

# 1 The Origins of Reform

## Pressure-Group Rivalries and the Conservationist Turn

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In the spring of 1838, abolitionist George Thompson was halfway through a fiery denunciation of coercive labor practices in the West Indies when a bolt of lightning and peal of thunder interrupted the proceedings at the Devonport Town Hall. He had been citing several firsthand testimonies that suggested Parliament could terminate the apprenticeship system – a component of the 1833 emancipation legislation that compelled freed slaves to labor on plantations – ahead of schedule without fear of an economic implosion. The disruptive meteorological event added some flourish to Thompson’s recitation. Such occurrences, he noted, were emblematic of abolitionist agitation, by which “the lightning of British indignation shall smite the throne of despotism reared in the West [and] the mild rays of freedom shall light up the Antilles.”<sup>1</sup> This sublime imagery of light and darkness was pervasive in the reformist literature of the period, which interlaced opposition to “Old Corruption” in the metropole with newfound anxieties over British misdeeds in the colonies. Autocratic powers, be they slaveholders, East India Company agents, or the landed aristocracy, could only abuse their authority if their actions were concealed. Unfortunately, India remained obscured by a “veil that has been suffered hitherto to shroud the mingled misery and splendour of this land of wonders.”<sup>2</sup>

From the vantage point of 1891, journalist John Hyslop Bell deemed India reformism to be symptomatic of a great spirit of improvement that had swept the nation sixty years prior. The abolition of slavery throughout (part of) the empire and the termination of the Company’s lingering monopoly powers in 1833 were “largely concessions to a popular agitation as unselfish in its objects as character.”<sup>3</sup> Bell based this claim partially on the testimony of Elizabeth Nichol, the daughter of prominent Quaker and British India Society (BIS)

<sup>1</sup> George Thompson, *Speech of George Thompson, Esq., at a Great Meeting for the Extinction of Negro Apprenticeship* (London: Central Negro Emancipation Office, 1838), 32.

<sup>2</sup> *British India. The Duty and Interest of Great Britain, to Consider the Condition and Claims of her Possessions in the East* (London: Johnston and Barrett, 1839), 9.

<sup>3</sup> John Hyslop Bell, *British Folks & British India Fifty Years Ago: Joseph Pease and his Contemporaries* (London: John Heywood, 1891), 7.

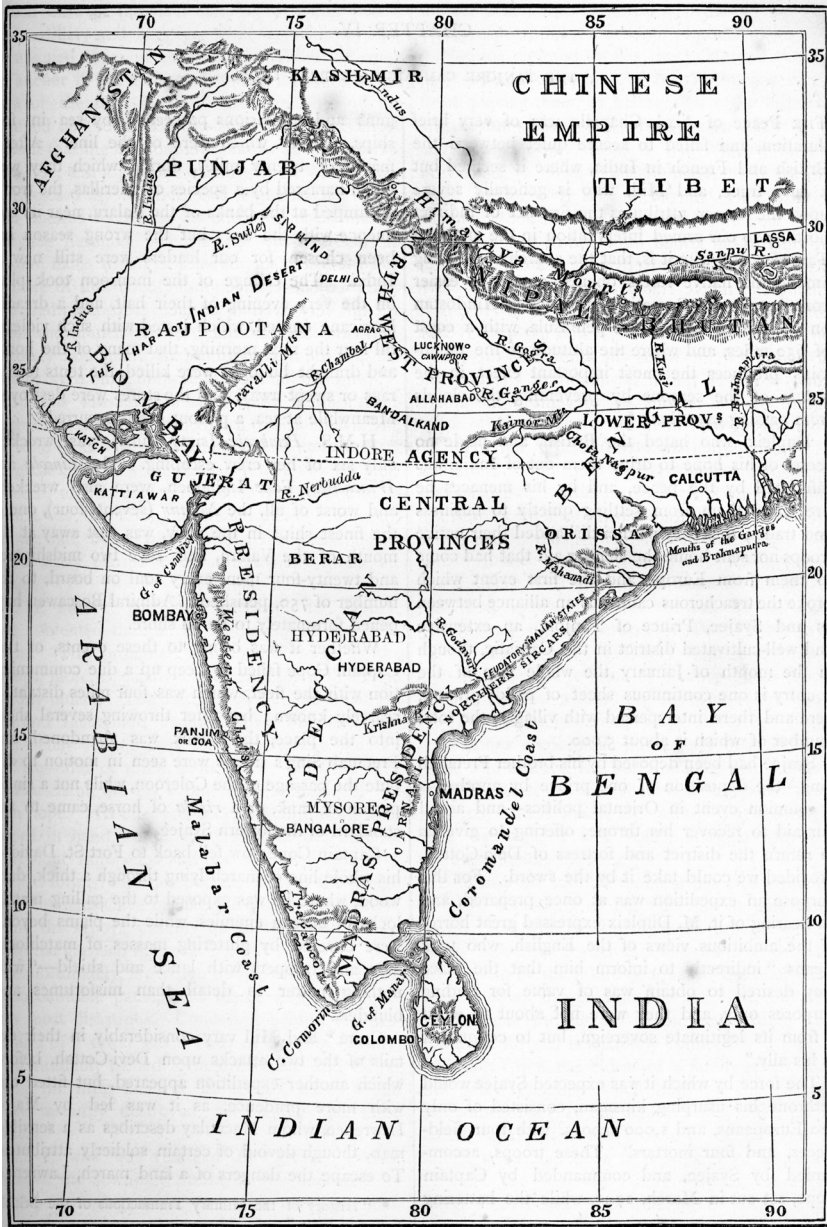


Figure 1.1 Nineteenth-century map of India

cofounder Joseph Pease, who had dutifully served as Thompson's behind-the-scenes advisor during the heady days of the early 1840s. It was the franchise-expanding 1832 Reform Act, Mrs. Nichol surmised, that catalyzed a political awakening among the middle classes and expanded their global gaze. Eager to exercise their new electoral powers, Britons took it upon themselves to "assuage the misery and relieve the oppression of the less favoured inhabitants of distant dependencies."<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, scholars have offered insight into the mechanics of this moral awakening by reconstructing the "'real' and 'imaginary' geographies of colonial philanthropy."<sup>5</sup> According to Alan Lester and David Lambert, organizations such as the BIS, Aborigines' Protection Society (APS), and British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) functioned as hubs in a web, collating information transmitted from the colonial periphery into a "more seamless philanthropic discourse."<sup>6</sup> At the same time, reformers were influenced by extra-imperial informational inputs such as American abolitionist debates and accounts of American Indians' decline. Collectively, these humanitarians sought to amplify the "distant sufferings of colonized others" while assuring Britons that these causes were indeed actionable; in so doing, they were "defining what it meant to be British in a global context."<sup>7</sup> Responding to this "sentimentalism," an emergent trans-imperial settler community asserted its own rival conception of Britishness that was rooted in racial hierarchization. While this historiographical focus on active and reactive "discursive spatialities" illuminates imperial interconnections, it runs the risk of flattening and homogenizing the combative, variegated culture of early Victorian moral agitation. By analyzing the fracture points of these philanthropic webs, we may better understand how individual reformers negotiated the contours of their own networks and how hostilities between organizations impacted the trajectory of their movements.

Reformist communities differed from kin groups, secret societies, or even political parties. They did not rigidly police their boundaries nor did they regularly excommunicate delinquent members. To borrow Ernest Gellner's phrasing, the reformer was a "modular" agent in the public sphere; he was capable of flexibly combining "into specific-purpose, *ad hoc*, limited association without binding himself by some blood ritual" or ceremonial display.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> "A Quaker of Sixty Years Ago," in *The Westminster Review*, vol. 139 (London: Henry and Company, 1893), 416.

<sup>5</sup> David Lambert and Alan Lester, "Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy," *Progress in Human Geography* 28 (2004): 322.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>7</sup> Lambert and Lester, 330; Alan Lester, "British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire," *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002): 30–31.

<sup>8</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), 100.

A defining feature of British abolitionism was the “constant spillover of individuals into new causes.”<sup>9</sup> Ruminating on this modularity, the *National Temperance Chronicle* confirmed that “he who begins in seeking the welfare of his fellow-men in one thing is led step by step to seek it also in other things.”<sup>10</sup> Such organizational permeability allowed for encouraging bursts of moral enthusiasm, but it also hindered reform societies’ membership retention and financial viability.

India reformism was as much a career as it was a humanitarian cause. The first and last sections of this chapter therefore adopt a sociological lens to examine how early reformers like George Thompson attempted to secure social and symbolic capital as spokesmen for India. Pierre Bourdieu famously defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network” of in-group members.<sup>11</sup> This network is not a static phenomenon, but rather is “the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term.” Meanwhile, symbolic capital (which Bourdieu did not theorize as explicitly) manifests as recognized status or authority and can even secure its possessor financial credit.<sup>12</sup> Crucially, Bourdieu recognized that both social and symbolic capital are “transformed, disguised forms of economic capital” that produce “their most specific effect only to the extent they conceal ... the fact that economic capital is at their root.”<sup>13</sup> Reformers could therefore benefit from “capital conversions” in times of exigency. An agitator who acquired symbolic capital as a martyr for his cause and social capital through his associational organizing might secure the resources to launch new initiatives or even subsidize his personal upkeep when his coffers were depleted.

This chapter also accounts for the ideological divergences that sprang up between vying humanitarian pressure groups and clarifies how reformers reacted to these hurdles. Chronicling the formation of the BIS, I argue that George Thompson and its leading lights generally subscribed to a “conservationism” that favored the retention of native institutions in order to obviate

<sup>9</sup> British women who had honed their protest skills during the anti-*sati* campaign of the 1820s turned their attention to opposing animal cruelty and vivisection in the following decade. See Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 57, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Brian Harrison, “Civil Society by Accident? Paradoxes of Voluntarism and Pluralism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions*, ed. Jose Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 82.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 248–249.

<sup>12</sup> Steven Loyal and Stephen Quilley, “The Particularity of the Universal: Critical Reflections on Bourdieu’s Theory of Symbolic Power and the State,” *Theory & Society* 46 (2017): 443.

<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu, 252.

societal destabilization. In so doing, I differentiate between the various currents within reformist thought and emphasize the singularity of the society's nonsectarian mission statement. Members of the BIS also broke with the abolitionist BFASS, which rejected the reformers' calls for global free trade and took a more interventionist stance on combatting indigenous slavery within India itself. Thompson's close relations with the radical American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and his acolytes further perplexed the mainstream BFASS and contributed to lingering animosities that persisted even after the BIS had fallen into abeyance. Delving into these clashes demonstrates that early advocates of India reformism were an embattled lot, contending with the obstructionism of a reactionary Company-state and the derision of detractors within the metropolitan philanthropic community as well.

### Cultivating Capital

In the 1830s, reformist organizations began to rely heavily upon charismatic, combative lecturers who could spearhead their out-of-doors agitation. Born in Liverpool to a poor Wesleyan Methodist family and apprenticed in a counting house at the age of twelve,<sup>14</sup> Thompson embarked upon a career in 1831 as a professional speaker for the Anti-Slavery Society's Agency Committee. Three years later, he earned a degree of infamy by conducting an American lecture tour in the company of the "fanatical" William Lloyd Garrison. His intemperate speeches targeting respected ministers in Massachusetts prompted critics to malign him as a meddling foreigner dispatched by "the old pussy-cats of Glasgow" to stir up trouble.<sup>15</sup> In Boston, two merchants plotted to corner him outside of Garrison's headquarters and raised a hundred dollars to "reward the individual who shall first lay violent hands on Thompson, so that he may be brought to the tar-kettle before dark."<sup>16</sup> Rioters targeted him on five occasions in the summer and fall of 1835, while proslavery pamphleteers rumored that he had taken a Black mistress.<sup>17</sup> While Thompson's tour galvanized enthusiasm and contributed to a surge in the antislavery societies' membership, it also convinced detractors of the necessity of the "gag rule" that prohibited the presentation of abolitionist petitions before the House of Representatives.

Although Thompson had initially believed that "the battle for liberty anywhere" required a philanthropic division of labor with specialized lecturers

<sup>14</sup> Ronald M. Gifford, "George Thompson and Trans-Atlantic Anti-Slavery, 1831–1865" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1999), 19.

<sup>15</sup> C. Duncan Rice, "The Anti-Slavery Mission of George Thompson to the United States, 1834–1835," *Journal of American Studies* 2, no. 1 (1968): 28.

<sup>16</sup> F. W. Chesson, "William Lloyd Garrison," *Leisure Hour* (January 1886): 23.

<sup>17</sup> W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrison, Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 53–55.

attached to each discrete cause,<sup>18</sup> he soon amassed a hefty portfolio. He was drawn to the plight of the Indian *ryot* (peasant agriculturist) in 1838 while touring the north of England with Irish statistician Robert Montgomery Martin to establish linkups between the provincial emancipationist organizations and the newly founded APS. What attracted him to this society was its portrayal of humanity as a mutual dependency in which “the oppressed, the helpless and the ignorant on every spot of the Globe” wielded a claim to the benefice of the powerful.<sup>19</sup> The APS took a strident stance in attributing the oppression of indigenous populations to governmental inaction, noting that unmediated colonial expansion had “banished from our confines, or exterminated, the natives, who might have been profitable workmen, good customers, and good neighbours.”<sup>20</sup> Going one step beyond the parliamentary select committee of inquiry that spawned it, the APS defended the brokering of treaties with the “Caffre or the Indian,” who were just as capable of understanding their terms as any European. Thompson applauded the organization’s revelations of imperial injustices, for he resented the British “custom to point rather to the small spots we had civilized and enlightened, than to the vast continents and innumerable islands we have covered with the ashes of a slaughtered race.”<sup>21</sup>

A fledgling entity, the APS basked in the glow of Thompson’s star power. Publications such as the *Birmingham Journal* admitted to having no knowledge of the APS or its goals but trusted that Thompson had lent his abilities to a worthwhile cause.<sup>22</sup> Yet Thompson’s working relationship with the APS was short-lived, as founding members such as Joseph Sturge cautioned him against misdirecting the organization’s energies to the amelioration of the *ryots*’ condition.<sup>23</sup> Other leading voices either exhibited a disinterest in Indian issues or utilized the society to further a scientific interest in non-Western cultures at the expense of political agitation.<sup>24</sup> The APS, meanwhile, was gradually incorporated within a governmental system of “humanitarian regulation” that linked

<sup>18</sup> Gifford, 190.

<sup>19</sup> George Thompson, “The Connection between the Protection and Civilization of the Native Tribes of the British Settlements and Colonies, and the Manufacturing and Commercial Prosperity of the Parent Country,” *Renfrewshire Reformer*, 24 November 1838.

<sup>20</sup> *Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes. Reprinted, with Comments by the “Aborigines Protection Society”* (London: William Hall, 1837), 104, 122.

<sup>21</sup> *Report of the Proceedings at a Meeting of the Aborigines’ Protection Society Held in the Lecture Room – Nelson Street, Newcastle upon Tyne on Tuesday, 22 August 1838* (Newcastle: W. and H. Mitchell, 1838), 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Birmingham Journal*, 14 September 1838, Library of Congress (LOC), Scrapbooks collected by Thompson and Chesson (Scrapbooks), vol. 6, E449.S43.

<sup>23</sup> Gifford, 197. Thompson also clashed with APS cofounder Thomas Hodgkin over his sponsorship of the American Colonization Society.

<sup>24</sup> James Heartfield, *The Aborigines’ Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1836–1909* (London: Hurst and Co., 2011), 26.

the protection of indigenous races with ameliorative, yet autocratic, rule in the settler colonies.<sup>25</sup> By January 1839, Thompson was firmly disenchanted with the society's avoidance of the East India question and its inability "to attempt anything by means of real agitation."<sup>26</sup> Although he feared that the appearance of a new reform organization might splinter public attention or result in cross-cutting negotiations with the government, he nevertheless rejected the APS's last-ditch offer to establish a subcommittee on Indian issues.

Thompson's misgivings were soon dispelled following a meeting with the Malabar planter Francis Carnac Brown, whose "soul seem[ed] absorbed in the great question of 'how shall the state of things in India be mended?'"<sup>27</sup> Hired as the traveling secretary for the incipient BIS, a group cofounded by a handful of radical Quakers and Anglo-Indians like Brown, Thompson further boosted his public profile. He was joined in this pursuit by antislavery and anti-apprenticeship activists such as Thomas Clarkson, Henry Brougham, and Daniel O'Connell, who now wished to address the "ignorance, poverty, crime, and disaffection" that prevailed across famine-stricken India.<sup>28</sup> To bolster public awareness of these distresses, the BIS aimed to disseminate information on Indian affairs within Britain and extract new data directly from the subcontinent. From the outset, it challenged the concatenated systems of monopoly and arbitrary power that marginalized disenfranchised groups throughout the empire. In 1839 and 1840, a bumper crop of auxiliary societies seemingly arose out of every public meeting that the reformers convened. From South Durham to Rochdale, where MP John Bright established an Auxiliary British India Association, public men signaled their intent to remedy colonial evils.<sup>29</sup>

Agitators associated with the BIS represented India reform as the logical outgrowth of various existing movements. Joseph Pease, for instance, urged O'Connell to turn his attentions to Indian bondage by stressing the similarities between the impoverished *ryots* and the rack-rented Irish peasants.<sup>30</sup> Fellow BIS cofounder William Howitt also suggested that India was governed as the "Ireland of the East ... pouring out wealth upon us" while millions of its native population

<sup>25</sup> Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 21, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Letterbook of George Thompson, 7 January 1839 and 12 March 1839, John Rylands Library (JRL), Raymond English Anti-Slavery Collection (REAS) 4/1.

<sup>27</sup> Letterbook of George Thompson, 7 March 1839, JRL, REAS 4/1.

<sup>28</sup> *Prospectus of the Provisional Committee for Forming a British India Society, for Bettering the Condition of our Fellow-Subjects – The Natives of British India* (London, 1839), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Associations formed in Newcastle, Leeds, Ashton-under-Lyne, Salford, Bolton, and Oldham. See "The Parliament of India," *British Indian Advocate*, no. 1 (1 January 1841): 7–8.

<sup>30</sup> Zoe Laidlaw, "'Justice to India – Prosperity to England – Freedom to the Slave!' Humanitarian and Moral Reform Campaigns on India, Aborigines and American Slavery," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22, no. 2 (2012): 309.

suffered in “the lowest state of poverty and wretchedness.”<sup>31</sup> Thompson, too, observed that both Ireland and India “seem to have been made for England, and their Aborigines only to be plundered by her tyranny.”<sup>32</sup> Writing to the Irish Quaker and publisher Richard Webb, he prayed that Ireland reciprocally would overcome its political factionalism and contemplate “the sorrows and slavery of others” in order “to make the world as free from tyrants and oppressors as she is herself from the venomous reptiles of the earth!”<sup>33</sup> By the early 1840s, the reformist *British Indian Advocate* was rejoicing that the Irish *Freeman’s Journal* and *Morning Register* had begun to “speak with a warmth and heartiness of the claims of India” and had “learned to feel keenly for the oppressed.”<sup>34</sup>

Yet the “philanthropic pound,” as Zoe Laidlaw puts it, “was thinly spread.”<sup>35</sup> The initial activities of the BIS were sustained largely through one-time donations from principal backers such as Joseph Pease, Major General John Briggs, and Francis Carnac Brown, who contributed as much as £50 each.<sup>36</sup> However, organizations of this sort required a constant influx of new capital to stay afloat, let alone expand. Annual subscriptions from casual members rarely exceeded a single pound, which was hardly sufficient to subsidize publication of the *British Indian Advocate*. One solution lay in forming connections with the new commercial and political associations that were arising in India’s presidency towns. In the early days of reformism, these groups were strictly feeders of capital and could not appropriate the resources of the metropolitan organizations; as a result, linkups were often impermanent. Representing the planter-friendly Calcutta Landholders’ Society, John Crawford provided the BIS with a £500 sponsorship, only to withdraw his support once Thompson and his Quaker allies came out against the Company’s opium trade.<sup>37</sup>

Reformism was also an uncertain occupation. Periods of great frenzy were followed by deep lulls in activity depending on the national mood. One could not pass up employment opportunities when they came along. Toward the end of 1837, Thompson informed his wife, Anne, that he had been offered six months’ pay to lecture against apprenticeship for the Central Negro

<sup>31</sup> William Howitt, *Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in All their Countries* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1838), 300.

<sup>32</sup> George Thompson, “Mr. Thompson’s Lecture on the Duty of Great Britain to her Hundred Million of Subjects in the East: Delivered in George Street Chapel, Glasgow, on Wednesday, Nov. 14, 1838,” in *Scrapbooks*, vol. 6.

<sup>33</sup> George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, 15 February 1839, Boston Public Library (BPL), Anti-Slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.8, 6.

<sup>34</sup> “Wrongs and Claims of Indian Commerce,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 2 (1 February 1841): 15.

<sup>35</sup> Laidlaw, 305.

<sup>36</sup> *Prospectus of the Provisional Committee for Forming a British India Society*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971), 19.



Emancipation Committee. While the claims upon him “from all parts of the country [were] very numerous and perplexing,” he longed to be at home in Edinburgh and wondered if he could provide for his family on a restricted income.<sup>38</sup> But Thompson remained on the circuit. As a leading spokesman for the BIS, he was keen to take India reformism “out of doors” and modify “the views of the Lords and Commons ... in exact proportion to the diffusion of information generally.”<sup>39</sup> Seeking a more stable arrangement, Thompson readily accepted retainers from both the dethroned Raja of Satara and (briefly) the Mughal emperor in the mid-1840s.<sup>40</sup> Opponents thereafter imputed mercenary motivations to his agitation and complained of the reformers’ departure from the civic republican ideal of disinterested philanthropy. Defending his probity, Thompson declared in one letter to the editor of the *Bengal Hurkaru* that he “would see [his] children starve, rather than feed them on the wages of prostitution.”<sup>41</sup> He particularly resented the fact that Company directors’ patronage networks were above board, while reformers’ receipt of any support from India rendered their testimonies suspect. Such aspersions, which devalued their symbolic capital, were “nothing better than an imputation on the justice of a universally recognized maxim, that the labourer is worthy of his hire.”<sup>42</sup>

When campaigns accomplished their objectives or ran out of money, reformers often found themselves adrift. Some took up journalistic piecemeal or else fled the country as debtors – Thompson did both. Particularly zealous reformers who required relief could convert the symbolic capital that they had accumulated through their exertions into a kind of safety net. Frederick Chesson, the secretary of the APS and Thompson’s son-in-law, served as a nexus redistributing charitable relief within the broader reformist community. In the winter of 1858, he received a £20 donation for Thompson’s upkeep from W. T. Pritchard, the recently appointed consul of Fiji, on the condition of anonymity.<sup>43</sup> Several years later, he loaned £35 to John Dickinson, the chairman of the India Reform Society (IRS), who was in fact channeling it to Louis Chamerovzow, the former secretary of the APS (with whom Chesson had bad blood). Even in a state of debt, reformers could still accrue “symbolic profit” from their agitation,<sup>44</sup> whether it was through rubbing elbows with beatified

<sup>38</sup> George Thompson to Anne (Jenny) Thompson, 29 November 1837, JRL, REAS 4/1.

<sup>39</sup> George Thompson to Anne Thompson, 3 February 1838, JRL, REAS 4/1.

<sup>40</sup> For Thompson’s account of his introduction to the Mughal emperor, see “G. T.’s Third Letter,” *Liberator*, 29 December 1843.

<sup>41</sup> *Ninth Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow, 1843), 55.

<sup>42</sup> *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd, and September 24th, 1845, on the Case of the Deposed Raja of Sattara and the Impeachment of Col. C. Ovens* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1845), 70.

<sup>43</sup> Diary of Frederick Chesson, 25 February 1859, JRL, REAS 11/6; 8 February 1862, REAS 11/9; 27 December 1862, REAS 11/9.

<sup>44</sup> Bourdieu, 249.

abolitionists such as Thomas Clarkson or by investing in a personal narrative of self-martyrdom.<sup>45</sup> In his India exertions, Thompson comforted himself with the adage that “public opinion has ever been against reformers” and likened himself to Noah, who “was in a minority of one, when he preached righteousness to the antediluvians.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Christian or Conservatist? Alternatives for an Integrated Empire**

The British India Society which was established in July 1839 was not the first organization to claim the name. Nearly twenty years earlier, a consortium of premier reformers (including William Wilberforce and APS cofounder Thomas Fowell Buxton) had convened in London to produce a “great moral operation” in India. Attendees concluded that Hinduism rendered its followers superstitious and inured them to the forces of despotism; Providence had “consigned the population of 100 millions to Great Britain, so that she might redeem them from this immoral vassalage” and “lift this people from their vices.”<sup>47</sup> Evangelical groups in the metropole continued this crusade against Indian heathenism throughout the 1840s. Baptist clergymen and their parishioners flooded the Court of Proprietors (CoP) with petitions urging the Company to withdraw its support from Hindu institutions and abolish the pilgrim tax (in conformity with the directors’ instructions from 1833). The stockholders retorted that the EIC had pledged to defray the expenses of the Temple of Jagannath in 1805 after it acquired the province of Cuttack.<sup>48</sup> It could not renege on this promise simply because the missionaries reported “scenes of infamy, misery, and death, which no pen can describe.”<sup>49</sup>

Reformist proprietors such as Robert Montgomery Martin would have been well acquainted with these impassioned applications. Though he refrained from invoking religion before the CoP, Martin associated the material improvement of Indian society with Anglicization and conversion in his printed polemic. His was no fringe voice. In the late 1820s, he had been

<sup>45</sup> Garrison insisted that it was the lot of “genuine abolitionists” to be “despised and rejected.” Far from being anti-Catholic, as some Irish alleged, his followers had in fact “emancipated themselves from sectarian bondage.” See William Lloyd Garrison to Daniel O’Connell, 8 December 1843, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, ed. Walter M. Merrill, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1974), 230.

<sup>46</sup> *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th*, 1845, 203.

<sup>47</sup> “British-India Society,” *Observer*, 27 May 1821, 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Accounts Respecting the Annual Territorial Revenues and Disbursements of the East India Company*, vol. 34 (1854), 86.

<sup>49</sup> “Petition of the General Baptist Missionary Society,” Minutes of the General Court of Proprietors, 23 June 1847, BL, IOR/B/271, f. 293. Later petitions were drawn up by the Baptist churches in Burton-on-Trent, Louth, and the Midland Conference of General Baptist Denomination.

involved in radical, free trade publishing ventures in Calcutta with the assistance of James Silk Buckingham and Rammohun Roy. Upon returning to England, he attempted to find permanent employment with the Company by publishing a defense of its Chinese tea monopoly and rejecting the schemes for European colonization that he had hitherto supported.<sup>50</sup> Reflecting on this turnabout, Lynn Zastoupil identifies a shift in Martin's sentiments after 1832 toward a "kind of Tory radicalism" that was primarily concerned with the preservation of the status quo.<sup>51</sup> But while it is true that Martin's subsequent works, including the five bulky volumes of his *History of the British Colonies*<sup>52</sup> and twelve works for the *Colonial Library*, affirmed the utility of the Company, he was hardly an apologist for the system of double government as it permanently stood.

Like the BIS reformers, Martin denounced the home government's continued reliance on mercantilist, unequal tariffs that disadvantaged Indian produce in British markets and impeded the country's economic development. In 1840, he established the *Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal* to further his vision for an integrated empire that incorporated India alongside the settler colonies. For generations, politicians had "looked on British India as a step-child and refused to treat it as a member of a great [imperial] body."<sup>53</sup> As British merchants pillaged India and undermined its industries to pad their own pockets, the metropolitan public normalized this behavior and displayed a "criminal indifference" to India's plight.<sup>54</sup> This complaint echoed Garrison's warning that India's woes would only worsen so long as the British public was "kept in profound ignorance of the misdeeds of their government."<sup>55</sup>

While Martin affirmed the BIS's demands for publicity, adherence to free trade principles, and distaste for anomalous modes of rule, he broke with the society by reifying Indian governance as a divinely ordained trial by fire for the colonizing nation. Like many Evangelicals, he believed that immense power had been granted to Britain "for great and holy purposes," namely "extending

<sup>50</sup> In later editions, Martin clarified that he was only supporting the continuance of the tea monopoly for a *limited* time to recuperate Indian finances. See Robert Montgomery Martin, *The Political, Commercial, & Financial Condition of the Anglo-Eastern Empire, in 1832* (London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., 1833), v.

<sup>51</sup> Zastoupil, 124.

<sup>52</sup> For a granular analysis that places the *History* in its political context, see Alex Middleton, "Robert Montgomery Martin and the Origins of 'Greater Britain,'" *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 49, no. 5 (2021): 833–865.

<sup>53</sup> "Cultivation of Sugar in British India," in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 6 (London: Fisher, Son, and Co., 1841), 177.

<sup>54</sup> "Justice for India," in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 2 (London: Fisher, Son and Co., 1840), 273.

<sup>55</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, "Preface," in *Lectures on British India, Delivered in the Friends' Meeting-House, Manchester, England* (Pawtucket, RI: William and Robert Adams, 1840), viii.

to distant parts of the world the blessings of Christianity, and giving to them our language and laws and literature.”<sup>56</sup> This triumphalist vision of a colonial Christendom was also dependent on the organic gestation of settler networks. Martin dramatized the demoralization of the working classes at home and estimated that the government-regulated emigration of one thousand Britons daily would preserve the country from internal revolt.<sup>57</sup> The intermarriage of these Christian, virtuous migrants with established settlers who were “free from the diseases to which long-established societies are so liable” would yield an integrated maritime empire comparable to a “spider’s web, which vibrated to the centre when touched at any one of its extremities.”<sup>58</sup>

Whereas Martin predicted that Britain’s imperial destiny lay in the formation of global Christian networks, reformers associated with the BIS were rather more circumspect when it came to the dissemination of religious doctrine. Cofounder William Adam, a former missionary who had converted to Unitarianism, was well aware of the practical limitations of conversion in India. He had broken ranks with the Baptists in Calcutta because he “could not approve of the plans which they prosecuted of preaching principally to the poor and the illiterate.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the tracts that the Baptists produced to aid in proselytization were “either mystical, puerile, or both”; there was “scarcely one fit to be put in the hands of a native of understanding and reflection.”<sup>60</sup> As a result, Indians who did convert were wholly dependent on the missionaries and “too few, too poor, too ignorant, and too much despised among their countrymen, to make much impression by their labours.”<sup>61</sup>

After breaking ranks with the Baptists, Adam set out on his own radical publishing venture and challenged the defamatory stereotypes of “uncivilized” Indian society that James Mill’s *History* had popularized.<sup>62</sup> As editor of the reformist *British Indian Advocate*, he took issue with the “Anglomania” that had begun to permeate missionary and Company circles. The CoP was certainly alive to the grievances of British Christians abroad that were “heard, heeded, reiterated, and forced upon public attention,” but the injuries sustained

<sup>56</sup> “Public Meeting,” *Glasgow Argus*, 10 September 1838, LOC, Scrapbooks, vol. 5, 63.

<sup>57</sup> Martin had little sympathy with the Chartists, lamenting that “republicanism in its worst features... stalks naked throughout the land” and threatened “all possessed of property.” See “Duties and Responsibilities of a Conservative Government,” in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 7 (London: Fisher, Son and Co., 1842), 4.

<sup>58</sup> “Social Effects of Colonies on England,” in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 1 (London: Fisher, Son and Co., 1840), 293–295; “Public Meeting,” *Glasgow Argus*, 10 September 1838, 64. See Scrapbooks, vol. 5.

<sup>59</sup> *Correspondence Relative to the Prospects of Christianity, and the Means of Promoting its Reception in India* (Cambridge, MA: Hillard and Metcalf, 1824), 16.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Julie L. Holcomb, *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 152.

by millions of Indian subjects were habitually overlooked.<sup>63</sup> Disputing the efficacy of Anglicization, Adam drew from his own education reports and propounded the need for vernacular teaching initiatives that had met with success under the auspices of the Calcutta School Society.<sup>64</sup> The BIS's "Calcutta informant" concurred, noting that the exclusive use of English as the language of instruction had failed in the Scottish Highlands and Ireland, and was sure to falter on the banks of the Hooghly as well.<sup>65</sup>

Like Adam, Thompson rejected the prevailing Anglomania and emphasized that accounts of the Indians' "complete moral turpitude" were "untrue and wholly unfounded."<sup>66</sup> This ideological conservatism was clearly apparent in his speeches that discouraged any attempt to "Anglicise India, to attempt to colonize India, or to destroy her institutions, or to give her those which are of mushroom growth in Europe."<sup>67</sup> The country's "enlightened and liberal" municipal machinery had survived intact for centuries, though it had been "dilapidated by the hand of the modern Goth." In an apparent attempt to deflect Evangelical criticism, Thompson routinely cited Bishop Heber's classic travelogue, which spoke to the innate civility of Hindus and Muslims alike and compared their advancement to that of the Italians and inhabitants of southern France. Heber's evidence further suggested that Indian laborers were willing to enter global markets; they were "just as desirous of accumulating wealth, as skillful in the means of acquiring it, and as prone to all its enjoyments, as any people on earth."<sup>68</sup> Still, Thompson's approbation of native civilization alarmed certain meeting attendees such as the peripatetic John Crawford, who remained convinced that Indians were "still a rude people, who had much to learn from Europe."<sup>69</sup>

A close analysis of conservationist reformist thought reveals a subtle distinction between the philanthropic "friends of humanity" and the "India experts" with firsthand experience of the subcontinent. From the time of his association with the APS, Thompson had hearkened to a broader natural rights discourse

<sup>63</sup> "The Parliament of India," *British Indian Advocate*, no. 1 (1 January 1841): 3.

<sup>64</sup> This organization received 500 rupees per month from the CoD and offered instruction in orthography, Bengali, and geography. See William Adam, *Report on the State of Education in Bengal* (Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1835), 11–13. John Briggs approved of Adam's educational scheme, in which a central college in each presidency would teach vernacular languages and offer English-language instruction for aspiring teachers and translators. See John Briggs, *India & Europe Compared; Being a Popular View of the Present State and Future Prospects of our Eastern Continental Empire* (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1857), 158–159.

<sup>65</sup> "Indian and Eastern News," *British Indian Advocate*, no. 2 (1 February 1841): 11.

<sup>66</sup> Here, Thompson was quoting Warren Hastings, whom nobody would accuse "of being over partial to the natives of India." See Thompson, *Lectures on British India, Delivered in the Friends' Meeting-House, Manchester*, 37.

<sup>67</sup> *British India. The Duty and Interest of Great Britain*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

when protesting the marginalization of colonial subjects; he hyperbolically counted the “philosophic Brahmin, the roving Arab ... the manly savages of the Oronoko, and the ferocious men eaters of New Zealand” as his “brethren” and “clients.”<sup>70</sup> Elevating the rights of humanity certainly gave Thompson a veneer of impartiality, as he constantly deflected the epithets of “paid agitator” and “stipendary agent.” Linking the fates of these groups also allowed him to craft a historical narrative of fatal contact through unmediated colonialism and racial conflict. In his anti-apprenticeship lectures, Thompson had spoken of ongoing cruelties in Jamaica after emancipation. These incidents suggested that the partially-liberated African apprentices might meet the same fate as the “slaughtered and exterminated race” of indigenous island-dwellers who had suffered at the hands of “men calling themselves Christians.”<sup>71</sup> India, meanwhile, was at a similar tipping point as famines exacerbated by the Company’s neglect and hoarding had rendered the country a “carnival of death!”<sup>72</sup> The entry of British mechanics and planters – which the Bengali elite called for – would likely boost production in the short term by virtue of capital investment, but their unmonitored influx also threatened to consign the natives to “the fate of the Red Indians.”<sup>73</sup> This rhetoric of catastrophic encounters, which rested on a degree of analogy, set Thompson apart from certain ethnographers and men of science who deemed racial collisions to be unavoidable or else believed that they functioned as a form of “human selection.”<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile, John Briggs’ materialist defense of Indian society was firmly rooted in his experience as a collector and political agent stationed at various princely courts. He had viewed the “remains of cities, and public works of vast labour and of high utility.”<sup>75</sup> He had encountered heroic poems in Sanskrit that were comparable to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and knew full well that South Indians “possessed the secret of making steel in the time of Alexander the Great.”<sup>76</sup> Echoing Burke, Briggs noted that these innovations were characteristic of a thoroughly advanced culture that prospered whilst Britons’ forefathers “painted their bodies, and wore the skin of beasts.” India’s societal stagnation in recent centuries was simply the product of despotic rule, internecine

<sup>70</sup> Thompson, “The Connection between the Protection and Civilization of the Native Tribes of the British Settlements and Colonies...,” n.p.

<sup>71</sup> George Thompson, *Speech of George Thompson, Esq., at the Great Anti-Slavery Meeting, Held in Hood Street Chapel, Newcastle* (Gateshead: Lowthian and Douglas, 1838), 7.

<sup>72</sup> Thompson, *Lectures on British India, Delivered in the Friends’ Meeting-House*, 58.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>74</sup> Sadiya Qureshi, “Dying Americans: Race, Extinction, and Conservation in the New World,” in *From Plunder to Preservation: Britain and the Heritage of Empire, c. 1840–1900*, eds. Astrid Swenson and Peter Mandler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 271.

<sup>75</sup> John Briggs, *The Present Land-Tax in India Considered as a Measure of Finance* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1830), 421.

<sup>76</sup> *British India. Speeches Delivered by Major-General Briggs and George Thompson, Esq., at the Annual Meeting of the Glasgow Society* (Edinburgh: W. Oliphant, 1839), 7.

conflict, and foreign invasion.<sup>77</sup> Briggs thus placed India at a high, if arrested, state of development quite dissimilar to that of the “savages of North America, the Negroes and Hottentots of Africa, [or] the cannibals of the islands of the Pacific Ocean.” Whereas these groups may have required the humanitarian aid of the APS, Indians were fully capable of spearheading their own development if artificial blockages to their trade were removed. Briggs specifically challenged the misconception that the Maratha inhabitants of Khandesh (where he had served as collector) lacked the skills or inclination to produce high-quality raw cotton for export.<sup>78</sup> Both he and Thompson thereby broke ranks with other critics of the Company such as Crawford, whose “capital theory of race” placed Indians at a lower civilizational tier due to their alleged indolence and lack of economic ingenuity.<sup>79</sup>

The BIS’s conservationist message did not always come across clearly within British social reform circles. Thompson was compelled to remind sympathizers that the organization was neither a profit-oriented nor a religious endeavor. After receiving a concerned memorial from Bombay, its provisional committee had purposefully edited out the term “Christian” from its prospectus and vowed instead to “appeal to the humane feelings” of the public. This revised document also explicitly referenced Britons’ “social and moral duties” to their fellow Indian subjects instead of their “social and religious” ones.<sup>80</sup> It appears that these alterations were palatable to zealous Society members such as O’Connell, who had previously pressured the EIC to sponsor conversions to Catholicism.<sup>81</sup> But commentators outside of the BIS struggled to differentiate India reformism from an Evangelical civilizing mission. Upon Thompson’s voyage to India in 1843, *Fisher’s Colonial Magazine* (the successor to Martin’s venture) urged him to impress “upon his auditory the iniquity of Mahommedanism, or Bhuddism or Brahminism, and the purity of Christianity.”<sup>82</sup> Thompson rejected this self-aggrandizing narrative, suggesting instead that the Mughals “in many respects ... surpassed our rule” by settling “in the countries which they conquered” and admitting Hindus “to all privileges.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Naoroji adopted a similar line in challenging John Crawford’s polygenesisist account of “Asiatic” racial inferiority. See Dadabhai Naoroji, “Observations on Mr. John Crawford’s Paper on the European and Asiatic Races,” *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 5 (1867): 144.

<sup>78</sup> John Briggs, *The Cotton Trade of India: Its Past and Present Condition* (London, 1839), 42.

<sup>79</sup> Onur Ulas Ince, “Deprovincializing Racial Capitalism: John Crawford and Settler Colonialism in India,” *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 1 (2022): 154.

<sup>80</sup> “Draft of Resolution,” Cambridge University Library (CUL), MSS.Add.7450/14, f. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Maurice Bric, “Debating Empire and Slavery: Ireland and British India, 1820–1845,” *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 3 (2016): 562.

<sup>82</sup> “Mr. George Thompson’s Visit to India,” in *Fisher’s Colonial Magazine and Commercial Maritime Journal*, vol. 3 (London: Fisher, Son and Co., 1843), 53.

<sup>83</sup> George Thompson, *Addresses; Delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta and on other Occasions* (Calcutta: Thacker and Co., 1843), 105.

Eager to secure funding for his printing costs, Thompson occasionally accepted aid from parties whose motives were at odds with his conservationist leanings. In April 1842, he approached Hugh Charles, a vocal Catholic member of the House of Lords who had taken to publicly assailing the EIC. Although Charles commended Thompson's lecturing and decried the "inexplicable" dethronement of the Raja of Satara (see Chapter 2), he was hardly cut from the same Quaker, free trader cloth as the bulk of the BIS.<sup>84</sup> Beginning in 1841, he singlehandedly launched a press campaign to popularize the outrages perpetrated by a Mr. Blackburn, the collector and magistrate of the South Indian district of Madurai. While Charles generated a laundry list of grievances, he was particularly incensed by a tale recounted by his brother Walter, an active missionary in the region. Blackburn had apparently declared that more than sixty churches and chapels in the district rightfully belonged to "schismatic" Goan priests; this ruling invalidated the claims of the British missionaries who had utilized these spaces for the past several years.<sup>85</sup> When his orders were ignored, Blackburn allegedly tortured a number of Indian Catholics so that they would relinquish the keys to the buildings. In recounting this saga, Charles denounced the Company as an enemy of organized religion and further upbraided Blackburn for preventing the introduction of Roman Catholic teachings in colonial jails.<sup>86</sup> Although these calls for a palpably Christian administration in India clearly diverged from the BIS platform, Thompson required the patronage and authorized the printing of 500 copies of his Manchester lectures on Charles' account.<sup>87</sup> Soon after, Thompson was informed that this monetary support was only intended for his personal upkeep and could not sustain his publishing ventures.<sup>88</sup>

While Thompson – as a fellow antagonist of the Company – managed to tap Charles' capital, other members of the BIS enjoyed less favorable relations with the missionaries and their supporters. Upon returning to his ancestral Anjarakandy estate in Tellicherry (Thalassery) following an extended sojourn abroad, Francis Carnac Brown observed burgeoning sectarian strife in the community. The Indian converts to Christianity had grown "haughty" in

<sup>84</sup> Supporters of the Free Church of Scotland accused Thompson of endorsing the establishment of Jesuit colleges in India. Thompson contended that he had merely visited "a native school, with which the Jesuits at this time have nothing to do." See George Thompson, *The Free Church of Scotland and American Slavery* (Edinburgh: T. and W. M'Dowall, 1846), 13.

<sup>85</sup> Hugh Charles and Lord Clifford, *Letters to the Editors of the Morning Chronicle and Tablet Newspapers on East India Affairs* (London: T. Jones, 1841), 11–15.

<sup>86</sup> Hugh Charles and Lord Clifford, *A Letter to the Editor of the Bombay Times* (London: W. Davy, 1842), 73–74.

<sup>87</sup> George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, 20 May 1842, BPL, Anti-Slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.12.2, 51.

<sup>88</sup> George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, 24 February 1843, BPL, Anti-Slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.13, 11.



his absence; they had been misled by Timothy, the local catechist who served under Reverend Samuel Hebach of the Basel Mission.<sup>89</sup> A dogmatic figure, Timothy had “proscribed all the manly and athletic sports of the boys as sinful” and replaced their “innocent amusements” with the singing of psalms and the recitation of “abstruse and apocryphal” Bible passages. More worryingly, Brown had been “obliged to reprehend [Timothy], a Hindoo by birth, for mingling scoffs and sneers in his preachings at the religion and tenets of the Hindoos and Mapillas.” Insisting that the attainment of “peace and quiet” took precedence over religious instruction, Brown called for Timothy’s dismissal and urged Hebach to cease his ministrations in the region completely.

Whereas the BIS’s rejection of Anglomania and proselytization as unnecessary and disruptive may have constricted domestic support for its agenda, the organization’s conservatism would have appealed to a rising set of Indian polemicists. In an influential tract, Shahamat Ali, a former *munshi* in Company service, echoed Burke’s pronouncement that an ideal statesman would exhibit “a disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve taken together.”<sup>90</sup> For Ali, the contraction of employment opportunities, along with the colonial state’s violation of landholding rights and insistence on centralization, had caused rampant destabilization. Refusing to establish continuity with indigenous political systems, the Company had weakened patronage structures and obstructed the circulation of resources within Indian society. Vanquished rulers no longer subsidized works of public utility that had once earned them symbolic capital; meanwhile, their former soldiers were thrust upon the land in droves.<sup>91</sup> Artisans who formerly produced commodities consumed at princely courts were now forced to take up menial agricultural work. Not content with toppling the middling ranks of society, the colonial state had also taken to expropriating tax-free landholdings like *jagirs* and *inams* that often supported educational and charitable institutions.<sup>92</sup> Under the British, these assets were seized to pay off the government’s debt or spirited away to England in the form of private wealth.

As the 1853 renewal of the EIC’s charter approached, critics in the London journals reiterated Ali’s claims and denounced the Company’s “wanton, selfish, and shortsighted mania for destroying every popular institution” in India that differentiated it from past conquerors.<sup>93</sup> American detractors of the British aristocracy’s neo-feudal oligarchy had also begun to reprobate the EIC’s meddling in the affairs of India’s village communities. According to the author of the lengthy *White Slaves of England* treatise, “the destruction of local

<sup>89</sup> Francis Carnac Brown to John Malcolm Ludlow, 23 December 1856, CUL, MSS.Add.7450/11.

<sup>90</sup> Shahamat Ali, *Notes and Opinions of a Native on the Present State of India and the Feelings of its People* (Isle of Wight: George Butler, 1848), 30.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–68. <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>93</sup> “The Anarchy of Thralldom,” *New Quarterly Review* 2 (1853): 191.

organizations and the centralization of authority, which is always attended by the increase of slavery, [had] been the aims of English efforts” under Company rule.<sup>94</sup> Conservationist sentiments were vocalized in India as well. During the Uprising of 1857, intellectuals attached to the court of Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar suggested that the British had suffered God’s disfavor for committing the very same abuses that Ali had enumerated.<sup>95</sup>

### Rival Economies, Rival Societies

Although its core network retained its integrity throughout the 1840s, the London-based BIS was a rather short-lived operation. Its rapid decay can be attributed partially to competition from other emergent groups such as the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL) and the BFASS that were vying for the attention of the philanthropic public. Thompson had initially anticipated that the free trade hub of Manchester would furnish a solid base of support for the BIS, but by August 1839 he was “discouraged by the lukewarmness of some from whom he had reason to expect better things.”<sup>96</sup> The following month, he once more complained to Elizabeth Pease of the “commercial men, who are merely such, and do not see the force of moral principles.”<sup>97</sup> Briggs also bemoaned the ACLL’s “extreme jealousy” of the India reform movement and admitted that “any attempt to have propelled our cause during their recent gatherings would have done more harm than good.”<sup>98</sup> Under Richard Cobden’s leadership, the ACLL continued to oppose broad-spectrum reform, opting to side-step Irish and Indian issues alike in favor of the total repeal of protectionist tariffs.<sup>99</sup> Having failed to secure an expansive popular backing by June 1841, the leaders of the BIS opted to unify provisionally with the ACLL until repeal was achieved. These reformers believed that their attempts to revive India’s shackled export trade dovetailed with the goals of the ACLL, as “the friends of Indian emancipation were, almost to a man, the advocates of the freedom of British commerce.”<sup>100</sup>

On the face of it, the India reformers’ economic platform should have been palatable to a range of classes and interest groups. Unlike policymakers in

<sup>94</sup> John C. Cobden, *The White Slaves of England* (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 448.

<sup>95</sup> Priya Satia, *Time’s Monster: How History Makes History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2020), 90.

<sup>96</sup> George Thompson to anon., August 1839, JRL, REAS4/3.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Andrea Major, “British Humanitarian Political Economy and Famine in India, 1838–1842,” *Journal of British Studies* 59 (2020): 234.

<sup>98</sup> John Briggs to George Thompson, 18 January 1840, JRL, REAS4/3.

<sup>99</sup> Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *The People’s Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 83.

<sup>100</sup> George Thompson, *Free Trade with India: Its Influence on the Condition and Prospects of the Country, and on the Slave Systems of America* (Kennington: J. Birdseye, 1847), 3.

Jamaica, who feared that formerly enslaved workers would abandon the sugar estates in favor of their own provision grounds, reformers took the *ryots'* capacity to labor for granted.<sup>101</sup> Putting forth a narrative of Indian exceptionalism, Thompson admitted to its advantages over Africa as a “settled and civilized country” with “no tribes to locate; no barbarians to tame; no unhealthy climate to contend with.”<sup>102</sup> India remained “foremost among the regions of the globe, as the choice storehouse of nature” and offered a boundless supply of cheap, free labor. A moderate land tax (payable in kind rather than in coin) would boost cultivation and exportation, which would free Manchester textile mills from their dependence on slave-grown produce. Appealing to skeptics’ fiscal logic, reformers also noted that the British government spent large sums on patrols to curb slave-trading off the coast of Africa while its own subjects continued to increase the demand for this human cargo by purchasing American cotton.<sup>103</sup> Yet their belief that the export of Indian cash crops would effect a “simple gradual revolution” and ensure “the extinction of slavery throughout the civilized world” put them squarely in the midst of an intractable conflict between the protectionist BFASS and the free traders.<sup>104</sup> Dissimilar stances on indigenous slavery in India, coupled with the fusion of reformist and Garrisonian networks (see Figure 1.2), also perturbed more moderate voices in the British abolitionist community.

Initially, abolitionists had been wary of trusting market mechanisms as a substitute for emancipation by political means. In 1839, Garrison’s Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society expressed concerns that the BIS would distract British agitators from the plight of the American slave; it hoped that the reformers’ “hearts will still bleed” and their “eyes will still overflow, at the remembrance of his suffering.”<sup>105</sup> By the following autumn, however, Garrison had evolved into an apostle of Indian cotton production and was rebuking the Company for having “systematically plundered” its subjects.<sup>106</sup> American abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips further anticipated that Thompson’s economic arguments would reach “the callous hearts of selfishness” in the cottonopolis that hitherto had been unaffected by ethical entreaties. For the freeborn African American Charles Lenox Remond, Indian cotton was nothing less than “the instrument

<sup>101</sup> George Thompson, *Report of a Lecture at Darlington, on the State of British India* (Durham: J. H. Veitch, 1840), 7.

<sup>102</sup> *Lectures on British India, Delivered in the Friends’ Meeting-House*, 160.

<sup>103</sup> Thompson, *Free Trade with India*, 8.

<sup>104</sup> “Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade: Letter from F. C. Brown to Joseph Pease,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 13 (1 November 1841): 160.

<sup>105</sup> Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society to George Thompson, CUL, MSS.Add.7450/14, f. 4.

<sup>106</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to Joseph Pease, 1 September 1840, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, ed. Louis Ruchames, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 689; “Selections from the Liberator,” *The North Star*, 18 February 1848, 1.

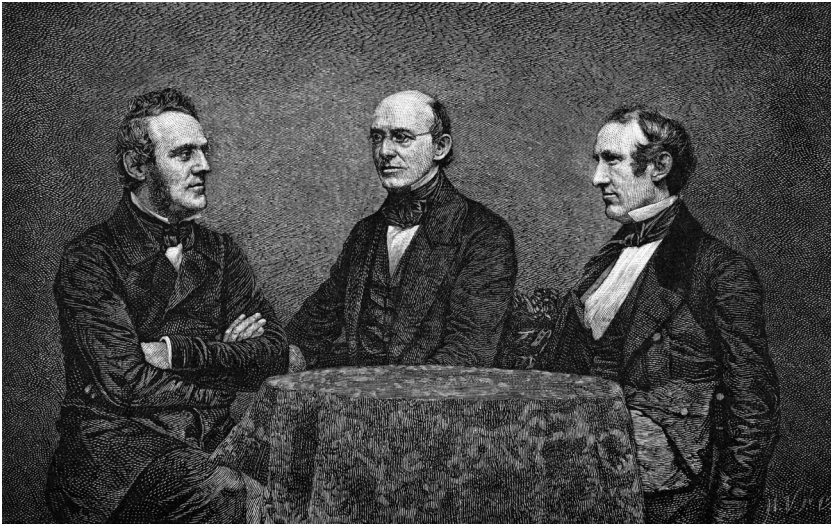


Figure 1.2 George Thompson, William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips (engraving)

which will put to death American slavery.”<sup>107</sup> Speaking before the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, an elderly Thomas Clarkson echoed these pleas to affect the “temporal interests” of commercially minded Britons. India, he predicted, would be able to overtake American cotton production in twelve years due to its abundance of arable land and the ready availability of cheap labor. This endorsement raised the ire of BFASS founder and “immediatist” Joseph Sturge, who edited out portions of Clarkson’s speech favoring East Indian produce from the convention proceedings.

It was not a foregone conclusion that the BIS and its free trade contingent would viscerally oppose the BFASS. Thompson had previously supported Sturge’s Central Negro Emancipation Committee in its mission to “humble the Colonial Office and awaken the nation from its trance” during the apprenticeship years.<sup>108</sup> And the BFASS soon after vowed in its constitution to advocate for the “use of free-grown produce, as far as is practicable, in preference to slave-grown.”<sup>109</sup> But Sturge was predominantly concerned with

<sup>107</sup> Christine Kinealy, *Daniel O’Connell and the Anti-Slavery Movement* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), 88.

<sup>108</sup> Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London: C. Helm, 1987), 79.

<sup>109</sup> Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 90.

the economic prospects of newly liberated populations, having established the West India Land Investment Company to buy up bankrupt plantations for subdivision and resale to former slaves in Jamaica. For many reformers, he went a step too far by insisting upon preferential duties to safeguard the modified British Carribean sugar economy.<sup>110</sup> The BFASS's push to ban the importation of slave-grown Brazilian and Cuban produce altogether in 1841 alarmed cotton lords such as Quaker and ACLL supporter Henry Ashworth, who feared that such a move would close foreign markets to English manufactures in retaliation. In advancing the "liberty of the blacks," Ashworth cautioned, the emancipationists should mind "they did not throw down the industrial population at home."<sup>111</sup> Any exclusion of foreign sugar, corn, or timber would reinforce the "class interests" of the monopolist, landowning aristocracy and tighten their hold over the laboring population. The BFASS, however, refused to amend its protectionist position at the 1843 World Anti-Slavery Convention and even blocked Thompson from bringing up the matter the following year.<sup>112</sup> But while the divergent economic concerns of the free trader India reformers and BFASS abolitionists were a source of tension, it was a prolonged spat over the amelioration of Indian forms of slavery that produced the deepest cleavages.

### Scoble's Crusade

As the BIS's leading spokesman, Thompson increasingly butted heads with members of Sturge's BFASS such as secretary John Scoble, who advised him to avoid "the occupancy of a position ... which may inflict the deepest injury on the interests of humanity."<sup>113</sup> The BIS's presumption that the prosperity of the *ryot*, American slave, and British laborer lay in the reorientation of global commerce distracted from the BFASS's platform of immediate emancipation by legislation. Scoble feared that such polemic would mislead the public into believing "that the deliverance of Africa from the horrors of the slave trade can *only* be effected through India, and that the universal abolition of slavery can *only* be secured by doing justice to the deeply injured natives." The BIS, he charged, was "not an antislavery society, much less 'the Anti-Slavery Society' which ... it has been assented to be."

<sup>110</sup> Simon Morgan, "The Anti-Corn Law League and British Anti-Slavery in Transatlantic Perspective, 1838–1846," *The Historical Journal* 52, no. 1 (2009): 97.

<sup>111</sup> "British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society," *Morning Chronicle*, 15 May 1841. For the BFASS's rebuttal to the ACLL, see [no title], *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 15 May 1844, 88.

<sup>112</sup> The equalization of sugar duties in 1846 forced the BFASS to relinquish "its pretensions to a monopoly of antislavery sentiment in Britain." See Richard Huzzey, "Free Trade, Free Labour, and Slave Sugar in Victorian Britain," *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 2 (2010): 361.

<sup>113</sup> John Scoble to George Thompson, 16 November 1839, Bodleian Library (BOD), Brit. Emp.s.22/G92/A.

The BFASS further clashed with the BIS over the issue of emancipation in India proper. The colonial administration had long viewed Indian slavery as a comparatively benign institution generally observable “within a private, secluded Indian domestic space.”<sup>114</sup> While Regulation X of 1811 had prohibited the transportation of slaves into British territory, it did not outlaw slaveholding as such.<sup>115</sup> The question of abolition arose once more during the Company charter debates of 1832–1833 and received the support of Earl Grey's ministry, but the Court of Directors reaffirmed the mildness of domestic slavery and classified individual emancipation as a “judicial proceeding.”<sup>116</sup> Colonial agents continued to insist that Indian slavery was in fact “a very modified form of servitude, and [did] not deserve to be called slavery”; it was “much more like the villeinage of the middle ages of Europe.”<sup>117</sup> This *laissez-faire* approach sat poorly with abolitionist Quakers and their allies who called for motions of inquiry into the subject on numerous occasions before the House of Commons.

In late 1838, Robert Montgomery Martin brought the matter directly to the attention of the BoC and produced officials' testimonies that spoke to the pervasiveness of agrestic, or praedial, slavery in Travancore and along the coast of western India. These low-caste, agricultural slaves were paid a pittance of grain for their labor, frequently ostracized by their communities, and routinely transferred between owners in lieu of interest payments on debts. To address this evil, Martin urged BoC president John Hobhouse to establish an expansive registry. Under this system, each district collector would tabulate the number of slaves in his jurisdiction; a commissioner in London would then compile this data and present the findings before Parliament on an annual basis. Emancipation, Martin cautioned, was best done quietly and would be accomplished most efficiently by liberating all enslaved children born after a certain date. Local magistrates would ensure that adult slaves were permitted to own property, enjoyed the same legal protections as other Indian subjects, and were not forcibly removed from their district of residence. Looking to fast-track this program, Martin recommended that Queen Victoria mention the proposed scheme in her upcoming speech upon the opening of Parliament. Hobhouse, Martin warned, would be wise to conciliate abolitionist public opinion, as the

<sup>114</sup> Andrea Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India, 1772–1843* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 144.

<sup>115</sup> Regulation II of 1832 further extended this ban on trafficking between the British Indian provinces.

<sup>116</sup> John Scoble, *Slavery and the Slave Trade in British India* (London: Thomas Ward and Co., 1841), 54. The Indian Law Commission criticized this arrangement whereby “the extent of the power of a master over his slave” was determined by the “disposition of the particular functionary who happens to be in charge of a district.” See “Slavery, Domestic and Praedial, in British India,” in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 3 (London: Fisher, Son and Co., 1840), 161.

<sup>117</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce, 1840* [H.C. 527], 91.

“Anti-Slavery Societies in this country [could] make or unmake any govt.”<sup>118</sup> We must assume that Martin was somewhat chagrined when Victoria limited her remarks to an endorsement of the Afghan expedition to oust reigning emir Dost Mohammad.<sup>119</sup>

The murky issue of Indian enslavement was not long deferred. Issued in late 1838, the report of the Indian Law Commission focused on indigenous rather than Anglo-Indian slaveholding and called for several measures to reduce the “harsher features” of the practice.<sup>120</sup> This recommendation precipitated a caustic exchange in the columns of the *Morning Chronicle* when a contributor disparaged the abolitionist turn to India as the result of “aggressive noisy benevolence.”<sup>121</sup> The fact that “certain classes of people in India are black, and are called in England slaves” had contributed to a false equivalency. Many domestic slaves, or *khanazads*, occupied an enviable position in wealthy households and could even inherit the property of their masters.<sup>122</sup> The abolitionists’ misplaced zeal had also led them to exaggerate the occurrence of praedial slavery, a practice confined to remote zones in Bihar and Malabar where caste hierarchies had long inured segments of the population to a subservient economic role.

In response to this article, Scoble characterized Indian slavery as an endemic practice responsible for widespread privations. The number of slaves in British India proper did not approach 320,000, as William Adam had estimated, but rather soared into the millions as a market for slaves had supposedly given rise to extensive kidnappings orchestrated by the itinerant Banjaras and Thugs.<sup>123</sup> Scoble therefore opposed the BIS’s calls for the appointment of an additional commission of inquiry in India and trumpeted the BFASS doctrine that “slavery, however modified or sanctioned in any part of the British Empire, must be abolished immediately and completely.”<sup>124</sup> In April 1841, a deputation composed of Adam, BIS secretary Francis Carnac Brown, and Garrisonian lawyer W. H. Ashurst approached Scoble with their

<sup>118</sup> Robert Montgomery Martin to John Cam Hobhouse, 5 December 1838, BL, Add MS 36469, ff. 208–220.

<sup>119</sup> *The Queen’s Speeches in Parliament*, ed. F. Sidney Ensor (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1882), 8.

<sup>120</sup> Margot Finn, “Slaves out of Context: Domestic Slavery and the Anglo-Indian Family, c. 1780–1830,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (2009): 198. The BFASS press campaign was triggered by Parliament’s failure to debate the commission’s 1841 report. See Howard Temperley, “The Delegalization of Slavery in British India,” in *After Slavery: Emancipation and its Discontents*, ed. Howard Temperley (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 181.

<sup>121</sup> “Does Slaves Exist in India? No. II,” *Morning Chronicle*, 18 March 1841.

<sup>122</sup> “Does Slavery Exist in India? No. I,” *Morning Chronicle*, 13 March 1841.

<sup>123</sup> John Scoble, “Slavery in British India. No. 1,” *Morning Chronicle*, 20 March 1841; *Slavery and the Slave Trade in British India*, 37–39.

<sup>124</sup> John Scoble to J. Beaumont, 2 April 1841, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G91.

own recommendation: since coercive labor practices were imbedded in the caste system, appealing to the Indian upper classes would be necessary to ensure lasting freedom.<sup>125</sup> Editorials in the *British Indian Advocate* also urged the BFASS to “proceed with due caution” and to “study the institutions, laws, customs and usages of the people for whom they propose to legislate.”<sup>126</sup>

Inflating the prevalence of customary forced labor practices, as the BFASS was wont to do, also undermined the BIS's economic agenda. India reformers found themselves repeatedly assuring their abolitionist colleagues in America that “not a single pound of sugar, coffee, cotton, rice, or tobacco exported from India” was produced by actual chattel slaves operating in a plantation-style economy.<sup>127</sup> They further believed that the existence of praedial slavery in some parts of southern India did not justify the continuance of prejudicial tariffs on Indian exports that adversely impacted the entire cultivating population. And while Scoble prioritized the abolition of longstanding indigenous social hierarchies, reformers generally focused their attacks on the *Company* for perpetuating forms of enslavement (see Chapter 2). While Indian landholders sold their slaves to meet the state's hefty revenue demands,<sup>128</sup> colonial authorities could become slaveholders in their own right by sequestering estates with coerced labor forces attached to them or else accepting custody of privately owned slaves as payment for arrears and using them as bearers and rock-breakers.

Scoble predictably turned a deaf ear to the reformers' cautions and transmitted a circular to various missionaries and government personnel in June 1842 to obtain current information on the existing forms of bondage in South Asia. The response was less than encouraging. Wesleyan Methodist missionary and Buddhism scholar R. Spence Hardy admitted that he was unaware of any cruelties suffered by enslaved laborers in Ceylon proper. Certainly, there was no separation of husband from wife, or parents from children, that typically characterized chattel slavery.<sup>129</sup> Writing from Coimbatore, Reverend W. B. Addis predicted that any antislavery committee established in the Indian

<sup>125</sup> John Scoble to J. Beaumont, 21 April 1841, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G91. Adam was initially amenable to more immediatist solutions and suggested that the “eighteen or twenty millions sterling annually wrung from the people of India and lavished on unnecessary wars and armaments, or on wasteful civil establishments, at home and aboard” would be “more honorably employed purchasing from their masters the freedom of a million of British subjects held in legal bondage.” See William Adam, *The Law and Custom of Slavery in British India* (Boston: Weeks, Jordon, and Company, 1840), 240.

<sup>126</sup> “Slavery in India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 14 (1 December 1841): 163.

<sup>127</sup> “Slavery in India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 3 (1 March 1841): 17. See also *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention* (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1841), 88.

<sup>128</sup> “The Ministerial Measure,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 6 (1 June 1841): 42.

<sup>129</sup> R. Spence Hardy to John Scoble, December 1842, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G92/A.



interior would lack sufficient European membership and surely incur the government's disfavor.<sup>130</sup> Abolishing debt slavery would also prove difficult, as such arrangements were hereditary; it was "therefore quite out of [his] power to even suggest a remedy for this kind of slavery." The diversity of Indian forms of indenture further defied any "systematic arrangement" akin to plantation slavery. Few informants had even observed Indian slaves firsthand, let alone detected instances of physical abuse or overwork. If anything, it was the Indian laborer who complained of the Christian planters, "who are strict in principle [and] will not give them employment on the Sabbath day."<sup>131</sup>

Historians have offered varying critiques of India Act V of 1843, which removed legal protections for slave ownership rather than banning the practice outright.<sup>132</sup> According to Indrani Chatterjee, this delegalization upheld a consensus that "proper slavery" – as evidenced by one's "complete immobility, transferability between masters and material 'hardship'" – only existed in the western hemisphere.<sup>133</sup> Satisfied with the enactment, officials increasingly turned a blind eye to less overt forms of slavery often involving women and children; the term "slave" itself gradually disappeared from official discourse. Similarly, Rupa Viswanath observes that colonial agents in southern India replaced "slave" with a host of euphemisms that obfuscated both "the severity of servitude as well as its caste character."<sup>134</sup>

At the time of this legislation's passage, however, the transatlantic abolitionist community responded to it with cautious optimism. Garrison's *Liberator* paper was pleased that this "act of simple justice" had robbed proslavery advocates in America of one of their key talking points: that British abolitionists were hypocritical interlopers whose own government was "holding millions in India in the most horrible bondage that ever existed under heaven."<sup>135</sup>

<sup>130</sup> W. B. Addis to John Scoble, 1 December 1842 and 2 December 1844, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G92/A.

<sup>131</sup> Henry Chapman to John Scoble, September 1842, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G92/A.

<sup>132</sup> Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 179.

<sup>133</sup> Indrani Chatterjee, "Abolition by Denial: The South Asian Example," in *Abolition and its Aftermath in the Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, ed. Gwyn Campbell (London: Routledge, 2005), 152, 158.

<sup>134</sup> Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 23. Customary forms of labor coercion did perplex some figures in the colonial administration. In the South Indian Chingleput *taluk*, revenue collectors in the 1880s argued that the low caste *paraiyars* lived in a state of slavery under the landholding *mirasidars* on account of their debt peonage and lack of housing rights. The Board of Revenue, however, preferred to refer to the *paraiyars* as "farm servants" and concluded that private charity would promote their uplift. See Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 153–190.

<sup>135</sup> "Slavery Abolished in India," *Liberator*, 19 May 1843, 78; "Washington Correspondence," *Liberator*, 27 January 1843, 15.

The Quakers' *British Friend* was convinced that the act had "virtually" abolished indigenous slavery, though "an open Proclamation ... would have been more acceptable to the people of England."<sup>136</sup> In his letters to the *Friend* – which the *Liberator* excerpted – Thompson assured readers that he had bent the ear of key colonial officials and was explaining the "nature and effects" of law to the Indians he encountered. Back in England, Pease's South Durham British India Society (SDBIS) drew up a petition to the Company directors that applauded the permissive measure as a "peaceful but permanent triumph."<sup>137</sup> Yet these reformers also urged the EIC to invest further in free-labor cash crop production in order to eradicate slavery globally. Noting that the BFASS had failed to support this campaign, the SDBIS provocatively wondered whether its rival deserved the title of "the true Abolition Society."

Tensions between the India reformers and mainstream abolitionists persisted throughout the decade. In 1846, Thompson and his fellow Garrisonians publicly castigated the Free Church of Scotland for accepting a £3,000 donation from American slaveholders. In so doing, the Church was implicitly sanctioning "a system which has overspread a large part of America with heathenism, and has frightfully corrupted Christianity."<sup>138</sup> These remarks proved controversial. The *Edinburgh Witness* printed a letter from a lawyer in Calcutta alleging that Thompson himself had served slaveholders in India by working as a paid agent of the Mughal emperor and the Landholders' Society.<sup>139</sup> The fact that the women and eunuchs in the emperor's palace were "little more than nominally slaves" was immaterial. Reprinting this correspondence, the BFASS's *Anti-Slavery Reporter* confirmed that "slavery still exists legally in the protected states, Sattara among them" and insisted that "Mr. Thompson never, to our knowledge, 'agitated' against slavery in British India." In fact, the "Committee of the British India Society refused to entertain the subject." Reformers, however, contended that the BFASS's doctrinaire platform was misguided and reflected an ignorance of cultural complexities. It not only jeopardized the long-term experiment of *universal* abolition through Indian cash-cropping, but also overlooked the Government of India's degradation of subjects and sovereigns alike.

### Transatlantic Abolitionism Divided

The latent hostility between the BFASS and the BIS was not solely the product of clashing policy positions on free trade and Indian slavery, but also stemmed

<sup>136</sup> "George Thompson in India," *Liberator*, 17 November 1843, 182.

<sup>137</sup> "The Address of the South Durham British India Society," *Liberator*, 20 October 1843, 167.

<sup>138</sup> Thompson, *The Free Church of Scotland*, 41.

<sup>139</sup> "Alleged Slavery in British India," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1 December 1846, 193.

from India reformers' linkups with the radical, distinctly cosmopolitan Garrisonians. The fracturing of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) in the late 1830s had resulted in a Garrisonian rump organization and a breakoff American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS) under the helm of the more conservative Tappan brothers. The effects of this rivalry were keenly felt across the Atlantic. Once Thompson's network of India reformers established lines of communications with Garrison's camp, moderate British abolitionists began to close ranks. Early tremors of fractiousness were felt at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention; the BFASS's decision to restrict female participation incensed Garrison, who had invited several women to represent their auxiliary societies. By the winter of 1841, Thompson was privately expressing his frustrations in seeing "men whose hearts should have been fused into one by a fervent zeal for a common cause ... biting and demeaning one another!"<sup>140</sup> Garrison himself found it "quite incomprehensible" that the English antislavery community did "not espouse the British India movement en masse."<sup>141</sup>

Personal feuds and doctrinal controversies were often at the root of these obstructed linkups. Sturge, for instance, distrusted Garrison's "religious anarchism" and rebuked him for breaking the Sabbath by boarding a steamer on a Sunday.<sup>142</sup> Erstwhile ally Daniel O'Connell also began to distance himself from the Garrisonians following his establishment of a Repeal Association that aimed to annul the Union with Ireland Acts of 1800. Accused once more of Sabbath-breaking,<sup>143</sup> Garrison questioned how O'Connell could classify him as a "maniac in religion" while avoiding any critique of Sturge's ardent Quakerism.<sup>144</sup> As O'Connell fell into the orbit of the BFASS and continued to accept donations from Irish separatists in the American South, his involvement in India reformism diminished precipitously.

Garrison's Christian "perfectionism," his aversion to nationalist patriotism, and his apolitical program of moral suasion could perplex even his most loyal adherents.<sup>145</sup> Despite his advocacy of nonviolence, he urged his supporters to "assail iniquity, in high places and in low places, [and] to apply our principles to all existing civil, political, legal and ecclesiastical institutions."<sup>146</sup>

<sup>140</sup> George Thompson to Elizabeth Pease, 27 March 1841, JRL, REAS2/4, f. 16.

<sup>141</sup> Bell, 111.

<sup>142</sup> Betty Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working-Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 64; Tyrrell, 112.

<sup>143</sup> Kinealy, 125.

<sup>144</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to Daniel O'Connell, 8 December 1843, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 231.

<sup>145</sup> Enrico Dal Lago, *William Lloyd Garrison and Giuseppe Mazzini: Abolition, Democracy, and Radical Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 69; Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 38.

<sup>146</sup> "Declaration of Sentiments Adopted by the Peace Convention," in *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3 (Boston: R. F. Walcutt, 1852), 75.

This willingness to challenge authority could manifest as “vicious and caustic rhetoric” in the *Liberator* newspaper,<sup>147</sup> but the Garrisonians’ performative advocacy of absolute moral truths and their embrace of polemical hyperbole broke new ground. As Joel Olson explains, their adoption of seemingly fanatical tactics was designed to provoke fence-sitting moderates into reassessing their ethical complacency.<sup>148</sup> Effective abolitionism therefore required a “total separation from Church and State, and a warfare upon both as the existing bulwarks of the slave system.”<sup>149</sup> By 1845, Garrison was roundly decreeing the federal union to be “the work of men’s hands” and potentially “imperfect, oppressive, or monstrous.”<sup>150</sup> Moreover, Christianity as practiced in America was nothing but a doctrine “of whips and chains, of branding-irons and blood-hounds ... of tyranny and heathenism.”<sup>151</sup> This disavowal of coercive institutions earned Garrisonians a reputation as anarchists pursuing a millenarian crusade for spiritual self-government. Garrison, however, assured wary British abolitionists that proslavery advocates had trumped up charges of his heterodoxy to delegitimize the AASS and “cripple our movement.”<sup>152</sup>

Garrison’s vision of emancipation was a universal one in which freedom would be granted “to every race, complexion, cast [sic] and clime.”<sup>153</sup> His *Liberator* newspaper therefore served as a clearinghouse for India reform propaganda in the 1830s and 1840s, allocating numerous columns to transcripts of Thompson’s lectures and publishing private correspondence relating to colonial governance. Elizabeth Pease was a key link in this network, granting Garrison access to letters that celebrity reformers such as Clarkson and Cobden had written to her father.<sup>154</sup> Although these informational circuits frayed with the decline of the BIS and the death of Joseph Pease, the *Liberator* increased its coverage of Indian affairs in 1846 following the establishment of

<sup>147</sup> Simon Morgan, “The Political as Personal: Transatlantic Abolitionism, c. 1833–67,” in *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. William Mulligan and Maurice Bric (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 79.

<sup>148</sup> Joel Olson, “The Freshness of Fanaticism: The Abolitionist Defense of Zealotry,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 4 (2007): 688.

<sup>149</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to James Miller McKim, 19 July 1845, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 307.

<sup>150</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to Elihu Burritt, 16 July 1845, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 299.

<sup>151</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to the Editor of the *Christian Witness*, 4 December 1846, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 459.

<sup>152</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to Thomas Clarkson, 26 August 1846, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 386.

<sup>153</sup> “The Cause of Emancipation,” *Emancipator*, 6 February 1840, 164. Garrison’s acolytes associated efforts “for the suppression of the slave trade throughout the world” with “the awakening of the British public to the abuses of the colonial government in India.”

<sup>154</sup> “Letters from Thomas Clarkson and Rich’d Cobden, to Joseph Pease, Sen.” *Liberator*, 28 July 1843, 1. For an overview of Elizabeth Pease’s activism, see Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), 120.

the Anti-Slavery League (ASL). Helmed by Thompson, this organization drew renewed attention to India's potential as a cotton exporter and popularized F. C. Brown's pamphlets on the matter; its period of operation overlapped with John Bright's select committee on the growth of cotton in India, on which Thompson served. Satara emissary Rungo Bapoojee even attended its meetings. The ASL held high hopes that it could now count on the "cooperation of the bone and sinew of the Anti-Corn Law League," as Parliament had voted in favor of repeal that same year.<sup>155</sup>

While the melding of Garrisonian and India reform networks familiarized American audiences with the extent of the EIC's misgovernment, this linkup also proved divisive. Despite its purported pivot to India, the bulk of the ASL's energies were actually spent denouncing the transatlantic Evangelical Alliance, which had organized a convention in the late summer of 1846 to present a unified front against global Catholicism.<sup>156</sup> Although an earlier planning conference had resolved to withhold invitations from American clergymen who "by their own fault" retained slaves "from regard to their own interest," British abolitionists took issue with this wobbly wording. Clergymen who tolerated slavery would simply claim to be obeying temporal laws, for the Southern states barred masters from liberating slaves if they could not ensure their expatriation to free territory.<sup>157</sup> Under the auspices of the ASL, Garrison, Thompson, and Frederick Douglass reminded the Alliance that slavery was an "act against God" as "the creator and sole proprietor of man" and chastised the clergy for placing mortal legislation above natural law.<sup>158</sup> At one Exeter Hall meeting, Douglass repudiated any divine sanction for human bondage and vowed to trample over any ministers who had "thrown themselves across our path."<sup>159</sup> Thompson, who aspired to build a broad base of support for the ASL, found it regrettable that "an anti-slavery meeting in England should, of necessity, be an anti-clerical" one. Indeed, the editor of the *Christian Witness*

<sup>155</sup> Robert Smith, "Letters from England," *Liberator*, 26 November 1847, 2–3. The organization attracted the bulk of its support from Bristol and Glasgow. See Morgan, "The Political as Personal," 83.

<sup>156</sup> J. F. Maclear, "The Evangelical Alliance and the Antislavery Crusade," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1979): 149. The British branch of the Alliance eventually banned foreign slaveholding delegates from joining its ranks in 1851.

<sup>157</sup> [no title], *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1 September 1846, 142.

<sup>158</sup> Douglass spent the autumn of 1845 with the Webbs in Ireland before journeying to Scotland to censure the Free Church. Prominent Garrisonians initially feared that he might defect to the BFASS if he was not sufficiently monitored. Douglass was none too pleased to hear of these misgivings secondhand. By 1851, he had fallen out with the American Anti-Slavery Society and was admonishing Webb and Thompson for their critiques of the Liberty Party. See Frederick Douglass to Maria Weston Chapman, 29 March 1846, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. John R. McKivigan, ser. 3, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 99; "G. Thompson, R. D. Webb, F. Douglass, and the Liberty Party," *Liberator*, 31 October 1851, 174.

<sup>159</sup> "Anti-Slavery League Meeting," *Patriot*, 18 September 1846, in Scrapbooks, vol. 6.

went so far as to accuse the ASL of seeking nothing less than the “extinction of Christianity.”<sup>160</sup>

Elected to Parliament in 1847 on a wave of free trade sentiment, Thompson encountered financial difficulties and sought succor from his Garrisonian allies. An American tour that began in the fall of 1850 offered a reprieve; charging 12.5 cents a head for admittance, he lectured on Indian affairs and the antislavery agenda before large crowds throughout New England and New York.<sup>161</sup> The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society even commissioned a daguerreotype of Thompson’s likeness that admirers could purchase for 37.5 cents.<sup>162</sup> Widely advertised in the *Liberator*, these engagements contributed to smoldering tensions between the BFASS and the Garrisonians.<sup>163</sup> Shortly after returning to Britain in 1852, Thompson was addressing his Tower Hamlets constituents when the tenacious John Scoble rose from the crowd and denounced his American tour as a dereliction of duty.<sup>164</sup> This same year, Scoble entered into a caustic exchange with Garrisonian Richard Webb in the columns of the *New York Anti-Slavery Standard*. Both Scoble and AFASS founder Lewis Tappan had spoken out against the Garrisonians’ anticlericalism and preference for the abrogation of the American union over the continuance of slavery. Webb countered that the lame-duck BFASS was only lumbering on as a result of Scoble’s animosity.<sup>165</sup> The AFASS, meanwhile, was a “puppet-show” that met for three hours annually, lacked any organizational framework, and was dependent on handouts from the American Missionary Association. Thompson relished Webb’s evisceration of Scoble, noting that the BFASS secretary’s incessant backbiting had rendered him “a poisonous creeping plant upon the antislavery tree in this country.”<sup>166</sup> The fact that these inter-associational feuds could span years and cross continents speaks to both the volatility of moral reformism and the necessity of maintaining enduring networks that one could tap in precarious times.

### Capital Conversions and the Legacy of Conservatism

Money troubles did not dissuade Thompson from broadening his following by purchasing the *Empire* newspaper in 1854, which necessitated the further

<sup>160</sup> “The ‘Christian Witness’ Examined on a Defamatory Charge of Infidelity against William Lloyd Garrison,” *Liberator*, 30 July 1847, 1.

<sup>161</sup> The turnout in the city of Rochester was 1,300. See George Thompson to Anne Weston, 26 March 1851, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection.

<sup>162</sup> “Portrait of George Thompson,” *Liberator*, 31 October 1851, 174.

<sup>163</sup> “British Misrule in India,” *Liberator*, 13 June 1851, 2.

<sup>164</sup> George Thompson to Richard Webb, 15 April 1852, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.21.

<sup>165</sup> Richard D. Webb, *The National Anti-Slavery Societies in England and the United States* (Dublin: Charles Hedgelong, 1852), 53.

<sup>166</sup> George Thompson to Richard Webb, 12 April 1852 and 15 April 1852, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.21.

conversion of his amassed social and symbolic capital into economic capital. Chesson, his partner in the affair, very much hoped the deal would succeed. If it fell through, “it really would seem as if fortune, position, and influence fled with it.”<sup>167</sup> Once Thompson managed to wrangle control of the paper, he vowed to use it as a vehicle to support free trade, the rights of industry, religious equality, and “justice to our colonies.”<sup>168</sup> Positioning himself as a Garrisonian firebrand, he informed his readers that institutions were “but the machinery for promoting liberties, and securing the rights of the people”; like all products of “mere human invention,” they were “liable to defects, and prone to decay.” This was no mere rhetorical flourish, but rather a populist call to arms that was reflected in the layout of the paper itself. A section on its first page – entitled “The Platform” – provided a space for contributors to “speak as they are inspired.” Another column aptly called “The Voice of the People” aired readers’ grievances, even those directed against the paper’s own staff.

Thompson’s personal ideologies and rivalries heavily influenced the *Empire*’s content, as its pages increasingly covered India reform agitation and the unfolding “crisis” afflicting transatlantic abolitionism. Aside from bemoaning endemic jobbery within the EIC, which the 1853 charter act had largely rectified by introducing competitive exams for civil service postings, the paper featured transcripts of House of Commons speeches delivered by IRS members. Revelations of torture at the hands of the police in South India and Bihar received particular attention; Thompson demanded that the “veil of secrecy should be rent from the top to the bottom, and the horrors of the prison-house exhibited to the world.”<sup>169</sup> By the fall of 1855, the *Empire* was also featuring the propaganda of the Stop-the-War League, a radical venture concocted in part by Thompson and Chesson that attracted Chartist support.<sup>170</sup>

The *Empire*’s embrace of pacifist reformism seems to have confused some of its 56,000 subscribers.<sup>171</sup> Thompson initially clarified that the title of “Empire” referred in a “broad and wide sense” to “English guardianship wherever English rule has a footing.”<sup>172</sup> Ideally, this expansive purview would deter parochialism and remove readers “from the narrow vision of sect, party, province, or central power.” But Thompson’s acerbic style, honed through years on the lecture circuit, was not to everyone’s taste. Some readers got the wrong end of the stick after reading a satirical piece entitled “Plea for Dictation

<sup>167</sup> Diary of Frederick Chesson, 6 October 1854, JRL, REAS 11/1.

<sup>168</sup> *Empire*, December 4, 1854.

<sup>169</sup> “Torture of British Subjects in India,” *Empire*, 13 January 1855, 105; “Torture of British Subjects in India – no. II,” *Empire*, 20 January 1855, 121.

<sup>170</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 255–256.

<sup>171</sup> Based on the government’s quarterly recording of stamps. This estimated circulation was equivalent to that of the *Economist* and even surpassed the *Guardian*.

<sup>172</sup> “The Empire,” *Empire*, 9 December 1854, 25.

and Despotism,” while others balked at the paper’s opposition to the Crimean War. One “Lancashire lad in London” accused the paper’s editors, along with Richard Cobden and John Bright, of producing propaganda for the Czar of Russia. If they were “to set up a literary shop in St. Petersburg, their storehouse would soon be emptied.”<sup>173</sup>

From a financial perspective, the *Empire* was mismanaged from the outset. A frustrated Chesson threatened to sever his connection with the venture several months after the acquisition, though he helped keep it on life-support until June 1856. He very much regretted “the extinction of a journal” that had initially “promised to produce reputation and influence” and was grateful that employment on Cobden’s *Morning Star* paper had granted him a reprieve.<sup>174</sup> As for Thompson, he was forced to abruptly leave England again in 1855 and seek out the rent-free hospitality of Prasanna Kumar Tagore in Calcutta until his new employer could settle his debts.<sup>175</sup> He continued to send various articles on Indian affairs to Chesson, who was “very sorry there is no *Empire* to receive them.”<sup>176</sup> For a while, Thompson’s symbolic capital as a famed advocate for Indian interests took him far. Enjoying the hospitality of the Raja of Burdwan in 1856, he resided in a lakeside dwelling, visited the tiger in the estate’s menagerie, and occasionally joined his host for a game of billiards.<sup>177</sup> However, the outbreak of the Sepoy Uprising the following year quickly brought Thompson’s hobnobbing to an end.

The forensic analysis of colonial rule that followed the Uprising further justified the conservationist reformers’ enduring opposition to invasive civilizing missions and evangelizing. In the aftermath of the Second Opium War (1856–1860), F. C. Brown once more registered his disgust at Christian hypocrisy:

the English, with an opium ball in one hand and a Bible in the other, have finally got their monopoly ball down the throat of the Chinese, at the bayonets’ point, and with their Bibles have begotten a religion, which has dissolved all the bonds of authority.<sup>178</sup>

Other reformers were aware that wanton cultural meddling could have grave consequences. When East India Association stalwart Iltudus Prichard accepted his chairmanship of the London branch of the National Association in Aid of Social Progress in India in 1870, he insisted that English “uplift” initiatives abroad “should be distinctly confined to aiding as opposed to initiating

<sup>173</sup> “Cobden’s Alienation from Popular Respect,” *Empire*, 3 February 1855, 154.

<sup>174</sup> Diary of Frederick Chesson, 29 June 1856, JRL, REAS 11/4.

<sup>175</sup> George Thompson to Amelia Chesson, 8 March 1856, JRL, REAS 2/2. In late 1856, Chesson reported that “no member of Mr. Thompson’s family is able to give...anything like a satisfactory account of his affairs and of what is necessary to be done in order to settle them.” See Diary of Frederick Chesson, 9 November 1856, JRL, REAS 11/4.

<sup>176</sup> Diary of Frederick Chesson, 2 August 1856, JRL, REAS 11/4.

<sup>177</sup> George Thompson to Anne Thompson, 25 March 1856, JRL, REAS 2/1, f. 47.

<sup>178</sup> F. C. Brown to G. Ballard, 5 March 1863, CUL, MSS Add. 7540/11.



any movement.”<sup>179</sup> In sponsoring female education, the Association ought to avoid adopting a savior complex; Indian women did not require liberation from their culture and were “certainly not the nonentities that they are generally represented to be by Western writers.” Recognizing that many Indians linked conversion with social ostracism, Prichard declared that the aims of the Association must be “as purely secular as those of the Statistical Society or the Geographical Society.”<sup>180</sup>

Conservationism also continued to win over agitators on the far fringes of reform networks like the inimitable Scot, Agnes Craig. From the early 1860s to the 1880s, Chesson sent tracts and pamphlets to Craig, who made her thoughts on current events readily known. Apart from her APS membership, Craig was involved in her local antislavery society, condemned vivisection, and opposed the re-imposition of the Contagious Disease Acts, which allowed authorities to confine women afflicted with venereal disease in lock hospitals. Occasionally her causes overlapped. In 1877, Craig drew Chesson’s attention to a newspaper article advertising a scheme for a Home for Female Inebriates that would allow doctors to detain drunken women against their will. One of the promoters for this venture was a medical practitioner who had assisted in vivisectioning a group of monkeys at the Wakefield Lunatic Asylum.<sup>181</sup>

The quintessentially modular reformer, Craig was also a keen observer of Indian affairs. In 1861, she warned Chesson of the deteriorating conditions suffered by the Andaman Islanders.<sup>182</sup> She was also upset that exiled Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was being denied mutton by his jailers at Rangoon. But she was perhaps most disconcerted by the “pernicious arrogant superstition” that was “usurping the guise of Christianity among the British.”<sup>183</sup> One article in the *Homeward Mail* had claimed that a recent famine in India was a divine judgment, as it began at a location where the Company had dismissed a Christian Indian soldier. On another occasion, the *Mail* interpreted an old Englishman’s donations to the starving poor of Delhi as “proof of his Christian forgiveness.”<sup>184</sup> Craig rejected this self-adulation. The alms distributed were surely “taken from the Indians first” and were but a fraction of “the sums extorted from the natives” to date. And for all of the state’s rapacity, there was not even one “respectable road to show for it.” The problem, Craig reported from Edinburgh, was that “almost everybody in Scotland has near relations plundering the natives in different parts of the world; which unconsciously

<sup>179</sup> Ittodus T. Prichard, *The Inaugural Lecture of the London Association in Aid of Social Progress in India* (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1871), 13.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>181</sup> Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, 31 October 1877, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.18, C/129, f. 164.

<sup>182</sup> Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, 24 April 1861, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.18, C/129, f. 147

<sup>183</sup> Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, 1861, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.18, C/129, f. 143

<sup>184</sup> Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, 21 April 1861, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.18, C/129, f. 145.

helps to foster the painful neglect of common honesty in the national ‘thinking’ on the subject.”<sup>185</sup> If any reformer expressed their disapprobation in polite company, they were met with “contemptuous indifference” or else “referred to the ‘noble Christian missionaries.’” Over a decade later, Craig reminded Chesson that “Scotch sympathy begins and ends in sending missionaries to teach the doctrines of Christianity without interfering with their countrymen’s practice.”<sup>186</sup>

In charting the landscape of early-Victorian moral reformism, this chapter has examined the processes of network formation and maintenance on a granular level. Conservationist reformers who sought to salvage India’s extant political institutions struggled to dampen the metropolitan public’s enthusiasm for an aggressive, evangelical civilizing mission abroad. Frictions between pressure groups further embroiled Thompson and his associates in drawn-out quarrels. Despite these obstacles, India reformers strategically marshaled resources to prolong their agitation; those who successfully accrued social and symbolic capital could rely on personal loans or gratis hospitality based on their reputations alone. These informal relationships allowed a capacious network of Garrisonians, free traders, and former Company personnel to retain its integrity even after the demise of the BIS. Its members persisted in their provocations by exposing the anomaly of “virtual slavery” in the post-Emancipation empire. The following chapter will probe these reformers’ attempts to stimulate an imperial public consciousness by intertwining the suffering of the famished *ryots*, metropolitan working classes, and degraded princes at the hands of coercive and monopolistic interests.

<sup>185</sup> Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, 30 December 1869, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.18, C/129, f. 148.

<sup>186</sup> Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, 22 October 1879, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.18, C/129, f. 169. Craig later surmised that it was likely the lack of “fixed principles in ‘Constitutionalism’” that led Britons to accept the Bible as “the secret of England’s greatness.” See Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, 25 February 1881, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.s.18, C/129, f. 182.