occasion in the history of Victoria's Empire when Britain negotiated a peace settlement from the loser's side of the table.

On 28 March 1881, Lawson, a leading member of the Transvaal Independence Committee waited upon Lord Kimberley and Grant Duff at the Colonial Office. Although the committee applauded the government decision to end the bloodshed in the Transvaal they emphasised that in their opinion the conditions placed on the Boers would lead to serious future difficulties.⁴⁴⁴ After the settlement, notwithstanding their earlier differences and the aforementioned concerns, Lawson defended Gladstone's decision, reminding those who accused the prime minister of cowardice that the greatest coward in the world was not afraid of what he did, but what the world thought of what he did.⁴⁴⁵

The hard times that helped to provoke conflict on the Eastern Frontier, in Zululand and the Transvaal also played their part in Basutoland where the white man's demand and need for land was again conspicuous. The composite tribal monarchy Basutoland, comprised a thin strip of arable land about 150 miles long intermingled with a confused tangle of mountain chains and untenanted bush. Although the Sotho's exported vast quantities of grain in good season, they could not feed their expanding indigenous population, pay their taxes or purchase their provisions; a set of circumstances, which forced many of their inhabitants to seek employment in neighbouring territories.⁴⁴⁶

In 1862, the Sotho supreme chief, Moshweshwe, under threat from the Orange Free State requested recognition from the British Crown. Five years later, after enduring hostilities reached unacceptable levels, Sir Phillip

⁴⁴³ Scramble for Southern Africa, Schreuder, p. 87.

⁴⁴⁴ The memorial read as follows: "At the same time it is our conviction that the establishment of the suzerainty of the Crown, the approbation of territory from the Boers, and the control of their foreign relations by Britain are conditions of peace which may lead to serious difficulties in the future. We are of opinion that the maintenance of friendly relations between Her Majesty's Government and the Boers will be most readily secured by adherence to the principles of the Sand River Treaty of 1852, and that every responsibility we retain in the Transvaal may prove troublesome hereafter, and lead to undesirable complications in the future." Times, 29 March 1881.

⁴⁴⁵ Hansard, vol. 263, col. 1842, 25 July 1881.

⁴⁴⁶ Imperial Factor in South Africa, Kiewiet, p. 265.

Wodehouse, the British High Commissioner to the Cape, received instructions to annex the territory. In 1871, Britain allowed the recently established Cape Government to annex Basutoland, a nation they described as tranquil and contented, which would supply great benefits in the way of trade and labour. Unfortunately no one explained the official terms and corresponding implications of the annexation, and as a result the natives continued to consider themselves direct subjects of the crown. The Cape Colony had assumed the government of a Native race, but declined to offer the native race a share in that representative Government.⁴⁴⁷ After the destruction of the Zulu tribal system, Frere extended the Transkei disarmament policy, ironically called, the 'Peace Preservation Act', to incorporate the Sotho nation. Although this occurred three weeks before Gladstone returned to office, by refusing repeated requests for Frere's recall the British Government became responsible for Frere's earlier actions. A point emphasised by Lawson, who argued that although the Cape Government had initiated the war,⁴⁴⁸ the British Crown had appointed and sustained the Governor.

Frere, by his own admission aimed to advance the cause of civilization, peace and security by maintaining the supremacy of the white race in South Africa.

This policy of general disarmament is, after all, only a branch of other greater and more complicated questions: Union or Confederation; self-defence against the African enemies and good government including settlement of the native question.⁴⁴⁹

However, he chose to ignore three important details; one, the decree only affected the black race; two, it was the white owners of the diamond mines who had chosen to pay the Sotho in military weapons;⁴⁵⁰ and three, the

⁴⁴⁷ Hansard, vol. 257, cols. 1065-67, 20 January 1881.

⁴⁴⁸ In 1878, the Governor of Basutoland warned that disarmament would lead to war, there was no other cause that would give occasion to war, and that any proposal of that kind would be insanity and might raise the black races against the whites. *Ibid*, vol. 257, col. 1068, 20 January 1881.

⁴⁴⁹ Scramble for Southern Africa, Schreuder, pp. 68-71

⁴⁵⁰ Three to six month's work at twenty-five shillings a week in cash, or ten shillings plus food, was enough to buy a good gun. British army muskets cost £4, while breach loading Snider

decree coincided with a severe drought, forcing maize to rise in price by fifty per cent. Chief Moorosi, then aged eighty was the first to challenge the white man's rule. Within months Cape forces, assisted by loyal Sotho's subjugated the indigenous tribe and the subdivision of Sotho territory into white farms began.⁴⁵¹ Having experienced the treacherous insincerity of the white man's ways the remaining Sotho's resolved to defend their territory. In September 1880, an armed struggle erupted after a force of 20,000 well-mounted and well-armed warriors deterred a detachment of the Cape Mounted Rifles who had moved on their Kraals.⁴⁵²

Lawson countered Frere's assertion, that because the Sotho rebelled, they must have held rebellious intentions.⁴⁵³ His argument was that almost every insurrection had a root cause, and occurred only after the people had failed to receive a satisfactory conclusion to a genuine grievance. He also rejected Lord Kimberley's remarks that the Sotho's had rebelled against the Queen. If they were rebels, Lawson insisted, then Britain had a legitimate right to assist the colonists in their suppression; however if not rebels, then Britain had a fundamental obligation to protect the natives from their aggressors. As he said, "by refusing to promote either course, the Government had encouraged a deadly struggle."⁴⁵⁴

Lawson viewed the conflict as a series of massacres; an opinion endorsed by the editor of one Cape newspaper, who likened the conflict to a hunt, "the great question was not to fight in accordance with the humanitarian ideas of the nineteenth century, but to fight in such a way as to make the discomfiture of the enemy certain."⁴⁵⁵ Wolseley, now back in the War Office also acknowledged the futility of the disarmament policy.

rifles cost £12. The History of South Africa, Frank Welsh, (London, 1998), p. 241. Also Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1068, 20 January 1881.

⁴⁵¹ Gordon Sprigg, the Cape prime minister was reported to have said at the time, that when the struggle should be over, the colonists would be given the spoils (land) of war. A statement later denounced by Lord Kimberley. Even a Cape newspaper called the remarks, 'startling and serious'. Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1068, 20 January 1881.

⁴⁵² The Great Trek to the Boer War, Nutting, p. 102.

⁴⁵³ Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1071, 20 January 1881.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, col. 1069.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, col. 1067.

If it were possible to disarm all the natives in South Africa, it might possibly be worthwhile to incur no little risk to secure that end, but to incur the risk of war as we are now doing in the Cape Colony for the purpose of obtaining say 20,000 or even 30,000 guns from the loyal Sothos, whilst hundreds of thousands of arms remain in the hands of the neighbouring tribes, and of the tribes in and around Natal and the Transvaal is, in my opinion, incurring a most serious risk for an incommensurate object.⁴⁵⁶

The Sotho war became the first in the nineteenth century in which the British Government, although indirectly involved, neither fought in nor financed.⁴⁵⁷ Eventually the Cabinet instructed Sir Hercules Robinson to find a peaceful solution. In Lawson's opinion, the conflict was one more example of Frere's forward policy, and justified his own campaign to demand the proconsul's recall. On 20 January 1881, Lawson moved an amendment to a clause in the Royal Address, relating to the protection of life and property. Although the clause specifically related to events in Ireland, Lawson asked the authorities to extend the instruction and to mediate between the warring factions in Basutoland, and by doing so prevent further destruction of 'life and property'. Lawson was comparing seven agrarian murders committed in Ireland with the slaying of hundreds of what he described as: "our fellow subjects in South Africa."⁴⁵⁸

With the exception of a few members of the Aborigine Protection Society, Lawson stood accused on two accounts; one, of testing the legality of the policy of the Cape Parliament, which in his opinion had waged a war to satisfy their own interest; and two, of offering encouragement to those who opposed the authority of the Cape Government. In Lawson's opinion the white settlers had driven the native from a position of semi-civilisation into savagery. He also censured a statement made by one unnamed Wesleyan missionary

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, 257, col. 1071. However, Wolseley was ignoring that the disarmament policy was only part of a process of extending the control of the Cape Colony over all tribes and all territories as far as the Natal borders. Imperial Factor in South Africa, Kiewiet, p. 263.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 268.

⁴⁵⁸ Hansard, vol. 257, col. 1066., 20 January 1881.

who advocated the sword as an appropriate path for Christianity to take as they journeyed among the dark races of Africa.⁴⁵⁹

On 30 March 1882, Lawson received an important undertaking from the Under Secretary of State for the Home department, Leonard Courtney.

There should be no abandonment under any circumstances, that there shall be no renewal of the war, nor confiscation, except as a last resort: that the disarmament proclamation shall be repealed; and that a commission shall be appointed to assess the injury done to 'loyals' and 'traders', and offer compensation: that the commission will also enquire into and report on the advisability of establishing local self Government; and a priority for giving the people some measure of representation in Parliament.⁴⁶⁰

After months of indecisive conflict, Sir Hercule Robinson negotiated a peace settlement, whereby the Cape forces withdrew and the Sotho's registered their weapons. In 1882, the Cape Parliament rescinded the Peace Preservation Proclamation, which had punished rebellious and loyal Sothos alike, and as a result the natives retained their arms, and eventually achieved protectorate status.

Conclusion

On 19 April 1881, Lord Beaconsfield, the Queen's favourite Minister died, and with him, Lawson thought Britain's obsession with imperialism. In an address to the Peace Society, Lawson acknowledged Disraeli's tenure of office and his influence upon Conservative political philosophy. He was, said Lawson, "a man who washed his spears in the blood of any nation with which he could pick a quarrel, whose great expenditure in pursuit of foreign policy had cost far more than the objects were worth."⁴⁶¹ "Look," said Lawson:

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, col. 1068.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, vol. 260, col. 359, 31 March 1881.

⁴⁶¹ West Cumberland Times, 31 January 1880.

At the undertakings into which the Government had gone, the things they had done, or tried to do, or promised to do, or failed to do. They had set themselves up to frighten Russia, protect Turkey, to annex the Transvaal, to reform Asia Minor, to occupy Cyprus, to manipulate Egypt, to invade Zululand, to catch Cetywayo, to smoke out Secocoeine, and to secure a scientific frontier for India. How he asked, had they tried to do these things? They had shifted our Indian troops up and down, moved our fleet backwards and forwards, made secret treaties, sent ultimatums to everybody with whom they had the slightest quarrel, engaged in two cruel and unjust wars and paved the way for any number more.⁴⁶²

Lawson also charged Lord Beaconsfield with waging a war against Britain's poor, and urged they abandon imperialism and redirect their war against the greater foes of vice, crime, ignorance and pauperism. Lawson maintained that many Conservatives considered:

The Zulu war was a glorious undertaking; that the occupation of Cyprus was a magnificent commission; that the two wars in Afghanistan were commendable acts; that a strong nation had every right to invade a weak one; that enormous expenditure was necessary; and that ministerial misstatements were an appropriate means of responding to parliamentary questions.⁴⁶³

He contended that such dogmatic commitments encouraged Conservatives to pursue disastrous policies. Although Lawson invariably honoured those who stuck by their principles, even when opposed to those of his own, the attitude of many imperialists made him question his own pragmatism. As he said, "He honoured their bulldog tenacity, which made them stick to their crazy convictions; he honoured them for the blundering, floundering way in which

⁴⁶² Ibid, 31 January 1880.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

they went on tumbling into one bog after another in pursuit of glory” but he would never sanction their unwillingness to acknowledge their own mistakes.

The Tories appeared to want to suppress the consequences of their actions. Russia has gained her ends in spite of Tory action; Turkey was more rotten than previous; Asia Minor was worse than before; the scientific frontier was nothing but a scientific scarecrow; and Cyprus was a national joke.⁴⁶⁴

Such expressions were the cornerstones of Lawson’s opposition to Beaconsfieldism. The questions arise, did Lawson’s agitation expose the anomalies of that imperial policy and did Lawson’s opinions make a difference? It is doubtful if Lawson’s interventions had any affect upon Conservative policy; they may have feared the combined strength of a Liberal party but showed little respect for the extremist elements within that organisation, those they called fools and dreamers. Critics could argue that the behaviour of the radicals strengthened Conservative resolve and on occasions forced moderate Liberals to support Conservative policy as a means of suppressing the ambitions of their radical colleagues.

However, Lawson was at his best when challenging the policies of his own Government. In 1881, he recorded his frustration in verse. The contents of the lines represent very characteristically, his peculiar blend of sharp criticism with playful temper; and summarise his feelings prior to entering perhaps his greatest agitation, an attack on Gladstone’s occupation of Egypt.

DON'T EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT.

Don't embarrass the Government! Fourteen good men –
We could never collect such a fourteen again:
A firm bulwark, they stand for our 'prestige' and glory,

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 29 January 1880.

They keep in the Whigs and they keep out the Tory.
Don't embarrass the Government! Leave them alone;
They're the very best Government ever was known.
'Peace, Retrenchment, Reform!' they proclaimed loud and clear,
When boldly they went to the country last year.
'Peace, Retrenchment, Reform!' we all shouted together,
'The Liberal Party!' and 'Nothing like leather!'
Don't embarrass the men we thus put into power,
If they cannot set everything right in an hour.
With what difficult matters they've had to contend!
Nay, inherited troubles and toil without end!
The deeds of those Tories, so mean and so base,
Left behind them a legacy rich in disgrace.
These fourteen good men were the heirs of entail:
'Tis unfair their proceedings as yet to assail,
Whate'er they do wrong is the fault of the Tory;
Whate'er they do right but augments their own glory.
Make allowance. They're terribly hampered you know,
'Don't embarrass the Government!' never, dear no!
'Don't embarrass the Government!' pause first and think.
If you do, from a course such as that you will shrink.
You don't like Coercion! I hate it, 'tis true;
But only consider – what were they to do!
The Tories required it, Sir Stafford insisted;
And forces like these should be never resisted.
Besides, all respectable people are pleased
When the members from Ireland are worried and teased.
How gladly we vote in each crushing division,
When 'the lot' were suspended, what shouts of derision!
Though we've fallen on curious political weather,
We've succeeded in 'keeping the party together.'
You don't like Intervention with each foreign nation,
Or sending a fleet for a grand Demonstration?
But consider a minute the fix we were in:

We were bound to enforce the decrees of Berlin.
The treaty was 'rot,' as we very well knew,
But once more I ask you, what were we to do?
The world's full of Jingoese who must be obeyed,
And displays of our force must be frequently made.
Even dwellers in Mesopotamia must feel
The strength of our arm and the edge of our steel.
'You object to the shooting of Boers,' do you say?
Well, that's awkward, I'm bound to admit, in a way.
But remember our forces were thoroughly beat,
And the Tories would howl if we made a retreat.
We must keep up our power on Africa's shores,
And try if, in turn, we can't kill a few Boers.
Last session besides we secured a great name
By the measure we passed for destroying 'Ground Game.'
And even more pleased the Dissenters were still
When we pushed through the Commons their Burials Bill.
Don't attempt then the Government's action to fetter;
Their deeds have been good – their intentions still better;
There's a Land Bill in store which is sure to impart
Warmth, comfort, and joy to the Liberal heart.
'Don't embarrass the Government!' leave them quite free,
If you'll only do that you will see – what you'll see.
We may all be embarrassed again and again,
But we must not embarrass the Fourteen Good Men.
Let Boers be shot down till a desert is made;
Let Basutos be butchered and Greeks be betrayed
Let millions on millions be squandered away,
And the Irish disturbance grow worse every day.
'Don't embarrass the Government!' still I implore:
The more blunders they make, only trust them the more.
Faith bids you the best to believe and assume;
Hope bids you be cheerful in spite of the gloom.
While charity tells you, forgiving all sins,

With firmness to stick to the party that wins.
So patiently wait till embarrassments cease,
And the Liberal Party be buried in peace.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 159-161.

PART 1

FROM THE PURCHASE OF THE SUEZ CANAL SHARES TO THE BATTLE
OF TEL-EL-KEBIR

The British occupation of Egypt was the most important single act of British foreign policy during Gladstone's second administration and has since become one of the classic case studies of the partition of Africa and of late nineteenth century informal imperialism in general. Many historians held the events that unfolded in Egypt in the year 1882 to be responsible for precipitating the birth of a new phase of imperialism, and of inaugurating the scramble for Africa.¹ In their celebrated work, Robinson and Gallagher concluded: "the Egyptian Question became the deciding struggle between British imperialism and anti-imperialism in Africa."² Moreover, Robinson and Gallagher's view of the events that unfolded in Egypt between the years 1875 and 1885, differs little from, and largely substantiates the earlier interpretations offered by John Morley, Lord Cromer and Alfred Milner, all of whom remained loyal to the official version given at the time. All of them chose to ignore the arguments put forward by those like Lawson who opposed the British government's policy, or who took an active interest in the contemporary concerns of the ordinary Egyptian people.

A brief summary of the events leading up to Britain's occupation of Egypt as explained by Robinson and Gallagher reveals that Egypt's problems began after the profligate Khedive Ismael reduced his country to a state of bankruptcy by borrowing money at extortionate rates of interest to fund the repayment of his accumulated debts. This led to foreign financial interference, where Britain aided and abetted by an assertive France, assumed control of Egypt's finances and demanded a leading role in the politics of the country. In a forlorn attempt to regain absolute power, Ismael dismissed his foreign controlled Cabinet and increased the size of his armed forces. When the gamble failed, his overlord the Sultan, under pressure from Britain and other

¹ England's Mission, Eldridge, p. 250.

² Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 94.

European Powers, replaced him with Tawfiq, his son, whom Britain thought they could control. The resultant burden of taxation and cost cutting in the military services led to an increase in the strength of Egyptian nationalism. Britain and France reacted by identifying the nationalist leader, Urabi, as an unrepresentative mutineer incapable of modernising the state. The two Powers interpreted these nationalist aspirations as a threat to their own national interests, particularly the security of the Suez Canal. On 8 January 1882, Britain and France further antagonised Egypt by issuing a general warning in the form of a 'Joint Note' expressing support for the Khedivate and the *status quo ante*. The Liberal Government, after hiding behind these earlier events, blamed France whose bondholders appeared to hold greater influence in Paris than Britain's creditors in London.³ After a rebellious Urabi threatened their interests, the two Powers mobilised their fleets; the citizens of Alexandria reacted; an excited crowd ran amok, massacring fifty Europeans, and Britain intervened. On the eve of the subsequent bombardment, France withdrew and the task of crushing Urabi fell upon Britain alone.⁴ In opposition Gladstone had predicted Egypt's fate and, although he had no expansionist desires, forces beyond his control proved too strong and within two years of returning to office he had ordered the bombardment of Alexandria, occupied Egypt and came to grief in the Sudan.

Notwithstanding Robinson and Gallagher's recognition of the longstanding Franco-British economic interests in Egypt, the impact of the international debt and the growth of the cotton and sugar industries, they preferred to lay independent stress on the nationalist-Islamic revolt which threatened to remove the collaborative government of the Khedive. Their explanation highlights the 'peripheral' local nature of the crisis, and emphasises that intervention was not triggered by the changing relationship between Europe and Africa but was a necessity to prevent 'anarchy', not for economic motives but for strategic ones, in particular the defence of the Suez Canal which they declared was fast becoming the key trade and defence

³ Egypt and Cromer: A Study of Anglo-Egyptian Relations, Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid, (London, 1968), pp. 1-6.

⁴ In February 1882, Freycinet replaced Gambetta, and the new government took a softer approach. In July Freycinet suffered a defeat when the French Parliament refused to sanction a joint expedition with Britain. Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 119.

artery to the East and India. Having bombarded Alexandria to protect the fleet, Britain entered Egypt to exact reparations for the Alexandria outrages and to overthrow a military despotism she remained in Egypt to re-establish order, and despite stating on numerous occasions her desire to leave, the occupation lasted seventy-two years.

The question arises: does the official version offer a satisfactory explanation to the problems under review? Cain and Hopkins argue that the available evidence does not. In their opinion the official account

was formulated with at least one eye on the need to ensure that the controversial decision taken by Britain presented her in a favourable light; the other was uninterested in recording causes of action which lay beyond the immediate reasons given for them by the participants themselves.⁵

The official enquiry into Britain's role in Egypt began shortly after Wolseley's expeditionary force landed. Early government critics, particularly Lawson, J. Seymour Keay, A. M. Broadly and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt,⁶ accused the British financial journalists and consular diplomats in Egypt, who could not bring themselves to trust 'Orientals' to manage their own society, of conspiring to bring intervention about.⁷ These opinions were reinforced later by both Hobson and Lenin, who used Egypt as an example of Europeans entering a non-European world using the vehicle of trade and the export of capital to their advantage. Nevertheless, the 'official' explanation offered by Cromer and Milner remained the dominant one.⁸

Recent research has focused upon increasing our understanding of the contemporary motives. Both D. A. Farnie, and Muriel Chamberlain have

⁵ British Imperialism 1688-2000, P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, (London, 2nd ed., 2001), pp. 312-317.

⁶ Spoiling the Egyptians: A Tale of Shame (Told from the British Blue Books), J. Seymour Keay, (London, 1882). How We Defended Arabi and his Friends: A Story of Egypt and the Egyptians, A. M. Broadley, (London, 1884). The Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt: Being a Personal Narrative of Events, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, (London, 1907).

⁷ "The Men on the Spot and the English Occupation of Egypt in 1882", Alexander Scholch, Historical Journal, 19, 3, (1976), p. 778.

⁸ England in Egypt, Alfred Milner, (London, 1892). Modern Egypt, Earl of Cromer, (London, 1908).

endeavoured to expose the myth that the Suez Canal was at risk or indeed thought to be at risk in 1882.⁹ Hopkins developed this argument further claiming: "it was the bombardment of Alexandria, which created a threat to the Canal, not a threat to the Canal, which made bombardment necessary."¹⁰ New evidence unearthed independently from Egyptian sources by Alexander Scholch, and by Juan Cole, questions the assertion that Egypt was in a state of anarchy before the invasion. Both historians have successfully demonstrated that Urabi and his coadjutors, far from being military despots, were indeed honourable moderate reformers who held the backing of the vast majority of the Egyptian people. Whereas both Scholch and Cole saw the army as a genuine revolutionary force, they demonstrated that the cause of the army revolt was nothing other than a reaction from a group of disgruntled soldiers endeavouring to secure their salary arrears.¹¹

Although a detailed investigation into Disraeli's policy towards Egypt lies outside the scope of this narrative, we cannot ignore contemporary research, particularly an assessment made by Richard Atkins, which explores the legacy bequeathed by Conservatives to their successors. For one must recall that Disraeli had supported Turkey against Russia in 1876-78 and had considered Egypt as a possible strategic fallback should Russia destroy or drastically weaken Turkey. Atkins gives a greater understanding of the extent of Conservative intrusions and acknowledges that they supported the squeeze on Egypt's finances from 1876 and that the European economic financial interests in Egypt had to be defended. Atkins appears to share Lawson's view that the primary cause of the conflict was Conservative insistence on interfering in Egypt's internal affairs; while conversely he agrees that the primary fault of Liberals was that upon taking office they did not rescind the policy of their predecessors as they did in Afghanistan.¹²

⁹ East and West of Suez: The Suez Canal in History 1854-1956, D. A. Farnie, (Oxford, 1969), p. 294.

¹⁰ "The Victorians and Africa", A. G. Hopkins, Journal of African History, 27, (1986), p. 374.

¹¹ Colonisation and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's Urabi Movement, Juan R. I. Cole, (Princeton, 1993). Egypt for the Egyptians: The Socio-Political Crisis in Egypt, 1878-1882, Alexander Scholch, (London, 1981).

¹² "The Conservatives in Egypt 1875-1880", Richard A. Atkins, Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, II (1974), pp. 190-205.

Many past historians have excused the actions of Gladstone, who was heavily preoccupied with the affairs of Ireland and as such dependent upon his Foreign Minister Lord Granville to formulate Egyptian policy. Gladstone later claimed that he had to rely upon newspaper articles for information on Egypt, and that telegrams from local officials to the Foreign Office gave him little or no additional insight.¹³ However, the overriding weight of the propaganda, particularly after the Alexandria massacres, eventually activated Gladstone's anti Islamic feelings and his radical aversion to 'militarism' such that he began to see Urabi in this light rather than as a genuine liberal revolutionary. Insofar as Gladstone received the benefit of the doubt few apologists have emerged to diminish the importance of the actions taken by the energetic under-secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Charles Dilke, whose collusion with Chamberlain and Hartington contributed towards the invasion and eventual occupation.¹⁴ Scholch in his critical analysis of the actions taken by Sir Auckland Colvin, the British Controller-General, and the British Consul, Sir Edward Malet, has developed an argument to show that the 'men on the spot' shaped and interpreted events by deluding their superiors to hasten and justify intervention.¹⁵ Muriel Chamberlain also enquired into the events leading up to the Alexandria massacres and the subsequent occupation, and her seminal interpretation has become the definitive source for those events,¹⁶ while a dual collaboration between J. S. Galbraith and the Egyptian historian, Al Sayyid-Marsot complements our understanding of the events leading up to the occupation.¹⁷ After the war, Urabi became the victim of the peace, and a scapegoat characterised as a self-seeking tyrant. John S. Galbraith's article,

¹³ The Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-86, Vol 1, Agatha Ramm (ed.), (London, 1962), (Gladstone to Granville, 16 July 1882), p. 55.

¹⁴ This subject will be further developed using information included in Muriel Chamberlain's important contribution entitled: "Sir Charles Dilke and the British Intervention in Egypt 1882: Decision Making in a Nineteenth Century Cabinet", M. E. Chamberlain, British Journal of International Studies, 2, (1976), pp. 231-245.

¹⁵ "The Victorians and Africa", Hopkins, p. 383.

¹⁶ "The Alexandria Massacres from 11 June 1882 and the British Occupation of Egypt", Muriel Chamberlain, Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 1977, XII, pp. 14-39.

¹⁷ "The British Occupation of Egypt: Another View", John S. Galbraith and Afaf Lufti al-sayyid-Marsot, International Journal of Middle East Studies, 9, (1978).

The Trial of Arabi Pasha corrects many of the previous misconception relating to the character of the nationalist leader.¹⁸

It is not the aim of this narrative to deny or to contest the accuracy of the 'official' account. Instead this chapter endeavours to analyse Lawson's reaction to events, his thoughts, arguments, contentions and concerns within the framework of the historiography of the events. The distinction between these two views, the official and the unofficial, is extremely important to this study because it has a considerable bearing on the interpretation of Lawson's role in the unfolding events. From the official viewpoint, Lawson, while making himself exceedingly disagreeable to constituted authority, was at the time seen as a hopeless eccentric rather than a visionary, and as a rebel rather than a patriot.

Lawson's Position in the Political Argument

Lawson regarded himself as the ultimate relic of the little company who kept the pure flame of true Liberalism alight below the gangway.¹⁹ Unlike later historians, he did not have the benefit of hindsight to assist him in the construction of his views relating to the Egyptian crisis, nor did he have access to sensitive government information. He did however have his conscience, his self-belief that his policies would benefit the recipients, his parliamentary privileges, newspaper reports, and information, when eventually released in the official parliamentary reports in the form of Blue Books. In Lawson's opinion the Blue Books overwhelmingly endorsed the actions of the Egyptian nationals and as such reinforced his denunciation of Britain's role.²⁰ This alone is rather interesting when one considers that although this information was compiled from official documents presented by the Government to Parliament, one must not forget that the documents were

¹⁸ "The Trial of Urabi Pasha", John S. Galbraith, Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, VII, (1979).

¹⁹ A Diary of Two Parliaments: The Gladstone Parliament 1880:1885, W. C. Lucy, (London, 1886), p. 106.

²⁰ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882.

selected by Government officials and as such did not contain all the known evidence but in reality only those facts which their compilers could not conceal or which appeared to support their case.²¹ To Lawson the evidence suggested that Britain's road to the East through the Suez Canal was secure and that no serious breakdown in law and order had occurred in Egypt, the official reasons offered by the British Cabinet to defend their policy of intervention. Since the Egyptian exchequer remained untouched throughout the entire conflict, Lawson concluded that the major reason for the military operations was financial and that Egypt was occupied in the interests of overseas financial speculators and Lancashire's cotton industrialists, an accusation later supported by several economic historians.²² He also identified those groups or organisations which made intervention possible; the resident diplomats, whose miscalculations and misjudgements turned Gladstone away from the doctrines of Midlothian; the intrigues of the previous Conservative Government; and the obstinacy of France. As Martin Ceadel emphasises, by seeing financial interests as harmful, the dissidents inadvertently pushed radical thinking further away from Cobdenism and towards the analysis pursued by J. A. Hobson, twenty years later.²³

Lawson's agitation against intervention in Egypt was completely in harmony with his support for the Transvaal Boers in their struggle against British rule; his support for Afghan tribesmen seeking to retain their independence; and his wish to see justice spread to encompass the needs of the Irish people. Underlying all of these policies was an inherent distrust of the concept of empire and a cardinal belief in the traditional assertions of Cobden, that Britain should promote peace, and avoid interference in the political institutions of other nations. Lawson offered several reasons for his animosity towards imperialism, each connected to upholding these aforementioned principles. Firstly, he had an antipathy towards bloodshed and slaughter, which invariably accompanied the expansionist dream. He shuddered when he read articles crying out for slaughter and blood for the

²¹ Spoiling the Egyptians, Keays, p. 1.

²² Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy 1815-1914, D. C. M. Platt, (London, 1968), p. 154-6. Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1303, 19 February 1883.

²³ Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945, Martin Ceadel, (Oxford, 2000), p. 120.

prestige of England.²⁴ To him war was murder, and deliberate wanton murder masquerading in the disguise of a military uniform did not alter his stance.²⁵ The Ten Commandments, he said, were just as valid east of Suez as on the shores of the English Channel; justice was not a matter of longitude.²⁶ Secondly, he objected to the accumulated cost to the British taxpayer of maintaining vast tracts of territory. Thirdly, he rejected the claim that Britain occupied Egypt to ensure India's protection; unlike many of his parliamentary colleagues, Lawson did not share the inherent mistrust of Russia and, in that capacity, he rarely considered Russia a threat to British interests in the East. Fourthly, he had an absolute commitment to free trade; the complete abolition of tariffs would, he argued, render both the empire and the military system obsolete, as he later explained to his constituents.

During the last thirty years, this nation, calling itself a Christian nation, has slaughtered by war, more than two million of men. During this time they have spent three thousand million of money, and the preparations now being made in time of peace involved an annual expenditure of £50,000,000.²⁷

In many respects, Egypt was Lawson's defining moment as an anti-imperialist radical. He not only led the agitation but he disagreed with the opinions of many of his radical contemporaries, colleagues he had and would later stand shoulder to shoulder with in agitating against similar imperialist concerns. Joseph Cowen, the much-maligned champion of the oppressed nations, was one example. As Cowen testifies "In any debate concerning the exercise of military and naval powers they (Lawson and Cowen) started from different premises and necessarily arrived at opposite conclusions."²⁸ Although both politicians initially opposed Britain's intervention in Egypt, their opinions varied greatly. In early life Cowen had made a special study of the

²⁴ Hansard, vol. 284, col. 1891, 25 February 1883.

²⁵ Ibid, col. 1900.

²⁶ Lawson, Luke, p. 110.

²⁷ West Cumberland Times, 11 September 1885.

²⁸ Hansard, vol. 280, col. 52, 8 June 1883.

Eastern Question²⁹ and these opinions changed little with time. He was and would remain a passionate supporter of Turkish reform, an empire Lawson wished to see dismantled. Cowen's concerns relating to the invasion of Egypt were in principle almost identical to the views held by Lawson, reasons, which will fully unfold in the development of this narrative; the onset of war ended that alliance. After Britain's victory at Tel-el-Kebir, Lawson advocated a swift withdrawal, contrary to Cowen who would not tolerate any reversals, Cowen followed a simple maxim, what was done was done and beyond restoration.³⁰ Britain was in Egypt; just as she was in the Punjab, in Assam, and in other Indian states, none formally annexed, but nevertheless all occupied. Withdrawal, Cowen stressed, would herald a return to tyranny, where the fellaheen, the Egyptian peasant would become further disadvantaged.³¹ On matters, relating to Egypt Lawson considered Cowen a jingo; Cowen in return regarded Lawson as 'a peace-at-any-price-man':

A man (Lawson) who would allow the marauders of the world to pursue their career of crime and conquest unchecked, rather than run the risk of a war; that would see them retreat from India, abandon their colonies, disband their army, and make England a focus of materialism and trade. Driven to its logical conclusion this doctrine was the deification of comfort rather than duty. It was simple but it was selfish. It certainly could not be called elevating, and it might be described as cowardly.³²

Whereas Cowen praised the remarkably 'low cost', and short time taken to conquer Egypt, he chose to ignore the weakness and subsequent slaughter of the opposition.³³ He believed that "England had a duty to perform, not only to

²⁹ Speeches on the Near Eastern Question: Foreign and Imperial Affairs: and on the British Empire, Joseph Cowen, (London, 1909), p. 174.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 134.

³¹ According to Cowen if they followed Lawson's policy: "The finances would be fastened on by harpies, the taxes would be enforced by the curbash, justice would be bought and sold, the group of slothful and mendacious pashas and unprincipled and greedy usurers, who constitute the entourage of the Khedive, would revel in their regained liberty to rob and ravage." *Ibid*, pp. 150-51.

³² Hansard, vol. 280, col. 50, 8 June 1883.

³³ *Ibid*, cols. 51-56.

her own people, but also to the great family of nations to which she belonged." He and Lawson also differed in the methods they employed to object against the awarding of perpetual pensions to Britain's military leaders; Cowen was prepared to support the award of lump sum grants.³⁴ Cowen also had a tendency to offer a Liberal Government the benefit of doubt, and seldom asked sensitive questions in times of controversy and conflict. Lawson held contrary views. He argued: "If the House should not speak then, when were they to interfere? It was in periods of danger, when there was a chance of committing a great wrong that was the time for the House to speak out."³⁵

Lawson was consistent in his principles and persistent in his contribution. Between 23 May 1882 and 9 September 1884, he raised almost one hundred parliamentary questions relating to Gladstone's Egyptian policy. This was a remarkable feat when one considers that members like Lawson who sat below the gangway on the ministerial side of the House had little opportunity to bring important matters to the Speaker's attention. From the outset, he assumed an attitude of the most pronounced hostility towards Gladstone's interventionist policy in Egypt, and unlike many of his radical colleagues, remained true to the Cobdenite ideals of conducting foreign and colonial policy. A situation recognised by Foreign Office spokesman Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice who claimed: "There was no man in England (Lawson), who was so perfectly free from inconsistency on this question."³⁶ It filled Lawson with bitter disappointment to find that, although the Beaconsfield era was over and its author silenced forever, the reign of militarism and aggression continued. Lawson was a modest man, who recognised his own inadequacies; he would have willingly relinquished all pretence of leadership had a like-minded politician emerged in the summer of 1882.³⁷

Anyone, who understood Lawson, knew he was a political freelance who held a rather singular attitude to party discipline. Furthermore everyone knew he was the liberal of Liberals, never one of the safe, cautious politicians who advocated the gradual destruction of abuses. He wanted to tear up by the roots everything that, in his view, hindered the growth of national

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, vol. 284, col. 1900, 25 February 1884.

³⁶ Ibid, vol. 276, col. 1312, 19 February 1883.

prosperity and checked national progress. He was in the broadest and fullest sense a radical reformer, not a political juggler like so many of his radical colleagues; a man who would conduct his business when the Conservatives held power and oppose the controversial policies of his own government when they strayed from his chosen path. Many radicals plucked up courage whenever the Conservatives held office, and bathed in the ineffectiveness of their dissent, only to retreat when it became a question of voting against a Liberal Government. To compound the issue some of these apathetic radicals would later accuse their leadership of betrayal when in reality they did not want their policies to succeed.³⁸ To Lawson, such a situation was a sham and he constantly reminded those who masqueraded under the disguise of their former reputations; that through their indifference they shared the responsibility for the atrocities committed in Britain's name.³⁹

Lawson never concerned himself with the wider diplomatic issues or with the need to sustain the integrity of the British Empire. To him the Egyptian question was fundamentally a single moral issue. Egypt was an oppressed nation trying to defend her frontiers from the excessive demands of foreign bondholders, and independence, liberty, justice and patriotism were higher virtues than money. As such he bitterly opposed the role of the 'usurer', and actively agitated against the bombardment of Alexandria, the war, the subsequent occupation, and the later campaigns in the Sudan. This alone does not explain the intensity of Lawson's agitation or the severity of his denunciation of Gladstone's imperialist aggression; a comprehensive explanation requires a reappraisal of the many events that led Gladstone to veer away from his Midlothian proposals and order a military invasion.

The Egyptian campaign was extremely popular in Britain and only opposed by a handful of dissidents, whose immediate influence was as insignificant as their number. These imperial dissidents embraced a true cross party amalgamation, whose primary aim was to embarrass the Liberal Government. They comprised maverick politicians, clergymen, intellectuals and workers; critics who performed their task by publishing letters, arranging

³⁷ Ibid, vol. 284, col. 903, 14 February 1884.

³⁸ Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, Shannon, p. 84.

³⁹ Hansard, vol. 285, col. 375, 5 March 1884.

meetings, and organising peace committees, who utilised the media to inform and to propagandise against continued occupation and hostilities. Of the twenty-one parliamentary dissidents who voted against the Government's implementation of the Vote of Credit, and hence against the war,⁴⁰ eleven represented Irish constituencies, whose opposition emphasised the relationship of British exploitation in Egypt to the plight of Ireland and the cause of Home Rule. One was a Conservative dissident, Percy Wyndham, the Member for West Cumberland, and cousin to the pro-Egyptian poet and diplomat, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.⁴¹ The remaining eight were Liberals: Thomas Burt, Jesse Collings, Alfred Illingworth, Samuel Storey, Sir David Wedderburn, T. C. Thompson, Henry Richard and Sir Wilfrid Lawson.⁴² Lord Randolph Churchill and his Fourth Party of splinter Conservatives;⁴³ would later join the agitation, as would the radical newspaper proprietor, Henry Labouchere. However, Lawson and Richard would remain the key figures on the radical wing of the Liberal party.

The Egyptian crisis had a catastrophic affect upon the fortunes of the peace movement, and forced it to confront an unenviable dilemma, and to make some painful decisions between political support for Gladstone and moral opposition to aggression. The majority in the movement chose the former, leaving Lawson, an ageing Henry Richard, and a rump organisation to represent the latter viewpoint. The events unfolding in Egypt and the Sudan between the years 1882 and 1885 reveals that many members of the peace movement were xenophobic. With so much ambiguity and soul searching, it is not surprising that a schism occurred. In 1882, many sympathisers left the

⁴⁰ The division on the Vote of Credit was taken on the 25 July 1882.

⁴¹ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922), entered the diplomatic service in 1858; served in Athens, Lisbon, Buenos Aires and Frankfurt; before resigning in Switzerland in 1869. In 1876 he travelled to Egypt and began his love relationship with the Arab nations. In 1879 he issued Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates; penetrated Nejd with his wife, issuing A Pilgrimage to Nejd, The Cradle of the Arab Race, 2 vols. (1881). In 1881, he preached against the Ottoman rule of the Arab regions and proposed returning Caliphate to Arabs. After the fall of Tel-el-Kebir and arrest of Arabi, Blunt organised Arabi's defence at personal expense of £5,000 and secured his exile in Ceylon. In 1884, he stood unsuccessfully as Tory Democrat for Camberwell; narrowly defeated in W. Birmingham against Joe Chamberlain, June 1885; published articles in Fortnightly Review as Ideas about India (1885); supported Land League and Home Rule Party. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 6, pp. 357-359.

⁴² Hansard, vol. 272, cols. 1608-9, 25 July 1882.

⁴³ A ginger group within the Conservative party comprised of Lord Randolph Churchill, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, Arthur Balfour and John Gorst. The principal objective was to harass Gladstone and ridicule the Liberal Government in the House of Commons.

movement; one potential future leader, W. G. Snowdon Gord resigned because he could not accept pacifism, notwithstanding Richard's continual reassurances that "he (Gord) would never find any measure proposed by us, which you could not have cordially supported."⁴⁴

Many historians have chosen to ignore Lawson's contribution to the debate. A. J. P. Taylor was one exception, he identified Lawson as virtually the only radical to raise his voice against a policy that was, "unwise, impolitical, ignoble and unjust."⁴⁵ Another is Dr. John V. Crangle, who described Lawson as the most vigorous anti-war radical and the foremost foe of intervention.⁴⁶ Muriel Chamberlain endorsed these views, acknowledging Lawson as "one of the few consistent critics of intervention."⁴⁷ Although Lawson tried to inform the public of the iniquity of Britain's proceedings, both inside and outside Parliament, he was not a strong leader, and on his own admission his contribution made little impact. Notwithstanding his misgivings he retained his principles, ignoring Cobden's declaration after the Crimean war that "should another great war break out involving England, he would not agitate against it for it was of no more use to do so than to reason with a man in a state of delirium."⁴⁸ As Lawson cordially explained: "a fever may be raging round, but there are some not affected by it;" it was to those he appealed, and as such he never regretted the humble stand he made against the militarism that periodically gripped the nation.⁴⁹

When compared to the Eastern Question, the agitation against the Egyptian occupation was weak. The principal reason for this lack of mass public support was the individual influence and strength of Gladstone who, although accused by many of betraying his Midlothian commitments, largely retained his popularity both within the Liberal party and throughout the country at large. The intensity of Lawson's campaign owed much to his belief that through occupying Egypt Gladstone had betrayed his earlier views. Lawson

⁴⁴ British Peace Movement, Ceadel, p. 123.

⁴⁵ Trouble Makers, Taylor, p. 81.

⁴⁶ "The British Peace Movement and the Anglo-Egyptian War of 1882", Dr. John V. Crangle, Quarterly Review, 1975-76, XV, pp. 139-50.

⁴⁷ "Sir Charles Dilke and the British Intervention in Egypt 1882", Chamberlain, p. 239.

⁴⁸ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 168.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

was bitterly hostile towards Gladstone and went to great lengths to emphasise their disagreements.

The Midlothian Campaign

After Midlothian, Lawson held Gladstone in high esteem such that the war against Egypt forced him to confront a personal crisis. During the Midlothian campaign, Gladstone appeared to raise political life from the mire of self and interest into the purer atmosphere of honour and duty. The campaign challenged Disraeli's foreign and imperial policies, and Gladstone's stand on those issues had partly carried the Liberal party back into power in 1880.⁵⁰ Any domestic reforms indicated in their programme tended to assume secondary importance. Gladstone distinguished himself by expressing his sympathy with the oppressed nations, and by demanding freedom, autonomy and self-government for suffering races.⁵¹ Statements such as: "We have taken to settle the affairs of a fourth, or nearly a fourth, of the entire human race, scattered over the world, and isn't that enough,"⁵² apparently restated his disapproval of further expansion of the empire. Lawson found it inconceivable that his seemingly anti-imperialist colleague and leader would contravene not only Liberal principles but also his own previous declarations. In 1880 and again throughout 1881, Lawson had supported Gladstone and with the exception of their Transvaal disagreements, defended him against persistent Conservative abuse. As late as April 1882, judging by the following statement, Lawson remained a Gladstone supporter:

They (Conservative's) charge him (Gladstone) with being an agitator, an anarchist, and an atheist, a Ritualist, Romanist and revolutionary - (laughter) - a tyrant, a time-server, a trimmer, a turncoat, and a traitor. (Laughter.) Then they tell us that he is sold to Russia, that he is coerced by Chamberlain, that he is the slave of Bright, and the devotee

⁵⁰ Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform, Biagini, pp. 413-15.

⁵¹ Hansard, vol. 273, col. 1934, 16 August 1882.

⁵² "The British Peace Movement", Crangle, p. 140.

of Spurgeon. (Laughter.) While ...Lord Salisbury, describes him 'as a man of uncontrollable temper and overweening vanity'. (Laughter.)⁵³

The speeches delivered by Gladstone during his Midlothian Campaign are central to this study.⁵⁴ Before we can begin to understand Lawson's behaviour or appreciate the animosity he expressed during the period under review we must gain an understanding of Gladstone's perceived policy as stated during what Disraeli called, his 'pilgrimage of passion',⁵⁵ or as Lawson preferred: "The most remarkable political campaign ever carried through by the tremendous energy and eloquence of one man."⁵⁶ During the campaign Gladstone suggested that Britain ought to conduct foreign as well as domestic policy on moral principles⁵⁷ and in this series of well-documented, enthusiastically received speeches he continuously attacked the use of military power for imperial aggrandisement, which he called the very roots of Beaconsfieldism. He denounced Conservative interference in the Balkans, Cyprus, Egypt, the Transvaal and Afghanistan, as gratuitous, dangerous, ambiguous and impracticable.⁵⁸ By his burning eloquence, Gladstone promised to support all that was just and right in politics, the equality of the weak with the strong, the principles of brotherhood among nations, and of their sacred independence.⁵⁹ By the end of the campaign, Gladstone had consolidated his rhetoric into 'six right principles' of foreign policy.⁶⁰ However,

⁵³ *West Cumberland Times*, 10 April 1882.

⁵⁴ *The General Election of 1880*, Trevor Lloyd, (Oxford, 1968), pp. 24-25.

⁵⁵ *Crisis of Imperialism*, Shannon, p. 139.

⁵⁶ *Lawson: A Memoir*, Russell, p. 146.

⁵⁷ *Africa and the Victorians*, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 91.

⁵⁸ *Gladstone's Speeches: Descriptive Index and Bibliography*, A. T. Bassett, (ed.), (London, 1916), pp. 570-1.

⁵⁹ In a speech at Edinburgh, Gladstone attacked the misappropriation of Britain's resources, the breaking of the international law of Europe, the tarnishing of the good name of England, and argued that the condition needlessly aggravated by useless and mischievous measures. At Glasgow, he ridiculed the idea that Britain, a small island at one end of the world with enormous possessions at the other, was entitled to claim a preferential right to the possession or control of territory in order to safeguard her road to India. *Times*, 6 December 1879.

⁶⁰ These he described as, 1. Good government at home. 2. The preservation to the nations of the world, in particular the Christian nations of the world, of the blessing of peace. 3. The cultivation and the maintenance of the Concert of Europe. 4. The avoidance of needless and entangling engagements. 5. The acknowledgement of the equal rights of all nations. 6. The acceptance of the idea that the foreign policy of England should always be inspired by the love of freedom. Although he cautiously qualified the majority of these principles he remained totally committed to the fifth doctrine, to which he attached the greatest value. "Henceforth," he proclaimed, "the Liberal Party will pursue a programme, guaranteeing the equal rights of all

once in office other priorities, notably Ireland, came to the fore. In Egypt, Gladstone faced a dilemma; should he pursue a policy, which he had continuously protested against or should he offer his support to a policy of giving Egypt to the Egyptians? Gladstone's concerns over the safety of India eventually forced him to drive a wedge between Urabi, Egypt's revolutionary leader, and the nationalist movement, which he was naturally inclined to support. By late summer 1882, contrary to his original intentions and to his principles, Gladstone had conducted a war against the Boers, bombarded a major international city and occupied Egypt. Lawson resisted every argument that led to the practical annexation of Egypt and endorsed Gladstone's six statements of policy long after its author had apparently abandoned them:

If the people of this country stick to these principles, if they insist on those who rule the destinies of the land observing them, then at last we may look forward to an end of all these disgraceful and bloody wars, which so much in former days afflicted us and injured the country.⁶¹

Lawson had long declared his independence, and now he embarked upon a programme of following his Cobdenite principles through to their eventual conclusion. "Should the party and the Government change their policy that was no reason for him to change his?" He had made his position clear a decade earlier, when he promised his constituents that he would never succumb to the intimidation of the Whips when voting in critical divisions, irrespective of the fate of any Ministry.⁶² Lawson emphasised that any departure from liberal principles would bring troubles abroad and prevent the promotion of much needed reforms at home.⁶³ At Edinburgh, Lawson gave a novel reply to a critic who accused him of embarrassing the leadership. "No", he said, "I am a true friend, who having seen a man on the road to ruin,

nations." Quoted at Midlothian on 27 November 1879. Political Speeches in Scotland: November and December 1879, With an Appendix, Containing the Rectorial Address in Glasgow, and other Non Political Speeches, W. E. Gladstone, (Edinburgh, 1879), 115ff.

⁶¹ West Cumberland Times, 14 January 1882.

⁶² Carlisle Journal, 21 November 1871.

⁶³ Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1306, 19 February 1883.

warned him of the dangers and asked him to retrace his steps."⁶⁴ Lawson's disappointment flowed into whimsical verse.

The Grand Old Man to the war has gone,
In the Jingo ranks you'll find him
He went too fast for brother John,
But Chamberlain's still behind him.

"Land of Fools," said the Grand Old Man,
Let nothing I do surprise thee;
And, if any blame be cast on my plan,
The Grand Old Man defies thee.

On Egypt's sands the Old Man fell,
But he would not own his blunder,⁶⁵
The Midlothian Book, which we knew so well
He took, and he tore asunder.

And he said, "No fall shall sully thee,
Thou record of worth and bravery;
Thy pages were made for the good and the free,
And not for this deep-dyed knavery."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ West Cumberland Times, 1 September 1882.

⁶⁵ According to Lawson, when it was too late, Gladstone gave away the whole case for intervention in Egypt, and threw the blame on the Conservative Government. In his address to the electors of Midlothian before the General Election of 1885, he used the following words: "We have, according to my conviction from the very first (when the question was not within the sphere of party contentions) by our intervention in Egypt committed a grave political error, and the consequence which the Providential order commonly allots to such error is not compensation but retribution." Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 304-5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 304-5.

The origin of the Egyptian question, as Lord Cromer explained in the opening sentence of Modern Egypt was financial⁶⁷ and the roots of that crisis lay in the year 1862, when Said Pasha (r. 1854-62) contracted the first loan from the international financiers Fruhling and Goschen.⁶⁸ Two years later Said's successor, Ismail, renewed the practice of borrowing money from foreign investors at extortionate rates of interest. Using part of the loans to finance economic bribes, Ismail secured greater autonomy and independence from the Ottoman Sultan and a guaranteed line of succession for his heirs.⁶⁹ Although Ismail's irrigation schemes increased agricultural productivity, and his canals, railway and telegraphic projects improved communications,⁷⁰ he stood accused by many, including Lawson, of erratically spending money on 'luxury and dissipation'.⁷¹ Without prior consultation and little benefit from the international loans, the Egyptian people now became responsible for the repayment of the debt,⁷² a significant proportion owed to British creditors,⁷³

⁶⁷ Modern Egypt, Vol. 1, Cromer, p. 11.

⁶⁸ The nominal amount of £3,292,800 raised to part finance the construction of the Suez Canal, was repayable over thirty years; the interest was seven per cent and the sinking fund one per cent. Report of Stephen Cave, on the "Financial Condition of Egypt, 23 March 1876", Parliamentary Papers, LXXXIII (1876), 99. The Scramble for Africa: (Seminar Studies in History), M. E. Chamberlain, (London, 1981), pp. 110-112.

⁶⁹ According to Mohammedan law, Prince Abdul Halim was the rightful heir, but the Firman of 8 June 1879, stated they proceed by right of primogeniture. Modern Egypt, Vol. 1, Cromer, p. 136.

⁷⁰ In the early days of the loan Ismail set in place several irrigation and agricultural schemes which had merit, but every step took him deeper into debt and difficulty; imports soared above exports and expenditure above revenue, while investments were failing to create sufficient wealth to cover the cost. Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, pp. 78-81.

⁷¹ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882. Although Lord Cromer and other contemporary observers expressed similar views to those of Lawson, and gave glaring examples of waste, like one Egyptian Princess running up a debt of £150,000 with a French dressmaker, they do not portray a complete picture. As Juan Cole points out, Ismail was not a total good-for-nothing; his infrastructure improvements stimulated the economy, and improved communications. He organised the digging of 112 canals, amounting to 8,400 miles; laid 5,000 miles of telegraph line and extended railway mileage from 500 to 1,100 miles. Colonisation and Revolution in the Middle East, Cole, p. 112.

⁷² By 1876, Ismail owed £68,110,000 of 'long term' funded debt, mostly to British investors; and £26,000,000 of floating debt to foreign creditors, mostly French. However only half that amount was ever nominally received in loans, the remainder was accrued interest, which had never sank below 6 per cent and on one occasion had reached 26 per cent. The original debt alone on the Suez Canal alone was £16,000,000. Spoiling the Egyptians, Keays, pp. 1-4. Also The Middle East in the World Economy 1800 – 1914, R. J. Owen, (London, 1981), pp. 122-28.

⁷³ "Egyptian Finances", M. G. Mulhall, Contemporary Review, Vol. XLII, (1982), p. 529.

one of whom was Gladstone, who held a third of his share portfolio in Egyptian stock.⁷⁴

In 1876, after the Egyptian Government suspended interest payments and declared the country bankrupt the creditor nations began to act on behalf of the bondholders.⁷⁵ This initiative had three important effects; it rationalised the debt, it introduced Anglo-French co-operation into Egypt, and more importantly, it altered Egypt's relationship with Europe and set the stage for greater anti-European feeling. The Egyptian question now became a financial question and European tutelage began.⁷⁶ The heaviest burden fell on the fellaheen, already one of the world's most abused cultivators,⁷⁷ now forced to endure ruinous sacrifices to repay the debt.⁷⁸ In February 1879, the Egyptian Cabinet promulgated a Decree headed by European Ministers, whereby large numbers of fellahs previously exempt from enforced labour became compelled to work unless they chose to purchase exemption.⁷⁹ A further complication arose after the Dual Control appointed scores of highly paid European bailiffs to the Egyptian Civil Service; while Egyptian nationals lost their jobs, foreigners, who paid no taxes kept theirs.⁸⁰ In April 1879, after

⁷⁴ Gladstone 1874-98, Matthew, pp. 135-6.

⁷⁵ The settlement formulated by George J. Goschen, a former British Cabinet minister, and his French counterpart, the banker M. Joubert, consolidated the debt at a relatively high rate of interest, and bound Egypt hand and foot to the Dual Control. The Control was empowered to make Egypt solvent again, to strengthen the Khedivate, and to secure the punctual payment of the debt. *Spoiling the Egyptians*, Keays, p. 6.

⁷⁶ *Great Britain and France in Egypt, 1876-82*, Agatha Ramm, included in *France and Great Britain in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Risk*, P. Gifford and W. R. Loius, (eds.), (Yale, 1971), Chapter 3, p. 79.

⁷⁷ Continuously oppressed since the time of the Pharaohs, these wretched peasants were taxed double that levied upon their Russian counterparts, and almost ten times more than Britain taxed her Indian subjects. This was a point taken up by Lawson in the Vote of Credit debate. *Hansard*, vol. 272, col. 1703, 25 July 1882.

⁷⁸ English officials in Egypt, unlike their French counterparts advised bankruptcy as a solution; however Salisbury instructed his officials to demand payment on schedule, irrespective of how the money was collected. "The Conservatives and Egypt 1875-80", Atkins, p. 198.

⁷⁹ A Quotation taken from the Blue Books, which Lawson used to emphasise the discontent endured by the fellaheen. *Hansard*, vol. 272, col. 1703, 25 July 1882.

⁸⁰ There was an additional 100,000 foreign residents in Egypt, the majority drawing high wages, whom under the protection of the 'Capitulations', a system which enabled foreigners the right to exemption from Egyptian taxation, and the right to trial in their own consular courts without interference from Egyptian administrators. *The British in Egypt*, Peter Mansfield, (London, 1971), p. 14. This was a situation recognised by Sir Edward Malet, who in a report dated 30 July 1877 acknowledged that the revenue would be greatly increased without imposing further sacrifices upon the already over taxed natives by ending the abuse and compelling the Europeans to contribute fairly. *Hansard*, vol 272, col. 1703, 25 July 1882.

dismissing his foreign dominated Cabinet and overthrowing the alien controls, the Sultan replaced a strong Ismael with Tawfiq his weakling son.⁸¹

On 19 September 1879, Britain and France formulated the Salisbury-Waddington⁸² agreement which pledged to support the government of the Khedive; to keep other European powers out of Egypt; and to act entirely in accordance with each other.⁸³ When Gladstone eventually learned of this intrigue, he called it an outrage, and later, directly responsible for the military occupation of Egypt.⁸⁴ These events brought about the inauguration of an international 'Debt Commission'⁸⁵ and the regulation of Egyptian finances by an international agreement known as 'The Law of Liquidation',⁸⁶ signed without objection by Tawfiq, Britain's pliable puppet⁸⁷ on 17 July 1880.⁸⁸ From this moment the long standing discontent began to fester into a national movement, whose bitter grievances inevitably led to universal hostility, an

⁸¹ For an understanding of Ismael's economic shortfalls see "Character and Imperialism: The British Financial Administration of Egypt, 1878-1914", P. J. Cain, Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Vol. 34, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 180-184.

⁸² William Henry Waddington (1829-94), a man of mixed English and French parentage, married to an English wife was Minister for Foreign Affairs (1877-1879), and later a successful Ambassador in London (1883-93).

⁸³ Great Britain and France in Egypt, 1876-82, Ramm, p. 79. In a parliamentary reply to a question tabled by Lawson on 26 May 1882, Gladstone appears to contradict this position. Hansard, vol. 269, cols. 1714-20, 26 May 1882. Gladstone also gave an extensive interpretation of the agreements shortcomings in a Parliamentary reply after Lawson requested further information, dated 16 August 1882. *Ibid*, vol. 273, cols. 1944-8, 16 August 1882.

⁸⁴ "The Conservatives and Egypt 1875-80", Atkins, p. 190.

⁸⁵ The Debt Commission was given wide-ranging powers over the administration of the Egyptian budget. The Commissioners could veto changes in taxation and fiscal legislation; prevent the raising of new loans; draw upon the administrative revenues to make up deficits in the debt budget; and deny the Egyptian authorities access to any surpluses in the debt revenue. The officials also had the authority to set upper limits of control on administrative expenses and the right to refuse increases without prior permission. Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 86.

⁸⁶ Britain, France, Austria, Italy, Germany and Russia signed The Law of Liquidation of July 1880, designed to arrange the settlement of Egypt's debts and finances with the two fore named nations holding the majority of the votes. Under these arrangements, sixty-six per cent of the revenue was assigned within the budget to service the cost of the debt. The remainder of the revenue was consigned for administrative expenditure and left in the hands of the Egyptian government.

⁸⁷ There is little doubt that the Khedive was a British puppet; he was not allowed to leave Cairo without the permission of the Foreign Office. "The Men on the Spot and the English Occupation of Egypt In 1882", Scholch, p. 776.

⁸⁸ Notwithstanding its shortcomings the report was well received by the general population who initially accepted that the activity was inspired by the Turkish and Egyptian Government. When journeying through the provinces the Khedive was received with warmth and even veneration, and the date 17 July was declared a patriotic feast day throughout the country. However, this public acclaim was short-lived. The resultant lack of available revenue for internal administration had a devastating effect upon the Egyptian military services, the army

increased awareness in nationalism, and the formation of a movement that demanded 'Egypt for the Egyptians'.

As a longstanding advocate of the 'bondholder's thesis', Lawson was extremely critical of the role-played by the Dual Control, which he considered contrary to the peace and prosperity of the fellaheen.⁸⁹ Throughout the crisis Lawson failed to find any evidence to substantiate the claim that Britain's interference produced great benefits in the material welfare of Egypt.⁹⁰ All he found was a strong correlation between the rise in popularity of the national movement and the grievances of the Egyptian people who continued to object to the debt collectors enforced rules.⁹¹ For reasons stated above Lawson does not sit comfortably in the explanation offered by Robinson and Gallagher who underrate the the impact of the changes in European, Egyptian economic relations, especially those in the 1870s.

The Nationalist Insurrection

According to the contemporary observer, W. D. Wallace, the nationalist insurrection had four phases: first military insubordination; secondly political agitation; thirdly, national defence; and fourthly, Mussulman resistance to aggressive Christendom.⁹² In January 1881, a group of Egyptian junior officers began to agitate against Ottoman-Egyptian discrimination and against reductions in the armed forces, affecting both officers and enlisted men.⁹³ At last, a champion arose from their ranks named Ahmed Bey Urabi (also known as Arabi), the son of a village sheikh,⁹⁴ who rose to prominence during the

went unpaid and thousands of Egyptian officers lost their jobs. Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, pp. 130-34.

⁸⁹ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882. This was also the opinion of Wallace. Egypt and the Egyptian Question, W. D. Wallace, (London, 1883), pp. 119-22.

⁹⁰ This opinion was later endorsed by al-Sayyid. Egypt and Cromer, al-Sayyid, pp. 6-7.

⁹¹ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882.

⁹² Egypt and the Egyptian Question, Wallace, p. 102.

⁹³ By 1878 budget cuts brought on by the debt crisis reduced the strength of the Egyptian army to 57,000, and one year later a massive demobilisation slashed the number to 32,000 with a view to reducing this further to 18,000 as the year progressed. In the summer of 1879, Tawfiq announced a further plan to shrink the army to 12,000 men. Colonisation and Revolution in the Middle East, Cole, p. 218.

⁹⁴ Urabi's strength like his weakness lay in his birthright. He was an indigenous Egyptian, not a Turk, Circassian, or Levantine, like most of those who held high office and traditionally

army revolt.⁹⁵ Having instigated several political assassinations, Tawfiq initiated Urabi's arrest; however, his followers concurring with pre-arranged instructions, disrupted a snap Court-martial and released their leader.⁹⁶ The decision had far-reaching consequences and resulted in Urabi's reinstatement, the ending of the Turko-Circassian domination of the army,⁹⁷ an increase in the salaries of the retired officers and promised army reforms.⁹⁸ By 9 September, a consolidated nationalist movement headed by Urabi tabled a series of demands against growing foreign interference.⁹⁹

The nationalist's demanded the immediate appointment of a new prime minister, the exclusion of members of the ruling house from the government, and the disqualification of all Circassian's from the office of Minister of War.¹⁰⁰ For the first time Egypt formed a homogenous ministry from within the revolutionary party thus replacing vice regal absolutism with cabinet rule. Sharif Pasha's¹⁰¹ new Cabinet, now included Urabi as Under Secretary for War.¹⁰² This escalation in the awareness of nationalism alarmed France, who pressurised Britain¹⁰³ to issue a Joint Note, warning Egyptian reformers of

surrounded the Khedive. For a contemporary illustration of the character of Urabi see Egypt and the Egyptian Question, Wallace, pp. 67-69.

⁹⁵ The mutiny of a group of Officers in the Egyptian army occurred after the Egyptian Government under pressure from the Europeans decreed that the Officer Corp, many of whom had not been paid for 24 Months, was to be reduced from about 2,600 to about 1,000 men. Between 300 and 600 Officers took part in the Cairo demonstration, not to establish a revolutionary government but to receive their arrears of pay. Their financial position was desperate; they were dismissed without hope of reinstatement or of employment in civil administration. Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, pp. 63-73.

⁹⁶ Egypt and Cromer, al-Sayyid, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, pp. 142-143.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 146-8.

⁹⁹ These demands included the dismissal of the ministry and the convocation of the 'Chamber of Notables', a body of landowners created by law in 1866, to give popular sanction to the decision taken by the Khedival government, the nearest organisation the Egyptian's had to a parliament; the drawing up of a constitution; that foreigners should pay taxes like native Egyptians; that all men should be equal before the law; that the freedom of the press should be respected; that the army be restored to its legal complement of 18,000 men, and once recruited paid on time, irrespective to the needs of the bondholders. Urabi also declared that the principal object of the National party was the intellectual and moral regeneration of the country by a better observance of the law, and to aid in obtaining for Egypt the blessing of self-government. "The British Occupation of Egypt", Galbraith and Marsot, p. 473.

¹⁰⁰ Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, p. 164.

¹⁰¹ Muhammad Sharif Pasha was born in Cairo in 1826. After receiving a military education he was made the highest ranking officer in the Guards, by Said Pasha. In 1857 he became Foreign Minister and under Ishmail and Tawfiq he served as Prime Minister.

¹⁰² Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt: Techniques of Domination, Robert T. Harrison, (London, 1995), pp. 58-59.

¹⁰³ Whereas Britain preferred a Turkish intervention she could not allow France to gain command of the Suez Canal route. Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 94.

their determination to uphold the rule of the Khedive, and to impose their Financial Control.¹⁰⁴ Although a French initiative, the immediate and later acquiescence by the ambitious Under Secretary for foreign affairs, Sir Charles Dilke, cannot be divorced from the consequences. Before the issue of the Note, Britain's relationship with the Egyptian nationalists was reasonably cordial. Dilke himself had not expressed any recent concerns over Egyptian affairs;¹⁰⁵ his major preoccupation was to renegotiate a commercial treaty with France. Whether or not the two countries concurred in the composition of the communication is open to conjecture,¹⁰⁶ what is certain however, is that they were in harmony over the joint policy.¹⁰⁷ The hard line further antagonised the nationalists who foresaw the Sultan drifting into the background, and Egypt enduring the disastrous fate of Tunis.¹⁰⁸ According to Scholch, the Note provoked from May 1882 onwards the call for an increase in army strength to the limit of 18,000 men; the construction of the fortifications along the Mediterranean coast; and the creation of a Chamber of Deputies, with Cabinet responsibilities.¹⁰⁹ David Farnie is equally forthright; he claimed the expedition to Tunis detonated waves of indigenous unrest throughout Moslem Africa, culminating in the rise of the Mahdi in the Sudan.¹¹⁰ In response the Chamber demanded the right to control that half of state expenditure required for internal needs; not to be confused with that portion required to pay the Ottoman tribute or service the international debt. A proposal rejected by the Dual Control. When the avowed nationalist Mahmoud Pasha Sami replaced

¹⁰⁴ For a more fuller understanding of the text of the Note see British in Egypt, Mansfield, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ As early as 14 January 1878, during the Russo-Turkish war, Dilke had advocated for the annexation of Egypt. East and West of Suez, Farnie, p. 265.

¹⁰⁶ "Sir Charles Dilke and the British Intervention in Egypt", Chamberlain, pp. 233-4.

¹⁰⁷ The significance of this unprovoked uncompromising ultimatum can never be overstated, it united many different factions who had previously shared little common ground, and from the moment it was issued foreign intervention became an almost unavoidable necessity. Ibid, pp. 234-5.

¹⁰⁸ From an Egyptian perspective, the threat of a continuation of the French intervention in Tunis, to incorporate Egypt, was real and lay at the root of the escalating grievance. The settlement of the 1878 Congress of Berlin allowed France a free hand in Tunis in return for a free hand for Britain in Cyprus. France was concerned about the fate of Tunis because it bordered her existing colony of Algeria, which she had possessed since 1829. However, the option to occupy Tunis was not taken up until May 1881, a decision, which so incensed the Sultan it made cooperation between France and Turkey impossible during the crisis.

¹⁰⁹ Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, pp. 159 & 173.

¹¹⁰ East and West of Suez, Farnie, p. 284.

Sharif Pasha,¹¹¹ Urabi became Minister of War, and from that moment, the army under Urabi held a monopoly of indigenous authority. Having called the Anglo-French bluff, the French initiative and the British response set the two Powers on a collision course with Egypt.¹¹²

Lawson was amazed that Gladstone could contemplate destroying a nationalist movement with such a positive political agenda.¹¹³ To him, Urabi was a genuine patriot trying to modernise his country; endeavouring to secure by arms the liberties of the Egyptian people. As he emphasised, Urabi claimed no rank for himself or his followers and showed no outward signs of becoming a rebellious mutineer or self-seeking military dictator: "Urabi never acquired or preserved his influence by terrorism; at the commencement he had no power to cause injury and during his rule he never initiated executions."¹¹⁴ Lawson never doubted that Urabi held the sympathies of most sections of the native population.¹¹⁵ As he concluded "Urabi was not unique, almost everyone in Egypt craved for freedom, not from the tyranny of military despots, but from the demands of the Anglo-French Control." Alexander

¹¹¹ C. F. Moberly Bell, who was a correspondent in Alexandria for The Times newspaper and personal friend of the British Controller, Sir Auckland Colvin, described Sharif Pasha as an indolent, jovial French-educated Turk, who was willing to accept any proposition rather than spare a precious half-hour away from his billiard table. Khedive and Pashas: By One Who Knows Them Well, C. F. M. Bell, (London, 1884), p. 166. Also British in Egypt, Mansfield, pp. 17-18.

¹¹² Robinson and Gallagher placed great emphasis on the part played by France whose political intrigues brought pressure to bear on Britain and in some minds caused the war. Alexander Scholch questions this approach arguing that after the fall of Gambetta on 31 January 1882, the French pressure was simply non-existent. Since Freycinet, Gambetta's successor, had renounced all French ambitions regarding military intervention in Egypt, neither the Government in London nor its representatives in Cairo, feared or had to fear aggressive French ambitions in Egypt. By June 1882, the roles of the two powers had almost reversed. The British cabinet told Freycinet in no uncertain manner when he considered making terms with Urabi and the nationalists, that no satisfactory or durable arrangements were possible without the overthrow of Urabi Pasha and the military party. "The Men on the Spot and the English Occupation of Egypt In 1882", Scholch, pp. 774-76.

¹¹³ Quotation taken from Urabi's National programme, issued in December 1881, and used by Lawson in a speech to justify his own attitude towards the policy of the British Government. Hansard, vol. 284, col. 904, 14 February 1884.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, vol. 285, col. 768, 6 March 1884. Egypt and the Egyptian Question, Wallace, pp. 396-7.

¹¹⁵ This is an argument largely supported by the historian Juan Cole, who stresses the persuasive case for important participation in the revolution by intellectuals, the merchants' and artisans' guilds, the rural middle class and the peasantry, and the urban crowd. Colonisation and Revolution in the Middle East, Cole, pp. 234-272.

Scholch also recognised Urabi's popularity: "Urabi became a people's tribune not a tyrant."¹¹⁶

The Suez Canal Factor

If Britain required an excuse to intervene in the affairs of Egypt, she had to look no further than Suez to recognise a potential threat to a valuable British interest. Britain had assumed an economic interest in the canal in 1875, after Disraeli rocked the British establishment by paying £4,000,000 for the Khedive's forty-four per cent stake in the Suez Canal Company.¹¹⁷ Although neither Parliament nor the press had expressed any concern for the canal's safety before July 1882, the need to protect the asset became the principal argument used to justify military intervention and eventually served as a permanent excuse for occupying Egypt.¹¹⁸ Although intended to give Britain a voice in the management of the Suez Canal Company and to maintain the balance of influence with France,¹¹⁹ Disraeli, through the purchase increased Britain's influence in the Middle East and simultaneously strengthened her control over the route to India; thus acquiring for England both an economic interest in the canal and a political interest in Egypt.¹²⁰ Although the purchase became a far sounder financial investment of public money than critics originally predicted,¹²¹ the protection of the asset had far-reaching consequences and led directly to intervention, first in Egypt then in the Sudan. In Britain, the purchase received a mixed reception. While Lawson

¹¹⁶ Scholch argued that the claim that in February 1882 or even earlier a military dictatorship was set up in Egypt and soon degenerated into anarchy and xenophobia belongs to the realms of legend and propaganda. *Egypt for the Egyptians*, Scholch, pp. 190 & 224.

¹¹⁷ The outturn cost of constructing the Suez Canal was £16,000,000. *Modern Egypt*, Vol. 1, Cromer, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ *East and West of Suez*, Farnie, p. 292.

¹¹⁹ *Africa and the Victorians*, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 83.

¹²⁰ These circumstances were also recognised by Sir Charles Dilke, who in 1882 stated that Egypt was now the chief highway to India and our interests beyond and that 82 per cent of the trade passing through the canal was British Trade. *Hansard*, vol. 272, col. 1720, 25 July 1882.

¹²¹ By January 1876 the share price had risen from £22. 10. 4d. to £34. 12s. 6d., a fifty per cent increase. The market value of the British Governments stake was £24 million in 1898, £40 million on the eve of the Great War and £95 million by 1935, around £528 for each share. Between 1875 and 1895, the government received its £200,000 a year from Cairo, which rose from £690,000 in 1895 to £880,000 in 1901. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, Niall Ferguson, (London, 2001), p. 233.

instinctively censured Disraeli's 'stock-jobbing activities', others, notably the liberal imperialist journalist and social critic, Edward Dicey, equated Britain's right to acquire Egypt with its right to hold India, Gibraltar, Singapore and Ireland.¹²² Dicey advocated the take-over of the Suez Canal and Lower Egypt because an unjust and above all incompetent Khedive could not guarantee the route to India.¹²³

Although Gladstone had welcomed the completion of the Suez Canal, for its obvious usefulness to the British Empire,¹²⁴ he questioned the value of the acquisition,¹²⁵ dismissing the purchase as a 'financial operation' of a 'ridiculous description' rather than 'the offspring of consummate human wisdom'.¹²⁶ During the Eastern Question, Gladstone had thundered against Egypt's occupation, whose association with imperial security, he ridiculed. In August 1877, in an article, published in the Nineteenth Century entitled, 'Aggression on Egypt and Freedom in the East' he issued what later proved an ironic prediction. He set out his objections in the clearest and strongest terms; he denounced any undertaking by England of any form of responsibility on the Nile and cited four objections to the occupation. Firstly, it would increase England's burdens in the East, already too great; secondly, it would extend imperial rule by immoral means; thirdly, the pretext of protecting the route to India by occupying the Nile valley was a false one, the route via the Cape of Good Hope was England's true line of communication; fourthly, intervention of any description, whether on the Suez Canal or Cairo would inevitably lead to further adventures in Africa.¹²⁷ Gladstone had no desire for such an empire, especially when brought about by war, and in opposition he worked tirelessly to prevent its founding. However, once in office he played

¹²² "Mr. Gladstone and Our Empire", Edward Dicey, Nineteenth Century, Vol. 2, (August 1877), p. 308.

¹²³ England and Egypt, Edward Dicey, (London, 1881), pp. 20, 26-28, 68-73. Also "The Victorians and Africa", Hopkins, p. 367.

¹²⁴ Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt, Harrison, p. 49.

¹²⁵ After Thirty Years, Viscount Gladstone, (London, 1928), p. 238.

¹²⁶ East and West of Suez, Farnie, p. 282.

¹²⁷ Gladstone had predicted that Egypt would "be the almost certain egg of a North African Empire, that will grow and grow until another Victoria and another Albert, titles of the Lake-sources of the White Nile, come within our borders; and till we finally join hands across the Equator with Natal and Cape Town, to say nothing of the Transvaal and the Orange River on the south, or of Abyssinia or Zanzibar to be swallowed by way of *viaticum* on our journey." "Aggression on Egypt and Freedom in the East", Gladstone, August 1877, pp. 149-66.

his part in developing the course of events, which led to the fulfilment of some of his own predictions.

The question of the Canal's safety is pivotal to this study. Was it at risk or thought to be at risk in the summer of 1882? Many political observers, including some Cabinet ministers considered it was; others like Lawson disagreed. In the House of Commons as late as 26 June 1882, Gladstone was reconfirming his earlier views with regard to the relative advantages of the routes to India via Suez and the Cape respectively.¹²⁸ He also stated in a letter addressed to Granville dated 16 July 1882, that although he did not fear an attack upon the Canal he had advised the admiralty to be vigilant.¹²⁹ In retrospect, as both Farnie and Galbraith have noted, the canal's security although never a priority before the summer of 1882, became a "palatable explanation to both the Liberal party and the public for invasion."¹³⁰

The Men on the Spot

Although Lawson continuously accused British diplomats of gerrymandering and of playing Machiavellian roles, he was always ready to exploit official communications if the contents however abstract reinforced his views. Through such methods he employed many of the statements below to enhance his argument. Immediately after the events of 9 September 1881, the two senior British representatives in Egypt, the British Controller Sir Auckland Colvin, and the British Consul General, Sir Edward Malet began to play leading roles in the unfolding events. Both representatives held the stereotypes common among Europeans of their day, they disparaged 'Orientals' and cared little for Arabian culture.¹³¹ Initially they advised their government to refrain from placing obstacles in the way of the nationalist movement, and to offer support unless it rushed too hastily for change.¹³² The

¹²⁸ Hansard, vol. 271, 26 June 1882.

¹²⁹ The Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-86, Vol. 1, Ramm, (Gladstone To Granville, 16 July 1882), p.372.

¹³⁰ "The British Occupation of Egypt", Galbraith and Marsot, p. 473.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 474.

¹³² In one dispatch, Malet advised Lord Granville at the Foreign Office that the powers should concede to the delegate's requests and that there should be no intervention on any account

Egyptians, Malet said, had distinctly, for good or for evil, entered on a constitutional course, and the Organic Law of the Chamber had become their charter of liberties. The Chamber, Malet said, exists "...and will continue to do so unless it is forcibly suppressed which can only be done by intervention."¹³³ Once the financial concerns became the predominant question, Malet abdicated his responsibilities in favour of Colvin, who although not a traditional diplomat held a consultative role in the Egyptian council of ministers. Colvin's official purpose was to maintain the financial credit of Egypt and to ensure the prompt repayment of coupons; he also held another influential post, that of the anonymous Cairo correspondent of the Pall Mall Gazette.¹³⁴ Gladstone's favourite newspaper.¹³⁵

Initially Colvin tried to guide and incorporate the nationalist movement into the existing puppet regime;¹³⁶ however, after the issue of the 'Joint Note' he quickly assumed a tough uncompromising line and using a series of misjudgements and misunderstandings began to paint an unrepresentative caricature of the revolutionary party. When Colvin (and a little later Malet), realised the reformers sought to curb not only the privileges of the local elite but also those of the Europeans, he systematically denounced Egyptian self-government and fearing the emergence of a 'military despotism' began to

over the budget. He adopted this approach despite recognising that an agreement would mean that official salaries not regulated by contract would be under the control of the Chamber, thus enabling the Egyptian's to abolish the land survey, and dismiss many Europeans if they so wished. Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, p. 192. Hansard, vol. 273, cols. 598-9, 1 August 1882.

¹³³ This was part of a dispatch from Malet to the Foreign Office, dated Cairo 11 January 1882. This quotation was used in a parliamentary speech by Lawson in a forlorn attempt to reinforce his argument favouring a reversal of Government policy, thus allowing the Egyptian government the right to vote the administrative part of the budget. Hansard, vol. 273, col. 1932, 16 August 1882.

¹³⁴ After the 1880 General Election, the then editor Frederick Greenwood, was replaced by John Morley who quickly converted the newspaper from Cobdenism to Jingoism and justified English intervention as necessary to protect the Suez Canal from Bedouin dominance. Morley, who later received a seat in Parliament, through the patronage of Dilke and Chamberlain, accepted Colvin's reports without question. East and West of Suez, Farnie, pp. 292-295.

¹³⁵ This position gave Colvin a powerful influence on English public opinion; and allowed him to play a significant role in coaxing the government towards acceptance of responsibility in Egypt. British in Egypt, Mansfield, p. 21.

¹³⁶ At first Colvin characterised the rebellion as a mutiny, then quickly concluded that the insurrection was an Egyptian movement against Turkish arbitrary rule, and an Egyptian nationalist movement with an anti-European flavour. Putting aside his many fears, Colvin recommended that what he termed a 'liberal movement' should not be discouraged, unless it undermined the institutions of the Control.

implement his own agenda.¹³⁷ Colvin considered the European interests in Egypt, "far to various and important to permit of the engagements contracted by the Khedive being placed at the mercy of Egyptian soldiery, or of an inexperienced native administration."¹³⁸

On 16 January 1882, after Malet informed the Chamber of Notables that their demands infringed international agreements, he reassured the Sultan that Britain and France would apply force should he denounce the demands of the Chamber.¹³⁹ Four days later Malet warned his employers not to guarantee Egypt a constitution as such a situation would, he stressed, lead both parties to extremities.¹⁴⁰ On 31 January 1882, Colvin informed Wilfrid Blunt of his intention to ruin the nationalist movement should they attain office. Colvin now favoured intervention, which he considered necessary and inevitable, and promised to spare no pains to bring it about.¹⁴¹ It was at this point that Colvin and Malet began to talk of 'anarchy' which they thought would inevitably follow should European financial control decline. On 27 February, Malet informed Granville that the current situation could no longer continue and that Egyptian occupation should precede re-organisation; but only after they had demonstrated the impracticability of the experiment.¹⁴² In the meantime the British press, which Lawson considered 'in the main rotten',¹⁴³ began a campaign to rescue the resources of the bondholders, thus eventually provoking Gladstone, who had remained a non-interventionist throughout 1881, to disclaim Urabi as a mutineer and a bloodthirsty fanatic.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ Colvin saw the situation deteriorating rapidly, and on the premise of an imminent collision between Moslems and Christians, he began to dispatch a series of alarmist reports, warning of the danger to European lives and property in Egypt. Scramble for Africa, Chamberlain, p. 41.

¹³⁸ The Making of Modern Egypt, Sir Auckland Colvin, (London, 1906), p. 25.

¹³⁹ Hansard, vol. 273, col. 1933, 16 August 1882.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, col. 1143, 8 August 1882.

¹⁴¹ A Secret History of the British Occupation of Egypt, W. S. Blunt, (London, 1907), p. 180. This was also the opinion of Hulme-Beaman, a member of the British consular staff in Cairo. Khedives and Pashas: (Sketches of Contemporary Egyptian Rulers and Statesmen), Author not named, (London, 1884), p. 235.

¹⁴² "The Men on the Spot and the English Occupation of Egypt in 1882", Scholch, p. 781.

¹⁴³ Times, 15 July 1882.

¹⁴⁴ This was a direct contradiction to the observations he made earlier that year, when he confessed to Granville: "Egypt for the Egyptians is the sentiment to which I should wish to give scope: and could it prevail it would I think be the best, the only good solution of the Egyptian question." The Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-1882, Vol. 1, Ramm, p. 326.

On 2 May, the Khedive sought the intervention of the 'Concert of Europe'. Five days later Malet informed Granville,

"That some complications of an acute nature must supervene before any satisfactory solution of the Egyptian question can be attained and that it would be wiser to hasten it than to endeavour to retard it, because, the longer misgovernment lasts, the more difficult it is to remedy the evils which it has caused."¹⁴⁵

A further complication arose on 6 May, when Irish nationalists murdered the newly appointed Irish Secretary, Lord Frederick Cavendish, brother to Lord Hartington. The Cabinet now equated Irish nationalism to Egyptian nationalism and decided to oppose Urabi as an adventurer and as Farnie emphasises: "they sent ironclad's to Alexandria so as to achieve a success in Egypt which might atone for failure in Ireland."¹⁴⁶ On 9 May, although failing to mention that the Egyptian Government had guaranteed public order, Malet reported an alleged conversation between the Egyptian Prime Minister and the Khedive, which made reference to the proposed implementation of a 'general massacre of foreigners'. As Scholch explains, Malet's reports did not produce anything of what was really taking place, but only what he himself wished to see take place.¹⁴⁷

The Alexandria Massacres

After failing to secure the temporary exile of Urabi and the removal of the Sami administration, the unstable British and French alliance proposed a naval demonstration.¹⁴⁸ Instead of intimidating the nationalist party, the arrival

¹⁴⁵ "The Men on the Spot and the English Occupation of Egypt in 1882", Scholch, p. 782.

¹⁴⁶ East and West of Suez, Farnie, p. 285.

¹⁴⁷ Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, pp. 234-5.

¹⁴⁸ Whereas the British Government was trying to solve the difficulty by armed Turkish intervention, the French feared a revival of the smouldering resurrection in Tunisia. Egypt and the Egyptian Question, Wallace, p. 83.

of the Anglo-French fleet¹⁴⁹ on 19 May 1882, unleashed a huge wave of patriotism throughout Egypt and provoked many inhabitants to rally behind Urabi. What began as a wave of military discontent had spawned a national, anti-European and anti-Turk agitation. The warships became a major irritant, and although the threat forced the resignation of the Egyptian ministry, the Khedive under pressure from a combined lobby of Muslim, Christian and Jewish dignitaries reinstated it three days later.

On 23 May, Lawson asked Dilke if the Admiralty had dispatched the fleet to protect the lives and property of British subjects or to intervene in Egypt's internal affairs. Lawson's argument was that should the former argument prevail then force was an unacceptable way of ensuring success.¹⁵⁰ Although the minister thwarted, frustrated and discouraged many of Lawson's appeals¹⁵¹ he seldom expressed any serious misgivings relating to his Government's Egyptian policy.¹⁵²

On 25 May, fearing an imminent British invasion, Lawson sought government assurance's that the navy would not intervene without prior parliamentary consultation and approval. Dilke's supercilious reply was far from reassuring

The question of affording opportunities for discussion is rather one for the Prime Minister than for myself; but I may state that it is the opinion of the Government that any discussion on this subject at the present moment would be contrary to the interests of the Public Service.¹⁵³

Dilke had obvious cause for evasion; for as he spoke the Cabinet was discussing the feasibility of conducting a war, with or without parliamentary approval. Lawson disapproved of Dilke's methods, for although strictly correct his continual denials had a tendency to misconstrue and misinform; Dilke

¹⁴⁹ The naval squadron comprised of two ironclad warships, two smaller vessels and two gunboats, each with a draught capable of entering the port. Hansard, vol. 269, col. 1616, 25 May 1882. This was an answer given by Sir Charles Dilke to a question tabled by Lawson.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, vol. 269, cols. 1404-5, 23 May 1882.

¹⁵¹ Blunt identified Dilke as the driving force in the Liberal Government working for and eventually securing British intervention. A Secret History of the British Occupation of Egypt, Blunt, pp. 211, 214, 241, 294-5.

¹⁵² "Sir Charles Dilke and the British Intervention in Egypt", Chamberlain, p. 233.

¹⁵³ Hansard, vol. 269, col. 1703, 26 May 1882.

seldom supplied requisite information on foreign affairs, and when 'British interests' were threatened, he stifled requests for further information. In consequence, Parliament knew little about the matter until hostilities began. As Lawson recorded:

The question had been to ask some question of a Minister, who declined to give an answer; and then, next day, to ask another question of some other Minister, who again referred to the Minister who had previously refused to give an answer.¹⁵⁴

In one satirical speech, Lawson summarised Dilke's tireless but insincere efforts to calm Parliament: "With his (Dilke) protocols and correspondence and his dual notes and identical notes and ultimatums, answering questions and non-answering questions in the House of Commons."¹⁵⁵ Since Lawson's requests went unanswered, he was forced to gather his information in 'bits and scraps', which, as he stressed had little value, when finally presented.

On 26 May, Lawson criticised the Government's decision to adjourn Parliament for the Whitsuntide recess. Although he acknowledged Gladstone's popularity and recognised that right or wrong Gladstone would receive overwhelming public support, he reiterated his antipathy towards any politician who initiated policies designed to maintain the independence and the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵⁶

On 11 June 1882, while British and French warships rode anchor off Alexandria,¹⁵⁷ riots erupted in the city. Before the Egyptian garrison could restore public order European diplomats were manhandled and a number of Christians were murdered. Although these events were widely reported almost every British newspaper chose to ignore the slaying of over two hundred Egyptian nationals, many at the hands of Maltese and Greek

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, vol. 272, col. 168, 12 July 1882.

¹⁵⁵ West Cumberland Times, 1 September 1882.

¹⁵⁶ Hansard, vol. 269, col. 1713, 26 May 1882.

¹⁵⁷ The city of Alexandria was one of the most beautiful in the Mediterranean, and comprised a growing population of 212,000 people, including some 76,000 Europeans. Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt, Harrison, p. 12.

merchants, clandestinely armed by their respective officials.¹⁵⁸ Although it is generally recognised that the cause of the riots was a trivial dispute,¹⁵⁹ the incident allowed Urabi's enemies to further blacken his name.¹⁶⁰ The massacre became pivotal to the revolution, insofar as the massacre constituted a matter of honour that required a British reactionary response.¹⁶¹ The events of 11 June also became the turning point for Gladstone, who in the company of Granville, Bright and Sir William Harcourt had previously represented the 'peace party' in the Cabinet. The views endorsed by politicians in regard to the character of Urabi, now appear mistaken. It is also worth recording that in later years, Dilke, Malet and Cromer all concluded that Urabi had no involvement in the instigation of the riots.¹⁶² While British officials saw the riots as a 'massacre' instigated by Urabi and his supporters, France interpreted the violence as a mere fracas, of a type that occasionally broke out in Egyptian ports, Euro-Egyptian conflicts were not uncommon in the 1860's and 1870's.¹⁶³ Cole proposes a third alternative, that the crowd acted both politically and spontaneously.¹⁶⁴ Many historians today believe that the disturbances may have been activated by the Khedive to encourage Britain and France to defend him as his power declined.

The Bombardment

Faced with either abandonment of Britain's Egyptian interests or invasion, Gladstone, under pressure from his Cabinet, capitulated and

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 93. This occurrence was included in the evidence presented by John Ninet, a former resident of Alexandria, later a London Doctor of medicine. Pictorial Records of the English in Egypt, with Life of General Gordon and other Pioneers of Freedom, Author not stated, (London, c 1885), pp. 238-44.

¹⁵⁹ The full truth is unlikely to be known, but the probability is that the riots spread spontaneously after a brawl between a drunken Maltese and an Egyptian donkey boy got out of hand. British in Egypt, Mansfield, p. 39. Also "The Alexandria Massacres of 11 June 1882", Chamberlain, p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ A Pilgrimage of Passion: The Life of William Scawen Blunt, Elizabeth Longford, (London, 1979), p. 183.

¹⁶¹ Colonisation and Revolution in the Middle East, Cole, p. 239.

¹⁶² British in Egypt, Mansfield, p. 39.

¹⁶³ Colonisation and Revolution in the Middle East, Cole, pp. 192-204.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 253.

sanctioned a naval and military intervention.¹⁶⁵ At the same time Urabi, angered by the presence of the warships, began to repair the emplacements in the forts commanding Alexandria harbour. On 20 June, Lawson spoke to a gathering of the Workers' Peace Association at the Westminster Palace Hotel, where he emphasised that his opposition was "not based upon a peace-at-any-price policy but solely on the information contained in the Blue Books." The meeting in general called on the Government to limit its involvement to inviting all of the Powers to guarantee Egyptian neutrality.¹⁶⁶ On 26 June, Lawson chaired a meeting of the Anti-aggression League, where he warned his audience that the British Government had dispatched their fleet to facilitate the collection of debts, and to act as bum-bailiffs for the Stock Exchange.¹⁶⁷ This opinion was partly reinforced on 29 June, when a group of leading Conservatives¹⁶⁸ met in Willis's Rooms under the presidency of the chairman of the Council of Bondholders, where in Lawson's words: "The Conservative opposition rode the British lion round the room, pulling its tail vigorously until it roared."¹⁶⁹ After delivering "fire and thunder speeches," the delegates agreed to "openly encourage the expansionist actions of the Liberal Government as the most affective way to protect British 'interests.'"¹⁷⁰ The presence of the bondholder's representative at this meeting demonstrated to Lawson that any proposed expedition to Egypt would allow the bondholders to extract even more blood from the fellaheen.¹⁷¹ Lawson viewed this meeting as one more example of a Government accepting advice from its enemies, and confirmation that: "When the Opposition and the Government of the day take the same line, one may be certain that a great wrong is at hand."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ On 20 June 1882, the Cabinet conducted a preliminary war meeting and on the following day Lord Hartington placed 5,000 Indian Sepoy troops on standby to invade Egypt at the Suez Canal. Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt, Harrison, p. 12. Also The Life of the Right Hon. Sir Charles Dilke, Vol. 1, Gwynn, and Tuckwell, p. 462.

¹⁶⁶ British Peace Movement, Laity, p. 97.

¹⁶⁷ Times, 27 June 1882.

¹⁶⁸ According to Lawson, both Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote were present at that meeting. Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 166.

¹⁶⁹ Lawson used this quotation several times during his agitation campaign. Hansard, vol. 285, col. 765, 6 March 1884.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, vol. 276, col. 139, 15 February 1883. Also *Ibid*, vol. 284, col. 879, 14 February 1883.

¹⁷¹ Lawson's opinions were consistent with many held within radical circles. However as P. J. Cain demonstrates British officials long argued that they were making the interests of the creditor's subsidiary to the interests of Egypt. "The British Financial Administration of Egypt", Cain, p. 187.

¹⁷² Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 166.

During the build up to the crisis, Lawson took an interest in a series of sympathetic authoritative letters written by the Conservative, ex-diplomat and poet, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and the Irish politician Sir William Gregory. Between December 1881 and December 1882, the Times published thirteen letters from Blunt and seven from Gregory.¹⁷³ On 5 July 1882, George Howard, later Lord Carlisle introduced Lawson to Blunt, where afterwards Blunt described Lawson as a charming man, who promised support and vowed to do all in his power to help the beleaguered Egyptians.¹⁷⁴ Lawson was equally impressed with Blunt, whom he later described as the one man to whom Britain and her Government were eternally indebted; who single handedly saved Urabi and his co-defendants from execution.¹⁷⁵

Blunt's opening letter, published on 3 January 1882, carried a direct communication from Urabi; who, after explaining the aspirations of the nationalist party thanked Britain and France for securing freedom and justice in Egypt. Urabi saw the foreign influence as a temporary measure and declared that the long-term objective of the nationalist party was to see Egypt entirely in the hands of the Egyptians. Although Urabi acknowledged the Sultan as Egypt's suzerain, he vowed to oppose all who would once again reduce Egypt to the condition of a Turkish Pashalik. Urabi reconfirmed his allegiance to the Khedive, but warned any would-be opponent that the army would not tolerate any reversion to despotism. He also recognised the foreign debt, and declared the repayment a matter of national honour. He disclaimed any connection with the current agitation but acknowledged that silence would open the way for the restoration of despotism and until the nationalists established parliamentary government, the army would speak for the people.¹⁷⁶ Blunt and Lawson met again on 13 July, where after discussing the war-like actions of the British Government they agreed that any reliance upon the integrity of the Cabinet was both foolish and hopeless.¹⁷⁷

Between 22 June and 6 September 1882, an international conference took place at Constantinople. Although assembled to seek European

¹⁷³ "British Public Opinion and the Invasion of Egypt", Chamberlain, Trivium XVI, pp. 10-11.

¹⁷⁴ A Secret History of the British Occupation of Egypt, Blunt, p. 275.

¹⁷⁵ Hansard, vol. 291, col. 1587, 5 August 1884.

¹⁷⁶ "British Public Opinion and the Invasion of Egypt", Chamberlain, p. 12.

¹⁷⁷ A Secret History of the British Occupation of Egypt, Blunt, p. 279.

unanimity on the Egyptian issue, it ended in deadlock primarily because Turkey rejected Britain's request to send troops to Egypt.¹⁷⁸ Lawson disparaged this diplomatic gathering; his argument was that Britain would act alone irrespective of its findings.

On 3 July, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville appointed General Sir Garnet Wolseley, commander of the British expeditionary force with orders to invade Egypt at the Suez Canal.¹⁷⁹ On the same day, the Cabinet instructed Admiral Sir Beauchamp Seymour (later made Lord Alcester), to take immediate steps to demolish the earthworks and destroy the batteries in the forts, should fortification work continue.¹⁸⁰ However he was only to act after the evacuation of the European population; the massacres at Alexandria took place on 11 June; the last vessel containing refugees left the harbour at 4pm on 10 July.¹⁸¹ Earlier that day the Admiral was offered an excuse when Egyptian soldiers began rolling guns towards the forts protecting the western side of the harbour entrance.¹⁸² That evening, Lawson asked Gladstone if he intended to issue a formal declaration of war, stating the reasons for the bombardment.¹⁸³

On the pretext that the fleet faced danger, Seymour demanded the surrender of the fortifications.¹⁸⁴ Although the Council did not consider the artillery a threat, they offered in the name of the Khedive, to dismantle the contentious guns where work had begun.¹⁸⁵ The nationalist's also stated that should a bombardment begin they would not return fire until after the firing of the fifth shot. In reality, the Egyptians did not return their weak and ineffective fire until after the fifteenth salvo.¹⁸⁶ Although the Khedive repeatedly stated

¹⁷⁸ For a contemporary explanation to the reasoning behind Turkey's reluctance to become involved in the internal affairs: See Egypt and the Egyptian Question, Wallace, pp. 89-90.

¹⁷⁹ Sir Garnet Wolseley, Kochanski, p. 134.

¹⁸⁰ In a private communication on 1 July 1882, Lord Northbrook, the First Lord of the Admiralty, admitted to Lord Granville that although he did not consider that the gun emplacements presented an immediate danger to British ships they could if they so wished provoke the conflict by demanding the dismantlement of the guns. Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt, Harrison, p. 14.

¹⁸¹ This was the essence of a speech delivered by Lord Alcester at the Guildhall and quoted by Lawson in the Commons on 8 June 1883. Hansard, vol. 280, col. 44, 8 June 1883. For a transcript of Alcester's speech see Pictorial Records of the English in Egypt, Anon, p. 252.

¹⁸² Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1302, 19 February 1883.

¹⁸³ Ibid, vol. 271, col. 1965, 10 July 1882.

¹⁸⁴ Illustrated London News, 15 July 1882.

¹⁸⁵ Egypt and Cromer, al-Sayyid, pp. 24-26.

¹⁸⁶ British in Egypt, Mansfield, p. 44.

during the discussions that he would carry a rifle and lead the troops from the front should war commence; in private he urged Britain to bombard the city.¹⁸⁷ In the early hours of the following morning Seymour rejected the offer to submit to British demands, the hour, he said for negotiations had passed.

At 7am on Tuesday 11 July, in what Lawson later described as an act of imperialist aggression, the British Fleet began a pre-emptive bombardment of Alexandria. After almost eleven hours of incessant shelling in a one-sided confrontation, the eight Egyptian forts and their obsolete guns, which had remained silent for most of the day,¹⁸⁸ lay in ruins with the majority of their gunners dead or dying. While members of the Commons sought information referring to the rank and the number of British casualties, Lawson enquired into the number of Egyptian dead.¹⁸⁹ A virtual although undeclared state of war now existed between Great Britain and Egypt.

In Lawson's opinion the British Government had, "...perpetrated one of the most barbarous, disreputable and odious acts, that a free and civilised nation could commit."¹⁹⁰ Incendiary devices torched the city¹⁹¹ and while Urabi left for Cairo under the cover of a white flag, a mob ransacked the city, committed numerous acts of murder and pillage, and drove thousands of Egyptians into the desert where they perished. Lawson's description of the bombardment: "...the execution of the wholesale massacre of the inhabitants", holds some validity.¹⁹² Although British officials long argued that the retreating Egyptian army under Urabi's command set fire to and destroyed Alexandria; later reappraisals have shown that British shells caused considerable damage. One source suggests that from the 3,200 shells fired during the action, as few as ten may have reached the intended target.¹⁹³ The question remains was this wanton wholesale destruction intentional or purely accidental? The answer may lie in a comment by Gladstone, who laid great emphasis on the skill of the British commander, whose experience he claimed

¹⁸⁷ How We Defended Urabi, Broadley, p. 124.

¹⁸⁸ Hansard, vol. 272, cols. 32 & 94, 7 July 1882.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, vol. 272, cols. 94 & 167, 7 July 1882. The number of British casualties was given as twenty-seven.

¹⁹⁰ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882.

¹⁹¹ Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt, Harrison, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹² Hansard, vol. 272, col. 170, 12 July 1882.

¹⁹³ Fifty Years in the Royal Navy, Admiral Sir Percy Scott, (London, 1919), pp. 48-49.

would greatly reduce the risk to civilian life and property.¹⁹⁴ In Parliament Lawson drew attention to an article in The Daily Telegraph, whose correspondent found four unexploded shells from H.M.S. Inflexible in the city. As Lawson remarked, "If the correspondent found four unexploded shells in the town centre how many exploded ones did he not find."¹⁹⁵

Earlier that day, France, who in conjunction with Turkey, Germany and Austria, had expressed a willingness to recognise Urabi's de facto government, ordered the withdrawal of their naval squadron, leaving Britain to commence the bombardment alone.¹⁹⁶ The British press and her people went wild with jubilation and excited approval. A report in The Times assured its readers, that Britain was fighting to save Egypt from anarchy. England they asserted "could never leave their immense political and material interests in Egypt to the mercy of a military adventurer."¹⁹⁷ Chamberlain and Dilke, keen to avoid association with the bondholders, or any responsibility to them, endorsed Hartington's demand for Urabi's removal, not to restore foreign financial control or to save the bondholders, but on the premise of protecting the Suez Canal¹⁹⁸ and of exacting reparations¹⁹⁹ for the Alexandria outrages.²⁰⁰ According to Farnie, the hawks in the Cabinet having recognised that the claims of 'sectional economic interests' would divide the party chose to emphasise the threat to the Canal as a means of uniting it, hoping to rally Free Traders and commercial radicals behind those Conservatives who

¹⁹⁴ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 178, 12 July 1882.

¹⁹⁵ West Cumberland Times, 1 September 1882.

¹⁹⁶ In February 1882, Freycinet (1828-1923) replaced Gambetta as Prime Minister, as a result the French attitude softened. In July Freycinet himself suffered a defeat after he asked Parliament to vote money for a joint expedition with Britain.

¹⁹⁷ Times, 12 July 1882. British interests' were twofold, national and personal. Nationally the Suez Canal had emerged as Britain's highway to India. Personally, because a number of her people had invested heavily in Egyptian finances and many northern industrialists were involved in Egyptian trade.

¹⁹⁸ The French who had already held communications with the Suez Canal Company were sure that the canal was safe and that the only danger to it would arise from foreign intervention to protect it. Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 108.

¹⁹⁹ In March 1884, the reparations valued at £4,500,000 were forwarded to the Egyptian Government.

²⁰⁰ On 4 July 1882 Dilke noted in his diary: "There is a belief among the great majority of Liberals that intervention in Egypt is only contemplated on account of financial interest. If we intervene to protect the Canal, or if we confine ourselves to exacting the repartitions due us for the Alexandria outrages, this feeling need not be taken into account. "The British Occupation of Egypt", Galbraith and Marsot, p. 471. As Dilke's response to a motion seconded by Lawson, in which Dilke argued that their failure to demand reparations would put the lives of

supported intervention. Farnie also recognised that most Liberals were as eager to interfere on behalf of the Canal, as they were to applaud the purchase of the shares in 1875.²⁰¹ Lawson opposed those views; he asked the Government to produce evidence to show that Urabi, "...had made any attempt, or suspicion of any attempt, or even a desire, to do anything to interfere with the safety of the Suez Canal."²⁰² Galbraith and Marsot have since endorsed these assertions and emphasised that the proponents of the bondholder school have no common ground with the Suez Canal forces, or vice versa.²⁰³

Although not in harmony with the hawks inside his Cabinet, (particularly Hartington who was worried about Egypt in relation to India) Gladstone eventually asked Parliament to sanction a military expedition to save the Egyptian people from the abuses of Urabi. Notwithstanding Urabi's position as the regularly constituted Egyptian Minister for War, he was branded a criminal by Gladstone and accused of torching and looting the city.²⁰⁴ In a parliamentary response to a question tabled by Lawson on 12 July, Gladstone clarified his position, offering three clear explanations for his change of attitude: First and foremost the need to protect the British Fleet, which he saw threatened by the fortifications; secondly, the need to uphold Britain's prestige throughout the East by avenging the massacres in Alexandria; and, thirdly, because Urabi was a dictator, who encouraged military violence.²⁰⁵ Lawson rejected the accusation that Britain could not allow Urabi to point a gun in her direction and emphasised his view by insisting that the fleet had gone to the forts not the forts to the fleet. "In the whole of the seas that are open to us, we could not let our Fleet lie in any other place except right before the forts of Alexandria."²⁰⁶ Lawson also dismissed the claims of nationalist dictatorship, arguing that Urabi represented the vast majority of the Egyptian people. He validated his opinion with a headline from that morning's edition of the

Europeans throughout the east at the danger of a fanatical mob of Mahomedans. Hansard, vol. 272, col. 190, 12 July 1882.

²⁰¹ East and West of Suez, Farnie, p. 293.

²⁰² Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1303, 19 February 1883.

²⁰³ "The British Occupation of Egypt", Galbraith and Marsot, p. 471.

²⁰⁴ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, pp. 113-121.

²⁰⁵ Hansard, vol. 272, cols. 176-178, 12 July 1882.

²⁰⁶ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882.

Manchester Examiner. "We are at war to the knife, not simply with Urabi and his army, but with the whole population of Egypt, backed up by the strong sympathy of the entire Mohammed world."²⁰⁷ Scholch has since contested all alleged dictatorial references, arguing that Urabi's role was simply that of a military general, whose field of command was explicitly limited to military matters, where even in the military sector he could not take independent decisions. Scholch also argues that other government business was incumbent in the 'Majli al urfi', a group of administrative and military experts informally organised to deal with the crisis as it arose.²⁰⁸ Lawson also dismissed the claim of anarchy. It was not anarchy that drew Britain into Egypt; although Urabi's enemies misconstrued a British presence, which made the maintenance of order and stability difficult, and in the end, was erroneously mistaken for anarchy. As Lawson said, "there was no anarchy in Egypt until Britain went there."²⁰⁹ Although Urabi emphatically denied the twin charges of arson and looting, his pleas went unheeded.²¹⁰

The Post Bombardment Agitation

On 12 July, Joseph Cowen asked Sir Charles Dilke if the Government had received any remonstrations from the Porte relating to the bombardment.²¹¹ The negative ministerial response should have settled the issue and prevented what developed into an unofficial, albeit lively, censure debate. After a barrage of questions,²¹² and a series of unsatisfactory ambiguous replies the Member for Sunderland, Mr. E. T. Gourley asked the Government to justify the bombardment; was it to protect British subjects and

²⁰⁷ Manchester Examiner, 12 September 1882.

²⁰⁸ Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, pp. 272-3.

²⁰⁹ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882.

²¹⁰ This was the second time that British politicians had discredited Urabi; first they blamed him for the massacres, and then condemned him for the destruction of Alexandria. Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt, Harrison, p. 22.

²¹¹ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 162, 12 July 1882.

²¹² Questions were asked by Mr Ashmead-Bartlett, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, Sir Stafford Northcote, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, Mr Macfarlane, Mr G. W. Elliott, and Mr Rourke. The diversity of the questions included the number and names of the British casualties; the truth in respect to the prohibition of merchant shipping through the Suez Canal; the involvement of the Concert of Europe; and the state of the proceedings at the conference in Constantinople.

British interests in Egypt; or was it to protect European bondholders?²¹³ The debate was greatly enriched by Lawson, who using his familiar humorous style expanded the argument far beyond the boundaries of the original question and elicited the liveliest cheers from those who normally opposed his views on such questions, not on account of their concurrence with his opinions but on account of the breadth and severity of the charges brought against the Government. In a savage denunciation he appealed to those who cared deeply about the 'degradation and dishonour' into which Britain had fallen, and urged them to speak out or through their silence take responsibility for the crimes of a nation.²¹⁴ Using a well-worn phrase, Lawson saw his Government "drifting into war with their eyes wide open."²¹⁵ The slightest mention of the word 'war' brought a chorus of criticism from a large section of the assembly, who belittled the act of bombardment, and rejected all references to an act of war.²¹⁶ After Gladstone described the attack as, "the application of the moral law,"²¹⁷ Lawson responded, calling it 'lawless military violence in Egypt'; a phrase Gladstone had himself earlier used to describe the nationalist response to the arrival of the fleet.²¹⁸

Lawson taunted John Bright, the weakest link in the Cabinet chain, manipulating a phrase Bright himself had used to denounce Palmerston's forward policy at the beginning of the Crimean war. "These hands are clean; no blood of our countrymen is on these hands."²¹⁹ That evening Bright submitted his resignation,²²⁰ immediately rejected by Gladstone, who urged his friend to reconsider and accept collective Cabinet responsibility. Two days

²¹³ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 167, 12 July 1882.

²¹⁴ Ibid, col. 168.

²¹⁵ The term 'drifting into war', was an expression first used by Lord Claredon in the House of Lords, in response to a question from Lord Lyndhurst at the commencement of the Crimean War. When asked for details of the actual position at that moment in time, Claredon replied, "All correspondence and all practical attempts for the maintenance of peace have ceased, and we are at the moment, if I might so say, drifting into war." Ibid, cols. 168-174.

²¹⁶ Gladstone later defended his position by insisting that they could only apply the term war to conflicts engaging recognised powers, thus deliberately belittling the status of the Egyptian nation, which he appeared to consider inferior when compared to western civilisation. In 1882, it was not uncommon for Europeans to consider Orientals as 'subject races', incapable of self-government, and by dismissing Egypt's status as a nation Gladstone appeared to uphold these views. Gladstone's words: "We did not go to war with any power, and that is the regular and normal meaning of the term, going to war." Ibid, vol. 273 cols. 664-5, 1 August 1882.

²¹⁷ Ibid, vol. 272, cols. 1335-8, 22 July 1882.

²¹⁸ Ibid, col. 1706, 25 July 1882.

²¹⁹ Ibid, col. 169, 12 July 1882.

²²⁰ The Diaries of John Bright, R. A. J. Walling, (New York, 1931), pp. 481-89.

later the matter remained unresolved prompting Gladstone to remind Bright of the righteousness of the Cabinet action: "the general situation in Egypt had latterly become one in which everyone was governed by sheer military violence, and a situation of force had been created, which could only be met by force."²²¹ Lawson's insinuation must have weighed heavy on Bright's conscience for five days later the most influential radical in the Cabinet resigned, though more out of habit than conviction.²²² As Lawson would later state, "it was a pity he (Bright) ever joined the Cabinet, as he was a greater power when outside any ministerial combination than when within it."²²³ Although Bright's accompanying note denounced the occupation as "unjust and immoral, and a worse crime than anything committed by Beaconsfield's administration,"²²⁴ he refused to denounce it from the public platform,²²⁵ and contributed nothing further to oppose its consequences²²⁶ Bright refused to lead the national anti-war movement, fearing it would split the Liberal party,²²⁷ which he remained in agreement with on domestic affairs and those connected with Ireland.²²⁸

Lawson took note of the absurd state of British politics, where liberal's ran with the fox and hunted with the hounds.

The other day a delightful resolution was passed at the Birmingham Liberal Association, approving the course taken by Mr Bright in withdrawing from the Cabinet, and simultaneously offering strong support to the Government. The resolution reminded me of a book I once read entitled: 'Making the Best of Both Worlds'. (Laughter.) It was holding with the non-interventionists and hunting with the Jingoists - (Opposition cheers and laughter) - shouting 'peace' with the ex-

²²¹ Gladstone 1874-1898, Matthew, p. 132.

²²² Victorian Radicalism: The Middle-Class Experience 1830-1914, Paul Adelman, (London, 1984), p. 108.

²²³ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 166.

²²⁴ Gladstone, Jenkins, p. 505.

²²⁵ John Bright and the Empire, J. L. Sturgis, (London, 1969), p. 112.

²²⁶ Trouble Makers, Taylor, p. 56.

²²⁷ Chamberlain believed that had Bright decided to lead the agitation he would have destroyed the Government. A Political Memoir 1880-92, Joseph Chamberlain, (London, 1953), p. 81.

²²⁸ "British Public Opinion and the Invasion of Egypt", Chamberlain, p. 20.

Chancellor of the Duchy (Bright), and 'glory and gunpowder' with the President of the Board of Trade (Chamberlain).²²⁹

Chamberlain, the other prominent radical in the Cabinet assumed a forward role throughout and was dubbed by Granville, "...almost the greatest jingo over Egypt."²³⁰ Both Chamberlain and Dilke supported Hartington's bellicose demands for intervention on the pretext of protecting the Suez Canal.²³¹ On 28 June, fourteen days before the bombardment, Hartington shocked his radical colleagues when he mobilised 5,000 Sepoy troops and placed them on alert for duty in Egypt. Later that year, Chamberlain reappraised his position, and he too questioned the reliability of the information supplied by the 'men on the spot'. As he explained in a letter to Bright: "I cannot but wish that this side of the question had been more fully discussed in the Cabinet at the crucial time when the fleet was sent to Alexandria."²³²

Lawson described the bombardment as an, 'international act of atrocity', and a 'cowardly, a cruel, a criminal act'. Britain he said,

Had sent her Fleet into Egyptian waters to overrule the wishes of the Egyptian people and to establish a Government favouring England, without providing any evidence to show that the Egyptian people favoured such a government.²³³

He recognised that whereas a tiny minority sought relief from the tyranny of military despots, the vast majority wished to see an end to the Anglo-French Control. Lawson found it difficult to accept that Gladstone, fresh from his Midlothian campaign could on behalf of usurers', destroy the first rising hope of a nationalist movement in Egypt, a country seeking self-determination.²³⁴

²²⁹ Hansard, vol. 272, cols. 1708-9, 25 July 1882.

²³⁰ Granville wrote to Lord Spencer, then Viceroy of India, that during their Cabinet meetings on Egypt, Chamberlain was "almost the greatest jingo." The letter was published in Lord Fitzmaurice's *Life of Granville* and the reputation stuck. "Sir Charles Dilke and the British Intervention in Egypt", Chamberlain, p. 239.

²³¹ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, pp. 105-108.

²³² Joseph Chamberlain to John Bright, 31 December 1882, Bright papers British Museum ADD MSS 43387.

²³³ Hansard, vol. 279, col. 169, 8 May 1883.

²³⁴ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 166-167.

"Why," he asked, "should the armies of England ruthlessly destroy a movement, which expressed such a positive political programme?"²³⁵ Lawson recalled many previous occasions when Gladstone had opposed both the Ottoman Empire and a forward British imperial policy. Such phrases as: "...the lust and love of territory have been among the greatest curses of mankind,"²³⁶ had convinced him of the absolute sincerity of Gladstone's Midlothian campaign and encouraged him to demand proof of Cabinet claims that Urabi was a rebellious mutineer and self-seeking military dictator. As Lawson emphasised, Urabi never acquired or preserved his influence by terrorism nor claimed any rank for himself or his followers. "At the commencement he had no power to injure anyone; and during his reign of power he discouraged executions."²³⁷ Scholch also recognises Urabi's popularity arguing that, "Urabi became a people's tribune not a tyrant."²³⁸ Scholch denies the existence of a military dictatorship in Egypt prior to February 1882, in his opinion the claim that Egypt had degenerated into anarchy and xenophobia belonged to the realms of legend and propaganda.²³⁹

Earlier that year Gladstone had qualified his Government's aims in Egypt; they were to maintain the established rights of the Sultan, the Khedive, the people, and the foreign bondholders.²⁴⁰ Through Lawson's eyes these claims were both ambiguous and impractical. He questioned why a Liberal government, elected on a strong mandate for 'peace, retrenchment and reform' should employ the 'blood and treasures' of a free nation to subjugate the first rising hope of freedom in a long downtrodden and oppressed people. Lawson had his own interpretation of those 'rights'. He questioned the Sultan's right to demand an annual tribute of £700,000 from the ground down

²³⁵ Lawson was referring to the wording of Urabi's National programme, issued in December 1881, discussed in detail in an earlier section, (The Nationalist Influence). He later used this argument to justify his own attitude towards the policy of the British Government. Hansard, vol. 284, col. 904, 14 February 1884.

²³⁶ Victorian Imperialism, Eldridge, p. 92.

²³⁷ Hansard, vol. 285, col. 768, 6 March 1884. Egypt and the Egyptian Question, Wallace, pp. 396-7.

²³⁸ Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, p. 190.

²³⁹ Ibid, p. 224.

²⁴⁰ Hansard, vol. 270, col. 1146, 12 June 1882.

and oppressed people of Egypt?²⁴¹ Lawson was indignant at the sight of what he saw as a British Government going “cap in hand to the Sultan, begging help to maintain Turkish authority in Egypt.”²⁴² He had a simple phrase to accommodate the rights of the Khedive, whom he described as “the most contemptible Potentate living.”²⁴³ Regarding the bondholders Lawson failed to see how the ruin of Egypt could add to their prosperity; and objected to the shedding of one drop of Egyptian or English blood on their behalf.²⁴⁴ Three out of the four of Gladstone’s ‘rights’ paled into insignificance when compared to the equal rights of the Egyptian people. “Why,” Lawson asked “should Britain slaughter the people of Egypt in order to protect their rights, when the first right of any nation was the right to self-determination.” Lawson predicted:

One day the people of this country will look back with horror at the events unfolding in Egypt today, and clearly see England, a free nation, the mother of Parliament, subjugating the first rising hope of freedom in a long down-trodden and oppressed people.²⁴⁵

In the end the British Government maintained only two of those rights those of the Khedive and those of the foreign bondholders. Lawson expressed his concerns:

The Sultan, the new ally of the right hon. Gentleman (Gladstone), was satisfied with Urabi Pasha, and had remonstrated against the atrocities we committed yesterday, and the Khedive had taken Urabi Pasha into his Government. And as for the rights of the people of Egypt, it was a

²⁴¹ Ibid, vol. 276, col. 1304, 19 February 1883.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ismail, Tawfiq’s father had a low opinion of his son who he once described as a man with “neither head, heart nor courage.” Hansard, vol. 284, col. 902, 14 February 1884.

²⁴⁴ Lawson was wrong on this account, for according to Bankers’ Magazine, Egyptian bondholders gained at each stage of European intervention; and Britain’s military intervention benefited them most of all; as highlighted in the price of Egyptian preference stock, which had risen from 35 in 1876 to 90 by 1884. Bankers’ Magazine, XLIV, (1884), pp. 483-487. Also Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1306, 19 February 1882.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, col. 1304.

nice story indeed, that Britain was protecting those rights, when they sent guns to massacre the population.²⁴⁶

Lawson was referring to two well-publicised events that occurred in the Egyptian council, on the eve of the bombardment. The first involved the Khedive, who with the Sultan's blessing had installed a compromise government, featuring Urabi as Minister for War.²⁴⁷ The second acknowledged two well-publicised letters written to Urabi in the Sultan's name, expressing satisfaction with Urabi's attitude towards the Porte, and assuring Urabi of the Caliph's special favour and trust.²⁴⁸ Lawson's argument was that although the Khedive had most probably held that meeting with a pistol to his head it was an Egyptian pistol.²⁴⁹

Lawson asked Gladstone to view the argument from an Egyptian perspective. How, he asked, would the people of England have reacted had a German Fleet entered the Thames and demanded the dismissal of British Ministers? His argument was that such demands would have witnessed an upsurge in nationalistic fervour, and seen anti-German riots erupting in Britain's principle towns and cities.

All the disreputable characters would have risen, as well as a good many that were not disreputable, against such an insult, and Britain would have had a similar massacre to that which the Government alleged was the cause of the current proceedings.²⁵⁰

The leader of the Anti Aggression league,²⁵¹ Frederic Harrison expressed similar reservations.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, vol. 272, col. 170, 12 July 1882.

²⁴⁷ Shortly before this event the Sultan had bestowed the Grand Ribbon of the Majidi Order on Urabi and elevated him to the rank of Pasha. Egypt for the Egyptians, Scholch, p. 255.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 244.

²⁴⁹ Hansard, vol. 273, col. 1931, 16 August 1882.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, vol. 272, col. 169, 12 July 1882.

²⁵¹ The Anti-Aggression League was established by Herbert Spencer, who had first discussed the idea in the autumn of 1879; launched on 22 February 1882. Because of the Egyptian crisis it had collapsed by August 1882. Semi-Detached Idealists, Ceadel, p. 429.

Imagine your own feelings, if you had to send every year some forty million sterling out of the taxes of the country to pay Turkish, or Arab, or Chinese bondholders; and then, having paid that regularly, that you had to keep a Turkish pasha and a Chinese mandarin in London to control your expenditure, so that every penny of the Budget had to get the sanction of their excellencies, and if Mr Gladstone or any other Chancellor of the Exchequer wished to put on or take off a tax, down would come a Fleet of ironclad's from the Bosphorus into the Thames, and train their 80 ton guns right in view of the Tower and Somerset House. That is the state of Egypt now.²⁵²

In a blistering attack on the Government's forward policy, Lawson reminded his colleagues of their probable response had the bombardment occurred under a Conservative and not a Liberal administration.

They would have had his right hon. friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sir William Harcourt), (laughter and cheers) stumping the country and denouncing Government by ultimatum. They would have had the noble Marquess, the Secretary of State for India (Lord Hartington) moving a Resolution condemning the proceeding's taken behind the back of Parliament. (Cheers from the Irish Members.) They would have had the President of the Board of Trade (Joseph Chamberlain) summoning the caucus. (Cheers and laughter.) They would have had the other right hon. Gentleman, the Member for Birmingham, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancashire (John Bright) declaiming in the Town Hall of Birmingham against the wicked Tory Government; and as for the Prime Minister, they all knew there would not have been a railway train, (cheers and laughter) passing a roadside station, that he would not have pulled up to proclaim the doctrine of non-intervention as the duty of the Government.²⁵³ (Laughter and cheers from the Irish Members). It was perfectly abominable to see

²⁵² "The Crisis In Egypt", F. Harrison, Anti-Aggression League Pamphlet, No.2, pp..3, 7, 11.

²⁵³ Biagini gives a good description of the impact of Gladstone's Midlothian tour. Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform, Biagini, pp. 405-416.

men whom they respected, whom they believed in, whom they had placed in power, overturning every principle they had professed, carrying out a policy that was abhorrent to every lover of justice and of right.²⁵⁴

Lawson's sarcastic outburst caused acute embarrassment, such that Gladstone asked him to revisit those speeches made during the Russo-Turkish War and re-appraise his criticism.

He (Lawson) seems to think I am a general apostle of non-intervention. I do not, however, see why he should say so; he has quoted nothing that bears out that view. On the contrary, if he will take the trouble to recollect, all my objections to the conduct of the late Government for a certain time—in the year 1876 and the year 1877—where, he will find, expressly founded on the charge that we had not had intervention enough.²⁵⁵

During the debate Lawson accused some Cabinet Ministers, of selfishly fostering or fathering the interests of London brokers and Lancashire industrialists.²⁵⁶ These 'cotton jingoes',²⁵⁷ as he described them, had for personal advantage endorsed policies they themselves did not traditionally approve. Since Lawson left no records or public statements to clarify the context of the phrase 'cotton jingoes' we will never know the exact nature of his accusation. He was however, aware of the facts surrounding the business interests of his parliamentary colleagues, and the connection between the Egyptian debt and the Manchester cotton industry. By 1880, Egypt had developed into an important source of raw cotton for one of Britain's major industries. Britain was taking eighty per cent of Egypt's exports and supplying

²⁵⁴ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 172, 12 July 1882.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, col. 174.

²⁵⁶ The cotton industry began in Egypt in 1820, when cotton was introduced as a cash crop. The American Civil war provided a major stimulus to the export of Egyptian cotton. The value of the cotton export rose from 1,430,880 Egyptian pounds in 1861 to 11,424,000 Egyptian pounds in 1866, with the area under cotton cultivation rising five fold. Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion, Ronald Hyam, (London, 1993), p. 178.

²⁵⁷ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 171, 12 July 1882.

forty-four per cent of her imports; and a significant portion of this trade came from the shipment of raw cotton and the sale of Manchester cotton goods.²⁵⁸ In addition, there was the indirect movement of Indian cotton to Manchester through Suez, which allowed Indian exports to seriously challenge imports from America.²⁵⁹ By offering military support to British industrial and financial interests, Lawson was accusing the Government of committing a grave error, and rather surprisingly of endangering the support of northern workingmen. Lawson was basing his arguments around past events when during the American Civil war workingmen from the North of England, at great personal disadvantage, supported the northern states against the cotton producing confederacy. He was however ignoring Disraeli's imperial legacy and its influence upon the culture of the emerging electorate. One Egyptian historian, Mahmoud K. Issa, has since concluded that 'the factor behind Britain's decision was simply an economic one, i.e. Lancashire's need for cotton'. Egypt he argues was to become 'a huge cotton plantation to satisfy the needs and desires of a colonial power'.²⁶⁰

On 13 July, Lawson questioned the authenticity of two reports printed in that morning's edition of The Standard and The Times, alleging that Seymour had commenced the bombardment without Cabinet approval.²⁶¹ Lawson was expressing a view later endorsed by Galbraith and al-sayyid-Marsot that the Admiral, with limited authority had provoked a conflict with certain knowledge that his opponents were incapable of serious resistance or reply.²⁶² British intelligence had earlier pinpointed the precise position and the fire-power of each gun and there is little doubt that the Admiral was aware of his enemy's limitations.²⁶³

Lawson was trying to rekindle a flame, which burst into light during the Bulgarian horror's campaign. On the 14 July, he encouraged the workingmen of London to rise up in their thousands and condemn the greater infamy of

²⁵⁸ "The Victorians and Africa", Hopkins, p. 379.

²⁵⁹ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 171, 12 July 1882.

²⁶⁰ "The Men on the Spot and the English Occupation of Egypt in 1882", Scholch, p. 773.

²⁶¹ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 457, 14 July 1882.

²⁶² "The British Occupation of Egypt", Galbraith and Marsot, p. 485.

²⁶³ Both Seymour and his Admiralty superiors were aware that the squadron faced little danger. The earthworks were almost entirely conducted on the forts overlooking the eastern approaches, some distance away from the squadron anchored in the western harbour. *Ibid*, p. 485.

the British atrocities perpetrated in Egypt. His hope was to project an overwhelming public opinion to inform the Government that the workingmen placed British honour above British interests.²⁶⁴ Since Lawson considered peace the greatest British interest he had every reason to feel vindicated after his audience unanimously adopted a motion moved by a plumber, calling on the Government to “withdraw the Fleet and retire from an unequal and unjustifiable contest fought on behalf of the bondholders.”²⁶⁵

On 22 July, Gladstone re-confirmed his position stating that Britain could not fully discharge her duty, if she did not endeavour to convert the present inferior state of Egypt from anarchy and conflict into peace and order. Lawson later challenged Gladstone’s claim that Britain was waging war against the oppressors of the people of Egypt and not against the people of Egypt. His argument was that the previous Conservative government had justified their much-maligned wars against the Afghans and the Zulus, by claiming that they were fighting against Sher Ali and Cetawayo, and not against the Afghan or Zulu nation.²⁶⁶

Outside of Parliament a small group of anti-war activists formed a broad-based Egyptian committee with Lawson acting as chairman. Their first meeting, held on 20 July 1882, generated little interest and forced the enthusiasts to affiliate with the Anti Aggression League. Notwithstanding their formidable parliamentary support with thirty-six parliamentarians on their general council the League was reduced in Harrison’s words to “...few besides Lord Hobhouse, Sir Wilfrid Lawson, Herbert Spencer and myself and from that day we have known that no member of the Liberal party, whether politician or publicist, could be counted on to resist unjust wars and imperial expansion.”²⁶⁷ The league failed primarily because, as Harrison recognised, few Liberals were prepared to oppose Gladstone, whatever doubts they may have held about the wisdom of his policies.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Times, 15 July 1882.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Hansard, vol. 273, col. 1931, 16 August 1882.

²⁶⁷ Autobiographic Memoirs, Vol. 2, 1870-191, F. Harrison, (London 1911), pp. 121-123. National and Social Problems, F. Harrison, (London, 1908), pp. 184-7.

²⁶⁸ Victorian Radicalism, Adleman, p. 109. Also Autobiographical Memoirs, Harrison, Vol. 2, p. 123.

The strength of the radical opposition to the occupation of Egypt was far weaker than any opposed to either Irish coercion or Balkan massacres. Few organisations and only a small number of die-hard radicals supported Lawson's opposition, while a large and varied lobby of 'bloodthirsty Christians' condemned him. These included the traditionally reliable nonconformists and many Quakers, whose parliamentary spokesmen abstained rather than oppose Gladstone.²⁶⁹ The Quaker industrialist and President of the Peace Society Joseph Pease abstained despite publicly stating that ordinary Egyptians would receive few benefits from the imposition of British rule.²⁷⁰ Lawson was particularly saddened by the later defection of the president of the Anti Aggression League, Herbert Spencer. According to the historian Martin Ceadel, Spencer left after Gladstone criticised the Peace Society for their rigid adherence to non-resistance. Henceforth Spencer trusted Gladstone to behave with restraint over Egypt. In August 1882, Spencer went to lecture in the United States and his movement splintered through sheer inanition'.²⁷¹

Although extremely successful at restricting time available to discuss the Egyptian crisis, Dilke was unable to stifle the legal requirement to debate and approve a Vote of Credit. On 25 July, the Government asked the Commons to commit £2,300,000 to finance a three-month Egyptian expedition. On the opening night of a three-night debate, Lawson composed his critical speech around Egypt's financial problems.²⁷² Taking his evidence from the Blue Books, he questioned the accuracy of the Government estimate; reminding Parliament that the initial request of £3 million approved to finance the invasion of Afghanistan had dramatically increased by a factor of seven.

Lawson challenged those who accused him of leading a 'Peace-at-any-price party'. To him such a remark was equally absurd as a suggestion that those who supported any particular war belonged to a 'War-at-any-price party'. He considered himself a pragmatist and repeatedly stated that should

²⁶⁹ Hansard, vol. 286, col. 780, 25 March 1884.

²⁷⁰ Trouble Makers, Taylor, p. 89.

²⁷¹ Semi-Detached Idealists, Ceadel, pp. 119-20.

²⁷² The evidence presented by Lawson was very similar in content to that compiled by J. Seymour Keay when presenting his dossier 'Spoiling the Egyptians'.

anyone convince him of the righteousness of any particular war he would willingly support the aggression.²⁷³ Since Gladstone had sufficient troops, a significant parliamentary majority, the overwhelming support of the Opposition and the national press; Lawson had few doubts that the Government would carry their imperial policies.²⁷⁴ However, he warned those who misguidedly sought to remove Urabi, that should they succeed the national party would remain and would retain its popularity. Although not anti-Semitic he advised Gladstone that through his defence of 'usurers and Jews'; "history would recall this sad incident of carrying fire and sword into Egypt, as the most damning event in an otherwise noble career." He beseeched Gladstone to "...listen to the still small voice within, and retract from an enterprise so unwise, so unpolitical, and so unjust."²⁷⁵

Lawson disagreed with those Liberals who accepted the invasion of Egypt rather than withdraw their confidence in a government of their own making: "If Britain was to commit a crime against humanity, he would ten times rather it was carried out by his political opponents, rather than by his political friends."²⁷⁶ During the debate Gladstone's imperialism came to the fore, and after the motion was passed he informed Queen Victoria: "...the entire House, with the infinitesimal exception, recognises the necessity and justice of the steps now about to be taken."²⁷⁷ Britain's European allies disagreed, both Italy and France rejected Britain's method of protecting the Suez Canal.²⁷⁸

Having identified the crisis as "a manifest violation of International and Foreign Law, and a sin against God and man,"²⁷⁹ Lawson urged Gladstone to delay the onslaught and allow Parliament an opportunity to assess the evidence linking Urabi with the torching of Alexandria. On 16 August, two days before Parliament closed, Lawson asked his colleagues to abandon their preconceived opinions relating to of the nationalist movement, and

²⁷³ During the Crimean war both Cobden and Bright had stood accused of being peace-at any-price men, but neither had opposed the war on those grounds.

²⁷⁴ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 1710, 25 July 1882.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., col. 1709.

²⁷⁷ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 117.

²⁷⁸ East and West of Suez, Farnie, p. 291.

²⁷⁹ Hansard, vol. 273, col. 1934, 16 August 1882. This point became a significant part of the arguments put forward by Lawson during his tour of Scotland and Northern England in 1882.

acknowledge Urabi's promise to honour Egypt's financial obligations. In a blistering attack Gladstone asked Lawson to provide evidence to support his view that the nationalist party was a popular party struggling to acquire their liberties. Lawson accepted the challenge and redirected Gladstone's accusations:

The army was Egyptian, and it was representative of the people to a large extent. If there was not a rag or a shred of evidence to show that Urabi represented the people, then neither was there a rag or a shred of evidence to show that the Khedive represented the people, any more than Urabi.²⁸⁰

Lawson was convinced that the control of the Egyptian budget was the key to a peaceful settlement. He argued in favour of allowing the Egyptian authorities a concessionary right to determine the administrative portion of their own budget.²⁸¹ The real culprits, Lawson believed were the 'men on the spot' whose mismanagement had dragged Britain into a war.²⁸² He reinforced his opinions with a dispatch from Malet, dated 20 January 1882, which acknowledged that: "Armed intervention will become a necessity if we adhere to the refusal to allow the budget to be voted by the Chamber, and we cannot do otherwise, as it forms only part of a complete scheme of revolution."²⁸³ Lawson never understood why the Government remained hostile towards his budget proposals, as he argued, a refusal by the Egyptian military authorities to lay down their arms on the conditions suggested would have strengthened Britain's arm among her international contemporaries, while an agreement would have prevented further bloodshed and the cost of an expensive war.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, col. 1932, 16 August 1882.

²⁸¹ This was a request proposed earlier that year by the Egyptian military authorities but rejected by Britain and France. On 11 August, in a parliamentary reply Gladstone said, "...there is nothing to prevent the Egyptian Chamber exercising some control in reference to its finances." Hansard, vol. 273, col. 1524, 11 August 1882.

²⁸² This was also the opinion of Blunt. "The Egyptian Revolution: A Personal Narrative", Nineteenth Century, September 1882, pp. 324-346.

²⁸³ Hansard, vol. 273, col. 1933, 16 August 1882.

Shortly after the landing of British Marines,²⁸⁴ Tawfiq, now under Admiral Seymour's protection, repaid his guest by stripping Urabi of his political rights and denouncing him as a rebel.²⁸⁵ In response Urabi obtained a 'Fatwa' from Egypt's leading clerics, on the premise that Tawfiq had betrayed his religion, and initiated the foreign occupation.²⁸⁶ In consequence, immediately after British forces landed in August 1882, Egypt had two leaders, the Khedive, who ruled over the British controlled regions surrounding Alexandria, and Urabi, who controlled Cairo and the remaining provinces. Notwithstanding contrary claims Urabi's popularity remained strong, such that members of Tawfiq's own Cabinet sent a clandestine note to Cairo; expressing their willingness to defect to Urabi's side should Britain withdraw her troops.²⁸⁷ Furthermore at a national congress convened on 29 July four hundred delegates unanimously supported a motion calling upon the Sultan to depose the Khedive.²⁸⁸

After Parliament adjourned on 18 August, Lawson left London in a vain attempt to eclipse Cobden's earlier attempt to prevent a full-blooded Crimean war. Beginning at Glasgow, he made the first in a series of personal, passionate appeals against Britain's military action. However, from his lukewarm, if not hostile reception the strength of public opinion overwhelmingly opposed him.²⁸⁹ The vast majority supported Gladstone and intervention. Notwithstanding his sincerity and enthusiasm, Lawson like Cobden was "hooted down, laughed at, reviled and ridiculed for his

²⁸⁴ On 20 July, the British Cabinet ordered Sir Garnet Wolseley, the Adjutant General of the British Army to lead a military taskforce comprising: 200 vessels, 34,000 combatants, 10,000 non-combatants, 18,000 animals, sixty guns, four locomotives, four generals and 400,000 tons of supplies. Facing them were 10,000 regular soldiers, and 50,000 reservists. Between 19 and 23 August, British forces seized the unfortified and undefended Suez Canal at Ismailia, and notwithstanding their continued promise to withdraw a seventy-year occupation of Egypt began. *Hansard*, vol. 274, cols. 181-2, 27 October 1882. *Ibid*, vol. 280, col. 55, 8 August 1883.

²⁸⁵ Tawfiq did not sign the document declaring Urabi a rebel until 24 July, and then in affect denounced him for failing to resist the British squadron at Alexandria. "The Trial of Urabi Pasha", Galbraith, p. 274.

²⁸⁶ *Hansard*, vol. 272, col. 1225, 21 July 1882.

²⁸⁷ *Colonisation and Revolution in the Middle East*, Cole, p. 238.

²⁸⁸ From that moment the assistant ministers of the various ministries with some officers and other officials ran the state as a 'common law' government, while they awaited the Sultan's decision. *Ibid*, p. 238.

²⁸⁹ *Times*, 7 September 1882.

criticism."²⁹⁰ Lawson often argued that, "...if his Liberal principles remained in a minority for three thousand years he would cling to them because he knew they were right and true."²⁹¹ However, even he was surprised when the president of one of Glasgow's Liberal Clubs carried a motion, denouncing him for basing his arguments around information contained in the Blue Books: "What did the people want with Blue Books when they had the newspaper reports to read?" After the meeting the secretary communicated the resolution to Gladstone who thanked the committee for their support.²⁹²

At the end of August, Lawson went to the heart of Gladstone's constituency, where in the company of Seymour Keay he challenged Government claims that Britain, the 'champion of the rights of man', had entered Egypt to liberate the Egyptians. In his opinion Britain was fighting to maintain the authority of the Khedive on behalf of bondholders. He reminded his audience of one of Gladstone's pre-interventionist speeches:

The principle that a country has the right to regulate the affairs of a neighbouring country for its own benefit is a lawless revolutionary principle. No doctrine more thoroughly and intensely evil has ever been hatched within the precincts of the commune.²⁹³

And urged them to use whatever influence they held over their constituency member to demand he place British honour above British interests, and reverse the policy in favour of freedom, peace and justice. Although Lawson tried to conclusively prove his argument, the people of Edinburgh followed their neighbours in Glasgow and heavily rejected any condemnation of the war.²⁹⁴

On 13 September, after a daring night march, British bayonets routed Urabi's ill prepared forces at Tel-el-Kebir, and perpetrated, what Lawson described as the "...wholesale massacre of the Egyptian army, whose

²⁹⁰ West Cumberland Times, 1 September 1882.

²⁹¹ Ibid, 3 January 1879.

²⁹² Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1301, 19 February 1883. The 'worthy' politician was in later years one of the Glasgow Unionist Members, sworn to oppose Gladstone to the death. Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 168-9.

²⁹³ West Cumberland Times, 1 September 1882.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

soldiers fled before us, as a flock of sheep would before a dog.”²⁹⁵ To Lawson’s horror the victory brought about euphoric rejoicing throughout Britain, whose inhabitants “gloated over the carnage and acted as if their troops had conquered the combined Powers of Europe and the United States.”²⁹⁶

On 14 September, the day after Wolseley’s victory at Tel-el-Kebir, Lawson delivered a powerful condemnatory anti-war address to his neighbours in Aspatria. In anticipation of the telegraphic requirements of the national press, the village Post Office installed two Wheatstone instruments, with their integrated transmitters and punching mechanisms, and brought in six skilled operators from Glasgow to relay the reports.²⁹⁷ Lawson’s mission that evening was educational and although his speech opposed war in general, his emphasis fell on Egypt. The Radical party, he insisted, did not own a monopoly over peace, even Lord Salisbury had once said:

There is nothing easier than to be brave with other people’s blood, and to be generous with other people’s money. If her Majesty’s Government had in the course of a war to sacrifice all their own fortunes, and then go into the field and be shot themselves, I would say it was a brave and generous action to undertake such a war.²⁹⁸

Having lost the arguments in Scotland, Lawson diluted the moral arguments and concentrated on the nation’s pockets, believing that fiscal grievances would receive greater sympathy than moral arguments. He questioned the high financial and economic costs of waging war, which he believed had expanded the ‘National Debt’, and gave a brief account of the disproportionate warlike expenses incurred throughout their own century.

For the general expenses of the civil government we paid in the year 1880 a total of £15,000,000. For the administration of law and justice,

²⁹⁵ Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1303, 19 February 1883.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. When the news of the victory reached England, Gladstone ordered that Church bells be rung and guns fired to proclaim the victory.

²⁹⁷ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882.

we paid £6,000,000. For educational purposes, we paid £4,000,000, giving a total expenditure of £25,000,000. Then for interest accrued on the national debt incurred in making wars, you paid no less than £28,000,000. In fact you paid a little more that year for past wars; and then for future wars you paid the Army and Navy £30,000,000 more, so that you paid £58,000,000 for wars past, present, and future, and only £25,000,000 for all other government expenditure.²⁹⁹

Lawson hoped his audience would recognise the extravagant cost of the military system, which enveloped over half the nation's taxes and the entire interest on the fearful National Debt.³⁰⁰ He singled out the Napoleonic and the Crimean wars for further investigation and compared their corresponding debts. Lawson argued that Britain had squandered millions of pounds and thousands of lives to remove one Napoleon from his throne before expending an equal amount maintaining the sovereignty of his grandson. Britain's traditional role, he said, was that of an aggressive invader not a passive defender and it was the cost of financing the expansion of the imperial boundaries, which attracted his attention.

It is a curious thing that every now and then we get into a panic, into a state of terrible alarm that a nation will come and invade us. You know what a fear there was lest the French should come burrowing like moles through the tunnel, and land at Dover all of a sudden, and we should all become Frenchmen next morning without knowing it.

Lawson was reminding Gladstone that the Liberals had betrayed their electoral mandate. They had been elected by a population concerned with financial and economic prosperity, and international morality. They had asked

²⁹⁸ This was a quotation which Lawson alleged Lord Salisbury made at some unspecified time, not against a specific war, but against war in general. Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ It was particularly galling to Cobden that a large part of the revenue to pay the interest on the National Debt and to meet current military and colonial expenses should be defrayed through tariffs, especially the Corn Laws, which helped to maintain the income and therefore the landed aristocracy and deprived industry of inevitable funds. "Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden," Cain, pp. 229-247. Lawson used the same argument but substituted alcohol for the Corn Laws and the 'wretched poor' for industry.

for peace and received war; they had asked for retrenchment and received additional public expenditure, all at the expense of much-needed home reforms.

In a dramatic speech Lawson delivered an accurate account of related events in Egypt's recent economic history and an illustrative account of Urabi's character, Lawson did not disagree with those who labelled Urabi a military adventurer, in his opinion all soldiers fitted into that category; the difference was, he said, that Urabi adventured to defend his fellow countrymen. He ended with a warning:

If you choose to think, every shot that is fired in Egypt plays havoc in the ranks of freedom at home... those who are now doing their best to quench the kindly spirit of liberty and independence in Egypt will perfect the lesson at home, and may prevent you attaining any more of that political independence which you desire.

The greatest drama occurred after Lawson's delivery, when a proposal supporting Government action and an amendment censuring the Cabinet's behaviour attracted little interest. The proceedings were both confusing and controversial. As neither side could muster more than a handful of supporters, it took a degree of coercion and several recounts to finalise the verdict. It was obvious that the vast majority of the audience were incapable of expressing any opinion.³⁰¹ Lawson may have secured his prized resolution but an overwhelming number of newspaper editors ridiculed the proceedings; Fun Magazine ran an uncomplimentary article describing the residents of Aspatia as, 'Ass-patriots' with a condemnatory reference to Lawson's Cumbrian postal address at 'Brae-ton' (Brayton).³⁰²

At Carlisle a few months later, Lawson posed the question, Was Urabi a rebel or was he a patriot? With a shrug of his shoulders, he flipped a coin into the air and gestured, 'Heads or Tails'. He was unrepentant and offered no excuse for opposing a Liberal policy, which hunted and crushed rebels. In his

³⁰¹ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882. Cobden had used similar arguments in his writings. "Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden," Cain, pp. 229-247

opinion, it took a great deal of injustice to make people rebel. After defining a rebel as a failed patriot and a patriot as a successful rebel, he singled out Hampden, Cromwell, Washington, Kossuth, Mazzini and Garibaldi, as one-time rebels, which international authority now accepted as patriots. He recalled earlier times when English people sympathised with the oppressed nations. As Lawson insinuated, without providing any evidence the British Government had blackened Urabi's name and accused him of many atrocities; of promoting massacres; of releasing convicts; of torching Alexandria, and of torturing officials. At the close he reminded his audience that through their support of the war, the British people had perpetrated a greater crime than that of the Government.³⁰³

He became particularly incensed after Gladstone declared his support for the *status quo ante* or the restoration of the absolute rule of the Dual Control and Turko-Circassian predominance in the upper ranks of civil and military administration. After Beaconsfield initiated the axiom 'Scientific Frontier' to justify his intervention in Afghanistan, Gladstone, he said, had invented "a good political slogan to tickle the ears of the population"; "It was," said Lawson, "a good conservative slogan, as you were; let things remain as they are, without change or alteration, which had in the past "maintained corrupt practices, parliamentary abuses, rotten boroughs, slavery and expensive food."³⁰⁴ Lawson saw the *status quo ante* as a control over the finances of Egypt and a means of oppressing the population. He expressed disgust at his colleague's willingness to engage in a war to prevent people managing their own affairs.³⁰⁵ In his opinion the *status quo ante* had a dual purpose: the banishment of Urabi and the promotion of Dilke; the first had gone to Ceylon and the other rewarded with a Cabinet position, President of the Local Government Board."³⁰⁶

³⁰² Fun Magazine, September 1882.

³⁰³ Maryport Advertiser, 15 February 1883.

³⁰⁴ West Cumberland Times, 15 September 1882.

³⁰⁵ Hansard, vol. 272, col. 1705, 25 July 1882.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, vol. 276, col. 1305, 19 February 1883.

PART 2

FROM TEL-EL-KEBIR TO THE DEFEAT OF GENERAL GORDON

Post Tel-el-Kebir Reorganisation

Shortly after Tel-el-Kebir, Urabi surrendered to British authority; his captors in turn committed the unusual act¹ of turning him over to his enemy, the Khedive. Lawson maintained that when this act was fully and fairly understood, every right-minded Englishman would record the event as one of the greatest crimes to disgrace the history of England.² The outcome set in motion a series of protracted events, which exposed the weakness of the Khedival administrative system and contradicted Gladstone's previous policy. After Tel-el-Kebir the British Government became solely responsible for restoring order in Egypt. Moreover, unknown to the British Parliament and their sovereign, and prior to Wolseley launching his attack, the Cabinet had determined the outcome of Urabi's trial. On 29 August 1882, Tawfiq reluctantly accepted a proviso that although the Egyptian authority would conduct the trial only the British Government would authorise a sentence of death.³

Henceforth British influence reigned supreme; however, disunity lingered within the Liberal Cabinet. The radicals, Dilke and Chamberlain reassessed their earlier position and sought to restore the Chamber of Notables. Hartington and the Whigs, who disparaged the Oriental and considered eastern society incapable of change without intense tutelage, demanded a strong Khedive reinforced with an English financial control. Gladstone and Granville sat somewhere in-between; they preferred an early evacuation to a prolonged occupation and regularly announced⁴ that Britain

¹ Britain had never delivered political prisoners to a foreign power unless the prisoners stood accused of ordinary criminal offences and then only on condition that their captors would not punish them for political misdemeanours. Egypt and the Egyptian Question, Wallace, p. 424.

² Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1305, 2 March 1883.

³ "The Trial of Urabi Pasha", Galbraith, p. 275.

⁴ By the time of Lawson's death (1906), the British Government had stated on at least seventy occasions that they would shortly leave Egypt but as Lawson predicted. "Egypt was a curious place; it was more difficult to get out of than into; as the Israelites had found, they found it easy to get into, but it was only a miracle they got them out of it." Times, 1 February 1884.

would remain in Egypt as the executor of the European will and would withdraw “as soon as the state of the country and the organisation of a proper means for the maintenance of the Khedivial authority would allow it.”⁵ Gladstone’s desire to maintain Khedival authority was diametrically opposed to a policy of withdrawal. Britain could not leave an unstable Egypt and the British Government was sure that instability would immediately recur upon their withdrawal.

In October 1882, Britain dispatched Lord Dufferin, then Ambassador to Constantinople, to Egypt, with the task of establishing a policy to stabilise Egypt prior to a withdrawal. Dufferin discarded direct and indirect British rule but recommended creating representative political institutions and urged the British Government to continue to administer Egypt through the most suitable local government they could find.⁶ Notwithstanding his many misgivings Dufferin failed to define the time required for Egypt to show she could control her own destiny. Lawson rejected Dufferin’s proposals because in his opinion they failed to offer Egypt a constitutional or representative government. Their delegates, he argued would have no real power they could only offer advice and their advice could and would be ignored.

The man who eventually reorganised Egypt’s political and economic affairs, Major Evelyn Baring (later made Lord Cromer) arrived as replacement to Sir Edward Malet in the summer of 1883. Baring found Egypt in a state of turmoil; Britain had crushed the nationalist movement and left the remaining authority dispirited, leaving an unpopular insecure Khedive at the head of a bankrupt government. Baring ruled Egypt with almost absolute authority for twenty-three years; such was his success that he balanced the budget within five years.⁷ Once the protection of the Suez Canal and the road to India became non-negotiable the policies advocated by Dufferin and Baring could never end British influence in Egypt. Although a British Agent-General oversaw the administration of Egypt, reinforced with British troops, the British Government never annexed Egypt and Egypt never officially became a part of

⁵ The British in Egypt, Mansfield, p. xi.

⁶ The report proclaimed that a joint policy of neutralisation and evacuation was the most appropriate means of relieving the intolerable burden of prolonged occupation, and of securing a stable self-governing Egypt. Egypt and the Egyptian Question, Wallace, p. 430. Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, pp. 122-4.

the British Empire until 1914; the Khedive remained the Khedive, and the Sultan remained the theoretical head of state.⁸

Lawson was the foremost parliamentary critic of the Government's Egyptian policy and the leading personality in a small but growing band of like-minded, morally self-conscious, anti-imperialist individuals. He continuously warned Gladstone not to drift into new responsibilities and counselled him to refrain from interfering needlessly in Egyptian affairs. By 1884, several Cabinet Ministers who had earlier criticised Lawson began to seek ways of extricating their Government from Egypt. The occupation wrecked party unity, brought about a realignment of European nations,⁹ and shook Gladstone, who endeavoured to prevent the British taxpayer carrying the financial burdens of Egypt.

After Tel-el-Kebir, Lord Randolph Churchill, who had missed the previous parliamentary session through ill health, and Henry Labouchere, who had earlier supported Wolseley's expedition as a necessary prerequisite to the defence of the Suez Canal began to play a role in the ongoing debate. However, their tactics of 'criticisms and attack' were somewhat removed from Lawson's courteous approach a circumstance recognised by Foreign Office spokesman, Lord Fitzmaurice.

Let them (Churchill and Labouchere) not indulge as on another occasions in small and petty attacks, but let them follow the example of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Lawson), who has the courage of his convictions and challenges us on distinct issues. It is my misfortune occasionally to differ from my hon. Friend, but I am bound at least to recognise that he never shrinks from giving full expression to his opinions.¹⁰

⁷ "The British Financial Administration of Egypt", Cain, pp. 188-91.

⁸ This solution was proposed by Gladstone during the Eastern Question debates in order to resolve the problem of local Christian self-government without precipitating the complete breakdown of the Turkish Empire. Gladstone Diaries, Matthew, Vol IX, p. xxxiv.

⁹ Crisis of Imperialism, Shannon, pp. 157-9.

Before commencing Egypt's reconstruction, the British Government had to dispose of the delicate question of deciding the fate of the revolutionary leaders. Tawfiq and other prominent Egyptians wanted to avoid the inevitable revelations of a public trial and sought to execute the ringleaders with few preliminary formalities. Wolseley wanted to shoot Urabi on orders from the Khedive; Queen Victoria favoured hanging;¹¹ Gladstone, after ruling that English standards of justice did not apply to Egypt, also sought the ultimate penalty.¹² However, a growing section of liberal opinion remained uncorrupted by the glamour of a successful imperial adventure. Led by Wilfrid Blunt, and the editor of the Times newspaper, Thomas Chenery,¹³ they pressurised Gladstone into allowing Urabi a military Court Martial.¹⁴ It was a remarkable reversal; a civil trial could embarrass the British Government, feed dissidence and test the vulnerability of both the Khedive and the Sultan. It was a constant concern that evidence might emerge linking the indigenous authorities to a degree of complicity with the alleged rebels.¹⁵ In the organisation of Urabi's defence Blunt raised a public subscription to finance the trial¹⁶ and appointed A. M. Broadley,¹⁷ an eminent Queens Council, to defend the nationalist ringleaders. An unusual occurrence; under the traditional code of practice used to conduct court-martials prisoners were rarely allowed counsel.¹⁸

¹⁰ Hansard, vol. 276, col. 148, 15 February 1883.

¹¹ Henry Labouchere and the Empire, Hind, p. 159.

¹² "Trial of Urabi Pasha", Galbraith, pp. 275-6.

¹³ Blunt's cousin, Algernon Bourke, served as an intermediary between Thomas Chenery, editor of The Times and many powerful politicians. *Ibid*, p. 280.

¹⁴ Fair play was maintained throughout the trial after the British Government assigned Sir Charles Rivers Wilson, the veteran diplomat with consular experience in the Middle East, as official observer. *Ibid*, p. 274.

¹⁵ This was in line with an earlier statement made on 16 August 1882, when Gladstone stated that "Urabi and his five coadjutors ought to be tried and examined, and put under judicial investigation. They ought to have a fair trial, not by persons of a foreign tongue, by an alien Power, but a great trial according to law by a tribunal in which they ought reasonably to be able to place confidence." "The Victorians and Africa", Hopkins, p. 384.

¹⁶ Although many, including Lawson, offered monetary support, Blunt ultimately bore most of the cost himself. In a letter to The Times newspaper on 27 November 1882, he confessed to spending between £20,000 and £30,000 of his own capital.

¹⁷ Broadley had distinguished himself in Tunisia, where he had acted for the Bey at the time of the French occupation. The British in Egypt, Mansfield, p. 51.

¹⁸ The Earl of Selbourne the British Lord Chancellor held that they would best serve justice if they allowed a counsel of Urabi's own choosing, whether foreign or Egyptian to defend him.

The alleged 'rebels' faced four charges. One, of pillaging and burning Alexandria while under the protection of a white flag; two, of inciting the population to arms against the Government of the Khedive; three, of continuing the war after a declaration of peace; four, of inciting the people to civil war.¹⁹ Lawson questioned the authenticity of the allegations, and demanded a detailed explanation of each charge, particularly the contradictory wording of the third indictment, which he considered hypocritical, confusing and difficult to understand. He also emphasised the ease with which the authorities could forge documents and intimidate witnesses. Although Lawson's demand for further clarifications went unheeded, behind the scenes some Cabinet Ministers were beginning to question those favouring the death penalty. The Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Selborne, openly expressed his opposition to a show trial with a predetermined outcome.²⁰

Initially the British authorities believed they could verify Urabi's complicity in the Alexandria riots but after local officials examined evidence collected after Urabi's arrest, it became apparent that without implicating officials close to the Khedive they could only convict Urabi on the dubious charge of rebellion. An examination of Urabi's private papers revealed that while he had acted with the approval of the Sultan, the same could not be said of the Khedive, who after ordering the defence of Alexandria changed his allegiance and supported Egypt's enemy. Had the trial proceeded the evidence would most probably have led to the formulation of a widely different opinion of the war.

The adverse publicity given in many English newspapers to the alleged indignities, maltreatment and physical abuse of political prisoners also affected public opinion.²¹ As Lawson recognised, in the months before September 1882, the authorities universally branded Urabi a rebel, then from October onwards he became the object of increased sympathy both inside and outside Egypt. As Lawson later recalled, "while Urabi's followers could be

This decision demolished the fiction that the Khedival authority was unable to deal with Urabi in line with Egyptian law. "Trial of Urabi Pasha", Galbraith, p. 279.

¹⁹ This was a parliamentary response given by Sir Charles Dilke to a question tabled by the Member for Kings Lynn, Mr Bourke. Hansard, vol. 274 col. 662, 2 November 1882.

²⁰ "Trial of Urabi Pasha", Galbraith, p. 276.

counted in their thousands, the supporters of the Khedive, consisted of six footmen at the Palace”²² In his search for answers to a long series of contentious questions relating to the welfare of the indigenous population Lawson questioned the British Government’s commitment to outlaw the kourbash and the bastinado,²³ and the sincerity of their denunciation of the practice of torture and brutality.²⁴ On 27 October, Lawson asked Dilke to release information relating to an inquiry into the health and welfare of Egypt’s political prisoners. Dilke reported that except for those facing a death sentence the remaining one hundred and forty political prisoners were unshackled.²⁵ On 9 November, Lawson sought assurances from Dilke that Britain would intervene on Urabi’s behalf should the Egyptian court pass a capital sentence.²⁶ Notwithstanding the aforementioned Cabinet decision and the Khedives complicity in the subsequent agreement, Dilke declined to give any assurances.²⁷ On 11 November, Lawson asked the Government to use their influence to guarantee a public trial.²⁸ Three weeks later, Lawson raised an objection after Tawfiq awarded Sultan Pasha a sum of £10,000 for ‘standing out with courage against military violence’. Lawson emphasised that although the British Government had also made the recipient an Honorary Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George, for services rendered, other authorities had publicly accused the millionaire landowner and former President of the Chamber of Notables of satisfying a private grudge after he sentenced the Mudir of Miniek to receive eight hundred lashes with the kourbash.²⁹ Lawson also raised concerns relating to the death of an Arab citizen, killed by a group of drunken British soldiers. He implored the Judge Advocate General (Osborne Morgan) to intervene and make it difficult for

²¹ Ibid, p. 280.

²² Hansard, vol. 276, col. 140, 15 February 1883.

²³ A form of torture where the soles of the feet of those inflicted are continuously beaten.

²⁴ Hansard, vol. 276, col. 1421, 5 March 1883. Ibid, vol. 277, col. 1640, 6 April 1883. Ibid, vol. 278, col. 1872, 8 March 1883. Ibid, vol. 279, col. 561, 11 May 1883. Ibid, vol. 280, col. 382, 12 June 1883. Ibid, vol. 282, col. 1844, 7 August 1883.

²⁵ Ibid, vol. 274, cols. 273-4, 27 October 1882.

²⁶ Ibid, col. 1115, 9 November 1882.

²⁷ By a strange coincidence, this was the same day that Granville determined that perhaps the death of Urabi and his five co-defendants was not in Britain’s best interest, and suggested, that Urabi be sentenced to the severest punishment short of the death penalty. “Trial of Urabi Pasha”, Galbraith, p. 277.

²⁸ Hansard, vol. 274, col. 567, 11 November 1882.

²⁹ Ibid, vol. 275, cols. 216-7, 28 November 1882.

British troops serving in Egypt to receive supplies of intoxicating liquor.”³⁰ Morgan held no temperance sympathies and refused to enact what he termed an extraordinary and unprecedented request.³¹ In March, Lawson asked Lord Fitzmaurice to comment on the authenticity of reports in the Echo, describing tortures inflicted with the kourbash on tax evaders. Lawson also drew attention to an article in the Daily News, which depicted Egyptian office-holders imprisoned in what the paper described as wretched cells.³²

Faced with mounting evidence, Lord Dufferin quickly concluded the trial, withdrawing all charges except those of rebellion. In collusion with Urabi's counsel the court pronounced the death penalty in line with the demands of the penal code and the Khedive commuted the pre-arranged sentence to one of banishment. Burma, Ascension, Bermuda and Fiji were among the places considered.³³ The British Government ruled out exile in England, for reasons, explained in Dilke's diary: "We did not much like the idea of his coming to England and stumping the country between W. Blunt and W. Lawson.”³⁴ After eighteen years of exile in Ceylon, Urabi was pardoned, but his spirit was broken and he died within ten years of his return.³⁵

Rewards and Honours

In the wake of the euphoric victory came the customary rewards; the sumptuous fetes and banquets; the lavishing of eulogies; the decorations and the honours; and the granting of hereditary pensions and peerages. In former days 'Votes of Thanks' to the victorious troops and their illustrious leaders were 'gala events' where the House confined its duties to the approval of the service of the recipients of the honour.³⁶ That precedent was broken after Gladstone heeded the advice of Lawson's dissident clique. Lawson did not

³⁰ Ibid, col. 385, 30 November 1882.

³¹ Ibid, cols. 385-6, 30 November 1882.

³² Ibid, vol. 274, col. 171, 26 October 1882.

³³ "Trial of Urabi Pasha", Galbraith, pp. 284-6.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 286.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 284-6.

³⁶ Hansard, vol. 280, col. 50, 8 June 1883.

object to the awards because he disapproved of the Egyptian war, which he consistently and strongly condemned; his objection was that such recognition encouraged and stimulated the military spirit and profession. He never accepted force as a remedy for the ills of a nation, and emphasised that the work of the warrior was "a one of pure destruction, to scatter havoc and ruin over the earth, and to carry mourning into the hearts and homes of ordinary people."³⁷ He refused to single out servicemen for reward and compared the dangers encountered by soldiers with those endured by industrial workers, singling out miners who daily descended into the bowels of the earth to extract the means of providing heat, light and locomotion for which modern society was totally dependent. Lawson's argument was that although many miners perished in the pursuit of their perilous occupation they never received decorations or medals, and remained exempt from royal recognition.

The returning troops were the first to receive Parliament's gratitude. Insofar as Lawson was the only speaker to directly oppose the principal behind the motion, other would-be critics took exception to the wording of the resolution, which thanked the troops for "the complete suppression of the Military rebellion, against the authority of His Highness the Khedive." This proclamation went contrary to the standard wording used to describe previous engagements, where the Government had described both the Afghan and Boer wars as 'Military Operations'. Many radicals had no wish or desire to embarrass the armed forces or indeed the Government but found themselves raising objections over points of order. Lawson argued that the wording of the resolution was prejudicial to British law and presented serious legal implications, which if accepted would theoretically convict Urabi of rebellion against the Khedive, and greatly influence the outcome of the on-going trial.³⁸

On 26 October 1882, Gladstone, with unreserved support from the Opposition moved a 'Vote of Thanks' to the armed forces. After both leaders praised the heroic deeds of Britain's fighting men,³⁹ Lawson rose, amidst cheers from the extreme Irish benches, and groans from Liberal and Conservative members, to challenge what he termed Parliament's 'misguided

³⁷ Ibid, vol. 274, col. 200, 26 October 1882.

³⁸ Ibid, cols. 210-1.

appeals'. Using a mixture of caustic humour and commonsense, Lawson accused Gladstone of embellishing the exploits of those who took part in the expedition. In his opinion the war was a sham:

If peerages and annuities are to be given now to our gallant soldiers, how would the country react when our armies came up against real soldiers? Why we should be bankrupt in the matter of decorations and there would be nothing left worthy of bestowal.⁴⁰

Having always spoken out against such propositions, Lawson compared his current concerns with those he expressed in the wake of the Afghan war. Although he found few inconsistencies in the flavour of his criticism, he acknowledged certain errors of judgement falsified by past events. After the Afghan war it had been his boast that while Britain retained a liberal Government he would never again suffer the ignominy of opposing such a vote. His mistaken assumption was that bitter recriminations and fierce opposition would accompany the slightest deviation from the Liberal Government's declared policy of non-intervention; and decidedly against all aggressive wars. He now recognised the error of his ways. The Egyptian war was a popular war, and was supported by "recreant radicals, sanguinary nonconformists, and fighting Quakers the very organisations which had opposed the Afghan and other recent confrontations."⁴¹

Lawson was particularly scathing about the quietness of the Quaker MPs. At a Workers' Peace Association meeting he complained: "As to Quakers they were taught to sit quiet at their Quaker meetings, and when they were in the House of Commons they also carried out their principal, for they sat silent."⁴² It would appear that Quakers in general were unwilling to embarrass the Prime Minister. In the Commons vote on war expenses on 27 July 1882, none of the eleven Quaker MPs opposed the Government. Even the Quaker William Pollard, who had earlier made strenuous efforts to

³⁹ Gladstone's speech filled sixteen columns of Hansard, while Northcote's filled five. Ibid, cols. 179-194, 194-198.

⁴⁰ Ibid, col. 201.

⁴¹ Ibid, col. 199.

⁴² British Peace Movement, Laity, p. 99.

persuade Friends to become involved in the peace movement, felt it was difficult to see how the Government could have acted differently. Pollard was of the opinion that "the movement carried on by the Peace Society was an utter failure, and that you may as well pour money down a sewer as spend money on efforts to promote peace."⁴³ A number of nonconformist ministers who had taken part in peace activities including the Congregationalist minister the Revd James Guinness Rogers were also heavily criticised.

Lawson did not object to the feting of soldiers who executed their duty, but questioned the wisdom of praising them in isolation.

In this country we have a celebrated motto, "England expects every man to do his duty," and if the soldiers should have this vote of thanks, why not thank the Minister of War, (cheers) who had been so involved in this matter. If they thanked the men who carried out the war, why not thank the men who made it. Why not thank the Prime Minister, whose war it was. (Loud laughter.) He failed to see why they should specifically select soldiers. The soldier entered into a contract to fulfil a certain obligation. Although he ran risks, he entered into a contract to kill, destroy, and ravage wherever his country demanded. He received remuneration, great honour and social position, especially in a Christian country, where the people looked upon him as a great benefactor. (Laughter.) If the soldiers on this occasion had done more than their duty, he would not have opposed the vote; but what were the facts. A hon. Member opposite, who had seen the Egyptian soldiers, had told him that they were the worst soldiers in the world; the Abyssinians had beaten them and it was inconceivable that soldiers could be so bad.⁴⁴ Yet we attacked them, we who spend £30,000,000 a year preparing for war, attacked a country with a £500,000 war budget, we, who had all the resources of civilisation at our command (laughter,) not only the wherewithal of Britain, but also the resources of India. With all these forces at our back we invaded Egypt with its five million of people, and now we were singing a "Hallelujah Chorus" all

⁴³ Ibid, p. 101.

over the country on account of our victories. ...In addition to this, they should not forget that the Egyptian soldiers fled before our troops on the slightest provocation. He did not disparage the troops; he believed that had they met men as brave as themselves they would have returned victorious. It was not their fault that they had encountered a weak foe; however, when it came to a vote of thanks, why give it to the English and not the Egyptians, who had the good sense to run away. (Loud laughter.) ... We have had banquets, addresses, triumphant entries, thanksgivings in the churches, and the Prime Minister on a balcony in Pall Mall waving his hat, (laughter) and all because, after tremendous preparations they had licked these miserable Egyptians. He considered the vote an insult to the British Army, whom he knew were brave and successful. He hoped that they would not let their radical friends, if there were any radical friends, (laughter), vote for this under the misunderstanding that it was a complimentary vote to the poor fellows who had been engaged in this war. It was nothing other than homage to the military spirit and profession, which had brought unnumbered evils on England, Europe and the world.⁴⁵

Notwithstanding Lawson's passionate appeals he lost the Division by a large majority.⁴⁶

After sprinkling commendations over the troops, Parliament turned its attention to those who warranted the ultimate accolade; an elevation to the peerage, and hereditary remuneration. Following parliamentary precedent, Gladstone prepared two distinct Bills, both intended to reward the pre-eminent service of the two military figureheads, Sir Garnet Wolseley and Admiral Seymour, now titled Lord Wolseley and Lord Alcester respectively.⁴⁷ Gladstone had intended to reward each recipient with a pension valid for a

⁴⁴ In 1875, and again in 1876, an Abyssinian army defeated the armies of Egypt.

⁴⁵ Hansard, vol. 275, col. 314, 29 November 1882.

⁴⁶ Parliament recorded a vote of 354 to 17 in favour of 'Thanking the Navy', and a vote of 230 in favour of 'Thanking the Army'. Division list No 355 Hansard, vol. 274, col. 212, 27 October 1882.

⁴⁷ Gladstone had wanted to reward Lord Alcester after his heroic deeds at Dulcigno. A vote on that occasion may have received Lawson's approval, as he later said, "At Dulcigno the Admiral avoided a war, while at Alexandria he caused one."

period of two lives, that of the beneficiary and that of his eldest son.⁴⁸ However, under extreme radical pressure he rejected the precedent, and replaced the anticipated annual remuneration of two thousand pounds with a calculated lump sum.⁴⁹ Although dissatisfied, Lawson accepted the change as it relieved the burden of taxation from a future generation. "In future each generation would pay for their crimes and their follies and their deeds of military glory."⁵⁰ As he emphasised, "What did the Liberal party exist for but to get rid of evil precedents, and to make good new ones?"⁵¹

Lawson despised the system of bestowing hereditary peerages, and military rewards on individuals, and disapproved of everything and anything that enhanced the military spirit. Since he found nothing exceptional, useful, meritorious or glorious in the services bestowed by the two beneficiaries, he warned that a successful motion would further devalue a system whose reputation was already tarnished. As he reminded Parliament:

Anyone might be made a Peer today; it did not require a man to go into battle, he had only to win two or three elections, be the personal friend of a Minister, or brew enough beer; to be raised from the beerage up to the peerage. Men were made Peers because the Government did not know what else to do with them.⁵²

Although he had no desire to deprive either Alcester or Wolseley of a tribute of affection from those who sanctioned their business, he objected to the taxpayer footing the bill. In consequence, he asked Gladstone to heed the advice of the objectors and to replace the contentious bills with a national subscription, which on account of the war's popularity would attract a profusion of support. "They would have archbishops subscribing to it; his friend the president of the Peace Society would subscribe to it; and the

⁴⁸ Gladstone was quick to inform Parliament that although neither beneficiary had a son, a son was possible in both cases. Hansard, vol. 280, col. 37, 8 June 1883.

⁴⁹ The proposal, which was calculated using age as a distinguishing factor, resulted in Lord Wolseley receiving a lump sum of £30,000 and Lord Alcester an award of £25,000.

⁵⁰ Hansard, vol. 280, col. 42, 8 June 1883.

⁵¹ Ibid, vol. 278, col. 680, 19 April 1883.

⁵² Ibid, col. 684.

London mob would willingly donate their pennies.”⁵³ He was not insensitive to the needs of the two senior officers; he did not oppose the bills on 'cheeseparing grounds', and openly declared his willingness to grant money to a wide variety of worthy causes.

He would vote with great pleasure a large sum for the widows and orphans of the poor soldiers who lost their lives in their country's cause and a still larger sum to the widows and orphans of the poor Egyptian soldiers who fell fighting for a better cause. He would also vote honour to those statesmen who settled great questions without reference to war.⁵⁴

Although Lawson resisted both awards, he identified one significant difference between the actions of the two recipients. Wolseley, he emphasised, had executed his instructions perfectly, successfully, and swiftly without contributing towards the origin of the war, unlike Alcester, whom Lawson accused of 'triggering the conflict'. Lawson maintained that any commander who failed to keep his country out of foreign entanglements was responsible for the consequences unless he could show that war was unavoidable. Since Lawson considered the war 'avoidable', it followed that Alcester deserved a condemnation, not a commendation in the form of public reward.⁵⁵ Lawson also drew attention to a series of after-dinner speeches in which the Admiral made several contradictory statements. At the Mansion House,⁵⁶ Alcester confirmed he had bombarded Alexandria to punish the Egyptian authorities for the massacres of 11 June. Some weeks later at a dinner at the Royal Academy he tied his action solely to the security of the Fleet. As Lawson remarked,

⁵³ Ibid, vol. 280, col. 46, 8 June 1883.

⁵⁴ Ibid, vol. 278, col. 681, 23 April 1883.

⁵⁵ Ibid, vol. 280, col. 43, 8 June 1883.

⁵⁶ Alcester also received a medal with two clasps, Grand Cordon of the Osmanick, Crown and Star of the Damanick, and the Khedive's Bronze Star. On 11 April 1883, the Corporation of the City of London, presented the admiral with an address, the freedom of the City, and a sword of honour. Pictorial Records of the English in Egypt, Anon, p. 251.

This was the first time he had heard of a man publicly accused by himself of falsehood, for the statement was made on Lord Alcester's own authority, and highlighted that a man who travelled the length and breadth of the country making such statements was a man unworthy of the proposed grant of public money"⁵⁷

Lawson responded to Alcester's description of the bombardment, as a comparatively simple event in the history of naval warfare.⁵⁸ "That may be so but the name of Alexandria will contaminate the history of the Liberal party, and will haunt future generations of Liberal orators preaching on their shibboleth of peace, retrenchment and reform."⁵⁹

Peace, there was no Peace, carnage smiled upon her daily dead. Retrenchment, they were lavishing enormous sums on military forces. Reform, they might whistle for it, but they would never get reforms while people were eagerly killing one another.⁶⁰

Speaking at Carlisle in January 1883, Lawson spoke against Britain's performance in Egypt, particularly the public and social celebrations that accompanied Lord Wolseley and the returning troops.

It was for this, to crush out the freedom of the Egyptians, that we spent five millions of the hard-earned money of the people of this country. It was for this that we poured out some of the best blood of England on desert sands. For this that the whole press wrote paeans of delight. For this that the aristocracy and the London mob joined in high carnival the other day; for this that the archbishops and bishops of the Christian Church sent up to heaven a thanksgiving for the slaughter, which we

⁵⁷ Hansard, vol. 280, col. 45, 8 June 1883.

⁵⁸ A view later endorsed by the British naval historian Sir William Clowes, who recounted, "Let it be admitted that the bombardment of Alexandria was no very brilliant or dangerous exploit. The place was not a Toulon or Cherbourg, its defenses were, for the most part, not highly trained; five-sixths of its guns were obsolete." The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to the Death of Queen Victoria, Laird Clowes, (London, 1903), pp. 327-34.

⁵⁹ Hansard, vol. 278, col. 683, 23 April 1883.

⁶⁰ Lawson, Luke, p. 115.

committed. And it was for this that the very Quakers themselves, in a paroxysm of patriotism, threw up their hats and shouted for Glory and Gunpowder.⁶¹

The Post War Agitation

Although Lawson continued to call for a public debate throughout the parliamentary recess, arguing that the government's Egyptian policy "had turned democracy into a political farce,"⁶² the Conservative opposition remained inconspicuous. Parliament had to wait until November 1882, before Sir Stafford Northcote, moved a mild and innocuous censure motion inviting the Minister to provide information relating to the nature and duration of the employment of troops in Egypt.⁶³ Lawson found the apathetic response totally unacceptable, he had long sought a motion of condemnation of the government's past action, not a declaration of their intended future conduct. When Lawson realised that Northcote had declined to lay bare the sore, he approached the Conservative leader, and invited him to present a Motion condemning Britain's military role in Egypt, and furthermore to repeat in Parliament, a series of widely reported condemnatory remarks made outside the House.⁶⁴ Northcote declined; he would later state that he could not entertain the thought of entering into the same lobby as Lawson.⁶⁵

When Parliament reconvened in 1883, Lawson moved an unsuccessful amendment to the Royal Address, asking Gladstone why he had employed British forces to restore order under the authority of the Khedive.⁶⁶ The Liberal party, he said, should never force any nation to accept a government not of their making. He also drew attention to a series of 'glory and gunpowder' speeches made by Liberals who appeared to boast a policy which was less

⁶¹ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 310.

⁶² Hansard, vol. 274, col. 199, 26 October 1882.

⁶³ Ibid, col. 842, 6 November 1882.

⁶⁴ In early November Sir Stafford Northcote informed an audience at Glasgow, "An unjustifiable war was the greatest crime which a Ministry or a country could commit, and he considered the Egyptian war both unjustifiable and unnecessary." Ibid, col. 200, 24 October 1882.

⁶⁵ Ibid, vol. 284, col. 899, 14 November 1884.

⁶⁶ Ibid, vol. 276, col. 139, 15 February 1883.

expensive and killed more people in a shorter period of time than the previous administration.⁶⁷ Arguing that Parliament's central duty was to vote money, Lawson questioned if the £4,500,000 'squandered' on the Egyptian war, was money spent for the benefit of Great Britain. He also drew attention to the escalating human cost of the occupation where several hundred British troops and a countless numbers of the indigenous population had perished. He called for a parliamentary inquiry to apportion the blame for what had occurred, and compared military mishaps with commercial accidents. As the principal Director of the Maryport to Carlisle Railway Company, he was quick to point out that before apportioning blame for a fatal accident the authorities always instigated an inquiry into the causes and origins of that incident. His complaint was that Ministers did not make sufficient inquiry before taking the fatal steps that led the country into war. The Government had failed to consult the House before entering a war, which he attributed to secret diplomacy.⁶⁸

Lawson became fully aware of the war's popularity in April 1883, when during a visit to Tyneside he encountered members of the Liberal fraternity gloating over the warlike deeds of individual soldiers. One enthusiast informed Lawson that the war was the most popular event in the history of the current Government. "Why" he said, "that trooper who cut an Egyptian through the middle with a single blow was a Newcastle man." Joseph Cowen joined the conversation: "Perfectly true; I gave the man a sovereign myself."⁶⁹

On 6 May, Lawson addressed a letter to the Birmingham Reform League, emphasising the acquiescence of the people in support of a policy of wanton aggression. "Governments," he wrote, "are what the people make them, and we must instruct the people more fully in what is right and just before we can stop these national outrages."⁷⁰

On 22 May, Lawson lit the fuse on what later transpired into a highly controversial and protracted debate, when he asked Lord Fitzmaurice to comment on Lord Dufferin's alleged refusal to accept evidence implicating Tawfiq with the Alexandria massacres. Lawson was inviting the Government to redress the situation by guaranteeing the protection of any witness

⁶⁷ Ibid, col. 140.

⁶⁸ Ibid, cols. 1300-1306, 2 March 1883.

⁶⁹ Ibid, col. 683, 19 April 1883.

prepared to testify against the Khedive.⁷¹ As the controversy developed it became apparent to Lawson that the identification of those responsible for the Alexandria massacres was pivotal to the whole Egyptian debate. Although a court of law had vindicated the prime suspect, Dilke refused to retract his previous condemnatory accusations against Urabi.

The incident reoccurred during the debate to determine Lord Alcester's grant, when Lawson accused the Khedive and the Egyptian civil authorities of masterminding the massacres of 11 June.⁷² Lawson added a proviso, that should they disprove his allegations, he would, unlike Dilke, immediately apologise.⁷³ In tabling this proposition, Lawson changed the direction of the entire debate, which degenerated into a verbal brawl relating to the causes and events leading up to the war. Although Lawson had no direct proof to substantiate his extraordinary indictment, Lord Randolph Churchill, then in direct communication with Broadley and Blunt, claimed he had. Churchill possessed a large amount of circumstantial evidence connecting the Khedive to the massacres. The detailed evidence linking certain characters to certain events comprised five memoranda and was already the subject of a lengthy correspondence between Churchill and Gladstone,⁷⁴ now through Lawson's intervention the controversial evidence came into the public domain.⁷⁵ Churchill claimed that upon his arrival in Cairo, interested parties approached Lord Dufferin with evidence linking Tawfiq with the massacres. According to sources close to Blunt, the evidence was sound, would stand up in a court of law, and would satisfy the scrutiny of the British Government. Churchill alleged that once Dufferin realised that the incriminating evidence would implicate the Khedive, he refused to pledge a British guarantee of safe conduct to would-be witnesses.⁷⁶ Churchill was trying to evoke an official

⁷⁰ Maryport Advertiser, 10 May 1883.

⁷¹ Hansard, vol. 279, col. 701, 22 May 1883.

⁷² Much of what Lawson said was later substantiated by an eyewitness account written by John Ninet. Pictorial Records of the English in Egypt, Anon, pp. 238-44.

⁷³ Lawson had continuously asked Sir Charles Dilke to table the evidence proving that Urabi had instigated the riots. When Dilke failed to produce the necessary evidence Lawson demanded that he (Dilke) apologised to the House. Hansard, vol. 280, col. 45, 8 June 1883.

⁷⁴ For a comprehensive account of the evidence presented by Churchill. Pictorial Records of the English in Egypt, Anon, pp. 237-49.

⁷⁵ Lord Randolph Churchill: A Political Life, R. F. Foster, (London, 1981), p. 121. "The Alexandria Massacres of 11 June 1882", Chamberlain, pp. 27-31.

⁷⁶ Hansard, vol. 280, col. 47-51, 8 June 1883.

parliamentary enquiry to determine the integrity of the claims and was allying himself with Lawson, a member of the party in power, to strengthen his case. Such an enquiry would, he argued, absolve the Egyptian political prisoners.⁷⁷ Although Lord Dufferin later denied Churchill's accusations, he did not reject the appeal outright. In an ambiguous statement he said, "as far as he could recollect, no such event took place; but he would not venture to say that there were not serious matters brought under consideration, so serious that he declined to go further into them."⁷⁸ Historians have never substantiated Churchill's claims and the debate remains open. In later years most western historians concluded that the riots were spontaneous. However, other observers, notably D. A. Farnie, support the charges brought against Tawfiq by Lawson, Blunt and Churchill.⁷⁹

In the autumn of 1883, Lawson raised a protest against the Egyptian Government's refusal to allow Wilfrid Blunt entry into Egypt.⁸⁰ The whole experience suggested to Lawson that Britain was in Egypt for nothing other than to shore up a system of cruelty and oppression and to stifle freedom of opinion.⁸¹ Fully aware that Blunt's exclusion made with the compliance of a British Government of liberal persuasion would set a precedent and lead to the exclusion of other radicals; he asked the ministry a pertinent question. "Were they to exclude people from any country in which Britain possessed influence simply because those concerned held contrary opinions to the reigning government?" His argument was that if Parliament endorsed such views then others who dared to favour a poor, suffering, downtrodden and oppressed nation would experience persecution.⁸²

⁷⁷ Ibid, col. 50.

⁷⁸ Ibid, col. 69.

⁷⁹ "The Alexandria Massacres of 11 June 1882", Chamberlain, pp. 15-6. East and West of Suez, Farnie, p. 286.

⁸⁰ Blunt had visited Egypt en-route to India, where he had held discussions with the families of the exiled 'rebels' and others associated with the 'insurrection'. He had hoped to make a return visit, however the authorities barred his entry listing six charges: one, of fraternising with the 'rebels'; two, with conversing with the merchants in the bazaars; three, of visiting a detained prisoner in a Cairo jail; four, of having met with a refusal on the part of the police, Blunt endeavoured to evade the order; five, of establishing an Egyptian newspaper; six, of encouraging the establishment of an Arabian Empire. Although Blunt distinctly denied having tried to disseminate ideas in favour of an Arabian Empire, he admitted through Lawson that he had spoken of the imbecility of the Egyptian Government.

⁸¹ Hansard, vol. 291, cols. 1588-91, 4 August 1884.

⁸² Ibid, col. 1615.

Lawson found it ironic that before Britain could leave Egypt as intended, she would have to establish a stable self-governing country, and, as such, would have to incorporate many of Urabi's earlier demands. As Lawson argued, "Urabi had driven out the usurers, the pauperisers of the people, only for Britain to bring them back by converting unsecured debts into first class mortgages."⁸³ He was convinced that the enormity of the debt lay at the root of Egypt's problems. The debt, he claimed, drained the lifeblood out of the people, and compelled the exchequer to provide a huge sum in the form of interest, to the detriment of the administration of their own government. Lawson argued that since the Egyptian people were not morally responsible for a debt incurred by a tyrannical despot who financed his own purposes; they should repudiate the legacy and send the bondholders packing.⁸⁴

Gladstone, Gordon and the Sudan

As quickly as Britain began to solve one problem another arrived on the horizon. From ancient times, Egypt held an influence over the Sudan; one million square miles of desert, adjacent to her southern frontier. Egypt's modern empire dated back to the year 1820, when the armies of Muhammad Ali invaded Central and Western Sudan suppressed the sparsely populated warlike tribes and established an Egyptian dependency under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. The place Ali chose for his provincial capital was the village of Khartoum close to where the Blue meets the White Nile.⁸⁵

In 1881, coincidental with Tawfiq's appointment, an obscure tribesman and religious zealot named Mohammed Ahmed el-Sayvid Abdullah, proclaimed himself the Mahdi, 'the Guided One of the Prophet'. The Mahdi initiated a 'jihad' against the Egyptian military occupation, which he

⁸³ Ibid, vol. 284, col. 901, 14 February 1884.

⁸⁴ Ibid, vol. 292, col. 384, 9 August 1884.

⁸⁵ In 1840, Egyptian rule was extended to include the Kassala province in Eastern Sudan, and in 1865, the Red Sea ports of Suakim and Massawa; Darfur, the far western province was annexed in 1874. When the Egyptian armies tried to push further east in 1875 and again in 1876, they encountered fierce resistance from the combined tribes of Abyssinia, whose forces so overwhelmed the invaders that no further encroachments were attempted? By 1880, Egypt had appointed a governor general in Khartoum and thousands of Egyptian troops manned a string of garrisons throughout the country. *British in Egypt*, Mansfield, p. 65.

considered corrupt, and an ally of the infidel European, the eradicators of the lucrative slave trade. After Wolseley annihilated the Egyptian army, the Mahdi accentuated his cause, referring to the alien occupation he urged its zealot tribesmen to take up arms, move northwards towards Khartoum and expel the invader. Gladstone's ministry had intervened in Egypt to restore the '*status quo ante*' only to find it no longer existed. Insofar as they planned to reform and regenerate Egypt through the office of the Khedive, they discovered that he retained no authority other than that ordained by British power.⁸⁶ Although only a minimal voice in the administration of his own country Tawfiq in theory continued to possess unlimited authority over the vast territory of the scattered population of the Sudan. Between 1882 and early 1885, the Mahdi exploited Tawfiq's weakness to gain a series of conspicuous victories over the Egyptian garrison forces.

In the winter of 1883, 50,000 Mahdist tribesmen annihilated a 10,000 strong Egyptian army under the command of a reluctant British mercenary, General William Hicks Pasha. Critics argued that Gladstone should have vetoed the expedition but he had no desire to become embroiled in the dispute. Although he eventually took advice from a combined lobby of jingoists and humanitarians his initial argument was that Britain had no right to advise Hicks on the conduct of the war without becoming responsible for the war. Britain he said should not enforce her counsel upon the Egyptian Government, except when closely connected to Britain's purpose in Egypt.⁸⁷ Lawson disagreed, from his position it was unrealistic for Gladstone to reconstruct Egypt while simultaneously rejecting all responsibility for the security of the Upper Nile. "If it was a sound principle to extinguish the Egyptian nationalist movement to keep Tawfiq on his legs, then the British Government had a duty to use troops to defend both his legs; the one in Egypt and the one in the Sudan."⁸⁸ Lawson issued a stern warning, "We shall yet hear of battles with the false prophet, and of officers receiving peerages in recognition of their victories over him."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 131.

⁸⁷ Hansard, vol. 284, cols. 716-7, 12 February 1884.

⁸⁸ Ibid, col. 898, 14 February 1884.

⁸⁹ Ibid, vol. 276, col. 138, 15 February 1883.

By the end of 1883, the Cabinet fully understood the serious nature of their involvement in Egypt. They had assumed responsibility for defending Egypt proper, and the Red Sea ports in the Sudan against the Mahdists; they had taken over the Khedive's government and become entangled in its financial liabilities; and were undergoing heavy diplomatic pressure from the combined powers of Europe.⁹⁰ Although many Liberals disagreed with Britain's policy of overburdening herself with the maintenance of Egyptian authority over the Sudan, they continued to depreciate the concerns of radicals like Lawson whom they accused of promoting policies damaging to their party. While one national newspaper used Lawson's name as an antonym to the word 'jingo',⁹¹ the Maryport Advertiser accused him of "...advocating that a great empire should be governed in accordance with the policy of a parish vestry." The idea that Britain should shuffle out of her responsibilities in all parts of the world, was the editor proclaimed, "Not statesmanship but fanaticism."⁹² Notwithstanding these assertions, it was government blunders in the Sudan, which eventually damaged the Liberal party not the attitude or behaviour of Lawson.

The annihilation of Hicks's force proved that Britain could not hold the Sudan without seriously restricting Egyptian financial reforms. On 14 January 1884, Gladstone decided to evacuate the regions of the Upper Nile, and advised the Khedive to withdraw the garrisons from his empire in the Sudan.⁹³ The decision caused bitter recriminations in the British Parliament; although it bridged the gulf between radicals and moderates it further alienated imperialist expansionists and humanitarian crusaders who favoured intervention on the pretext of curbing the restoration of the slave trade.⁹⁴ On 18 January, while the British press, the mob and the Queen clamoured for retribution, a Cabinet Committee comprised of Granville, Northbrook, Dilke and Hartington, offered General Charles Gordon,⁹⁵ a remit to oversee the

⁹⁰ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 138.

⁹¹ Yes England is a Great Power, but it is a fact, sad or auspicious, according to whether it is regarded from the jingo or the Wilfred Lawson point of view. Illustrated London News, July 1882.

⁹² Maryport Advertiser, 21 March 1884.

⁹³ Life of Gladstone, Vol. 2, Morley, pp. 288-91.

⁹⁴ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 138.

⁹⁵ Charles George Gordon (1883-1885), probably the most distinguished nineteenth century British soldier besides Wellington, entered the Royal Engineers in 1852; served at Sebastopol

evacuation of the Sudan. In February, Gordon accepted orders to go to Khartoum to arrange the evacuation and to reconstitute the region by offering 'ancestral territory' to those chiefs who had lost their territory during the Egyptian occupation.⁹⁶ It was a disastrous choice: Gordon was a stubborn, egocentric and God-intoxicated soldier. Once installed in Khartoum, he defied his orders and as critics predicted, found himself under siege.⁹⁷

In the meantime Osman Digna, a former native slave dealer and leader of the Beja tribesmen, threatened Egypt's Sudanese garrisons. In response Tawfiq sent a force under the command of another English mercenary, Valentine Baker Pasha. On 5 February, the Beja, whose extravagant hairstyles earned them the nickname of Fuzzy-wuzzies, almost annihilated Baker's force, leaving the Red Sea Port of Tokar under siege. With Gordon under peril in Khartoum, the Cabinet came under intense pressure from both the Jingo press and the Queen, to dispatch a rescue mission. After Gladstone distinctly told Parliament that he required a military force to act as a small service to humanity, which he would strictly restrict to rescuing the beleaguered Red Sea garrison, he dispatched 4,000 troops under the command of Major-general Gerald Graham. In response Lawson offered the government reserved approval.⁹⁸

On 12 February, Sir Stafford Northcote placed the defeat of Hicks and Baker firmly at Gladstone's door when he moved a censure motion against the Government's policy of 'vacillation and inconsistency', and of failing to prevent an inadequate Egyptian force from attempting to re-conquer the Sudan.⁹⁹ For almost two years Lawson had pleaded with Northcote to censure the government's Egyptian policy. Now that the Government had begun to withdraw from the Sudan, Northcote had launched what Lawson called "a dastardly weak attack, which did not reproach the Government for

in 1855, took part in the capture of Peking in 1860, served under the Chinese government, earning the title, 'Chinese Gordon' after suppressing the Tai Ping rebellion. He also served in the Sudan 1873-6 and 1877-80, where he suppressed the slave trade. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 22, pp. 864-870.

⁹⁶ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 139. For a copy of the entire correspondence between the British Government, and their representatives. and Gordon. Pictorial Records of the English in Egypt, Anon, pp. 260-65.

⁹⁷ Gladstone's Foreign Policy, Paul Knaplund, (London, 1935), pp. 211-249.

⁹⁸ Hansard, vol. 284, col. 899, 14 February 1884.

⁹⁹ Ibid, cols. 684-700, 12 February 1884.

doing wrong, as he (Lawson) had consistently done but for having failed to succeed when doing wrong, an entirely different proposition."¹⁰⁰ On the second night of a protracted debate, Lawson, moved an amendment demanding that "...future British Forces refrain from interfering in the selection of an Egyptian Government."¹⁰¹ A move, which he believed would offer some advantage to the Egyptian people, after Britain's inter-party squabbles ceased. He reinforced his argument with a reference to a previous speech made by Lord Granville: "From the Atlantic to the Vistula it is everywhere admitted that the people should have a say in their own government."¹⁰² As Lawson emphasised, why should they exempt Egypt from a rule, which Britain was anxious to apply to other nations?

Although the massacres in the Sudan horrified Lawson, he compared the episodes with the bloodbath instigated by British forces at Tel-el-Kebir and other lamentable long forgotten places. He referred to the composition of the reconstituted Egyptian army, which their Government, with Britain's compliance, had sent into the Sudan; troops, he described as slaves in chains, driven at the point of a bayonet.¹⁰³ He contradicted those who excused Britain's diplomats from any responsibility for the unfolding events. "You cannot absolve responsibility by crying out that you disclaim that responsibility." His argument was that having committed the initial error of entering Egypt, the British Government had become a party to the events that ensued.¹⁰⁴ Lawson claimed Northcote had misdirected his censure motion; he should have reproached his own leadership, the architects of the Dual Control. Northcote's censure motion passed the Lords by a large majority; in the Commons the Government majority slumped to forty-nine.

Lawson had supported a policy which he described as 'rescue and retire' after receiving assurances that the military operations would have strict limitations.¹⁰⁵ However, within ten days the garrison at Tokar surrendered,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, col. 899, 14 February 1884.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, cols. 896-911.

¹⁰² This remark was made in the House of Lords a few days prior to Lawson's outburst. Ibid, col. 897.

¹⁰³ Lawson claimed that Gordon had stated that the Sudanese were justified in their rebellion and that the Egyptian Government in the Sudan was nothing more nor less than the worst form of tyranny. Ibid, col. 898.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 901.

and the beleaguered garrison which British forces were attempting to relieve had joined the enemy and took up arms against the Khedive. Since the relief of Tokar now attained a scope and significance never contemplated when approved by the House, Lawson immediately withdrew his support, he could find no relationship between what Gladstone described as “a small service to humanity,” and the killing of thousands of Arabs.¹⁰⁶ He had, he said, supported the expedition with great reluctance in the belief there were no greater scoundrel than Sudan’s Egyptian rulers.¹⁰⁷ Since there was now nobody left to rescue then future hostilities were purely for the sake of fighting a war, which he maintained was simply organised murder.¹⁰⁸

The British press clamoured for revenge and military glory. Using fanatical, jingoistic language, the editor of the Daily News insisted that Britain should wash her spears in the blood of the Dervishes. On 23 February, the Government instructed Graham to execute what they described as ‘defensive operations’. Graham was to bury English dead before returning to Suakim to take effective action should tribesmen threaten the region. On 29 February Graham defeated Osman Digna’s force. In Lawson’s opinion, the attack was unprovoked slaughter, the Sudanese Arabs he said, had more right than either the English or the Egyptians to go to Suakim since Suakim was in the Sudan. Gladstone however, had heavy political responsibilities and could not leave until he fulfilled his obligation to ‘peace and humanity’.¹⁰⁹

On 3 March, Lawson asked the Government to justify the slaughter of two thousand Dervishes, “...with the ease, which is manifest when the strong encounter the weak.”¹¹⁰ He described the carnage as one more example of the glory and infamy of Britain’s foreign policy, which left massacres marked like milestones across imperialist highways. Lawson was accusing the Government of engaging in vindictive military operations, designed to demonstrate British military superiority, and implored the House, to end the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Except for the brief period, 1877-79, when Gordon resided at Khartoum as governor-general of the Sudan, the unhappy people had been exposed to the rapacity of unscrupulous merchants, the brutality of the slave dealers, and the greed, corruption, and inefficiencies of the servants of the Egyptian government. Gladstone's Foreign Policy, Knaplund, p. 212.

¹⁰⁸ Hansard, vol. 284, col. 1900, 25 February 1884.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, Vol. 285, col. 378, 3 March 1884.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, cols. 374-5.

'dastardly and cowardly' confrontation, and to "check the country in its wild career of crime." He knew his views were unpopular, "For the slaughter of weak, helpless people was extremely popular in Britain, whose people cheered when their armies mowed men down to make a Jingo holiday."¹¹¹ He responded to disparaging taunts. "Their bodies may lie festering in the desert sands, but the blood of those men cries out for judgment upon the nation which committed the lowest and basest crimes in the pursuit of money."¹¹² When judgement day arrived he should prefer to share the company of 'savages' massacred by British soldiers rather than those who destroyed them. Although these minor victories boosted public morale, they had little long term affect, Osman Digna quickly recovered and regrouped.

On 15 March, Gladstone's Government wobbled, after Henry Labouchere flanked by Lawson and Churchill submitted a censure motion against the Government's proposed supplementary estimates.¹¹³ The proceedings attained notoriety after Sir William Harcourt dubbed the proceedings, the 'Dirty Tricks' debate'.¹¹⁴ Lawson's support in that division provoked fierce anger in the constituencies. The Stalybridge Liberal Association carried a resolution expressing regret that Lawson had supported the renegades.¹¹⁵ These and other related incidents elicited an article in the religious newspaper, Christian World, or as Lawson so whimsically paraphrased, the 'Worldly Christian'. The article criticised the leading dissidents: describing Henry Richard as a well-meaning enthusiast, entirely at sea in regard to the facts; Labouchere as a political scapegrace whose actions were characterised by reckless and insolent injustice. The editor saved his strongest condemnation for Lawson, whom he described as: "The leader of a loquacious crew, guilty of 'facetious partisanship' and 'arrogant folly', an English nondescript, a savage and monomaniac, who had become inebriated on his own fanatical crotchets and irresponsible audacity." The

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ During the debate Labouchere unexpectedly moved that, "The necessity for the great loss of British and Arab life, occasioned by our Military operations in the Eastern Sudan, has not been made apparent." Ibid, col. 1662, 15 February 1884. Division List 1884, No 39, 15 March 1884. Henry Labouchere and the Empire, Hind, p. 172.

¹¹⁴ Maryport Advertiser, 21 March 1884. Also Hansard, vol. 285, col. 1725, 15 March 1884.

¹¹⁵ A reference to the disruptions in the aforementioned debate in the House of Commons on 15 March 1884.

writer advised his readers to "Be wise, let us take no part in this screaming chorus of objectors, but trust in God, Gordon and Gladstone."¹¹⁶

Immediately after the Government became embroiled in Egypt, they began seeking ways to extricate themselves from the increased burden of taxation. Lawson understood the Government's dilemma, "They had joyously gone into a country and now were dolefully trying to come out of it; they had begun by acting unjustly and now they were trying to act with honour."¹¹⁷ He was wary of his party's election prospects, and feared that a change of Government would herald a clamour to stay in Egypt. Englishmen, he said, liked to get something; and should the Conservatives return to office they would no doubt say: "Having got Egypt we had better keep it."¹¹⁸ In the two-week period following Northcote's censure motion, Parliament continued to discuss the Egyptian question, provoking Gladstone to complain, "We have had five nights on the Vote of Censure, and we had besides seven discussions on the same subject."¹¹⁹ Not that Lawson complained:

If the Egyptian policy was a great and beneficial policy then surely it must be satisfactory to the government to have it discussed in the House. On the other hand if it involved them in discredit and danger if not in disaster that was the more reason for discussing it constantly.¹²⁰

Lawson maintained that Britain's policy in the Sudan was a sham; it was disastrous to the people of Egypt and a discredit to the people of Britain.¹²¹

The Government had ordered great marches and counter marches; evacuated one part of the country and invaded another; sent ships of war to the Red Sea ports; made proclamations against the Slave

¹¹⁶ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 172-3. Hansard, vol. 286, col. 780, 25 March 1884.

¹¹⁷ Hansard, vol. 284, col. 899, 14 February 1884.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, col. 900.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, vol. 285, col. 762, 6 March 1884.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, vol. 292, col. 388, 9 August 1884.

Trade; and appointed a famous slave dealer¹²² to rule over the northern Sudan.¹²³

Critics accused the 'irreconcilables' of wasting parliamentary time on matters abroad while ignoring important legislation at home. Although passionate about the Contagious Diseases (Animals) Bill and the Representation of the People Bill, Lawson supported Churchill because he believed that when lives were threatened he was duty bound to raise questions against the government's Egyptian policy. He also emphasised that it was highly hypocritical to discuss methods of enfranchising people at home when they were sending armies to enslave and destroy people abroad.¹²⁴ Such remarks irritated the press who accused Lawson of presenting "a tissue of misrepresentations and baseless statements, seasoned with sickly sentimentalism."¹²⁵

Lawson was quick to use newspaper reports to enhance his arguments, and often suggested that the Government was engaged in vindictive military operations, punishing Egyptian and Sudanese tribesmen with no object other than to indulge their thirst for blood and acquire military glory. He drew Parliament's attention to an insensitive series of appalling battleground sketches published in the Illustrated London News, portraying heaps of dead and dying Arabs, underlined with captions depicting, "English Troops shooting wounded rebels." To Lawson, the scenes suggested that: "one of the great delights in Britain was to see other people dying in agony and torture."¹²⁶ "If he were a savage in one of the tribes in the Sudan," Lawson proclaimed, "he would pray day and night to whatever Deity he supposed ruled over his life that he may be protected from Christianity and civilisation."¹²⁷

¹²² On his arrival in Khartoum, Gordon appointed Zobeir Pasha as governor-general of the Sudan with a commission to hold the capital and the Nile valley against the Mahdi. Zobeir was a former slave trader, who Gordon had not only opposed but had ordered the executed his son. England 1870-1914, Ensor, p. 81.

¹²³ Hansard, vol. 285, col. 762, 6 March 1884.

¹²⁴ Ibid, vol. 286, col. 778, 25 March 1884.

¹²⁵ Maryport Advertiser, 28 March 1884.

¹²⁶ Lawson, Luke, p. 118.

¹²⁷ Hansard, vol. 286, col. 781, 25 March 1884.

On 12 March 1884, after tribesmen cut telegraphic communications with Khartoum, Gordon's safety became problematic. Gordon had concluded that Egypt should retain suzerainty over portions of the Sudan and that those who had sent him were duty bound to smash the Mahdi and set up a stable government at Khartoum.¹²⁸ The decision or lack of decision created conflict within the Cabinet; Hartington wanted to prepare a relief expedition, Selbourne threatened to resign if they did not send one and Harcourt if they did. Gladstone fell on the side of caution, refusing to send British troops to Khartoum without proof that Gordon faced immediate danger.¹²⁹ Lawson supported Harcourt, he saw no reason why British taxpayers should shoulder further expenditure and declared his intention to impede any rescue attempt.¹³⁰ The Queen and the general public failed to share his indifference, they clamoured for Gordon's relief, and after months of Cabinet wrangling, Gladstone reluctantly agreed to their demands. In October Wolseley began his sixteen hundred mile journey up the Nile; however, the delay and Gordon's arrogance cost those under siege their lives, and Gladstone the wrath of the nation. On 5 February 1885, news reached London that Khartoum had fallen, Gladstone was no longer the GOM (Grand Old Man) he had quickly become MOG (Murderer of Gordon). On 15 April the Cabinet ordered the evacuation of the Sudan. When the Conservatives returned to office in 1886 they did nothing to reverse this decision despite their previous criticism.

Economic Reconstruction

The occupation of Egypt made Britain vulnerable to pressure from other European Powers and presented France and Germany with opportunities to invade British spheres of influence elsewhere in Africa and Asia, which had previously gone unchallenged.¹³¹ In June 1884, Gladstone invited the European Powers to a conference in London, hoping to gain

¹²⁸ Gladstone's Foreign Policy, Knaplund, p. 237.

¹²⁹ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 141.

¹³⁰ Hansard, vol. 286, col. 779, 25 March 1884.

approval for his proposals to balance the Egyptian budget. A gathering Lawson described as comprising "a group of hungry vultures sitting on a tree, watching the dying struggles of their intended prey, discussing the arrival of the appropriate moment to pounce upon their quarry."¹³² Lawson's simile has some foundation. France's refusal to reduce the interest on the Egyptian debt or to transfer any portion of the debt revenue to supplement the cost of administration and defence denied Egypt's bankruptcy and as Lawson argued, allowed bondholders to "continue to extract the last piastra from the miserable people."¹³³ Lawson saw the failure of the conference, which Gladstone blamed on Bismarck and the French,¹³⁴ as a lost opportunity for Britain to unshackle herself from the Egyptian problem.

Although Granville tried to trade off the hostility by accepting German claims in the Cameroon's; Portuguese requests in the Congo; and French demands in West Africa, all was in vain. Africa had become a pawn in the European balance of power. The Cabinet reacted by dispatching Lord Northbrook to Egypt with the aim of finding the shortest financial route back to evacuation. Lawson considered Northbrook's quest foredoomed to failure, his argument was that although Britain had previously dispatched her ablest men, in the guise of saviours, the Government remained in a quagmire. The mission, he said, was not an enquiry into Egypt's finances, nor was it to establish the conditions of the country or to ascertain the unpopularity of the Khedive's government, since all this was common knowledge.¹³⁵ Nor was it to perform the impossible task of extricating additional money from the Egyptian people, as Lawson mocked: "Solomon was a wise man, and Samson was a strong man, but neither of them could extract brass from a man who had nothing."¹³⁶

Northbrook advised Tawfiq to break his international agreements and divert the surplus from the debt revenues to make up his administrative deficit; he also proposed a guaranteed British Treasury loan of £9,000,000.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 144.

¹³² Hansard, vol. 292, col. 385, 9 August 1884.

¹³³ Ibid, col. 384.

¹³⁴ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 143.

¹³⁵ Hansard, vol. 292, col. 385, 9 August 1884.

¹³⁶ Ibid, col. 386.

¹³⁷ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 146.

The proposals signalled to the world Britain's long term commitment to Egypt, and caused further Cabinet wrangles. Lawson feared that any formal acceptance of the liability would inevitably lead to full annexation. In his opinion there were only three choices open to Gladstone, annexation, occupation, or retraction, or in his witty vocabulary, "the policy of grab, muddle or scuttle."¹³⁸ He insisted that the policy of withdrawal, as exemplified in the Transvaal settlement was the highest and noblest policy Gladstone could adopt.¹³⁹ Since Gladstone remained committed to evacuation he rejected Northbrook's submission, and eventually accepted a French proposal, whereby the combined European powers guaranteed an Egyptian loan allowing the Egyptian Government to tax the coupon for two years and to use any surplus in the revenues earmarked for debt payments for administrative purposes.¹⁴⁰ Gradually Egypt became a 'second' India, dependent upon British civilians for administration, on British troops for security, and on British engineers for the improvement and maintenance of the infrastructure. In January 1884, Lawson promised his constituents that he "would do everything in his power to get our troops out of Egypt with the greatest possible speed."¹⁴¹

West Cumberland

At the height of the Egyptian crisis, Lawson attained the age of fifty-four, he had graduated from a fanatic wishing to 'rob a poor man of his beer',¹⁴² to become an influential and well respected anti-imperialist, non-interventionist in the Cobden tradition. He had laboured tirelessly throughout the Egyptian campaign, such that the long parliamentary sessions, the early morning hours of research and speech preparation, and the arduous task of

¹³⁸ This was a widely used term. Chamberlain refers to the Radicals wanting to 'scuttle and repudiate'; while Harcourt wanted to 'pay and scuttle'. Ibid, p. 149.

¹³⁹ Hansard, vol. 292, col. 386-7, 9 August 1884.

¹⁴⁰ Africa and the Victorians, Robinson and Gallagher, p. 150.

¹⁴¹ Maryport Advertiser, 11 January 1884.

¹⁴² For thirty years society had charged Lawson with trying to rob a poor man of his beer, but during the lead up to the debate on the 1885 Reform Bill this was changed to that of trying to do a poor man out of his Peer. Ibid, 15 August 1885.

stumping the country drumming up a national agitation, left him physically and mentally exhausted. To compound the issue Lawson had voluntarily changed his constituency, moving from the safe liberal stronghold in Carlisle to an uncertain future in Lowther-dominated West Cumberland.¹⁴³ The Lowthers, Lawson's traditional enemies had ruled West Cumberland for generations and their yellow livery had become a badge of the Conservative Party.

By March 1885, his nagging cough had further deteriorated, such that the Liverpool Mercury was informing its readers that because of a serious illness Lawson would no longer appear in public life or seek re-election.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps he should have relaxed at the close of the parliamentary session but he continued to stump the country speaking for, and on behalf of Temperance and Franchise Reform. In late December he left the harsh Cumbrian climate and travelled to the French Riviera to convalesce, vowing to either 'end or mend' his bronchial problems. Using letters and a diverse selection of newspapers, he kept abreast of political developments at home. In a letter dated February 1885, he apologised to the Carlisle Liberal Association for neglecting his constituency duties. He described himself as, 'not much of an invalid', although he was finding it difficult to shake off his nagging cough, despite dieting on a menu of beefsteak.¹⁴⁵ In another letter he criticised the influence of the armed services, particularly their relationship with the Conservative party, the press and other vested interests. He urged his correspondent to place his trust in the independent speaker and continue to convey the non-interventionist message against imperialists who influenced foreign policy.¹⁴⁶ By April, his health had somewhat improved, and he joked with colleagues who humorously suggested that the want of a little alcohol was the cause of his illness.¹⁴⁷

Lawson's attitude towards Gladstone's imperialist policies had made enemies in his new constituency. On 1 April 1884, a delegation assembled at Maryport to consider his past behaviour. The chairman acknowledged

¹⁴³ Lawson declared his intentions to rid West Cumberland of the influence of the Lowther family during a public meeting at Workington attended by Sir William Harcourt. Times, 1 November 1881.

¹⁴⁴ Maryport Advertiser, 18 March 1885.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 25 February 1885.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 18 March 1885.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 2 April 1885.

Lawson's close bonds with the working classes but noted that several members opposed his candidature, while others had threatened to support the Conservative Lord Muncaster.¹⁴⁸ Although the delegates accepted Lawson's right to express his opinions, and respected his distinctive views on peace, temperance, and other related radical crotchets, they claimed his undisciplined programme of agitation passed their limits of toleration, and outraged their sense of public decency. Lawson's critics never fully understood his arguments, some thought he paraded as a Liberal under false pretences; and grumbled at his extraordinary peculiarities and his equally extraordinary speeches. As the Maryport Advertiser pronounced:

Nobody knows anything about Egyptian affairs other than Sir Wilfrid Lawson, and it is his mission, like a political Jeremiah, to wail over the abomination of desolation caused by a wicked Government. Everybody being against him, it is a matter of profound indifference. He is right and everybody else is wrong. His position is not unlike that of an inmate of a lunatic asylum, who when asked to state the reason for his confinement, replied that it was owing to a difference of opinion.¹⁴⁹

Conversely, his admirers predicted he would emerge from the parliamentary furnace, pure, bright, and spotless.¹⁵⁰

Most delegates drew a line above treachery, singling out remarks describing Gladstone as 'un-Christian'.¹⁵¹ One delegate expressed an opinion that Lawson was unfit to represent the constituency, and asked, "Where is there a Liberal Member who has opposed the Grand Old Man so much, or gone so directly against him, as Sir Wilfrid."¹⁵² Lawson faced two serious

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 21 March 1884.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 28 March 1884.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 21 March 1884.

¹⁵¹ Lawson suggested that Gladstone had acted in an un-Christian manner in a parliamentary speech delivered on 3 March 1884. During his speech Lawson quoted a statement made by Gladstone thirty years earlier when the latter described the making of war for what was called success as, "...indefensible, hideous, anti-Christian, immoral and inhuman. If when you have obtained the object of a war, you continue it in order to obtain a military glory, I say you tempt the justice of Him, in whose hands, the fate of armies is solely lodged; you tempt Him to launch on you his wrath. If this is courage I for one, have no courage to take such a course." Hansard, vol. 285, col. 373, 3 March 1884.

¹⁵² Maryport Advertiser, 24 April 1885.

charges, one of acting in a manner inconsistent with Liberal professions and pledges; the other of obstructing public business, wasting public money and assisting Churchill in the 'dirty tricks' debate. Lawson's defenders argued that since Gladstone had deviated from his Midlothian sentiments Lawson had every right to oppose him. Notwithstanding the intensity of their arguments, all this criticism achieved was to advertise Liberal divisions and offer encouragement to Conservatives. Lawson was unrepentant. At Carlisle in 1883, he had told an audience:

I don't suppose there is any man in the kingdom who has advocated more questions that were in a minority, and that were unpopular at the time that I advocated them, than I have. I have advocated questions not to benefit the rich and the powerful, who have plenty of friends; but I have always striven to advocate questions and to promote measures, for the great masses of the people - the weak, the poor, the desolate, and the oppressed.

In July 1885, after the Re-distribution Bill partitioned West Cumberland, the Liberal Association met to select their candidates for the new constituencies. With two sitting members and a longstanding commitment to Sir Wilfrid Lawson, the executive reached a compromise, whereby Lawson would contest the Cockermouth Division while David Ainsworth would contest Egremont. In arriving at their decision the executive took Lawson's health and durability into consideration, hoping to spare him the anxiety of an election in a seat they considered perfectly safe. Despite recognising Lawson as one of the purest, noblest, and most unselfish philanthropists the editor of the Maryport Advertiser expressed his irritation: "That no similar arrangement was ever characterised by a greater want of tact, and that no political incident has ever shown more forcibly the evils that result from government by caucus."¹⁵³ From Cannes, Lawson accepted the nomination with a proviso that should the delegates disagree with his election address, he would discharge them from their commitment.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 10 July 1885.

During the General Election, Lawson defied medical advice and made a short address to a large constituency gathering. He faced a stiff challenge; the local Tories had pulled off a masterstroke. His opponent Charles James Valentine had all the attributes required to defeat Lawson; he was the owner of the Moss Bay Hematite Iron Company, and a paid up temperance member. Valentine supported 'Fair' as opposed to 'Free Trade', arguing that 'unfair' foreign competition had ruined the economy; he supported James Lowther's call for a five-shilling levy on imported corn and tried to convince the working class protectionists into accepting that while the price of bread would remain static wage increases would automatically follow tariff controls. Fair Trade,¹⁵⁴ Lawson argued, would, only benefit a few aristocratic landowners and their satellites who, rather than reduce the tenancy rents, would make it difficult for workingmen to maintain their living standards. Protection to Lawson meant creating artificial scarcity allowing dealers in protected articles to achieve more than the market price; protection meant robbing the poor for the benefit of the rich.¹⁵⁵

On 5 December, the newly enfranchised electorate in the Cockermouth Division rejected Lawson by a small but decisive margin of ten votes.¹⁵⁶ Lawson summarised his dejection with appropriate lines from Byron:

So, the struck eagle stretched upon the plain,
No more through rolling clouds to soar again,
Viewed his own feather on the fatal dart,
And winged the shaft that quivered in his heart

He expressed his feelings in a letter addressed to Joseph Mallins.

I do not suppose that my defeat will really interfere much with the progress of our temperance work, although doubtless it had an ugly

¹⁵⁴ Fair Trade was a campaign introduced in the 1880's to restrict free trade to only those countries which reciprocated. This led in the 1890's to a muted but insistent protectionist campaign including such ideas as an Imperial Zollverein. George Herbert Perris, 1866-1920, Gomme, pp. 138-145.

¹⁵⁵ Maryport Advertiser, 3 November 1885.

¹⁵⁶ The actual number of votes cast were Lawson 3,835; Valentine 3,845. West Cumberland Times, 6 December 1885.

look for the moment. I suppose that no-one will ever write the true history of my contested election. But I have an impression that if it could be done in this case we should see revealed one of the most extraordinary combinations ever before constructed in a political struggle—Irish Nationalists, Orangemen, priests, parsons, publicans, and local optionists, all working frantically to kick me out. It seems beyond the bounds of possibility that such a combination can hold together for a very long time. But as Sam Weller remarks, “those who live longest see most.”¹⁵⁷

A strange indictment but as Lawson acknowledged, this unusual combination of ‘interests’ is worthy of closer examination. When it came to enfranchising the workingman few worked harder than Lawson. However, on their very first occasion of using that vote, they turned him out of Parliament. Few Englishmen had so consistently supported the Irish cause inside and outside Parliament. This should have guaranteed success in a constituency where almost one thousand voters claimed Irish descent. However, Parnell had instructed all republicans to oppose the Liberal party candidates to a man, with Catholic priests enforcing the instruction from the pulpit. Lawson had already lost the Orange vote for continuously supporting Irish Catholic demands for justice and equality. He would long remember that gloomy afternoon, when the combined votes of the working classes, the publicans and the Irish defeated him. In the meantime the Liberal candidate defending the Carlisle constituency entered Parliament unopposed.

Conclusion

Within two years of returning to office forces outside Gladstone’s control proved too strong, British ships bombarded Alexandria, and her troops occupied Egypt. By 1882, notwithstanding his consistent denial that control of the Suez Canal was a critical matter, Gladstone allowed Dilke, Hartington and

¹⁵⁷ Lawson, Luke, p. 106.

Chamberlain to press their point that the canal was vital to India's security. In letting his colleagues determine policy, Gladstone also implicitly accepted that continued financial control was central to British interests. This was in direct contradiction to his stand on the Bulgarian atrocities five years earlier and directly contrary to the policies expressed during his Midlothian campaign. There were other 'official' arguments put forward at the time to justify Britain's intervention; these included recriminations for the massacre of British subjects at Alexandria; the restoration of order to a country overrun by anarchy; the defence of Her Majesty's ships; the maintenance of the Khedival rule; and the protection of the rights of the bondholders; each alone sufficient to justify the action from an imperialist standpoint. This narrative is an attempt to understand the nature and the character of the agitation, and the reasons behind the actions taken by two of the principal characters, Lawson and Gladstone, neither of whom had a natural attachment to the imperialist viewpoint.

Speaking to a packed House of Commons, Lawson summarised his own interpretation of the events relating to Britain's 'achievements' in Egypt.

First we bombarded Alexandria; a large portion of it was consumed by fire, and multitudes were left to perish in the desert. Then we destroyed the Army at Tel-el-Kebir, an exploit that had given rise to great laudations and rejoicing, an army, which it now appeared, lay down its arms screaming when it saw the enemy. For this they made a great warrior a Peer and gave him £25,000. Having done all this, we next connived to send another army into the Sudan. We had crushed out the nationalist movement, which had Urabi at its head, and which represented the real feeling of the country, although no one had believed him (Lawson) when he said that would happen. Then we handed the leader of that movement over to his bitterest enemies, who were thirsting for his blood. We next set up the Khedive who although the Prime Minister spoke very highly of him, Tawfiq's father had a contrary opinion, describing his son as a man with neither a head, heart or courage. Britain supported the Egyptian Government, which

ground down the fellaheen more cruelly, and brutally than ever before, and virtually created anarchy while pretending to put it down. The Egyptians did not want our Evelyn Barings, our bondholders, and our Europeans governing them; they wanted us to go away, and above all to get rid of the abominable government of Turks and Circassian's, supported by the Egyptian government, for the benefit of Jews and bondholders and stony-hearted traders.¹⁵⁸

So it came to pass that the potentially great Liberal administration that promised so much ended barren of achievement; having spent its energy on Bradlaugh debates, Afghan boundaries, and political difficulties in Egypt, Ireland and South Africa. In later life Lawson acknowledged that the economic controls placed on Egypt brought long-term benefits to both the people and the administrative government.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, he considered the invasion wrong and stated that the events left a great stain on the character of Gladstone. If an enemy had followed the occupation policy, he might have borne it, but that Gladstone should suddenly go on the warpath, a path that led to prolonged fighting and later humiliation not only distressed him but also amazed him.¹⁶⁰ During the Midlothian campaign, Gladstone appeared to conjure up a vision showing a new foreign policy based upon truth, justice and humanity; one where free trade would bring peace and prosperity to a new world order, comprised of independent nations existing side by side, in harmony, with minimal outside interference. But Gladstone was never a Cobdenite; he always considered that intervention for the right cause was both acceptable and desirable, although he preferred it carried out by the 'Concert of Europe' rather than by particular nations. In Egypt he tried to involve both the Sultan and France in the decision making process and his problem arose after both these bodies failed to comply with his wishes.

¹⁵⁸ Hansard, vol. 284, col. 902, 14 February 1884.

¹⁵⁹ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 167. On page 188, Lawson offered another explanation for the occupation. "The taking of Egypt was a rascally and dishonourable proceeding; yet, from all accounts, it has been a military success and the people flourish under our rule; at least so we are told, and in absence of any testimony to the contrary, the natives not having many facilities for giving their own view of the matter we must believe it." The interviews between Lawson and Russell were conducted in the year 1900.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 167.

However in his zeal to promote Cobdenism, Lawson like other radicals most probably mistook Gladstone for a Cobdenite at Midlothian and that probably explains his outrage with Gladstone's intervention. If this is so, then Gladstone should share the blame because he did not make clear enough in 1879 what his differences were with radicals like Bright.

In monetary terms the war and subsequent reconstitution of Egypt, cost the British taxpayer £35,000,000. According to Lawson, it also brought the hatred and animosity of many nations; and the Egyptians, from whom we might have earned friendship for evermore, came to loathe us.¹⁶¹ This narrative has endeavoured to demonstrate Lawson's significant contribution to a debate concerning an important aspect of British imperial history when a Liberal Government led by Gladstone elected to pursue the path of more interference not less; and appeared as an active aggressor not a victim of the unfolding events. Lawson's role was important because although intervention in Egypt was unpopular with a significant portion of the Liberal party, few opposed their leader, whose personal influence appeared to counter every Liberal principle and the doctrines he himself appeared to proclaim during his Midlothian campaign. For Gladstone the affairs of Ireland were greater issues and to keep the Cabinet together he eventually gave in to those who argued that the financial and strategic considerations far outweighed any sympathy for the oppressed nations, a direct contradiction to his earlier stand on non-interventionist principles. Gladstone would continue to say one thing in opposition then to say something entirely different when in office.

Whereas Gladstone invariably had to act as a responsible statesman, Lawson never deluded his audience into believing that he was anything other than a 'maverick' independent minded politician. Lawson cared little for the prestige of British authority throughout the Empire and based his anti-imperialist stance on a platform of peace, retrenchment and reform. While Lawson roared, others whispered. Only eight members of the Liberal party registered their opposition to the vote of credit and hence the war. Of these, Lawson was by far the most active, the most vociferous, the most dynamic and the most consistent critic of Government policy. Notwithstanding all these

¹⁶¹ West Cumberland Times, 7 January 1888.

qualities, historians have largely chosen to ignore his contribution to the debate.

As an individual or a humanitarian, as an independent member of the House of Commons or as a radical upholder of Cobden's doctrines, Lawson never doubted that his attitude towards Gladstone's policy in Egypt and the Sudan was unquestionably and unequivocally correct. From his viewpoint, the evidence published in the Blue Books overwhelmingly supported this contention. He refuted all arguments suggesting that Urabi was acting as a ruthless dictator, Egypt existed in a state of anarchy or that the Suez Canal was endangered. He chose to believe that British Conservatives had connived with France on behalf of the bondholders; that the doctrine of Midlothian was in tatters; that the war and the subsequent occupation was a response to the demands of those bondholders; and that British diplomats in Cairo had duped the Government. He made unremitting demands for a government declaration relating to their short and long term intentions towards Egypt and constantly drew Parliament's attention to the subject.

If the criterion for gauging ultimate success is influencing policy, then Lawson was a failure. His attempts to change Government policy were totally ineffective. The war destroyed Egyptian nationalism, and Britain remained in Egypt for a further seventy years. However, the concept of success is both vague and subjective and one could equally argue that Lawson was more successful and comfortable in defeat than Gladstone was in military glory. Lawson played his part with honour, justice, commitment and enthusiasm and he accepted the odium of his critics with dignity. Although his health suffered and largely through his stand on Egypt he lost his seat at the ensuing General Election, Lawson could look back with satisfaction at having "steadily opposed all the raids and robberies which were the outcome of 'Britain's so called foreign policy in Egypt."¹⁶² In retrospect, Lawson looks more right about militarism and anarchy than does Gladstone and he could well argue that what he foretold in the beginning did to a great extent come to pass.

Although Lawson's opinions surrounding the events that unfolded in Egypt between the years 1875 and 1885 were very unpopular at the time and,

¹⁶² Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 172.

have been forgotten, his explanation was not too dissimilar to that proposed by modern scholarship. Lawson's interpretation largely adheres to the bondholder's thesis, which extols the protection of investor's money, in other words Egypt became a victim of financial imperialism. With a few minor exceptions¹⁶³ Lawson would have rejected the later claims of Robinson and Gallagher but was comfortable with the current explanation offered by Cain and Hopkins who advocate that 'gentlemanly capitalists' used finance to enforce economic and financial influence over Egypt. Lawson acknowledged the revolution taking place in Egypt but not anarchy; and whereas others downgraded the Egyptian race to provide a moral justification for their aggression, Lawson preferred to empower 'Orientals' with self-government. To Lawson, Robinson and Gallagher's interpretation would have been a red herring used to mask British financial motives for intervention. He maintained that changes in Europe triggered the changes on the 'periphery'; that economic and financial motives especially in the 1870s were uppermost; that British officials played Machiavellian roles; and that the Islamic nationalist surge in the late 1870s and early 1880s was a genuine revolutionary movement, fuelled by rigorous European financial control.

Nevertheless, as Gladstone rightly observed it was impossible to leave Egypt without a Government, and although Lawson huffed and puffed he never really offered an alternative to the Khedive, other than Urabi and the nationalist movement which after Tel-el-Kebir no longer existed as a political force. Gladstone maintained that Lawson's continuous disparaging of the Khedival system was not only unwarranted by facts, but was highly impolitical, and "calculated to prolong the very system that he does not desire, namely intervention in Egypt."¹⁶⁴ As Stephen J. Lee suggests it is possible to overstate the case against Gladstone. He deserves credit for the moral courage shown in defending the rights of the occupied people, and of

¹⁶³ By recognising the early financial and cultural influences before the year 1880, the building of the Suez Canal and the French flood to fuel investment, and hence the political power of their bondholders, Lawson does attach a degree of significance to the importance of French intrigues prior to the onset of the Alexander massacres.

¹⁶⁴ Hansard, vol. 284, col. 913, 14 February 1884.

restoring some of the credibility of his government in the international arena.¹⁶⁵

Lawson almost drowned in the deluge of criticism that accompanied his agitation against the Government's Egyptian policy. His critics came from a wide section of society and included Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, one of Lawson's closest allies. Blunt saw the Egyptian revolution as the beginning of a modernising transformation of the society and argued that Egypt be allowed the liberty to create its destiny. Blunt saw himself as alone in these beliefs and in an article published in the Nineteenth Century, he compared himself, with Lawson and Harrison, the two leading opponents of the war.

Sir Wilfrid Lawson and Mr. Frederic Harrison, who are valiantly pleading the cause of peace, stop short of this. [Blunt's optimism about the Arabs and the Egyptian revolution] They call the war unjust, unnecessary and unwise. They wish it over. But they profess themselves at the same time ignorant about the justice, the necessity, and the wisdom of the war for the Egyptians. They do not really feel with these poor patriots or long to see them established in peace against their enemies. They do not care for their honour. They doubt their talk of liberty. Their sympathy is not as that of a man with his own kin, rather as a man for some ill-treated beast. They do not love the Musselmen 'Arabs' of Egypt as I do.¹⁶⁶

Notwithstanding Lawson's prolonged agitation against Gladstone's Egyptian policy, Blunt suggested he harboured 'Orientalist' opinions, and viewed the Egyptian people in an 'Orientalist' manner. In his seminal study, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said makes the reader aware of the stereotypes used by westerners to depict their relationship with non-Europeans. As Said explains,

There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land

¹⁶⁵ Aspects of British Political History, Lee, pp. 204-5.

occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasures put at the disposal of another western power.¹⁶⁷

Said tends to share Blunt's view that the latter was more or less alone in his convictions and with this in mind Blunt's remarks require serious examination. Blunt's arguments are interesting but they contain contradictions. We should recall that irrespective of his lack of knowledge or experience of the Egyptian cause, Lawson did support self-government in Egypt. Although Lawson was a product of mid nineteenth century western society and never denied Britain's superiority or Egypt's inferiority, he was a Cobdenite; and although he thought that the native races of Africa and Asia lived on a lower plain of civilisation he argued that they could best improve through their own efforts and not through the imposition of European rule.

Blunt's interpretation has however, some validity. Although Lawson spoke with the authority of a distinguished, respected long-time parliamentarian, we must accept that he did not love the Musselmen Arab in the same way as Blunt did. Blunt spoke Arabic, had an understanding of Islamic religion and Arabian culture, and had visited Egypt on numerous occasions; experiences alien to Lawson. Although a 'Little Englander', both politically and philosophically Lawson was more of an internationalist than a nationalist.¹⁶⁸ Although Lawson had no knowledge or special sympathy for Egyptian or Sudanese people, he was on the side of the oppressed everywhere, whereas Blunt appears to have reserved his sympathy for particular national groups. Lawson was concerned with the larger imperial picture; his major interest was world peace. Unfortunately, he held no international standing and as such had to agitate against conflicts involving his own country, as a means of achieving his aims. Peace, retrenchment and reform were the three pillars of his philosophy. War to Lawson was anathema, a waste of human life and resources. He was a Christian not a Quaker, a man who understood the need to fight a defensive war; and he agitated against his own government's policy in an endeavour to prevent that necessity. His

¹⁶⁶ "The Egyptian Revolution", Blunt, p. 324.

¹⁶⁷ Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient, Edward W. Said, (London, 1978), p. 36.

passion for justice towards the Egyptian fellaheen was consistent with views expressed in defence of the rights of the Zulu warrior, the Afghan tribesman, the Sudanese zealot and the ex-European Boer; all oppressed and contaminated by 'Western civilisation'. Although Blunt's analysis is technically correct his tendency is to overstate his conclusion. I have yet to uncover any evidence to support the claim that Lawson perceived the oppressed races 'as some ill-treated beast'.

Since Lawson believed that imperialism had close connections with exploitation and class conflict, it is not surprising that he had a genuine concern for the welfare of his own countrymen, whose lives he sought to enrich, not at the expense of another race but through the merits of their own industry. Lawson advocated, free trade, franchise reform and temperance legislation in the belief that such reforms would influence British foreign and imperial policy. Temperance legislation would, he argued sever the links tying the brigadier to the brewer, and stifle the revenue accrued from the annual sales of alcohol, the traditional treasury source of financing Britain's military machine. Changes to this system would he believed, have two immediate impacts; firstly, it would encourage the newly enfranchised taxpaying public to question their allegiance to military aggrandisement; and secondly, it would increase the status of the lower classes and increase family welfare and education.

Although Lawson was detached from those 'poor patriots' he longed to see them 'established in peace against their enemies', not only their European aggressors but also their Sudanese neighbours. Blunt appears to ignore the fact that the oppressed Egyptians were simultaneously oppressing their African neighbours. Lawson took the same line in Egypt as he did in the Transvaal, when he supported the cause of the Zulu and later the Boer, in their confrontation with British imperialism. Insofar as Lawson's speeches occasionally included seemingly derogatory expressions ('uncivilised savages' comes to mind), in reference to the native races of Africa, Asia or Polynesia, there was no malice in these outbursts and they were often tinged with an air of irony. He detested the methods employed by western society to subjugate

¹⁶⁸ See my comments in the opening chapter. Northern Pioneer, 28 February 1882. Maryport

in the name of civilisation or religion, a practice he called 'Christianisation by the sword'. Likewise, Lawson's description of 'wretched alcoholics' starving their wives and children in pursuit of their evil addiction is not elitist in character or degenerative in principle but a cry for improvement and reconciliation.

Introduction

My aim is to contextualise and explain Lawson's various opinions, attitudes and observations relating to Ireland, her people, her political turmoil, and her culture. Insofar as a detailed description of the revolution taking place in Ireland during the period under review constitutes such familiar ground, and is outside the scope of this narrative, it is necessary to briefly discuss the salient events and the characters that organised and influenced them. Many important incidents such as the Kilmainham treaty, the Pheonix Park assassinations, and other related incidents are either excluded or glossed over, not because they are trivial but because Lawson left no important contributions to the debate and as such any portrayals would simply divert attention away from the aims and objectives of this study.

If Europe had her Eastern problems, England had her Irish Question, both were ancient and both owed their origin to conquest and confiscation. We can trace the genesis of the modern republican movement in Ireland to the Protestant lawyer, Wolfe Tone, who with French assistance tried to sever all connections with England. On 1 January 1801, Ireland lost what little independence she held¹ when, without any form of consultation, her leaders took the extraordinary and unparalleled step and sanctioned the closure of their own Parliament.² Thereafter Ireland's brief period of independence became no more than a passing footnote in the long turbulent history of that country.³ Lawson often called the instruments that forged the Union, the three

¹ As a result of the pressure brought to bear by the 'Patriots' in the 1750's combined with the impact of the American War of Independence, the British Government yielded to Irish demands and by the 'Constitution of 1782, the Irish Parliament achieved legislative independence. Great Britain and the Irish Question: 1800-1922, Paul Adelman, (London, 1999), p. 6.

² The constitutional exchange gave Ireland one hundred seats in the House of Commons and thirty-two peers in the House of Lords. Modern Ireland: 1600-1972, R. F. Foster, (London, 1988), pp. 282-285.

³ The British Government paid over £1,240,000 in bribes and compensation to important members of the landed classes, and a large contingent of the British army took up permanent residence in Ireland.

F's, force, fraud and folly.⁴ His argument was that England had attained the Union by deception and maintained it with coercion, using a shameless system of bribery and corruption.⁵

In 1828, Daniel O'Connell, the founder of the Catholic Association (1823), marshalled the support of the forty-shilling freeholders, and with the aid of a mass public subscription was elected for County Clare.⁶ Agitations now became spasmodic, until rekindled by the outrage of the 'Great Hunger', and its subsequent mass migration.⁷ The exodus carried the passions of Ireland across the oceans creating a series of new Irelands overseas, all nursing the fiercest resentments and the most implacable of hereditary hatreds.⁸ Historians have since contemplated the question was Ireland through mass immigration, imperialising or was she becoming imperialised? As C. C. Eldridge recognised, "Ireland had become the prime exporter of population from the United Kingdom, but she was also the major exporter of French revolutionary ideology, Roman Catholicism, and anti-British sentiments."⁹

From childhood Lawson watched the struggle unfold, at first with alarm and then with anguish. To him Ireland symbolized the worst outworks of aristocratic and landowner privilege, whose problems, he believed, had long emanated from Conservative party obstinacy:

⁴ West Cumberland Times, 9 November 1887.

⁵ Ibid, 7 January 1888.

⁶ After the authorities debarred O'Connell from Parliament, the British Government, fearful of the consequences, passed the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829), which granted Catholic Emancipation allowing O'Connell to take his seat. However, as a result of attaining this concession O'Connell had to accept the disenfranchisement of the very people who offered him the most support, the Irish forty-shilling freeholders. The Dimensions of British Radicalism: The Case of Ireland 1874-95, Thomas William Heyck, (Chicago, 1969), p. 18.

⁷ A period in Irish history set between the years 1845-49, when successive failures in the potato crop, the staple diet of many Irish people, caused, hunger, starvation, disease and eventual death. The famine reduced the Irish population from 8.5 million in 1845 to 6.5 million in 1851. Great Britain and the Irish Question 1800-1922, Paul Adelman, (London, 1999), pp. 64-7. The Great Hunger, Cecil Woodham-Smith, (London, 1962). During the years 1847-54 some 1,316,761 persons went to the United States, and a further 378,532 in the period 1855-62. Home Rule and the Irish Nation, Grenfel Morton, (London, 1988), p. 12.

⁸ As early as 1861, the historian W. E. Lecky, wrote: "The impact of 'the great clearances and the vast un-aided emigration that followed the famine was the true source of the savage hatred of England that animates the great body of Irishmen on either side of the Atlantic.'" Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland, Vol. 2, W. E. Lecky, (London, 1903), p. 177.

⁹ Victorian Imperialism, Eldridge, p. 77.

For years and years the Tory Party offered the most stolid resistance to the granting of equal rights to our Roman Catholic fellow subjects; who paid the same taxes, who lived among us and obeyed the same laws. But the unjust Tory policy suggested that because they did not happen to hold the same religious opinions as the dominant part in the state, they ought to be excluded from all political rights.¹⁰

The continually, recurring insurrections and revolts had three important affects, "England became fearful, Ireland was crushed, and Europe scandalised."¹¹ For while Ireland had sufficient representation in the English Parliament, those who attended failed to represent the real needs of the Irish people. This resulted in the masses having a lack of confidence and extreme hatred for the British parliamentary system. Lawson criticised the political representational system in Ireland: "You have there a dominant church supported by the state; you have landlords almost omnipotent, and a system of boroughs, which are little better than rotten boroughs."¹² Although early franchise reforms brought improvements, it was the introduction of the Secret Ballot (1872) that made an immediate and lasting impact.¹³ The manipulation of the Ballot allowed the Irish electorate to affectively return an entirely different class of representative.¹⁴ Lawson noted that whereas the new intake may have held the respect of their fellow countrymen, many English members considered their behaviour repulsive, their language atrocious, and their manners repugnant.¹⁵

After entering Parliament in 1859, Lawson took a deep and sympathetic interest in Ireland. Although he never became a principal spokesman for Irish nationalism he developed a deep-rooted concern for Irish problems, which he considered an abuse worthy of reform, and a cause

¹⁰ Carlisle Journal, 1 October 1869.

¹¹ West Cumberland Times, 7 January 1888.

¹² Carlisle Journal, 6 November 1871.

¹³ Lawson had long predicted that Ireland in particular would benefit from the introduction of the Secret Ballot. He related many personal experiences of the unsuitability of open voting. *Ibid*, 13 September 1867.

¹⁴ In 1868, Irish voters returned 91 MPs who owned estates larger than 500 acres or valued at £500 and above. At the General Election of 1874, the numbers fell to 72 and stood at 47 in 1880. "Landlord Responses to the Irish Land War: 1879-87", L. Perry Curtis Jr, Journal of Irish Studies (Fall-Winter, 2003), p. 7.

worthy of his support. He eventually became a Home Ruler by conviction, viewing the movement as a natural development of the principle of responsible self-government, a genuine radical policy and another step in the grand Liberal programme of emancipation, an extension of democracy, and a means of assisting individual freedom. The affairs of Ireland became a subject on which he had very clear and distinct opinions; views alien to those held and expressed by many English parliamentarians. Lawson was naturally inclined towards increasing the rights of the peasantry just as most Conservatives were inclined towards defending the rights of the landlords. His desire was the amiable settlement of the Irish problem and no thought of personal or party advantage ever turned him away from his chosen course. Although the Irish contingent in Parliament abused him and in 1885 turned him out of his constituency at Parnell's behest, he never subscribed to their denunciation. Had he been an Irishman, he would, in all probability, have rebelled and acted accordingly.¹⁶ When in March 1867 Fenians began to use force as a means of advancing their cause Lawson saw the outrage as proof of the misgovernment of Ireland. His argument, since supported by modern scholarship, was that the authorities would only grant reforms in conjunction with applied political pressure and insurrection.¹⁷ He recalled the 1865 General Election, when the disestablishment of the Irish Church lay outside the range of practical politics for many liberals; and yet within two years the Fenian outrages made this a reality.¹⁸

Catholic Emancipation had passed into law through fear of revolution;
Free Trade, passed to alleviate famine in Ireland; fear of war with
America and France secured educational and ecclesiastical

¹⁵ West Cumberland Times, 24 October 1887.

¹⁶ Ibid, October 1887.

¹⁷ Carlisle Journal, 6 November 1868. This was also the opinion of Lord Salisbury who wrote in the Quarterly Review of October 1872: that recent events had convinced him that violence always produced concessions.

¹⁸ Lawson cited two instances that had startled the British authorities: The first an attempt to free one Fenian leader by blowing down the walls of the Clerkenwell House of Correction; the second, when two leading Fenians were rescued from a police van in broad daylight in the streets of Manchester.

concessions in 1845; while the systematic murder of landlords and land agents brought about the Land Act of 1870.¹⁹

Lawson produced numerous accounts of Conservative duplicity, and noted that Englishmen, particularly those with Conservative sympathies had for generations reinforced the Anglican rule using the instruments of torture and tyranny.²⁰ He wanted to treat Irishmen not as a conquered nation but as brothers holding similar freedoms and privileges to those enjoyed by Englishmen; as such he continuously strove to find ways of making Ireland content to be an equal partner in a greater nation.²¹ Unlike many nonconformist radicals he never understood why Britain endured years of trouble subjugating the Irish, instead of granting them self-determination.²² He never fudged major issues or diluted his views. In 1871 he stated:

I am very much afraid that we shall not pacify Ireland by any measure wise and just as they are. I am afraid there is a deep-seated dislike and hostility towards English rule, and I think it would be wiser to let them have a Parliament of their own. There will be a great deal of sentimental nonsense about weakening the empire and the glory of the people but I cannot see why we should hold them against their will.²³

Lawson was predicting future developments when nationalism would represent more than a demand for reform of the land tenure laws but a repudiation of the concept of society upon which the continued role of landlordism depended.

The Irish contingent in the House of Commons after the 1868 General Election comprised sixty-five Liberal members and forty Conservatives. By 1885, this situation had changed and the combined total of the two English

¹⁹ Carlisle Journal, 20 January 1871.

²⁰ Alexis De Tocqueville half a century earlier emphasised that whereas the same aristocracy had given the English one of the best Governments in the world it had given the Irish one of the most detestable ever imagined. Journey's to England and Ireland, Alexis De Tocqueville, J. P. Mayer, (ed.), (London, 1963), pp. 157-8.

²¹ West Cumberland Times, 18 March 1887.

²² Most nonconformist radicals opposed Home Rule on religious grounds holding a conspiratorial view of Catholicism. Dimensions of British Radicalism, Heyck, p. 28.

²³ Carlisle Journal, 20 January, 1871.

parties had fallen to eighteen seats, the Home Rule party holding the balance. To Lawson this was significant, he went by the voting habits of the people alone believing that a nation expressed their opinions at the ballot box. "When a nation like Ireland demanded a government to manage their own affairs, the people like Greeks and Bulgarians were equally entitled to have that privilege."²⁴ Lawson respected the loyalty held by Irish nationalist politicians towards their cause and predicted that future historians would respect their resolute unflinching union. The rise of the nationalist movement, supported by men of all classes and views, was, in Lawson's opinion due to England's incompetent administration of Ireland. He maintained that having returned a great majority in favour of self-government it was unconstitutional and inconsistent for the Imperial Parliament to ignore Ireland's demands. He considered England's failed attempts to hold Ireland as a country by force of arms an object of imperial policy. "If Britain held Ireland by force of arms for the benefit of the Irish people," he said, "why did Ireland remain one of the worlds most notorious, disaffected, discontented and disgraced countries?"²⁵ Moreover, he said, "if Britain held Ireland as a dependant colony, the enormous expenditure incurred in maintaining the presence of an alien garrison of 30,000 troops was equally apparent."²⁶ Lawson continuously and consistently opposed the application of coercive legislation in Ireland, arguing that each Government in turn appeared to prefer coercion to conciliation. His argument was that Imperialism was practically inconsistent and morally incompatible with Liberalism. Whereas Conservatives called coercion, 'resolute government', Lawson referred to the "abandonment of a constitutional Government, for which Englishmen were prepared to die."²⁷

Since Lawson was the most Cobdenite of the Cobdenites one would expect him to follow the orthodox Cobdenite perspective on Irish issues, which was that all talk of separatism or Home Rule would become redundant once the Irish land issues were resolved. In other words Ireland isn't a colony at all, it's just another region of the British Isles and if you get rid of the large

²⁴ West Cumberland Times, 8 November 1891.

²⁵ Ibid, 14 January 1882.

²⁶ Ibid, 14 January 1882. The garrison comprised 20,000 soldiers and 12,000 military police. Davitt and Irish Revolution 1846-82, T. W. Moody, (London,1981), p. 516.

²⁷ West Cumberland Times, 19 October 1887.

absentee landlords, secure the tenant class, and remove the worst excesses of land ownership and the Anglican Church, you solve the problem fuelling the Home Rule Question, damping down all talk of separation. This was Cobden expressing his thoughts in the 1840's and 1850's during a time before two well intentioned land acts had failed to pacify Ireland. However, we can never predict with any certainty the position that Cobden would have taken up in 1886 when in Gladstone's opinion Cobden would have embraced Home Rule.²⁸ The evidence is far from conclusive, for unlike Bright, Home Rule never became a serious issue in Cobden's lifetime, and Cobden always expressed his readiness to follow wherever the laws of political economy led him.²⁹ The ambiguity expressed in the texts written by Cobden in 1848 clearly identifies an uncertainty about Irish Government but this was not an exclusion of some form of Home Rule; and Cobden unlike Bright would have at least recognised that the Parnellites were Irish politicians with a purpose.³⁰ Lawson was a member of a group of Liberal activists who recognised the validity of the arguments presented by the English philosopher John Stuart Mill who saw the English and Irish land question co-joined. Mill argued that the British government had a moral duty to reform the existing land tenure in Ireland. Justice, he said, "requires that the actual cultivators should be enabled to become in Ireland what they will become in America – proprietors of the land they cultivate."³¹

The evidence suggests that Lawson supported the traditional long-running 'nationalist' argument that England always treated Ireland as a colony rather than an equal member of Great Britain, sympathising with those who argued that England treated Ireland in much the same way as Tsarist Russia treated its subordinate domains such as Poland. Indeed the Irish – Polish comparison is a long standing one in Irish historiography. Although this opinion was shared with many Irish and international observers it was and remains an open issue. Modern research is investigating the alternative opinion, the modern Irish historian Roy Foster vociferously denies this accusation and in his book Modern Ireland he chips away at the traditional

²⁸ Gladstone and the Irish Nation, J. L. Hammond, (London, 1964), p. 213.

²⁹ John Bright and the Empire, James L. Sturgis, (London, 1969), p. 122.

³⁰ Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership, Read, p. 199.

nationalist historiography. For Foster stresses themes as well as events, by concentrating on areas that have come under recent re-evaluation, thus attempting to liberate them from the Anglocentric obsessions which he believes have distorted Irish history. Lawson also appears to support the nationalist perspective on the subject of land reform.

Although recent research suggests that 'good landlords were a more prevalent figure in the Irish countryside than earlier suggested',³² Lawson appears to ignore such incidents, for he saw only those characterisations which traditionally predominate; the greedy, voracious exploiter of tenants: the rackrenters, the absentee, the evictor and the spendthrift. Although he distanced himself from the nationalist claim that 'no rent' was the only 'fair rent'; by endlessly striving to remove the disabilities against Catholics he accepted the realisation of the confiscation and as such rejected the institution of landlordism. We can explain Lawson's enthusiasm for the disestablishment of the Irish Church by referring to his adherence to nonconformity. However, as a principal English landowner it becomes more difficult to describe his support for Gladstone's two Irish Land Acts, which were an intrusion of the law upon their rights of property, a violation which offended not only Conservatives but also many Liberals and radicals.³³ Perhaps this was because Lawson came from a family of agricultural 'improvers and modernisers', who recognised and responded to the world in which their tenants inhabited; who adopted a high moral if not paternalistic role. From 1861, at considerable personal cost, Lawson's celebrated brother William ran an experimental farm³⁴ on the model of that established by Alderman Mechi at Tiptree Hall Farm, Essex in 1841. In the 1870's, in conjunction with his neighbours and his tenant farmers, Lawson sponsored the inauguration of an Agricultural Co-operative Society (1869),³⁵ and an Agricultural College (1874)³⁶ in his home town of Aspatria, the first and second institution of their kind in the country. Another example, worthy of

³¹ The Principles of Political Economy, Vol. 1, (3rd ed.), J. S. Mill, (London, 1852), pp. 398-9.

³² Land, Politics and Nationalism: A Study of the Irish Land Question, Philip Bull, (Dublin, 1996), pp. 18-19.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 18-54.

³⁴ Ten Years of Gentleman Farming, Lawson and Hunter.

³⁵ Carlisle Journal, 3 December 1869.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 23 February 1875.

mention, occurred in 1882; after his agent informed him that he had let one of his farms by auction for a ten year duration at an annual rent increase of £80 per annum, Lawson sent the outgoing tenant a cheque valued at £800 thus acknowledging the tenants' improvements.³⁷ If Lawson, as a Christian could attain the position of a 'good' landlord then he expected other landlords who were also Christians to treat their tenants accordingly, anything less would be utterly repugnant to the spirit of the age.

The Disestablishment of the Irish Church

When Lawson visited Ireland in 1868³⁸ he encountered injustices, considered by many observers as the worst in Europe.³⁹ He concluded that Ireland's suffering emanated from the Protestant ascendancy;⁴⁰ an absentee aristocracy and an alien Established Anglican Church. He singled out the Anglican Church, which although supported by only a small minority enjoyed all the privileges of a state church, and proclaimed it one of the great curses of Ireland and one of its greatest evils.⁴¹ His argument was that the union of church and state was a "sin against the principle of religious equality, a premium upon hypocrisy and a barrier against the truth."⁴² Lawson became an avowed advocate of disestablishment not only in Ireland but also throughout Great Britain, where he viewed "the established order as a symbol of oppression, a badge of conquest, and a standing insult to millions of Britons."⁴³ Furthermore he believed the Anglican Church in Ireland had failed both politically and religiously; politically, it failed to secure the Union; and

³⁷ Maryport Advertiser, 16 April 1882.

³⁸ Carlisle Journal, 6 November 1868.

³⁹ This was a recurring opinion shared by many travellers of many ages. The Frenchman Gustave de Beaumont found in Ireland the extremes of human misery, worse than the Negro in his chains. The Great Hunger, Woodham-Smith, p. 19. In a letter to The Times newspaper dated 3 December 1880, General Gordon considered the conditions under which many people lived in the West of Ireland far worse than those in Bulgaria, China, India and Anatolia. Carlisle Journal, 1 October 1869.

⁴⁰ 'Protestant Ascendancy' is a term used to describe the emergence and eventual dominance of the Anglican order, which monopolised law, politics and society in eighteenth century Ireland. Great Britain and the Irish Question, Adelman, pp. 18-9.

⁴¹ Carlisle Journal, 1 May 1868.

⁴² *Ibid*, 20 June 1873.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 1 October 1869.

religiously it tied Ireland more fully to the Catholic faith than any other country in Europe.⁴⁴ The hatred and detestation held between Catholics and Protestants was the common link between the two principal religions. Irishmen were bound to their church by cultural and political ties, such that the abandonment of their faith was not merely the renouncement of their religion but also the betrayal of their country.

During the 1868 General Election, Lawson criticised the Anglican Church, which he saw comprised of "Protestant earls, evangelical vicars, ritualistic rectors, high church doctors, and Low Church deans."⁴⁵ He had several skirmishes with his previous temperance ally the Dean of Carlisle, who, marching shoulder to shoulder with the publicans, flourished a Conservative manifesto⁴⁶ denouncing Lawson as: 'Europe's Greatest Radical'.⁴⁷ The Dean petitioned the electors to counter Lawson's triple threat towards the crown, the constitution, and the values of the church; opinions, which if adopted, would, "...desolate the Church in Ireland, desecrate its property and shake the foundations of all corporate property in England."⁴⁸ Although deeply religious, Lawson countered claims that only the State Church could house true religion. He favoured religious equality, for all sects, all creeds, and all classes, not only in Ireland, but throughout the United Kingdom.⁴⁹ He advocated disestablishment because he opposed the appropriation of national funds to perpetuate the rule of one sect in the community over another, which not only caused a grievance but taxed the people to finance the troops required to maintain that grievance.⁵⁰ He rejected the principle that the Irish Church, with its close associations to the richest elements of the community, required public funds,⁵¹ and sought a change, whereby each individual could follow his own mode of worship, and support it from his own subscription.⁵² After the Dean suggested that many Catholics

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 12 October 1869.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 16 October 1868.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 1 September 1868.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 6 November 1868.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 20 October 1868.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1 September 1868. Also Ibid, 20 June 1873.

⁵¹ Ibid, 8 September 1868.

⁵² Although only twelve per cent of the population belonged to the Anglican faith, the group contained almost the entire aristocracy and the vast majority of the upper and middle classes.

approved of their situation, Lawson challenged him to produce one Romanist favouring taxation to fund a religion, which he did not approve; and in return, he would exhibit that individual in a museum, alongside a 'Conservative working man' and donate the admission charges to his opponents' election expenses.⁵³

Lawson favoured the disestablishment of the Irish church in the belief that it would reduce political and financial privileges, and undermine state religion in the remainder of the United Kingdom. He saw the four branches of the tree bound together by a common trunk, should one fall the other three would eventually follow.⁵⁴ He once said he 'feared' Irish disestablishment would lead to a similar occurrence in England, a sentiment that brought a chorus of presumptuous approval from the 'respectables'⁵⁵ in the audience. He qualified the statement. "He had no fear of it but a certainty it would happen for he longed for the fall of the English, Scottish and Welsh equivalent."⁵⁶ The Anglican Church, he argued, had no more claim to the endowment and patronage of the state than any other sect in the country. If the privileges enjoyed by the established church were to maintain spiritual influence then they were a weakness not an asset. Unlike others he never saw the disestablishment question in Ireland as simply a religious question. The Anglican Church was in every respect a political church instituted by a foreign and conquering power.⁵⁷ There was, he said, no more religion in the State Church than there was in the dissenting bodies. He emphasised that once they freed the Anglican Church from the clutches of treacherous politicians (a reference to Toryism), who sought power and patronage for self gratification, Protestantism would emerge stronger and more powerful. Writing in the 1830's, Cobden had also hinted that Protestantism would be stronger in Ireland after disestablishment.

The disestablishment of the Irish church in 1869 appeared to herald a new British willingness to grapple with some of the more fundamental causes

⁵³ Carlisle Journal, 16 October 1868.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 17 November 1868.

⁵⁵ Those whom Lawson termed 'respectables' were "those who professed Liberal principles in ordinary times, but who always found some reason for not acting upon them, when they would be of any value." Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 137.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 80.

⁵⁷ Carlisle Journal, 8 September 1868.

of Irish disaffection, and once passed became one of the great landmarks in British history. In retrospect, it was an obvious injustice; the 1861 census records an Irish population of 5,750,000; of which 4,500,000 accepted the Catholic faith.⁵⁸ Lawson rejoiced at the decision. By choosing to fight the election on Irish issues, Gladstone had “breathed life into the dry bones of the Liberal Party, giving it a creed, a policy, a leader and a future.”⁵⁹

Gladstone constructed his Church Bill around the twin principles of disestablishment and disendowment; and through sheer perseverance severed the link binding the Church and State in Ireland, forever. The bill had three dramatic affects; it finally abandoned the tithes previously paid to the established church by the entire population regardless of their faith; the Church of Ireland became a separate voluntary organisation; and the crown no longer appointed four Irish Anglican Bishops to sit in the House of Lords. They partly resolved the disendowment of the Church property by awarding a series of grants to fund pensions for redundant clergy, poor relief, and education in the secular bodies.⁶⁰ They also offered 8,000 tenants living on church lands grants to purchase their holdings thus setting a precedent which would eventually be seen as the primary solution to Ireland’s land problems.

Gladstone’s Irish Land Acts

Well intentioned as the acts of emancipation and disestablishment were they could not pacify Ireland; arguments surrounding the ownership of land remained paramount. The land problem was more critical in Ireland because of the lack of industry to absorb the overflow of rural people. Lawson acknowledged the serious objections concerning land ownership and land legislation, which dated back to the jurisdiction of Oliver Cromwell (1653-8),

⁵⁸ Great Britain and the Irish Question, Adelman, p. 76.

⁵⁹ Lawson was referring to the passing of the long fruitless premiership of Lord Palmerston, when reforms were the idle fancies of the faithful. Carlisle Journal, 12 November 1869.

⁶⁰ The Church became a voluntary body in 1871, with its holdings and property vested in a body of Commissioners. A large proportion of the estimated value possibly £10,000,000 was paid out in compensation; the remainder about £13,000,000 went to fund poor relief, education and agriculture. Capital sums were also made over to the Presbyterian and Catholic Churches to replace the *regium donum* and the Maynooth College grant. Modern Ireland, Foster, p. 396.

when in 1869, Lawson advised his Liberal colleagues to introduce a Land Bill to oppose landlord tyranny in Ireland, and “to provide that men shall have security for enjoying the fruits of their labour.”⁶¹ As he reminded his constituents, “for three hundred years the strong have trampled over the weak in Ireland, under the protection of unscrupulous legislation.”⁶² Ireland was a plantation imposed upon the country and its people;⁶³ by the orders of various English sovereigns and governments, and just as the Irish Church had failed to enforce Protestantism the Irish land system had failed to colonise the island with English and Scottish settlers.

Ireland could trace the majority of her miseries to the occupation and ownership of land, a system aided by successive Protestant conquest, colonisation, rebellions, confiscations, and punitive legislation.⁶⁴ Furthermore, by 1870, eighty per cent of Ireland’s population depended upon the land to carve out a living, of which a significant proportion remained in the hands of habitual absentee landlords, who held possession as an alien force of intruders.⁶⁵ The statute books contained numerous Acts designed to strengthen the powers of the Irish landlord but few to protect his counterpart the Irish peasant. The typical Irish landlord rarely improved the land or repaired the buildings and related property; and invariably spent his income outside Ireland.⁶⁶ He was, in Lawson’s view, “a consumer of rent, a reaper who did not sow, and a person who obtained the benefit of the tenant’s enterprise, without giving retrospective remuneration.”⁶⁷ Lawson emphasised that whereas the English tenant had standing in the community, his Irish counterpart was a helpless victim of an oppressive system, with no law of compensation and no legal redress against eviction.⁶⁸ Many unscrupulous

⁶¹ Carlisle Journal, 12 November 1869.

⁶² Ibid, 1 May 1868.

⁶³ A History of our Times: From the Accession of Queen Victoria to the General Election of 1880, Vol. 4, Justin MacCarthy, (London, 1908), p. 281.

⁶⁴ The Great Hunger, Woodham-Smith, p. 20.

⁶⁵ The Report of the Devonshire Commission, published a few months before the outbreak of the 1845 famine recognized these facts but did not address them.

⁶⁶ Of the total rental, almost £10,000,000 extracted annually by the landlords, not more than one eighth can be credited to their investment, care, enterprise, or superintendence. Davitt and Irish Revolution, Moody, p. 516.

⁶⁷ Carlisle Journal, 20 June 1873.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 12 November 1869.

landlords and their agents abused their superior status and evicted their tenants on the merest pretext.

Gladstone's first Irish Land bill (1870) served both as a vindication of the demands made in the past and a justification for the course embarked upon by Irish nationalist leaders.⁶⁹ It was a complex measure⁷⁰ with economic, legal, political and social implications, designed to overthrow many of the doctrines of the landlord's absolute and unlimited right.⁷¹ It strove to establish a more equitable relationship between the landlord and his tenant, and offered parity with Ulster, where tenant-right prevailed.⁷² Thus reversing the existing assumption of the law by presuming that all improvements were the property of the tenant, leaving the landlord to prove the contrary, and allow payment in compensation for improvements. The Government also offered attractive loans to tenants who wished to purchase their holdings.⁷³ Although it did not prevent evictions it endeavoured to protect every tenant turned off his land and strove to make eviction more difficult to enact.⁷⁴ Insofar as improving tenants were not the kind of tenants who were evicted, the bill was partly ineffective.

Although Lawson's contribution to the parliamentary land debates was minimal, he continuously supported Gladstone in the divisions and he was verbally active outside Westminster. It was, he said, "evictions and the intensity of such evictions that lay at the heart of the Irish problem."⁷⁵ Notwithstanding his social status as one of Cumberland's principal

⁶⁹ Land, Politics and Nationalism, Bull, pp. 18-58.

⁷⁰ Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland 1880-92: A Study in Conservative Unionism, L. P. Curtis, (Princeton, 1963), p. 6.

⁷¹ The bill was also highly controversial with resignations anticipated in a Cabinet of landowners opposed to restrictions of property rights.

⁷² The custom went back to the O'Doherty's rebellion in 1608, when James the First instigated a Protestant colonisation project, which became known as the 'plantation of Ulster'. Economic Thought and the Irish Question 1817-1870, R. D. Collinson Black, (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 6-7. The principle allowed a tenant to remain in undisturbed possession of his holding on the understanding that he paid his rent; and offered him the right to compensation for unexhausted improvements; and also the freedom to sell the good-will of his farm for a fair market price. A History of Our Times, Vol. 4, Maccarthy, pp. 278-9.

⁷³ Tenants who wished to buy their holdings had to provide one third of the purchase price, the state provided the remaining two thirds, repayable at 5 per cent over 35 years. Its affects were minimal, only 877 tenants bought their farms as very few tenants had the necessary capital.

⁷⁴ The House of Lords diluted the bill and demanded that tenants provide proof that their failure to pay rent was a result of a bad harvest thus allowing evictions to continue for non-payment of rent.

⁷⁵ Hansard, vol. 308, col. 732, 27 August 1886.

landowners,⁷⁶ he unequivocally supported the legislation which although the reforms fell a long way short of his expectations it was both right in principle and detail.⁷⁷ He rejected Lord Palmerston's famous dictum that tenant-right was landlord wrong,⁷⁸ declaring, "I think landlords and tenants ought to be put on an equal footing in terms of legislation; the landlord should not have any legislative privileges giving him advantages over his tenants."⁷⁹

The bill, which Lawson believed was only adopted after Irishmen began to shoot their landlords,⁸⁰ received the royal assent on 1 August 1870. Gladstone may have hacked away at the second branch of the upas tree of Protestant ascendancy but the roots and limbs remained intact.⁸¹ Dramatic as it first appeared the bill was too modest and Gladstone had to re-introduce coercion in 1871.⁸²

In his 1880 election address, Disraeli put Ireland on the political agenda, describing Home Rule as an idea destructive of the power and prosperity of the United Kingdom.⁸³ Within days the Home Rule Confederation issued an election circular, urging Irish voters to "vote against Disraeli as you should vote against the moral enemy of your country and your race."⁸⁴ When elected, the new Parliament comprised 347 Liberals, 240 Conservatives, and 65 Irish Nationalists, of whom 35 supported Parnell, 26 the moderate William Shaw, while 4 remained unattached.⁸⁵ After six years of

⁷⁶ Lawson was listed in the official returns of landowners for Cumberland, as the owner of 7,388 acres, with a gross estimated rent roll of £8,349. Lawson, Luke, p. 158.

⁷⁷ Carlisle Journal, 20 January 1871.

⁷⁸ Modern Ireland, Foster, p. 380.

⁷⁹ Carlisle Journal, 17 November 1868.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 20 January 1871.

⁸¹ At Wigan in 1868, Gladstone used the simile of a Upas tree, (a poisonous Javanese tree, which destroyed all life in its vicinity,) to describe the three evil branches of Protestant ascendancy. In Ireland; the Church of Ireland, the land of Ireland, and the education of Ireland. Times, 24 October 1868. Gladstone 1809-74, H. C. G. Matthew, (Oxford, 1991), p. 147.

⁸² For a tenant to claim Ulster custom rights he had to prove his case in a court of law. Compensation may have been a 'tax' to deter evictions but the landlords retained the upper hand, they could raise the rents and evict without penalty. The measure failed to protect the tenant from rent increases and security of tenure; two important considerations, which impacted upon the aggravation that accompanied the approaching agricultural depression.

⁸³ On 8 March 1880, Lord Beaconsfield, launched his historic indictment of the whole Irish movement in his famous electioneering manifesto addressed to the Duke of Marlborough, the then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, Michael Davitt, (London, 1904), pp. 229-30.

⁸⁴ Times, 12 March 1880.

⁸⁵ Home Rule and the Irish Nation, Morton, p. 23.

Conservative imperialism, Ireland remained in a desperate condition with many outstanding economic and social abuses requiring redress; with this in mind and without pressure from his constituents, Lawson reconfirmed his pledge to support an inquiry into Home Rule.⁸⁶ Ireland now dominated domestic affairs, such that legislation directed towards the control of land in Ireland consumed almost the entire sessions of 1880 and 1881.⁸⁷

Gladstone's first Irish Land Bill had attempted to offer certain rights of protection by recognising a certain ownership on the part of the tenant. Unfortunately an agricultural depression exposed the inadequacies of the bill, aggravated tenant insecurity and again brought tenants and landlords into direct confrontation. In 1877 the number of families evicted totalled 463; in 1878, 960; in 1879, 1,238; and in 1880, 2,110.⁸⁸ In response Gladstone tried to introduce emergency measures in the form of a Compensation for Disturbances Bill designed to protect tenants in arrears who could show that their failure to pay rent had resulted from a bad harvest. Had this passed into law it might have greatly pacified Ireland by meeting the most urgent grievances but it was rejected by the House of Lords who termed it a 'Bill of Confiscation', leaving those distressed tenants fearing eviction, with little alternative but to join forces with Michael Davitt's emerging and destructive Irish National Land League (1879-82) a body which co-ordinated local tenant associations and incorporated radical and Fenian elements previously absent in tenant agitation.⁸⁹

Gladstone fell between two stools; the House of Lords had prevented him from fulfilling the minimum demands of the Land League, while the actions of the Land League would not allow him to satisfy the minimum demands of the Lords. While the landlords cried confiscation the Land-League screamed, 'No Rent'. In 1878, the various elements of the nationalist

⁸⁶ Dimensions of British Radicalism, Heyck, p. 50.

⁸⁷ Unlike England, industrialisation made little impact upon the structure of Ireland. Excluding the four north-easterly counties situated in the province of Ulster, the vast majority of the people remained attached to the land, which they sought to reclaim from their absent English landlords.

⁸⁸ Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 155.

⁸⁹ The Land League was an organisation formed in 1879 by Michael Davitt and John Devoy, funded by disillusioned expatriates in America and Australia, whose principle aim was to challenge 'landlordism' and the forces of law and order that supported it. Davitt and Irish Revolution, Moody, p. 121.

movement combined⁹⁰ under the presidency of Charles Stuart Parnell,⁹¹ and throughout that autumn continually irritated English rule by inventing the 'Boycott', which they applied with surgical precision to all subsequent incitements.⁹² Gladstone had continuously opposed the reintroduction of coercion; however, after a Dublin court released a group of Fenian's the hawks in his Cabinet had their way.⁹³ On the second reading of the Person and Property Bill, the First Coercion Bill (February 1881), which empowered the Irish executive to arrest and imprison without trial any person reasonably suspected of treasonable practices, the opponents numbered fifty-six, of whom seven were mainland radicals; on the third reading forty-six, of whom five were mainland radicals. On the second reading of the Peace Preservation Bill, the Second Coercion Bill (March 1881), prohibiting the possession of arms in proclaimed districts, empowering government to search suspects and houses, and restricting the sale of arms, the opponents numbered thirty-seven and on the third reading twenty-eight.⁹⁴ Lawson condemned these measures because he considered it morally wrong and impractical for the Executive to have power in so wide an area to incarcerate people for an indefinite period of time on the flimsiest evidence.⁹⁵ If coercive legislation were necessary, it should be preceded, or at least accompanied by redress of acknowledged grievance. Coercion was maintained by Foster with

⁹⁰ This informal alliance of Parnell, Davitt and Devoy was often referred to as the 'New Departure'. The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923, J. C. Beckett, (London, 1966), p. 386.

⁹¹ Charles Stuart Parnell (1846-91), leader of the Irish Home Rule Party, elected to Parliament for the Meath constituency in 1875 and for Cork in 1880. Parnell believed that his class, the Anglo-Irish Protestant gentry, had a crucial role to play in the solution of the Irish question and that in a Home Rule Ireland they would remain the national governing class. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 42, pp. 815-827.

⁹² In response to his policy of forcing evictions, the community in Lough Mask, County Mayo, outlawed Lord Erne's English agent, Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott, (1832-1897), whose name thereafter became a lasting household name. The organised ostracism of those who offended against the Land League was a much more effective protection to the tenants than those violent methods applied in the past and resulted in fewer evictions. *Ibid*, Vol. 7, pp. 21-22.

⁹³ In the Cabinet, Gladstone strongly opposed coercion; however he had to give way because even Bright and Chamberlain failed to support him. After Thirty Years, Gladstone, p. 269.

⁹⁴ Irish obstructionism reached its peak in January 1881 during the time that W. E. Foster introduced his Coercion bill into Parliament. It was during a debate on this bill that the Speaker first applied the 'Closure' after the House had been in continuous session for forty-six hours. Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923, Beckett, p. 390.

⁹⁵ Others in the group included Joseph Cowen, Henry Labouchers and Charles Bradlaugh. Dilke also opposed coercion and would have resigned his Government office had he successfully persuaded Chamberlain or Bright. Dimensions of British Radicalism, Heyck, p. 65.

energy, determination, and distaste; he prescribed the Land League and imprisoning Parnell and thirteen of his confederates in Kilmainham gaol. By February 1882, the Government held more than one thousand Irishmen without trial.⁹⁶

In April 1881, Gladstone introduced his second Land Bill, and after four turbulent months of fierce argument succeeded in forcing it through the upper chamber but not without serious implications. By rejecting the clauses relating to the relief of distress, which provided for compensation for disturbances, the Lords aggravated the principal cause of distress and disorder. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the great Irish Land Act, which followed the recommendation of the Bessborough Commission,⁹⁷ created a system of 'dual ownership' and secured the famous three F's for the Irish tenant farmer; Fair Rent, a guarantee of Fixtity of Tenure, and Free Sale of the interests of their holdings.⁹⁸ It also created a supervening authority, the Land Commission, with its own courts, a body which effectively deprived the landlords of their traditional right to determine the rent of their non leasehold farms.⁹⁹ Although it fulfilled the hope of generations of moderate land-reformers and justified the fears of die-hard defenders of the right of property, the act of 1881, like that of 1870, came too late to satisfy the heightened expectations of Irish public opinion.

Since Lawson welcomed any proposal designed to remove grievances by assimilating the laws of Ireland to the laws of England he supported the measure. Notwithstanding his deep-rooted sympathies he refused to give outright support to the pleas of the Land League, which advocated the compulsory conversion of all tenants into owners, and the abolition of landlordism, which he considered a 'dishonest cry'. His argument was that

⁹⁶ Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 252.

⁹⁷ Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870. (Bessborough Commission). The committee was headed by the Earl of Bessborough, an Irish landlord distinguished as a cricketer, author and amateur actor, and comprising an able and broadly based membership, the commission set forth in its report an analysis of the issues at stake in Irish land tenure which was lucid, comprehensive and penetrating. Land, Politics and Nationalism, Bull, pp. 18-58.

⁹⁸ Between the years 1846 and 1868, John Stuart Mill, recognised that the real problem was to improve Ireland for its tenants. Principle of Political Economy, J. S. Mill, (London, 1848). England and Ireland, J. S. Mill, (London, 1868).

since landlords had loaned their investment they deserved a fair reward in return.¹⁰⁰ Lawson's idea of the term 'fair', although not defined, was somewhat removed from that of government spokesmen, or indeed the later interpretation given by the historian L. P. Curtis.¹⁰¹

In 1882 Lawson became preoccupied with Egyptian affairs, and throughout the remainder of that Parliament gave sparse attention to Irish problems. He did however, recognise the culprit. He believed that the 'obstinacy and dishonesty' of the House of Lords had provoked anarchy.¹⁰² To counter tenant gains, the Lords inaugurated a committee to inquire into the workings of the Land Act. The committee's findings recommended a scheme of land purchase, correctly identified by Lawson as "a scheme stimulated by the landlords to further self interests."¹⁰³ Although committed to a peasant proprietary in Ireland, Lawson disliked most Land Purchase bills;¹⁰⁴ he did not object to the principle, but considered the proposed compensation unduly favourable to the Irish landlords and the financial obligations a burden on the British taxpayer. His argument was that any system, which made the British taxpayer the landlords of Ireland was both corrupt and a swindle. Since Lawson was out of Parliament in early 1886, he took no part in the debate surrounding Gladstone's Land Purchase Bill, which became an essential element in the settlement of Home Rule. Although ill at ease Lawson later defended the proposed legislation because it was not detached but contained within the context of a general settlement. In 1890, Lawson opposed Balfour's Land Purchase Bill.¹⁰⁵ His argument was that the British Government, instead of governing Ireland on behalf of the people had long sponsored government

⁹⁹ In the short run the so called judicial rents handed down by the Land Courts reduced the rents by an average of twenty percent. "Landlord Responses to the Irish Land War, 1879-87", Curtis, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ West Cumberland Times, 17 January 1891.

¹⁰¹ "Landlord Responses to the Irish Land War, 1879-87", Curtis, p. 6..

¹⁰² West Cumberland Times, 11 December 1883.

¹⁰³ The 1881 Land act was slightly more generous than its predecessor. It offered tenants three-quarters of the purchase price with the same length of time to repay and the same rate of interest (5%). However, only 731 families took up the option.

¹⁰⁴ Gladstone strongly disliked the expensive form of Land Purchase recommended by the Ashborne Act of 1885. According to Matthews, Gladstone did not disagree with those like Lawson, who considered the bill a 'gigantic bribe'. Gladstone 1874-1898, Matthews, pp. 244-7

¹⁰⁵ In 1891, Balfour introduced the Balfour Act, aimed to ameliorate suffering in the 'congested districts', under which £33,000,000 was advanced for land purchase, and tenants were again lent the whole of the purchase price over 49 years at 4%. Although thousands of tenants took

of the landlords by the landlords for the landlords; and for generations had long abused their power for personal advantage. He believed that since landlords could no longer extract satisfactory levies by letting the land, their allies the Conservatives had established a system which involved the state in the position of a land jobber who paid high prices.¹⁰⁶

Lawson and Home Rule

The Irish Fenians¹⁰⁷ had long called for a separate Irish Parliament, shared by Protestant and Catholic alike but little happened until May 1870 when Isaac Butt, the protestant lawyer, freemason and former Orangeman launched the Irish Home Government Association¹⁰⁸ and the broader Home Rule League three years later.¹⁰⁹ This ill-disciplined conventional association was a broad alliance of Irish Protestants, Irish liberals and moderate nationalists; enveloping the nobility, gentry and the wealthy middle classes. The movement reasserted 'the inalienable right of the Irish people to self-government and declared that the restoration of an Irish parliament was essential to the peace and prosperity of Ireland'.¹¹⁰ Gradually the character of the movement changed, anti-imperialist concerns replaced imperialist philosophy and as Protestants withdrew an articulate form of nationalism filled the vacuum, Catholic in character and supported by the majority of Irishmen. In 1874, Butt introduced the subject of Home Rule into the Commons and in consequence began the long debate relating to the need to restructure the

up the offer, the landlords were reluctant to sell because the government paid them in land bonds which fluctuated in value.

¹⁰⁶ Hansard, vol. 369, cols. 153-4, 27 November 1889.

¹⁰⁷ Fenians belonged to a secret revolutionary organisation established in Ireland in 1858, under the name of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, organised in the United States, the movement was committed to the overthrow of British power and the establishment of an independent Irish republic.

¹⁰⁸ The Home Government Association was formed to secure the establishment of a federal system, under which an Irish Parliament would look after Irish affairs, leaving to the parliament at Westminster, in which Ireland would still be represented, responsibility for all questions affecting the imperial crown and government. Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923, Beckett, p. 378.

¹⁰⁹ According to the recollections of Michael Davitt, the genus of the Home Rule agitation was twofold, influence of the amnesty movement on behalf of the Fenian's and dissatisfaction by a section of the Irish loyalists against the imperial Parliament for the disestablishment of the Irish State Church. Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, Davitt, p. 85.

government of both the United Kingdom and the empire at large. Although Butt spoke well in a lively debate he failed to introduce any distinct or practical scheme, which the League was prepared to advocate. The only change he foresaw was to take some of the duties relating to Irish business from the Imperial Assembly and discharge them to another.¹¹¹ Unfortunately Butt failed to explain what these duties would comprise; a point emphasised by Lawson, who urged the advocates to promote a distinct and practical scheme which they all agreed upon.¹¹² For the next three years, Butt moved his motions favouring a federal United Kingdom, in a proper conciliatory and constitutional manner, trying to convince the English by logical argument that Home Rule would grant justice to Ireland and simultaneously relieve the workload of the House of Commons.¹¹³

Since Lawson always sought the success of his cause rather than the convenience of his party, he acted independently of the Liberal leadership and to a large extent, said what he liked and voted accordingly. He made his opening parliamentary speech in support of Irish Home Rule on 24 April 1877, during a debate initiated by Butt's successor, William Shaw. Shaw sought the inauguration of a parliamentary Select Committee to enquire into nationalists' demands for the restoration of their Parliament, with power to control the internal affairs of Ireland.¹¹⁴ Only one English representative spoke in favour of the resolution, while four others gave it their approval.¹¹⁵ It is probable, said the Times that their example will not be followed in the future.¹¹⁶ The lone contributor was Sir Wilfrid Lawson, who acknowledged the far-reaching consequences of an unresolved Irish question. Without pressure from his constituents,¹¹⁷ Lawson offered his support in the hope that it would

¹¹⁰ Davitt and Irish Revolution, Moody, p. 121.

¹¹¹ Hansard, vol. 220, col. 708, 29 June 1874.

¹¹² Ibid, vol. 233, col. 1808, 24 April 1877.

¹¹³ Butt spelled out his ideas in Home Government for Ireland, Irish Feudalism: its Meaning, its Objects, and its Hopes, Isaac Butt, (Dublin, 1870).

¹¹⁴ Hansard, vol. 233, col. 1742, 24 April 1877.

¹¹⁵ The four were Jacob Bright (Manchester) who had spoken in favour of the motion in the previous year, Joseph Cowen (Newcastle upon Tyne), Peter Rylands (Warrington) and Thomas Burt the miners' representative from Morpeth; the latter like Lawson would vote in every Division against coercion.

¹¹⁶ Times, 25 April 1877.

¹¹⁷ When approached by an Irish group during the 1874 election, Lawson refused to pledge his support for any inquiry into Home Rule, although he did vote in favour whenever the subject was introduced. Dimensions of British Radicalism, Heyck, pp. 24-5.

encourage the nationalists to submit a bill as the most expedient way of disposing of the unsatisfactory state of politics in Ireland.¹¹⁸ A public enquiry would be emphasised, achieve two objectives. It would allow Parliament to gain a greater understanding of the nature and character of the Irish grievance; and it would allow the Irish party to advance their long-term aims.

Lawson insisted that Britain treat Ireland fairly on principles of justice and equality. His argument was that since social and cultural misunderstandings were the root cause of strife between the two nations, Parliament should adopt any course that was right; however exceptional, if there was the slightest chance of formulating a solution.¹¹⁹ Although he recognised the exasperation of the Irish people, he denounced their continual whinge relating to 'centuries of oppression', which he argued had little to do with contemporary government. Lawson advised the nationalists to "establish a Government which would protect life and property and pass equal laws and rights, even though that Government might emanate from the same race that half a century earlier had tarred and feathered their forebears."¹²⁰ If Home Rule had no foundation, the committee would reject it, alternatively if they found genuine grievances, which he believed they would, then a proper hearing would inevitably define the problem. Lawson emphasised that he spoke not as an acknowledged Home Ruler but as a person striving to improve the union by introducing some form of federal system, which would blend the different portions of the Empire into one harmonious whole."¹²¹ He favoured the retention of the concept of a Greater Britain; and sought to introduce some sense and stability into the debate as a means of preventing the promotion of extreme measures. Since Lawson did not see Ireland in a state of veiled rebellion, he rejected Disraeli's claim that in times of war a self-governing Ireland would pose a strategic threat to England's security.¹²² Other English critics of Conservative policy in Ireland did not share Lawson's optimism. The radical MP for Brighton, Henry Fawcett, opposed the Home

¹¹⁸ The Commons rejected the request by 417 votes to 67. Hansard, vol. 233, col. 1846, 24 April 1877.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., col. 1808.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 1866.

¹²² Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 293. Hansard, vol. 233, cols. 1753-65, 24 April 1877.

Rule Confederation; because he believed the nationalists were intimidating liberals into accepting Home Rule.¹²³ Hartington also spoke against the measure¹²⁴ while W. E. Forster expressed a preference to repeal the union rather than accept Home Rule.¹²⁵ The unpopularity of the motion prompted the Annual Register to record: "That in almost every borough in Great Britain more is to be lost than to be gained by professing to regard as an open question the dismemberment of the United Kingdom."¹²⁶

Although the aforementioned concerns represented Lawson's first parliamentary foray into the political affairs of Ireland, the social injustices remained paramount. Governments, he said, might govern but people elected Governments.

I propose that this meeting enters its emphatic protest against the Coercion Bill, which the Government has introduced in Parliament for the restriction of popular rights and liberties in Ireland. And is of opinion that the present conditions in Ireland do not call for such exceptional legislation, but rather they introduce a large measure of self-government in harmony with the demands of the great majority of Irish people.¹²⁷

In 1882, he gave an indication of the distance a British government might have to travel to settle the Irish question.

In the past the Tories have tried coercion; while the Liberals have tried reforms, certain improvements in the land laws, abolishing the Irish Church, and Catholic emancipation. This Liberal Government are currently trying both policies, passing not only a strong coercion bill, but

¹²³ Earlier that year the Vice president and Hon. Secretary of the Home Rule Confederation published an authoritative declaration initiating a threat and intimidation to the whole Liberal party of England and Scotland, distinctly stating that in fifty of their largest towns the Irish vote would be given 'solid' whenever there was a Conservative minority. Hansard, vol 233, col. 1803, 24 April 1877.

¹²⁴ Ibid, cols. 1836-40.

¹²⁵ Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 157. Hansard, vol. 233, cols. 1753-65, 24 April 1877.

¹²⁶ The Annual Register: A Public Review of Events at Home and Abroad for the Year 1878, Author not named, (London, 1878), p. 56.

also a land bill, giving the tenant security for his property and possessions; and yet things do not look much better than before. We have not done with the Irish question and you will have to make up your minds before long what to do with it. It is impossible to say what we shall not be prepared to do before many years and months are over.¹²⁸

The historian Gary Pleating emphasises that. "Before Gladstone's conversion in 1885, the number of British Home Rulers was generally recognized to have been infinitesimal."¹²⁹ If correct, Lawson's response in 1877 places him in a very unique position and closely aligns him to the British positivist movement. Although not an adherent to the Positivism of Auguste Comte and independent of the associated philosophical dogma, Lawson shared many of the group's attributes. In his opinion Ireland had a moral right to Home Rule. According to Pleating, Positivism shared two main theatres of political activity, labour and imperial questions.¹³⁰ Although not a champion of the Trade Union movement, Lawson, who regularly addressed meetings at Mechanics Institutes and Working Men's Clubs, was not indifferent to their aims.¹³¹ He always supported genuine and bona fide organizations and constantly argued that every workman had a duty to himself and his family to combine wherever necessary to extract from his employer the maximum benefits in exchange for his labour.¹³² Furthermore as early as 1868 Lawson was campaigning to obtain legal protection for trade union funds.¹³³ Lawson's anti-imperialist concerns are well documented. He favoured a peaceful dismemberment of the British Empire, he was a friend of peace, an advocate of economy, international arbitration, and strove to increase the social and moral ideals of the working classes; opinions favourably compared to those of

¹²⁷ West Cumberland Times, 10 April 1887.

¹²⁸ West Cumberland Times, 14 January 1882.

¹²⁹ British Opinion and Irish Self-government 1865-1925: From Unionism to Liberal Commonwealth, Gary Pleating, (Dublin, 2001), p. 15.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹³¹ In 1868 Lawson met a delegation of Trade Unionist in Carlisle. During their discussions the union sought clarifications of Lawson's opinions regarding several issues. Lawson's views were basically in line with their demands. Carlisle Journal, 17, October 1868.

¹³² West Cumberland Times, 20 June 1892.

¹³³ Carlisle Journal, 1 September 1868.

the most outspoken English radical. Lawson believed that Irish independence was in the interest of the British people, in the sense that it would free domestic government and promote better relations with other states. However, whereas he shared the Positivists dream of a foreign policy designed to encourage a European federation of democratic republics, he would not sacrifice his preference for peace and non-interventionist Cobdenism.¹³⁴

Obstructionism

Butt's ineffectiveness and inevitable failure to win significant concessions from the imperial Parliament created a new phase in Irish politics, with the emergence of a new breed of republican obstructionist, led by Charles Stewart Parnell, and the exuberant patriot MP for Cavan, Joseph Gillis Biggar. These two naturally individualistic politicians shared a carefree attitude towards the law and the constitution, henceforth the Irish parliamentary party existed for their own interests, regardless of the interests of Britain as a whole.¹³⁵ Parnell, the more intellectual and forthright of the two, emphasised his determination to fight the matter out to its bitter conclusion. Initially he employed parliamentary procedure as an antidote to force and violence. If the Irish could not have their own Parliament in Dublin they would hold it in Westminster.¹³⁶ Lawson described Biggar, as honest and single-minded, utterly wanting in tact, deficient in taste and holding a limited power of speech. At first, Lawson looked upon this new breed of nationalist as partly senseless, partly evil-minded and altogether a nuisance. Notwithstanding these assumptions the application of their tactics left a lasting impression and forced him to recognise that "with shrewdness and perseverance, they were working for the interest of their country."¹³⁷ By July 1877, obstruction¹³⁸ had

¹³⁴ British Peace Movement, Laity, p. 41.

¹³⁵ West Cumberland Times, 17 January 1891.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 7 January 1888.

¹³⁷ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 126-7.

¹³⁸ Obstruction meant the deliberate abuse of procedure for the purpose of holding up business. This was most effectively pursued in committee, where each member held the right to make repeated motions for reporting progress. It was not until 1877 that obstructionists

become an everyday part of political life, practised with coolness and precision, such that all night sittings became regular parliamentary occurrences.¹³⁹ Day after day, using notices of amendment, motions of adjournment, and organised delay, Irish members exposed the inadequacies of the procedural rules of the House of Commons. Lawson described those all night sittings as 'hideous and horrible performances', as trials of brute strength and endurance.

Most of the speeches made little sense, the majority of those in attendance sat in a stupor, either fully or half-asleep, leaving only a few of the militant minority alert and ready to come to the fore and repeat the performance of the previous orators. Moreover, as the clerks and attendants relapsed into a deep slumber, the Speaker made strenuous efforts to stay awake.¹⁴⁰

Lawson's rhyme described the condition of an assembly, overpowered by the nightmare of obstruction.

"Oh! Parnell Mavoureen! Oh Biggar go bragh!

"Oh! Parnell Mavoureen! Oh Biggar go bragh!
It's the pride and the joy of your country you are!
Sustained by O'Donnell and mighty O'Gorman,
You have broken the might of both Saxon and Norman.

"A light o'er thee darkness of Erin now breaks,
You have bullied the Speaker and trampled on Raikes,
And the House, dispossessed of its pride and its vigor,

made their technique really affective. Obstruction was not entirely new; but in the past it had been employed only to hold up particular measures about which minority groups felt very strongly. Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923, Beckett, p. 383.

¹³⁹ On one occasion, Irish members forced a sitting in the House of Commons that kept the members embroiled in debate for over twenty-six hours. The memorable 'long' sitting began at four o'clock on Tuesday, 31 July and lasted until six on the following evening. Times, 2 August 1877.

¹⁴⁰ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 125-6.

Lies low at the feet of its Parnell and its Biggar.

"Oh! Parnell Mavoureen! Oh Biggar go brag!
The noblest your country as sent us so far;
Through the lobby you march with a conquerors stride
When you've summoned your host to the cry of 'Divide'.

"Yes! We feel at length the Celt's wrongs are revenged,
And years of oppression by you are avenged,
But, Parnell Mavoureen! Oh Biggar go brag!
While proudly you ride upon victory's car,
Let Mercy beside 'mid your virtues appear,
And think of the state you have brought us to hear.

"The Speaker, exhausted grows daily more sad,
And Raikes, as you see, is almost driven mad.
Sclater-Booth in his figure is visibly shrinking,
And two or three Members have taken to drinking

"Oh! Keep us not here in this terrible weather,
While the Grouse-cocks are calling us off to the heather,
While the yacht, with its sails flapping out to the breeze,
Invite us away to the smooth summer seas.

"The clerks at the table look languid and wan,
Gloom sits on the face of the noble Lord John,
The wig of Sir Erskine is turning to grey.
Sweet Biggar--kind Parnell--please let us away."¹⁴¹

Thus began a growing impatience with Irish questions. Irish manners in the House of Commons, Irish crimes in Ireland, and Irish plots in the English towns exasperated English opinion. Many parliamentarians despised these

disruptive tactics and supported the reintroduction of ancient dictatorial precedents to outlaw the practice. Although Lawson deplored the parliamentary disruption, he opposed the introduction of the 'closure' resolution in January 1881, which he saw as a personal threat to representative government and the independent member. By 1887, he was beginning to see some advantages in the procedure.

If the House was compelled to forge a weapon to be used by the Tories in promoting tyranny and oppression (the closure), that weapon would remain a precedent; and in the days that were to come Liberals would apply that weapon to a far more nobler purpose, namely the purpose of promoting measures of freedom and progress.¹⁴²

Gladstone's First Home Rule Bill

By 1885 Parnell had achieved unchallenged supremacy, having presided over a successful campaign for land reform in Ireland, controlled extremism while benefiting politically from it, and forced Home Rule on to the agenda of the Liberal party.¹⁴³ That year, Parnell was approached by Joseph Chamberlain with a proposal to inaugurate elective county boards coordinated by a central board in Dublin.¹⁴⁴ Although this offered a measure of self-government it fell far short of the desired Irish Parliament. Parnell was later approached by Lord Randolph Churchill, who acting independently, suggested that should nationalists oppose the Liberal budget an incoming Conservative administration would not renew coercion.¹⁴⁵ On 8 June 1885 the Government was defeated by 264 to 252 votes after Irish members supported

¹⁴¹ A Diary of Two Parliaments, Vol. 1, Disraeli's Parliament, H. W. Lucy, (London, 1985), p. 300.

¹⁴² Hansard, vol. 315, col. 1624, 10 June 1887.

¹⁴³ Modern Ireland, Foster, p. 400.

¹⁴⁴ Chamberlain envisaged that the Board would have control over such affairs as land laws, elementary education, the poor laws and public works. The central board composed of members elected by the county boards would have no judicial functions but would supplant most of the administrative departments in Dublin Castle. Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, p. 18.

an amendment opposing the rise in spirit duties; thus allowing a reluctant Lord Salisbury to form a minority administration. As many as 76 Liberals including several radicals failed to record their vote. Lawson disapproved of these abstentions: "How strange it is, that one man should have caught a cold, that another should have missed a train, that a third should have got wet outside, and that a fourth, was unaware that a division was taking place."¹⁴⁶

On 7 July 1885, amidst a chorus of Irish condemnation, Lawson moved a motion censuring the newly installed Conservative Government, which was ruling a Commons with a significant in-built Liberal majority. For the majority to keep a minority party in power from whom it professed to differ was he declared, not only undesirable but made representative institutions a farce.¹⁴⁷ Contrary to Gladstone's advice,¹⁴⁸ Lawson, with the support of only three radicals tried to impede the Government; it was, he said, "an evil to be a Tory, and it was a greater evil for a Tory Government to have the welfare of the country in their hands."¹⁴⁹ Lawson defended his right to move the motion by reminding the ministry that "it was the spirit interests and the policies of the Radical teetotaler that had inspired the defeat of the outgoing Government."¹⁵⁰

After honouring their pledge to repeal the coercion legislation, the new Conservative Cabinet introduced the Ashbourne Land Act, the first really effective state-assisted land purchase scheme.¹⁵¹ In the meantime, Lord

¹⁴⁵ Churchill made non renewal of coercion one of the two conditions of his accepting the Indian office. Lord Randolph Churchill, Vol. 1, W. L. S. Churchill, (London, 1906), pp. 390-1.

¹⁴⁶ Lawson was referring to the fact that as many as twelve radicals had deliberately abstained from the division. Dimensions of British Radicalism, Heyck, p. 104. Hansard, vol. 298, col. 1883, 7 July 1885.

¹⁴⁷ Hansard, vol. 298, col. 1883, 7 July 1885.

¹⁴⁸ Lord Salisbury had reluctantly agreed to form a ministry, on the condition that the Liberals gave definite guarantees that they would not impede the ordinary business of Parliament before the dissolution. Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, pp. 28-30.

¹⁴⁹ Hansard, vol. 298, col. 1882, 7 July 1885.

¹⁵⁰ The two points raised by Hicks Beach in his fatal motion were, first the increased duty on beer and spirits, without a corresponding increase on wine; and, second, the increase of the duty on real property while no relief was given on rates. Life of Gladstone, Vol. 2, Morley, p. 330.

¹⁵¹ In July 1885 the Conservative Lord Chancellor of Ireland introduced a Land Purchase bill into the House of Lords that advanced £5,000,000 to fund cheap loans to Irish farmers who wished to purchase their land. They were allowed to borrow the whole sum and repay it over 49 years at 4% interest. The terms were so attractive that the Government had to increase the sum allotted over the next few years. 25,000 tenants took up the offer, which in turn created a new class of small landowner in Ireland. However, the act was not compulsory; the landlord was not obliged to sell.

Carnarvon, the Lord Lieutenant to Ireland, held several clandestine meetings with Parnell. On 21 November 1885, with the General Election in progress, Parnell ordered his countrymen to vote conservative,¹⁵² publishing a manifesto calling upon Irishmen to vote against: "The men who coerced Ireland, deluged Egypt with blood, menaced religious liberty in the schools, freedom of speech in Parliament, and generally promised the country a repetition of the crimes and follies of the last Liberal administration."¹⁵³ There were four exceptions, Henry Labouchere, Joseph Cowen, T. C. Thompson and S. Storey.¹⁵⁴ The directive was particularly harsh on Lawson, whose new constituency comprised a significant Irish contingent.¹⁵⁵ The affairs of Ireland were one subject on which Lawson had consistently shown the greatest independence such that his conduct in the Commons when voting for Irish matters had regularly annoyed his constituents.¹⁵⁶ Orange Cumberland had long despised him as the champion of Irish Liberal ideas, now Irish 'nationalist' Cumberland coerced by Catholic priests voted solidly against him.¹⁵⁷ On 5 December 1885, Lawson lost the election by ten votes, in what he described as a broad coalition of Home Rulers, Protestant loyalists, fair traders, Local Optionists,¹⁵⁸ and military interventionists.¹⁵⁹ Lawson would look back with amazement at this extraordinary event. He had laboured intensely to secure, an extended franchise for working men, for Irishmen to

¹⁵² Parnell, who was particularly annoyed by Gladstone's refusal to commit himself, hoped that the move would make the Liberals equally dependent on his support in the Commons. Caernarvon's behaviour however had led him to anticipate a major concession from the Conservatives if they received a majority at the election. Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, p. 62.

¹⁵³ Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, pp. 425-6.

¹⁵⁴ Henry Labouchere and the Empire, Hind, p. 100.

¹⁵⁵ There were above 500 Irish votes in Lawson's West Cumberland Constituency. This influence was overlooked in Heyck's assessment; he failed to list Lawson among those who lost their seat through Irish voting influence. Dimensions of British Radicalism, Heyck, pp. 111-12.

¹⁵⁶ Maryport Advertiser, 11 September 1885.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 6 December 1885.

¹⁵⁸ Since Lawson was the president of the United Kingdom Alliance, one of the strongest parliamentary pressure groups, it seems difficult to believe that members of that body would play a part in his dismissal but we must remember that whereas many Conservative voters were also affiliated to the temperance movement they had on this occasion been given the choice of a Conservative temperance candidate.

¹⁵⁹ Lawson's fate followed the nine pre 1885 Liberal constituencies in Ulster, in what Morley described as: "Orangemen and Catholics; the men who cried damnation to King William and the men who cried 'To hell with the Pope', joining hands together against them." Life of Gladstone, Vol. 2, John Moreley, (London, 1908), p. 369

receive Home Rule, and for the Temperance party to secure the local veto, only for such a combination to unseat him.¹⁶⁰

Gladstone having failed to free his party from dependence upon the Irish party could no longer obscure the extent to which he had already moved towards accepting Home Rule. When Parliament reconvened the Liberal majority over the Conservatives totalled eighty-six;¹⁶¹ the exact number that Parnell claimed as solid Home Rulers.¹⁶² Although Parnell had rightly recognised that the Conservatives carried more influence with the landlords and through their control of the House of Lords were more able to settle the land question satisfactorily he had committed a grave error. In reality, he could only realise his ambitions from a Liberal administration. Gladstone's desire was for an agreed bipartisan solution to the problem, and as such he did not challenge the Conservative - Parnellite alliance; although, through the mediation of Parnell's mistress Kitty O'Shea, he began secret negotiations with the nationalists.

Gladstone reviewed his position inherited through a force of circumstances and contemplated three alternative strategies. One, to retire from the field and leave the problem to a younger man; two, to adopt the timesaving policy of coercion; three, to make an appeal to the British electorate on behalf of Ireland. He chose the latter, Ireland for the Irish, and paid dearly for the consequences. On 15 December 1885, Gladstone's son Herbert flew the 'Hawarden Kite' and in front of a startled press broke the news of his father's conversion to Home Rule.¹⁶³ The well-intentioned intervention alleged that if returned to office, his father would deal with Irish demands in a Liberal spirit.¹⁶⁴ Although Gladstone claimed the statement was out of context and not an accurate portrayal of his views, he neither confirmed

¹⁶⁰ West Cumberland Times, 13 July 1892.

¹⁶¹ The 1885 General Election produced eighty-five Irish Home Rule MPs including seventeen of the thirty-three in Ulster, and one for the Scotland division of Liverpool, T. P. O'Connor who held the seat until 1929. Irish Liberals disappeared altogether, and Irish Conservatives were practically restricted to the north-east and the Trinity College representative. Modern Ireland, Foster, pp. 416-17.

¹⁶² The effectiveness of Parnell's manifesto continues to cause controversy, contemporary politicians including Lord Salisbury and John Morley, reckoned that the mainland Irish vote was worth between twenty-five and forty seats. The Irish Question: 1840-1921, Nicholas Mansberg, (London, 1968), p. 143.

¹⁶³ As Curtis explains there was no sudden conversion on Gladstone's part but the product of many years reflection. Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, pp. 69-71.

nor denied the accusations. The Conservatives immediately reneged on their alliance with Parnell, leaving Gladstone and Parnell to develop a new understanding. Although critics always accused the advocates of Home Rule of sponsoring separation, it was not part of the nationalist manifesto, which simply demanded devolution of control over Irish affairs to a 'Home Rule' parliament in Dublin. Lawson had long accepted that some limited form of separation was necessary as a practical expedient to rid the Imperial Parliament of the inherent Irish problem.¹⁶⁵

When Parliament reconvened on 12 January 1886, Lawson remained in the South of France, recuperating from his debilitating illness, viewing the proceedings through postal correspondence and English newspapers. However, before Lord Salisbury could re-introduce a new act of coercion into Ireland he was defeated on an unconnected allotment amendment, commonly referred to as 'Three acres and a cow'. Although Gladstone carried the amendment by 79 votes, with 74 Parnellites voting in the majority, 18 Liberals, including Hartington and Goschen voted to save the government, while 76 abstained.¹⁶⁶ On 28 January, Salisbury resigned and two days later Gladstone formed what later became known as his first Home Rule government. Unfortunately, he could not carry his own party. Hartington and Goschen declined all ministerial offers. Sir Henry James, refused the Lord Chancellorship,¹⁶⁷ and although Chamberlain and Sir George Trevelyan accepted Cabinet positions they both resigned when the proposed Home Rule bill came before the Cabinet.¹⁶⁸ From January to July 1886 the struggle over Home Rule was fought out in the Liberal party, in the Commons, and in the country.

¹⁶⁴ After Thirty Years, Gladstone, pp. 312-13.

¹⁶⁵ West Cumberland Times, 24 October 1887.

¹⁶⁶ Hansard, vol. 302, cols 525-29, 26 January 1886.

¹⁶⁷ According to Herbert Gladstone, Sir Henry James was in agreement with the Prime Minister in relationship to Home Rule, but had been bitterly attacked by the nationalists at the election and had answered back in words which he could not repudiate. After Thirty Years, Gladstone, p. 289.

¹⁶⁸ In a speech at Warrington on 8 September 1885, Chamberlain had flatly rejected Home Rule on a number of contentious grounds. Times, 9 September 1885. Chamberlain raised four major objections. He wanted to keep the Irish representation at Westminster; to keep in British hands the control of customs and excise, and the appointment of judges and magistrates, and to specify the things that an Irish government might do instead of specifying the powers and duties that were withheld. The Irish Question: 1840-1921, Mansberg, p. 163. Trevelyan

On 8 April, Gladstone introduced the first Home Rule bill into the Commons. The debate which lasted sixteen nights set out to establish an Irish Parliament in Dublin, with powers of legislation and control over all matters except 'reserved subjects'.¹⁶⁹ Notwithstanding the bills modest undertakings a major argument arose after Parliament learned that Irish members would not attend Westminster unless summoned for special reasons, particularly those relating to Home Rule. Unlike many radicals, Lawson shared his leader's optimism. In his opinion coercion was unsustainable as a permanent system of governing Ireland, leaving Home Rule as the only practical long-term solution. By supporting Home Rule, he hoped to support unity, agreement, harmony and cooperation. He was, he said, striving to replace the chains of slavery with the links of love;¹⁷⁰ and reminded cynics of Britain's past attitude towards self-governing colonies, particularly those in North America, where an aggressive policy brought about a war and a lasting division between England and the thirteen colonies, in contrast to Canada, where concessions of self-government strengthened the moral bonds of the Empire and maintained peace without separation.

Early in the proceedings Chamberlain met with a large group of wavering Liberals where he recited a curious letter written by John Bright, in which the aging, once-radical, now conservative announced that although he intended to vote against the bill he advised others to abstain.¹⁷¹ Although Bright raised no parliamentary objection he published a condemnatory article, which caused considerable damage. Lawson was appalled at the treacherous behaviour of a large body of men of his acquaintance, whom he described as 'matter of course' Gladstonian's. He was particularly annoyed with Bright, whom he long considered unreasonably devoted to Gladstone. "Why," he said, "no sooner did Gladstone crystallise into legislating on the principles of liberty, of which Bright was the noblest and grandest champion than he went

disapproved of Ireland gaining control of the police. Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 483.

¹⁶⁹ These related to the crown, peace and war, the defence forces, foreign and colonial relations, custom and excise, trade, post office, coinage and legal tender.

¹⁷⁰ West Cumberland Times, 30 November 1887.

¹⁷¹ The Life of John Bright, George Macauley Trevelyan, (London, 1913), pp. 454-5.

bitterly against him.”¹⁷² “It was,” said Lawson, “owing to his (Bright’s) glorious teaching of former days, in the light of which I myself walked, that I am the strong Home Ruler that I am.”¹⁷³ He reminded Bright of a statement he made in 1864, when Bright declared that the English “owe it to Ireland to make such amends as we can for an amount of neglect, cruelty and injustice committed in the past. Such as I think no civilised or Christian nation has ever inflicted on another Christian nation.”¹⁷⁴ In his criticism, Lawson was referring to the Bright of the 1850’s and 60’s and choosing to ignore the Bright of the 1870’s and 80’s, the Bright who loathed Parnell, describing him, as a mountebank profiting from Ireland’s misfortunes.¹⁷⁵ The Bright, who upon hearing in 1872, that he was being named in Ireland as an advocate of separation, issued a public denial asserting that dual Parliaments in Dublin and Westminster would be an intolerable mischief.¹⁷⁶ Davitt also made the same mistake, when, in a political address at Mourne Abbey, he described Bright as far in advance of every other English statesman on the Irish Land question.¹⁷⁷ Bright, whom the Times once described as the tried and trusted friend of Ireland,¹⁷⁸ soon lost all perspective, and his old Irish sympathies, so creditable to his past, were extinguished by what seemed to him the base ingratitude of the Irish party.¹⁷⁹ To Bright, nationalists were rebels whose main objective was the break-up of the United Kingdom, and unlike Lawson he could not accept that after the introduction of the ballot that the Irish members were the true representatives of the Irish people. In his opinion, if granted: “The Irish Parliament would be constantly struggling to burst the bars of the statutory cage in which it is sought to confine it.”¹⁸⁰ Bright’s concerns correspond with the one recurring argument put forward by the critics of Home Rule; the argument that Ireland would use any such institutions to extort greater concessions and ultimately

¹⁷² When a few days later, Lawson met Bright in the Reform Club, Bright described Gladstone’s decision as thus: “It looks to me as if Gladstone had looked at the eighty Irish members and said, I’ll buy them!” Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 185

¹⁷³ West Cumberland Times, 24 October 1887.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 9 November 1887.

¹⁷⁵ John Bright and the Empire, Sturgis, pp. 118-178.

¹⁷⁶ Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership, Read, p. 197.

¹⁷⁷ Davitt and Irish Revolution, Moody, p. 430.

¹⁷⁸ In October 1866, Bright attended a banquet at a Rotunda in Dublin where the Chairman The O’Donogue welcomed Bright in such a manner. Times, 31 October 1866.

¹⁷⁹ Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 213.

¹⁸⁰ The Diaries of John Bright, R. J. A. Walling (ed.), (New York, 1931), pp. 536-7.

complete independence. Notwithstanding these difficulties Lawson felt no personal resentment towards Bright.¹⁸¹

In the early hours of 8 June, Gladstone's pleas, to think "not for the moment, but for the years that are to come, before you reject this bill"¹⁸² went unheeded, first by the House of Commons, and secondly by the country at large.¹⁸³ In July Gladstone and Parnell, fought a united front in a highly controversial and contentious General Election. Lawson later described the proceedings as a time when, "John Bull became frightened by words he could not understand, believing, that a vote for Gladstone was a vote for 'disintegration',¹⁸⁴ and "John Bull would be hanged rather than disintegrated!"¹⁸⁵ Disintegration became a splendid Conservative cry, a sentiment Lawson later corrupted to enhance what became known as the Liberal 'Manchester programme'.¹⁸⁶

The Liberal party are going to disintegrate the hereditary legislation that has so long cursed the country. They are going to disintegrate the licensing magistrates, who filled the country with misery and crime. They are going to disintegrate the political priesthood, the strongest allies of the Tory party. They are going to disintegrate that great military caste, which lived upon the hard earnings of the people. They are

¹⁸¹ At Bright's funeral, held at Rochdale in 1889, Lawson offered an appropriate eulogy. "My admiration and affection for him was so great, much so that I feel any comments of mine on his life and character might be thought to come from a prejudicial source." Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, p. 199.

¹⁸² Life of Gladstone, Vol. 2, Morley, p. 435.

¹⁸³ In the division, the combined forces of the opposition defeated the bill on its second reading by 343 votes to 313, with some 93 Liberals, including 32 radicals voting in the majority. The Division List, Hansard, vol. 306, cols 1240-45, 7 June 1886. A later analysis of the popular vote shows that public opinion was more evenly balanced than the range of votes suggest. Three fifths of the Scottish members and five sixths of the Welsh members actually supported Gladstone. Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 472. For a greater understanding of radical support throughout the country see Dimensions of British Radicalism, Heyck, pp. 144-5.

¹⁸⁴ Disintegration was the title of an article written by Lord Salisbury in 1883 for the Quarterly Review, in which he warned against the illusion that Home Rule was compatible with imperial integrity. "Disintegration", Quarterly Review, Lord Salisbury, October 1883, Vol. 156, No 312, pp. 559-95

¹⁸⁵ West Cumberland Times, 20 June 1892.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 7 December 1889. For further information see The National Liberal Federation, Twelfth Annual Report 1889.

going to disintegrate Irish tyranny, and they are going to disintegrate unequal taxation.¹⁸⁷

Lawson opposed Conservative methods of preserving the integrity of the Empire, which he sought to preserve by granting Ireland a separate Parliament, with Great Britain and Ireland remaining under the same crown¹⁸⁸ He did not strive to promote a union between “the ‘conqueror and the conquered’, or the oppressor with the oppressed, or the master with the slave but to promote the real union of England and Ireland.”¹⁸⁹ He did not measure the integrity of the Empire by its territorial magnitude, or in the number of men of heterogeneous views who lived under its rule, or by its wealth. To Lawson, the integrity of the Empire consisted in the union of hearts, and in those common interests and affections which bound men together. His argument was that a small and contented Empire was better than a large and populous one afflicted with the canker of chronic disaffection.¹⁹⁰

The Liberal Party Schism

By opposing Irish Home Rule the Conservative party gained strength; in contrast to a Liberal party schism. On 14 May 1886, a meeting took place in Devonshire House, which came to symbolise a permanent feature of British politics; when Whigs led by Lord Hartington, combined with the thirty-two followers of Chamberlain’s National Radical Union to create a new party, known as the Liberal Unionist Association; described by Lawson as:

A political creature that combined all that was least desirable in the Liberals with all that was most objectionable in the Tories. He could not sit amongst the Tories and he could not vote with the Liberals. He was

¹⁸⁷ West Cumberland Times, 10 December 1889.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 20 June 1892.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 10 February 1888.

¹⁹⁰ Hansard, vol. 233, col. 1811, 24 April 1877.

like the amphibious animal described by the showman, that could not live on land and died in the water.¹⁹¹

The Unionists saw Home Rule endangering the Union, the Irish Protestant minority and the Empire. In Lawson's opinion their proposed policy of coercion and corruption,¹⁹² endorsed the idea that the only way to govern Ireland was with a thick stick in one hand and a heavy purse in the other.¹⁹³

Notwithstanding Lawson's political creed of reform, reform and more reform, he willingly conformed to Gladstone's request to defer all domestic reforms as an expedient to solve the overriding Irish problems. Lawson viewed politics not as the art of governing by one moderate and cautious expedient after another, but the art of reconstructing by one bold reform after another. He now saw Home Rule as an obstacle blocking the way leading to all outstanding measures; the call for religious liberty; the advancement of an international peace policy; the demand for one man one vote; the reform of the hereditary system; and radical changes to the licensing laws, were all deeper concerns.¹⁹⁴ The removal of Irish Questions from British politics became the principal reason why he embraced Home Rule. He compared the Irish incubus with a wrecked car, blocking the road leading to home reforms and urged the electorate to help Gladstone remove the obstacle.¹⁹⁵ Lawson predicted that the dam restraining the tide of Irish democracy would breach.¹⁹⁶ "The Tories were ramming in clay" he cried, "in a vain attempt to stem the overflowing, but once breached, the raging torrents would flush away the wrongs and abuses, and usher in a new revitalised golden age of reform."¹⁹⁷

The Conservatives, Lawson argued had chosen to resist the will of the vast majority of the Irish nation and to achieve these aims had enlisted the

¹⁹¹ West Cumberland Times, 10 November 1891.

¹⁹² Lawson was using the word corruption as a substitute for conciliation. One example of his concerns was the introduction of the Crimes Bill into the House of Commons, which the Government timed to coincide with the introduction of the Land Bill into the House of Lords, thus hoping to bribe the Opposition into curtailing their obstruction of the Coercion Bill. Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, pp. 338-9.

¹⁹³ Hansard, vol. 331, col. 561, 29 November 1888.

¹⁹⁴ West Cumberland Times, 7 January 1888.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 25 June 1892.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 9 November 1887.

support of a new breed of Liberal dissenter. The pact between the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists which began in 1886 brought about an agreement between the two parties; whereby Conservatives agreed not to challenge Liberal dissenters. Since all of the parties predominantly contested that election on the issue of Home Rule, this agreement had a profound affect upon voting patterns.

On 20 July 1886, Gladstone received the public's unequivocal response, highlighting the lack of national support for his policy. When Parliament reconvened the new contingent comprised 316 Conservatives, 78 Liberal Unionists, 191 Liberal Home Ruler's and 85 Irish nationalists, signalling the return of Lord Salisbury with a solid majority over the Liberal-Parnellite alliance of 118 seats. Eighty-five of the one hundred and three Irish parliamentary representatives demanded Home Rule; the remainder belonged to the ascendancy party, whose very name, Lawson said, stuck in the nostrils of the great mass of the Irish people.¹⁹⁸ In twenty-eight of the thirty-two Irish counties a majority favoured Home Rule. In the remaining four, situated in the northeast province of Ulster, with Belfast as their provisional capital, the majority demanded the retention of the status quo. Lawson's solution was to offer those four counties the right to form a small community and likewise manage their own affairs.¹⁹⁹ The problem was this minority rejected Home Rule outright; their argument was that Home Rule offered Roman Catholics an opportunity to persecute Protestants. Lawson despised sectarianism almost as much as he despised alcohol and war,²⁰⁰ and long argued that if tyranny existed in Ireland, it was on behalf of this minority, an argument somewhat endorsed by the voting habits of the predominant Catholic electorate who elected Protestants to public office, without reciprocation.²⁰¹

The Liberal party schism destroyed the traditional two party British system of government and ushered in a realignment of the various

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 7 February 1890.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 17 January 1891.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 24 July 1893.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 20 December 1891.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 18 July 1892.

groupings,²⁰² comprised of orthodox Liberals, Irish nationalists, hybrid Liberals and orthodox Conservatives.²⁰³ Lawson was appalled at the outcome of the second Parliament elected on an expanded franchise.²⁰⁴ "The most reactionary, most oppressive, and most pig-headed Tory Government; aided by a group containing many leading Liberals, who when combined represented the greatest threat to human freedom in the United Kingdom."²⁰⁵

In Lawson's opinion the turncoats had become the reactionary radical opposition and had placed Britain under the yoke of a Conservative administration. He cared little for their names,

Liberal Unionists, Dissenting Liberals, Hartingtonians, Chamberlainites, Old Whigs, Randolphians, Tory democrats, Conservatives, Constitutionalists, Ruling Councillors, Knight Harbingers, Union Jacks and Union Jackasses; they were all out and out Tories.²⁰⁶

He culled from the dictionary a plethora of epithets and hurled them towards his adversaries, calling them Conservative converts, Salisbury satellites and Brummagen bandits.²⁰⁷ He gave many whimsical descriptions of the leading dissidents, describing Lord Hartington as "an honourable erect and manly foe, a straightforward man, who had tried all his life to become a Liberal and never thoroughly succeeded."²⁰⁸ Describing Chamberlain as a 'bitter, brilliant, biting antagonist', who after choking on coercion would return to the fold?²⁰⁹

As to the reconciliation of Chamberlain, Lawson had just cause for optimism. During the first few months of 1887, a series of sporadic meetings took place with a view to reconciliation. However, these 'Round Table'

²⁰² Hansard, vol. 308, col. 735, 27 August 1886.

²⁰³ Ibid, vol. 316, col. 365, 16 June 1887.

²⁰⁴ In 1893, Balfour stated that although the majority in Ireland were greater in number they were inferior in practical knowledge and experience. "You the wealthy, the orderly, the industrious, the enterprising portion of Ireland are to supply the money for that part of Ireland which is less orderly, less industrious, less enterprising and less law abiding." Modern Ireland, Foster, pp. 420-21.

²⁰⁵ West Cumberland Times, 5 November 1887.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 7 January 1888.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 10 July 1887.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 9 November 1887.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 9 November 1887.

conferences failed to fulfil early expectations.²¹⁰ The question relating to Chamberlain's sincerity in attending these talks is open to conjecture. He for his part entertained no great hope of reconciliation; seeing Gladstonian Liberalism coming more and more under the influence of 'anarchists, separatists and wild spirits of the left'. As he explained to his son Austen

I think that matters are coming to a crisis here. Gladstone is becoming more sectional & more irreconcilable & I do not want to reunite with a party—or faction—controlled by Labouchere, Lawson, Conybeare & Co. I see the possibility of a strong Central Party, which may be master of the situation after Mr Gladstone goes.²¹¹

Chamberlain now became the darling of the Unionist party; he made his peace with property and with the church, and was now the colleague of Salisbury, Hartington and Goschen, the three men he had despised the most in 1885.²¹²

Lawson returned to Westminster in the election of 1886, one of the few 'Home Rulers' to capture a Conservative seat; converting a minority of ten into a majority of over one thousand.²¹³ Upon his re-entry into the Commons he found the Liberal party permanently scarred. The new Ministry was pure Conservative flanked by Liberal defectors, who ironically continued to sit on the opposition benches. The Liberal Unionists support had become indispensable to the second Salisbury ministry.

²¹⁰ The Round Table Conferences met three times in early 1887, attended by Chamberlain, Trevelyan, John Morley, Sir William Harcourt and a Liberal Barrister named Farrer Herchell. Joseph Chamberlain and Liberal Reunion. The Round Table Conference of 1887, Michael Hurst, (Toronto, 1967).

²¹¹ Radical Joe: A Life of Joseph Chamberlain, Denis Judd, (London, 1977), p. 159.

²¹² Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 494.

²¹³ A study of the returns shows that only two other constituencies succeeded in turning out a sitting Tory member and replacing him with a Liberal. West Cumberland Times, 10 June 1887

As an inveterate enemy of coercion, Lawson reminded those Liberal supporters of coercion in Ireland that through their actions “every rag and remnant of Liberalism would be torn from them and they would stand before the country naked and deformed as Tories.”²¹⁴ In his opinion the combination of the words, liberal and coercion were anathema, which could never co-exist, like a “white negro, an honest thief, a sober drunkard or a truthful liar.”²¹⁵ Speaking as an independent member, he believed that a true Liberal should act conscientiously and forgo personal gain.

A true Liberal would rather sit indefinitely in the cold shades of opposition, or wander in the wilderness of discomfiture, or have poured upon his head the torrent of jibes and jeers, which worldly wisdom always pours on those whom it calls the people who are in the miserable minority. The true Liberal would rather endure all that than abandon for one moment those principles that are the very lifeblood of Liberalism, and without which those who profess Liberalism are only professing a mockery, a delusion and a snare. The Liberal party is, or ought to be, nothing other than an instrument, for promoting the freedom and the happiness of the country. In Ireland we have failed to carry out the principles of promoting freedom and happiness. On the contrary, it has been our system for many generations, to prevent the good and promote the bad and because of this all the trouble and confusion has arisen.²¹⁶

Ireland now became the principal question of the day. From Lawson's viewpoint, the policy of coercion had three phases. The first aimed to restore power and confidence to the Irish landlords; the second, inflicted harsh measures, which systematically encouraged disorderly reprisals and alienated

²¹⁴ Hansard, vol. 315, col. 1069, 27 June 1887.

²¹⁵ West Cumberland Times, 10 July 1887.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 10 June 1887.

the sympathy of a large section of the English public; the third, curtailed all forms of domestic reforms.

You (the workingmen) should be just to Ireland simply because it is right. Remember this, that if you don't do justice to Ireland you will suffer for it. No nation can do wrong with impunity; and be sure of this, as certain as I am standing here, the Tory party strikes at you and your liberties through the Irish people.²¹⁷

His argument was that the Liberal party was not fighting solely on behalf of the Irish people; there were other far-reaching, overriding considerations. To him the heart of the democratic system was at stake, for when they eventually settled the Irish question:

Then tremble ye potentates, ye Primroses²¹⁸ and peers, ye councillors and knights harbingers, ye comic singers and Tory democrats. (Laughter.) For when that question is settled on the grounds of justice, the day of democrats without an adjective, (laughter and cheers) the day, not of Tory, but of real democrats will have arrived. (Cheers.) The aristocrats have had their day. They have elected to fight in the last ditch, the Irish question, and in this last ditch, they will politically die. The ridding of the Irish question is like a man ridding his body of a bad tooth that has for years and years destroyed his health, impaired his indigestion and made him lead a miserable life. Get rid of this question and almost immediately the Parliament of the people will be restored to life, health, vitality and vigour. (Cheers.)²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Ibid, 24 October 1887.

²¹⁸ The Primrose League became a vital part of the Conservative machinery in the fight against Home Rule. During the period 1886-92 the number of knights, dames and associate members jumped from some fifteen thousand to over one million. Habitations or local associations sprang up in Ireland attracting merchants, manufacturers, and members of the professional classes. The Primrose League 1883-1906, J. H. Robb, (Columbia, 1942), p. 57.

²¹⁹ West Cumberland Times, 30 November 1887.

On 27 August 1886, Parnell moved a motion seeking concessions connected to Irish land issues.²²⁰ After Chamberlain, who appeared to share Parnell's concerns declared his opposition to all ameliorative measures, Lawson intervened, offering his support to a man who nine months earlier had directed the electorate of West Cumberland to vote against him.²²¹ It was ludicrous, Lawson said, that Parliament should allow Chamberlain one hour to abuse his fellow colleagues while restraining the subjects of that abuse from responding to the accusations.

He (Chamberlain) may be the autocrat of Her Majesty's Government but he is not the autocrat of this House. Are the men who have been returned by Tory votes to influence the conduct of Liberal members? I hope not, Sir; they may say what they like; they may sit where they like; but they are Tories pure and simple. They are advertising Tory doctrines; they are supporting a Tory policy; and they are the great supporters of the Tory Government. The right honourable gentleman the member for West Birmingham (Joseph Chamberlain) says that he supports Her Majesties Government. He either does not mean what he says, or he is going to support a policy, which, he himself says is most mischievous, and will be most disastrous to the country. He has told us it would be one of the most unjust measures that could possibly be conceived, to make up by public money the loss to the Irish landlords. Certainly he (Chamberlain) has taken very extraordinary courses lately. One hardly knows where to find him. He is like a farm servant I heard of the other day, who did very extraordinary things. One day the farmer in whose service he worked went into a barn and found the man had

²²⁰ Firstly, Parnell drew attention to the heavy fall in the price of agricultural produce and its probable affect upon the ability of the Irish tenant farmer to pay his rent.²²⁰ Secondly, he predicted that numerous evictions would follow causing wide-spread suffering and endangering the maintenance of social order. Thirdly, he asked Parliament to deprecate any attempt to transfer the envisaged losses of the landowners of Ireland to the taxpayers of Great Britain and Ireland by any extension of state assisted purchase, which was based upon rents fixed when prices were high. Hansard, vol. 308, col. 732, 27 August 1886.

²²¹ Ibid.

hanged himself! Looking at him with astonishment the farmer said, I wonder what that man will do next.²²²

As Parnell predicted, an unusually bad harvest brought great hardship and corresponding demands for rent reductions.²²³ The failure of Parnell's request to admit leaseholders to the safeguards provided in the 1881 Irish Land Act propelled many of the poorer families into the arms of bailiffs,²²⁴ provoking John Dillon, and William O'Brien, two prominent members of the National League to re-ignite the embers of the agitation through the 'Plan of Campaign' (1886-89).²²⁵ An organisation which imposed specific rent levels on selected estates. Notwithstanding Lawson's social status as a landowner, he did not oppose the campaign, which he considered legal and morally justified.

The Conservative Government reacted consistently and relentlessly, entrusting the act of restoring the law to Lord Salisbury's nephew, Arthur James Balfour, who planned to kill Home Rule by applying the well-worn policy of coercion and conciliation. Balfour struck at the symptoms and suppressed those who perpetrated violations, and only after that battle was won would he consider granting concessions to win the hearts of the mass of the Irish people.²²⁶ The enactment of the former was strongly opposed by English radicals, who continuously referred to the Chief Secretary as 'Bloody Balfour',²²⁷ the epitome of everything cruel and tyrannical.

Lawson emphasised that the discontent emanated from Conservative party policies, whose principles had fullest expression in Ireland. His argument was that the Conservatives had "gone through an entire session

²²² Ibid, col. 734. Heyck gives an interesting explanation of Chamberlain's psychological make-up in respect to Irish issues. Dimensions of British Radicalism, Heyck, pp. 147-50.

²²³ On 20 September 1886, Parnell lost his Tenants Relief Bill, which he described as an expedient to relieve the tenantry during an emergency. The bills defeat offered the nationalists a good excuse to revive the land wars. Hansard, vol. 309, cols 1032-1247, 20 September 1886.

²²⁴ Ibid, cols 984-1000.

²²⁵ The Plan of Campaign was a scheme whereby tenants were encouraged to act as a body, and, to offer the landlord a reduced rent. If the landlord refused to accept the offer, they paid the unaccepted offer into a fund for the benefit of the evicted. The funds thus collected would be spent on promoting the scheme and subsidising evicted tenants. For details of the plan's origins and aims see Parnell and His Party, C. C. O'Brien, (Oxford, 1957), pp. 201-06. Also John Dillon: A Biography, F. S. Lyons, (London, 1968), Chapter 4, pp. 82-113.

²²⁶ Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, p. 332.

doing little more than making people believe that they wished to do something.”²²⁸

The Tories persist in trying to govern Ireland by brute force, as England has tried to do for over seven hundred years. The Liberal party on the other hand now believe they can attach Ireland to Great Britain by the ties of self-interest and goodwill. The weapons of the Tory party are the bludgeon and the rifle in the hands of Lord Salisbury. The weapons of the Liberal party are reason and justice from the lips of Gladstone.²²⁹

Lawson pledged to support Home Rule whatever the outcome.

Even if the authorities prove beyond any doubt, that the Irish members are murderers, moonlighters, and assassins. Even if it transpires that all the opponents of Home Rule are angels, archangels or knight-errants of the Primrose League.²³⁰

Unlike Lord Salisbury, Lawson accepted the concept of an Irish nation.²³¹

When they see an Irishman, the Tories grind him down, bullet, oppress, suppress, prosecute and persecute him. If he demands from a public platform the right to manage his own affairs, the authorities imprison him, shave his head and feed him on a diet of bread and water. If he takes up arms, they shoot him, and if, as a Member of Parliament, he continues with his protest, they ‘closure’ him.²³²

In a stirring address to his constituents, Lawson questioned Britain’s methods of governing Ireland: “should it be by the ballot of the people or by the bullets

²²⁷ The term became a popular sobriquet after the police massacre of nationalists demonstrating at Mitchelstown against the Crimes act. Ibid, pp. 197-202. Also Balfour: A Political Biography, Sidney H. Zebel, (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 60-77.

²²⁸ Hansard, vol. 315, col. 1065, 24 May 1887.

²²⁹ West Cumberland Times, 7 January 1888.

²³⁰ Ibid, 20 July 1887.

²³¹ Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, p. 406.

²³² West Cumberland Times, 9 November 1887.

of English soldiers; by conciliation or by coercion; by concessions to Irish demands or by the expulsion of Irish members from the House of Commons.”²³³ He also accused the Government of holding innate and unreasonable prejudices against the practicalities of Home Rule.

What is the Government doing now? It is bringing in a bill (coercion) to make prisoners of the Irish members, bankrupt the Irish farmers, and make slaves of the Irish people. While this is going on there will be no reforms in England. Everything is obstructed; the local Government bill, and the disestablishment of the Welsh church. Not a day or even an hour can be spared for discussing other questions only Irish affairs. This Irish policy and obstructive English policy are supported by Tories, Liberal Coercionists, Orange Men and Primrose Dames, bonded together by the common ties of maintaining stagnation in the body of politics.²³⁴

When Lawson opposed the introduction of the Crimes Bill in June 1887,²³⁵ he referred to the Government's intransigence and their large majority; Parliament he said, could have saved twelve nights of meaningless debate had they simply legislated that henceforth they would administer Ireland at the will and pleasure of the Lord Lieutenant.²³⁶ His concerns bore some credibility for the measure swiftly passed through both Houses, receiving the royal assent on 18 July.

On 27 June, Lawson reconfirmed his commitment to Home Rule, when he accused the Government of relinquishing power to the whims of an ascendancy party, who aided by an army of occupation continued to rule Ireland through force and fear. He acknowledged Conservative criticism: previous Liberal Governments had indeed introduced coercion into Ireland but

²³³ Ibid, 7 January 1888.

²³⁴ Ibid, 20 July 1887.

²³⁵ The bill, probably the most severe in the long line of repressive acts by which Britain ruled Ireland in the nineteenth century, gave the Irish executive the power to stop public meetings at will, allow the state prosecutors extensive change of venue powers, provide that cases involving major crimes be tried before 'special' juries (men known to be favourable to the Government), and grant stipendiary magistrates summary authority over lesser offences. This became a permanent part of Irish law.

²³⁶ Hansard, vol. 315, cols 1362-63, 8 June 1887.

he hoped they had now learned their lesson. "Experience", he said, "was a dear school but it was the only one that fools would learn at, and some people, (an obvious reference to Conservatives) were so intensely foolish, that they did not even learn at that school."²³⁷ A sentiment distorted by the Leeds Mercury who offered their readers a somewhat different interpretation.

For once the jocular baronet was funny without meaning it, and raised a hearty laugh at his own expense. The Liberal Party, he said, quite proudly had learned the lessons of experience. It was a dear school, he added, but fools would learn at no other. It was only when the Tories burst into a loud laughter over the compromising reflection, when Sir Wilfrid saw he had made a mess of it.²³⁸

After a string of by-election successes the Government majority dwindled from 116 to 66.²³⁹ Lawson's role was significant; he shared the platform with almost every mainland Home Rule candidate during that campaign. At Nantwich, Lawson accused "'Coercion Joe', 'Rip Van Winkle',²⁴⁰ and the 'Skeleton at the feast'²⁴¹ (Chamberlain, Hartington and Goschen) of fighting a battle on behalf of the aristocracy in direct confrontation to the will of a democracy."²⁴²

When Lawson visited the town of Enniskillen in December 1887,²⁴³ the Orange administrators refused him access to the only public building in the town.²⁴⁴ On a miserable snow clad night, Lawson made a passionate but comprehensive appeal to a crowd gathered in an open square warning his listeners against the folly and the evil of criminal acts, beseeching them to

²³⁷ Ibid, col. 1234, 7 June 1887.

²³⁸ The Leeds Mercury, 28 June 1887.

²³⁹ Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, p. 397.

²⁴⁰ A term originally coined by Chamberlain, who, while speaking at Warrington on 8 September 1885, attacked his future colleague for ridiculing his 'Radical Programme'. Times, 9 September 1885

²⁴¹ This was a derogatory phrase used earlier by Chamberlain after Goschen accepted the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, following the resignation of Churchill. Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, p. 64.

²⁴² West Cumberland Times, 12 August 1887.

²⁴³ Lawson: A Memoir, Russell, pp. 191-2.

²⁴⁴ West Cumberland Times, 7 January 1888.

disassociate themselves from the outrages.²⁴⁵ His argument was that the actions of the Land League had brought the tenants plight to the attention of the British Government and a wider audience; and that since the people had a new found power they had no need to take up a gun to avenge their wrongs because their sufferings would be brought not only before the British Parliament but before the world. After a fellow Cumbrian wrote to congratulate him upon his successful return, Lawson responded with the following verse:

I have dodged the police and emergency men,
And I'm safe and sound in old England again.
It's a fact to be proud of, to think, just good luck,
Still a head on my shoulders and clothes on my back.
Aha! My good friend. I steer clear of the rocks—
You surely should know I'm a canny old fox.
But best thanks for your letter, which shows you take thought
Lest in perils or dangers I chance to get caught.
Your advice I will take, though a foolish young man,
And to keep out of trouble do all that I can.
Now no more at present, accepting adieu!
With the best of all good Christmas wishes for you.²⁴⁶

Lawson argued that ordinary crime in Ireland, already the lowest in the United Kingdom could be further reduced should Parliament introduce laws to protect tenants against widespread eviction.²⁴⁷ Although he considered eviction abominable he acknowledged that since landlords acted within the framework of the law, the executive had little choice but to enact those laws. His argument was that when the Government encountered bad laws they had a moral obligation to repeal those laws.²⁴⁸ Lawson argued that coercion encouraged unscrupulous absentee landlords, (he named both Colonel

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 11 January 1888.

²⁴⁶ At a Home Rule Meeting at Moreland near Penrith, the chairman (Mr Charles Thompson, Moreland Hall), referred to Lawson's visit to Ireland, adding that he had written to congratulate Lawson. Ibid, 20 December 1887.

²⁴⁷ Hansard, vol. 308, col. 732, 27 August 1886.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, vol. 315, col. 363, 16 June 1887

O'Callaghan,²⁴⁹ and the infamous Lord Lucan,²⁵⁰ an English nobleman who evicted 160 tenants from his estate in County Mayo,) to screw impossible rents out of their tenants. "Why we can hardly pick up a newspaper" Lawson complained, "without reading such stories as the Battle of Glenbeigh²⁵¹ or the battle of Bodyke."²⁵²

On one occasion Lawson challenged Balfour's promotion of state-assisted emigration:

It has been said that the curse of Ireland is the absenteeism of the landlords. Well if the absenteeism of the landlords is so bad the absenteeism of the people, who create the wealth of the nation must be much worse. I would much rather see the landlords go away for ever than see the people evicted as we are now evicting them.²⁵³

When conciliation finally arrived Balfour created a special Congested Districts Board,²⁵⁴ composed of seven land experts, charged with purchasing estates, resettling tenants on viable holdings, constructing large scale drainage works, and providing instruction in scientific farming methods.²⁵⁵ Contrary to what one might expect Lawson did not support all of these policies.²⁵⁶ On 19 July 1889, he moved a motion against the introduction of a bill to promote light

²⁴⁹ Colonel John O'Callaghan of Maryfort, County Clare, came to the wider public's attention on 1 June 1881, when he accompanied a force of 150 police armed with fixed bayonets arrived at Bodyke to serve writs on 26 tenants who had combined and were withholding payment of rent. In the ensuing scuffle one man was killed in the police charge and an ensuing gun battle took place between the authorities and the tenants' supporters.

²⁵⁰ George Charles Sarsfield, Lord Lucan (1800-1888). Despite his exploits at Balaclava during the Crimean war he was known locally as the 'Old Exterminator'.

²⁵¹ In March 1887, at a daily cost of £1,000 to the British taxpayers, a posse of soldiers and mounted police entered Glenbeigh in County Kerry to batter down the walls and raise to the ground a number of tenant cottages. During the violent proceedings a sick child was dragged from her mother's arms and later died in a pigsty.

²⁵² On 2 June 1887, a large crowd gathered to meet the eviction party, consisting of the acting sheriff, the O'Callaghan agent, a resident magistrate, the RIC, the second Royal Welsh Fusiliers, bailiffs and 14 Emergency men. By nightfall they had only succeeded in evicting 2 tenants from their well barricaded homesteads. By 15 June, they had only evicted 28 families from the 57 summoned.

²⁵³ Hansard, vol. 315, col. 365, 16 June 1887.

²⁵⁴ Through the Irish Land Act, the government set up an agency to alleviate poverty in Ireland. The board had a remit to work in the congested districts of Western Ireland to relieve starvation by building railways and roads, promote industry and fishing and help farmers improve the land.

²⁵⁵ Balfour: A Political Biography, Zebel, p. 71.

²⁵⁶ Hansard, vol. 338, cols 886-7, 19 July 1889.

railways in Ireland, arguing that parliament should treat Ireland and Great Britain on equal terms. He refused to support any public works in Ireland that depended upon grants of public money, refused in England for similar schemes, except in the case of amply secured loans.²⁵⁷

Lawson and Parnell

After the 1886 General Election, the British parliamentary system entered into a new phase of politics with Liberal 'Home Rulers' regularly sharing nationalist platforms. This situation deteriorated after the Times published a series of sensational articles, entitled 'Parnellism and Crime',²⁵⁸ accusing Home Rulers of conspiring with Irish American revolutionaries. On the day after the introduction of the Crimes bill, the same newspaper published a facsimile letter linking Parnell by implication to the Pheonix Park murders.²⁵⁹ Although Parnell immediately denounced the letters as 'villainous and barefaced forgeries' he refused to institute proceedings in an English court of law. The controversy became a festering sore, until a former Parnellite lost a libel action against the same newspaper.²⁶⁰ On 9 July 1888, Lawson forced Parnell out of the shadows when he asked for a parliamentary Select Committee to inquire into the authenticity of the reports.²⁶¹ Unfortunately the well intentioned request backfired when Balfour used the opportunity to institute a special commission under the direction of three English judges,²⁶² to enquire into the methods employed by the nationalist

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Times, 7, 10 and 13 March; 12 and 18 April; 2, 13, 20 May; and 1, 7 June 1887.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 18 April 1887.

²⁶⁰ At the trial of the case of O'Donnell v. Walter on 2 July 1888 counsel for the defence produced further incriminating letters allegedly written by Parnell. England 1870-1914, Ensor, p. 182.

²⁶¹ Hansard, vol. 328, col. 712, 9 July 1888. This intervention allowed the government with Unionist complicity to put Parnell, his colleagues, and the New Departure on trial before a commission of English judges. Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, p. 277.

²⁶² The special commission consisted of three English judges, Sir James (afterwards Lord) Hannen, president; Sir J. C. Day, and Sir A. L. Smith. They were each and all political opponents, not only of Parnell, but of the Liberal party, with which the Irish leader was in alliance on the Gladstonian policy for Ireland. The proceedings began in October 1888. Fall of Feudalism in Ireland, Davitt, p. 543.

movement and its leaders.²⁶³ During the debate Lawson asked his colleagues to reject this dangerous precedent and restrict their enquiries into the criminal charges against specified individuals.²⁶⁴ He also questioned the impartiality of one of the judges, reminding the Commons that 190 of their members had raised complaints against the judges contemptuous past performance towards the Irish people. Where he asked would their enquiries end?

The Land League and the National League and other forms of Irish agitation had done a good deal that was not above suspicion, the Tory party was also not above suspicion? Was any Party above suspicion; were the Liberal party above suspicion? Was there any political association pure? He did not believe that the Anti Corn Law League was pure. He did not know that the United Kingdom Alliance was above reproach. This was a commission to enquire into the whole history of Ireland over the previous ten years and he doubted very much whether the history of England for the same period would bear investigation.²⁶⁵

Although the charges against Parnell eventually collapsed,²⁶⁶ his enemies presented further misdemeanours. In November 1890, the whole cause of Irish history took a backward step when Captain William O'Shea began divorce proceedings against his wife Katherine, citing Parnell as co-respondent. As the couple had shared a home for several years, and Parnell was the father of her two living children, no defence was offered, and the judgement and the scandal went against him. Total confusion followed, forcing Gladstone to publicly inform Irish politicians, that the electors of England, particularly Nonconformists, would not tolerate a Home Rule movement with Parnell at its head. Parnell aided by 27 parliamentarians

²⁶³ Balfour: A Political Biography, Zebel, p. 74.

²⁶⁴ Hansard, vol. 329, col. 25, 8 August 1888.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, col. 26.

²⁶⁶ On 13 February 1890, after 128 days of hearings, at which 98,000 questions were asked of 450 witnesses the Commissioners report was published. The charges against Parnell eventually collapsed after Richard Pigott, an unemployed journalist, confessed to having forged the crucial evidence and although the leading members of the party were found guilty of associating with boycotters and moonlighters, they found nothing new against the New Departure. Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland, Curtis, p. 292.

reacted in a classical irrational manner renounced his alliance with the Liberal party whose policies had become 'hopelessly inadequate'.²⁶⁷

Lawson did not pass judgement on Parnell's indiscretions; his argument was that Parnell's misconduct had nothing to do with the principle of Home Rule. However, he did criticise Parnell's political misjudgements, accusing him of becoming a man who placed his own individuality before the collective counsels of the Irish members, who had destroyed the confidence of the English voters by reviving the dying embers of national hatred.²⁶⁸ Lawson was saddened.

The great-distinguished leader of the Irish party lost his character. I need not go into the details of that: you all know he lost his character. But what difference did that make to the case? What difference did that make to the great public question? Was freedom of election not worthy of support and encouraged in the country because John Wilkes was a man of infamous character? Was Christianity to be tabooed because Simon Magus committed a faux pas? Certainly not! Take the temperance question, in which I have worked for many years. Supposing tonight, instead of going home quietly to sleep at the house of my friend, Mr Waugh, I insist on getting out of the carriage, going into a public house, and getting drunk. Then taken up by the police, lodged overnight in a cell, and charged with drunkenness and disorderly behaviour. (Laughter.) Would that make the prohibition of the liquor traffic any less desirable? Not a bit. It would make it all the more so. (Cheers.) I say that the thing requires to be looked at, and you will see what unmitigated rubbish all this is about Home Rule being damped by the mad conduct of one man. No ladies and gentlemen, sound policies don't depend upon the devotion of a man, but upon adherence to a principle. In all politics let reason and conscience be your only guide, and you will never go wrong.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 308-323.

²⁶⁸ West Cumberland Times, 29 August 1891.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 10 January 1891.

The Newcastle Programme and the Second Home Rule Bill

In October 1891, the Liberal Party held their annual conference in the city of Newcastle. During those frantic few days of fervent debate, the delegates thrashed out a radical agenda to take them through the next General Election, and beyond to the new century. Immediately but reluctantly endorsed by Gladstone, the 'Newcastle programme' as it became popularly known was a grandiose scheme that enshrined the majority of Lawson's outstanding 'crotchets'.²⁷⁰ Lawson emphasised that he had waited a lifetime for the realisation of these enactments, and boasted: "If the chartists could rise from their graves they would not believe that the Liberal party had absolutely homologated those great reforms."²⁷¹ The election issue was no longer simply Home Rule; it was the full Newcastle programme, and Lawson was anxious to settle the Irish question to secure domestic reforms.²⁷²

In the 1892 General Election the Cockermouth Conservative Association selected Major John Scott Napier, a man whose political creed epitomised the anti Newcastle programme. Napier advocated protection and the re-introduction of import controls, claiming that separation would result in Irish protection, and impact upon Cumberland coal and Iron exports. He tried to forge a genuine fraternity with the working classes; he participated in their football matches, and climbed up their greasy poles, promising shorter working hours and higher wages.²⁷³ In his appeal to West Cumberland's industrial workforce he drew attention to Lawson's dependence on the large

²⁷⁰ The programme included the introduction of the Direct Veto; the abolition of the plural franchise; and the inauguration of triennial Parliaments. The programme also addressed the concerns of the rural voters and proposed to reform the land laws, establish District and Parish Councils, and relax the procedure for acquiring land to transform into allotments. Although they initially declined to support payment to Members of Parliament and fell short of the ultimate demand of endorsing the shorter working week, they recognised the emerging influence of the Trade Unions and proposed the introduction of worker friendly legislation, promising to introduce an Employers Liability for Accidents Bill. They also appealed to the national instincts of the people of Wales and Scotland, and promised to alleviate one of their long-standing irritations, by disestablishing the state church. National Liberal Federation, Fourteenth Annual Conference 1891.

²⁷¹ West Cumberland Times, 20 June 1892.

²⁷² Ibid, 20 June 1892.

²⁷³ Ibid, 29 August 1891.

'ragtag and bobtail of an Irish enclave',²⁷⁴ summarising Lawson's programme as, "Down with the Church, the Army and the Navy; Up with the illiterate Irish peasantry, and hurrah for Roman Catholic priests."²⁷⁵ Notwithstanding, Napier's rhetoric Lawson returned to a Parliament,²⁷⁶ where Home Rule parties could count on 355 seats, and the Unionists 315. The Liberals had achieved a majority but it was not secure. They still depended on the Irish vote; now split into two factions of unequal size, each afraid to accept limitations on Irish autonomy for fear of receiving damaging criticism from the other.

After 1886, Lawson, a maverick even among radicals, intensified his attack on the House of Lords.²⁷⁷ Mend them, was not his way, "you only mend a thing you want to keep, and he never wanted to keep the House of Lords, he wanted to end them."²⁷⁸ In 1887, he issued a stark prediction,

Supposing we succeed in electing a House of Commons ready and willing to do justice to Ireland, what will be the result? The elected House may do its duty and fulfil its pledges, and when it has done so, may find all its efforts neutralised by the actions of the House of Lords. If any one will take the trouble to look a little closely into the Parliamentary history of the present century he will find that the House of Lords has been the one great factor in preventing all legislation which would have benefited or conciliated the Irish nation.²⁷⁹

Anthony Taylor has since taken Lawson's argument one step further to show that "Irish Peers were the shock troops of the House of Lord's, mobilised to vote down measures that might alleviate the lot of the Irish peasantry;

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 1 July 1892.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 19 July.

²⁷⁷ Hansard, vol. 316, col. 1069, 27 June 1887. Also West Cumberland Times, 7 February 1888.

²⁷⁸ West Cumberland Times, 8 January 1890.

²⁷⁹ Extract from a letter written by Lawson to the editor of The Daily News under the heading of "Home Rule or Lords Rule", subsequently printed in the West Cumberland Times, 16 August 1887.

habitually blocking attempts to resolve the Irish question and clouding the debate about British reform measures at home.”²⁸⁰

At a post election celebratory gathering at Keswick, Lawson asked his supporters to applaud the courage and conviction of Gladstone’s Irish policy.

He (Gladstone) had met the strongest combination of real Tories and sham Liberals, (applause) a mixture of hereditary obstructionists and recreant radicals, apathetic Englishmen and incendiary Irishmen, desperate dukes and obstinate commoners, gingerbread nuts and mad cows – (great laughter). And the old hero had stood boldly against them all (applause) true to his policy, true to the promise that he made to distressed Ireland. (Applause.)²⁸¹

After many hours of intense Cabinet discussion, Gladstone introduced his second Home Rule bill, which, except for a reduced number of Irish members at Westminster mirrored its predecessor. As expected the bill’s progress through Parliament was obstructed by the Opposition²⁸² who emphasised all the inadequacies in the measure, which in turn justified the House of Lords rejecting the bill.²⁸³ In the Commons the bill passed its third reading on 1 September. However, after four nights of obligatory debate, the Lords rejected the measure by a huge majority of 419 to 41.²⁸⁴

Lawson identified the ‘real enemies’ of democracy:

The Commons discussed the details of the Home Rule Bill for 82 days, where the most important points were exhaustively discussed. The bill was taken to the House of Lords by an old fellow in a wig and gown,

²⁸⁰ Lords of Misrule, Taylor, p. 117.

²⁸¹ West Cumberland Times, 7 August 1892.

²⁸² According to Lawson the main protagonists were, Mr James W. Lowther (Mid Cumberland), Mr R. W. Hanbury (Preston), Mr Bartley and Mr T. G. Bowles (Kings Lynn). A group who “ moved amendments, they rose to points of order, they repeated themselves, they remonstrated, they recapitulated, they reiterated, they argued, they contended, they controverted, they disclaimed, they denounced, they protested, and they persevered until they managed to prevent all business going on.” Ibid, 28 October 1893.

²⁸³ On a visit to Ireland in 1893, Lord Salisbury had assured his supporters that they need not fear for the House of Lords would never allow this accursed bill to pass through Parliament. The Annual Register: A Public Review of Events at Home and Abroad for the Year 1893. Author not named, (London, 1893), pp. 304-7.

who resembled a huntsman carrying a fox into a pack of hounds. When the Lords heard there was a Home Rule Bill in their House the news was spread about by letter and by telegram and by summonses from all parts. Up they came to London from the east and from the west and from the north and the south, some of them from Europe, Africa and America, from the Highlands and the Lowlands, their grouse moors their deer forest, their race course, their betting ring, their prize ring, from the hall, from the cote, the castle and from the lunatic asylum. There they assembled and met together, that noble army of hereditary enemies of all that is good; and what did they do when they got there? They came up to worry this bill to death. They did not want to discuss it; not they. But the hypocrisy of them, "Oh" they said, "this bill has not had adequate discussion." Was not 82 nights adequate discussion, and yet these old hereditary chaps discussed it for four days and said that was enough for them, and they kicked it out.²⁸⁵

Lawson did not favour the reintroduction of a bill that would require a reappraisal in the House of Lords: "If a man takes me in once it is his fault, but if he takes me in twice it is my fault." The issue became who ruled Britain, was it the aristocracy or was it a democracy? He offered a suggestion to those who sought ways of relieving the imbalance. He would create a great many peers to swamp the existing chamber; he would elevate a host of radical chimney sweeps, and ask them to swear an oath, promising to vote for the total extinction of the Lords.²⁸⁶ In the end Gladstone did nothing, other than warn the Lords that such abuse must lead inevitably to their demise.²⁸⁷ By mid 1894 a frustrated Lawson was warning his party that their refusal to take determined measures to abolish the Lords would, for many years to come, neutralise their position as a reforming party.²⁸⁸ Although Gladstone's reforms were an inadequate response to the problems of alienation and

²⁸⁴ Gladstone, E. J. Feuchtwanger, (London, 1975), p. 268.

²⁸⁵ West Cumberland Times, 28 October 1893.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Gladstone and the Irish Nation, Hammond, p. 181.

²⁸⁸ West Cumberland Times, 11 July 1894.

poverty they did send a signal to the people that protestant ascendancy would eventually end.

Conclusion

In Lawson's long political career the affairs of Ireland were a constant and consistent drain on his resources. Between the years 1868 and 1894, the period covering the vital years of the Home Rule movement, when Irish questions dominated British politics, he was actively engaged in trying to right Irish anomalies. Lawson's response to Home Rule corresponds with his interpretation of the principles of democracy and of doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Although his influence on Liberal party policy is debatable, his contribution deserves a recognition that has too long been withheld.

Lawson fully understood the dimensions of Irish national conscience, his argument was that having delivered the secret ballot and the extension of the franchise to urban and rural workers,²⁸⁹ Home Rule for Ireland was a natural progression. Although an early pro-Home Ruler its inevitability was set in 1885, after the Parnellites achieved their goal of ascendancy at Westminster, emerging from the election holding the balance in Parliament with 86 seats. To Lawson, Home Rule had everything to do with national aspirations and little to do with material grievances. The British Government might solve the land question, the evictions, the chronic distress in the congested districts, revive native industries, allow the tenants to purchase their holdings, encourage agricultural education, foster the fishing industry, and build new lines of communication, but nothing would change the fact that 85 of the 103 Irish representatives returned to the English Parliament by Irish votes wanted an Irish Parliament. Lawson further emphasised the point that

²⁸⁹ The Franchise Act of 1884 and the Redistribution Act of 1885, which left unchanged the number of Irish seats, completely altered the electoral outlook and virtually handed over the counties outside Ulster to the home rulers, while most of the small boroughs previously held by Whig or Liberal candidates also became suspect to change. Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923, Beckett, p. 394.

nationalist representation at Westminster never fell below eighty seats after 1886, a phenomenon he associated with the continuous failure of the Conservative party to win a constituency in Ireland previously held by a nationalist, even where the nationalist vote was split between two candidates.

Although Lawson sympathised with Ireland, he was never fully committed to their cause. Ireland never became his major preoccupation; there were always numerous radical distractions to captivate his attention, as portrayed in other sections of this study, Egyptian affairs, franchise reform, international peace, and temperance reforms²⁹⁰ were always greater issues.²⁹¹ Although Lawson always sympathised with Irish injustices, he became more and more determined to find a solution to their problems as an expedient to advance domestic reform. What the Irish question meant to domestic politics in England in terms of time wasted and bills lost through obstruction can never be ascertained. Lawson believed that this situation suited the Conservatives; by offering them an opportunity to neglect measures designed to alleviate social and economic problems. However, this should not imply that he adopted Home Rule because he longed to see the end of the Irish at Westminster.

Notwithstanding his position as a man of landed property he had few delusions; what happened in Ireland would eventually happen in England. After the fall of the Irish Church, he worked tirelessly to disestablish the same institutions in the remainder of Britain. And when the masses defeated the classes in Ireland, England would follow. One is left to pose the question, what did Lawson mean when he described himself as a Home Ruler? Was he a Home Ruler in the Gladstonian sense of the phrase or did he advocate total separation? Lawson was first and foremost a pragmatist and a democrat,²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Lawson experienced a serious distraction throughout 1890, after Goschen, the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced his local taxation duties bill. The proposed legislation offered compensation for publicans, whose liquor licenses would be revoked through the actions of the bill. The bill antagonised the temperance movement and from that moment enveloped Lawson's time. Although his thoughts and concerns over justice to Ireland ebbed they remained close to his heart.

²⁹¹ During the 1892 General Election, the Temperance party contested two seats against the official Liberal and Home Rule candidates, both brewers opposed to Temperance legislation. At both Houghton –le-spring and East Birmingham, Lawson spoke in favour of the temperance candidate and against the Home Ruler. *West Cumberland Times*, 3 July 1892.

²⁹² Lawson was a democrat in the sense as used by Seeböhm: "Democracy is the claim of a self-reliant people for equal rights and fair play for every man, standing on his own feet, to

who saw Gladstone's Irish policy as reconciliation not separatist. He believed unashamedly in the verdict taken at the ballot box and since the issue of total independence in the separatist sense or in the parliamentary sense never became an issue, we cannot say with any confidence how far he would have moved had this become a primary demand. He made it quite clear that he was endeavouring to pacify Ireland not liberate it, he sought to retain Ireland under the influence of the crown, by granting Ireland some form of federalist status. Neither was the integrity of the empire ever an issue with Lawson. To him Home Rule could be reconciled with the integrity of the empire, if England could not bind nations together with the ties of free trade and eternal friendship then integrity was worthless.

guide his own life unfettered by needless interference on the part of the state." "Imperialism and Socialism", Frederic Seebohm, Nineteenth Century, Vol. 7, (April 1880), pp. 726-36.

CONCLUSION

Although Brian Harrison's seminal study 'Drink and the Victorians' recognises Lawson's enthusiasm for reform, he implies that Lawson's extreme form of radical, reforming, anti-imperialism was nothing other than a by-product of his obsession with temperance reform.¹ This view is greatly reinforced by the article published in the revised Oxford Dictionary of National Biography which almost ignores Lawson's opposition to Britain's occupation of Egypt and other imperialist concerns.² This thesis endeavours to show that these assessments are unfair. Whereas temperance reform was very important to Lawson, it was only one side of a multi-faceted radical programme to which he devoted his political life. These sources suggests that Lawson was a 'faddist', a person who pursued one particular policy, when in reality he was a 'crotchety' man, a politician who favoured the introduction of a wide range of measures that were generally unpopular at the time of their advocacy. There were many 'crotchety' examples in Lawson's political portfolio, the secret ballot, the disestablishment of the state church, female suffrage, the abolition of the House of Lords, Home Rule for Ireland to name but a few. Indeed had my objectives been somewhat different I could have expanded the content of this thesis to encompass the full depth and range of Lawson's extreme form of radicalism.

In matters relating to Britain's imperial and foreign policy Lawson was 'a Cobdenite of the Cobdenites'; a man who notwithstanding his own wealth and landed interests held a life-long hostility towards the British landed aristocracy, whom he believed used their privilege to monopolise British life. Like Cobden, Lawson thought of war and imperialism as natural manifestations of the aristocracy; Britain's gods were 'Bacchus and Mars', the gods of 'bottles and battles'.³ Lawson regarded colonies as a costly burden whose defence could involve Britain in war and which only offered benefits to the privileged minority who exploited the jobs and patronage that colonies generated. Imperialism added to taxation and thus slowed down capitalist

¹ Drink and the Victorians, Harrison, p. 253.

² Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 32, pp. 906-908.

³ Hansard, vol. 221, col. 1299, 4 August 1874.

accumulation, which Lawson saw as the key to both moral and material progress in Britain. Lawson was also an internationalist who championed peace and international co-operation and deplored Britain's traditional diplomatic stance of supporting Turkey and opposing Russia. To Lawson, Russia could never pose a serious threat to Europe because of its immense size, its geographical remoteness and the backwardness of its economy and people.⁴ He emphasised that the armed services were primarily responsible for the increase in national spending, and noted, that although taxes increased in response to successive foreign crisis they seldom reduced after the relaxation of the crisis. Lawson campaigned against loans for standing armaments and with his profound distrust of government intervention, he urged the Commons to make it obligatory that all parties would commit themselves to refer any dispute to arbitration before resorting to war. Lawson long argued that war scares were got up by interested journalists sitting in snug editor rooms writing leader articles hounding on their countrymen to slaughter.⁵ When war finally came, as was the case in Egypt, Lawson opposed it, and led a defiant albeit unsuccessful parliamentary battle against Gladstone's interventionist policies. Lawson's non-interventionist views were never popular in the Liberal party, and as such were difficult to swallow, even for some of the advanced radicals, never mind the more mainstream members of the party, who felt it right to intervene against 'barbarism' in the interests of 'civilisation, Christianisation, and commerce'. Like Cobden, Lawson grew to despise colonial expansion and the association of the British Empire with glory, a theme which became one of his most cherished concerns and in which he took an abiding critical interest. In his view Britain had sufficient distractions in the vast stretches of 'barbarian territory' already in her possession, and he objected, while his own countrymen remained steeped in 'ignorance and vice', to the administration of fresh hordes of 'barbarians' in Africa or Asia.⁶

To describe someone like Lawson as anti-imperialist suggests that he was opposed to the 'empire' as a whole. In strict terms the phrase anti-

⁴ Richard Cobden, Hinde, p. 248.

⁵ Hansard, vol. 243, col. 1000, 17 December 1878.

⁶ Lawson, Luke, p. 109.

imperialist is a rather misleading description and to do justice to Lawson's case we should consider two fundamental questions: Was Lawson totally against the concept of an empire or was he against the enlargement of an empire that already existed? Although he was an extreme critic of British foreign and imperial policies, I have yet to unearth overwhelming evidence to suggest that Lawson supported the 'disintegration' of the empire.⁷ He said little detrimental about those parts of the empire that existed before 1870; his main concern was to prevent a further expansion of its boundaries. Lawson opposed imperial expansion in Africa, Asia, Polynesia and anywhere else in the world but had little to say about India. Although he would not accept that Russia posed a serious threat to India he never suggested abandoning the subcontinent, although he did express concern about one of the major sources of the Indian revenue and the debilitating affect opium was having on Asia's population.⁸ He was also extremely critical of the British Government's constitutional right to wage war and raise troops in India or anywhere else in the Empire without the consent of the British Parliament, providing Parliament was not required to foot the bill. Other significant regions of the Empire, in Australia, Canada and the Cape Province caused him little concern until they themselves assumed the role of the imperialist. It was only after self-governing colonies like Australia began to consider annexing islands in Polynesia, and the Cape began to control the destiny of Basutoland that he raised serious objection to that form of administration; although it should be stated that he was less concerned if British taxpayers were not involved.

On imperial matters, Lawson believed that if Britain was to receive the assent of the local communities under her jurisdiction she should achieve this aim by taking into consideration the interests of the natives. He wanted Britain to be great, not through the exploits of her generals, and admirals, but through the skills and aspirations of her people and as such believed that the true strength of the empire rested upon the love and affection of its people, and by people he meant people of varying races, creeds and colour.⁹ He repeatedly

⁷ It should also be noted that notwithstanding Lawson's long attachment to the United Kingdom Alliance, and the Alliance being a prohibitionist organisation, I have not unearthed any evidence to show that his was a prohibitionist.

⁸ Lawson: A memoir, Russell, p. 86.

⁹ Hansard, vol. 233, col. 1866, 24 April 1877.

rejected an enforced militaristic empire; his argument was that should a group of countries, territories or regions choose to combine to form a Commonwealth of nations it should be based upon free trade and the combination should only take place with the consent of the vast majority of the population. When the overall evidence showed that the indigenous people had other preferences such as expectations for independence, he overwhelmingly supported their views, as was the case for Home Rule in Ireland, and complete independence for the Transvaal Boers. After 1870 Lawson was one of the few English politicians consistently identified with opposition to imperialist expansion, coercive policies, and with the rights of other societies, irrespective of alleged British interests. Lawson was violently opposed to forward imperial policies which originated in Britain, and he tried to cast aside territories in which British influence was increasing and which he feared might be added to the empire. Thus he advocated withdrawal from Afghanistan, Egypt, the Transvaal, and the Sudan.

Lawson was a democrat and as such he advocated local self-governing communities throughout the empire. He supported devolution of authority in the form of county assemblies throughout the British Isles and, although unsuccessful, he stood for a Cumbrian constituency in the election to determine the membership of the first Cumberland County Council. He also proposed individual assemblies for England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Such methods were in line with his proposal for temperance reform as exemplified in the local veto which, had it become law, would have empowered local communities to determine the appropriateness or inappropriateness of allowing the establishment of licensed premises in their community. As a democrat he went by the voting habits of the electorate believing that the decisions taken at the ballot box empowered the elected member to pursue his own personal mandate, and to follow his conscience and his judgement especially when these went against the policies pursued by the party leadership. His argument was that should the attitudes held by a sitting member alienate his constituents the electors of his constituency would have an opportunity to remove him at the appropriate moment. However, when the people's elected representatives who sat in the House of Commons had their proposed legislation subsequently rejected by the unelected

aristocracy he openly rebelled. He once advocated flooding the House of Lords with radical workingmen¹⁰ as a means of abolishing the upper chamber. Unlike many radicals he did not care about preserving the fabric of the hereditary House of Lords and saw no need to replace it with a revising chamber, whatever the origin of its membership. He strove to prevent expenditure for imperial purposes from passing through Parliament without scrutiny or comment and since he advocated an open government he repeatedly objected to decisions taken by a Cabinet or worse by some unscrupulous Minister, particularly in matters relating to public expenditure, without parliamentary consultation and eventual approval.¹¹

Lawson's persistent contempt for authority, his natural tendency to rebel and act independently irrespective of party loyalty placed principles before expediency. He criticised anyone or any party, friend or foe alike, when he saw them deviating from his Cobdenist view of British foreign and colonial policy. Lawson criticised dissenters, Quakers, and fellow members of the Peace Society when they failed to protest as strongly as he did against the immorality of pointless massacres, particularly when perpetrated by British troops. Lawson despised Tory dogma and engaged in direct conflict against a Conservative administration, continuously, efficiently and consistently, yet despite his constructive criticism, Lawson rarely displayed that killer instinct in attacking Conservatives, which became a well-known feature of his agitation. This he reserved for the deviants who belonged to his own party. Lawson was never a one to seek the limelight, and when Conservatives held power he accepted a secondary role, knowing that there were always sufficient Liberal anti-imperialists to take the lead. He held a different set of rules for a Liberal Government when they deviated from what he saw as abiding liberal principles, especially when the party carried a mandate for change. Lawson frequently said that by trying to remedy abuses, and injustices abroad, Conservatives, Whigs and many Liberals were fostering imperialism as a smoke screen to divert attention away from the promotion of much needed home reforms.

¹⁰ West Cumberland Times, 28 October 1893.

¹¹ Hansard, vol. 214, col. 481, 14 February 1873.

We can summarise Lawson's political philosophy into three overworked words, peace, retrenchment and reform, which dominated his attitude towards imperial and foreign policy. How he said, could the people allow futile wars to divert attention and resources away from domestic reforms so desperately needed? In his opinion forward policies weakened the existing empire by imposing regular and heavy financial burdens, by increasing the military estimates and thus increasing the possibility of war. He continuously strove to reduce the size of the British army but notwithstanding his numerous resolutions he never fulfilled his expectations.¹² To highlight the spiralling cost of wars in general and to expose the unrealistic assumptions made by the Government when preparing their military estimates he often made critical reference to the cost of previous wars such as those in the Crimea and New Zealand.¹³ Lawson was adamant that all classes in Britain should contribute towards the imperialising process because this was the only way to ensure that the masses fully understood the financial implications of their support for the empire. Similarly when the British Government used the Indian army as a substitute for British forces he argued that the British taxpayer and not the Indian exchequer should pay for the privilege.

British policies towards Ireland, Egypt, the Sudan, and Southern Africa were particular issues that he chose to confront. By challenging these policies he endeavoured to end coercive policies in order to secure for the Irish, Egyptian, Sudanese and Transvaal Boers the right to political self determination. Should Irish landlords and Egyptian bondholders suffer in the process then their losses were of little consequence to him. He also opposed schemes in which British taxpayers were to accept financial responsibilities for the purchase of land in Ireland because although he sympathised with the peasant proprietary he always considered that by paying a far greater price that the land was really worth the British taxpayer was subsidising, selfish, predominantly, conservative landlords.

Many of Lawson's supporters argued that since Lawson was the parliamentary leader of the Temperance movement that he should be returned to Parliament unopposed like other leaders of 'great' national

¹² Ibid, vol. 203, col. 1739, 9 August 1870.

¹³ Ibid, vol. 221, cols 1295-9, 4 August 1874.

movements. Lawson never subscribed to this view and welcomed every opportunity to present his claim to the electorate. In his time in the Commons he contested fourteen elections and was unsuccessful on five occasions. Lawson was never secure in any of the constituencies he represented and always had to fight elections while a significant number of his contemporaries entered Parliament unopposed. However, the opposition's determination to keep him out of the Commons was most probably a result of his attitude towards temperance concerns rather than his attitude towards anti-imperialist radicalism.

Lawson championed the cause of liberty and although his views were consistent he totally ignored the possibility that a British administration in some territories might have brought beneficial results to both the region and its people. When he opposed Britain's interference in West Africa, he was accepting that a British withdrawal would allow the Asante to revert to their earlier ways and to persecute and subjugate the neighbouring tribe, the Fante. He also ignored the argument that if Britain did not annex Fiji, then some other European nation would and this could have retrograde steps for the natives. He repeatedly opposed the official line of establishing new Crown Colonies arguing that the imposition of fresh taxes and future military commitments would lead to additional expense and inevitably lead to future confrontation. His main concern was one of preventing the establishment of a precedent. During such debates, Lawson refused to be drawn towards the arguments put forward by the various evangelical, humanitarian or philanthropic pressure groups, which combined with the commercial and colonial interests to lobby parliament in favour of annexation. Lawson despised humbug, particularly religious humbug, and often contrasted Christian belief and Christian practice while strongly objecting to the notion of Christianising the native races through imperialism.

It is extremely difficult to assess the impact and influence that Lawson's ideas, protests, attitudes and concerns had upon the subjects he chose to oppose or champion. Was he a failure simply because he failed to modify any of the major policies he pursued? The expansion of the empire continued; Britain's military strength increased, the prospect of Home Rule for Ireland diminished, and the trade in alcohol went from strength to strength. It is a tall

task for any politician to significantly change the habits and opinions of a long established nation like Britain, especially when dealing with circumstances that are highly contentious and by nature controversial. Wilberforce and Plimsoll are rare examples of success. Among all of his 'fads and crotchets' Home Rule for Ireland with the eventual formation of Eire probably came closest to fulfilling his expectations. Perhaps he was nothing other than a humanitarian and a humourist, a nuisance to the government and a moral conscience for those colleagues who prosecuted imperial views who did nothing more than extract from the government information they would have preferred to keep unavailable. Nevertheless, what he predicted did on many occasions come to pass, as exemplified by the second Boer war, which erupted twenty years after he forecast trouble.

Lawson lacked the stature of a Cobden or a Bright, and although he strove to influence anti-imperialist opinion he rarely tried to lead or organise the agitation opposing imperial expansion. On those rare occasions when he did try, as was the case over Egypt, he did not have the influence of others around him and as such was arguably unsuccessful. Lawson's actions in connection with anti-imperialist concerns bear witness to a considerable amount of political courage, although it is worth remembering that his wealth allowed him the opportunity to act independently.

Until his dying day he remained true to the crusading wing of the Manchester school in domestic, colonial and international affairs, which claimed that Britain paid additional taxes to meet the cost of the empire, and that the people were taxed more heavily when forward policies replaced those that were more pacific in nature. Lawson never lost faith in the principles and advantages of following a programme of free trade and *laissez faire* economics, and always believed in the benefits that such a policy would bring and in the notion that an expansion of free trade would make both war and empire an irrelevance.

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