CHAPTER LIII

SAINTS AND SLAVES

In every nation, there is a soul. And the soul of England was unsatisfied by the cynical scepticism of Holland House:

Panshanger, January 1, 1832: Distress seems to increase hereabouts, and crime with it. Methodism and saintship increase too. The people of this house are examples of the religion of the fashionable world, and the charity of natural benevolence, which the world has not spoiled. Lady Cowper and her family go to church, but scandalize the congregation by always arriving half an hour too late. The hour matters not; if it began at nine, or ten, or twelve, or one o'clock, it would be the same thing; they are never ready, and always late, but they go. Lord Cowper never goes at all; but he employs multitudes of labourers, is ready to sanction any and every measure which can contribute to the comfort and happiness of the peasantry. Lady Cowper and her daughters inspect personally the cottages and condition of the poor. They visit, enquire, and give; they distribute flannel, medicines, money, and they talk to and are kind to them, so that the result is a perpetual stream flowing from a real fountain of benevolence, which waters all the country round and gladdens the hearts of the peasantry, and attaches them to those from whom it emanates.

April 12, 1838: Dined with Lord Anglesey yesterday, to meet Wolff, the missionary. I had figured to myself a tall, gaunt, severe, uncouth man; but I found a short, plump, cheerful person, with a considerable resemblance to the Bonaparte family, and with some to old Demon, with one of the most expressive countenances I ever saw, and so agreeable as to compensate for very plain features; eyes that became suddenly illuminated when he is warmed by his subject, and a voice of peculiar sweetness and power of intonation. He came prepared to hold forth, with his Bible in his pocket, and accordingly after dinner we gathered round him in a circle, and he held forth.

It would be no easy matter to describe a discourse which lasted a couple of hours, or indeed to say very precisely what it was about. It was a rambling, desultory reference to his travels and adventures in fluent and sometimes eloquent language, and not without an occasional dash of humour and drollery. He illustrated the truth of the Scriptures by examples drawn from his personal observation and the habits, expressions, and belief of the present inhabitants of Palestine, and he spoke with evident sincerity and enthusiasm. He sang two or three hymns as specimens of the psalmody now in use at Jerusalem. The great fault of his discourse was its length and desultory character, leaving no strong and permanent impression on the mind. He subsequently gave us a second lecture upon the Millennium, avowing his belief that it is near at hand; he "hoped and believed that it would take place in 1847," and he proceeded to show that this was to be inferred from the prophecies of Daniel, and that the numbers in that book, rightly explained, bore this meaning. He told us that he had learnt fourteen languages, and had preached in nine.

The Reason did not solve the spiritual problem. By creating a vacuum, it induced a hurricane of mysticism. The United States had her Joseph Smith. England had this:

December 2, 1833: I went yesterday to Edward Irving's chapel to bear him preach, and witness the exhibition of the tongues. The chapel was formerly West's picture gallery, oblong, with a semicircular recess at one end; it has been fitted up with galleries all round, and in the semicircle there are tiers of benches, in front of which is a platform with an elevated chair for Irving himself, and sort of desk before it; on each side the chair are three armchairs, on which three other preachers sat. The steps from the floor to the platform were occupied by men (whether peculiarly favoured or not I don't know), but the seats behind Irving's chair are evidently appropriated to the higher class of devotees, for they were the best dressed of the congregation. The business was conducted with decency, and the congregation was attentive. It began with a hymn, the words given out by one of the assistant preachers, and sung by the whole flock. This, which seems to be common to all dissenting services, is always very fine, the full swell of human voices

producing a grand effect. After this Irving delivered a prayer, in a very slow drawling tone, rather long, and not at all striking in point of language or thought. When he had finished, one of the men sitting beside him arose, read a few verses from the Bible, and discoursed thereon. He was a very fine fellow, and was followed by two others, not much better. After these three Spencer Perceval stood up. He recited the duty to our neighbour in the catechism, and descanted on that text in a style in all respects far superior to the others. He appeared about to touch on politics, and (as well as I recollect) was saying, "Ye trusted that your institutions were unalterable, ye believed that your loyalty to your King, your respect for your nobility, your" —when suddenly a low moaning noise was heard, on which he instantly stopped, threw his arm over his breast, and covered his eyes, in an attitude of deep devotion, as if oppressed by the presence of the spirit. The voice after ejaculating three "Oh's," one rising above the other, in tones very musical, burst into a flow of unintelligible jargon, which, whether it was in English or in gibberish I could not discover. This lasted five or six minutes, and as the voice was silenced, another woman, in more passionate and louder tones, took it up; this last spoke in English, and words, though not sentences, were distinguishable. I had a full view of her sitting exactly behind Irving's chair. She was well dressed, spoke sitting, under great apparent excitement, and screamed on till from exhaustion, as it seemed, her voice gradually died away, and all was still. Then Spencer Perceval, in slow and solemn tones, resumed, not where he had left off, but with an exhortation to hear the voice of the Lord which had just been uttered to the congregation, and after a few more sentences he sat down. Two more men followed him, and then Irving preached. His subject was "God's Love," upon which he poured forth a mystical incomprehensible rhapsody, with extraordinary vehemence of manner and power of lungs. There was nothing like eloquence in his sermon, no musical periods to captivate the ear, no striking illustrations to charm the imagination; but there is undoubtedly something in his commanding figure and strange, wild countenance, his vehemence, and above all the astonishing power of his voice, its compass, and variety, which arrests attention, and gives the notion of a great orator. I daresay he can speak well, but to

waste real eloquence on such an auditory would be like throwing pearls to swine.

Spencer Perceval was the son of the Prime Minister who had been assassinated in 1812 and he belonged to the noble house of Egmont. When Greville met him (August, 1834) as he "rode into London," he got off his horse to walk into town with him:

August 19, 1834: . . . He talks rationally enough till he gets on religious topics. . . . His notion was "that it all proceeded from a departure from God," that ours was a backsliding Church, and that God had forsaken it, and that we had only to put our trust in Him, and rely entirely on Him, and He would work out the salvation of His own. We parted in the midst of the discussion, and before I had any time to get from him any explanation of the course he would recommend to those who govern in furtherance of his own theocratical principles.

In Spencer Perceval, therefore, society was faced by a man who could not be ignored:

February 1, 1836: Howick gave me an account yesterday of Spencer Perceval's communications to the Ministers, and other Privy Councillors. He called on Howick, who received him very civilly. Perceval began, "You will probably be surprised when you learn what has brought me here." Howick bowed. "You are aware that God has been pleased in these latter times to make especial communications of His will to certain chosen instruments, in a language not intelligible to those who hear it, nor always to those by whom it is uttered: I am one of those instruments, to whom it has pleased the Almighty to make known His will, and I am come to declare to you, &c. . . ." and then he went off in a rhapsody about the degeneracy of the times, and the people falling off from God. I asked him what Perceval seemed to be driving at, what was his definite object? He said it was not discoverable, but that from the printed paper which he had circulated to all Privy Councillors (for to that body he appears to think that his mission is addressed), in which he specifies all the great acts of legislation for the last five years (beginning with the repeal of the Test and Corporation acts and finishing with the Corporation Bill), as the evidences of a falling off from God, or as the causes of the divine anger, it may per-

haps be inferred that he means they should all be repealed. It is a ridiculous and melancholy exposure. His different receptions by different people are amusing and characteristic. Howick listened to him with patient civility. Melbourne argued with and cross-questioned him. He told him "that he ought to have gone to the Bishops rather than to him," to which Perceval replied, that one of the brethren (Henry Drummond) was gone to the Archbishop. Stanley turned him out at once. As soon as he began he said, "There is no use, Mr. Perceval, in going on this way with me. We had, therefore, better put an end to the subject, and I wish you good morning." He went to Lord Holland, and Lady Holland was with great difficulty persuaded to allow him to go and receive the Apostles. She desired Lord John Russell (who happened to be in the house) to go with him, but John begged to be excused, alleging that he had already had his interview and did not wish for another. So at last she let Lord Holland be wheeled in, but ordered Edgar and Harold, the two pages, to post themselves outside the door, and rush in if they heard Lord Holland scream. Perceval has been with the King, and went to Drayton after Sir Robert Peel, but he complains that he cannot catch the Duke of Wellington.

February 3, 1836: . . . I heard a great deal more about Perceval's proceedings and those of his colleagues yesterday; they continue to visit the Privy Councillors. Lyndhurst told me he had been with him for an hour, Lord Lansdowne the same. When he gave Lord Lansdowne his book, as he glanced over it, Perceval said, "I am aware it is not well written; the composition is not perfect, but I was not permitted to alter it; I was obliged to write it as I received it."

The grandfather of Sir William Harcourt and great-grandfather of Viscount Harcourt was for many years Archbishop of York. Greville notes (November 8, 1847) "the wonderful felicity of his life," his "amiable and graceful prosperity," his many "professional dignities and emoluments and . . . large private fortune"; also "his numerous family whom he saw flourishing around him in opulence and worldly success." Even the Archbishop was tackled by an Irvingite:

February 3, 1836: . . . Drummond went in a chaise and four to the Archbishop of York at Nuneham, who endeavoured to

stop his mouth with a good luncheon, but this would not do. He told the Archbishop the end of the world was approaching, and that it was owing to the neglect of himself and his brethren that the nation was in its present awful state. Perceval told Lord Lansdowne that their sect was increasing greatly and rapidly; they have several congregations in London, two clergymen of the Church of England have joined them, and two men who still occupy their pulpits are only waiting for the call which they daily expect to receive.

March 26, 1832: . . . What celestial influences have been at work I know not, but certain it is that the world seems going mad, individually and collectively. . . . Dudley has gone mad in his own house, Perceval in the House of Commons, and John Montague in the Park, the two latter preaching, both Irvingites and believers in "the tongues." Dudley's madness took an odd turn; he would make up all his quarrels with Lady Holland, to whom he has not spoken for sixteen years, and he called on her, and there were tears and embraces, and God knows what. Sydney Smith told her that she was bound in honour to set the quarrel up again when he comes to his senses, and put things into the *status quo ante pacem*. It would be hard upon him to find, on getting out of a strait waistcoat, that he had been robbed of all his hatreds and hostilities, and seduced into the house of his oldest foe.

Lord Dover, the wire-puller of the Waverers during the Reform Crisis, was an interesting peer who, incidentally, tried to identify the Man in the Iron Mask with Mathioli, the captured agent of the Duke of Parma. He also was affected:

Friday, July 12, 1833: . . . Soon after his marriage, Ellis [Lord Dover], who had never been vicious or profligate, but who was free from anything like severity or austerity, began to show symptoms of a devout propensity, and not contented with an ordinary discharge of religious duties, he read tracts and sermons, frequented churches and preachings, gave up driving on Sundays, and appeared in considerable danger of falling into the gulf of methodism; but this turn did not last long, and whatever induced him to take it up, he apparently became bored with his self-imposed restrictions, and after a little while he threw off his short-lived sanctity, and resumed his worldly

habits and irreverent language, for he was always a loose talker.

In the House of Commons, there was a group called the Saints:

April 9, 1928: . . . I sat next to Stanley, who told me a story which amused me. Macintosh, in the course of the recent debates, went one day to the House of Commons at eleven in the morning to take a place. They were all taken on the benches below the gangway, and on asking the doorkeeper how they happened to be all taken so early, he said, "Oh, sir, there is no chance of getting a place, for Colonel Sibthorpe sleeps at a tavern close by, and comes here every morning by eight o'clock and takes places for all the Saints."

The leader of the Saints had been Wilberforce:

March 7, 1831: . . . When Wilberforce went out of Parliament he went to Canning and offered him the lead and direction of his party (the Saints), urging him to accept it, and assuring him that their support would give him a strength which to an ambitious man like him was invaluable. Canning took three days to consider it, but finally declined, and then the party elected Brougham as their chief; hence the representation of Yorkshire and many other incidents in Brougham's career. [Nothing appears of any such election in Wilberforce's life. July, 1838.]

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What interested the Evangelicals was the emancipation of backward races:

July 18, 1833: . . . There seems every probability of Stanley's West India Bill being thrown out. The Saints, who at first had agreed to support it, object to pay the twenty millions for emancipation to take place twelve years hence, and the present condition of the question seems to be that all parties are dissatisfied with it, and there is nearly a certainty that it will be received with horror by the planters, while the slaves will no longer work when they find the fiat of their freedom (however conditional or distant the final consummation may be) has at length gone forth.

August 14, 1830: . . . The signs of the times are all for reform and retrenchment, and against slavery. It is astonishing the interest the people generally take in the slavery question, which

is the work of the Methodists, and shows the enormous influence they have in the country.

January 26, 1833: . . . There can be no doubt that a great many of the Abolitionists are actuated by very pure motives; they have been shocked at the cruelties which have been and still are very often practised towards slaves, their minds are imbued with the horrors they have read and heard of, and they have an invincible conviction that the state of slavery under any form is repugnant to the spirit of the English Constitution and the Christian religion, and that it is a stain upon the national character which ought to be wiped away. These people, generally speaking, are very ignorant concerning all the various difficulties which beset the question; their notions are superficial; they pity the slaves, whom they regard as injured innocents, and they hate their masters, whom they treat as criminal barbarians.

March 8, 1838: . . . On Tuesday night Brougham made another great slavery speech in the House of Lords, as usual, very long, eloquent, powerful; but his case overstated, too highly wrought, and too artificial. . . . He will certainly gain a great deal of reputation and popularity by his agitation of the Anti-slavery question, for it is a favourite topic in the country. Wharncliffe told me he walked away with him from the House after the debate on Tuesday, and some young men who had been below the bar saluted him as he went by with "Bravo, Brougham!"

March 30, 1838: . . . On Wedesnday afternoon I found Downing Street thronged with rival deputations of West Indians and Quakers, which had both been with Melbourne. Out of Brougham's flaming speeches on Anti-slavery a tempest has arisen, which threatens the West Indians with sudden and unforeseen ruin in the shape of immediate emancipation. . . . The West Indians had no notion they were in any danger, and were reposing under the shade of Government protection and in undoubting reliance upon the inviolability of the great arrangement, when they find themselves overtaken all at once with the new question of immediate emancipation which has sprung up into instantaneous life and strength. Their terror is accordingly great. They went to Melbourne, who said he agreed with them, and that the Government was determined to support them,

and so they might tell their people, but that he could not promise them to make it so much a government question as to resign if they were beat upon it. The leaders of the Opposition equally took their part, but the question is whether the tails will not beat the heads. I never remember before to have seen any question on which so much uncertainty prevailed as to individual votes. More than one half the members of the House doubted, and probably are at this moment doubting, how they shall vote. The petitions are innumerable, and men are disposed to gratify their constituents by voting as they please on this question, not caring a fig either for the slaves or the West Indians, and reconciling it to their consciences to despoil the latter by assuming that they were overpaid with the twenty millions they got by the Emancipation Act.

London, February 22, 1833: . . . The public appetite for discussion and legislation has been whetted and is insatiable; the millions of orators and legislators who have sprung up like mushrooms all over the kingdom, the bellowers, the chatterers, the knaves and the dupes, who make such an universal hubbub, must be fed with fresh victims and sacrifices.

Over Emancipation, King William had been difficult:

June 18, 1832: . . . When Normanby went to take leave of him on going to Jamaica, he pronounced a harangue in favour of the slave trade, of which he has always been a great admirer, and expressed sentiments for which his subjects would tear him to pieces if they heard them.

An island which paid Greville for his sinecure indulged in threats of secession—interesting as a precedent:

February 4, 1833: . . . The people of Jamaica have presented a petition to the King (I don't know exactly in what shape, or how got up), praying to be released from their allegiance. Goderich told me that it was very insolent.

February 4, 1833: . . . George Hibbert told me last night that if they were driven to extremities there was nothing they were not ready to do, and that there would be another panic if Government did not take care, and so Rothschild had told them.

June 1, 1838: . . . These men of peace would prefer a violent commotion in the West Indies, attended with every sort of

mischief to the slaves as well as to the planters, rather than abandon their own schemes and notions, in which there is much more of vanity and the love of meddling than of benevolence and charity.

Sometimes a slave did not want to be free:

London, February 22, 1833: . . . Goulburn mentioned a curious thing *à propos* of slavery. A slave ran away from his estate in Jamaica many years ago, and got to England. He [the man] called at his house when he was not at home, and Goulburn never could afterward find out where he was. He remained in England, however, gaining his livelihood by some means, till after some years he returned to Jamaica and to the estate, and desired to be employed as a slave again.

The real question was whether the Negroes, if emancipated, would work:

London, February 22, 1833: . . . Stephen, who is one of the great apostles of emancipation, and who resigned a profession worth £3,000 a year at the Bar for a place of £1,500 in the Colonial Office, principally in order to advance that object, owned that he had never known so great a problem nor so difficult a question to settle. His notion is that compulsory labour may be substituted for slavery, and in some colonies (the new ones, as they are called—Demerara, etc.) he thinks it will not be difficult; in Jamaica he is doubtful, and admits that if this does not answer the slaves will relapse into barbarism.

Sir Henry Taylor, "who rules half the West Indies in the Colonial Office, though with an invisible sceptre," foretold the "consequences of emancipation, both to the Negroes and to the planters":

January 26, 1833: . . . The estates of the latter would not be cultivated; it would be impossible, for want of labour; the Negroes would not work—no inducement would be sufficient to make them; they wanted to be free merely that they might be idle. . . . They will resume the habits of their African brethren, but, he thinks, without the ferocity and savageness which distinguished the latter. Of course the germs of civilization and

religion which have been sown among them in their servile state will be speedily obliterated. . . . The island (for Jamaica may be taken for example, as it was in our conversation) would not long be tenable for whites.

Lord Ellenborough, a flamboyant as we shall see, advised the proprietors "to agree instantly to stop their orders which he believes would compel Government to arrest their course":

Of the struggle over slavery, the echoes long continued. England stopped the trade by sea, but with a grumble at the cost:

February 13, 1848: . . . He [Graham] is entirely against the squadron on the African coast and keeping up that humbug, which he says costs directly and indirectly a million a year. I told him Auckland said it only cost £300,000; he replied, it was not so, and that including indirect expenses it cost a million.

The West Indians, living under emancipation (1848), demanded that slave-grown sugar from other territories be excluded.

But the point for us here is that Jamaica and her sorrows proved quite too much for Melbourne. With the slaves set free, the island, which yielded to Greville his sinecure, was confronted by essentially the same difficulties which were to arise later in the southern states of the Union after the Civil War. Constitutional Government "could only lead to the oppression of the blacks by the whites or of the whites by the blacks."

A bill was brought in, therefore, to suspend the Constitution of Jamaica for five years. And on this "half measure," a division was taken in the House of Commons at two o'clock in the morning of May 7th.

"Ten of the Radicals voted against them [the government] and ten or a dozen stayed away," and while "six of the Tories voted with the government," Melbourne was left with no more than a majority of five. And as a result, "the Cabinet met and resolved to resign." Melbourne's Millennium was interrupted. His "chair" at Windsor Castle was menaced with vacancy.