LORD LIVERPOOL

The Unknown Conservative

'*Mon dieu, conservons-nous le chaos*'

- Lord Liverpool at the Creation, according to Talleyrand

Lord Liverpool was born plain Robert Banks Jenkinson, on 7th June 1770. His earliest known ancestor, Anthony Jenkinson, was an explorer and sea captain, agent of the Elizabethan Muscovy Company, and the first Englishman to penetrate Central Asia. With his fortune and coat of arms, the family then settled as Oxfordshire country squires, rising in the social scale until they acquired a baronetcy at the Restoration. The first four Baronets, including Liverpool's great grandfather and two great uncles, were successively MPs for Oxfordshire in the High Tory interest from 1661 to 1727. The third Baronet was a member of the October Club and the fourth was named in 1721 to the Pretender as a probable supporter in the event of a rising. The family finally lost its Parliamentary seat in the Walpolean landslide of 1727.

The Jenkinson family had clearly lost much of their political influence by the time of Liverpool's birth, but Liverpool's own father, Charles Jenkinson (1727-1808) was to change all that. Charles was a remarkable man, with a particularly good head for business and a firm Conservative outlook. After distinguishing himself academically at University College, Oxford, he became unpaid private secretary to Bute in 1760, entered Parliament in the Tory revival election of 1761 and became a Junior Lord of the Treasury within two years. He was one of the leading 'King's Friends' in Parliament, and was thought to have

enormous influence with George III. He resigned when Rockingham came to power in 1765, was appointed a Lord of Admiralty by Grafton, and a Privy Councillor in 1772 by North.

In 1778, after a reshuffle due to the American War's lack of success, Jenkinson became Secretary at War, and he was influential in the selection of his brother-in-law Charles Wolfran Cornwall as Speaker in 1780, in which office Cornwall was to continue through changes of Ministry until his death in 1789. Jenkinson resigned with North in 1782, but being more adept at picking winners than his former colleagues of the North Ministry, he became President of the Board of Trade and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster under Pitt in 1786. Thereafter he remained a shadowy figure, but one of the most influential of all Pitt's Cabinet Ministers, until Pitt's resignation in 1801, finally resigning himself owing to ill-health the following year. He was created Lord Hawkesbury in 1786 and Earl of Liverpool, in honour of the great trading port, ten years later. In short, his was a great Conservative success story.

Liverpool's father thus helped him in his early career in all the traditional ways of a successful father with an able son. He obtained a Parliamentary seat for him before his majority, brought him to the notice of Pitt, who took him, Canning and Castlereagh under his wing, and in 1801 was able to pass on his 'influence' to his son, to such good effect that the 30-year old Lord Hawkesbury entered Addington's Cabinet in the crucial position of Foreign Secretary.

Charles Jenkinson's political legacy was less clear-cut, but also significant. He had always been impeccably Conservative, even as he switched Parliamentary horses several times. While he had become a principal advocate of Pitt's fiscal reforms, he was fairly hard-line in his attitude to political sedition after the French Revolution. As far as policy went, therefore, the young Liverpool was substantially in agreement with his father, if more directly a 'disciple' of Pitt. In methods, the son differed from the father, having more

political personality, but this was probably due more to a difference in temperament than to conscious planning. In any case, even in this area there was enough similarity to allow the son, not a man for the ringing declaration of policy or the flash of wit that attracts biographers, to be branded unfairly by posterity as a colourless mediocrity. Contemporaries would have applied the term 'colourless' only to the father, whose colourlessness was largely deliberate. Neither man was mediocre.

Liverpool's mother Amelia was the only daughter of William Watts, an associate of Clive in India who married a Eurasian wife. Amelia thus brought Charles Jenkinson a considerable dowry, and made her son around one eighth Indian, a fact which seems to have caused absolutely no stir in Britain, a very different society from contemporary America, where Liverpool's contemporary Andrew Jackson fought several duels through being accused of having coloured blood. Amelia died after bearing Liverpool, however, and he was thus motherless until 1782, when his father married Catherine, the widow of Sir John Cope, who bore him a further son (Charles, later the third Earl of Liverpool) and a daughter.

Robert Banks Jenkinson was educated first at a preparatory school at Parsons Green, Fulham, where he remained until he was twelve, and then at Charterhouse. His career at Charterhouse, which lasted just over 3 1/2 years, seems not to have been particularly distinguished, although a letter from his father dated November, 1784 indicates that already he showed signs of talent out of the ordinary -- his father wrote that 'the principal happiness I shall expect to enjoy in the decline of life is that which I shall derive from your prosperity and eminence.'[1]

In 1786, Jenkinson went up to Christ Church College, Oxford. He was sixteen, which was only slightly young for those days. At Oxford, he was a

[1] Yonge, 'Life and administration of Lord Liverpool' Vol. I, p7

serious student; his letters home were full of comparisons between the classical authors he was studying -- Oxford education at that time offered little chance of broadening the intellectual scope beyond the classics. He disputed in company during his first two or three terms but became 'convinced of the bad effects arising from that habit' and later 'avoided as much as possible all mixed companies, and lived principally with a few particular people.'[2] Two of these people remained friends into later life, Lord Granville Leveson Gower, whom Jenkinson was to make Ambassador to France and first Viscount Granville, and George Canning. The latter was still a Whig; he was to change sides after the French Revolution, and join Pitt in 1793, but the political differences between the two men -- Jenkinson was a Tory, a firm supporter of Pitt, and an even firmer one of his father -- made no difference to their friendship.

After leaving Oxford in 1789 (he was awarded an M.A. in 1790) Jenkinson took the customary tour of Europe, going to Italy, which he disliked, and then to France. In later years (30th November, 1819) he was to claim in Parliament that he had been an eyewitness of the storming of the Bastille on 14th July; the 'Gentleman's Magazine' in its obituary not only makes this assertion but also claims that he was given a watching brief by Pitt over the events of the next few weeks. Other biographers have been less certain; Yonge contradicts himself, suggesting that he arrived only in early August. In any case, the events of the next few tumultuous months made a lasting impression upon the young man. He appears to have observed events as they unfolded both accurately and shrewdly, and to have been quite uncontaminated by the Radical enthusiasm for the early months of the French Revolution, as expressed by the Whigs. 'How much the greatest event it is that this ever happened in the world! and how much the best!'[3] wrote Fox on hearing of the storming of the Bastille. 'How this matter

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[2] Yonge, op. cit., I, p9

[3] Letter to Richard Fitzpatrick, 30th July, 1789

will end it seems more and more difficult every day to determine'[4] wrote Jenkinson to his father. At nineteen, it was Jenkinson who exhibited the maturer judgement.

In the following year, 1790, Jenkinson entered Parliament. He was still under age, but at the General Election of 1790 he was returned for Appleby, the Lowther family borough which had first seated William Pitt ten years earlier, and Charles Jenkinson from 1767-72. With a General Election only every six years, and Jenkinson's party securely in power, it was an opportunity too good to be missed.

Jenkinson travelled considerably around Europe in 1790-2, and thus his maiden Commons speech was delayed for over a year. However, when the opportunity arose, it was a good one, and Jenkinson made excellent use of it. On the occasion of a censure motion moved by Whitbread on the Government's policy over the Oczakov crisis, Pitt selected Jenkinson to open the debate on the Government side. His speech was closely argued; it proclaimed that Turkey, as the natural enemy of Austria which was in turn the natural ally of France and enemy of Prussia, which was in turn the natural ally of Britain, should be supported against Russian aggression. As for France itself, though she was 'at present in the most distracted situation, was it likely that she would long continue in that state?...Possibly her ancient and arbitrary government might be restored; and in that case she would once more be a powerful rival...perhaps she would obtain a moderate and free government; and then, though less fear might be apprehended from intrigue, more would be to be dreaded from her power.'[5] He then went on to propound the central British policy of the next century in respect of the Eastern Question: 'It has been advanced as a wise maxim that, for the sake of the balance of power, the Russian Empire should not, if possible, be

[4] Yonge, op. cit., I, p14
[5] Anon., 'Memoirs of the Public Life and Administration of the Earl of Liverpool,' pp 20-21

allowed to increase; nor that of Turkey to diminish.'[6] He then discussed the Oczakov peace proposals in detail, and ended with a ringing declaration in favour of the Balance of Power.

Jenkinson's first speech was quite exceptionally well received. Pitt began his own speech by pronouncing it 'not only a more able first speech than had ever been heard from a young Member, but one so full of philosophy and science, strong and perspicacious language, and sound and convincing arguments, that it would have done credit to the most practised debater and most experienced statesman that ever existed.'[7]

During the summer of 1792, Jenkinson visited the Prussian and Austrian armies in the Low Countries, and their French émigré hangers-on -- by this stage Louis XVI was giving secret encouragement to the invading armies. His comments on the French émigrés were both accurate and acid: 'The French army consists of about 16,000 men. In that number there are about 500 soldiers, all the rest are officers.'[8] As for the Prussians, both they and their commander, the Duke of Brunswick, were much more impressive -- the latter remarked of his soldiers 'Ils sont grands bêtes, mais ils savent bien leur affaire'[9] -- a touch of the later Wellington there. Jenkinson also learned of the hatred between the Austrians, the Prussians and the French émigrés, and of the intrigues between the Allies, which disillusioning knowledge may well have contributed greatly to his later abilities in foreign policy. In any case, his reports back to his father, the contents of which were communicated to Pitt, must have been of considerable service to the latter in the formulation of an appropriate foreign policy at a time of such international fluidity.

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[6] Anon., op. cit., p23
[7] Yonge, op. cit., I, p17-18
[8] Yonge, op. cit., I, p21
[9] Yonge, op. cit., I, p24

In the 1793 Parliamentary session, Jenkinson spoke several times with considerable success, including his first speech on the subject of Parliamentary Reform. A Bill to bring in Reform had been introduced by the young Whig Charles Grey (forty years later to become Earl Grey of the Reform Bill) and once again Jenkinson had been chosen to lead the opposition. He began by praising the diversity of the eighteenth century franchise, and continued by remarking that 'If public opinion is necessarily to affect their (House of Commons) decisions on every occasion, it will cease to be a deliberative assembly, and the members of it would have nothing to do but go to their constituents, and desire to be directed by them, in the votes they are to give on every important subject.'[10] He then continued 'Form a House of Commons as you please; assemble the people in Salisbury Plain; you cannot prevent their having improper attachments and improper aversions. You cannot prevent their placing too much confidence in one Minister, because they approve of him, or too little in another, because they disapprove of him. The defect is not in the representation; it is in human nature, and our eyes had better be turned to an improvement of that.'[11] Grey's motion lost by 72 votes, but it had provided a superb platform for the young Jenkinson to go on record for the first time against what was to become the greatest danger to the Conservative constitution -- radical Parliamentary Reform.

Liverpool's attitude to Parliamentary Reform remained perfectly consistent all his life. Whereas in his last years he became more liberal in his social policies, proposed moves towards free trade, in which he had a thoroughly Pittite belief, and was prepared to regard Catholic Emancipation as an open question within his Cabinet, he never wavered on the central issue of Reform. He perceived radical Reform correctly as the principal threat to the Conservative society he fought so long and so successfully to preserve. The eighteenth

[10] Anon., op. cit., p70
[11] Anon., op. cit., p73

century franchise, which had grown up largely fortuitously, was a delicate precision instrument that ensured that the balance in government between the various national interests was maintained. The central principle of a free society, that taxes should be levied by the votes of those who must pay them, was admirably maintained -- taxation fell largely on the landed classes, and these were best represented in both Houses of Parliament, but other classes, such as trade, manufacturing and even the urban working classes (the 'popular boroughs' whose inhabitants were largely disfranchised by Russell in 1832) all had their representatives. The two-party system was present, but a substantial number of semi-independent 'country gentlemen' members formed a floating bloc that allowed government to continue yet formed an admirable bulwark against arbitrary power. As for rotten/pocket boroughs, they performed an admirable function now totally lost -- they allowed brilliant young men of the calibre of Pitt, Liverpool, Canning and Castlereagh to reach Parliament and high office in their twenties, where they could devote themselves to government, their true vocation, without having to glad-hand importunate constituents.

Liverpool perceived with complete clarity the benefits of this constitutional system, as well as the perils, both short- and long-term, of a full-blown Parliamentary Reform, and he probably postponed the latter by twenty years. Where he can be faulted is in not pursuing, during the prosperous 1820s, a mild measure of readjustment which took account of the new importance of the manufacturing districts while retaining the central principles of the old constitution. However, popular demand for such a readjustment was less than overwhelming throughout his tenure of power, and he appears to have felt, with some reason, that such a readjustment allowed the principle of arbitrary realignment of Parliamentary seats, and thus could to a major degree itself weaken the case against thoroughgoing Reform.

Following Jenkinson's speech on Parliamentary Reform, Pitt offered him junior Ministerial office as a member of the India Board of Control. Here his official duties were limited, but he was regarded by Pitt as one of his most reliable oratorical supporters in the House of Commons. The principal thrust of his defence of government policy at this time was two-fold: the conduct of the war -- and its continuance -- must be vindicated, while domestically the serious sedition which was rife during these years must be quelled, by legislative means if necessary, and the Opposition attacks based on 'liberty of the subject' had to be fought off.

On the war, Jenkinson's defences of the government were vigorous, indeed a trifle too much so. A suggestion in early 1794 that the Allies should march on Paris met with considerable mockery at that time and afterwards, although in retrospect a bold stroke in that year, while French governmental organisation was still reeling from the effects of the Terror, might well have succeeded. Three months later, he opposed Fox's motion for the opening of peace negotiations with France, declaring of the French government: 'Should they ever depart from their usual system of violence, by thinking of so humane and moderate an idea as treating for peace, their downfall would be inevitable.'[12]

The following year, 1795, was notable for Jenkinson for his marriage to Lady Louisa Theodosia Hervey, third daughter of the highly eccentric fourth Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry. The match was opposed by Jenkinson's father, who felt that he was too young and she too poor (the third Earl had left the Bristol money away from the fourth) -- he may also have objected to the Hervey blood, which had produced three divorces among four Earls, including the Earl/Bishop himself, and a first cousin of Louisa's, "Fighting Fitzgerald" executed for murder in 1786. Both Pitt and the King had to intercede with Charles Jenkinson before he would allow the marriage to proceed.

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[12] Anon., op. cit., p87

Reacting against her deist and radical father, Louisa herself was quiet and Evangelical, and Jenkinson remained devoted to her for the 26 years of their marriage. She had little political influence over her husband, although she did dislike Canning, who showed a tendency to patronise and tease the more serious Jenkinson. The Jenkinsons' private life was notable in a dissolute age for its correctness -- no scandal was ever suggested about them, and the worst accusation made against them in the diaries of the period was that of being dull hosts. Their financial position was comfortable although not opulent. While their attempts to secure a legacy from a distant cousin eventually proved fruitless, they acquired considerable property in Surrey, purchasing an estate at Coombe Wood, near Richmond, in 1801. After Jenkinson's father died, in 1808, they were fairly wealthy, with an income of around £23,000 per annum, and Liverpool thus never suffered the financial difficulties prevalent among many of his contemporaries.

During the 1795-6 sessions, Jenkinson attended Parliament little, concentrating instead on his military duties as an officer in the Kent militia, which was stationed for a while at Dumfries. In May 1796, his father was created Earl of Liverpool, to keep him in line with Pitt on the subject of relations with the fledgling United States, and Jenkinson gained the courtesy title of Lord Hawkesbury. At the General Election of that year, he removed from Appleby, which experience had shown could be an uncomfortable seat for a Minister, because of Lowther's strong and eccentric views, and became MP for Rye, which he remained until his own elevation to the Lords in 1803.

The next few years were uneventful ones for the young Hawkesbury, as his Commons reputation slowly rose in spite of his infrequent appearances. He received little official recognition, although clearly he remained on good terms with his superiors, as in 1799 he was appointed to the lucrative, if undemanding, office of Master of the Mint, with a seat in the Privy Council. Nevertheless, by

1799-1800 he appears to have become somewhat disillusioned with Pitt's handling of the war, and to have felt that a negotiated peace was desirable. In any case, the principal issue of these years was Ireland, in which Hawkesbury had neither knowledge nor, except for his estranged father in law, involvement; consequently the part he played in Ministerial councils was minor at this stage.

Hawkesbury's position was transformed by the resignation of Pitt in February 1801, over Catholic Emancipation. Suddenly, the men of experience left the Ministry -- Pitt, Dundas, Grenville and Castlereagh all resigned and only four members of the Cabinet remained to take office under Addington, who as Speaker of the House and a personal friend of the King was chosen as Pitt's successor. The new Ministry was very much a 'second eleven' therefore -- apart from the Duke of Portland and, for a time, the old Lord Liverpool, it contained little Ministerial experience, and was regarded as greatly inferior to its predecessor, even though in Eldon (to remain Lord Chancellor with one brief interlude until 1827), Hawkesbury and, from 1802, Castlereagh, it contained some outstanding members of the younger generation.

Hawkesbury's promotion to Foreign Secretary, at thirty, with no previous front bench experience, seems even more surprising to modern eyes than it would have at the time. Youth was no bar to Ministerial office -- Pitt himself was witness enough to that. As for official experience, once the Portland Whigs entered Pitt's Ministry in 1794, that had been almost unobtainable -- like all coalitions, Pitt's second Ministry was notable for having far more senior people with claims to office than there were offices to go around. Since in any case there was no tradition in the eighteenth century of regular rotations of Ministers between jobs, political life became ossified, if only for a period, and Hawkesbury, who in the normal course of events could have expected to reach junior Ministerial office in about 1797-8, was forced to remain out of office (albeit a Privy Councillor from 1799) until the great Ministry disintegrated in 1801. Like

Palmerston in Liverpool's own Ministry, who was to remain in the mid-level office of Secretary at War for almost twenty years and then leap very quickly to Foreign Secretary in a Ministry which had great need of his talents, Hawkesbury owed his long obscurity and sudden promotion to the whims of political circumstance. Of course, the considerable Parliamentary influence that had been built up by his father over forty years didn't hurt!

Hawkesbury's promotion was well received in the Commons, with Pitt paying him a tribute in the House, declaring his talents superior to anyone but Fox's. Pitt continued supportive to Hawkesbury during the difficult peace negotiations, dining with him at least once a fortnight during the remainder of 1801. Only the Canning circle, jealous of Hawkesbury's new-found eminence, joined Hawkesbury to Addington in their satirical attacks.

The most urgent task facing the Addington Ministry was to bring the French war to a speedy conclusion. The Jacobinical doctrines of 1793-4, which had posed such an extreme danger to Britain, and had required the utmost effort to oppose them, had now been discredited even in France, and a new leader had arisen in Bonaparte, who although a great general and a thoroughly ruthless man, had not yet displayed his full expansionist dream for France, and was expressing a desire for peace. Bonaparte's desire for peace was of course false; he merely wanted a year's breathing space to allow him to cement his hold on power and reorganise and re-equip the French forces. Pitt, a man of piercing vision and great experience, saw through Bonaparte and rejected his first peace overture, but by the spring of 1801, as peace still seemed elusive, Pitt's political support had eroded on this issue. Indeed, even Pitt was beginning to feel that peace negotiations might be inevitable, and in a Ministry without Pitt, even one with Pittite ideals, an attempt to sue for peace was inevitable.

Bonaparte, being the man he was, saw quite clearly the new government's need for peace, and hence was able to wring terms out of the inexperienced

Hawkesbury which were much in his favour, but it is doubtful whether, in the climate of the time, even Pitt could have done significantly better.

Peace negotiations became easier just after Hawkesbury took over the Foreign Office, as Britain secured two victories, those of Abercromby in Egypt and Nelson at Copenhagen, which made Bonaparte more amenable to reasonable negotiation. The Egyptian victory, in particular, was important since it put paid to any dreams Bonaparte had had of an Eastern Empire. It also meant that if he were to carry on an aggressive war at all, it would have to take the form of an invasion of mainland Britain, which was clearly impossible in the short term given the debilitated state of France's armies and finances. Negotiations between Hawkesbury and the French envoy, M. Otto, continued throughout the summer, with Otto demanding that all the very considerable British colonial acquisitions of territory since 1792 should be returned to their former owners, France and her allies Spain and Holland. Hawkesbury insisted that Britain should be allowed to retain at least some of her West Indian conquests and that Malta should remain at worst neutral. A vague agreement to this effect, which provided for peace on a more or less impartial basis given Britain's Colonial conquests and France's successes in Europe, was eventually signed on 1st October, and Cornwallis (who always seems to have been given the rotten jobs) was sent to Paris as Special Envoy to negotiate a definitive Treaty. If that Treaty had been signed on the basis of the 1st October preliminaries, then the negotiations could have been regarded as successful from the British point of view, especially given the weak bargaining position of a government anxious to make peace and Hawkesbury's inexperience.

The preliminaries of peace, which provided for Britain to retain Ceylon and Trinidad, were regarded by the Commons as being more or less final, and debated as such. They were supported by both Pitt and Fox, and after an able speech by Hawkesbury himself the Commons approved the preliminaries

without even a division, while even in the Lords only ten votes could be found against them. However, negotiations in Paris were by no means successful. Cornwallis was completely duped by Bonaparte, who told him that 'he was a stranger to the arts of negotiation, and would not attempt to carry any point by cunning or chicanery.'[13] Articles in the Treaty, after they had been agreed to, were surreptitiously altered -- for example Malta, which it had been agreed would be put under the protection of the Czar, was surreptitiously transferred to the tender mercies of the Two Sicilies, who were safely under Bonaparte's thumb. By the time the final peace was signed, on 25th March 1802, it was becoming clear that it would prove short-lived, and that Bonaparte's ambition was boundless. As Sheridan said, it was 'a peace which all men are glad of, but which no man can be proud of.'[14] Windham introduced a motion of censure into the Commons, but an able speech by Hawkesbury, and support from Pitt, meant that only twenty members opposed the Ministry on the division.

The first actions of the Ministry after the signing of the Treaty of Amiens reflected the initial view that peace could be sustained -- the fleet in commission was reduced from 104 to 32 ships of the line, and the Income Tax was abolished. By the autumn of 1802, Bonaparte, who had made himself First Consul for Life, was already issuing threats and, more important, behaving as if Amiens was a dead letter. He annexed Piedmont and Parma, sent troops into Switzerland, and ordered his satellite states to put prohibitive tariffs on British goods. When he attempted to get various anti-French newspapers in Britain suppressed, however, and demanded the expulsion of French Royalists from Britain, Hawkesbury stood firm and Otto was forced to back down.

By the late autumn, the Treaty of Amiens was clearly an irrelevance as far as Bonaparte was concerned and therefore, although on 1st December Lord

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[13] Petrie, "Lord Liverpool and his Times,' p70
[14] Petrie, op. cit., p72

Whitworth was sent across as Ambassador to France, his instructions from Hawkesbury indicated that Britain reserved the right to retain Malta because of France's expansionism. This gradual drift towards renewed war had its effect on the temper of the House of Commons which, immediately after the election of 1802 seemed favourable to the Addington Ministry, but gradually began to drift away as Pitt's support for the Ministry weakened and war became more likely -- it was at this time that the Pitt Club was formed and Canning composed 'The Pilot that Weathered the Storm' -- all designed to indicate that, if war was to be renewed, Pitt must once again become Prime Minister.

Hawkesbury now refused to relinquish Malta, and the early months of 1803 contained a series of threats, public and private, from Bonaparte, as to the inevitability of war if Britain remained obdurate. The Bonaparte family opened negotiations with Whitworth, offering to persuade Bonaparte not to declare war on Britain in return for a large bribe, but Whitworth and Hawkesbury concluded rightly that their influence over their relation was limited. Relations between Britain and France steadily deteriorated, and on 12th May 1803 Whitworth was given his passports to return to England.

The war won widespread support in the Commons, with Hawkesbury replying to the Royal Address, and only the hard core Foxites dividing against the Ministry, which won by 398 votes to 67. The appropriate war measures were taken, but although Pitt was now moving into opposition, Addington took the surprising step at the end of 1803 of moving Hawkesbury to the Lords, thus seriously depleting the Ministry's Commons debating strength. However, as far as Hawkesbury was concerned, it was a promotion, since he now became Leader of the Ministry in the Lords.

The early months of the renewed war went quite well, with Bonaparte forced to raise money by selling Louisiana to the U.S., and Britain recovering several West Indian islands ceded at Amiens. Further, Bonaparte's execution of

the Duc d'Enghien further alienated Prussia and the minor German princes, causing them to look more favourably on an alliance with Britain. However, domestically the Addington Ministry was showing signs of weakness. Addington lacked Pitt's supreme grasp of finance, Pitt himself had gone into opposition, and the Treaty of Amiens, the raison d'être of the Ministry, had lasted only a year and had ended once more in war. Thus, when in late April 1804 Pitt and Fox combined in opposition to the Ministry, Addington was forced to resign, which he did at the beginning of May.

The new Ministry was composed of many of the remnants of the Addington Cabinet (but not Addington) together with a substantial leaven of Pitt's own friends (but not Grenville, who went into opposition) and Foxites (but not Fox himself, who was vetoed by the King.) Hawkesbury, over his objections, was transferred from the Foreign Office to the Home Office, to be replaced by the Earl of Harrowby, but retained his leadership in the Lords. This change of office gave rise to an acid remark from Canning in the Commons, which led Hawkesbury to threaten resignation, but fortunately Pitt was able to smooth things over.

Hawkesbury's most pressing task as Home Secretary was to prepare the nation for the invasion by Bonaparte, which was expected daily. In this, two of his principal obstacles were the King and the Prince of Wales; the former because he intended, in the event of invasion, to put himself personally at the head of his forces, while the latter was permanently complaining, in public, because he was never advanced in military rank beyond the Colonelship of the 10th Hussars. Fortunately, Bonaparte was compelled to realise in the autumn of 1804 that an invasion was impossible without command of the English Channel, and the Royal leadership qualities were never put to the test.

Following the removal of the immediate invasion threat, Hawkesbury turned his attention to the Trades Union problem, at that time in its infancy. The

employers asked the Home Secretary to prosecute the Trades Unions as illegal combinations, and Hawkesbury referred the matter to Spencer Perceval, the Attorney General. Perceval, after noting that the object of the combinations was not only to raise wages, but also to impose a closed shop, declared that such combinations were clearly illegal. However, he then expressed his opinion that to prosecute in this case would insert the government between employers and workmen. Although for an individual to prosecute would be difficult, this was nevertheless the best alternative, since it was 'owing to the inertness and timidity of the masters that the conspiracy has reached this height, and it may well be feared that this inertness will be rather increased than diminished by the interference of Government.'[15] Thus, on balance a government prosecution of the Trades Unions would tend to exacerbate the problems that the unions caused. Hawkesbury followed Perceval's advice, but informed the union leaders of the illegality of their actions; this appears to have had a salutary effect in quieting their activity.

At this time Hawkesbury first became engaged with an issue that was to dominate his period as Prime Minister, the question of Catholic Emancipation. Attitudes towards Catholic Emancipation varied greatly between statesmen whose opinions on other subjects were closely aligned. Pitt and Castlereagh favoured Emancipation on rational and objective grounds, while Canning and the Whigs favoured it as part of a general sympathy for Reform, and Grenville favoured it because his brother Buckingham had a Catholic wife (and had been denied a Dukedom by George III for this reason.) On the opposition side, Addington appears to have opposed it on grounds of sheer bigotry, while Hawkesbury's father Liverpool and others opposed it because it was unpalatable to the King. Hawkesbury himself was strongly influenced in his opposition to Emancipation by his Evangelical wife Louisa, and by their common dislike for

[15] Yonge, op. cit., I, p168

her estranged Radical father, the Earl-Bishop of Derry, who was one of the very few Church of Ireland prelates to favour it. His opposition, however, was not particularly strong, as evidenced by his willingness throughout his Premiership to work with a split Cabinet, with Emancipation being held as an open question. Of considerable importance in his thinking, however, was that Emancipation remained extremely unpopular with the electorate, both in Ireland (to be expected) and in the rest of Britain. The Grenville Ministry lost an election over the issue in 1807, and Liverpool was conscious throughout his Premiership that by conceding Emancipation he would lose one of his Ministry's main electoral advantages over the Whigs, and damage Conservatism severely thereby. When Peel, reneging on his earlier political principles, finally conceded Emancipation in 1829 he split the Tory party, lost the Tories the next election, and led to the destruction of Conservatism.

The Irish Catholics, thwarted of Emancipation on Pitt's resignation in 1801, chose this period to begin a great agitation among the Irish peasantry in favour of their cause. Since Napoleon was encamped across the Channel, and invasion of both England and Ireland was at this time a very real possibility, Hawkesbury naturally took a low view of both the Catholics' patriotism and of their common sense -- the poor timing of their appeal led to Emancipation being defeated in the Commons by the unusually large majority of 336 votes to 124. This episode hardened Hawkesbury's attitude towards Emancipation in general.

Hawkesbury became of still further service to the Ministry in the winter of 1804, when he prevailed on Addington to rejoin the Cabinet, becoming Lord President of the Council with the title of Viscount Sidmouth. This accession of strength to the Ministry was however to prove short lived, for the Melville scandal, which caused Sidmouth to call for the impeachment of Pitt's oldest associate, led to his renewed resignation in June 1805. Hawkesbury's part in the

debates over Melville was slight; at one point Pitt suggested replacing Melville at the Admiralty by Hawkesbury, but the project fell through.

The later months of 1805 belong properly to the biography of Pitt. The formation of the Third Coalition, the triumph at Trafalgar, and the subsequent collapse of Continental resistance to Napoleon at Ulm and Austerlitz, all made up the heroic background to the last months of the great Prime Minister, sadly failing in body if immortal in reputation. Hawkesbury was with Pitt during his last months, as was Canning, and they both saw the devastating effect on him of the news of Austerlitz. However, hope remained, and when Parliament met on 21st January 1806 Hawkesbury proposed a deliberately uncontroversial King's Speech, to which the Opposition refrained from opposing an amendment before Pitt's death, which took place on 23rd January.

Hawkesbury conveyed the distressing news to the King, who asked him to form an Ministry, but at a series of cabinet meetings it was decided that without Pitt it was impossible for the Ministry to carry on. Their numerical strength in the Commons might still be considerable, but without Pitt, in an hour of crisis, they would be unable to stand against a united Opposition made formidable by military defeat in Europe. Hawkesbury therefore recommended to the King that a new Ministry be formed, including Fox, and the Cabinet resigned, with the King indicating his favour to Hawkesbury by granting him the office of Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, made vacant by Pitt's death.

Instead of sending directly for Fox, the King sent for Grenville, who included Fox at the Foreign Office, and allowed him a very considerable say in the conduct of the entire Ministry. The new Ministry also included Sidmouth and his followers, but although it was, from the breadth of nominal support, dubbed the 'Ministry of All the Talents', in fact the absence from it of Hawkesbury, Castlereagh, Canning, Eldon and Perceval made administrative ability thin on the ground. Nevertheless, as long as Fox lived, the Ministry's

chances of survival were good. One peculiar feature of the Ministry was the inclusion of Lord Ellenborough, the Lord Chief Justice, in the Cabinet. Hawkesbury and the Opposition rightly attacked this as a gross violation of the doctrine of separation of powers, such as had only been attempted once since 1688.

For the first and last time in his life, Hawkesbury was in opposition, its leader in the Lords. His policy was not to harry the Ministry too hard, giving it time to demonstrate its administrative incompetence. In any case, the failing health of Fox, and his continuing great popularity, made any sustained attack on him counterproductive by increasing Ministerial support through the sympathy of the back-bench squires. However, in September 1806 Fox died and, once Canning had refused an offer of the Foreign Office, it became clear that the Ministry's days were numbered.

In an effort to retain power, Grenville decided to dissolve Parliament, three years before its appointed time. Hawkesbury, as Leader of the Opposition, advised the King to refuse the Ministry a dissolution, but the King decided against this course. The Ministry went to the country, mainly on the issue of abolition of the slave trade, and gained a reasonable majority. However, on the new Parliament being called, the Ministry took up Catholic Emancipation, Sidmouth resigned and the King insisted on a pledge from the Ministers to relinquish their attempts in this field. The Ministry, naturally, was thus forced to resign on an issue where their opponents had much the more popular side. As Sheridan remarked 'he had heard of men running their heads against a wall, but he had never before heard of men building a wall expressly for that purpose.'[16]

The king's first step in forming a new Ministry was to send for Hawkesbury and Eldon. The king wanted to make Hawkesbury Prime Minister,

[16] Petrie, op. cit., p111

but Hawkesbury demurred, as the party had decided to serve under a figurehead. Thus the Duke of Portland became Prime Minister and Hawkesbury returned to his old office of Home Secretary, and the Leadership of the House of Lords. Canning became Foreign Secretary, Castlereagh became Secretary for War and the Colonies, Perceval became Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader in the Commons, and Eldon returned to the Woolsack. Consequently the framework was set up of the Ministry that was to dominate British politics for the next twenty years. Hawkesbury was a leading figure in that Ministry from the start, having the greater influence in that Canning had now abandoned his early jealousy of Hawkesbury and was at daggers drawn with Castlereagh. Thus even before his assumption of the Premiership in 1812, Hawkesbury's views on the conduct of affairs outside his own Ministry often prevailed.

The initial debate on the change of Ministry resulted in majorities for the Ministry of 81 in the Lords and 46 in the Commons, but the new Ministry still felt it necessary to dissolve Parliament in order to cement its position. The combination of government influence and popular hostility to Catholicism worked strongly in their favour, and thus the first divisions in the new Parliament showed a Ministerial majority around 150, indicating that governmental stability had once again been achieved.

Hawkesbury's years as Home Secretary from 1807 to 1809 were relatively uneventful. The danger of invasion by Napoleon had disappeared at Trafalgar, while the industrial and social unrest that had marked the 1790s and was to mark his own Premiership was quiet at this time. Abroad, the government was active, with the seizing of the Danish fleet in 1807, the commencement of the Peninsular War in 1808 and the Walcheren Expedition in 1809, but in none of these was Hawkesbury directly connected, except in expounding government policy to the House of Lords in his capacity as Leader. Minor crises relating to the Prince of

Wales' wife and to the French Royal family took up much of his time, but his principal concern during this period in office was with Ireland.

Hawkesbury's involvement with Ireland was greater than that of most Home Secretaries for two reasons. First, it was clearly the weak point in the British defences -- the middle and lower classes were 'decidedly hostile to the government and to the English connection, and...talked and thought of nothing but Bonaparte's successes on the Continent, and relied with certainty on his invading their country and separating it from England; the poor saying that they could not lose, and that they believed they should gain, by the change.'[17] Second, the Chief Secretary was Sir Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, who retained his office even after his departure for Portugal in May 1808.

Hawkesbury's measures for dealing with the Irish problem were twofold. First, he attempted to repress any rebellion; thus he fortified Cork and Dublin, making the former a large military depot, and reformed the Irish police. On the other hand, he augmented the grant to the Catholic seminary at Maynooth, and attempted to design a system of commutation of tithes -- the latter reform was not carried out until the Whig government of the 1830s. However, to Catholic Emancipation he remained consistently opposed, and consequently Ireland remained a potential hotbed of rebellion throughout his period in office.

In December 1808, Hawkesbury's father died and he became second Earl of Liverpool. The early part of 1809 saw him play little part in the foreign policy of the Portland Ministry, but in September 1809, after the failure of the Walcheren expedition, the duel between Castlereagh and Canning and the retirement of the Duke of Portland led to a general Ministerial reshuffle. Perceval and Liverpool were both consulted by the King, but Perceval, the older man and still in the House of Commons, was awarded the Premiership in order

[17] Yonge, op. cit., I, p260

to attempt a brave face against the opposition in a Ministry without Canning or Castlereagh.

The chances of success of the new Ministry did not seem high. In spite of the large Ministerial majority remaining from the 1807 election, the old party of Pitt seemed doomed to splinter into ever smaller fragments. Perceval and Liverpool thus took office with considerable hesitancy, one of their principal motivations being to protect the old, sick King from the Whigs and Catholic Emancipation. The reshuffle brought in Wellesley at the Foreign Office and Liverpool from the Home Office to that of War and the Colonies, bringing him a new associate in the subordinate office of Secretary at War: the youthful Palmerston, who was to remain in the office until the end of Liverpool's own Ministry in 1827.

Liverpool's first policy decision at the War Office was to evacuate the Walcheren Expedition, which had clearly failed, and was in severe danger, following the capitulation of Austria after Wagram, of being destroyed by a Napoleonic blitzkrieg. The fortifications, docks and arsenal at the mouth of the Scheldt were therefore destroyed, and the troops were evacuated, the last regiment arriving home by Christmas.

However, the principal theatre of war during Liverpool's tenure of the War Office was the Peninsula. Here Wellington had, during the summer of 1809, captured Oporto and won a victory at Talavera, but it became obvious that, with France able to direct her entire efforts against Spain, temporary retreat was essential. Immediately on assuming office, Liverpool sent a letter to Wellington inquiring what were the chances of success, and Wellington responded that he was confident of ultimate success, although it was likely that the French would once more invade Portugal in the interim. Liverpool decided that war in the Peninsula should have priority over all other operations, and consequently promised Wellington enough reinforcements to keep 30,000 men in the field. It

was now too late in the year for serious campaigning, but it was clear that the campaign of 1810, when Wellington was met by the whole might of the French forces, would be decisive for the future of the war.

Throughout 1810, Wellington and Liverpool were assailed by the Opposition, who regarded the campaign in Portugal as a side-show, immensely expensive in men and materiel. Further problems arose from the acute shortage of specie, necessary to supply troops quartered in a foreign country, after wartime inflation and the issue of paper money had combined with Gresham's Law to make gold extremely scarce. In the early months of 1810, the Ministry had considerable qualms about the Peninsula effort, particularly as it was subjected to repeated Parliamentary attack. Nevertheless, Liverpool was determined to persevere, if on a limited scale; as he wrote to Wellington in September, 1810: 'We must make an option between a steady and continued exertion on a moderate scale, and a great and extraordinary effort for a limited time which neither our means, military or financial, will enable us to maintain permanently.'[18]

After the retreat to the Lines of Torres Vedras in the winter of 1810-11, it became clearer that the Portuguese enterprise was proving fruitful, and thus the number of British troops in Portugal was gradually increased, to a level of 50,000 in the early part of 1811. Grey for the Whigs admitted, in a debate in the House of Lords, that the Wellington campaign was proving successful, and although 1811 itself brought little reward to the British labours, by the time Liverpool left the War Office in May, 1812, it was clear that Wellington's army was on the road to victory, a fact confirmed by the Battle of Salamanca in June of that year.

The Colonies, the other half of Liverpool's large official responsibility, were quiescent during his period as Minister. Canada was perhaps the only significant exception. There the French Canadians, dissatisfied with the

[18] Yonge, op. cit., I, p337

Anglicised constitution set up by the Canada Act of 1791, were looking to Bonaparte to reverse the Treaty of Paris in their favour. Liverpool however determined to stand fast on the base of the 1791 Constitution, believing that any amendment would give rise to Opposition attack that could endanger not only Canada but also Ireland.

The principal problem that Liverpool was called upon to deal with as Leader of the House of Lords was that of the Regency. The King relapsed into his old disorder during the last illness of his favourite daughter, Princess Amelia, who died on 2nd November 1810. At first, his illness was thought to be temporary, like previous bouts in 1789, 1801 and 1804, but as the autumn and winter wore on, it became clear that the new occurrence, if temporary, would at least be long-lived. Thus, in December 1810, the Ministry decided to impose a Regency. There was some question as to whether Parliament had any right to impose restrictions on a Regent, but on 27th December, Liverpool brought forward three Resolutions declaring that Parliament should remedy the suspension of monarchical authority and appoint a Regent. His arguments in favour of this novel practice, which skated over some pretty thin constitutional ice, rested on the idea that the British constitution had deliberately not provided for a Regency in order that Parliament would be able to arrange one on an ad hoc basis when the occasion arose. His precedent for this dated back to the minority of Henry VI, when Parliament had rejected the claim of the Duke of Gloucester to act as Regent. Thus he was able to avoid the Royalist Tudors and Stuarts altogether and to revert to the days when, with a weak King, the great nobles ruled with an iron hand. Liverpool further asserted that an Act sealed with the Great Seal was the law of the land, whether or not the King had been involved.

Liverpool's argument provoked storms of protest from the Whigs, but remains the constitutional foundation for the consideration of a Regency to this day. The Regency Bill of 1811, which provided for the Regency of the Prince of

Wales subject to restrictions with a time limit of a year, was rapidly passed by both Houses of Parliament and received the Royal Assent from a special commission on 5th February 1811.

The year 1812 saw a series of Ministerial reshuffles, which were caused first by the removal in February of the restrictions on the Regency and then by the assassination in May of the Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval. The general expectation when the restrictions expired was that the Whigs would at last come into their own, the Prince Regent turning immediately to the friends who had supported him against his father in his youth.

However, in spite of the war, 1812 was more like 1727 than 1761. The Ministry was well entrenched, relatively popular, and formed of men who were mostly in their forties, while the Opposition was weak and divided. Moreover, as in 1727, but unlike 1761, the main group of the Opposition were dangerously Radical, by the Prince Regent's standards, and there was no obvious Conservative rallying-point, other than Canning or Castlereagh, both of whom were relatively close to the Ministry, around which Royalists disaffected with the Ministry could muster. Thus when the Regency restrictions were lifted, the Regent made overtures to Grey and Grenville to join the Ministry, but he indicated clearly that the general policies of the existing Ministers must continue.

Grey and Grenville declined Ministerial office, but on the resignation of Wellesley in March over the Roman Catholic question the Ministry gained an important accession of strength in Castlereagh, who took over as Foreign Secretary, the office which he was to hold with such distinction until his suicide ten years later. Thus the Ministry, with full Royal support and only Canning and Wellesley in disgruntled opposition, appeared set fair until on 11th May 1812 a madman named Bellingham pulled out a revolver in the lobby of the Commons and shot the Prime Minister.

The initial decision by the Prince Regent was to appoint Liverpool Prime Minister and to attempt to win the support of one or more of Canning, Wellesley, Grey and Grenville. Of the four, Canning and Wellesley were the most likely, as they were separated from the Ministry only by the question of Catholic Emancipation. Both, however, refused, and the Ministry was therefore reconstructed only by appointing the feeble Vansittart to the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, on 21st May, a backbencher, Stuart Wortley, moved what was effectively a vote of no confidence, and when this was carried by a majority of four the Ministry resigned.

The Regent now had no alternative but to comply with the Commons' wishes, and he therefore called on Wellesley to form a Ministry, who in turn called on Canning. The retiring Ministers however refused to join a Wellesley/Canning Ministry, both because of Catholic Emancipation (they were known to be determined to bring forward a Bill at the earliest opportunity) and because both Wellesley and Canning had been critical of Perceval. The Prince Regent then turned again to Liverpool, to ask him to form a Ministry with Wellesley and Canning included, but Liverpool, feeling that his position at the head of such a Ministry would in the circumstances be untenable, refused. The Regent then approached Wellesley again, to meet again with failure, and then with the Whig Moira, to try and form a Whig Ministry alone. This attempt failed because of a Whig attempt to dictate to the Regent the members of his household.

Finally, on 8th June 1812, the Regent turned again to Liverpool,

who returned with his original Ministry. An early attempt was made to win over Canning, but to no avail, as he would not serve under Castlereagh's Commons leadership even though Castlereagh offered to resign the Foreign Secretaryship in his favour and take on the less exalted office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Thus the Liverpool Ministry finally got off to a shaky start, with Castlereagh at the Foreign Office, Eldon still Lord Chancellor, Sidmouth at the Home Office, Earl Bathurst at War and Colonies and Vansittart at the Exchequer. Of the junior Ministers, Robert Peel was the most notable, being promoted to Chief Secretary for Ireland. Liverpool had at last, without question, succeeded to the highest office of state -- he was just 42, but had filled successively all three Secretaryships of State.

The first crisis of the new Ministry was the declaration of war by the United States. The dispute dated back to 1807, and Jefferson's objections to Portland's Orders in Council blockading France and thus severely damaging the U.S. carrying trade. American ships were captured and contraband seized, and in retaliation the U.S. prohibited all trade with the belligerents -- which in practice meant Britain. Jefferson's replacement by the less aggressively anti-British Madison in 1808 reduced the possibility of war, but the Congress elected in 1810 contained a considerable number of War Hawks from the Western states, notable among them the young Henry Clay of Kentucky, who was elected Speaker. Congress in turn passed a law in April, 1812, threatening with the death penalty any British ship impressing an American seaman who might be an immigrant and thus still a British subject. At the same time, the Prince Regent revoked the Orders in Council that had caused all the trouble, with effect from 1st August, but it was too late to have any effect on the war-hungry Americans, and on 18th June President Madison declared war on Great Britain. Thus Liverpool, at the beginning of his Ministry, was faced with a dangerous war on two fronts.

Meanwhile, at home, the Ministers proved their liberal principles by passing a Toleration Bill, which relieved Dissenters of all sects from the obsolete requirements of the Five Mile Act and the Conventicle Act, although the Test and Corporation Acts, which prevented Dissenters from exercising political power, remained. However, a much more important test of Ministerial will was to come, in retrospect ominous for the tranquillity of Britain once peace over Napoleon had been gained.

Industrialisation had been proceeding rapidly throughout the Napoleonic Wars, and had by now brought into existence for the first time in human history an industrial proletariat, disciplined by a strong Trades Union system. It was at this point, when the benefits of industrialisation were still modest, and suppressed by the draining effect of twenty years of war, that Marxian class conflict presented the greatest danger. Later in the century, when Marx wrote, or in the early twentieth century, when the rise of Bolshevism would cause the feeble British government to quake before the Triple Alliance of 1912 and the General Strike of 1926, the dangers to social order, in Britain at least, had been greatly lessened by a century of rising prosperity. Had Asquith or Baldwin been in charge of affairs in 1812-20, there can be little doubt that British civilisation would have succumbed to the onslaught. As it was, the men in charge, Liverpool, Castlereagh and Sidmouth, were made of sterner mettle than their feeble successors: they were Conservatives.

Liverpool's first experience with the tensions brought about by industrialisation came with the Luddite riots of 1812. At this stage, real wages, while on a rising trend since about 1800, had still returned only to about the 1790 level, and therefore workers in depressed areas, who were losing their jobs as technology priced them out of the market, blamed their poverty on the hated new machinery. They called themselves Luddites, after the illiterate Ned Ludd, who had vented his fury on some stocking-frames, and during the spring of 1812

bands of men traversed Nottinghamshire, Cheshire and the southern districts of Lancashire and Yorkshire wreaking vengeance on the hated machinery.

Committees of both Houses of Parliament were set up to examine the riots, and came to the conclusion that they were the work of a systematic organisation of secret societies and that the primary motivation behind them was not economic, but political. Therefore Castlereagh introduced a Bill into the Commons increasing the authority of the magistrates to search for arms, giving them greater powers against tumultuous assemblies and aiding co-operation between magistrates of different counties. This relatively mild measure met with considerable opposition from the Whigs, and has subsequently been condemned by liberal historians, but the destruction it was designed to combat was real, and its effect was salutary -- vandalism of this kind declined sharply for the remainder of the war. It was a moderate and Conservative measure, designed to meet a novel threat without violating the accepted liberties of the subject. In this it was to be typical of the Liverpool Ministry's social legislation.

By the autumn of 1812, Wellington's victory at Salamanca and Napoleon's clearly deteriorating situation in Russia had made the Ministry popular. Therefore, in spite of the great reduction in government patronage that had been caused by Curwen's Bill of 1809 preventing the sale of Parliamentary seats, at the General Election called by Liverpool to strengthen the Ministry's position, the Ministerial majority was substantially increased. By one estimate, the Ministry's gained about thirty seats net over its position before the dissolution, and about twelve over the substantial majority obtained by Portland in 1807.

The year 1813 was a tranquil one at home, largely because of the successes of Wellington and Castlereagh in working towards the final downfall of the Napoleonic Empire. The Princess of Wales caused considerable agitation because of restrictions placed on her access to her daughter, the young Princess Charlotte, but an Opposition motion to examine the Royal couple's private lives

met with little support. The East India Company charter was renewed, confirming the Company's political authority for a further twenty years, but removing its monopoly of the eastern trade, except that with China and, interestingly enough, providing the first example of an official establishment of a Church of England hierarchy abroad. Again, the measure passed relatively smoothly -- during the debate a standing ovation was given to Warren Hastings, as atonement for his sufferings a generation earlier. By the end of the year, in contrast to the situation just eighteen months earlier, an 'era of good feeling' had dawned, in which Liverpool was congratulated for the Address of December, 1813 by the leaders of the Opposition.

The following year, 1814, was notable initially for the defeat of Napoleon, which was followed by Castlereagh's expert negotiations at the Congress of Vienna. Liverpool, however, deserves a substantial amount of the credit for both accomplishments. His determination to provide Wellington with the means of advancing steadily through Spain and into France was crucial in applying the steady pressure that crushed French morale and sustained that of the Allies. Further, his staunch defence of the Allies and of Castlereagh's negotiations to the Prince Regent, to the Cabinet and to Parliament enabled Castlereagh to negotiate with far more confidence than had been possible for Shelburne, during the wrangling over the American War, let alone the negotiators of the Treaties of Paris (1763) or Utrecht (1713). Thus British wishes, which included a decisive defeat of Napoleon, a restoration of the Bourbons and a peace that was moderate in its attempts to wring reparations from France, were agreed between Liverpool and Castlereagh, and the strategy to obtain them was co-ordinated between London and wherever the Allied negotiations were taking place. While Castlereagh deserves (and has received in V above) most of the credit for the successful conclusion of the Treaty of Vienna, the part played by

Liverpool in ensuring the smooth support of Parliament and the country while negotiations proceeded was of very considerable importance.

After the victory, the next few months were largely consumed by festivities. All the major Allied sovereigns came to London and were cheered by the London crowds. They were impressed both by the naval might demonstrated to them at Portsmouth, but even more by the growing industrial prosperity that was transforming Britain in a way no other country had yet experienced. Again a dispute between the Prince and Princess of Wales put a damper on the celebrations, but all in all the year 1814 marked a high point of the tranquillity and public regard which was to be so highly prized by the Liverpool Ministry. Not until nearly ten years later, when the economics of 'Prosperity' Robinson and lengthening years of peace had applied balm to the wounds of the early post-war years, was the Liverpool Ministry again to sail before such a favourable breeze, and even then Liverpool himself did not receive the public acclaim which had been spontaneous in the first rapture accompanying the awakening from the nightmare of war.

During the Parliamentary session of 1814-15, the principal question at issue was that of the financial provision to be made for the first year of peace; in particular the Corn Laws and the property, or Income Tax. The latter had been introduced by Pitt in 1799, had been repealed by Addington in 1802, reintroduced in the following year when war renewed, and was levied by the end of the war at two shillings in the pound (10%.) The Ministry attempted to extend the Income Tax for an additional year, but popular feeling against the tax was very strong, and therefore the Ministry allowed it to lapse, hoping by this concession to gain broader support for their other financial measures. Their main objective was to maintain in place Pitt's Sinking Fund, which had grown rapidly during the war and, if only it could be maintained, seemed likely to pay off even the war-swollen National Debt by the 1860s. The Ministry's financial

measures were sound and unimaginative including an increase in the horse and carriage taxes, an extra Stamp Duty, and extra taxes on wine. However, they were rendered ineffectual by the Waterloo campaign, and Vansittart was compelled to reintroduce the Income Tax as an interim measure. Thus the Ministry was forced to undergo in the 1816 session all the odium it had attempted to avoid in that of 1815.

The Corn Laws were a different proposition. Here the opposition against them was not in the House of Commons, where the greatest division against them was only 78, but in the metropolis, where the people feared a possible rise in the price of bread. The existence of any corn tax dated back only to 1773, and since that date a sliding scale of corn import taxes had helped to produce great instability in the market for corn. Therefore, in 1815, it was proposed to fix 80 shillings (4 pounds) as a price below which all imports were to be forbidden, and above which they were to be free. This was somewhat above the average price that had previously prevailed, and there was consequently much agitation for a lower price, but the government view prevailed, and the measure was signed into law that, with modifications during the 1820s, was to provoke the political crisis of 1846.

Liverpool himself summed up Conservative tariff policy in his speech introducing the Bill, when he said 'The great object is the interest of the consumer...The present measure...would...render grain cheaper instead of dearer. The important point to attain was a steady and moderate price'[19] and 'The general principle, supposing all nations, or at least all considerable nations, to act upon it, was that in these cases the Legislature ought not to interfere, but should leave everything to find its own level... If that system were to be adopted by all the considerable nations of the world, there could be no doubt but that it was the system which all must consider the most proper and desirable but if not the

[19] Hilton, 'Corn, Cash, Commerce', p14

exceptions ought to be as few as possible, the legislative regulations should be as limited as the situation and circumstances of the case would allow; but still exceptions there must be.'[20] It was an admirable statement both of the economic case against tariffs, and of the reasons why unilateral free trade of the Cobdenite variety was not a satisfactory policy.

The 1815 Corn Law has subsequently been vilified by liberal historians and admirers of Peel. By 1826 Liverpool himself was prepared to modify it substantially in a free trade direction. Nevertheless, in 1815 the measure was necessary, if only to protect Britain's most important economic sector from foreign dumping in the immediate aftermath of twenty years of embargo. It was plausible (though probably, on the very long view, wrong) for the late Victorians to denounce the Corn Laws; such denunciation makes no sense coming from a generation that has seen agricultural surpluses piled to the skies for no rhyme or reason, but all at public expense.

The latter part of the 1815 Parliamentary session was disrupted by Napoleon's escape from Elba, and the military and diplomatic manoeuvres necessitated by the Hundred Days campaign. Unlike in the previous year, the Whigs seized this opportunity to denounce the government and to suggest that Napoleon represented no real menace to the peace of Europe. However, Liverpool and the Ministry were firm; they won the vital divisions in both the Commons and the Lords by large majorities, the Income Tax was reintroduced for another year, and Wellington duly equipped to meet Napoleon at Waterloo. The victory at Waterloo, and the capture of Paris which followed two weeks later, both quietened the Opposition, though not as effectively as the ending of the war in the previous year, and enabled matters in the House of Commons to resume the course of events which had been interrupted by Napoleon's return.

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[20] Yonge, op. cit., II, p140

The year 1816 began the most difficult period of Liverpool's Ministry. Following the end of the war, the inevitable slump had now occurred, making the populace once more restive, blaming both the new machinery and the 1815 Corn Laws for their low standard of living. It was a period when Malthusianism seemed close to reality -- both British industry and agriculture had been inflated to unsustainable heights during the war, and now peace had arrived a depression seemed inevitable which would only be alleviated when starvation and disease had removed the relentless pressure of the greatly increased population. Cobbett fulminated against industrialisation, and extolled the virtues of a rural Utopia that had never existed, while the reactionary squires, who were benefiting from the high price of corn, nevertheless feared revolutionary forces at work within the new urban areas.

The Ministry, and Liverpool himself, perceived more clearly than most that the new machinery was to be the salvation, not the ruin of Britain. As he was to say in 1820 'Next to the spirit of her people, England is indebted for her commercial power and greatness to her machinery.'[21] The period 1815-22 was painted by Disraeli as one of gloomy mediocrity, and by most historians as one of blind atavistic reaction. In fact it was neither; the Ministry resolved on a policy of firmness, to preserve the stability of British society in the face of unparalleled social stresses, but they saw clearly that if social stability was preserved, the dynamism of the Industrial Revolution could be relied upon to carry all classes of British society to a prosperity never before experienced. The history of the Liverpool Ministry is not one of mindless reaction transformed by Canning into a prototype for enlightened mid-Victorian liberalism; it is one of enlightened, intelligent and above all courageous management of a society undergoing dizzying and unprecedented social and economic change.

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[21] White, 'Waterloo to Peterloo' p14

The first major peacetime crisis of the Liverpool Ministry came over the attempt, at the beginning of the 1816 session, to renew the Income Tax, which Vansittart had reintroduced in the previous year after it had been allowed to lapse. As the Ministers prepared their Budget for 1816, it became obvious that a major new source of revenue needed to be found if fiscal equilibrium was ever to be approached. On the one hand, government revenue, excluding the Income Tax but including continuation of the highly unpopular Malt Tax, totalled around £41 million against expenditure projected at £61 million, of which £32 million represented interest and Sinking Fund costs of the National Debt. There was a £3 million surplus left from a £30 million loan floated in 1815, but the 5% Income Tax which was proposed by the Ministry could be expected to bring in an additional £7 million, which would go far towards meeting the central government deficit.

The problem of finance was in many ways the most difficult which the Liverpool government had to face. The National Debt, at £901 million gross, or £751 million net of the £150 million Sinking Fund built up since its institution by Pitt in 1786, was 2 1/2 times the Gross Domestic Product even on a net basis, higher in relation to GDP than at any time, before or since, except immediately following the Second World War, when it was marginally higher (at present the debt is around 50% of GDP, lower than in the 1780s.) The charges on this debt were therefore enormous as a percentage of the central government budget, and the first priority of the Liverpool Ministry had to be to restore the balance of the government's finances.

There were three possible solutions to the problem of the National Debt. One was that chosen after the Second World War, to inflate the economy to such an extent that the debt was reduced in real terms to manageable proportions. Since this involved systematic fraud upon investors in government debt, it was unthinkable in the early nineteenth century when such investors in any case

formed a large portion of the electorate. During the Liverpool Ministry, the emphasis of majority public opinion was not on inflation but on deflation -- bringing down prices to the extent where the Gold Standard could once more be resumed. This naturally had the same temporary adverse effect on employment and production as the similar operation following World War I, but Liverpool's Ministry was made of sterner stuff than Baldwin's or Macdonald's, and they were therefore able to see through the crisis and reach the prosperity of the 1820s.

The second possibility open to the Liverpool Ministry was to raid Pitt's Sinking Fund. With the new Sinking Funds set up as each new debt was raised during the wars, this had now reached £15 million in interest and principal payments annually, or almost half the charge on the entire National Debt. Removing this charge could bring the annual budget into balance, but at the expense of weakening public confidence in the government debt and dissipating forever the possibility of paying it off. This Liverpool's Ministry was only prepared to contemplate as a last resort; the memory of Pitt, and the visible prospect of the Sinking Fund, now holding over £150 million of government debt, being able at last to pay off the debt entirely, were strong emotional reasons why such an expedient should be avoided if at all possible.

Finally, the Ministry were faced with the possibility of finding some new source of revenue that would fill the gap. The most obvious such source was the wartime Income Tax, which had yielded £14 million per annum when levied at 10% in the last years of the war. By continuing the Income Tax, albeit at a low rate, the Ministry would be able to retain the Sinking Fund, and indulge in substantial remissions of indirect taxation in the interests of freer trade as revenue expanded. The Income Tax, bearing as it did largely on the rich and on the growing industrial sector of the economy, was a suitable counterbalance to the multitude of taxes that bore upon consumption and upon the agricultural

interest. There was no redistributive effect intended, and an Income Tax of more than 10% or so would have horrified Liverpool and his Ministers. The object of the tax was simply to balance Britain's fiscal system and ensure that a start could be made on paying off the enormous National Debt.

The opposition to the Income Tax, from the Whigs and from the popular agitation that they whipped up, was enormous. Various devices were used to delay the introduction of the Income Tax proposals until popular (or, at least, urban middle-class) fury had been aroused. Over four hundred petitions were admitted to the House of Commons against the tax, and while most of these were minor or obtained by dubious means, they nevertheless represented a strong current in popular opinion which opposed, not so much the Income Tax, as high wartime levels of taxation in general. Thus, when the division on the tax came, and the Opposition won by a majority of 37, there was little the government could do but resort to the money markets to finance the inevitable government deficits.

The Liverpool Ministry has been blamed for maintaining an unnecessarily high tariff policy, at a time of widespread national distress. In fact, it had no alternative; with one of their major sources of revenue cut off by the Whigs, they needed every source of income they could find in order to meet debt payments. Thus although tariffs declined during the 1820s, there was no question of widespread reform such as Repeal of the Corn Laws, even had such a measure been feasible on a reciprocal basis. (Liverpool would never have tolerated a unilateral measure of the Gladstone/Cobden variety.) In changed circumstances, in 1842, Peel reintroduced the Income Tax; by that time, because of rising prosperity, it was much less necessary, and even after Cobdenite tariff reduction, was nearly abolished twice by Gladstone, in 1853 and 1874. Had the Liverpool Ministry been allowed to retain the tax, both tariff reduction and even the final abolition of the Income Tax might have taken place much earlier, as the National

Debt was rapidly eaten away by the Sinking Fund. Liverpool's fiscal policy therefore was not one of blind agriculturalist reaction, but one of well thought out Conservative fiscal prudence, trying in exceptionally difficult circumstances to bring government finances into a long-term stable balance.

Following their success on the Income Tax, the Whigs attempted to make an issue out of government economy, and the extravagances of the Prince Regent's Civil List spending (£70,000 cost overrun on the furnishings of the Chinese Pavilion at Brighton.) However, in this case the efficiency and integrity of the Liverpool Ministry, together with their continuing attempts at Economical Reform, enabled the back-bench country gentlemen to be easily satisfied. Demands for government economy continued sporadically to emerge from the Whigs, who hoped to ride to power on a surge of popular revulsion at high taxation and the Regent's profligacy, but the Ministry generally had little difficulty in deflating them.

The harvest of 1816, the 'Year without a Summer,' was very bad, and by early 1817 the excise returns were well down on the previous year, as the inevitable slump followed the overheated economy of the war years. Poor relief figures rose sharply, and Liverpool wrote: 'We must always bear in Mind, that if our Commercial Situation does not improve, Emigration, or Premature Deaths, are the only remedies.'[22] The Ministry passed the Poor Employment Act, providing loans to local authorities for public works employing the poor if their Poor Law spending had increased above a certain percentage. However, in spite of Ministerial haste, this Act only reached the statute book by mid-June, 1817, and by that time it appeared obvious that a good harvest in that year would enable recovery to begin.

Although the depression was thus relatively short-lived, it provoked a revival of working-class violence, which in turn awoke memories in Ministers of

[22] Cookson, 'Lord Liverpool's Administration, 1815-1822' p98

the Jacobin uprisings of the 1790s. A great meeting at Spa Fields in November, 1816, was dispersed by a few constables, but attacks on flour mills and iron works were more serious indications of the ability of Radicals to foment social unrest, as was an attack on the Prince Regent at the opening of the 1817 Parliamentary session. It was clear to Liverpool that action needed to be taken, but he deliberately delayed it after the Spa Fields meeting in order to prevent the inevitable Opposition attacks on such action in Parliament from coinciding with the worst social unrest. Apart from suspending Habeas Corpus, the main government legislation was the Seditious Meetings Act, which forbade the formation of federations, and restricted the right of assembly, preventing meetings of more than fifty people without official permission. Incitement to rioting was made a capital offence, as the government was particularly concerned about the Army's status as the principal peace-keeping force. Thus by a judicious mixture of public compassion and firmer repression of violence, Liverpool's Ministry were able to survive what Liverpool himself believed to be a more serious threat than those of 1794 or 1812.

Government successes in 1817 made up for their difficulties in 1816. An enquiry into Economical Reform was easily deflected by the obvious seriousness of the government's attempts at economy. Thus, at the end of the session, Castlereagh was able to remark: 'We separated the question of the economy from that of seditious reform, and we became masters of both.'[23]

The last few months of 1817 and the early months of 1818 were ones of prosperity, which was fortunate as a General Election was due. The Ministers prepared for the election by appropriating £1 million for building churches in the new urban areas which were not well supplied -- an interesting form of ecclesiastical 'pork-barrel' legislation. The Ministers were also helped by the desertion of the Grenvilles from the Whigs; by this time they formed only a small

[23] Cookson, op. cit., p129

sect linked by family ties, but the former importance of their patriarch Grenville, Foreign Secretary under Pitt and then his successor as Prime Minister, made their gradual accession to the Ministerial side of considerable importance with public opinion. The Whigs in Parliament were reduced to barely sixty votes in the 1818 session, although on one matter, the allowances for the Royal Dukes, who were all (following the death of the Prince Regent's daughter Princess Charlotte) hurriedly marrying German princesses, the country gentlemen demonstrated their independence by voting to reduce the figure the Ministry had originally determined upon. The election itself was a noisy one, with more contests than any other before 1832, but was in the end highly satisfactory to the Ministry, with a net loss from their favourable 1812 position of only seven or eight seats, although Whig successes were greater in the larger constituencies.

The great question of the first part of the 1819 Parliamentary session was the resumption of the Gold Standard. Inflation during the war years had reduced the value of the paper pound to 14s. 2d. (£0.71), and an equally severe deflation in 1816 had returned it almost to par. This fluctuation in the value of money was highly unpopular, especially with people who had contracted debts when prices were high, and thus there was massive public support, based on the Bullion Committee's report of 1810, for a return to the free coinage of gold at par. There was considerable disagreement about the effects of a liberal credit policy on the exchanges, and the expansion of the money supply which helped to revitalise trade in 1817 also caused the price of gold to rise sharply again, but by the following year Ministers were agreed on the Bullionist view that a tight credit policy was needed to bring gold back to par.

At the beginning of 1819, it appeared that the exchanges were still too unfavourable for a resumption of specie payments, and Liverpool was at first in favour of postponing consideration of resumption until the following year. However, the popular demand for resumption had now become strong, and the

Ministry therefore bowed to it gracefully, setting up first a Committee of Enquiry and then, led by Peel, a convinced Bullionist, passing the Currency Act of 1819, which provided for resumption of specie payments in four stages from 1820 to 1823.

The return to honest money was to Liverpool an entirely natural and necessary move. It would tend to favour long-term investment over speculation, and would guarantee to all participants in the economy the integrity of the unit of value. There would be some financial casualties from a resumption, and it would inevitably act as a brake on short-term economic growth (during 1819 it caused the second downturn of a 'double-dip' recession that was to have important political consequences.) However, the long-term benefits from financial soundness were to Liverpool far more important than the short-term friction it caused. Organised fraud on investors, fuelled by a misguided egalitarian belief that borrowers were poorer than lenders, would to Liverpool have been not merely abhorrent but incomprehensible.

Fiscal policy also played a major role in the 1819 session. The Sinking Fund had become a proportionately greater burden on public finances as the war, and its exceptional expenditure, had receded. By 1819, the deficit of ways and means was still £14 million, compared with £15 1/2 million of interest and principal payments to the Sinking Fund. With a revival of the Income Tax being unthinkable, and indirect taxation already as high as the country could bear, raiding the Sinking Fund was the only alternative.

The rising political economist William Huskisson was right when he pointed out that only a genuine surplus of revenue over expenditure, together with the expansion of gross domestic product, would reduce the National Debt, but he missed the central point of Pitt's 1786 establishment of the Sinking Fund, which was that the temptation to cut taxes would inevitably outweigh governmental virtue in the form of large surpluses, and therefore the National

Debt would be reduced only at a minuscule rate. After a century of almost perpetual peace and expansion, from 1815 to 1914, the National Debt stood only £200 million lower than at the end of the Napoleonic wars. Had even a modified form of Pitt's Sinking Fund been allowed to constrain successive Chancellors of the Exchequer to the paths of budgetary virtue, there can be little doubt that the debt would have been eliminated altogether, as was the U.S. debt after the Civil War. This would have made little difference to government finances in the 1914-45 period -- the amounts needed to fight two world wars were orders of magnitude greater than the pre-1914 debt -- but it would have acted as a salutary example after 1945 which might well have instilled a measure of discipline into Britain's otherwise chaotic post-war fiscal policy.

In order to balance the budget, the government therefore raided the Sinking Fund of its whole produce and demanded £3 million in new taxes, mostly from malt. This was the step that brought government finance back into balance. Liverpool insisted on a Commons resolution mandating a surplus of at least £5 million to preserve some of the benefits of the Sinking Fund; without the statutory provisions of Pitt's Sinking Fund, this surplus proved evanescent against Whig finance in the 1830s. From now on, the budget ran more or less in balance and then, as the depressed post-war years led into the prosperous twenties, in more and more substantial surplus, culminating in the redemption of almost £10 million of funded debt in 1825 -- Liverpool's Ministry being more virtuous than its successors.

The other agitation of the session of 1819, which was to lead to major constructive legislation during the peaceful twenties, related to criminal law reform. The Whig leader, Sir Samuel Romilly, until his suicide in November 1818 had kept criminal law reform constantly before Parliament, and various Committees of Enquiry had more or less established the fact that the death penalty was overused, frequently being imposed for quite trivial crimes. Harsh

penalties had not deterred the rise in crime, which had resulted in a trebling in the number of committals for trial in the decade up to 1817. Juries were often unwilling to convict for such offences as sheep stealing because of the disproportionate punishment attached. Thus when the Ministry attempted to put forward a broad-ranging committee to examine the penal reform question in toto, it was defeated by a majority of 19 on an Opposition amendment providing for a narrower committee on capital felonies. It was now the Ministry's task to regain control of the movement for penal law reform, and to divert it towards putting sensible legislation on the statute book. This was eventually achieved, but the struggle took close to a decade.

The spectre of popular agitation raised its head just after the end of the session, when news arrived of the 'Massacre of Peterloo.' This 'massacre' has gone down in Radical folklore as the most notorious example of brutal repression by the tyrannical Liverpool Ministry, and it is most unlikely that any amount of cool historical reappraisal will weaken the force of such an attractive myth. Both Sidmouth and Liverpool -- and, to a large extent, Castlereagh -- became tainted, not necessarily as evil tyrants, but more insidiously as third-rate, frightened men, terrified by peaceful, respectable protest into an unprovoked assault on the lives of their fellow-Britons.

The blame for the Peterloo 'massacre' has traditionally rested firmly upon the local magistrates, and upon the Ministry in that they set the policy of the magistrates, and subsequently defended their conduct in Parliament. A recent study [24] has suggested that both government and magistrates were much less to blame than has traditionally been thought. The Peterloo meeting on 16th August, 1819, was the largest in a long succession of inflammatory meetings by the Manchester radicals, spurred by the recurrence in 1819 of recession, forming a campaign of disruption organised by the Radical orator Henry Hunt; it was in

[24] Walmsley, 'Peterloo, the Case Reopened'

fact an illegal gathering, not having received magisterial permission. About 60,000 people, over half the then population of Manchester, gathered in well-drilled marching columns in the crowded space of St. Peter's Field to hear Hunt's inflammatory oratory. The magistrates had taken the precautions both of calling out the local yeomanry, who were very inexperienced, and of having available in reserve a body of regular troops, the 15th Hussars.

So far, they were acting in accordance with Ministerial policy, but then the local magistrates determined in contravention of instructions they had received from the Home Secretary, Sidmouth, to enforce the strict letter of the law and arrest Hunt and the other Radical leaders. The head of the local constabulary refused to proceed without military help, and consequently the Yeomanry were sent into the crowd to arrest the leaders. At this point, there are conflicting accounts of what transpired; what is clear is that the mob, armed with sticks and throwing stones, linked arms to form a cordon around the platform, and surrounded the troop of Yeomanry, cutting them off from either advance or retreat. The Yeomanry drew their swords, probably intending to use the flat of them to beat off the mob, but at this point the magistrates, seeing the Yeomanry surrounded, ordered the 15th Hussars to disperse the meeting, which they did quickly and efficiently. Fourteen of the mob were killed, and 424 were wounded, but it is clear that the majority at least of the latter were injured by the mob themselves in the panic rather than by any direct action of either Yeomanry or regulars.

Thus Peterloo, a tragedy certainly but only by a considerable stretch of the imagination a 'massacre,' was caused by a number of factors, among them the inexperience of the Yeomanry, the aggression of the mob, and the misguided action of the magistrates in hastily trying to arrest Hunt in the middle of the meeting, but above all by the inflammatory tactics of Hunt and the leading radicals themselves in staging massive illegal demonstrations in an attempt to

subvert the government of Britain by unconstitutional means. What is clear, and has been grossly obscured by subsequent historians, is that the 'massacre' was in no sense the fault of any excess of governmental repression of dissent. Indeed, the real criticism of the Ministry, which was remedied later in the year by the passing of the Six Acts, was that their policy was excessively liberal in allowing the organisation of such dangerous Radical attempts to undermine the system.

Immediately after Peterloo, the Manchester authorities pressed home the advantage they had gained in arresting the Radical ringleaders, and after a number of ugly demonstrations, the Radical upheavals fizzled out, with their support being drained away by the steady economic improvement becoming apparent in 1819-20. However, the problems of disaffection clearly needed to be tackled on a permanent basis, and the local magistrates needed to be given the utmost support in their attempts to restore law and order. Thus a firm statement in support of the magistrates was issued, and the Whig attempts to convene a Committee of Enquiry were firmly resisted.

Soon it became evident, in view of the success of Fitzwilliam (whom Liverpool dismissed as Lord Lieutenant of Yorkshire when he took part in meetings condemning official policy) and other Whigs in stirring up popular support for the Radicals, that Parliament would have to be recalled. In the event, further measures dealing with disaffection, which might have been avoided had the Whigs not seized their opportunity to embarrass the Ministry, would have to be legislated.

The legislation which the Ministry passed, the Six Acts, has become a byword for repression, but in fact was relatively mild, shocking only to those reared in the less violent and disturbed society of late Victorian Britain. The intention of the Ministry was never to repress the traditional liberties of British subjects, but to preserve the stability of the British constitution against the onslaughts of radicalism that were to overwhelm it only thirteen years later. The

Liverpool Ministry's mild intentions were evidenced by the relaxation in all walks of political life that occurred after the depression and anxieties of the early post-war years had begun to fade. The seriousness with which they took the situation in 1819, and their determination to avoid revolution, were emphasised by Liverpool's speech in the House of Lords in which he reminded the House that he had been present thirty years earlier at the storming of the Bastille, where 'in every instance it was the desperate conduct of the few, and the fears of the many, that produced revolution.'[25]

The Six Acts were divided into three groups: three aimed to curb the means of violence and intimidation, two to limit the ability of the press to incite sedition, and one to control the demagogues themselves. The three first bills confined political meetings to a local parish level, prohibited martial assemblies, and allowed magistrates the power to seize arms dangerous to the public peace. The definition of seditious meetings was deliberately kept narrow, for libertarian reasons. As far as the press was concerned, one bill made publishers of periodicals enter into recognisances if convicted under the seditious libel laws, and the Stamp Duty on newspapers was increased to fourpence -- thus the Ministry hoped to raise the price of the twopenny Radical weeklies too high for working class pockets. Finally, the Misdemeanours Bill stopped the legal loophole whereby agitators accused of the misdemeanours of seditious conspiracy or seditious libel could postpone their trials to a later assizes, leaving them completely at liberty in the meantime. Thus the combined effect of the Six Acts was to address directly the specific activities that seemed to pose a threat to national security, while restricting as little as possible the long-established, legitimate forms of political activity necessary to a free society.

The Six Acts were passed relatively easily, as the country gentlemen recognised the Ministry's good intentions and doubted those of the Whig

[25] Yonge, op. cit., II, p442

opposition. Their necessity was almost immediately proved by the Cato Street Conspiracy, in which 24 conspirators plotted to murder the entire Cabinet as they dined at Lord Harrowby's house in Grosvenor Square. Information gained by the authorities prevented the conspiracy from being carried out, although the danger to Liverpool's person was increased by Wellington's -- fortunately abandoned -- plan to arm the Cabinet to the teeth and await the conspirators at the dinner table. In any case, the public alarm for the safety of Ministers was sufficient justification, to both Parliament and the electorate, for the relatively mild rigours of the Six Acts.

The prospects for the remainder of the session looked more tranquil for the Ministry, with trade looking up and unrest declining. However, on 29th January 1820, the aged George III finally breathed his last, and the Ministry was faced with the prospect of King George IV, an early general election, and a major political row over the new King's relations with his estranged wife Caroline.

Queen Caroline had been living apart from George IV since a year after their marriage in 1796, and a Committee of Enquiry set up by the Grenville Ministry in 1806 had condemned her character forever. George IV, when he became Prince Regent, spared no effort to harass his wife, and he was rumoured to have toasted her departure from England in 1814. He hoped to divorce Caroline for adultery, but the Liverpool Ministry refused to permit this in spite of the evidence, fearing, surely with reason, that Caroline's lawyers would retaliate with counter-allegations, bringing on a Royal scandal that could rock the monarchy. The radical Whig Henry Brougham, acting for Caroline, offered in 1819 a way out of the impasse, suggesting a separation and renunciation of Caroline's right to be crowned rather than a divorce. This seemed an admirable solution to the Ministry, but not to George IV, who was thirsting for blood.

On George's accession, the question immediately arose of Caroline's place in the new liturgy. Ministers, having weighed up Caroline's determination

against George's, decided that the King was the more dangerous enemy, and therefore recommended the removal of Caroline's name from the liturgy. However, while this was intended by Ministers as a moderate step, it was clear that depriving Caroline of her legal rights would imply guilt or misconduct, and would bring on a messy Parliamentary and legal inquiry. Thus it was decided to remove the Queen from the liturgy, and to give her a pension of £50,000 per annum, provided she stayed away from Britain, thus avoiding awkward questions about her coronation, etc. The King threatened to dismiss the Ministry, but careful handling by Castlereagh soothed his ruffled feathers, and the crisis therefore blew over, temporarily at least, although it was clear that if the Queen defied both King and Ministry and returned to England, a major political storm would ensue.

Before this could happen, the Cabinet decided to hold immediately the General Election necessitated by the change of reign, to take advantage of the swing of events in their favour. The result of the election was again favourable, albeit with a further loss of four or five seats to the Whigs, taking the Ministry back to about the 1807 position. The Ministry, provided they avoided a split and retained Royal favour, was thus confirmed in office for a further Parliamentary term. The main problems would come from the country gentlemen, who were at this time rendered distinctly nervous by the continuing unrest and economic difficulties a full five years after the war, and from the King, who was continually tempted to assert his thoroughly unattractive personality against Liverpool, whom he disliked.

Shortly after the election, the sordid Queen Caroline saga moved to its inevitable denouement in crisis. The Ministry thought they could negotiate with her through Brougham as intermediary, but she was too headstrong, refusing to accept any Ministerial proposals that did not acknowledge her innocence, and on 5th June arrived at Dover, determined to claim her rights. A considerable

amount of negotiation aimed at a compromise ensued, which ended in Parliament passing a motion by 391 votes to 124 entreating the Queen to yield to compromise proposals. However, she insisted on spurning them, making a public trial inevitable. Apart from the storm this would clearly cause, another unfavourable consequence to the Ministry was the attempted resignation of Canning, who felt his position to have been irretrievably compromised as he had been a leader in persuading Caroline to go abroad in 1814. Fortunately, Liverpool and the King allowed him to stay on without taking any part in the Queen's matter.

The Ministry decided to proceed by means of a Bill of Pains and Penalties, involving degradation of the Queen from her Royal privileges, but also a clause divorcing her. This was introduced through the House of Lords, felt to be a more suitable judicial body than the Commons, particularly in view of the high level of public agitation that the Queen's supporters were mobilising. The main Opposition argument was that degradation of the Queen was perfectly acceptable, but that the use of the Bill as a preliminary to divorce was unacceptable on religious grounds, and meant that the King's misdeeds should also be included as evidence. Although the Ministry's case was ably presented and was generally felt to have been decisively proved, much moderate opinion, regarding King and Queen as equally culpable, remained unconvinced of the desirability of pandering to the King's whims, and in the end the Bill passed the Lords by a majority of only 28 on the Second Reading.

The Ministry attempted to drop the divorce clause at this stage, feeling that the Bill would be endangered thereby, but Grey outwitted them, leading the Whigs into the lobbies in favour of the divorce clause and making the Bill a pure party matter. On the Third Reading, the government majority dropped to only nine and Liverpool, who wanted to proceed with the Bill but foresaw inevitable defeat in the Commons, withdrew it at this point. Thus public opinion, inflamed

by the Radicals, which had been resisted with total firmness on vital constitutional matters in 1816-19, was allowed more or less to prevail in 1820 on an issue that Ministers plainly regarded as inessential to the continuance of a Conservative government.

Following the withdrawal of the Bill, Parliament was prorogued, to allow popular passions to cool. The King, disgruntled with the failure of the Ministers, considered forming a new Whig Ministry, in spite of the dangers of liberal foreign policy and Catholic Emancipation, but both Whigs and Grenvilleites proved unwilling to form a Ministry based on Royal favour alone, which would come to power over such a delicate issue. However, any defeat in the Commons would give the King and Grey the excuse they needed, and so the Ministry's position was at this stage precarious, in spite of the appearance as the year wore on of pro-Ministerial newspapers and a degree of popular support, evidenced by a series of pro-Ministerial Addresses. The Ministry nevertheless felt confident enough to bring forward measures excluding the Queen from the liturgy and denying her a Royal Residence, based now not on rumour but on her known adultery, proven by the House of Lords.

Ministerial confidence was shaken by the resignation of Canning, their principal orator in the Commons, who felt that the Queen had legally been acquitted and should therefore suffer no punishment. However, the moderation of the Ministry's conduct, and the readiness of the Whigs to use the Queen as an excuse to shake the constitution, brought the country gentlemen into line, and the Ministry survived by 310 votes to 209. A motion of censure that the Whigs then proposed failed by a majority of 146, thus finally settling the problem of Queen Caroline. Her attempts to gatecrash a Carlton House levee and the Coronation itself proved unsuccessful, and drew on her the contempt of the respectable classes; within a year she had died, and George IV was left in peaceful, if unpopular, enjoyment of his throne.

The principal economic question of these years was the balance between the agricultural and the manufacturing interests. Both wanted protection for their own products, but in the former case the Ministers resisted firmly the granting of any protection beyond the 1815 Corn Laws, while in the latter case the Ministry was well ahead of business and City opinion in the move toward freer trade. Liverpool had clearly shown himself to be in favour of freer trade in 1820, but the subject had been dropped because of the Queen Caroline fracas. Liverpool's own view on the subject was demonstrated in a Lords debate in May, 1820, when he declared that 'he could entertain no doubt of what would have been the great advantages to the civilised world if the system of unrestricted trade had been acted upon by every nation from the earliest period of its commercial intercourse with its neighbours.'[26] In addition, a Commons committee set up to examine the navigation Laws reported that commerce should be 'a source of reciprocal amity between nations, and an interchange of productions to promote the industry, the wealth and happiness of mankind'[27] -- a stirring phrase indicating the direction in which the Ministry intended to move.

The agricultural interest, on the other hand, in spite of being one of the principal bulwarks of government support, got short shrift in its attempts to magnify the plight of the farmer. Any difficulties felt by the farming community were simply a backlog from the hyper-extended wartime years, and corn prices in general had remained steady at around the 78s. (£3.90) level. This indicated the success of the 1815 measures, but offered no encouragement to attempts to stir up popular anger by tightening them. Thus when a minor reform of the Corn Laws took place in 1822, it merely introduced a sliding scale of duties between 70s. (£3.50) and 85s. (£4.25), rather than increasing the price level below which corn imports were banned.

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[26] Yonge, op. cit., III, p5
[27] Cookson, op. cit., p301

The measures taken over the 1820-22 period applied both to the income and to the expenditure sides of government. On the expenditure side, in 1821 the Ministry finally persuaded the Horse Guards to reduce the complement of the Army by a further 15,000 men and this, together with other military savings, led to a reduction in government expenditure of almost £2 million, an important amount allowing for a significant reduction in taxation. A further economy came from subcontracting the payment of half-pay naval and military officers to private interests; because of the exceptionally high level of pensions arising from the Napoleonic wars this saved a further £2 million. These economies, the latter a somewhat false piece of accounting, allowed the malt tax to be reduced, the salt tax to be repealed and a reduction in the hated window duty to be promised. Along with government loans to parishes for public works and to farmers warehousing corn, these measures provided the economic stimulus that the infant recovery needed in order to reach full, vigorous maturity.

The other question that raised its head during 1820-22 was Parliamentary Reform. Grampound, which had been condemned for corruption by a Commons inquiry of 1818-19, was due to be disenfranchised, and the question arose of to where the seats would be redistributed. The normal procedure was to throw the representation of the borough into the surrounding hundred, but this already contained four Parliamentary boroughs. The Reformers, under Russell, saw their opportunity and attempted to give the benefit of the representation to the new manufacturing city of Leeds. With the country gentlemen voting against the Ministry, the Bill enfranchising Leeds passed in the Commons.

Liverpool's own views were contained in a Memorandum placed before the Cabinet, in which he described the enfranchisement of the manufacturing towns as 'the greatest evil conferred on these towns; it would subject the population to a perpetual fractious canvass, which would divert, more or less, the people from their industrious habits, and keep alive a permanent spirit of

turbulence and disaffection amongst them. Against such a measure all the most respectable inhabitants of these towns would, I am convinced, protest.'[28] He then continued: 'I believe (such boroughs) to be more corrupt than any other places when seriously contested; and I believe the description of persons which find their way into Parliament from these places are generally those who, from the peculiarity of their character or their station, are the least likely to be steadily attached to the good order of society.'[29] Thus, when the Bill reached the House of Lords, Liverpool was able, as a compromise measure, to give the extra seats to the county of Yorkshire instead of to Leeds itself. He did this 'not because he was a Parliamentary Reformer, but because he was an enemy to all plans of general Reform.'[30]

To avoid Reform, and the destruction of the Conservative system by the Whigs, it was necessary to bring about both a return of economic prosperity and a thorough rationalisation of the social and political anomalies that had been neglected during the crisis of the Napoleonic period. The achievement of both objectives, and the regaining of popular support by a Conservative Ministry which had been in office for a decade, were the principal features of the transitional period of 1820-22, as well as of the Liverpool/Canning years of 1822-27.

For Liverpool, personally, these transitional years were sad ones. Louisa, to whom he was devoted, fell ill late in 1820 and died in June 1821. Like many quietly happily married men, Liverpool was rendered intensely unhappy by her death. His health also began to worsen at this time, with his left leg developing phlebitis and his coronary activity and circulation becoming restricted. While his health continued to deteriorate, however, his loneliness was assuaged in September 1822, when he married Mary Chester, his wife's long-standing friend

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[28] Yonge, op. cit., III, p136
[29] ibid, p138
[30] Petrie, op. cit., p253

and companion. Liverpool's second wife, a quiet spinster in her thirties, could never replace Louisa in his affections, but she comforted him in his decline, outliving him by twenty years.

The years 1821-22 were ones of change and renewal for the Liverpool Ministry. On the one hand, as discussed above, the end of post-war economic distress and social unrest enabled the Ministry to reduce taxation, eliminate tariff barriers, and liberalise the penal laws. On the other hand, the replacement of Vansittart by Robinson, Sidmouth by Peel and Castlereagh by Canning naturally had the effect of changing both the appearance and the political emphasis of the Ministry in a way that to Victorian eyes was more 'enlightened.' Victorian historians, and indeed Victorian romantic novelists, were misled by these changes into downgrading the importance of Liverpool himself and the elements of continuity, and regarding these years as a dramatic watershed between the black reaction of Sidmouth, Castlereagh and the 'government of mediocrities' and 'liberal Toryism' of the enlightened Peel and Canning. By doing so, they inflated Peel's and Canning's reputations much more than they deserved, and consigned Liverpool himself to the role of an amiable nonentity who was prepared to go along with any policy proposed by the stronger personalities in his Cabinet.

The description of Liverpool as a nonentity would have been sharply rejected by his contemporaries -- one need only examine the speed with which the Conservative position collapsed after Liverpool's retirement. As for the changes in polices and personnel of the Liverpool Ministry, this was entirely voluntary, and directed from its head. Sidmouth's retirement and Castlereagh's suicide made changes in these areas inevitable, and Liverpool's long friendship with Canning and respect for the young Peel's intellectual qualities made their promotion entirely natural irrespective of any change in policy. As far as

policies themselves were concerned, in all three areas, foreign policy, finance and penal reform, the new Ministers simply encouraged a trend already in place.

Castlereagh was already moving away from his close friendship with the Continental powers before his death, and in Europe at least, Canning merely emphasised the liberal rather than the Conservative aspects of Castlereagh's foreign policy in the context of a European situation that was showing far more stability than had seemed likely in 1815. Canning was not a true Conservative, and his encouragement of nationalism in South America and Greece produced some un-Conservative results (including numerous massacres) but his overall foreign policy objective, like that of Palmerston later, was the furtherance of British interests, and in this respect he was admirably successful. His foreign policy also had the Disraelian side effect of winning the Ministry a great deal of popular support.

Liverpool had throughout been a strong believer in Adam Smith's economic principles, and the move towards freer trade and the encouragement of manufacturing in the 1820s was a natural outcome of his beliefs. Once the Sinking Fund concept had been abandoned in 1819, it became possible with rising prosperity to consider a wide-ranging relief of taxes, and whether Vansittart or Robinson had been Chancellor in the 1820s, these tax reliefs would have taken more or less the same form. Vansittart began the process in 1820-2; Robinson continued it after his accession to the Chancellorship in 1823. Robinson himself, as Chancellor, emphasised the area of change from Vansittart's high taxation policies of 1816-19, but this was purely in order to gain popular support, for himself and for the Ministry, from the economic boom of the 1820s.

As far as penal reform was concerned, this had originally been urged on the government by the Whig Romilly, but after 1819, two years before Peel became Home Secretary, the Ministry had seen the force in the Opposition's arguments, and had begun to take steps in this direction. Like Canning and

Robinson, Peel found it convenient to court popular appeal by emphasising the differences between his policies and Sidmouth's, but the overall direction of policy, for Peel and Robinson if not for the vastly more experienced Canning, came from Liverpool himself. The new, more 'enlightened' penal policy was a result of Liverpool's shrewd appreciation of the measures appropriate to changing circumstances as the social disorders of 1816-20 receded.

The actual process of making the Ministerial changes nearly wrecked the Ministry. George IV had a rigid dislike of Canning because of his erstwhile friendship with Queen Caroline. As always, however, the Ministry was short of debating talent -- one reason why Disraeli, a better debater than Prime Minister, described it as a government of mediocrities. Thus, when Sidmouth announced his impending retirement from the Home Office in May 1821, Liverpool regarded Canning's re-employment, and inclusion in the Cabinet, as essential, and attempted to bring matters to a head by threatening resignation (his emotional state was further weakened at this period by the illness and death of Louisa.) George IV, who disliked Liverpool and found duller minds like Sidmouth far more congenial, showed signs of taking him up on this offer, and thus Liverpool had to back down hastily, while reserving his -- constitutionally still doubtful -- right to include Canning a few months later. For some time, the Ministry's future was in the balance, but the King then spotted an opportunity to get rid of Canning once and for all by recalling Lord Hastings, the Governor-General of India, and appointing Canning to the post, which he would be certain to accept, for financial reasons. By holding out this tempting bait to Canning, the King was able to keep him out of the Cabinet, at least for the time being, and possibly (it seemed) forever.

The first part of the Cabinet reconstruction finally went ahead in January 1822, with Peel and Williams-Wynn (now Commons leader of the Grenvilleites) kissing hands as Home Secretary and President of the Board of Control.

However, the matter would have rested there, and Canning would have been driven either to India or into opposition, had it not been for Castlereagh's suicide in August 1822. While removing a figure of towering stature from the Government benches, this unhappy event meant that Canning could be elevated to the Foreign Office, without the King being able to dispute the necessity of the move -- if Canning went into opposition, the life of a Ministry led in the Commons by the inexperienced Peel would be measured in weeks. Thus in August 1822, at the age of 52, Canning finally rose to the position he had fought so bitterly to obtain. His elevation greatly strengthened the Ministry in the Commons, at the cost of a weakening of its unity and harmony in Cabinet.

The final stage of the Ministerial reconstruction, the replacement of Vansittart by Robinson in December 1822, and the elevation of Huskisson to the Board of Trade, was relatively easily accomplished. In this context again it should however be noted that the elements of continuity were greater than those of change; as Williams-Wynn remarked 'Robinson will be a decided improvement on poor Van... but as to measures Liverpool must of course give the orders and he obey.'[31] Indeed, there was a considerable sense in which Robinson's elevation was a tribute to the memory of Castlereagh; they had been close friends and political allies. Huskisson's principal influence in financial matters came not directly, nor through Robinson, but through Liverpool himself, with whom he was on excellent terms. Thus by the beginning of the 1823 session the Ministry was remodelled and apparently ready to face another decade in office.

Contrary to the conventional view, the respect of Liverpool's Cabinet colleagues for him remained great during the Canning years, in spite of his deteriorating health, and he remained pivotal to the Ministry. Although he was highly strung, with occasional bursts of temper or fits of tears (which were, even

[31] Brock, 'Lord Liverpool and Liberal Toryism' p54

before the Victorian cult of the stiff upper lip, considered unmanly by the macho Canning and Palmerston) Liverpool's ability and integrity won the ungrudging respect of all those who came to know him well. He was also critical to his Ministry's Parliamentary performance, being regarded by many as its best speaker in either House. Lacking Canning's oratory or Peel's debating talent, he nevertheless commanded attention and respect by his powers of analysis and attention to detail.

Examples of Liverpool's intellectual gifts abound; on one occasion in 1826, for example, he upbraided Canning in front of the cabinet for an incomplete briefing on the Oregon dispute. While he remained powerful in foreign affairs and social policy, however, Liverpool's greatest dominance, like the peacetime Pitt's, was in the area of finance, where his understanding of the latest economic thinking and its application was second to none. Outside the Cabinet chamber, he was considered a boring host, 'surrounding himself with clerks' although he remained popular with women, including the lively Princess Lieven. However, he took a great interest in the arts, arranging in 1824 on behalf of the Treasury to purchase the Angerstein collection of pictures, which became the nucleus of the National Gallery.

The years 1823-25 were notable for two things: the economic prosperity of the country, which was fostered by the reforming free trade policies of the Liverpool Ministry, and the transition from a Conservative to a Liberal foreign policy abroad, which was supported by Liverpool but whose principal architect was Canning. In addition, Peel's reforming policy at the Home Office, although less noted at the time, laid the foundation for the best of nineteenth century penal reform. Taken as a whole, these years were the most successful ones of the Liverpool Ministry. They witnessed a steady but substantial increase in its popularity (which had already begun in 1821-22), remarkable in a Ministry that had been in office more than a decade, and they bear favourable comparison

with any similar period of any British government of the nineteenth century. To liberal historians, the greatness of the Liverpool Ministry, to the limited extent that it achieved it, arose from the positive accomplishments of this period. Their view is however blinkered by their insistence on praising Canning, Peel and Huskisson while neglecting their leader, and above all by their failure to realise that the achievements of 1823-25 were a carefully thought out, Conservative fulfilment of the ideals that had been defended against Radical assault in the difficult years 1816-20.

The area in which Liberalism went furthest, and in which Liverpool had least overall control, was that of foreign policy. Canning's political stature was now immense, close to that of Liverpool himself, because of his brilliant mind, his oratorical power in the House of Commons and his experience, unmatched by anyone except the Prime Minister. Consequently, his control of foreign affairs was as strong as Castlereagh's had been, and just as Liverpool had contented himself with general support of Castlereagh's policies and determination to steer them through the Cabinet and the Lords, so, too, Canning's more Liberal ideas met with general, if qualified, support from his Prime Minister and friend. The degree of change in foreign policy from Castlereagh to Canning should in any case not be exaggerated, but to the extent that Canning's policies represented a new departure, Liverpool was prepared to suppress most of his misgivings and support Canning against the Ultra Tories, in the interests of prolonging the life of his successful Conservative Ministry. Without Canning, the Ultras and Liverpool were in grave danger from a combination of Canning and the Whigs; with him, they could easily withstand all opposition. By tolerating the inconsequential pinpricks of Canning's bombastic foreign policy, Conservatives were able to exorcise, for Liverpool's lifetime at least, the twin demons of Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform.

The principal activity of Canning's foreign policy, with which his name will always be associated, took place in Spain, and the Spanish ex-colonies of South America. Spain was at this time run by the Bourbon despot, Ferdinand VII, who was opposed by a strong Liberal opposition, pulling the country towards civil war, but was supported by Louis XVIII of France, and to an extent by Austria and Russia. Canning had an instinctive distrust of Ferdinand, which extended in particular to his attempts to regain control over the former Spanish colonies in South America, which had been 'liberated' by San Martin and Bolivar over the previous decade. At the Conference of Verona, which Castlereagh had been prevented by death from attending, the Duke of Wellington, carrying out the policy already agreed by Castlereagh and Liverpool, refused to agree to an invasion of Spain by France, and threatened to recognise the newly independent states of South America. When Louis XVIII threatened invasion of Spain, the Radicals tried to bring Britain into the war against France on the side of the Spanish Liberals, but Liverpool and Canning contented themselves with offering to mediate the dispute. In fact, the Spanish Liberals offered little resistance to the French invasion, but nor did Ferdinand seem likely to mend his ways, or even offer any real gratitude for French assistance. Thus Liverpool and Canning, by preserving British neutrality, had increased rather than diminished Britain's influence abroad.

Attention then turned to Britain's policy towards South America. Throughout 1824, the South American question remained quiescent but menacing; whatever decision was taken on the recognition of the new republics had severe disadvantages. If they were recognised, then Britain cut herself off once and for all from the Congress powers, and destroyed the system of collective European security that Castlereagh had worked so hard to build. Canning, as both a Liberal and an isolationist, regarded this system as of little value, and it is certainly true that with ten years having passed since Waterloo

the need for it had grown much less. Moreover, unless the South American countries were recognised, there was no means of stamping out piracy in the South Atlantic and the West Indies, which had become a severe danger to British shipping.

First steps towards recognition were taken with a commercial treaty with Buenos Aires -- at that time a separate country -- in June, 1824, but it was only at the end of that year that Liverpool presented a Memorandum to the Cabinet setting out in detail Britain's options in South America. For the reasons of the inevitability of eventual recognition, trade rivalry with the United States, and political rivalry with France, Liverpool came down on the side of recognition. With only Sidmouth and Wellington holding out, this opinion was decisive, and the recognition of the new South American nations went ahead. As Canning said later 'Contemplating Spain, such as her ancestors had known her, I resolved that if France had Spain, it should not be Spain 'with the Indies.' I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the old.'[32]

The Iberian peninsula was the scene of the other great foreign policy success of this period, that of the Portuguese succession. When John VI died in 1826, his elder son and heir, Dom Pedro, a Liberal, was Emperor of Brazil, while the younger son, Dom Miguel, who remained in Europe, had leanings towards autocracy. Dom Pedro, on his accession, promptly abdicated, appointing the Infanta Isabella Maria, his sister, as Regent for his infant daughter. Before his resignation, however, he issued a Constitutional charter, which limited autocracy and introduced a number of more or less Liberal institutions. Dom Miguel, with offers of help from France and Spain, naturally saw in the weakness of the Regency his chance. However, unlike Spain, Portugal was bound to Britain by a 400-year old alliance, and therefore the Regent invited in Lord Beresford, once

[32] Brock, op. cit., p281

Wellington's deputy in the Peninsula, as Commander in Chief of their armed forces.

Liverpool agreed to this, and prepared contingency plans for use in the event of a Spanish declaration of war on Portugal. However, Spain would not be warned, and in late November 1826, invaded Portugal on two fronts. Almost immediately, a body of 6,000 British troops was sent to Portugal, inspired by a magnificent Commons speech by Canning, in which he declared 'We go to Portugal, not to rule, not to dictate, not to prescribe constitutions, but to defend and preserve the independence of an ally. We go to plant the standard of England on the well-known heights of Lisbon. Where that standard is planted foreign dominion shall not come.'[33] In the event, this firm and well-considered policy met with complete success. The Army never fired a shot, and Portuguese independence, if not the survival of the Constitutional Charter of 1826, was guaranteed.

The moderating influence of Liverpool over Canning's foreign policy was nowhere better demonstrated than in Greece, where, upon the outbreak in 1824 of the rebellion against Turkish rule, the British government were careful to preserve a scrupulous neutrality, in spite of Byronic efforts to the contrary, and modestly successful fund-raising efforts by the rebels in the London money market. Only after Liverpool's retirement did Canning's enthusiasm carry him away, resulting in the British defeat of Turkey at the 'untoward event' of the Battle of Navarino, a glorious naval victory, but a diplomatic disaster which, by hurting Turkey and strengthening Russia, damaged the balance of power which Liverpool had so presciently extolled at the time of Oczakov in 1791.

The final area of foreign policy in which Liverpool played an active role was that of the Slave Trade, and slavery in general. Liverpool had been a steady antagonist to the Slave Trade during his early career, and after its abolition under

[33] Yonge, op. cit., III, p413

Grenville had continued to press for active enforcement of the prohibition. However, in 1826, he went a stage further and, in a speech encouraging the education and Christianising of the slaves, came down in favour of the eventual entire abolition of slavery. Once again, although a staunch Conservative, Liverpool had shown himself to be in no way illiberal.

Thus the foreign policy of Liverpool's last years, while more activist and less European than that of Castlereagh, nevertheless remained highly successful and at least moderately Conservative. There was little Radical bombast such as was later indulged in by Palmerston, and although Britain became isolated from the Great Powers of Europe, an isolation which was to prove far from splendid at various junctures during the succeeding decades, she nevertheless acquired that position of moral leadership among the smaller states which was later to bring important benefits, both psychological and tangible. To give up a leadership position in Europe, and a friendship with the incomparable Metternich (who was to last until 1848), for the sake of the vast empty acreage of South America was probably, on balance, an unwise decision, but it was not without its important advantages.

When Robinson took over the Exchequer in 1823, he inherited a prospect that was steadily improving, and he recognised this in his first major speech as Chancellor. 'We have seen the opening of a brilliant dawn, and we may anticipate without hesitation the steady and glowing splendour of a meridian sky,'[34] he declaimed. It was surely the most optimistic prognostication ever made by a holder of his office, though one grounded in reality, and it immediately qualified him for his mocking sobriquet of 'Prosperity Robinson.' Tax reductions exceeding £2 million were possible, even while preserving intact the £5 million Sinking Fund.

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[34] Jones, 'Prosperity Robinson' p100

It was, however, in 1824 that, with the encouragement of Liverpool, Robinson presented the first of his 'free trade' budgets. Robinson again hit the rhetorical heights: 'It is time to cut the cords which tie down commerce to the earth, that she may spring aloft, unconfined and unrestricted, and shower her blessings on every part of the world.'[35] The tariff on rum was reduced, restrictions on shipping inland coal to London were eased, trade restrictions on wool were abolished, and the prohibition of silk imports replaced by a 30% duty.

The economic situation for Robinson's third budget, in 1825, was even brighter, and previous estimates of the 1825 surplus had been proved to be very conservative. Robinson provided considerable help to the poorer classes by removing small houses from both the House Tax and the Window Tax, while at the same time he reduced the excise on cider from 30s. to 10s (£1.50 to £0.50.) Later that year, Huskisson introduced a general reform abolishing all prohibitory tariffs, and reducing tariffs in general to between 10% and 30%. Thus, by late 1825, when the long golden boom of the 1820s at last terminated in speculative overheating and collapse, the fiscal system of Britain had been brought a long way towards full free trade. Robinson's reforms, unlike Peel's or Gladstone's, were actuated by a practical desire for economic gain rather than by Cobdenite dogma. Therefore, in spite of his Technicolor taste in rhetoric, he deserves to be regarded on the basis of this period as among the best of nineteenth century Chancellors.

The crash of 1825 was caused by an over-expansion of credit. One major problem was the export of large amounts of bullion in ill-thought-out loans to the new Republics of South America (including one to export Scottish milkmaids to churn butter in Buenos Aires; the buffalo would not stand still to be milked, the butter turned rancid, and the Argentines retained their preference for oil.) The other, reinforcing the difficulty, was an excessive note issue, un-backed by gold,

[35] ibid., p103

by the English country banks. Liverpool himself, who had remained optimistic during the darkest economic days of 1816-19, had issued a stern warning in March 1825 against excessive speculation, which he said was 'likely to bring the greatest mischief on numerous individuals.'[36] (In this he was either more prescient or more honest than political observers of the 1927-29 boom or the 1996-2000 bubble, who were conspicuous by their silence.)

On 12th December 1825, the leading banking house of Pole, Thornton closed its doors, and bankruptcies began to multiply. The depression bore some resemblance to the crash following the collapse of the South Sea Bubble, over a century before, but otherwise it was to contemporaries more or less unique: the first full-scale financial/ industrial boom had been succeeded by the first genuine financial/ industrial crisis which had neither cause nor effect in agriculture.

Immediately after the collapse of Pole, Thornton, it appeared that the Bank of England itself might become insolvent, but Liverpool, after calling Huskisson, the Governor of the Bank and Alexander Baring into conference, ordered the Bank to issue £5 million of notes immediately, which removed the danger of financial collapse. Once the crisis was over, the Ministry began to consider remedies against future crises. Small denomination banknotes were withdrawn from circulation, and the Bank of England monopoly on joint stock banking was restricted. This allowed sizeable country banks to grow up, whereas previously 'any small tradesman, a cheesemonger, or butcher or a shoemaker, might open a country bank; but a set of persons with a fortune sufficient to carry on the concern with security were not permitted to do so.'[37] Robinson declared to the Commons that 'Although the leaves and branches of the tree have been shattered, its roots are firmly fixed, and they will shoot forth again with fresh beauty,'[38] and, later 'It is quite impossible to govern the speculations of

[36] Brock, op. cit., p202
[37] Brock, op. cit., p207
[38] Jones, op. cit., p117

individuals of such a country as this, without doing far more mischief than good.'[39] Liverpool and Robinson set their face firmly against an issue of Exchequer Bills to prop up merchants in difficulties. Eventually they had to allow the Bank to issue notes against purchase of Bills, which produced a similar effect, but the principle, which had been breached in the extreme circumstances of 1793, that the government would not intervene to save merchants from their own speculative folly, became further established. It is in fact a significant principle of Conservative economic policy, the avoidance of the 'moral hazard' that comes from traders believing the state will bail out their losses.

The general economic condition of the country had been little affected by the financial crisis, and by the summer of 1826 equilibrium had been largely restored. However, a poor harvest in 1825, followed by a drought in 1826, led to a significant renewal of agricultural distress, and so at the end of the 1826 session Liverpool personally sponsored a measure obtaining authority to import grain duty-free should it be required. In the event, the ports were opened at the beginning of September for the import of oats, rye, beans and peas, which action was ratified retroactively by a recalled Parliament in November. This action brought up the question of a further reform of the Corn Laws, that 'while not sacrificing the agricultural interest to the commercial' would nevertheless liberalise the import restraints on this vital commodity, and bring a further important step towards Free Trade. Huskisson had expressed himself in favour of outright Repeal, but in the event the Bill brought forward contained another sliding scale, this one from a 30s. (£1.50) duty at a price of 55s. (£2.75) to free imports at a price of 70s (£3.50). Corn imports would thus be greatly liberalised, and the price brought down to the benefit of the consumer, while at the same time the principle of agricultural protection would be maintained. It was an elegant compromise, which had it been put into effect and remained until the

[39] ibid.

1870s, would have prevented the collapse of British agriculture in face of U.S. competition which was to destroy the traditional British landed society in the period 1873-1939. However, Peel's betrayals and Gladstone's dogmatism, and not Liverpool's principled and intelligent statesmanship, were to determine the future of British tariff policy.

In the event, Liverpool suffered a stroke less than a week before the Corn Bill was to be introduced. Although, when he complained of fatigue at the end of 1826, he had proclaimed that the manoeuvring into law of the new Corn Bill over the opposition of the Ultras was his one remaining task, this was not to be. During his illness, Liverpool's Corn Bill was thrown out by the House of Lords; by the time a Bill was finally carried in 1828, the Ultras, under Wellington, were firmly in control. The final Bill, which prohibited imports at a price below 66s. (£3.30), caused Huskisson's resignation and thus, indirectly, became one of the factors leading to the collapse in 1830 of the long Tory hegemony, and of Conservatism.

The years 1822-27 were also ones of steady reform in the legal framework of Britain. Although opposed to radical constitutional changes, Liverpool favoured the steady modernisation of the penal laws in order to bring them into line with the realities of the newly industrialising society. Peel, once settled at the Home Office, began by reforming the prison system and the system of deportation -- the latter had lost its sting as a deterrent now that people were emigrating to Australia voluntarily. The penal code itself was modernised, and the number of offences carrying the death penalty was drastically reduced. The criminal law, which had grown up hotchpotch over the centuries, was consolidated into a limited number of reasoned statutes. Thus during these years Peel, with the active support and encouragement of Liverpool, laid the foundations of the system of criminal law, which was to become the envy of the

world in the nineteenth century, and to be so foolishly undermined in the twentieth.

In the long term, however, the most important legal change of these years, and the one that belies traditional ideas both of the nobility of the Trades Union movement, and of the determination of nineteenth century governments to suppress it, was the repeal in 1824 of the Combination Laws. Restrictions on the rights of workmen in general were repealed during these years, including the prohibition of the export of machinery and the restraints on free international movement of labour. Pitt's Combination Act of 1800, which prohibited combinations of workmen, seemed to the Liverpool Ministry an unnecessary restraint of free trade, especially as combinations of employers were not restricted.

Radicals, like Joseph Hume, asserted that once combinations of workmen were permitted, the need for them would disappear. The Liverpool Ministry took a more cynical view of the methods and motivations of the industrialised workforce, but nevertheless recognised their right to the removal of any artificial restrictions on their right to bargain for a greater share of the new prosperity. After a Committee packed by the Radicals had urged complete abolition of restraints on combinations, both the Combination Acts of 1800 and the common law penalties for conspiracy were abolished.

The effect on labour relations vindicated the Conservatives rather than the Radicals. Trades Unions spread rapidly, and their discipline was enforced by terrorist methods -- in one Glasgow union four sentences of death were pronounced on recalcitrant members. The Ministers considered reversing their decision, but in the end they contented themselves with regulating the formation of Trades Unions, and with upholding the Common Law against acts of vandalism and violence.

Although imperfect, the legal position after 1824 reflected fairly accurately the tenets of Conservatism in relation to Trades Unions. The right of workers to combine in pursuit of higher wages should be legalised in a free society, both because of the rare cases in which such combinations could prevent genuine abuses (such as in the Ford Motor Company, during the Bennett years of the mid 1930s), and also because of the natural tendency of the ill-educated and relatively impoverished working classes to band together for greater security in a hostile world. Thus were born the Co-Operative Movement, the Labour Party, and the Salvation Army. However irrational such combinations might be, they were harmless, if prevented by society from encroaching on the rights of others, and they could perform a useful social and/or economic function for their members.

In the particular case of Trades Unions, however, experience had shown that if left unchecked they tended to produce a number of abuses. These included attempts to force a monopoly of labour (the closed shop); the discipline of members and non-members by force; attempts, by mass action, to play a political as distinct from an economic role, and the harassment of modernisation plans by their misguided Luddism. Thus the Liverpool Ministry resolved that Trades Unions, while permitted, should be significantly discouraged; a decision which did much to encourage the rapid growth in both production and wage rates during the early and middle nineteenth century. Only after Disraeli's 'reforms' of 1875, which gave the Trades Unions an entirely unwarranted immunity from civil actions, did they come to possess their huge malign influence on British economic life and, through the Labour party, on society in general.

The final problem of Liverpool's later years, and in the end the one which was to split apart the Tory coalition which Pitt and Liverpool had held together for forty years, was Catholic Emancipation. This had been an 'open question' in the Cabinet throughout the Liverpool Ministry, which until 1822 had meant in

practice that the 'Protestant' forces of Liverpool, Sidmouth and Eldon had been able to prevent any action being taken. However, once Canning became Leader of the House of Commons (even in succession to the 'Catholic' Castlereagh) and Sidmouth retired from senior office, the Cabinet balance of power shifted considerably, in spite of the promotion of Peel, who at this stage was regarded as the great hope of the 'Protestant' forces in the Commons.

The question first arose in connection with the Catholic Association, a body which had been built up by extorting an illegal levy from the Catholic parishes of Ireland, and which used its strength to further the causes of Emancipation and, among its extremists, Disunion. Liverpool proposed a Bill banning the Association in a speech that explicitly disavowed any connection between opposition to the Association and opposition to Emancipation, but the Bill was only passed after a Commons resolution in favour of Emancipation had been passed by 13 votes. A further Commons vote proclaimed the desirability of a state endowment of the Irish Catholic Church, which might, had it been passed, have had the effect of removing priestly opposition to Union, but this proposal was allowed to lapse. The success of the Emancipation resolution encouraged Sir Francis Burdett, its principal supporter, to bring in a Bill that was passed in all its stages through the Commons. However, the Lords, after a stirring speech by Liverpool in which he correctly forecast the demise of the Irish Church if Emancipation was passed, rejected the Bill by 178 votes to 130.

The session of 1826 was quiet on the question of Catholic Emancipation, because of the impending General Election. This was fought partly on the Liverpool Ministry's excellent record, but also on the Catholic question, with Palmerston standing against 'Protestant' Tories at Cambridge. However, in England as a whole, a strong 'Protestant' tide was running, as it had in 1807, aided by support for the Ministry which had been so successful, and the Tories made a net gain of nineteen seats. Although they lost a net four seats in Ireland,

their final position was as favourable as, if not more favourable than, their high-water mark of 1812. The 'Catholic' majority of 1825, which had been small in any event, had disappeared, and even after the retirement of Liverpool, both Canning and Goderich, both 'Catholics' felt themselves unable to proceed against a hostile House of Commons and Royal opposition. Only in 1829, after a considerable agitation by the Irish Catholics against a government they sensed to be weakened, and a tergiversation by Peel, who had refused to serve under the 'Catholic' Canning, which split the Tory Party, did Emancipation become law. In doing so, not only did it pronounce the eventual death knell of the Irish Church, but it also destroyed the Liverpool coalition.

By the end of 1826, Liverpool, whose health was now clearly deteriorating, foresaw that Corn Laws and Catholicism were likely to bring his Ministry to a speedy end. He wrote to Robinson: 'The government hangs by a thread. The catholic question in its present state, combined with other circumstances will, I have little doubt, lead to its dissolution in the course of this session.'[40]

The Ministry had in fact become extremely long in the tooth, not so much chronologically (its average age at the end of 1826 was still only 58, two years older than Liverpool himself) but in terms of length of service. Eight out of the fourteen Cabinet members had served continuously for the fifteen years of the Liverpool Ministry, an average of twenty years had elapsed since each Minister first achieved senior Ministerial office (more than thirty in the cases of Sidmouth, Westmoreland and Eldon) and a number of Ministers, including Sidmouth, Westmoreland, Harrowby, Bexley (the former Vansittart) and to a lesser extent Eldon and Bathurst, were decades past their best. While some younger men such as Peel and Robinson had been given high office others, such as Palmerston, Grant, Aberdeen, Goulburn and Herries had languished in junior office far into middle age, thus in some cases souring them on Conservatism and in all cases

[40] Dictionary of National Biography, "Jenkinson, Robert Banks" p751

preventing the refreshment of the Ministry with new talent. The average age of Cabinets increased sharply between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the longevity of the Liverpool Ministry, and its lack of turnover, caused this change to happen largely within a single Ministry.

In the event it was the funeral of the Duke of York in February 1827, at which both Liverpool and Canning were compelled to stand on flagstones on an ice-cold day for several hours, which finally made Liverpool's condition critical. On 27th February, he suffered a stroke that paralysed his speech, and after a month waiting to see if he would recover, he admitted himself to be too weak to carry on, and the long Liverpool Ministry came to an end. Liverpool himself lingered on for another eighteen months, unable to participate in political life, suffered at least one more stroke, and eventually died on 4th December 1828. His funeral was a quiet affair, with the procession from Kingston to Gloucestershire being honoured by the Duke of Clarence (the future William IV) but only Sidmouth of his former Cabinet colleagues (where were the ungrateful Robinson and the quisling Peel?) He was buried in the family vault at Hawkesbury, and succeeded by his half-brother Cecil as third and last Earl of Liverpool.

Without Liverpool at the helm, the great Tory Ministry was in trouble. Its more liberal faction might have continued a more or less Conservative policy under Canning, but once Canning died, there was no leader who combined sufficient tact and political stature to hold together a team divided over one of the fundamental issues of the day. Pitt had created a coalition between the landed gentry, the manufacturing interest, and the intellectual leaders which formed one of the finest governments Britain ever enjoyed, and Liverpool had held it together through fifteen traumatic years, but after Liverpool's departure the forces of dissolution proved greater than the bonds of cohesion, and allowed in a Ministry which, through sheer ignorance of government rather than radical

ideals, passed a measure which destroyed the Conservative system which almost all concerned had the strongest reasons for preserving.

Liverpool is a forgotten figure. Only two short biographies of him have been written since Yonge's official "Life" of 1868, and there is little other direct source material. Partly this is the result of his personality; he was a careful man, with an unblemished private life, a somewhat ponderous manner that belied his real warmth and intelligence, and a propensity to paper over the disputes between his highly-strung colleagues rather than to create emotional fireworks himself. Poor pickings for the type of historian whose ideal, based usually on a shrewd nose for the best seller, is a torrid tale of drama, passion and intrigue.

Disraeli, in Coningsby, portrayed Liverpool as the Arch-mediocrity, and the accusation, made in 1844 before any serious historical appraisal of him, has stuck. The epithet, made with Disraeli's usual disdain for mere historical accuracy, begs the question of how Liverpool could have remained Prime Minister for fifteen years among contemporaries whom even Disraeli was forced to admit were far from mediocre. Disraeli's outburst was caused largely by his delayed juvenile Radicalism -- he was 40 when Coningsby appeared in print. He also went on to describe the Liverpool Ministry as consisting entirely of mediocrities, ignoring Castlereagh, without doubt the greatest Foreign Secretary before Salisbury, whose politics happened to be opposed to the romantic proto-Socialism which Disraeli was at that point trying to peddle. In short, Disraeli's case against Liverpool, although almost contemporary, can be dismissed by Conservatives out of hand.

The accepted wisdom of the period 1815-1870 is that it was an 'Age of Reform', with the initial black reactionary period of 1815-22 giving way to the progressively more 'enlightened' figures of Canning, Grey, Melbourne and Peel. In particular, the record of the Liverpool Ministry in domestic and social policy has been frequently been attacked by later historians, most of whom have sought

to glorify the social reforms of the nineteenth century by contrasting them with a period of industrial squalor and black reaction which is supposed to have preceded them. Under this view of history, Liverpool is an amiable nonentity, dominated first by the black reaction of Castlereagh and Sidmouth and then by the enlightened, if cautious, liberalism of Canning and Peel. While the Disraelian description of his Cabinet as one of mediocrities is not now completely accepted -- at least in the case of Castlereagh, rehabilitated by Sir Charles Webster and by twentieth century failures in areas where he had achieved success -- nevertheless, Liverpool's Premiership is seen as an essentially negative period, whose achievements were either backward-looking, or were pale forerunners of the great reforming activity of the thirties and forties.

Liverpool's hold over both his cabinet and the Tory Party in both Lords and Commons was powerful. In part, this was due to his persuasive abilities. His speeches do not rank with the oratorical triumphs of Pitt, Canning, Disraeli or Gladstone, but they contained clear, lucid statements of policy that could rally the great magnates and the independent country gentlemen to his side. Another factor which helped Liverpool, which escapes later observers, was the great respect and affection which most of his colleagues felt for him. Liverpool's leadership was regarded as vital for the continuance of the Ministry, as indeed was demonstrated after his retirement. Peel and Canning have always been well regarded by historians, and Castlereagh has now also achieved posthumous glory; Liverpool, the man who led them all for fifteen years, and whom all regarded as indispensable, also deserves to be placed in his rightful position among Britain's greatest Prime Ministers.

The area in which Liverpool had least real influence was foreign policy. Both Castlereagh and Canning were powerful political figures, with strong ideas of their own on foreign policy, who deserved and got a more or less free hand in their expert handling of world affairs. Liverpool tempered Castlereagh's

Europeanism with a shrewd sense of what would be acceptable to British public opinion, while he guided Canning's Liberal enthusiasms, which brought the Ministry increased popular support, into paths which would not harm either British interests or the cause of Conservatism in general. His influence on foreign policy was thus a negative rather than a positive one, but the foreign policy successes of his period in office are sufficient indication that no further intervention was necessary.

The Liverpool Ministry demonstrated in the early years after 1815 the potential strength of Conservatism in dealing with social upheaval. Cautious repression of social unrest in the difficult years after Waterloo, mingled with a keen appreciation of the overriding value of the liberties of the subject, gave way after 1820 to a steady relaxation of the restrictions on working class organisation and reform of the penal laws. The great economic boom of the early 20s, together with the relaxation of Trades Union legislation and the Peel law reforms, gave the working classes a greater liberty and a higher standard of living than they had ever enjoyed before, with every prospect that they would continue to prosper as in important, but not dominant, element in a stable Conservative society.

It is, however, in the area of economic policy that Liverpool's Conservative achievements deserve to be best remembered. In 1815, Britain was close to bankruptcy after a generation of war. Liverpool re-established the finances of government on a sound basis, which was to prove the cornerstone of Victorian policies of tax reduction and encouragement of trade. Far from being the prisoner of the agricultural interest, as has been accused, Liverpool was the only Prime Minister of the nineteenth century, at least between 1806 and 1885, who fully understood and valued the contributions of both agriculture and industry to British prosperity. Pitt had steered an even course between the various wealth-producers in the 1780s, but of Victorian Prime Ministers, Melbourne,

Peel, Russell and Gladstone regarded the agricultural interest as a reactionary force to be combated, while Derby and Disraeli had that snobbish distaste for industry and trade which has disfigured British national life and hindered her material progress since 1850. Only Liverpool, and to a lesser extent Palmerston, understood the immense material benefits which were brought by the mighty engines of industrialism, while at the same time appreciating and wishing to preserve the tranquillity and social stability of the old agricultural Britain. Liverpool, far from being a mediocrity, above all had the intellectual power and public authority to engraft the new doctrines of Smith and Ricardo onto a social order that was still rightfully dominated by the 'Gentlemen of England.'

Liverpool, as a disciple of Pitt, always acknowledged his debt to his great predecessor, but in many ways his achievements were even more substantial. For his adept handling of the last years of war, for his firmness during the difficult early years of peace, and for his constructive achievements in the prosperous twenties, he deserves to be remembered with gratitude by British historians of all political persuasions. When examined more closely, this cool and reserved personality becomes, to us as he did to his contemporaries, worthy of the deepest respect for his abilities, his character and, above all, for his achievements. From the shadows of obscurity, Liverpool deserves to emerge into the sunlight of honour as perhaps the greatest of all the great Prime Ministers who adorned the nineteenth century.