

CHAPTER XXIII

PAX ECONOMICA

A peace interested in the development of the world would prepare the way for universal free trade. It would make possible the razing of customs barriers, which have been a fruitful cause of war. With protective tariffs abolished people would trade with one another on natural terms. They would produce the things they were best fitted to produce; the things for which they have the greatest aptitude. Under existing conditions and the ever-present menace of the war each nation must encourage its iron and steel industry, the building of ships, the development of minerals, the making of all kinds of equipment, the production of many raw materials in order that it may at all times be ready for war. The military state must be self-contained. It must have iron, coal, oil, copper, and all of the things which enter into the mechanism of military and naval power. Protectionism is in part at least a product of the military state.

Free trade will weaken boundary-lines. Warring states will tend to be toward one another as are the states of the American nation; as are the states of Germany. Arizona, Kansas, Mississippi do not chafe because they are not great magazines of industry. They are content to produce the things with which nature endowed them. France does not take kindly to industry. Her instincts are for agriculture, for the refinements and the beautiful things of the world. The people of Italy are instinctively artists. They care little for industry. Industry is forced upon them by the necessity for self-preservation born of exaggerated nationalism. A peace with free trade will end these hothouse growths found in every nation. It will create a life responsive to the gifts, the aptitudes and desires of people.

That protective tariffs are provocative of conflict has long been recognized. Many statesmen hold that they are the main causes of war. This was the opinion of Cobden and Bright, who shaped the destinies of the British Empire for a generation along democratic lines. They challenged the old colonial policies. They assailed the protective tariff. They opposed

the "closed door" or any artificial aid to trade and commerce. They championed free trade and equal opportunity for all nations. They ridiculed the idea that the poverty of one country could increase the well-being of another. They opposed trade monopolies. They believed in free competition in every field of endeavor. They urged that British legislation should aim at the prosperity of all countries. And Great Britain grew in wealth and power. She was at peace with the world. There was no demand for a great navy or military establishment. This was the most generous period in the history of England.

Cobden believed that all wars were either dynastic or economic. He believed that economic wars could be ended by freedom, by equality of opportunity. It was his successors, notably Disraeli, who turned England toward imperialism. Cobden was an idealist who believed that the well-being of England was dependent upon the well-being of the world at large. And he urged freedom of trade as possibly the greatest of all agencies for permanent peace. Speaking of the far-reaching influence of free trade, he said:

"I have been accused of looking too much to material interests. Nevertheless, I can say that I have taken as large and great a view of the effects of this mighty principle as ever did any man who dreamt over it in his study. I believe that the physical gain will be the smallest gain to humanity, from the success of this principle. I look further; I see in the free-trade principle that which shall act on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe—drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race and creed and language, and uniting us in the bond of eternal peace. I have looked even further. I have speculated and probably dreamt in the dim future—ay, a thousand years hence—I have speculated on what the effect of the triumph of this principle may be. I believe that the effect will be to change the face of the world, so as to introduce a system of government entirely distinct from that which now prevails. I believe that the desire and motive for large and mighty empires, for gigantic armies and great navies—for those materials which are used for the destruction of life and the desolation of the rewards of labor—will die away. I believe that such things will cease to be necessary, or to be used, when man becomes of one family and freely exchanges the fruits of his labor with his brother man. I believe that, if we could be allowed to reappear on this sublunary scene, we should see at a far distant period the governing system of

this world revert to something like the municipal system; and I believe that the speculative philosopher of a thousand years hence will date the greatest revolution in the world's history from the triumph of the principle which we have met here to advance."¹

Never before did a war-weary world so stand in need of such men as Cobden and Bright to inspire idealism and guide the conferees of the peace negotiations along lines of freedom—freedom of trade, freedom of the seas, freedom from imperialism, freedom of people, freedom from privilege and monopoly in every form.

¹Speech of January 15, 1846. See Hirst, *Free Trade and the Manchester School*, p. 229.