

**Reciprocity and Henry C. Carey's traverses  
on "the road to perfect freedom of trade"**

Stephen Meardon\*

Abstract

Free trade and protectionist doctrines have long had ambiguous relationships to bilateral trade deals, known throughout the nineteenth century as "reciprocity" arrangements. Henry C. Carey, "the Ajax of Protection" in the nineteenth-century United States, represents well the ambiguity from one side of the controversy. Carey's early adulthood in the mid to late 1820s was a time when the forerunners of the Whig Party pursued reciprocity at least partly as a means of fostering protection. In the 1830s, Carey, too, endorsed reciprocity – because he stood for free trade and believed reciprocity would promote it. In the 1840s and 1850s Carey changed his mind, decided that protection was the real "road to perfect freedom of trade," and for that reason opposed reciprocity with Canada. In the 1870s he remained a protectionist but reconciled his doctrine with reciprocity. This paper attempts to explain the changes in the disposition toward reciprocity of America's foremost protectionist thinker from the Second Party System to the generation after the Civil War.

---

\* Department of Economics, Bowdoin College, 9700 College Station, Brunswick, ME 04011-8497. E-mail: smearдон at bowdoin.edu. I wish to thank Ariel Roy and participants in the Carey session at the 2009 History of Economics Society meetings, especially Roger Sandilands, for helpful comments. The usual disclaimer applies.

## Introduction

During the nineteenth century, as today, the United States' international trade treaties and agreements were a perennial cause of domestic dispute. Some ninety-six "reciprocity" arrangements, in the parlance of the time, were signed and put into effect in the course of the century.<sup>1</sup> Evidence of the disputants' arguments and motives abounds. Secretaries of State sent instructions to their plenipotentiaries overseas to negotiate the arrangements; members of Congress debated their merits, sometimes passionately, on the floors of their respective houses; newspapermen, advocacy groups, and other proselytizers of trade doctrines sent memorials to Congress and published articles and pamphlets. But reciprocity occupies a strangely confined place in histories of U.S. trade policy, let alone histories of American economics.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Any count of the number of reciprocity arrangements – which typically had numerous articles concerning trade, navigation, contraband, treatment of foreign nationals, and even religious freedom – depends on which articles one considers essential for the definition of reciprocity and how one reads them. In other words, much depends on the method of the counter. My method, borrowed from Allen and Meardon (2007), makes the presence of at least one article regarding the tariff treatment of trade in goods a necessary and sufficient condition of a reciprocity agreement. By privileging goods trade above navigation (i.e. trade in commercial services), the method may err in the direction of undercounting.

<sup>2</sup> The outstanding general U.S. trade policy histories, namely Taussig (1892), Stanwood (1903), and more recently Eckes (1999), treat reciprocity mainly in light of agreements toward the end of the nineteenth century plus the Canadian treaty of 1854 and the Hawaiian one of 1875. By the early twentieth century, reciprocity had come to connote tariff bargaining, which did not figure in the earlier and more numerous treaties centered on the most-favored-nation provision. Laughlin and Willis's (1903) study of reciprocity is limited to the restricted understanding of the term. A couple of particularly impressive early-twentieth-century studies, while sharing that understanding, do integrate their treatment of tariff bargaining with most-favored-nation treaties – but they make little reference to the trade doctrines that supported or opposed reciprocity in either form. The studies are by the U.S. Tariff Commission (1919) and Culbertson (1925). More recent works on reciprocity, namely those of Wolman (1992) and Rhodes (1993), are more limited in

One of the chief reasons for reciprocity's historiographical confinement is the same one that recommends its study. Advocacy or opposition to reciprocity had no stable relation to political party membership or advocacy of free trade or protection. The dispositions of Democrats, Whigs, and Republicans toward reciprocity, and likewise of free traders and protectionists, changed not only with the varying forms of reciprocity but also with other political and economic circumstances. It would seem there is no conclusion at once concise and durable that can be drawn about reciprocity on one hand and ideology or politics on the other. What the history of reciprocity offers is less succinct and more substantial. It offers a window into the interdependence of trade and other domestic and international policy questions in American history. It also offers a window into the mutual accommodation of public policy and economic doctrines.

A useful perspective from that window may be found in the treatment of reciprocity by a prominent contributor to nineteenth-century American trade doctrines. This paper will consider that of Henry Charles Carey of Philadelphia, the "Ajax of Protection" (Morrison 1978, 460). Carey's conversion to protectionism in the wake of the Tariff Act of 1842 – near the middle of his life, yet relatively early in his long career as a political economist – came just as his Whig Party's affinity for reciprocity was beginning to cool. Carey was the indispensable supplier of arguments against the Canadian reciprocity treaty ratified in 1854. He also argued against re-establishment of reciprocity with Canada in 1874. Beginning in the 1870s, however, the Republican Party which then claimed Carey's allegiance favored reciprocity in cases apart from the Canadian one. What was more, Carey's own doctrine was used to justify the policy. This curious turn of events and ideas is the subject of this article.

### **Reciprocity and protectionism in the early United States**

Henry Carey's politics, by inheritance and studied conviction, were Whig under the Second Party System beginning in the mid to late 1820s. They were Republican under the Third Party System from the mid 1850s until his death, at age 85, in 1879. In relation

---

temporal scope. Like the general U.S. trade policy histories, only more, they pass over the events and ideas of reciprocity preceding the late nineteenth century.

to the controversies over the tariff and reciprocity these affiliations are suggestive, but they do not indicate unambiguously either his position or his reasoning. The Whig position on the tariff admitted various degrees and defenses of protectionism. Whigs' early embrace of reciprocity was even less unanimous and more tenuous. Republicans, at least in the first two decades of their party's history, grappled with similar internal divisions.

During Henry Carey's formative years, the Whigs (or proto-Whigs, considering their emergence in the mid to late 1820s before the name was affixed) who were most prominent in shaping trade doctrine included Carey's own father. Mathew Carey (1760-1839) was distinguished first as sole owner and later joint owner of the country's leading publishing and distribution firm from the 1780s to the 1820s (Bradsher 1912, vii). He was also one of the country's leading exponents of political-economic thought, particularly of protectionist doctrine. In the latter vocation, though, he was more closely rivaled. Although Mathew Carey was the senior of both Hezekiah Niles (1777-1839) of Baltimore and Henry Clay (1777-1852) of Kentucky, between the second and fourth decades of the nineteenth century all three of them – the elder Carey with his tireless pamphleteering and editorial entrepreneurship from his home in Philadelphia, Niles with his indispensable political periodical, the *Weekly Register*, and Clay with his political speeches and maneuvers in the U.S. Senate, House, and Department of State – were equals in fostering what became known as the “American System” (Rowe 1933, 68; Swain 1842, v. 1, 44; Stone 1933).

The first tariff act embodying the American System was arguably that of 1824.<sup>3</sup> The act was the result of a long campaign by its proponents (Stanwood 1903, v. 1, 200). To promote it, Mathew Carey had elaborated a theory of the “identity of interest between agriculture, manufactures, and commerce,” which interest could be either fractured by the “ruinous effects of the *let-us-alone* policy” or fostered by protection.<sup>4</sup> Niles had called

---

<sup>3</sup> So argued Henry Clay (1832, 9-12). Henry Carey, though, would later describe the act as merely “partially protective” (Carey 1851, 10).

<sup>4</sup> The “identity of interest ...” is the subtitle of Carey (1820). Mathew Carey's comment on the “*let-us-alone* policy” is in an article titled “National Policy” written by him under the pen name “Hamilton” in *Niles' Weekly Register*, Sept. 21, 1822, 23, 575, p. 40.

for “a general protection” that until then had been afforded only to the shipping interest,<sup>5</sup> Clay had called on his fellow legislators to “create a home market, to give further scope to the consumption of the produce of American industry,” which would redound to the equal benefit of agriculturalists.<sup>6</sup> But Carey’s, Niles’s, and Clay’s advocacy of protection did not preclude, and in differing degrees could even be read to demand, reciprocity arrangements with foreign countries.

Mathew Carey had little to say on the subject of reciprocity from the 1820s onward. He had opposed vigorously the Jay Treaty of 1795 with Great Britain, which put the United States on a most-favored-nation footing with other countries in regards to shipping in British and colonial ports but left in place Britain’s considerable discrimination in favor of its own ships. But Carey’s opposition, according to his biographer, was from a time before he “became an avowed devotee of political economy” (Rowe 1933, 50). It was a time when his writings were connected with “specific economic events,” not the invisible links of a system of thought (32). The elder Carey had denounced the Jay Treaty, according to his biographer, for “containing only an appearance of reciprocity” (41). The denunciation implied, perhaps, that a good treaty embodying true reciprocity was at least conceivable. But if his opposition could not have meant much to his one-year-old son, much less could the implication about reciprocity’s positive prospects have made any impression.

The period from Henry Carey’s birth, in 1793, to his early twenties, in 1815, was one of dramatic rise and fall for U.S. shipping interests. The European wars that began in the first of those years were a boon to neutral U.S. ships (not to mention U.S. agriculture) that was felt through 1807. A few years prior, in 1805, Britain had begun seizing and condemning U.S. ships traveling between enemy ports indirectly by way of U.S. ports, and then, in 1807, ordering neutral ships en route to continental Europe to pay tribute first at a British port. France under Napoleon Bonaparte threatened the confiscation of all vessels complying with the British order (Johnson et al. 1915, v. 2, 18-19; Setser 1937, 161-162, 168). In December, 1807, as a retaliatory measure short of war, President Jefferson sought and obtained an embargo of all U.S. foreign trade, which embargo was

---

<sup>5</sup> “Equal Rights and Reciprocity,” in *Niles’ Weekly Register*, Jan. 10, 1824, 25, 643, p. 289.

<sup>6</sup> Clay, “On American Industry” (1824), p. 229, in Swain (1843, v. 1, 219-266).

modified in 1809 to forbid intercourse only with France and England (Setser 1937, 168-169). In 1808, total recorded imports and exports, including re-exports, decreased over sixty percent relative to the preceding year (Johnson et al. 1915, v. 2, 20). The large decline of trade, and more generally the early-nineteenth-century maritime rivalry among Britain, France, and the United States that provoked it, gave rise to new forms and channels of reciprocity.

The bill known as “Macon’s No. 2,” signed into law in May, 1810, promoted reciprocity in a manner reflecting the bellicosity of the era. Up to that date, American protests of British and French predations on U.S. shipping had been in vain: neither belligerent could be persuaded to leave the other’s commerce with the U.S. unmolested, regardless of the nationality of vessels. Nor had American efforts to change the British and French calculus by way of the embargo had its intended effect. The diplomacy that proceeded simultaneously with the embargo, however, revealed that the effect might be produced by other means. Each belligerent appeared amenable to relenting if doing so would involve the U.S. in hostilities against its enemy. Macon’s Act repealed immediately the non-intercourse act of the preceding year, but provided further that if either Britain or France should “revoke or modify her edicts as that they shall cease to violate the neutral commerce of the United States,” then non-intercourse would “at the end of three months revive against the nation which had not revoked its edicts” (quoted in Adams 1921, v. 1, 297).<sup>7</sup> The act was essentially one of commercial reciprocity in exchange for the prospect, if not the promise, of U.S. co-belligerency. Within the three-month window lay U.S. hopes that the prospect would not really happen.

The story of how, partly in consequence of the Macon’s Act and despite the hope it embodied, the United States became embroiled in war with Britain cannot be recounted here. It suffices to observe that the next experiment with reciprocity was different. The Reciprocity Act of March 3, 1815, following by less than a month the Senate’s ratification of the Treaty of Ghent to conclude the war, was less cunning in design than Macon’s Act, as befitted a moment that was less immediately perilous. It anticipated the reciprocal relinquishment, not of blockade and embargo, but merely of high protection for shipping interests (Setser 1937, 185).

---

<sup>7</sup> See also Stanwood (1903, v. 1, 120) and Setser (1937, 169).

Even by 1815, protection for shipping was longstanding. In Congress's third act, in 1789, it had levied tonnage duties of 6 cents on American-owned ships, 30 cents on American-built ships that were partly or wholly owned by foreigners, and 50 cents on all other ships. It had stiffened the discrimination in 1804 by an act imposing "light money" (connoting the purpose of maintaining lighthouses) equal to an additional 50 cents on all foreign-built ships entering U.S. ports (Johnson et al. 1915, 296-297). Coincident with protection, American shipping grew apace, at least up to 1807. In 1790, the total tonnage of ships engaged in U.S. foreign trade was 603,825, of which 58.6 percent was in U.S.-owned vessels; by 1807, the total had nearly doubled and the proportion in U.S. vessels had risen to 92.7% (Johnson et al. 1915, 28, table 45). But eight years later, with shipping prostrated by interdiction, embargo, and, finally, war with Britain, Congress did not look toward sustained discrimination in tonnage duties or light money to revive the industry at the war's end. It looked instead toward the reciprocal dismantling of discrimination.

The Reciprocity Act of March 3, 1815, rather than first abolishing restrictive legislation altogether and then re-imposing it on one country pending favorable legislation by another (as Macon's Act had done), promised simply to abolish discriminatory duties on the tonnage of a partner's ships as compared to U.S. ships, and on merchandise imported in a partner's ships as compared to U.S. ships, pending a reciprocal act by that partner (Setser 1937, 184-185; 3 *U.S. Stat.* 224). In short, it offered reciprocal national treatment in shipping. The partner's reciprocal act could be embodied either in domestic legislation or in a treaty. Congress acted to "revive and continue in force" the Reciprocity Act of 1815 on January 7, 1824 (4 *U.S. Stat.* 2-3).<sup>8</sup> These two acts, and the treaties and debates spawned by them, framed the relationship between protectionism and reciprocity during Henry Carey's formative third decade.

Hezekiah Niles saw the relationship as one of cause and effect. In editorializing on the act of January 7, 1824, he also saw bitter irony: the merchants who had established themselves under the shelter of discriminating duties, and who had become able to survive without them, were now clamoring for reciprocal freedom to ply their trade in foreign ports without such duties – while also opposing protective tariffs on merchandise.

---

<sup>8</sup> See *Niles' Weekly Register*, Jan. 10, 1824.

“Protection established them,” observed Niles, “enabled them to compete with others of all nations, and built them up so strongly, that they were able to relinquish it in favor of all who would meet them on ‘*terms of reciprocity*.’”<sup>9</sup> But if reciprocity was beneficent, as Niles agreed it was, then why should the shipping interest alone enjoy the benefits? Why not the manufacturers of merchandise? In order to enlarge the scope of reciprocity, the protective system should first be enlarged. Protection had “caused” reciprocity in shipping, according to Niles, so “let it produce (and it will produce it, if permitted) the same effect as to agriculture and manufactures.”<sup>10</sup>

Niles’s argument appropriated reciprocity for the rhetorical purposes of protectionism. Henry Clay advanced a step beyond Niles, appropriating reciprocity as a policy tool, not just a rhetorical one, for implementing the “American System.”

The system, as Clay conceived it, served foreign policy objectives as much as domestic economic ones. The drama of Macon’s Act, and President Madison’s efforts to cajole Britain and France into respecting U.S. neutrality, played out against the background of the disintegration of the Spanish empire; at that moment, Britain and the U.S., “like two vultures,” by Henry Adams’s account, “hovered over the expiring empire snatching at the morsels they most coveted” (Adams 1921, v. 1, 305). The moment began during Henry Clay’s early career in the U.S. Senate and continued into his terms as Speaker of the House and Secretary of State. To Clay, the American System was equally, and indeed originally, a means of drawing the whole hemisphere into the United States’ orbit and extracting it from Britain and Europe’s. In place of the “stupendous system of colonial despotism” that the Spanish-American provinces had long suffered, they would as independent countries be “animated by an American feeling, and guided by an American policy.”<sup>11</sup> They would “obey the laws of the system of the New World ... in contradistinction to that of Europe.”<sup>12</sup>

The protectionist pillar of the American System was not only consistent with the foreign-policy pillar. Each, as Clay saw it, bolstered the other. Although U.S.

---

<sup>9</sup> “Equal Rights and Reciprocity.” *Niles’ Weekly Register*, Jan 10, 1824, 25, 643, p. 289.

<sup>10</sup> “Equal Rights and Reciprocity,” *Niles’ Weekly Register*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 15<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup>, Sess. (1818), pp. 1477, 1482.

<sup>12</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 15<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup>, Sess. (1818), p. 1482.

manufacturers required protection from British and European imports, Clay presumed they could export their products to Spanish America, where the U.S. had the advantage of proximity as well as an active merchant marine – provided U.S. ships were allowed to enter their ports on equal terms with foreign rivals.<sup>13</sup> Besides, if the Spanish-American countries looked to the United States for models of their institutions, they could be expected to do the same for their imports. In return, Spanish America offered the United States precious metals, cocoa, coffee, cochineal, sugar, and assorted other articles of which, by Clay’s calculations, less than two percent competed with U.S. products.<sup>14</sup> In short, Spanish America would be a bulwark against British and European anti-Republicanism as well as a “vent” for surplus manufactures and grain, trading in return raw materials and consumables that presented no threat to U.S. producers.

The qualification that U.S. ships would have to enter Spanish-American ports on equal terms with foreign rivals was a crucial one. Under a treaty of 1810, Brazil had afforded Britain explicit and exclusive commercial privileges, and from nearly everywhere else the U.S. *chargés d’affaires* reported anxiously their suspicions that similar arrangements were being concocted (Rippy 1929, 128 and *passim*). The policy of the United States, therefore, articulated by John Quincy Adams as Secretary of State to President Monroe – and pursued vigorously by Clay, beginning 1825, as Secretary of State to Adams – was to resist all such privileges. The U.S. disclaimed them for itself and insisted they should not be granted to others. Thus Adams directed his *chargé* in Buenos Aires to “strenuously maintain the right of the United States to be treated in every respect on the footing of the most favoured; or as it is more properly expressed, the most friendly nation ... and should you negotiate a Treaty of Commerce you will make that principle the foundation of all its provisions” (Manning 1925, v. 1, 191). Having assumed Adams’s former office, Clay warned his *chargé* in Brazil that “France and Great Britain will probably strive to obtain for themselves peculiar advantages as those which her Commerce has so long enjoyed with Portugal ... You will resist, firmly, and constantly, any concessions to the Commerce or Navigation of either of those two powers, which are not equally extended to the Commerce and Navigation of the United

---

<sup>13</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 15<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess. (1818), p. 1485.

<sup>14</sup> *Annals of Congress*, 15<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess. (1818), p. 1484, 1486.

States” (Manning 1925, v. 1, 238). Reciprocal guarantees of most-favored-nation treatment in both shipping and merchandise trade, and wherever feasible the stronger guarantee of national treatment in shipping (but *not* in merchandise trade, where national treatment would imply free trade), achieved the aims articulated by Adams and Clay in a manner entirely concordant with protectionism.

During Clay’s four-year tenure at the State Department, and under his instructions, U.S. plenipotentiaries signed seven reciprocity treaties (with Central America, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, Great Britain, the Hanseatic Republics, Prussia, and Brazil) that were later ratified – a rapid pace, considering that the average rate over the entire nineteenth century was about one per year (Allen and Meardon 2007, 48-51). The connection between protectionism and reciprocity was well established in both doctrine and politics.

In the generation thereafter, while the Whig Party that sprang from the Adams-Clay faction remained committed to protectionist doctrine, the enthusiasm of the partisans and doctrinaires for reciprocity waned. The reasons were multiple: support for reciprocity arrangements was sometimes politically inexpedient when the administration initiating them was that of another party, as it was for at least twenty-four (and arguably more) of the next thirty-two years; particular articles in a reciprocity arrangement *apart* from those stipulating most-favored-nation or national treatment were sometimes objectionable (as had been the article of the Jay Treaty concerning the West Indies trade); and Whigs observed that some reciprocity arrangements, like that of 1846 with New Granada (formerly Colombia) permitting free passage over the Isthmus of Panama, would facilitate U.S. territorial expansion in areas where slavery would likely be permitted.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Henry Carey’s observations from his youth into his early adulthood were

---

<sup>15</sup> Holt (1999, 91-92) describes how apprehensions of the expansion of U.S. slave territories entered into debates within the Whig party from 1836 to 1840. Northerners, naturally, harbored the greatest apprehensions, and Daniel Webster was most adept at articulating (and fomenting) them. But even Henry Clay, a Kentuckian and a slave owner, was compelled to accommodate the apprehensions in order to advance his presidential prospects in 1840. The most pressing issue of expansion at the moment was the annexation of Texas by joint resolution of Congress. Arguing that annexation would “would only strengthen the abolitionist movement and thereby endanger the Union” (95), Clay maneuvered to bury the resolution (96).

that reciprocity and protectionism could, in principle and often in practice, fit together comfortably.

On the other hand, notwithstanding the influence of Mathew Carey, when Henry Carey began to study and write political economy in earnest he was not yet a protectionist.

### **Carey's early system: *The Principles of Political Economy***

Before 1835, Henry Carey was first a superintendent, then a minor partner, then, beginning in 1821, the leading partner in the publishing firm his father built (Elder 1880, 31-32). He retired in 1835 to devote his energies to political economy. A short while later, in 1837, he published the first volume of his *Principles of Political Economy* (1837-40), a work he completed with the third volume in 1840. "Up to this time," writes his biographer, "Mr. Carey had been, as he supposed, a Free Trader" (Elder 1880, 26).

Carey's free-trade orientation appears here and there in his *Principles*, but it is not the main line of argument. His purpose is to dismantle the distribution theory of British classical economics circa the first third of the nineteenth century. The theory, Carey averred, was wrong in holding the relation between the interests of land on one hand, and capital and labor on the other, to be antagonistic – and wrong again to suppose that, regardless of the rent paid for land, the long-term prospects for labor were no better than subsistence.

According to Carey, the long-run prospects for labor, and everyone else, depends on proximity and communication among people. This was Carey's fundamental idea. "The tendency to association is natural to man"; the more extensively he associates with others, "the more advantageously can he devote his time to the production of those commodities which are included under the term wealth" (1837-40, v. 2, 13-14). Although population growth impels people to cultivate poorer soils, as David Ricardo supposed, they are better off nonetheless because a larger population enables them to devote a smaller portion of their collective efforts to their collective security (v. 2, 15). Security is essential for capital accumulation; capital is essential for increasing labor's productivity; labor's productivity determines its rewards; and so, "consequently, as

cultivation is extended, the labourer has it in his power to retain a constantly increasing proportion of the fruits of his labour” (v. 2, 18). Ricardo’s errors were to suppose, first, that the portion of land last employed is less productive due to the necessity of cultivating ever poorer soils; and second, that rent was a payment for lands whose “original and indestructible powers” are large when the poorer soils are brought into use. Carey claimed to the contrary, first, that as poorer soils are taken under cultivation, “the portion last employed’ *is* more productive,” because the same population growth that impels its cultivation also fosters the accumulation of capital, which makes the land and the labor employed upon it more useful (v. 1, 202); second, that rent is not paid for “original and indestructible powers” at all, but rather for “advantages of situation” where people associate numerously and effectively (v. 1, 187-212). Such advantages are not “original” but circumstantial. Due either to bad luck or bad policies (or better policies elsewhere), they are indeed destructible. “The *natural* advantages of the site of Carthage, of Alexandria, of Venice, are as great now as at any former period, but they cannot command rents, nor have they value. ... While labour and capital were employed [there], they were valuable, but that value is transferred to the cities of those countries where labour is most advantageously employed – where capital accumulates – and where the inferior soils are cultivated – the United States and England” (v. 2, 191).

Rent, therefore, is not to be regretted by anyone. It is “but a sign of value” (1837-40, v. 1, 202). Where rent is highest, capital and labor can bear it easily, because it comprises a smaller share of a higher income. Population growth, likewise, is not a bane but a boon: “it is precisely as population increases, and as cultivation is extended over inferior soils, that the proportion of the landlord diminishes, and that the labourer becomes free and independent, and is enabled to live as becomes a man” (v. 1, 195).

Carey offered up his *Principles* as an attempt “to controvert doctrines supported by the authority of Malthus, Ricardo, McCulloch, and Torrens,” to the end of illuminating “the *laws* by which the operations of man are governed” (1837-40, v. 1, v, xii). The work does not appear on its face to be polemical. It amounts nevertheless to an excellent theoretical justification of the Whig program in opposition to the second Jackson and the Van Buren administrations of 1833 to 1841. Carey’s portrayal of harmony among the interests of landowners, capitalists, and laborers was consistent with

the Whigs' hold on the votes of the economic and social elite even as they campaigned (most famously in the "log cabin and hard cider" presidential campaign of 1840) for the votes of Americans of more humble means (Holt 1999, 116, 107). His celebration of "association" and the market transactions it entailed dovetailed with the Whigs' embrace, in Michael Holt's (1999, 115) words, "of those who wanted to expand the market sector because they had already enjoyed its benefits or hoped to do so in the future." Democrats, by contrast, appealed generally to a "coalition of those still outside the market economy who feared its spread and those who had experienced and been victimized by market mechanisms" (115). To those tempted to join the coalition, Carey warned that "restraining the employment of labor and of capital" could only "impair their power of their physical, moral, intellectual, and political condition" (1837-40, v. 3, 256).

The general policy recommendation of the *Principles* was for "maintenance of perfect security of person and property, and of perfect freedom in the employment of both" (1837-40, v. 2, 465). Accordingly, "existing restraints upon action or upon the employment of capital, should be abated" (v. 2, 465) – with the important qualification that "violent action, even in the removal of restraints, tends to produce disturbance and insecurity" (v. 2, 466) and should be avoided. Two particular questions to which both the recommendation and the qualification pertained were slavery and the tariff.

Regarding slavery, the desirability of "perfect security of person" (if not of property) implied the undesirability of treating people like chattel. In that sense, Carey opposed slavery; but like most Americans circa 1840, including the majority of the Whig Party, he did not seek its abolition by political means. The reason lay in his admonition against "violent action." Emancipation by means of government "interferences," whether immediate or gradual, would be "positively injurious" to the "physical, moral, and political condition of the slaves" (1837-40, v. 3, 197). Indeed, at least for the present, "the man who really desires to benefit the race, must retain his control over them" (v. 3, 204). In this Carey saw no paradox. His premise was that slavery was essentially labor in a degraded condition – different only in degree, not essence, from the condition of low wages. Given the premise, his logic followed the same lines as his critique of Ricardo. Real emancipation of slaves required "rendering them more valuable" (v. 3, 204). Like conventional labor, slave labor is more valuable inasmuch as it is combined with capital.

Any threat to the security of the slave owner diminishes his incentive and ability to accumulate capital; if he is allowed to retain control unmolested, the accumulation of capital continues. Slaves become more productive, hence more valuable. Slaves in the cities soon find opportunities for “hiring their own time, and paying their owners a fixed sum for the privilege,” thereby taking “early steps” to emancipation (v. 3, 202). As for field slaves, “the owners will find, as in time past they have found ... that more may be obtained by granting to individuals the privilege of cultivating a certain number of acres, giving a certain portion of the product to the master, than from working them, as at present, in gangs” (v. 3, 203). From then on, “the progress to freedom will be rapid” (v. 3, 203). In short,

Let the United States continue at peace, and let the growth of capital continue at its present rate, and it is not more certain that the sun will rise than it is that it will become the interest of the owners to pursue a course that will lead ultimately to the abolition of slavery. By it the slaves will be gradually prepared for freedom, and when it comes, they will appreciate its advantages. (v. 3, 207)

Regarding the tariff, Carey was less expansive. There was, after all, no immediate occasion for expansiveness: Henry Clay’s Compromise Tariff of 1833 had provided for a gradual reduction, over nine and a half years, of the system of high protection first put in place in 1824. Numerous goods would be added to the free list, and all others would be reduced by stages to twenty percent ad valorem in 1842. The outcome was largely satisfactory to free traders; and while it was not so to protectionists, including Clay himself, they “would not dare to disturb it through fear of a worse fate” (Stanwood 1903, v.1, 398-399).

Another reason for Carey’s reserve on the tariff question, however, may be that up to 1840 he had not given it much thought. Although he rejected most of Ricardo’s distribution theory, he accepted the Ricardian trade doctrine whole cloth, applying its conclusions without inquiring much into its foundations. Thus, according to Carey, Clay’s compromise of rolling back the restrictive trade legislation of the preceding decade and a half was forged simply because “the impolicy of such restraints soon

become obvious” (1837-40, v. 3, 223) – a surprising elision of political history as well as political economy. The duties that remained, he suggested elsewhere in the work, had effects that were easily described. As Carey was writing the first of his three volumes, for instance, the duty on imported iron stood at thirty dollars per ton. “Were that duty abolished,” he remarked, “the price of iron would probably be twenty dollars less than at present, and the labourer who desired to purchase it would obtain a larger quantity in exchange for a given amount of labour” (v. 1, 207). The gist of Carey’s remark was identical to Ricardo’s argument that if government interference required him to exchange, for an imported pipe of wine, a commodity that cost 105 days of labor instead of one that cost 100 days, then “the produce of five days’ labour is lost to me” (Ricardo 1821, 214). The freer was trade, the greater was the quantity of goods obtainable for a given quantity of labor, or, equivalently, the smaller was the quantity of labor required to obtain a given quantity of goods. Apart from Carey’s lesser depth of exposition, the only substantial difference on the subject between him and Ricardo was that Carey supposed the laborer would, in the very long run as well as the short, be able to reap the rewards of his greater efficiency – Ricardo’s notion of a “natural rate of wages” near subsistence having fallen together with the rest of his distribution theory (Ricardo 1821, 52-53; Carey 1837-40, v. 1, 187-212).

Carey’s qualified agreement with Ricardo in trade doctrine extended to their common eschewal of “violent action.” Ricardo, of course, had devoted an entire chapter to “Sudden Changes in the Channels of Trade,” warning of the “considerable distress” caused by compelling people and capital to change their employments (1821, 175-6). Some capital could not change its employment even with difficulty: “it is often impossible to divert the machinery which may have been erected for one manufacture to the purposes of another” (177). The same conservative temperament that led Carey to disclaim the political abolition of slavery led him to a similar disclaimer in trade policy. To his fellow advocates of free trade, especially the more devout ones, he admonished that “justice, as well as the interest of the nation at large, requires that all changes be gradual, in order that the desired improvement be attained with the least destruction of existing capital” (1837-40, v. 3, 256-7).

Carey's agreement with Ricardo on trade policy signaled, in that one respect, his disagreement with Henry Clay. But it was one of only a very few inconsistencies between Carey's *Principles* and Clay's platform, and a minor one at that. Clay professed to be a protectionist while Carey, in the 1830s, was a free trader; but they agreed on the expediency of the Compromise Tariff of 1833 and neither would entertain tampering with it. In 1837, Clay wrote that he "supposed and hoped that the Compromise Act settled and terminated all our unhappy disputes," that he wished it "faithfully executed," and that he had "no purpose of disturbing its provisions."<sup>16</sup> In the same vein Carey wrote in his *Principles*, "Happily, the question of protection is now settled forever" (1837-40, v. 3, 224).

The claim that Carey's *Principles* was a theoretical justification of the Whig program from the Compromise Tariff to the election of 1840 may be sharpened. In relation to a party riven by sectional differences – most enduringly between the Northern faction that cast a jaundiced eye at slavery, stood solidly for protection, and favored Daniel Webster, and the Southern and border-state faction that accommodated competing views on the slavery and tariff questions and favored Clay – the *Principles* was oriented toward the Clay faction. But politics change and so do the economic doctrines that serve them. Not long after the turn of the decade, as Northern abolitionism grew more restive, Carey's reaction to it became more determined. The moment soon arrived to reconsider the Compromise Tariff. When it did, the trajectories of the Clay-Whig political program and Carey's economic thought grew even nearer.

### **Carey's mature system: *The Past, the Present, and the Future***

When Clay disclaimed any intention of disturbing the Compromise Tariff, he meant that he would honor the timetable of reduced duties through its full term to the summer of 1842. Beyond that, the compromise required that "such duties should be laid for the purpose of raising such revenue as might be necessary for an economical administration of the government." When 1842 arrived, the large differences of interpretation of that requirement came clearly into view. Henry Clay contended, "with entire confidence, that

---

<sup>16</sup> Clay to Francis T. Brooke, Dec. 10, 1837. In Hopkins et al. (1959-91), v. 9, p. 100.

it is perfectly consistent with the provisions of the compromise act, to impose duties to any amount whatever, thirty, forty, or more per cent. subject to the single condition of an economical administration of the government” (Swain 1843, v. 2, 536). Under the circumstances, Clay did not think the provisions called for “the revival of a high protective tariff” (548) – but they called unquestionably for an increase. The protection afforded by the increase would be an incidental and happy advantage (549).

The circumstances in question were the precipitous decline of federal government revenue in the wake of the crisis of 1837. Revenue had fallen from over fifty million dollars in 1836 to under seventeen million by 1841. The budget deficit of the latter year, nearly ten million dollars, was over one-third of the value of government expenditures.<sup>17</sup> Democrats did not believe that “economical administration” called for an increase, but Whigs, who had taken control of the House, did. In August, 1842, they passed a tariff act with a scale of duties resembling approximately that of 1832, just prior to the Compromise Act (Stanwood 1903, v. 2, 27-30).

Henry Carey’s conversion to protectionism happened shortly after. Business revived in 1843; by 1844, the federal government budget was seven million dollars in surplus.<sup>18</sup> Even Frank W. Taussig, a skeptic in regards to protection, supposed in retrospect that the tariff might have played some positive role. By increasing profits in some industries, particularly cotton textiles and iron manufactures, it “may have been the signal for a general revival of confidence” (Taussig 1892, 120). But Taussig refused to go so far as to admit that the tariff was the cause of prosperity. Carey’s skepticism, by contrast, fell away unreservedly.

Accounts of how it happened differ. According to Carey’s friend and biographer, William Elder, “in the closing months of 1842, seeing the wonderful change effected by the Protective tariff then in operation,” and in conversation with John Calhoun, Carey suggested “there must be some great law that would explain the fact that we always grew rich under Protection, whereas we always ended in bankruptcy under Free Trade.” One or two years later, “there came to him as with a flash of lightning the conviction that the

---

<sup>17</sup> Carter et al. (2006), Series Ea584-Ea586.

<sup>18</sup> Carter et al. (2006), Series Ea586.

whole Ricardo-Malthusian system is an error, and that with it must fall the system of British Free Trade” (Elder 1880, 26).

According to Carey’s nephew and intellectual heir, Henry Carey Baird, the epiphany came in two parts. The lightning flash illuminating the beneficence of the protective tariff happened in 1844, consistent with Elder’s account. But the full catalog of errors of the “Ricardo-Malthusian system,” the vision of the true system that should supplant it, and the reconciliation of his new protectionist inclinations with economic theory, hardening them into firm conviction – all this occurred to Carey later, in a daydream, in 1847.

Lying in bed one morning, picturing to himself the settlers on the sides of the hills, moving down into the valleys and approaching each other, as wealth, power, and civilization grew, he realized the vital importance of bringing the consumer to the side of the producer, and, as he said to me, “I jumped out of bed, and, dressing myself, was a protectionist from that hour” (Baird 1891, 171)

Before the daydream, of course, and even before the lightning flash, Carey had believed Ricardo’s system was erroneous. (It may even be said, given his early emphasis on the “principle of association,” that he had believed in the “importance of bringing the consumer to the side of the producer.”) The difference between before and after was that, even so, he had accepted parts of the system: the premise that people cultivate ever less fertile land as their numbers increase, for instance (although he had denied that the burden of rent on workers and capitalists would increase correspondingly), and the doctrine that free trade, by permitting specialization, increases the productivity of labor (although he had denied that the long-run benefits would accrue only to the rentier). By 1847 Carey apprehended that the whole of Ricardo’s system was erroneous, even the foregoing parts.

The timing was propitious, in part because the Walker Tariff Act of July 1846 had just overturned the act of 1842 and set trade policy on a liberal course from which it did not deviate until the Civil War. “Strangely enough,” writes Dorfman (1946-59, v. 2, 799) dryly, Carey’s “inspiration came just as the tariff was being reduced.” In fact, the

important legislation of the moment was not just the tariff reduction. Liberalization of trade was one part of the program of President Polk and his allies in Congress (where, after the election of 1844, Democrats controlled both chambers). Another was territorial expansion. Congress had declared war on Mexico in May 1846, a month and a half before passing the tariff act. To its opponents, among whom Carey counted himself, the Mexican war was tainted indelibly by the slavery question. When Carey took up his pen in 1847 to repudiate entirely Ricardo's system and articulate the theoretical grounding of protectionism, he did so, as he had done in the *Principles*, in a manner that also showed the relevance of his system to the slavery debate. Such was the intensity of his inspiration and the urgency of the moment that this massive task took him all of ninety days (Dorfman 1946-59, v.2, 799). The result was *The Past, the Present, and the Future* ([1847] 1872), the work that established the foundation for his thought in the remainder of his career.

In it, Carey's critique of Ricardo grew more comprehensive and more heated. Ricardo was a "demagogue," his system "one of discords." As for the system's lessons, "the sooner they shall come to be discarded, the better will it be for the interests of landlord and tenant, manufacturer and mechanic, and mankind at large" ([1847] 1872, 74-75). Carey's competing system, consistent with his *Principles of Political Economy*, denied any naturally discordant interests. The system was reflected, Carey held, in the true history of land settlement and human progress around the world. History unfolded as he apprehended his daydream: "the settlers on the sides of the hills, moving down into the valleys."

To Carey, the histories of the United States, Mexico, South America, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Egypt, Asia, and Australia were all marked by the same tendencies of settlement ([1847] 1872, 24-25). The tendencies had often been frustrated by war and unenlightened policy – but supposing they were not, they could be represented, abstracting from particularities of place, by the progress of the "Happy Valley" (284).

The first settlers begin their cultivation of the Happy Valley "on the sides of the hills by which it was shut in from the world" ([1847] 1872, 284). The soil they work on is poor; the rich land, near the banks of the stream below, is thick with vegetation beyond

their means to clear. “By slow degrees we find them, however, working downward, and all looking inward toward the banks of the little stream” (284). As their population increases their commerce with one another grows and their employments diversify: “farmers’ sons become blacksmiths and tanners, and shoemakers, and tailors, and hatters, and carpenters, and masons, and weavers” (284). Together they garner the knowledge and material means of extending their cultivation toward the rich land. As they do, their wealth and population grow further. At last, having cultivated the land at the bottom, they reapply their now-formidable efforts toward improving the poorer land above, and their settlement spreads to the top of the hill (286).

With the farmer in close proximity to the blacksmith and “other mechanics” throughout hill and vale, so that he is “in the habit of daily intercourse with them” and they with him, the community’s knowledge and power grow apace ([1847] 1872, 285-286). “From day to day, and hour to hour, the power of man over land, and over himself, is seen to grow” (286). The community has become “perfect in itself, and capable of advancing in civilization were it to have intercourse with none other in the world (284).

A bird’s-eye view of the Happy Valley and its distant environs witnesses countless communities of the same kind advancing similarly. Abstracting still further from geographical particularities, the communities are “an infinite number of little pyramids, with heights proportioned to their breadth and depth” ([1847] 1872, 286). Specifically, by broadening and deepening the diversification of employment and extent of cultivation, the community’s knowledge and wealth, as well as its physical habitation, grow ever higher. Call it Carey’s “pyramid theory” of development.

To Carey, the pyramid theory, together with the corroborating evidence he proffered from history all around the world, supplanted entirely Ricardo’s system. Rent grows with the progress of population not because people resort to land of lesser fertility, as Ricardo said, but because they amass the knowledge and power to cultivate land of greater fertility. “Improvement of cultivation results from the increase of wealth. The more spades and ploughs, and the better their quality, the larger is the return to labour, and the greater is the rent” ([1847] 1872, 73). While rising rent enriches landlords, the conditions giving it rise enrich laborers even more (73-74). This last claim was already in Carey’s *Principles of Political Economy*, of course. But Carey reckoned that *The Past*,

*the Present, and the Future* rebuilt it from a vaster and firmer foundation that was more antithetical to Ricardian principles.

The most notable difference in the new book from both Ricardo's system and Carey's earlier views was its implication for U.S. trade policy. The indispensable requirement for the advancement of wealth was concentration of population and diversification of employment. Were it not for a "disturbing force of prodigious power" ([1847] 1872, 470) – namely, Great Britain's drive "to be made the workshop of the world at any cost" (111), which entails driving British workers "from the cultivation of her own soil to the fashioning of products of other soils," (464) – the requirement would be met. Under the sway of that power, it is not. Americans buy British rather than domestic manufactures. Not buying domestic manufactures, they have scant manufacturing employment. Absent manufacturing employment, they cannot cultivate land intensively, so neither can they concentrate their numbers geographically. At the first opportunity, those who would otherwise be manufacturers fly off to farm virgin but poorer lands on more distant "pyramids" – leaving the old pyramids, like the the new ones, narrow and short. Those who would be blacksmiths, tanners, and shoemakers near the rich meadows of Pennsylvania and Virginia scratch out a living instead from soils of Oregon and Texas (469). To Carey, the solution was clear: "we must arrest the progress of depopulation and promote concentration on rich soils, and that can only be done with increased protection" (469).

The protectionist prescription carried some qualifications. One, curiously, was that as a means of raising revenue, Carey considered the tariff (or any other kind of indirect taxation) a form of "plunder" ([1847] 1872, 466). He proposed protection "by aid of *a tariff that is not for revenue*" (469, italics his). Revenue was raised ideally from "taxes demanded directly from the owner of the property himself" (469). After the tariff had been allowed to do its work, Carey expected that "every obstacle to the establishment of perfect freedom will disappear, and the tariff will pass out of existence" (471).

"Perfect freedom," it may be recalled, described the community that could continue advancing "were it to have intercourse with none other in the world." A second qualification was that although such a community could get along without external trade, Carey did not mean that it *should* get along without trade. The community would

naturally associate with others; indeed, that is how states are formed. “In time, twenty, thirty, fifty, or a hundred of these little communities ... are brought into connection with each other: and these numerous little pyramids now form a great pyramid, or State” ([1847] 1872, 288). Trade among states would evolve similarly:

The State, thus formed, is neighbour to another little State; and with the further growth of population and wealth intercourse arises, and a new union is now formed; each, however, still preserving its local organization and its laws, so far as regards the interest of its own people, but adopting such as may be deemed equitable in relation to those of their own State with those of the other. (289)

Left unsettled was what form such intercourse would take and what would be the flavor of the laws governing it. Carey did not care to settle those questions, perhaps, because they did not seem pressing. Of more immediate concern in 1847 was the relationship among states under the far less ideal conditions of war.

With such an emphatic denunciation of “the progress of depopulation” of the East, one might consider Carey’s “bitterness” at the Mexican War unsurprising (Smith 1951, 23). It was, after all, in both cause and effect, a war for westward expansion. But Carey’s theoretical grounding of his opposition to the war was nuanced enough to resist designation as an “anti-expansionist” argument. Generic anti-expansionism would have been inconsistent at once with Carey’s staunch appreciation of property rights and with the pyramid theory.

“All that is needed for the settlement of the great slavery question,” Carey averred, echoing his earlier view in the *Principles*, “is the observance of the most perfect respect for the rights of property” ([1847] 1872, 370). By this he did not mean that state laws allowing slavery should be respected where they exist but proscribed in new states and territories. “It is supposed by many that it is necessary to pass laws to prevent the extension of slavery over new territories,” he acknowledged, by way of disagreeing. Such laws would be an “unnecessary interference” (366). Only a change in material conditions could put an end to slavery. Without such a change, the political abolition of

slavery anywhere would probably be ineffective. It would certainly infringe on property and undermine security.

What was more, Carey expected that the material changes producing slavery's eventual demise could actually be fostered by territorial expansion, including the expansion of slave territories. The pyramid theory did not suggest that expansion was necessarily detrimental – only that it should be deferred until the rich soils near at hand had been cultivated. After that was achieved, pioneers might migrate outward. Then, and no sooner, their migration would amount to a beneficial expansion of the “great pyramid, or State” surmounting all the little ones.

So it was happening in the United States, Carey argued. The Southern planter had cultivated increasingly fertile land with increasing capital intensiveness, and had grown wealthy. “With this increase of wealth,” he explained, “the planter has acquired the ability to seek more fertile soils, and we observe him, accompanied by the black race whose services he employs, regularly descending the slope from the mountains of Virginia and Kentucky towards the better lands in the vicinity of the Gulf of Mexico; and with every step in their progress, the value of labour rises” ([1847] 1872, 361-2). As the value of labor rose, by the process Carey had described already in the *Principles*, the institution of slavery proceeded gradually toward extinction.

The foregoing rationale would seem, on a first pass, to present Carey as friendly toward colonization and annexation. In regards to the annexation of Texas and the ensuing war, however, he was decidedly unfriendly. In this matter, as in the matter of his antagonism toward political abolitionism, he justified his position with reference to his theory. The problem with the annexation of Texas, or all of Mexico for that matter, was that it was another political measure running in advance of the material changes that alone could justify it. Seen through the theory's prism, it was an act by the “great pyramid” to wrest violently into the union a smaller pyramid before it had developed enough to warrant its inclusion. By superseding the organic decisions of the smaller pyramids with the fiat of the larger one, the act disregarded the supremacy of “local organization and laws.” By effecting prematurely an economic union with a smaller pyramid that was scantily populated, it impeded geographical concentration. “The peaceful annexation of Mexico would be a great work,” wrote Carey, “but the

accomplishment of that object requires spades and steam engines, not swords and cannon” ([1847] 1872, 413).

Carey’s pyramid theory was an elaborate justification of his newly acquired protectionism, but it was also more. It justified not just one plank but instead the entire Whig platform – especially as advanced by the Clay faction, or more generally the border-state faction – while positioning protectionism as the central plank that secured the rest.<sup>19</sup> Social conservatism, sanctity of property rights, industrial development, subordination but not surrender of states’ rights to unionism, anti-abolitionism yet opposition to the annexation of Texas and the Mexican war: it was a theory of all this, too. So it might be expected that the theory spoke also to reciprocity.

### **Carey on reciprocity in the antebellum period**

In fact, before *The Past, the Present, and the Future*, Carey had already spoken to the question of reciprocity in his *Principles*. Referring to the protective tariff of 1824 and the reciprocity act of the same year, Carey had written, “at the very time that the passage of the tariff indicated a change of system, offers were made to all the nations of the world to abolish all discriminating duties on shipping, thus showing the tendency towards free trade, and freedom of action” (1837-40, 224). Notably, beyond approbation of the benefits for the shipping interest, his reason for touting reciprocity appears to have been the opposite of Clay’s. Clay saw reciprocity as consistent with, even a way of promoting, protectionism; Carey saw in it a “tendency” toward free trade. But that was before Carey renounced free trade. After the renunciation, what happened to his view on reciprocity?

The debate about reciprocity from the late 1840s to the mid 1850s related predominantly to trade with British North American Provinces, consisting of Canada, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. Simultaneously with the liberal Walker Tariff Act of 1846 came the more dramatic repeal of the British Corn Laws, and, in the few years following, Britain’s more comprehensive

---

<sup>19</sup> Although he does not mention reciprocity, Smith (1951) offers the outstanding treatment to date of the intersection of Carey’s political economy and his politics, including the identification of his thought with the particular interests of border-state Whigs (p. 42 and *passim*).

adoption of a free-trade policy. Free trade was hard on British North America: it implied the dismantling of preferences granted to British imports from the colonies. Exports of wheat and flour from the North American colonies fell by over forty percent in 1848 compared to the previous year when the full suspension of the Corn Laws took effect, and timber exports fared no better. The colonies were afflicted by a severe depression (Cross 1971, 4-6). Their inhabitants looked anxiously to the United States for relief.

Great Britain had offered at least some limited means of relief. The Enabling Act of 1846 gave the colonies discretion to levy duties that were not necessarily preferential to the mother country; Canada and the Maritime colonies alike took the opportunity to equalize tariffs on British and U.S. imports at low rates (Hart 2003, 46). But any substantial boost to U.S. demand for Canadian exports would have had to entail U.S. reductions of its own tariff barriers. Notwithstanding the Walker Act, those barriers remained substantial: coal, firewood, and manufactures of fur paid thirty percent; hewn and sawed timber, fish, wheat, Indian corn, oats, barley, rye, and furs dressed on the skin paid twenty percent (9 *U.S. Stat.*, 42)

One method of removing the barriers was by way of U.S. annexation of the colonies. The immediate impetus for annexation came from Canada. Cross's (1971, 9-12) evidence suggests that, although annexation was supported by only a minority in Canada (let alone in the Maritime provinces, which tended to be more loyalist), the minority was large and widespread, at least until economic conditions improved somewhat in 1849-1850. Indeed, the agitation for annexation was just large enough to add force to the other method of removing barriers: a reciprocal trade treaty. Lord Elgin, the Governor General from 1847, informed Britain's Colonial Office that "unless reciprocity of trade with the United States be established, these colonies must be lost to England" (cited in Cross 1971, 13). In the United States, some Southern senators who feared the consequences of bringing several new antislavery states into the Union came around to the same view: reciprocity would attenuate the push for annexation (Hart 2003, 47, 51). Beginning around 1850, reciprocity and not annexation was the salient question (Cross 1971, 12).

Lord Elgin was the British agent responsible for lobbying the United States government to agree to reciprocity, which course he pursued beginning 1849 (Hart 2002,

50-51). The treaty he negotiated in the course of five years eliminated import duties in both countries on several natural products of the land and sea, including hides, pelts, grain, timber, and fish; this provision was expected to benefit mainly Canada. The United States was enticed by other provisions that concerned not tariffs but expanded fishing and navigation rights in British North American waters (Robinson 1904, 31). Of interest here is Carey's role in the public debate about the treaty.

His role was one of opposition from an early stage. The monthly agricultural journal *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil* – a veritable serial homage to Carey published by his associate, John S. Skinner<sup>20</sup> – sounded the alarm about Canadian reciprocity years before the treaty was signed and ratified. In 1851 the journal referred to “the bill for the prostration of the agricultural interests of the Union, commonly known as the Reciprocity Bill.” The object of reciprocity was described, in one instance, as “admitting the products of Canada duty free, while the duties on those of our products that Canada required to purchase, as tobacco, cotton, &c. &c., are continued”;<sup>21</sup> in another, “to admit the products of this land duty free, in order that our land may be cheapened.”<sup>22</sup> The complaints are reducible, on one hand, to the unreciprocal, even conspiratorial, nature of the negotiations and the treaty's text; and, on the other, to its pernicious economic consequences. These were the complaints that Carey himself voiced before the treaty's signing and ratification, during its ten-year life, and afterwards to put down efforts to resuscitate it.

---

<sup>20</sup> Of Carey's association with Skinner and the journal, Elder (1883, v. 1, 27) says that Carey “raised the necessary funds for the establishment of *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil*, published by Mr. Skinner. For six years he furnished the leading articles and many of the minor ones.” Smith (1951, 31-32) elaborates along the same lines. As for Skinner, he acknowledged his reliance on Carey's writings and ideas. In October, 1848, he appended to one of several excerpts he had reprinted from *The Past, the Present, and the Future* a signal apology: “We should feel ashamed to draw so often from Mr. Carey's book, if we could elsewhere find so well presented the great truths which ought to be engraved on every farmer's mind” (v. 1, no. 4, October, pp. 255-256).

<sup>21</sup> *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil*, vol. 3, no. 11, May 1851, p. 656.

<sup>22</sup> *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil*, vol. 3, no. 5, Nov. 1850, p. 319.

In January through May of 1851, Skinner's journal published a series of essays by Carey folding his complaints about the proposed Canadian reciprocity into a more general indictment of U.S. trade policy under the Walker Act.<sup>23</sup> When republished the next year as a pamphlet, *The Working of British Free Trade* (1852), the essays' title and content alike amplified a trope Carey had used in *The Past, the Present, and the Future*. There he had insisted that "free trade" did not deserve its name, because the dismantling of trade barriers impeded rather than enhanced man's power to produce and trade things. Now he took the rhetorical step of conjoining the term "free trade" with an odious adjective, and italicizing it to boot. "*British free trade*," Carey scorned, "looks to limiting the [American] planter to a single market in which to sell his cotton, and a single market in which to purchase his cloth and linen" (1852, 38). The benefits would go to the British, who would have the power to set a low price for their imported cotton and high prices for their exported manufactures (7). This he endeavored to demonstrate with exhaustive argument punctuated liberally with statistics comparing the poor economic conditions of the post-Walker years with the bountiful ones of the four years prior.

But British free trade did worse than turn the terms of trade against America. Under its sway, the more grain Americans exported, the "more rapidly we exhaust the land, impoverish the farm, and weaken the State and the nation" (1852, 32). When, by dismantling tariff barriers, "the farmer of Ohio ... closes the furnace and drives away the miners and smelters of iron ore," moving those occupations and industries to Great Britain, he loses the domestic market for other things produced on his farm. "He ceases to *manufacture* his food into pork, and beef, and lard." Failing to raise pigs and cows, he also fails to make fertilizer for his land: "and then he exports his corn, and gives his land no manure, after which he runs away himself" (22-23).

The United States was not the only country that suffered thus from British free trade. Canada, fixed tighter to the British yoke, suffered more. Contrasting the large production of butter, cheese, and wool in Ohio, New York, and Vermont with the small production of the same goods in Upper Canada made sufficiently clear to Carey "the

---

<sup>23</sup> "The Prospect: Agricultural, Manufacturing, Commercial, and Financial, at the Opening of the Year 1851," by Henry Carey. In *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil*, vol. 3, nos. 7-11 (Jan.-May), 1851.

reason why the latter is compelled to beg for the admission of her products into the Union” (1852, 23). British free trade made Canadians hungry and cold. By substituting a merely distant market for a trans-oceanic one, reciprocity with the United States might prevent them from starving and freezing. But neither in Canada nor in the United States was reciprocity a substitute for the home market that could be secured by protection. In Canada it would be the smallest step, and in United States a violent deviation, from “the road to perfect freedom of trade” (40). Progress along that road required efforts “to bring the loom and the anvil to take their natural places by the side of the plough and the harrow” (40). British free trade kept them apart. At this moment Carey’s critique of reciprocity involved a straightforward application of the ideas he set down in *The Past, the Present, and the Future*, with perhaps a more determined tone. In very little time, as the reciprocity treaty gathered momentum and other circumstances loomed menacingly over the political debate, his tone grew more determined still.

The other circumstances were slavery and the growing bitterness of the surrounding controversy. It hardly needs to be mentioned that *The Working of British Free Trade* was not the best-selling publication of 1852, but it is worth recalling what was. Readers of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* numbering in the hundreds of thousands raised a “resistless tide of emotion that swept all before it” (Stowe and Stowe 1911, 160). Carey’s ability to make his argument heard, let alone accepted, required the tide’s force to be rechanneled away from abolitionism.

This he set out to accomplish in *The Slave Trade, Domestic and Foreign* (1853). Stowe’s readers were correct, Carey believed, to deplore Uncle Tom’s removal from Kentucky to the Deep South and to weep for his fate there. But as to the responsibility for that fate they should look not to the South but abroad:

The less the power of association in the Northern slave States, the more rapid must be the growth of the domestic slave trade, the greater must be the decline in the price of wheat, cotton, and sugar, the greater must be the tendency to the passage of men like Uncle Tom, and of women and children too, from the light labour of the North to the severe labour of the South and South-west – but the greater, as we are told, must be the prosperity of the people of England. (1853, 116)

To put it simply, the afflictions of the likes of Uncle Tom, and likewise of the shivering Canadians, were no accident. The case of the West Indies, both before *and after* the act of 1833 to abolish slavery in the British colonies, showed concretely the cases' similarity in both effect and origin. Just as by "rendering it necessary to send all the raw products of the land to a market far distant" the mother country had enervated Canada's land and made its workers poor, and just as liberal trade had done the same to the United States since 1846, so it had done to the West Indies. Consistent with his argument in the *Principles* a decade and a half earlier, Carey denied that it mattered whether slavery existed formally and by that name. What mattered was the condition of laborers. British free trade "ensured that the planter could exist, himself, only by overworking his people" (1853, 73, 76); thus it had promoted West Indian slavery before emancipation, and it had maintained slavery, in effect if not in name, after emancipation. As for the planter, "he was himself a slave to those by whom the labours of himself and his workmen were directed, and it would be unfair to attribute to him the extraordinary waste of life resulting necessarily from the fact that the whole people were limited to the labours of the field" (83). One should blame instead the British merchants and government, who, "by separating the consumer from the producer," maneuvered "to take to themselves three-fourths of the whole sales of the commodities consumed, while leaving but one-fourth to be divided between the land and labour that had provided it" (88).

Here, in its complete form, was Carey's project to build an intellectual foundation for the Whig Party's nation-wide coalescence around a conservative position on slavery and a protectionist one on trade policy. To Southern outward-looking agriculturalists and merchants, he aimed to show that protection not free trade would yield their prosperity; to Northern anti-slavery industrialists and smallholders, that protection not abolition would yield emancipation. To assuage each section's increasingly bitter feelings toward the other, he aimed further to redirect their antagonism to the real culprit for their complaints: Great Britain and its American agents.

Opposition to reciprocity with Canada was consistent with Carey's project, and even promoted it, in the same manner that advocacy of reciprocity a generation earlier

served Henry Clay's. But changing political circumstances changed the project. Eventually, though not immediately, they impelled changes in Carey's stand on reciprocity, too.

In 1854, the Canadian reciprocity treaty that Carey had been arguing against for at least three years became a reality. Thereafter the evidence of its effects was available to bolster Carey's argument or, less likely, to change his mind. More importantly, in the same year, the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri compromise barring slavery to the west of Missouri in all territories north of its southern border. The sectional reaction was so vituperative that the Whig Party as a national entity could not be sustained. It dissolved. To Carey, the urgent question that presented itself was the trade-policy orientation of the nascent Republican Party. The new party embraced, in addition to nearly all Whigs from Northern states and many like him from Border and Mid-Atlantic states, numerous erstwhile Democrats from the North with anti-slavery convictions. The latter faction tended toward free trade; their preference had to be squashed.

In fact, the combination of these circumstances only hardened Carey's opposition to reciprocity and did little to change the substance of his argument. Even the argument's connection to slavery remained useful. The Republican Party's opposition to the extension of slavery in violation of settled compromise did not imply advocacy of the political abolition of slavery where it already existed – a cause that Carey still believed should be combated. The West Indies, therefore, remained to Carey's mind a potent example of antislavery sentiment badly misapplied and British free trade disastrously introduced, and one that carried implications for reciprocity with Canada. In his *Principles of Social Science*,<sup>24</sup> Carey wrote,

---

<sup>24</sup> The immediate purpose of Carey's *Principles of Social Science* (1858) is of only tangential interest to the subject at hand. It was to demonstrate that the system of political economy he delineated in *The Past, the Present, the Future* and elsewhere was grounded in the same laws that governed the physical sciences. As Carey stated it in his preface, his intention was to show "that there existed but a single system of laws – those instituted for the government of matter, in the form of clay and sand, proving to be the same by which that matter was governed, when it took the form of man, or of communities of men" (vi). Put briefly, "As the Planets gravitate to each

The people of the West India islands have, for years, and in vain, petitioned for such an alteration of the duties as would enable them to refine their own sugar. The British colonies of the continent and the West Indies recently determined to establish between themselves a perfect reciprocity – abolishing all duties upon their respective productions; and in so doing only desired to carry into full effect the views so strenuously urged upon the government of the United States in reference to the – so-called – Reciprocity Treaty, then just made with Canada. (Carey 1858, v. 1, 454)

The anecdote concludes with Carey telling ironically of the British government’s disapproval of the West Indies’ petition on the grounds that it ““would be inconsistent with the imperial policy of free trade’!”

Given what Carey had already written about Canadian reciprocity, what is most notable here is not the allusion to his continuing opposition to the Treaty of 1854. It is the clear implication that, in *some* instances, reciprocity, even in the specific form of an agreement for the mutual abolition of customs duties, could be mutually beneficial. How Carey’s hint about “perfect reciprocity” might be drawn out and applied in the United States, however, would not become evident until after the Civil War.

### **Carey on reciprocity in the postbellum period**

The contest within the Republican Party for the protectionist or free-trade orientation of its platform was moot during the war. Revenue needs drove policy. After the war, the maintenance of high tariffs meant that Carey’s view prevailed. Its prevalence, combined with resentment of perceived Canadian sympathy for the Confederate cause, led to the United States’ abrogation of the treaty for reciprocity with Canada in 1866 (Stanwood 1903, vol. 2, 138).

---

other, Man tends towards his fellow man” (xiii). Apart from setting his system of political economy on a more universal foundation, he did not change it substantially, nor did he change importantly his illustrations of its operation.

Great Britain and its North American provinces tried without success to reinstate reciprocity from the moment of U.S. abrogation. They made progress toward the general end of U.S.-Canada economic cooperation, falling short of commercial reciprocity, with the Treaty of Washington in 1871. The treaty settled the United States' claims against Great Britain for the wartime construction of the Confederate raiding vessel *Alabama*. It also gave the U.S. rights to fish in the waters of British North America, for a fee to be determined later, in return for continuation of the privilege of free passage of goods between Britain and its North American provinces by way of the United States. The privilege, which pertained most importantly to traffic on the railway between Montreal and Portland, Maine, was an essential lifeline for Canada during the several months annually when the St. Lawrence River was choked with ice. President Grant had threatened to cut the lifeline in frustration with British recalcitrance in paying the *Alabama* claim. The treaty of Washington settled those matters and set aside the question of reciprocity for later (Morrison 1978, 462-463).

The question returned to the fore in 1874, when Secretary of State Hamilton Fish conveyed to the President the draft of a new U.S.-Canada reciprocity treaty proposed by British commissioners. The hook the British dangled was the prospect, in return for the reinstatement of reciprocity, of suspending the payment required under the Treaty of Washington for U.S. access to the British North American fishery (Morrison 1978, 464-465).

Carey, now an octogenarian, feared that the President and Congress might bite. With unflagging vigor, in the space of ten days he wrote a series of nine disapproving letters to Grant (taking a break only on the Sabbath) and published them collectively as "The British Treaties of 1871 & 1874" (1874).

Carey's complaints were several. Included in the litany was a recollection of the "sham reciprocity" of twenty years earlier, which he believed the proposed treaty of 1874 would reinstate (Carey 1874, 17, 20). He objected also to the way "conspirators" submitted it for the government's consideration with little public scrutiny (28). As he might have expected from a conspiracy, the ostensible reciprocity it put forth was unreciprocal: the free access that the United States would be granted to the British North American fishery belonged to the U.S. anyway by right (12). A national security concern

arose from a certain stipulation that the United States would lend financial support to construct a system of canals linking together the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes, and the Hudson River for British and American vessels drawing up to twelve feet. In effect the U.S. would be paying to put its cities from Milwaukee to Buffalo “practically under the guns of almost the whole British fleet” (25-26). And Carey worried (needlessly, in fact) that the most-favored-nation provisions of U.S. treaties with France, Germany, Belgium, and other countries would require all the treaty’s favors to be extended to them, too (27).<sup>25</sup>

More fundamental than all the foregoing complaints, however, was this: “Nominally treating of a reciprocal free trade with the British provinces, this treaty is really one of free trade with the British empire” (Carey 1874, 18). By the Treaty of Washington, British goods were already allowed to pass through the U.S. to Canada duty free, saving transportation costs; by the proposed reciprocity of 1874, they would pass back into the U.S. subject only to whatever duties, if any, applied to Canadian merchandise. The treaty stipulated that to be subject to U.S. preferences the goods should be the “growth, produce, or manufacture” of Canada – but who could tell? “The whole arrangement,” said Carey, “is but a new edition of the fable of the monkey and the cat, the former employing the latter to draw from the fire the chestnuts that would have burnt his own fingers had he attempted to do the work himself” (18).

---

<sup>25</sup> This one of Carey’s concerns was groundless because the United States’ interpretation of most-favored-nation treaties held the MFN provision to be conditional unless it was written explicitly in the unconditional form. Such an interpretation, which came to be known as the “American view,” implied that whatever favors the United States granted in a particular treaty were construed to have been in exchange for all of the partner’s concessions stipulated in that treaty. The U.S. did not consider itself bound to extend the favors to any existing or future MFN treaty partners except on condition of the partners’ granting precisely the same concessions in return. Such an event hardly ever happened; indeed the U.S. construed it to have happened only when it was opportune to do so. Except in the unconditional form, the MFN provision was toothless. The unconditional MFN provision was included only in a small fraction of U.S. reciprocity treaties: at the time that Carey voiced this concern, it had been granted in U.S. history only to Portugal (1840), China (1844 and 1858), Switzerland (1850), Japan (1854), Madagascar (1867), and the Orange Free State (1871). See Allen and Meardon (2007).

Opponents of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1874 in Congress, like steadfast protectionist Sen. Justin Morrill of Vermont, voiced arguments resembling Carey's (Morrison 1978, 468, note 32). In February of 1875 they defeated the treaty in the Senate (*Sen. Exec. Jour.*, 43<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 502). Remarkably, only one month later a new Congress would begin debate on another reciprocity treaty – and this time, many protectionists would apply the same doctrine and come to a more favorable verdict.

Hawaii and the United States had been negotiating either reciprocity or annexation for some time. A reciprocal most-favored-nation treaty was signed in 1849 and ratified the following year (Malloy 1909, vol. 1, 908-915). Shortly later, in 1851, the Hawaiian King proposed a treaty ceding his country voluntarily to the United States in order to shield it from British and French predations, but the treaty was not accepted in Washington (Robinson 1904, 106). Only three years after that, in 1854, the U.S. sought a treaty of annexation for the same reason, but the King died before signing it and his successor refused it (111). A treaty of reciprocity negotiated in 1855, allowing several U.S. manufactures and other goods to enter Hawaii duty free in exchange for similar treatment by the U.S. of Hawaiian sugar and other products of agriculture or livestock, was defeated by the U.S. Senate (112-113). So too, in 1870, was another reciprocity treaty along the same lines that had been negotiated in 1867 (115-116).

Still another reciprocity treaty, similar in regards to goods and the elimination of duties to the unratified treaties of 1855 and 1867, was signed in 1875 and permitted to take effect in 1876. What was decisive on this occasion was a new article, namely the fourth, which forbade Hawaii to grant the same duty-free access to the goods of any other countries. The article guaranteed the U.S. a crucial advantage against its European rivals in the Hawaiian trade – and by extension a commercial and military advantage in all Pacific. In the words of the majority of the House Ways and Means Committee (which was involved because the treaty stipulated duties, and so concerned revenue, which was under the purview of the House), the Hawaiian Islands were “the key to the Pacific and in time of war the power that possesses them controls all the commerce of the Pacific to destroy at its pleasure” (cited by Robinson 1904, 128). Above all else, the logic of international rivalry had prevailed.

But the supremacy of that logic did not imply the irrelevance of free trade and

protection. One could just as well say that reciprocity with Hawaii was established because protectionists found a way to reconcile advocacy of the treaty with their doctrine, and their doctrine with the treaty. Robinson (1904, 138) lists first among the several arguments spoken in favor of the treaty in Congress that “the treaty would protect the United States by shutting out other nations.” In the votes on the bill authorizing the treaty as a revenue measure, some protectionists opposed it, Senator Morrill prominent among them. But most of the protectionist party favored it. Republicans cast twenty-four of the twenty-nine votes for the treaty in the Senate and only three of the twelve votes against it (137).

Decades later, a frequenter of Carey’s home during his Sunday afternoon receptions, called variously his “Round Table” or “Vespers,” recalled that “Mr. Carey and his friends vigorously opposed the reference of any public matters to arbitration of claims on foreign governments, commercial and other treaties” (Cramp 1908, 3). But the only particular discussion he referenced concerned the U.S.-Canada case (*ibid.*, 1). In other cases, Carey’s writings offered an elaborate reconciliation of protection and reciprocity – and indeed a more broadly and enduringly applicable one than the promise of “shutting out other nations.”

Carey had hinted at the reconciliation in the “perfect reciprocity,” mentioned previously, that he saw in the doomed agreement between British North America and the West Indies. Its perfection consisted in the colonies’ proposal to abolish the duties on their “respective productions.” The latter term implied that some goods are the native products of one country and not another.<sup>26</sup> When such goods pass between the two

---

<sup>26</sup> The notion of native products that are the natural stuff of international trade is also found in a missive by Carey titled *The North and the South* (1854), which he wrote during debate over the Kansas-Nebraska bill. “Cuba and Brazil have advantages for the growth of sugar that are entirely wanting in Louisiana and Texas,” he argued – and considering those advantages, the national separation that some Southerners threatened if the bill should not pass would not be so hard on the North as many supposed. “In a Northern Union there would be no duty on sugar, and the gain to the people of the North from the abolition of this interference with the trade with Cuba, Brazil, Hayti, Liberia, and other sugar-producing countries, and the consequent extension of trade with them, would, as we believe, be fully equal to all the profits now resulting to the trade for which

countries they pose no difficulty from the standpoint of protection: if both countries draw up non-overlapping lists of native goods, and each agrees to abolish duties on those goods insofar as they originate in the other country, then reciprocity is perfect because it does not threaten import-competing producers of other goods. It could even benefit them if among the listed goods are some of their inputs to production.

Canadian wheat for West Indian sugar, then, was an example of perfect reciprocity. Hawaiian sugar for American wheat and manufactures was another, or at least was close enough. From the protectionist perspective, anyway, it was an improvement over the “free breakfast table,” a term that Republicans had used lately to promote the reduction of duties on tea, coffee, sugar in the Tariff Act of 1870 (Tarbell 1912, 63). According to Rep. Garfield of Ohio, many supporters of the Act of 1870 had intended the legislation to deflect anti-tariff sentiment that might otherwise “soon shatter our whole protective system” (*Cong. Globe*, 41<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> Sess., 272). To that end, the free breakfast table was an effective stratagem that required little sacrifice of principle, given that there were no producers of coffee or tea to protect and few enough of sugar.<sup>27</sup> Reciprocity of the U.S.-Hawaii kind was just the free breakfast table, which many protectionists had already endorsed, plus an extra dollop of jam in the form of the foreign country’s relaxation of duties on U.S. goods.

Carey’s doctrine evolved with the exigencies of Republican politics in the 1870s. He emphasized more the circumstances in which promotion rather than suppression of interregional and international trade was desirable. In the same week of 1876 in which Congress gave final authorization to the Hawaiian treaty, Carey addressed “The Friends of the Union Throughout the Union” (1876) on the matter of the upcoming election. He

---

the North is indebted to the Union.” Carey’s reason for believing that protection for Northern industry was beneficial for the whole while protection for Southern sugar was burdensome was that the industrialist, in contrast to the cane planter, “wars not against nature, but only against those difficulties that time must unquestionably remove” (29).

<sup>27</sup> Before proponents of the Tariff Act of 1870 appropriated it, the notion of a “free breakfast table” was apparently popularized in 1868 by the British apostle of free trade, John Bright (Vince 1898, 162-163). That American protectionists imported it from the British free-trade movement is a compound irony of which they were probably unaware.

remembered a conversation he had had with the martyred President Lincoln in which they agreed that if only there were railroads criss-crossing Appalachia – one from the Ohio River southeast through Eastern Tennessee to Charleston and Savannah, another from the Delaware Valley southwest through the mountains of Western Virginia to Alabama and the Gulf of Mexico – then the Union could not be dissolved. Such “iron cross-ties” would help the people of each region to reach the others’ markets by means that would also help them “to maintain a commerce among themselves such as before they had never known” (1876, 4-5). Local commerce would grow; inter-regional commerce would grow too, but only as a consequence, not an antecedent, of local development. Settlers would develop intensively the Border States, and commerce along the whole expanse of the railroads would grow proportionately with their development. Here again implicitly was the pyramid theory, with the added twist that the Federal government would build internal improvements to assist the development of each little pyramid while preparing simultaneously for the gradual development of commerce among all of them.<sup>28</sup> The new twist was also a nod to an old Whig tradition.

“True to its constructive instincts,” Carey continued, “the Republican party has now for fifteen years been engaged in developing and building up those internal connections by means of which the men of all sections are to be brought into harmonious relations with each other” (1876, 7). It had done so while maintaining high tariffs on imports of many goods, especially manufactures. But tariffs should not be seen as manifesting a general aversion to foreign trade. Just as local development leads to inter-regional commerce, so too does national development lead to international commerce. When foreign trade evolves in the right way, it tends to consist of items that the particular climates and soils of different countries are uniquely well suited for producing:

Domestic commerce causes the creation of local roads, by aid of which the farmer is enabled at diminished cost of transportation to reach both the near and the distant markets, with constantly increasing power to choose between them. With

---

<sup>28</sup>Carey’s belief that the criss-crossing railroads would develop Appalachia first and commerce among the extremities second, not vice-versa (or perhaps even lead to a depopulation of Appalachia), appears to have been a presumption more convenient than well justified.

each and every such improvement that commerce grows, enabling both farmer and planter to become from day to day better customers to distant men whose lands produce tea, coffee, sugar, and other commodities for which their own soils, or climates, are not well fitted. That commerce, therefore, it is which constitutes the foundation of which a foreign commerce rests, and it is to Republican legislation that we stand now indebted for the gigantic proportions to which it already has attained. (Carey 1876, 8)

On the eve of final approval of the Hawaii treaty and in one of his last published works before his death, Carey was issuing a doctrinal endorsement of the free breakfast table and Republican reciprocity. The endorsement completed a half-century-long arc of the development of protectionist doctrine in tandem with the politics of reciprocity. To Carey, the “road to perfect freedom of trade” remained tariff protection. But reciprocal trade arrangements had once again become, as they had been for the generation of protectionist thinkers preceding Carey, a vehicle for reaching that end.

## **Conclusions**

Retracing the arc protectionism and reciprocity in Henry Carey’s time draws three main conclusions. The first concerns the degree and nature of Carey’s protectionism. Even while Carey still lived, his erstwhile protégé, David A. Wells, after leading the U.S. Revenue Commission and experiencing thereby a “knock-down blow” against his own protectionist convictions (Meardon 2007, 584), exaggerated the views of his former patron. To the laughter of an assembly of ardent free-traders, Wells characterized Carey as wishing “to have the ocean that rolls between the two continents converted into a sea of fire so impassable, that if Dives was in Europe and Lazarus in Pennsylvania they could not under any circumstances enter into commercial correspondence” (Wells 1873, 44). What began as hyperbole soon became an assertion of fact (Wells 1882, 9).<sup>29</sup> But the fact is different. Carey’s preferred trade policy was restrictive, particularly in regards to trade

---

<sup>29</sup> Schumpeter (1950, 516) lent his authority to the assertion: he referred to Carey as a man “who could conceive of the United States as a world unto itself.”

between the U.S. and Britain or Europe, but even in those cases international trade played an important role. To put the point concretely, when Carey convened his Sunday “Vespers” with Rhine wine served in red Hungarian glasses and proceeded to extol protectionism, there was no whiff of hypocrisy.<sup>30</sup> Carey’s theory emphasized the superiority of local and domestic commerce, but it also – and, in the last thirty years of his career, increasingly – pointed up the particular paths by which international commerce was desirable.

Second, to whoever proposes it, reciprocity has always been a means of steering international commerce in the right direction. But which way is right depends on who does the steering and the several political and economic circumstances close in view. Those variables changed often during Carey’s lifetime. Reciprocity, then, cannot be viewed historically as a free trade or a protectionist policy, nor a Democrat, Whig, or Republican policy. The most-favored-nation form of reciprocity served the purposes of protectionist proto-Whigs during the early to mid 1820s, when maritime rivalry in the Caribbean and support for the fledgling independent republics of the Americas against Britain and Europe was at issue; when the issue was accommodation of the territorial expansion of the United States under a Democratic administration with proslavery intentions, the attitude of protectionist Whigs toward reciprocity of the same general form turned ambivalent or hostile. Reciprocal reductions of import duties served the purposes of free traders in the 1850s and early 1870s, when the treaty partner was Great Britain on behalf of Canada and the products to be imported were hides, pelts, grains, timber, and fish; in the mid 1870s, when the partner was Hawaii and the product sugar (and in the generation thereafter, when the partners were in large part Central and South American and the products similarly tropical), reciprocity of the same general form served the purposes of protectionists.

Third, connecting Carey’s peregrinating protectionism with the vicissitudes of reciprocity, it is evident that establishing reciprocity’s consistency with trade doctrine involved more than aligning practice to fit principle. It involved, on one hand, amending the doctrine to highlight the desirability of certain paths of commerce for which reciprocity could be a useful vehicle; and, on the other, undermining forms of reciprocity

---

<sup>30</sup> Del Mar (1897, 99-100) describes Carey’s Sunday afternoon convocation ritual.

that were unsuitable to that end and advancing those that were. Carey's protectionist traverses and his varying disposition toward reciprocity are read most aptly as an economist's tinkering with his doctrine to accommodate public policy ends, simultaneous with his search for policy instruments consistent with the doctrine.

## References

Adams, Henry. 1921. *History of the United States of America During the First Administration of James Madison*, 2 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Allen, Treb and Stephen Meardon. 2007. "Reciprocity in Retrospect: Progressive and Pernicious Bilateralism in Nineteenth Century U.S. Trade Policy." Paper read at the 2007 meetings of the Economic History Association, Austin, Texas, September 6-9.

Baird, Henry Carey. 1891. "Carey and Two of His Recent Critics, Eugen V. Böhm-Bawerk and Alfred Marshall." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 29.136 (Jul.-Dec.), 166-173.

Bradsher, Earl L. 1912. *Mathew Carey: Editor, Author and Publisher*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Carey, Henry C. 1837-40. *Principles of Political Economy*, 3 vols. Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard / Lea & Blanchard.

———. [1847] 1872. *The Past, the Present, and the Future*. Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird.

———. 1851. *The Harmony of Interests: Agricultural, Manufacturing, and Commercial*. In William Elder, ed., *Miscellaneous Works of Henry C. Carey*, vol. 1. Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird & Co., 1883.

- . 1852. *The Working of British Free Trade*. New York: Myron Finch.
- . 1853. *The Slave Trade, Domestic and Foreign: Why It Exists, and How It May be Extinguished*. Philadelphia: A. Hart.
- . 1854. *The North and the South: Reprinted from the New York Tribune*. New York: Office of the Tribune.
- . 1858. *Principles of Social Science*, 3 vols. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co.
- . 1874. “The British Treaties of 1871 & 1874: Letters to the President of the United States.” In William Elder, ed., *Miscellaneous Works of Henry C. Carey*, vol. 2. Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird & Co., 1883.
- . 1876. “To the Friends of the Union Throughout the Union.” In William Elder, ed., *Miscellaneous Works of Henry C. Carey*, vol. 2. Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird & Co., 1883.
- Carey, Matthew. 1820. *The New Olive Branch, or, An Attempt to Establish an Identity of Interest Between Agriculture, Manufactures, and Commerce*. Philadelphia: M. Carey & son.
- Carter, Susan B., et al. 2006. *Historical Statistics of the United States*, Millennial ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Clay, Henry. 1832. “Defence of the American System.” In James B. Swain, ed., *Life and Speeches of Henry Clay*, 2 vols. New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1843, pp. 9-67.
- Cramp, Charles H. 1908. “Carey’s ‘Vespers’.” Typescript. Henry C. Carey Papers, Edward Carey Gardiner Collection, part B, vol. 21. Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Cross, Michael S. 1971. *Free Trade, Annexation and Reciprocity, 1846-54*. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Limited.

Culbertson, William Smith. 1925. *International Economic Policies: A Survey of the Economics of Diplomacy*. New York: D. Appleton and Company.

Del Mar, Alex. 1897. "Henry C. Carey's Round Table." *Gunton's Magazine*, August.

Dorfman, Joseph. 1946-59. *The Economic Mind in American Civilization*, 5 vols. New York: Viking Press.

Eckes, Alfred E. 1999. *Opening America's Market: U.S. Foreign Trade Policy Since 1776*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Elder, William. 1880. "A Memoir of Henry C. Carey." In William Elder, ed., *Miscellaneous Works of Henry C. Carey*, vol. 1. Philadelphia: Henry Carey Baird & Co., 1883.

Hart, Michael. 2002. *A Trading Nation: Canadian Trade Policy from Colonialism to Globalization*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Holt, Michael F. 1999. *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hopkins, James F. et al. 1959-91. *Papers of Henry Clay*, 10 vols. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.

Johnson, Emory R., et al. 1915. *History of Domestic and Foreign Commerce of the United States*, 2 vols. Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Laughlin, J. Laurence and H. Parker Willis. 1903. *Reciprocity*. New York: The Baker & Taylor Co.

Malloy, William M., ed. 1909. *Treaties, Conventions, International Acts, Protocols and Agreements Between the United States of America and Other Powers, 1776-1909*, 2 vols. Sen. Doc. No. 357, 61<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2d Sess.

Manning, William R. 1925. *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States concerning the Independence of the Latin American Republics*, 3 vols. New York: Oxford University Press.

Meardon, Stephen. 2007. "Postbellum Protection and Commissioner Wells's Conversion to Free Trade." *History of Political Economy* 39.4, 571-604.

Morrison, Rodney J. 1978. "The Canadian-American Reciprocal Trade Agreement of 1874: A Pennsylvanian's View." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (October), 457-468.

Rhodes, Carolyn. 1993. *Reciprocity, U.S. Trade Policy, and the GATT Regime*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Ricardo, David. 1921. *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: John Murray.

Rippy, J. Fred. 1929. *Rivalry of the United States and Great Britain over Latin America (1808-1830)*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Robinson, Chalfant. 1904. *A History of Two Reciprocity Treaties: The Treaty with Canada in 1854; The Treaty with the Hawaiian Islands in 1876; With a Chapter on The Treaty-Making Power of the House of Representatives*. New Haven: The Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor Press.

Rowe, Kenneth Wyer. 1933. *Mathew Carey, a Study in American Economic Development*. The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Series LI, Number 4. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Schumpeter, Joseph. 1954. *History of Economic Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Setser, Vernon. 1937. *The Commercial Reciprocity Policy of the United States, 1774-1829*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Skinner, J. S. et al. 1848-1857. *The Plough, the Loom, and the Anvil*, 10 vols. Philadelphia: J. S. Skinner & Son (vols. 1-3); New York: Myron Finch (vols. 4-10).

Smith, George Winston. 1951. *Henry C. Carey and American Sectional Conflict*. Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press.

Stanwood, Edward. 1903. *American Tariff Controversies in the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company.

Stone, Richard Gabriel. 1933. *Hezekiah Niles as an Economist*. The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Series LI, Number 5. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Stowe, Charles Edward and Lyman Beecher Stowe. 1911. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Story of Her Life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Swain, James B, ed. 1843. *Life and Speeches of Henry Clay*, 2 vols. New York: Greeley & McElrath.

Tarbell, Ida. 1912. *The Tariff in Our Time*. New York: The Macmillan Company.

Taussig, Frank W. 1892. *The Tariff History of the United States*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

United States. 1789-. *Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America*.

United States Tariff Commission. 1919. *Reciprocity and Commercial Treaties*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Vince, Charles A. 1898. *John Bright*. Chicago: Herbert S. Stone & Company.

Wells, David A. 1873. Speech of the Hon. David A. Wells, Being a Retrospect of the Results of Protection in the United States of America. In *Free Trade and Free Enterprise: Report of the Proceedings at the Dinner of the Cobden Club*, June 28, 1873. London: Cassel, Petter, & Galbin.

Wells, David A. 1882. *Freer Trade Essential to Future National Prosperity and Development: A Lecture by David A. Wells, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1882, before the Young Men's Democratic Club, of Brooklyn*. New York: Wm. C. Martin's Steam Printing House.

Wolman, Paul. 1992. *Most Favored Nation: The Republican Revisionists and U.S. Tariff Policy, 1897-1912*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.