

## "THE SUBLIME OF THE BAZAAR": A MOMENT IN THE MAKING OF A CONSUMER CULTURE IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

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Early in 1844 Richard Cobden, accompanied by Robert Moore and Peronnet Thompson, visited Harriet Martineau on her sick bed at Tynemouth. Cobden's intention was to persuade Martineau to use her considerable propagandist powers to further the cause of the Anti-Corn Law League, the motivating centre of the campaign against economic protectionism. He proved persuasive and the first result was *Dawn Island*, a typically moralistic, far-fetched fiction that described how free trade had civilized a race of savage South Pacific cannibals.<sup>1</sup> It was published in a special edition and sold at the great National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar held at Covent Garden Theatre in London the following spring. The bazaar certainly impressed Martineau. In her *laissez-faire* reading of early-nineteenth century history published five years later she wrote: "the porcelain and cutlery exhibitions, the mirrors and grindstones, the dolls and wheat-sacks, shoes and statuettes, antiquities and the last fashion of colored muslins, flannels and plated goods, and anatomical preparations, laces and books, made a curious and wonderful display, which was thought to produce more effect on some Parliamentary minds than all the eloquence yet uttered in the House of Commons."<sup>2</sup> The promiscuous intermingling of politics and commerce that was such a characteristic feature of the bazaar made Martineau anxious as well as excited. Mixed feelings intensified after the Corn Laws were repealed; buying and selling at the Great Exhibition in 1851, for example, had turned it into the "Sublime of the Bazaar," implying that the event in Hyde Park was not only a beautiful apotheosis but that it also simultaneously inspired awe and even terror.<sup>3</sup>

The Great Exhibition has attracted much attention from historians, especially in recent years.<sup>4</sup> This article returns instead to the National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar as a key moment in the making of modern consumerism. Whereas the commercial aspects of the Great Exhibition were deliberately downplayed—price tags were conspicuously absent for instance<sup>5</sup>—consumption of the profuse forms of Victorian commodity culture was openly paraded at the Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar. Archibald Prentice, the League's official historian, underlined the formative influence of the bazaar.<sup>6</sup> And more than half a century later, in his monumental biography of John Bright, G. M. Trevelyan similarly noted that the event "astonished that simple era with its magnificence and variety, and paved the way for the great Exhibition of 1851."<sup>7</sup> The bazaar should still command our attention for it simultaneously celebrated and mobilized the changing consumption practices of an increasingly self-confident metropolitan middle-class.<sup>8</sup>

The search for origins is fraught with dangers, especially when we are considering such a complex and disputed formation as a 'consumer culture.'<sup>9</sup> In Eng-

land the roots of a culture in which the consumer assumed a central importance have been traced back variously to the early modern period;<sup>10</sup> the commercial revolution of the eighteenth century;<sup>11</sup> the expansion of advertising and branding in the late-nineteenth century;<sup>12</sup> and the onset of mass consumption after World War Two.<sup>13</sup> Besides the general problem of timing, it is also worth bearing in mind Margot Finn's recent criticism of 'culturalist' generalizations about the so-called modernity of Victorian consumer society; continuities were undoubtedly important and we will return to them later.<sup>14</sup> Rather than search for putative origins, then, this article considers a vital and largely overlooked moment in a long evolution, a specific iteration of modern consumerism.<sup>15</sup> Both the novelty and distinctive contribution made by the Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar to what was a complex and protracted transformation deserve consideration, not least because many of the issues and tensions that marked the development of consumer culture in subsequent decades were explicitly revealed and openly discussed in the spring of 1845. Most importantly, we still need to link the culture with the politics of free trade finance and a case study of the bazaar enables us to do this.

In the dominant historiography the Anti-Corn Law League has traditionally been cast as a kind of vanguard political party for the rising middle class. Monographs by Norman McCord, Anthony Howe, and Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrell have ably dissected the mechanics of this 'pressure group' and we now know much about its organization, ideology, tactics and leadership.<sup>16</sup> More recently, a number of historians influenced by postmodernism and the 'cultural turn' have quite rightly pointed out that, despite orthodox readings, the League represented itself as above the sordid and partial world of 'class', though there has been little attempt to investigate the culture of the League in any depth.<sup>17</sup> The absence of any systematic analysis of the League's language is indicative here.<sup>18</sup> This study attempts to bridge an historiographical divide and reconnect the culture and politics of this organization in a preliminary manner by discussing four major themes. First, the ways in which the bazaar pulled together commerce and politics are explored. The League was not only concerned with the abolition of excise duty on staple goods (especially 'the people's corn') but was also keen to address the commodity world of Victorian capitalism more generally, and a focus on the bazaar helps unravel the significance of this preoccupation. The article then goes on to consider the central role played by middle-class women in this area and suggests why their participation was thought vital. Third, contradictory attitudes toward consumption and continuing fears provoked by the commercialization of politics are discussed in more detail. Finally, the essay suggests, more speculatively and in the longer term, that the culture of the League—embodied in the bazaar of 1845—helped prepare the ground for the emergence, or rather invention, of the modern consumer in Victorian England.

### 1 "A great and holy thing": the Bazaar idea

Buying and selling goods in aid of a political cause had been done before the Anti-Corn Law League refined the art, most notably by abolitionists during the campaign to end the slave trade.<sup>19</sup> The charity bazaar went back a long way too, at least to the 1790s as Frank Prochaska demonstrated decades ago.<sup>20</sup> The

form was also indebted to the exhibitions of manufactured goods popularized by Mechanics' Institutes from the 1830s.<sup>21</sup> The Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar collapsed consumption and politics together and captured perfectly, both materially and symbolically, the ultimate ambition of the League: to turn the whole world into a giant bazaar.<sup>22</sup> That was why the idea was taken up so enthusiastically early on. John Bright, for example, paid for his own factory workers to attend the first free trade bazaar held at Manchester in January 1842. Bright's sister Priscilla wrote from Rochdale: "The factory people all went yesterday to the Free Trade Bazaar, my brother paying for a cheap train to conduct them to Manchester. There were 700 of them, and George Wilson let them go in *free*. They assembled on the moor just below these gates; the women and girls went first in twos and threes, then followed a band of music, and the men and boys brought up the rear. It was really a beautiful sight. They were all so well-dressed and in such high spirits. . . ." <sup>23</sup> The goods piled up in the Theatre Royal were supposed to demonstrate the rightness of the League's principles to working-class as well as to middle-class spectators. *The Times'* correspondent, however, was unimpressed by it all: "The bazaar on this occasion had nothing of novelty about it. The stalls were occupied by females, who distributed their fancy articles at a very high rate."<sup>24</sup> Although the event probably failed to impress workers much either in 1842—a year of acute economic distress and political protest—it was a great success in both financial and propaganda terms, raising about £10,000 for the League.<sup>25</sup>

The venue chosen for the great bazaar held in the metropolis three years later exactly suited the deliberately theatrical nature of the event. The public entered Covent Garden as if attending a dramatic performance, through the entrance in Bow Street, then up the grand staircase to the "Shakespeare saloon" that had been "fitted up with tapestry, carpets, shawls, etc. so as greatly to resemble the show room of a mercer," as the *Morning Herald* revealingly observed. Inside the theatre the pit and stage had been boarded over, transformed into a "Gothic Hall," with imitation paneled walls decorated with the mottoes of the League.<sup>26</sup> No expense had been spared on the interior, which was designed by Thomas Grieve, the most famous theatrical scene painter of his generation. The transparent roof and "immense" stained glass window helped to create a particularly luminous and romantic space: "The wondrous view had all the effect of enchantment; it seemed as if Aladdin's palace had been called into existence by the spell of the magician . . . long vistas of pillars extending to a distance which imagination more than doubled."<sup>27</sup> The bazaar featured stalls of goods of all descriptions from forty-six provincial towns and twelve districts of London, and it opened on Thursday 8 May, when visitors could admire but not purchase the exhibits after paying an entrance fee of 10s 6d.<sup>28</sup> Buying and selling proper began the week after and proved so popular that the pavements outside the theatre were soon "crowded with well dressed people anxious to obtain admission," and the normal charge was raised from a shilling to half-a-crown. In just seventeen days it attracted approximately 170,000 people and raised over £25,000 for the League.<sup>29</sup> According to the news-sheet that appeared daily to publicize the event, the bazaar demonstrated that "no protection is necessary to British industry and ingenuity, and that our artisans, if allowed to contest with foreigners on equal terms, would have no reason to dread competition."<sup>30</sup>

Memorabilia was a familiar feature and included engraved portraits of Cobden and Bright, silk Free Trade waistcoats decorated with wheat sheaves (the League's ubiquitous logo), Free Trade pocket handkerchiefs, sofa cushions and so on.<sup>31</sup> Though such fancy work was obviously still important, the bazaar form was considerably developed, and the undoubted impact and real novelty of the event can be attributed to the fact that the latest consumer goods now took pride of place on many stalls. Fashionable dresses for women and children as well as chintzes and fabrics of all kinds and for all purposes could be purchased, as one report observed; "Mr. Hertz [a prominent Manchester manufacturer] has sent several dresses of printed lace, a new style of dress, of such light and gossamer texture that it seems as if it had been woven by fairy hands."<sup>32</sup> The latest furniture and, most importantly, inventions that promised to revolutionize the bourgeois home, including water filters, stoves, and even washing machines, made their first public appearance. Sounding suspiciously like advertising copy, the *Bazaar Gazette* sang the praises of the latter and testified to the fact that, "numerous respectable families who have long held them in constant use . . . kindly allowed themselves to be referred to as to their efficiency . . . These machines will wash the most delicate, as well as any every other description of linen . . . The machine may also be worked by a very young or inexperienced person."<sup>33</sup>

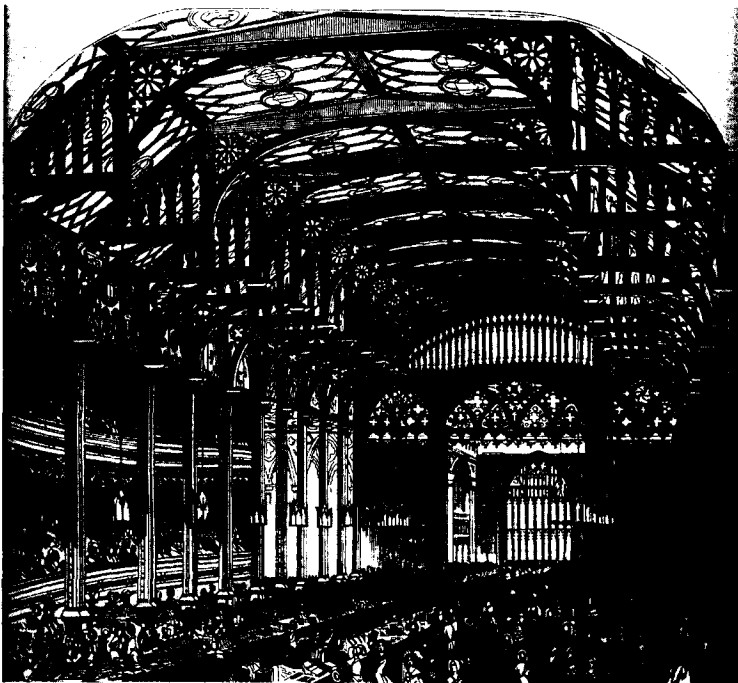
The frenzied nature of the buying and selling perturbed taste professionals writing in *The Art Union* magazine, who like Martineau and others, found it all rather vulgar. A determined effort was made to separate those aspects perceived to be educational from those thought purely commercial: "It was unfortunate for Art that this exposition was connected with a Bazaar—not merely because the ideas associated with a Bazaar are those of the luxurious products of laborious idleness—fancy work, screens, cushions, workbags, purses, and similar nicknackeries,—but because many articles most illustrative of manufactures were sold as fast as they were displayed, and disappeared from the stalls before they could be examined by the artist."<sup>34</sup> The flux of things disturbed the senses and made the aesthetic appreciation of objects difficult if not impossible. Even the most decorative and finely-wrought goods—John Ridgeway's porcelain for example—"came like the gorgeous hues of summer's evening clouds, and were even more transitory, for they were purchased as fast as they could be set out."<sup>35</sup> Many contemporary observers employed a similarly romantic idiom as they struggled to convey the excitement and meaning of what *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine* accurately called "a sort of huge collection, not of one, but of all classes of social objects."<sup>36</sup>

What these objects had in common of course was that they were all for sale; everything could be bought at the Bazaar, and even the culture and politics of the movement itself was thoroughly commodified. Its educational function was repeatedly emphasized by supportive organs of the press, including the *Morning Chronicle* that referred to "this extraordinary museum" and noted that, "as a spectacle, it is unsurpassed in beauty, attractiveness, and interest by any that our metropolis affords. It is a great social and political fact."<sup>37</sup> The *Illustrated London News* carried elaborate representations of this shopping festival (Fig. 1) and drew particular attention to the inclusive, democratic nature of the event. Technological advances like the galvanic process had brought the good things in life to a wider circle than ever before: "This new system of gold-printing is

intended to supersede the more expensive mode of embroidering fabrics with gold and silver for window- curtains, and other descriptions of furniture. It is peculiarly adapted for long drawing-room draperies; the brilliancy of the gold is rather heightened than impaired by washing; and the fabric is as economical as it is elegant."<sup>38</sup> *The Times* described the Bazaar as simultaneously, "a museum of British manufactures" and a "cathedral" of modern commerce and also emphasized the wide variety of goods on offer: "But of all that is to be purchased here, how can we speak? From a lady's dress to a doll's cap—from the *prie-dieu* of most elaborate manufacture to the smallest articles of the toilette—ay, even to soap and lavender-water—are all to be found here, and in the greatest profusion."<sup>39</sup> And despite the criticism, even *The Art Union* could enthuse about the latest carpet: "no engraving can do justice to its gorgeous colouring, its close texture, and its luxurious softness. The sensation it gave to the tread was like that of elastic mountain-moss, in which the foot sinks to the instep and yet leaves no print behind."<sup>40</sup> In a novel move, activists managed to successfully combine fashion with virtue to create what we could call a new morality of style.<sup>41</sup>

In this eminently practical manner middle-class consumption power was thus harnessed as a political force and channeled in appropriate ways so that individual desire and the collective progress of 'the people' could be harmonized. The following advertisement nicely captures the point: "We have to announce the

Figure 1



Cathedral of consumption: *Illustrated London News*, 10 May 1845.

receipt of twenty packets of Reynold's Anti-Corn Plasters, which the proprietor says will commend themselves to all classes, whether Whig, Tory, or Radical, being free from all party bias, while they act upon the well-known political principle of yielding to pressure from without; and while they will speedily deprive the poor of 'corns', they will better enable him to get 'bread'.<sup>42</sup> Gigantism was symptomatic of the ambition and hubris of a metropolitan middle class enjoying its golden hour.<sup>43</sup> One of the chief objects of attraction in the refreshment room—a giant plum cake which measured five feet in diameter, weighed 280 lbs. and was iced with “nearly all the maxims which embody the religion of the League . . . so sweet and richly ornamented as to almost induce the visitor to swallow them” according to the *Morning Herald*—was divided up and ritualistically consumed on the closing day of the exhibition.<sup>44</sup> For its promoters, then, the Covent Garden Bazaar not only hastened the repeal of the Corn Laws the following year, it also portended a new way of life, allowed visitors to glimpse fragments of a cornucopian future or eat it in the form of a giant plum cake.

The notion that the goods on sale at the bazaar were pregnant with meaning and could even come to life was sometimes explicitly stated. Perhaps the best example can be found in *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, where commodities speak the message of free trade. It is worth quoting in full:

The workman was represented by his handicraft; the toiling city was shadowed forth by rich stuffs, or glancing metals; and the fabrics, gorged from the loom, or dazzling from the forge, cried aloud, although they spoke not:—‘Let us accomplish our mission; let us go forth over the earth, civilizing, aiding, comforting man; and bringing, in return, plenty to the board, and peace to the hearth, of the toil-worn men and women who have fashioned us!’ A ‘Bazaar’—‘tis a trite word for a commonplace thing—often an idle mart for children’s trumpery—for foolish goods brought forth of laborious idleness. But an idea can ennoble anything. Nobility, in its true sense, is an idea; and how grand is the idea which ennobles *our* Bazaar—which, even apart from its claims as an industrial exposition, makes it a great and holy thing. ‘Free Trade.’ These words form a spell by which the world will yet be governed. They are the spirit of a dawning creed—a creed which already has found altars and temples worthy of its truth. The Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar has raised thoughts in the national mind which will not soon die. As a spectacle, it was magnificent in the extreme; but not more grand materially than it was morally. The crowd who saw it, thought as well as gazed. It was not a mere huge shop for selling wares; but a great school for propagating an idea.<sup>45</sup>

It is a commonplace of modern scholarship that goods carry complex symbolic meanings that require careful reading and contextualization.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, prescient observers in mid-nineteenth century England like George Cruikshank and Karl Marx noted at the time how commodities were increasingly taking on a life of their own or becoming “personified.”<sup>47</sup> What Marx famously called ‘commodity fetishism’ was not merely the product of critical reason but was integral to the world-view of a precocious bourgeoisie.

## 2 “Votaries of a great principle”: women and the Bazaar

The consumer culture of the League depended upon the “co-operation of the ladies,” in Cobden’s phrase.<sup>48</sup> The connection between women and consump-



tion stretched back to the eighteenth century and before, though the link had often been portrayed in negative ways. More specifically, middle-class women had practical experience of consumer politics; they had been in the forefront of boycotts of goods produced by slave labor and from the start had been the main organizers of charity bazaars. As many scholars have remarked, the emerging social domain provided these women with an important field of action, particularly within philanthropy.<sup>49</sup> The bazaar built on this tradition but developed and extended it within a new context; the Covent Garden Bazaar needs to be situated within a changing field of economic and social practices. Shopping was reinvented after the end of the Napoleonic wars as urban middle-class elites eagerly spent their newly acquired or augmented wealth; 'going a shopping' became a leisure pursuit for more and more people. Forms that many scholars have come to regard as fundamental to the development of modern consumer culture, particularly arcades and bazaars, made their first appearance. The great Manchester Bazaar, for example, which developed into Kendal Milne, an early department store, was established by John Watts in 1831.<sup>50</sup>

Another sign of a growing propensity to consume was the diffusion of goods like the piano. As Stena Nenadic has shown, from the 1820s pianos rapidly replaced dining tables as the most expensive objects in middle-class homes in Glasgow and Edinburgh. From the early 1860s it was possible to buy such status goods on the "three-year system."<sup>51</sup> Theodore Hoppen observes: "The characteristic mid-Victorian liking for clutter required increasing expenditure on tables, chairs, sideboards, chiffoniers, escritaires, pianos, dumb waiters, (all covered with tasseled velvet cloths and runners), upon Staffordshire figurines, Doulton china, brass candlesticks, coal-scuttles, papier-mâché models, vases, stuffed birds, wax fruit, and framed photographs. Rapid fashion changes in something as fundamental as carpets regularly forced the 'up-to-date' into making new acquisitions as the flat-woven body carpets of the 1840s gave way in the 1850s to fitted pile or tapestry carpets. . . ."<sup>52</sup>

Consumption practices drew an increasing amount of comment around mid-century. The "sport of shopping" was satirized by *Punch* in 1844, for instance, which defined it as, "the amusement of spending money at shops." According to the writer new spaces of consumption necessitated different techniques: "In street-shopping walk leisurely along, keeping a sharp look-out on the windows. In bazaar-shopping, beat each stall separately. Many patterns, colours, novelties, conveniences, and other articles will thus strike your eye, which you would otherwise never wanted or dreamt of." Street-shopping "related mainly to hosiery, drapery and 'jewellery of the richer sort'; whereas bazaars and arcades, "though excellent sport", tended to specialize in more frivolous goods—"toys and superfluities".<sup>53</sup> More straight-faced observers like the Board of Trade official and ardent free-trader, George Porter, approvingly noted the visible effects of all this activity. According to Porter, writing in 1836 in the first edition of his best-selling work, *The Progress of the Nation*, prosperous London shopkeepers at the end of the previous century were generally without even sitting room carpets. The contrast with the present was striking: "we now see, not carpets merely, but many articles of furniture which were formerly in use only among the nobility and gentry: the walls are covered by paintings and engravings, and the apartments contain evidences that some among the in-

mates cultivate one or more of those elegant accomplishments which tend so delightfully to refine the minds of individuals, and to sweeten the intercourse of families."<sup>54</sup>

The Anti-Corn Law League Bazaars were organized by the wives and daughters of the national and local leaders of the League though the hundreds who took part were not simply goaded into action by George Wilson. The League's chairman was certainly encouraging but their own efforts were of paramount importance.<sup>55</sup> The bazaar proved attractive to them because it furnished a bridge between women's knowledge and power within the private field of consumption and the public world of politics. The supposed distractions and shallow temptations of the world of goods could thus be checked or regulated by purposeful action in an emergent *social* domain.<sup>56</sup> According to some male observers—including an anonymous versifier who penned doggerel to his imaginary bucolic relative—the bazaar nevertheless retained a certain licentiousness: "And Cousin of Suffolk, you'll look with surprise/On the lady stall-keepers there;/They'll dazzle you quite, with the light of their eyes/And tempt you to purchase their ware." But in case the cousin was misled the writer continued, reassuringly: "They are not painted ladies, just come from the South,/Or in hothouse or greenhouse unfurl'd;/But England's own flowers, and rear'd in her bowers,/Beloved and admir'd all over the world."<sup>57</sup> More typical, perhaps, were representations of the bazaar that emphasized its family nature, such as this image in the *Illustrated London News* (Fig. 2); women featured on the stalls but were also shown contemplating and enjoying goods with their husbands and children. In this way a large and influential cross-section of the metropolitan middle class were taught crucial lessons in the micro and as well as the macro politics of consumption by this proto-department store. Middle-class consumers were deliberately encouraged to shop as families and this was probably a new phenomenon.<sup>58</sup>

On a more elevated level, other organs of the press emphasized how women's participation would help humanize or moralize the capitalist market. Free trade proposed its own distinctive form of 'moral economy' as the *Economist* underlined at the time and women had a vital role to play here:

We see stalls bearing the inscription of nearly every important town and neighbourhood in the kingdom, containing the richest specimens of all that art and ingenuity and taste can display, presided over by the votaries of a great principle, and by those who have been moved to a compassionate sympathy for the sufferings of the great masses of our fellow countrymen in the recent years of scarcity and distress;—who, now that those clouds are passed, and a more happy and prosperous period accompanies a time of plenty, are still willing to make any personal effort or sacrifice to save their neighbours and their country from a recurrence of such scenes as have stricken with grief and sorrow the hearts of the stoutest during the late years of suffering.<sup>59</sup>

The League spoke to plenty, as we have seen, but was also keen to explain scarcity; only a few years before during the general strike of 1842 the leadership inflamed the volatile food issue to further the case for repeal.<sup>60</sup> As literary scholars have demonstrated, middle-class women's role in moralizing the capitalist market was a key theme for mid-Victorian novelists like Elizabeth Gaskell; one thinks, most obviously, of the character of Margaret Hale in *North and South*



Figure 2



Middle-class family shopping: *Illustrated London News*, 17 May 1845.

(1855).<sup>61</sup> The “votaries of a great principle,” it was thought, would not only help introduce more middle-class families to an expansive world of consumption but could also teach forbearance and provide hope for those who were, for the time being at any rate, shut out from this exciting new order.

### 3 “The broad shield of the League”: handling contradiction

The League managed to bring together constituencies of gender but also attempted to overcome differences of locality, age, class (with not much success after 1842 it must be said) and religion. The new consumption practices sketched above generated deep unease among various groups. A plebeian supporter of the League, Joseph Livesey, struck an apocalyptic note in an article on the “evils of shopping” in *The Struggle*, for example, and singled out working-class women who adopted the consumption practices of their social superiors for particular censure: “On the part of the consumers, this system is a source of loss, extravagance, disputes, litigation, and immorality.” For Livesey, shopping and buying were quite distinct activities, the former dependent on the growing availability of easy credit and unchecked desire: “the thorough-going shopping woman, is she who has a husband at regular work, getting his 20s or more a week, and per-

haps one or two girls at the steam-loom . . . Drinking and idleness are too often the accompaniments of shopping."<sup>62</sup> The pull between moral restraint and uncensored desire was certainly not new and can be found in very different contexts across time.<sup>63</sup> What was novel, however, were the ways in which the League handled such contradictions.

John Bright himself literally embodied these contradictions. The plain-speaking "Father Bright", as Marx liked to call him, also prided himself on plain-living; he was notoriously thrifty, kept an "almost accusing tally" of personal expenditure in his diary and even skimped, unforgivably, on his fishing tackle.<sup>64</sup> Bright quite self-consciously rejected the fashionable attire and home furnishings of the successful public man, adopting instead the already long outmoded Quaker dress early in his career and living in simple if not quite Spartan style. Trevelyan underlined this aspect, observing that at One Ash, Bright's Rochdale home, there was "no aping the wealthier classes, even when in later years he became well off . . . There was no following the fashions, but adherence rather to the old Quaker standards . . . On a tour abroad, he writes that he is 'abstaining from buying things, as our house is full of things.' Many people would have thought it bare."<sup>65</sup> Bright was, unsurprisingly, an early and enthusiastic convert to the temperance cause, though many of his peers in the League were far more profligate in their spending habits.<sup>66</sup>

Such tensions were clearly exposed during the musical soiree or "final promenade" organized for the last night of the Bazaar. The committee of women who had organized the Manchester Bazaar in 1842 had wanted to organize something similar, but as a correspondent remarked in *The Times*: "the gentleman saints of the League, considering that a ball is a 'Vanity Fair,' and both wicked and immoral, have refused to countenance it, [and] much to the chagrin of the ladies. . . ."<sup>67</sup> Three years later the women were not to be thwarted, and the editor noted that many hundreds, perhaps even thousands, attended this invitation-only event, held to honor "the fair dames and damsels" who had acted as saleswomen. Entertainments therefore were of "a somewhat more gay and trivial character than might suit the taste or harmonize with the prejudices of the prim sectarians who form a large proportion of the constituency of the Anti-Corn Law League." Reconciling ethical and religious difference was a key theme in the editorial:

Side by side with the Independent minister might be seen the Unitarian, and in a far corner was to be detected a Wesleyan looking awful astonishment at the profane vanities above and around him; but, worse than all seemed to those who in the tariff of sanctity stand at the highest rate of import duty when the gaieties of life are concerned—shocking to relate, there were to be seen a dozen or so of dashing young Quakers, in "cutaway" coats with diminished collars, white waistcoats, and unexceptionable kid gloves; and these were really the cavaliers of the assemblage, meeting their reward in the smiles and sly gatiety of their proverbially pretty partners.<sup>68</sup>

There were serious concerns among some middle-class fractions at the prospect of hedonistic consumption propelled by heightened fashion consciousness, as the editor underlined. The point, however, was that such differences could be buried in the ideology of free trade which enabled influential sections of the middle classes to "make their peace with indulgence" at this time.<sup>69</sup> Many leaders

of the League attended the soiree, including Dr Bowring, Peronnet Thompson, Robert Moore, W. J. Fox and Dr Price. Dancing was proposed at 11 o'clock but for some this was going too far. Indeed, more straight-laced elements had left as soon as the music had commenced. Dr Price along with the more puritan elements fought off calls for dancing until midnight, then quit the theatre. As the editor of *The Times* observed, "the broad shield of the League covered them all," though only just.<sup>70</sup>

The Anti-Corn Law League drew its major support from at least five different constituencies; these included self-interested industrialists, humanitarian businessmen, pacifists, Philosophic Radicals, as well as the broad base of middle-class radicals who made up the backbone of the movement for free trade in the country.<sup>71</sup> Dissenters played a key role in the organization as has often been observed and Bright and Dr Price were not the only ones to turn up their noses at the showy excesses of middle-class consumerism; Edward Niall's *Nonconformist* thought the bazaar lowered the tone of the campaign, for instance.<sup>72</sup> Sometimes prioritizing and celebrating the role of consumption thus generated discord within the ranks. The groups that supported the League did not share a coherent ideology, nor had they all read and understood the central tenets of classical political economy; the so-called Manchester School was heterogeneous in composition and outlook, and even the term itself, as is well known, was a retrospective construct, coined by Benjamin Disraeli in 1848.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, during this critical decade class fractions which were often bitterly divided managed to put their differences to one side for the sake of what was frequently portrayed as a religious or ethical crusade against protection.

#### 4 Inventing the 'consumer'

The National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar of 1845 not only raised a great deal of money for the cause of free trade, it also celebrated in suitably dramatic ways an emergent consumer culture and attempted to bring the consumer centre stage and develop new ways of talking about consumption and the consumer. This had profound intellectual as well as practical ramifications. Although Adam Smith had asserted that, "consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer" in the *Wealth of Nations* (1776), the sphere of consumption was marginalized within classical political economy.<sup>74</sup> To be sure, Malthus and Christian economists like Thomas Chalmers adopted underconsumptionist arguments in the 1820s, arguing that capital and commodity gluts would recur as "middle-class avarice outpaced the natural limits of consumer demand."<sup>75</sup> Ricardians, however, continued to propound Say's law which maintained that, under favorable conditions, supply would always create its own demand and thus tended to regard consumption as unproblematic.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, it was not until the marginal revolution during the last quarter of the nineteenth century—associated in Britain particularly with the mathematized economics of W.S. Jevons—that the consumer was treated at all seriously by professional economists.<sup>77</sup> Ironically, the discovery of the consumer at this time coincided with a crisis of faith in the ideology of free trade and increasing doubts

about Britain's position as the leading economic power in the world.<sup>78</sup> And even then the Cambridge economist, Alfred Marshall, could justifiably claim as late as 1890 that; "Until recently the subject of demand or consumption has been somewhat neglected."<sup>79</sup> As the foregoing discussion has suggested, despite this theoretical neglect during the 1840s the figure of the consumer assumed greater importance in British social and political as well as economic life. The League can take much of the credit for this as it attempted to overturn negative conceptions of consumption that associated it primarily with destruction and waste. The League aimed to remoralize the sphere of consumption, and that is what the leaders of the League meant when they claimed that it was nothing less than a new religion or way of life. And at the centre of this way of life was the commodity.

However, we should not overestimate the speed of change or underplay the deep ambivalence toward the world of goods within the ranks of the middle classes themselves. Unease, it must be emphasized, did not abate. Mrs. Beeton's parsimony and concern for thriftiness that marked the hugely popular *Book of Household Management* (1861) is just one example of continuing concern.<sup>80</sup> The public controversy over the rise of Whiteley's the 'Universal Provider' in the 1870s also points up the partial nature of the transformation sketched above.<sup>81</sup> And we should also bear in mind continuities within the sphere of consumption throughout the long nineteenth century, such as the persistence of small traders, a distinctive feature of retailing that has been stressed by various scholars.<sup>82</sup> But decisive shifts did occur at mid-century, especially at the level of representation: the Victorians invented the modern consumer as a desiring agent and abstract category. The term was not used much before the 1840s; the traditional designation was purchaser or customer and these terms were freighted differently. As Raymond Williams insisted: "The relative decline of *customer*, used from C15 to describe a buyer or purchaser, is significant here, in that *customer* had always implied some degree of regular and continuing relationship to a supplier, whereas consumer indicates the more abstract figure in a more abstract market . . . to say *user* rather than consumer is still to express a relevant distinction."<sup>83</sup> During the 1840s 'going a shopping' became a leisure pursuit for more and more people and the term 'consumer' was gradually brought to the fore. Middle-class consumers later began to organize themselves as specific interest groups and describe themselves as consumers, especially in relation to natural monopolies such as gas and water.<sup>84</sup>

Like Martineau, the maverick inventor Charles Babbage was critical of the Great Exhibition but for opposite reasons. For him, significantly, it did not go far enough. Babbage celebrated what he called "the world's great bazaar" as a showcase for the civilizing influences of free trade and unbridled competition: "the free and unlimited exchange of commodities between nations, contributes to the advantage and the wealth of all."<sup>85</sup> Typically ahead of his time, Babbage fully embraced the new idiom and situated a universal category of the consumer at the centre of his account: "all men are *consumers*, and as such their common bond of interest is to purchase every thing in the *cheapest* market." It was the consumer, pursuing his or her own self-interest, which disciplined both producers and middlemen to the advantage of all. The only major complaint was that goods were not openly priced at the Great Exhibition, for this undermined its

fundamental educational role, which was “to instruct the consumer in the art of judging of the character of the commodity.” The Royal Commission’s decision to separate display from exchange (influenced perhaps by the overt commercialism of the Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar), according to Babbage, “puts aside the greatest of all interests, that of the consumer, in order to favour a small and particular class—the middle-men.”<sup>86</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The Great Exhibition in Hyde Park in 1851 proclaimed the hegemony of free trade to the world.<sup>87</sup> Cultural historians like Thomas Richards have done much to unravel the ways in which the exhibition elaborated new, sophisticated modes of commodity representation that transformed the advertising industry after mid-century.<sup>88</sup> By this time the protectionist cause was completely lost, despite the odd spasm, and what had already become the ‘tradition’ of free trade (with a pantheon of heroes and an official history) remained active and alert, more than capable of routing the enemy once again if necessary.<sup>89</sup> The League was in the vanguard of an emerging consumer culture and its cultural project had at its core the figure of an acquisitive, abstract consumer with expansive desires. The chief business of political associations, according to the leadership of the League, was to protect and further the freedom of consumers. They preferred as a rule to use the language of the ‘people’ rather than the ‘consumer’ certainly, though even Bright lamented how workers were “prevented from continuing or becoming consumers or purchasers of manufactured goods,” during the depression of the early 1840s.<sup>90</sup> Here changes in political and social practice preceded changes at the linguistic level; buying and selling were profoundly transformed during the mid nineteenth century before the modern concept of the consumer had fully developed.

Others commentators took up the discourse much more readily, especially, we might tentatively suggest, if their economic interests and professional lives were bound up less with the world of work and production, as was Bright’s, and more with trade and commerce. Joseph Livesey, for instance, made his living and improved his status as a cheese merchant. George Porter at the Board of Trade meticulously documented consumer desire and fed the Victorian “appetite for inventory.”<sup>91</sup> Porter welcomed the abolition of the sugar duty as, “a measure of justice to the consumer,” and reckoned the change would quicken technological advance in the production of this staple commodity.<sup>92</sup> Like other free traders, he believed that growing prosperity and material abundance demonstrated the rightness of his economic principles. “Progress”, for example, was measured in terms of the ability of the nation to satisfy the expanding needs of the majority. According to Porter, improvement was most visible among “those who are called, by a somewhat arbitrary distinction, ‘the working classes,’” but was not confined to that stratum as all classes benefited from the diffusion of what he called “comforts”. Porter also stressed how consumption practices invariably raised issues of morality; standards of material “comfort” and “respectability” were intimately bound together as goods were the visible markers of social status and individual worth. Sheffield artisans were singled out for special praise by Porter, who drew attention to their domestic pride: “the floors are carpeted, and



the tables are usually of mahogany; chests of drawers of the same material are commonly seen, and so in most cases is a clock also, the possession of which article of furniture has often been pointed out as the certain indication of prosperity and of personal respectability on the part of the working man."<sup>93</sup>

It seems likely that many now shared this faith in the positive influence of goods, as Trevelyan remarked: "The connection between a good coat and the right to the franchise seemed an obvious first postulate of civilised society; it was an instinct beyond the assault of argument, outside the proper limits of political controversy."<sup>94</sup> The new consumer culture, with its own particular freedoms and restraints, was increasingly regarded as potentially within reach of everybody. Leaders of the League, most famously Richard Cobden, were not the only ones to grasp the global nature of this project. Henry Bellows, the New York Unitarian, expressed the ambition nicely in 1853: "the productive industry of the whole race will soon be required to meet the demands of the consumers," Bellows wrote, "for when all the world are great consumers, all the world must be great producers."<sup>95</sup> The plethora of commodities produced by modern industry spoke the message of free trade and would, it was widely believed, eventually civilize the savage both at home and abroad. Martineau's South Sea head-hunter and Porter's Sheffield artisan thus had a good deal in common, might equally be molded into modern consumers as well as workers, simultaneously stimulated and tamed by the world of goods.<sup>96</sup> *Dawn Island* caught the mood well: this was the utopian promise of the National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar of 1845.

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## ENDNOTES

I should like to thank Jeremy Krikler, Paul Pickering, Steve Smith, Miles Taylor, Frank Trentmann, John Walton and my anonymous readers for helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

1. See R. K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: a radical Victorian* (New York, 1960), 264.
2. Harriet Martineau, *The History of England during the Thirty Years' Peace, 1816-1846* Vol.II (London, 1850), 674-5.
3. Harriet Martineau, "The Crystal Palace," *Westminster Review* 62 (October 1854), 548. There is a huge literature on the sublime but George Landow, *The aesthetic and critical theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton, 1971), is useful.
4. Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven, CT, 1999); John Davis, *The Great Exhibition* (Stroud, 1999); Louise Purbrick (ed.), *The Great Exhibition of 1851: new interdisciplinary essays* (Manchester, 2001); Peter Hoffenberg, *An empire on display: English, Indian, and Australian exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley, 2001); James Buzard, Joseph Childers and Eileen Gillooly, (eds), *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace* (Charlottesville, 2006).

5. See Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (London, 1990), 714.
6. Prentice observed that the opening of the bazaar "created an interest scarcely inferior to that which was felt at a later and happier period at the opening of the Crystal Palace, in Hyde Park." *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*, Vol. II (London, 1853), 327.
7. G. M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright* (London, 1913), 129.
8. For a review of the literature on consumption and middle-class formation see Lisa Tiersten, "Redefining Consumer Culture: Recent Literature on Consumption and the Bourgeoisie in Western Europe," *Radical History Review*, 57 (1993): 116–59.
9. There is an insightful discussion of the meanings of 'consumer culture' in Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge, 1997), 24–32.
10. Carole Shammas, *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford, 1990); Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclothing of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and Their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1984); Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1978).
11. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England* (London, 1983); Lorna Weatherhill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760* (London, 1988); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT, 1998).
12. W. H. Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850–1914* (London, 1981); Christopher Brewer, *The Hidden Consumer. Masculinities, fashion and city life 1860–1914* (Manchester, 1999); Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: women in the making of London's West End* (Princeton, 2000).
13. John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain 1880–1980* (London, 1994); Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in late Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 1996); Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge, 2003).
14. Margot Finn, *The character of credit: personal debt in English culture, 1740–1914* (Cambridge, 2003), 17.
15. Peter N. Stearns, "Stages of Consumerism: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization," *Journal of Modern History*, 69/1 (March 1997): 103.
16. Norman McCord's, *The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838–1846* (London, 1958) was a useful corrective to earlier enthusiastic histories of the League but approached the organisation as a fairly ineffective political pressure group rather than a cultural movement. Anthony Howe's meticulous Cobdenite study, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* (Oxford, 1997) and Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell's, *The People's Bread. A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 2000) enlarge our understanding considerably but do not assess the League as a form of consumer organizing. Note also the pioneering work of C. R. Fay, *The Corn Laws and Social England* (Cambridge, 1932); and Norman Longmate's accessible study, *The Breadstealers. The Fight against the Corn Laws, 1838–1846* (London, 1984), which contains some useful material on the culture of the League.

17. Patrick Joyce, *Democratic subjects. The self and the social in nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994), 128–9; Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the 'Middle Class': The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780–1840* (Cambridge, 1995), 268–72. For the 'cultural turn' see Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The new cultural history: essays* (Berkeley, 1989); Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the cultural turn: new directions in the study of society and culture* (Berkeley, 1999).
18. The absence of a study of the language of the League is noted by Howe in *Free Trade and Liberal England*, 32.
19. On the consumer politics of the abolition movement see Clare Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture," *Slavery and Abolition*, 17/3 (1996): 137–62; Charlotte Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties. Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713–1833* (Stanford, 2000).
20. F. K. Prochaska, "Charity Bazaars in Nineteenth Century England," *Journal of British Studies*, 16/2 (Spring 1977): 62–84; *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England* (Oxford, 1980). See also S. J. D. Green, "The Death of Pew Rents, the Rise of Bazaars, and the End of the Traditional Political Economy of Voluntary Religious Organizations: the Case of the West Riding of Yorkshire, c. 1870–1914," *Northern History*, 27 (1991): 198–235.
21. See Toshio Kusamitsu, "Great Exhibitions before 1851," *History Workshop Journal*, 29 (1980): 70–89.
22. For a modern update by an academic economist see John McMillan, *Reinventing the Bazaar. A Natural History of Markets* (New York, 2002) who stresses that bazaars or markets are always embedded within particular political and social contexts. On this theme see also Mark Bevir and Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Markets in Historical Contexts. Ideas and Politics in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2004).
23. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 107, wrongly dated 1843.
24. *The Times*, 4 February 1842, 5.
25. See Longmate, *The Breadstealers*, 197–8; Simon Morgan, "Domestic Economy and Political Agitation: Women and the Anti-Corn Law League, 1839–46," in Kathryn Gleadow and Sarah Richardson (eds.), *Women in British Politics, 1760–1860. The Power of the Petticoat* (London, 2000), 123–5.
26. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*, Vol II, 328–9.
27. *The Art Union*, 1 July 1845, 211. Tropes of space and light also marked descriptions of the Great Exhibition as Marshall Berman notes in his influential study, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, 1982), 237–8.
28. *The League Guide to London and Free-Traders' Hand-Book of the Metropolis; prepared for the use of visitors to the Great Bazaar* (London, 1845).
29. *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 7, 5; no. 8, 1; Longmate, *The Breadstealers*, 199–207.
30. *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 2, 1–2.

31. Ibid., 5; no. 7, 1.
32. Ibid., no. 3, 2.
33. Ibid., 7–8.
34. *The Art Union*, 1 July 1845, 209.
35. Ibid.
36. *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, June 1845, 518.
37. *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 16, 1; Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*, Vol II, 337.
38. *Illustrated London News*, 17 May 1845, 309.
39. *The Times*, 9 May 1845, 6.
40. *The Art Union*, 1 July 1845, 218.
41. For a much later example of an attempt to forge such a link see Lawrence Glickman, "‘Make Lisle the Style’: The Politics of Fashion in the Japanese Silk Boycott, 1937–1940," *Journal of Social History*, 38 (Spring 2005): 573–608.
42. *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 16, 7.
43. On gigantism see Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England. Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (London, 1991), 48–9.
44. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*, Vol II, 330–1.
45. *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, June 1845, 516–17. On Jerrold's commitment to the panacea of free trade see Michael Slater, *Douglas Jerrold: a life, 1803–1857* (London, 2001).
46. See Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London, 1996); Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986).
47. Two prints by Cruikshank capture this particularly well: "A Swallow at Christmas," which appeared in *The Comic Almanack*, December 1841; and "The dispersion of the works of all nations from the Great Exhibition of 1851," which can be found in Henry Mayhew and George Cruikshank, *1851: or, the Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys and Family* (London, 1851). Marx's classic formulation of commodity fetishism is in *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I (1867: Middlesex, 1976), 163–77.
48. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*, Vol. I, 386.
49. Women's participation in the bazaar is discussed in Alex Tyrell, "‘Woman's Mission’ and Pressure Group Politics (1825–1860)," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 63/1 (1980): 194–230; Morgan, "Domestic Economy and Political Agitation," 126–9. See also note 20 above.
50. Alison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping 1800–1914* (London, 1964), 18–21.

51. Stena Nenadic, "Middle-Rank Consumers and Domestic Culture in Edinburgh and Glasgow 1720–1840," *Past and Present*, 145 (1994): 145, 153; "Romanticism and the urge to consume in the first half of the nineteenth century," in Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford (eds.), *Consumers and Luxury. Consumer culture in Europe 1650–1850* (Manchester, 1999), 212; Cyril Ehrlich, *The Piano: A History* (Oxford, 1990), 100–4. More generally, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and women of the English middle class 1780–1850* (London, 1987), 357–87.
52. K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846–1886* (Oxford, 1998), 336. See also Ralph Dutton, *The Victorian Home: Some Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Taste and Manners* (London, 1954), 145; Thad Logan, *The Victorian parlour: a cultural history* (Cambridge, 2001).
53. Quoted in *The Times*, 26 September 1844, 8. Note also the humorous song, "Going Out a Shopping—Happy Moments" (London, 1850).
54. G. R. Porter, *The Progress of the Nation, in its various Social and Economical Relations* (1836; London, 1851), 522. Note also Lucy Brown, *The Board of Trade and the Free Trade Movement, 1830–1842* (Oxford, 1958).
55. Morgan, "Domestic Economy and Political Agitation," 116.
56. For women and the social see Denise Riley, *Am I that name?: Feminism and the category of "women" in history* (Basingstoke, 1988); Mary Poovey, *Making a social body: British cultural formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago, 1995); Eileen Janes Yeo, *The contest for social science: relations and representations of gender and class* (London, 1996).
57. *National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar Gazette*, no. 15, 7–8. The bazaar inspired a great deal of poetry, including a commemorative verse by William Gardner, *A Rhythmic Notice of the Anti-Corn-Law League Bazaar held at Covent Garden Theatre* (London, 1845).
58. This subject deserves fuller investigation though there are some useful leads in Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire. Design and Society 1750–1980* (London, 1986), 105, 118–9.
59. Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn-Law League*, Vol II, 340–41. The *Economist* was established in 1843 by James Wilson, a keen supporter of the League, which gave the journal vital financial help in its early phase. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League*, 184; Ruth Dudley Edwards, *The Pursuit of Reason. The 'Economist' 1843–1993* (London, 1993).
60. For a full discussion see my article, "'Rejoicing in potatoes': the politics of consumption in England in 1842," forthcoming.
61. Gaskell's complaints about consumer culture are discussed by Ellen Rosenman, "More Stories about Clothing and Furniture: Realism and Bad Commodities," in Christine Krueger (ed.), *The Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time* (Athens, Ohio 2002), 47–54.
62. *The Struggle*, 91, 1843, 2.
63. In *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York, 1987), Simon Schama, for example, observed how Dutch merchants in the seventeenth century attempted to reconcile Calvinist discipline with domestic material extravagance. Note also Jan de Vries, "Between purchasing power and the world of goods:



understanding the household economy in early modern Europe," in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993).

64. Palmerston also thought Bright a humbug, as Asa Briggs noted in, *Victorian People. A Reassessment of Persons and Themes 1851-67* (1954; London, 1965), 208, 212. Evidence of Bright's parsimony can be found in R. A. J. Walling (ed.), *The Diaries of John Bright. With a Foreword by Philip Bright* (London, 1930), 229-30.
65. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 173-4.
66. For Bright's temperance connections and his changing drinking habits see Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (1971; Keele, 1994), 165; 282-3. However, compare William Ashworth's wine-cellar and the extravagances of one of the Fielden brothers: Rhodes Boyson, *The Ashworth cotton enterprise: the rise and fall of a family firm* (Oxford, 1970); Brian Law, *Fieldens of Todmorden. A nineteenth century business dynasty* (Littleborough, 1995).
67. *The Times*, 4 February 1842, 5.
68. *Ibid.*, 29 May 1845, 6.
69. Stearns, "Stages of Consumerism," 116.
70. *The Times*, 29 May 1845, 6
71. William Grampp, *The Manchester School of Economics* (Stanford, 1960), 5-11.
72. See Pickering and Tyrell, *The People's Bread*, 210. On the importance of support from dissenting communities in Wales see Ryland Wallace, "Wales and the Anti-Corn Law League," *Welsh History Review*, 13 (1986): 8-9.
73. Michael Turner emphasizes divisions within the elite over the policy of *laissez faire* in, "Before the Manchester School," *History*, 79/2 (1994): 216-41. See also his article, "'The Bonaparte of Free Trade': Peronnet Thompson," *Historical Journal*, 41/4 (1998): 1011-34.
74. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1937) Vol. II, 155. Smith, however, also regarded consumption as morally frivolous; see Joyce Appleby, "Consumption in early modern social thought," in Brewer and Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 168-9. An alternative reading is proposed by Neil De Marchi, "Adam Smith's accommodation of 'altogether endless' desires," in Berg and Clifford (eds.), *Consumers and Luxury*, 18-36.
75. Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), 118; Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty. An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge, 1996), 367-8. Marx refuted the vulgar underconsumptionist theory of crisis in *Capital* Vol. II, chapter 20.
76. As Mark Blaug has observed, in *Principles of Political Economy* (1817), Ricardo conceived the economy, "as descending smoothly into the stationary state without any hitch from a failure of effective demand." Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect* (1962; Cambridge, 1985), 129.

77. *Ibid.*, 294–327; Sandra Peart, *The Economics of W. S. Jevons* (London, 1996).
78. See Philip Mirowski, “Macroeconomic instability and the ‘natural’ processes in early neoclassical economics,” *Journal of Economic History*, 44/2 (June 1984), 436; Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts. El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London, 2001), 222–3. In *The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class* (1919; London, 1927), 26, the Bolshevik intellectual, Nikolai Bukharin, linked the marginal revolution to changes in the structure of late-nineteenth century capitalism, suggesting that; “Consumption is the basis of the entire life of the *rentiers* and the ‘psychology of pure consumption’ imparts to this life its specific style. The consuming *rentier* is concerned only with riding mounts, with expensive rugs, fragrant cigars, the wine of Tokay.”
79. Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (1890; London, 1961), 84. See also David Reisman, *The Economics of Alfred Marshall* (London, 1986). Regenia Gagnia underestimates the continuing importance of moral imperatives among professional economists in *The Insatiability of Human Wants* (Chicago, 2000).
80. Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (London, 1861), i–xv.
81. See Erika Rappaport, “‘The Halls of Temptation’: Gender, Politics and the Construction of the Department Store in Late Victorian London,” *Journal of British Studies*, 35 (1996): 58–83.
82. Including Michael Winstanley, *The Shopkeeper's World, 1830–1914* (Manchester, 1983); Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain (eds.), *Cathedrals of consumption: the European department store, 1850–1939* (Aldershot, 1998); Finn, *The Character of Credit*, 280–1.
83. Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A vocabulary of culture and society* (London, 1983), 79.
84. See, for example, R. M. Massey, *A Letter to the Gas Consumers of the City of London* (London, 1851). Middle-class consumers defended themselves against monopoly by means of bodies such as the London Gas Consumers’ Association in the 1870s and the Water Consumers’ Defence League in the 1880s. For these organizations see *The Times*, 21 August 1872, 3; 27 October 1873, 6; 20 December 1883, 6; 4 January 1884, 12. Note also Martin Daunton, “The Material Politics of Natural Monopoly: Consuming Gas in Victorian Britain,” in Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton (eds.), *The Politics of Consumption. Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford, 2001); Frank Trentmann and Vanessa Taylor, “From Users to Consumers: Water Politics in Nineteenth-Century London,” in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2006).
85. Charles Babbage, *The Exposition of 1851; or, Views of the Industry, the Science, and the Government of England* (London, 2nd. ed., 1851), vi, 10 (his emphasis). Note also the remarks on 42, 73.
86. *Ibid.*, 45, 81, 129. See also Peter Hoffenberg, “Equipoise and its discontents: voices of dissent during the international exhibitions,” in Martin Hewitt (ed.), *An Age of Equipoise? Reassessing Mid-Victorian Britain* (Aldershot, 2000), 43–9.
87. Wolfram Kaiser, “Cultural Transfer of Free Trade at the World Exhibitions, 1851–1862,” *Journal of Modern History*, 77, 3 (September 2005): 563–590.

88. Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, 17–72; Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (London, 1989), 83–6.
89. Briggs, *Victorian People*, 29; Anna Gambles, *Protection and Politics: Conservative economic discourse, 1815–1852* (London, 1999). The League was revived briefly during the general election campaign of 1852.
90. In a diary entry for 1843 cited in Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 57. Note how Bright used both the old and new designation here suggesting ambivalence. In a letter to his sister-in-law Margaret (*ibid.*, 73), Bright also denounced the aristocracy for squeezing “all they can out of the mass of consumers.”
91. Derek Walcott’s phrase cited by Miriam Bailin, “The New Victorians,” in Krueger (ed.), *The Functions of Victorian Culture*, 43.
92. Porter, *The Progress of the Nation*, preface to the second edition (1847), xix.
93. *Ibid.*, 523.
94. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 60.
95. H.W. Bellows, *The Moral Significance of the Crystal Palace* (New York, 1853), 17–18.
96. See Catherine Hall, *Civilising subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867* (Oxford, 2002). The global impact of the religion of free trade is assessed in Mike Davis’s compelling study, *Late Victorian Holocausts. El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*.

has suggested that "self-divorce" among the medieval English may have been more common than we think. Walker and Kelly have made similar suggestions. The goal of this paper is to use their work as a foundation, to explore the various licit and illicit means of separation in late medieval England. Using marriage litigation, bishops' registers, ecclesiastical actbooks, manorial courts, chancery records, and assize rolls, this paper will attempt to discern the risks involved in husband desertion to both the wife and her "rescuers," common features of wife desertion, as well as contemporary attitudes held by both wives and society in general.

### Timothy Parsons, "The Consequences of Uniformity: The Struggle for the Boy Scout Uniform in Colonial Kenya"

Boy Scout uniforms in colonial East Africa, like civilian clothing, were tangible but malleable archives of social reality that enabled young African men to imagine, if not create, new identities and realities. By appropriating Scout clothing and symbols and turning them to new purposes, they challenged the established colonial order and proposed new social identities. Yet uniforms constituted a special category of clothing that is largely missing from broader studies of African dress. Scholars have tended to assume that the disciplined and regimented nature of Scout clothing protected from capture both authorized and unauthorized wearers.

Uniforms conveyed great power in colonial Kenyan society. The colonial regime used them to discipline and empower the African soldiers, policemen, and civil servants who extended its reach into urban and rural African communities. The uniforms of these colonial proxies conveyed the standardized message that their wearers represented the authority of the state and accepted its guidance and discipline regardless of who they actually were. Yet the institutionalized power embedded in uniforms also made them vulnerable to appropriation. Their conformity and enforced anonymity meant that anyone putting them on could claim the authority and privileges they represented. The Scout uniform therefore became the center of a fierce struggle in colonial Kenya between Africans who sought to turn it to their own uses and the colonial authorities who recognized that it had the ability to undermine British rule by blurring racial, class, and gender lines.

### Peter J. Gurney, "'The Sublime of the Bazaar': A Moment in the Making of a Consumer Culture in Mid-Nineteenth Century England"

This article attempts to reconnect the culture with the politics of the campaign for free trade through a case study of the National Anti-Corn Law League Bazaar held at Covent Garden Theatre London in the spring of 1845. Four major themes are considered. First, the ways in which the bazaar pulled together commerce and politics are explored. The League was not only concerned with the abolition of excise duty on staple goods (especially 'the people's corn') but was also keen to address the commodity world of Victorian capitalism more generally, and a focus on the bazaar helps unravel the significance of this preoccupa-

pation. The article then goes on to consider the central role played by middle-class women in this area and suggests why their participation was thought vital. Third, contradictory attitudes toward consumption and continuing fears provoked by the commercialization of politics are discussed in more detail. Finally, the study suggests, more speculatively and in the longer term, that the culture of the League—embodied in the bazaar of 1845—helped prepare the ground for the emergence, or rather invention, of the modern consumer in Victorian England.

Luther Adams, "‘Heading for Louisville’: Rethinking Rural to Urban Migration in the South, 1930-1950"

During the period between 1930 and 1970 more than 17,000 migrants were drawn to Louisville, challenging us to rethink the centrality of rural to urban migration narratives during the era of the Second Great Migration. African American migration in Louisville, Kentucky demonstrates the necessity of recognizing the distinctiveness of the Second Great Migration as well as the need to turn our attention to Black mobility within the South. Between 1935–1940, the largest Southern cities witnessed an influx of Black population; many of these migrants originated in the urban, not rural South. That Kentucky’s Black population was primarily urban stood in stark contrast with much of the South; however, Blacks in Tennessee, Alabama, Florida and North Carolina were also predominantly urban. Not only does examining urban to urban migration patterns offer a more complex view of African American migration, it also offers a more nuanced view of African American urbanization as a process. African American migration in Louisville, Kentucky challenges us to rethink the centrality of rural to urban migration narratives during the era of the Second Great Migration.

Jan Dumolyn, "Nobles, Patricians and Officers: The Making of a Regional Political Elite in Late Medieval Flanders"

The county of Flanders belonged to one of the most urbanised regions of Western Europe. In the later medieval period, it witnessed the rise of a new power elite. As a consequence of the state formation process impoverished noble lineages who survived by serving the prince fused with rich patrician families who also took up princely offices. They did this by forming social networks based on marriage alliances. The nobility did not at all close itself off from newcomers. During the fifteenth century, the possibilities for interaction between nobles and non-nobles were frequent. Burgers and members of the rural elites were ennobled in different ways. The ducal officers constructed family and social networks that went beyond their class and geographical origins. The elite groups of the city and the surrounding countryside had a tendency to overlap. Important layers of this composite political elite developed into what could be considered a new 'state nobility'. Along with ennoblement and upward social mobility, high officials adopted the family structure of the patrilineal 'lineage' typical of the nobility. The new regional political elite which was partially created by the state