

‘Too long mere food for powder’: the British army in *Punch*, 1841–61

Frederick Hyde

University of Southampton, United Kingdom

freddiewhyde@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The place of the British army in Victorian society has been a popular subject for historical enquiry. Insufficient attention has been paid to the mid nineteenth century, however, other than studies of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. To illustrate the importance of the wider period, this article surveys the depiction of the army in the comic periodical *Punch*, or the *London Charivari* between 1841 and 1861. It notes a lasting interest in the army’s role at home and abroad and traces a radical tradition that lasted well into *Punch*’s so-called ‘respectable’ years.

Britain’s attitude towards its army changed dramatically in the nineteenth century. In the decades that followed the Battle of Waterloo, mistrust of the army was widespread and the Burkean conviction that an armed, disciplined force was ‘dangerous to liberty’ died hard.¹ Nascent enthusiasm for the army as a citizen force evaporated in the age of the Peterloo Massacre, the Six Acts and an oppressively expensive peacetime establishment.² The association between professional armies and continental despotism became so deep-rooted that the duke of Wellington, who concluded that ‘the only way to maintain an army in this country is to keep it out of sight’, was forced to scatter single-battalion regiments across colonial garrisons to curtail demands for military retrenchment.³ In stark contrast to ‘Jack Tar’, the stereotypical sailor who was lauded as a moral hero, the British ranker was looked upon with deep suspicion. As late as 1869 the *Contemporary Review* described him as ‘the refuse of the beer shop’ and ‘the sweepings of the gaol’.⁴

By 1900, however, at the close of a century of imperial expansion, the army was celebrated as a national institution. While certain pubs and parks continued to bar ‘men in uniform’, the soldier was no longer regarded as a tool of state oppression.⁵ The establishment of national policing had relocated

¹ *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, ed. J. Nimmo (12 vols., London, 1887), iii. 224..

² For enthusiasm for the army in the eighteenth century, and the post-1815 reaction, see L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), pp. 92–4, 257–88, 264–5; and ‘The British atlas, or John Bull supporting the peace establishment’, satirical print, 1816, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, BM Satires/Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires, no. 12786.

³ Quoted in P. Morton, ‘Another Victorian paradox: anti-militarism in a jingoistic society’, *Historical Reflections*, viii (1981), 169–89, at p. 169. See also H. Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, 1997), p. 76. For pressure for retrenchment, see M. Taylor, ‘The 1848 revolutions and the British Empire’, *Past & Present*, clxvi (2000), 146–80, at pp. 158–9.

⁴ *Contemporary Review*, xii (1869), p. 548.

⁵ B. Farwell, *For Queen and Country: a Social History of the Victorian and Edwardian Army* (London, 1981), p. 93. In 1941 George Orwell was still able to write that ‘within living memory it was common for “the redcoats” to be booed in the streets and for the landlords of respectable public houses to refuse to allow soldiers on the premises’ (G. Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (3rd edn., London, 1982), p. 41).

the army's role in quelling unrest to the colonial periphery, where it became shrouded in an aura of moral authority. Imperial heroes like Major General Sir Henry Havelock and General Charles George Gordon, who combined Christian fervour with military zeal, featured in countless paintings, biographies and poems. Concurrently, an increased sensitivity to the plight of the ranker underpinned a series of reforms that steadily improved his welfare. Jack Tar, it seemed, had met his match in the form of Tommy Atkins: the soldier lionized by Kipling and fêted in music hall numbers. 'Anyone', the *Westminster Review* observed in 1891, 'may notice the crowd which always collects in front of the windows of a picture shop displaying any stirring episode of military life'.⁶

Historians of Victorian Britain have discerned much that is of inherent value from studying this changing relationship between the army and its 'parent society'.⁷ Historians of imperial culture, for example, have used the army to contest the notion that enthusiasm for empire was an elite concern that 'did not weigh particularly heavily on European peoples'.⁸ In *Popular Imperialism and the Military* John MacKenzie argued that colonial wars, which had 'too often been depicted simply as wars of conquest', gave the army a new role as the promoters of Christian civilization. To MacKenzie, 'climactic events' like the Indian Mutiny transformed officers into 'heroic saviours' of national honour and soldiers into 'evangelical shock troops' of empire.⁹ A tendency prevails across a range of cognate fields, however, for scholars to prioritize the army's place in late Victorian popular culture, after the 'watershed' of the Crimean War.¹⁰ The 'climactic events' of the mid century are certainly no stranger to analysis, but the scope of enquiry requires broadening.¹¹ Much has been written about the 'visual complement' to the Crimean War that existed in art and political caricature, characterized as it was by a more realistic depiction of the impact of war on the private soldier.¹² Yet how this compared to the depiction of other conflicts remains unclear. Mid century invasion scares are another example: more could be done to locate such debates in the broader context of changing attitudes towards warfare and the army.¹³

Nor have other 'climactic events' of the period been awarded the attention that surrounds the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. This is surprising considering the extent of colonial warfare in the period. By the mid century colonial military expenditure had increased to record levels and in the 1890s, the late Victorians reflected with pride on how the days of their forefathers had been defined by 'the most successful and best carried out of England's little wars'.¹⁴ While such panegyrics tended to ignore military blunders at Kabul, Chillianwala and elsewhere, it is undeniable that, to quote Byron Farwell, continual colonial warfare became 'an accepted way of life' in the mid nineteenth century.¹⁵

⁶ *Westminster Review*, cxxxvi (1891), pp. 624–42.

⁷ G. Harries-Jenkins, 'The development of professionalism in the Victorian army', *Armed Forces and Society*, i (1975), 472–89, at p. 488. See also B. Bond, 'The late-Victorian army', *History Today*, xi (1961), 616–62; I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763–1984* (London, 1966); A. R. Skelly, *The Victorian Army at Home: the Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular, 1859–1899* (London, 1977); E. Spiers, *Army and Society, 1815–1914* (London, 1980); J. Gooch, *The Prospect of War: Studies in British Defence Policy, 1847–1942* (London, 1981); and D. French, *The British Way in Warfare, 1688–2000* (London, 1990).

⁸ B. Porter, 'Popular imperialism: broadening the context', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xxxix (2011), 833–45, at p. 843.

⁹ J. M. Mackenzie, 'Popular imperialism and the military' in *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950*, ed. J. M. Mackenzie (Manchester, 1992), pp. 1–24, at p. 3; J. M. MacKenzie, 'The press and the dominant ideology of empire', in *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c.1857–1921*, ed. S. J. Potter (Dublin, 2004), pp. 23–38, at p. 29; and MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, pp. 281 and 4. See also B. Sebe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: the Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester, 2013).

¹⁰ MacKenzie, 'Popular imperialism and the military', p. 1. See also A. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? the Impact of Imperialism on Britain From the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow, 2005); and M. Bryant, *Wars of Empire in Cartoons* (London, 2008).

¹¹ See, e.g., O. Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics During the Crimean War* (London, 1967).

¹² See M. Lalumia, 'Realism and anti-aristocratic sentiment in Victorian depictions of the Crimean War', *Victorian Studies*, xxvii (1983), 25–51; J. W. M. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: the Military in British Art, 1815–1914* (Manchester, 1988); and A. Cross, 'The Crimean War and the caricature war', *Slavonic and East European Review*, lxxxiv (2006), 460–80.

¹³ For invasion scares, see Gooch, *Prospect of War*, p. 35; A. Lambert, 'the ultimate test: the fourteenth earl, the admiralty and the ministry of 1852', in *Conservatism and British Foreign Policy, 1820–1920: the Derbys and Their World*, ed. G. Hicks (Farnham, 2011), pp. 41–58; and J. Parry, 'The impact of Napoleon III on British politics', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xi (2001), 147–75. For broader assessments of the period, see A. Lambert, 'The Tory world view: sea power, strategy and party politics, 1815–1914', in *The Tory World: Deep History and the Tory Theme in British Foreign Policy, 1679–2014*, ed. J. Black (Farnham, 2015), pp. 122–48; and K. Mantena, 'The crisis of liberal imperialism', in *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. D. Bell (Cambridge, 2007).

¹⁴ Taylor, '1848 revolutions', p. 148; and *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. L. Stephen and S. Lee (London, 1890), xxii. 393. For the domestic repercussions of such 'little wars', see H. Strachan, 'The early Victorian army and the nineteenth-century revolution in government', *English Historical Review*, xcvi (1980), 782–809, at pp. 785–6; and Taylor, '1848 revolutions', p. 167.

¹⁵ B. Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (London, 1973), p. 1.

Historical understanding of the army's place in mid nineteenth-century Victorian society therefore requires a broader level of engagement with the period. To illustrate this point, this article examines the depiction of the Regular Army in the weekly comic periodical *Punch*, or the *London Charivari* between 1841 and 1861.¹⁶ *Punch* is ideally placed for such an exercise. Its first edition appeared in July 1841 and within a few years *Punch* had amassed the endorsement of the *Times*, a circulation of over 30,000 and a total readership – due to a combination of public reading and the availability of printed media in public spaces – of up to five times that number.¹⁷ *Punch*'s influence was greater still. Not only can its authors and illustrators be credited with the origin of the very word 'cartoon', but they also influenced the growth of cartoon styles overseas.¹⁸ The 1850s and 1860s saw the launch of *Punch in Canada*, *Melbourne Punch*, five separate magazines with the title of *New Zealand Punch* and even a short-lived Confederate periodical, *Southern Punch*.¹⁹ Outside the English-speaking world, *Punch à Paris* appeared in 1850, Russian caricaturists copied *Punch* during the Crimean War, and the launch by British emigrants of *Japan Punch* in 1862 gave rise to a new Japanese artform, the Ponchi-e picture, an ancestor of contemporary manga.²⁰

The army was a popular subject among the *Punch* staff in this period. It also underwent a considerable change in its depiction. In 1844 Gilbert à Beckett, one of *Punch*'s most prolific writers, was full of praise for 'the glory of the Navy' but could think of no reason to envy the soldier aside from the 'jealousy felt by policemen at the superiority of the bayonet over the wooden staff'.²¹ By 1856, however, *Punch*'s opinion had changed dramatically. A rendition of 'The British Grenadiers' that Tom Taylor, another prominent writer, composed to mark the introduction of the Victoria Cross, attests to the transformation that had taken place:

Too long mere food for powder
We've deem'd our rank and file
Now higher hopes and prouder
Upon the soldier smile
And if no Marshal's baton
Private Smith in his knapsack bears,
At least in the war his chance of the star
With his General he shares.²²

Yet no comprehensive survey exists of the army's depiction in *Punch*, despite the potential of such an exercise. This is especially true of the periodical's first twenty years from 1841 to 1861. The melodrama of late nineteenth-century foreign policy has ensured a ready supply of chapters and monographs on the magazine's portrayal of specific crises, including the American Civil War, the Scramble for Africa and the Boer War.²³ Yet from M. H. Spielmann's foundational 1895 *The History of 'Punch'* to Mark Bryant's 2005 'graphic scrapbook' of the wars of the British empire, comparative chronologies of the army in *Punch* are few and far between.²⁴ The best work available on the subject is a chapter in Charles L. Graves's 1921 *Mr. Punch's History of Modern England*.²⁵ Graves, however, was himself a member of the *Punch* staff. His brief was celebration, not criticism, of the periodical's history and his jaunty

¹⁶ For similar studies of the auxiliary and Volunteer forces, see M. Bennett, 'Portrayals of the British militia, 1852–1916', *Historical Research*, xci (2018), 333–52; and Morton, 'Another Victorian paradox'.

¹⁷ R. D. Altick, *Punch: the Lively Youth of a British Institution* (Columbus, Ohio, 1997), pp. 37–8; and MacKenzie, 'Dominant ideology of empire', p. 26.

¹⁸ A. Matthewson, *Cartooning China: Punch, Power, & Politics in the Victorian Era* (Oxford, 2022), p. 53; and Bryant, *Wars of Empire in Cartoons*, p. 8.

¹⁹ R. Scully, "'For gorsake, stop laughing! This is serious": the British world as a community of cartooning and satirical art', in *Revisiting the British World: New Voices and Perspectives*, ed. J. Mann and I. Johnston-White (New York, 2022), pp. 145–54.

²⁰ R. Scully, 'The cartoon emperor: the impact of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte on European comic art, 1848–1870', *European Comic Art*, iv (2011), 147–80, at p. 163; Cross, 'Crimean War', p. 460; Matthewson, *Cartooning China*, p. 16; and Scully, "'For gorsake, stop laughing!'", p. 150.

²¹ *Punch*, or the *London Charivari*, 17 Feb. 1844.

²² *Punch*, 23 Feb. 1856.

²³ For some of the more selective studies of late nineteenth-century empire building and *Punch*, see R. Douglas, 'Great Nations Still Enchained': the Cartoonists' Vision of Empire, 1848–1918 (London, 1993); and Bryant, *Wars of Empire in Cartoons*.

²⁴ M. H. Spielmann, *The History of 'Punch'* (New York, 1895); and Bryant, *Wars of Empire in Cartoons*, p. 9.

²⁵ C. L. Graves, *Mr. Punch's History of Modern England* (4 vols., London, 1921), i. 112–40.

four-volume *History* downplayed the biting radicalism of *Punch*'s early years. Graves was also more interested in 'post war parallels' with the Crimean War – 'The charges of incompetence in the conduct of war ... have a painfully familiar ring' – than with a broader consideration of the army's depiction.²⁶ His conclusion that 'anti-militaristic tirades' were 'mainly directed against ... needless pomp and pageantry' made no allowance for *Punch*'s moral outrage at the First Opium War or its exasperation with the expense of colonial campaigns.²⁷ Conversely, many of the themes that Graves traced were downplayed by later historians. The jollity of his prose notwithstanding, Graves was correct in identifying a 'strongly anti-militaristic' and 'distinctly pacifistic' strain in *Punch*.²⁸ Yet *Cap and Bell*, the edited compendium of cartoons and prose by Asa and Susan Briggs, contained little on the army aside from the occasional remark that *Punch* was 'passionately involved in support of Britain entering the Crimean War'.²⁹ Richard Altick's 1997 history of *Punch*'s 'lively youth' similarly concluded that *Punch* 'had no quarrel with the armed forces as an institution' and that 'none of *Punch*'s thrusts at the military ... could have been interpreted as outcroppings of antimilitarism, even less so of pacifism'.³⁰

The case for this article, however, is not based solely on the grounds of its novelty. The lack of work on the army's depiction in *Punch* would be inconsequential were it not for the value of *Punch* to the historian of Victorian Britain. This has admittedly been called into question by recent arguments that, since *Punch* tended to focus on 'the high politics of Westminster and the passing social fads of London', claims that its cartoons reflected public opinion are 'overdone'.³¹ A suitable counter charge is the increased sensitivity that scholars have paid to the importance of visual communication in the nineteenth century. A greater willingness to treat cartoons as 'cultural artefacts' has led to complaints that the medium has been 'poorly served' by historians, and of the 'want of a global perspective on comic art', which has led in turn to a renewed focus on *Punch*.³² Anthony Cross and Richard Scully, for instance, located *Punch*'s depiction of the Crimean War and of Napoleon III in a 'pan-European', transnational form of caricature.³³ The most significant addition to this field was *The Punch Brotherhood*, by Patrick Leary. Leary noted that historians had tended to reference *Punch*'s attitude towards historical events as a 'single-authored phenomenon', even when the cartoons used to illustrate such events were drawn by different artists at different times.³⁴ His response was to recontextualize *Punch* as a product of a close-knit 'literary brotherhood' of artists and authors.³⁵

Punch, if not a national paper, at the very least came closer to becoming one than any other satirical journal or illustrated periodical of its day. As Leary noted, *Punch*'s success owed much to the efforts of its staff to ensure that their doggerel and cartoons reflected what they understood as public opinion.³⁶ They may not always have reflected the opinions of provincial Britain, but they were certainly capable of bridging the gap between metropole and province. Spielmann's *History* contains numerous examples of this, including a postman who recognized Lord Palmerston on a visit to Wales because he had 'seen your picture in *Punch*, my lord'.³⁷ Nor can London 'fads' be regarded as the sum total of *Punch*'s world view, which extended overseas to incorporate America, the British empire and Europe. A cartoon produced during the Indian Mutiny – 'The British lion's vengeance on the Bengal tiger' – became a popular Victorian print and a favourite of Winston Churchill, while both Napoleon III and Wilhelm

²⁶ Graves, *Mr. Punch's History*, i. 129.

²⁷ Graves, *Mr. Punch's History*, i. 114.

²⁸ Graves, *Mr. Punch's History*, i. 112.

²⁹ *Cap and Bell: Punch's Chronicle of English History in the Making, 1841–61*, ed. S. Briggs and A. Briggs (London, 1971), p. xxvii.

³⁰ Altick, *Punch*, pp. 429, 216.

³¹ H. Miller, 'The problem with *Punch*', *Historical Research*, lxxii (2009), 285–302, at p. 286.

³² M. Roberts, 'Election cartoons and political communication in Victorian England', *Cultural and Social History*, x (2015), 369–95, at p. 370; and Scully, "'For gorsake, stop laughing!'", p. 140. See also M. Taylor, 'John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England c.1712–1929', *Past & Present*, cxxxiv (1992), 93–128; J. Thompson, "'Pictorial lies"? – Posters and politics in Britain, c.1880–1914', *Past & Present*, cxcvii (2007), 177–210; *Drawing the Line: Using Cartoons as Historical Evidence*, ed. R. Scully and M. Quartly (Victoria, 2009). For the historiography of cartoons, see R. Scully and A. Varnava, 'The importance of cartoons, caricature and satirical art in imperial contexts' in *Comic Empires: Imperialism in Cartoons, Caricature and Satirical Art*, ed. R. Scully and A. Varnava (Manchester, 2020), pp. 1–30, at pp. 7–13.

³³ Cross, 'Crimean War', p. 460; and Scully, 'Cartoon emperor', p. 161. See also Bryant, *Wars of Empire in Cartoons*; and S. Markovits, *The Crimean War in the British Imagination* (Cambridge, 2009).

³⁴ P. Leary, *The Punch Brotherhood: Table Talk and Print Culture in Mid-Victorian London* (London, 2010), p. 4.

³⁵ Leary, *Punch Brotherhood*, p. 15.

³⁶ Leary, *Punch Brotherhood*, pp. 39–44.

³⁷ Spielmann, *History of 'Punch'*, p. 203.

It were wont to ban *Punch* from their court when its cartoons met with their disapproval.³⁸ Indeed, the global world view of *Punch* has been a recurrent theme in recent years among historians of imperial culture. Richard Scully and Andrekos Varnava argued in *Comic Empires* that cartoons were ‘a key means by which British readers encountered and engaged with issues of empire’, from the Scramble for Africa to decolonization.³⁹ Scully has continued to push this argument and to locate *Punch* firmly in the context of the ‘shared humour’ that linked Britain with its colonies.⁴⁰ A recent monograph by Amy Matthewson, *Cartooning China*, likewise attempted to fill ‘a gap in the historiography of *Punchology*’ characterized by the absence of China and the Chinese, an exercise that this article seeks to repeat for the British army.⁴¹

The depiction of the army in *Punch* between 1841 and 1861 was the product of eight writers: Gilbert à Beckett, Shirley Brooks, Douglas Jerrold, Percival Leigh, Horace Mayhew, William Makepeace Thackeray, Henry Silver and Tom Taylor. These men worked with three comic artists: Richard Doyle, John Leech and John Tenniel, who replaced Doyle when he resigned in 1850. These men were subordinate to the editorship of Horace’s brother Henry Mayhew and, when he resigned in 1846, to Mark Lemon.⁴² Matthewson described this group in *Cartooning China* as a collection of ‘white men from the bourgeoisie’, but such criticism masks a wide range of backgrounds.⁴³ Lemon was born to a family of hop merchants and Jerrold to an itinerant actor. Leigh and Leech began their careers in medicine and Taylor and Beckett at the Inns of Court. Thackeray, meanwhile, would later become a household name as the author of *Vanity Fair*. Nor did these men share the same world view. Jerrold, Lemon and the Mayhew brothers all belonged to a radical political tradition, which was balanced by Thackeray’s conservatism and Leech’s imperialism. Doyle, meanwhile, was a Roman Catholic who resigned when *Punch* adopted a ‘no-Popery’ campaign in 1850.⁴⁴ Each man made his own contributions to the weekly issue. The one truly collective effort was the full-page cartoon, or ‘large cut’, the subject of which was decided by the group at a weekly dinner.⁴⁵ Aside from the hieroglyphic-like ‘signatures’ that its artists hid in the corners of their cartoons, however, the *Punch* ‘brotherhood’ maintained a consistent anonymity. *Punch* never identified its contributors and aside from the use of the proprietary possessive – in ‘*Punch*’s labours of Hercules’, for example – the editorial nosism was always employed.⁴⁶ The result was a unified *Punch* outlook that comprised a multiplicity of voices and political opinions.

The findings of this article are grouped thematically into four parts. The first part discusses the army as a domestic institution, a subject that *Punch* treated with frivolity in the 1840s until a more serious campaign for administrative reform developed in the 1850s. The one exception was a desire for military economy, which remained consistent throughout the period. The second part examines *Punch*’s opinion of the army as a fighting force and notes a persistent strain of anti-militarism, even while the best of England’s ‘little wars’ were still being fought. It also questions the significance of the Crimean War as a watershed in attitudes towards the British army, which, in *Punch* at least, did not pivot exclusively around the events of 1854 to 1856. The third part discusses the officer class and the ‘military snob’, a trope that *Punch* used to pillory idleness and incompetence among the army’s leadership. Finally, part four examines *Punch*’s attitude towards the ranker and traces a consistent interest in his welfare, albeit one couched increasingly in terms of his bravery rather than his status as a downtrodden wretch, who needed to be distracted from the evils of the wars in which he was called to fight. Together, these four parts suggest that narratives of *Punch* having ‘abandoned its basic radicalism by the end of the [eighteen] forties’ to become a ‘pillar of the establishment’ cannot be applied to its depiction of the army.⁴⁷ By 1861 *Punch* was far more willing to praise the army’s role at home and

³⁸ Spielmann, *History of ‘Punch’*, pp. 191–4; Bryant, *Wars of Empire in Cartoons*, p. 9; Scully, ‘Cartoon emperor’, p. 165; and Matthewson, *Cartooning China*, p. 12.

³⁹ Scully and Varnava, ‘The importance of cartoons’, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Scully, ‘“For gorsake, stop laughing!”’, pp. 142–3.

⁴¹ Matthewson, *Cartooning China*, p. 17. See also B. Maidment, ‘The presence of *Punch* in the nineteenth century’, in *Asian Punches: a Transcultural Affair*, ed. H. Harder and B. Mittler (Berlin, 2013), pp. 15–46.

⁴² Leary, *Punch Brotherhood*, pp. 18–28.

⁴³ Matthewson, *Cartooning China*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Altick, *Punch*, p. 44; and Leary, *Punch Brotherhood*, pp. 18–28.

⁴⁵ Leary, *Punch Brotherhood*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Briggs and Briggs, *Cap and Bell*, p. xxxvi; and *Punch*, 13 May 1843.

⁴⁷ Altick, *Punch*, p. 737; and Miller, ‘Problem with *Punch*’, p. 288.

abroad than it had been twenty years earlier. Yet its irritation with Britain's military establishment, its unease at the expense of war, its disdain for aristocratic ineptitude and its outrage at the lot of the common soldier remained as strong in 1861 as in 1841.

*

There is no better place to begin than with the British army's *raison d'être*: national defence. This role was never taken seriously in *Punch*, even when the nation appeared to be under threat of a French invasion.⁴⁸ The first major panic occurred in January 1848, when a letter from Wellington, which cast doubt on the effectiveness of Britain's defences, was leaked to the press. Over the next two months, *Punch* poured scorn on the invasion scare. Leech's cartoon 'A silly trick' depicted the whole affair – literally – as a joke. The cartoon depicted John Bull's amusement at a small boy dressed up in a ghostly costume and the shako of a French soldier, with a sign hanging from his neck labelled 'Invasion by the French'.⁴⁹ Three weeks later, Richard Doyle produced a six-page parody of the Bayeux Tapestry, in which a flotilla of seasick Frenchmen crossed the Channel and advanced 'upon ye Capitale bye an earlye train' before being arrested by policemen and chased back into the sea by Mr. Punch and his dog.⁵⁰ In 1852 Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* prompted another invasion scare. Though concerns over the inadequacy of defence expenditure led to the downfall of Lord Derby's Conservative government, *Punch* remained unfazed. 'We have had England threatened so often lately', Beckett noted in February, that 'no method of disembarking the French on our shores seems too absurd'. The nation's alarmists, he added, would soon be predicting 'an invasion by balloons'.⁵¹ *Punch's* response to these invasion scares forms an intriguing point of departure, for the army was conspicuously absent. It was butchers' boys and tradesmen who did battle with cowardly Frenchmen, while the army's role as a domestic institution was ridiculed and caricatured.⁵²

Punch's lampooning of the army's relationship with the monarchy – and especially of Prince Albert's predilection for designing impractical military uniforms – typifies the gentler extreme of this ridicule.⁵³ In 1843 Gilbert à Beckett applauded the Prince Consort for designing 'a hat which may spare the effusion of blood' on the grounds that, when enemy forces caught sight of 'the British soldier in a machine which seem[s] a cross between a muff, a coal-scuttle and a slop-pail ... they will instantly take to their heels'.⁵⁴ Two months later Beckett informed *Punch's* readers that 'the brave fellows who never flinched at the sight of Napoleon's battalions' had been rendered 'panic-stricken at a report that His Royal Highness is going into the hat line'.⁵⁵

Punch's authors and illustrators reserved a harsher line of critique for contemporary debate on army reform, a subject that prompted a complex response. On paper, the chaotic system of mid nineteenth-century military administration – the army was managed by thirteen separate department heads – was a perfect target for satire.⁵⁶ *Punch*, however, refused to take the matter seriously until the system's failings were exposed in the Crimea. Before 1855 its writers and artists were content to poke fun at both sides of the debate. In 1845, when Wellington attempted to regulate smoking in messrooms, to the anger of many officers, Beckett invented the story of a soldier being cashiered for smoking a cigar and suggested that 'the Articles of War' would shortly be rewritten 'for the purpose of declaring the smoking of a cigar to be an offence, for which any officer may be brought to a Court Martial'.⁵⁷ The large cut for the week, 'Mrs. Wellington and the military nursery', depicted Wellington as a governess in nursery full of moustachioed babies, one of whom cried, 'I want my pipe' (Figure 1).⁵⁸ In 1847

⁴⁸ The same was true of other publications, including the *Economist* and the *Illustrated London News* (Gooch, *Prospect of War*, p. 1; and Altick, *Punch*, p. 421).

⁴⁹ *Punch*, 8 Jan. 1848.

⁵⁰ *Punch*, 29 Jan. 1848.

⁵¹ *Punch*, 7 Feb. 1852.

⁵² See 'French sympathisers', *Punch*, 22 Apr. 1848; and 'How to treat a foreign propagandist', *Punch*, 29 Apr. 1848.

⁵³ For the monarchy, see A. Taylor, *Down With the Crown: British Anti-monarchism and Debates About Royalty Since 1790* (London, 1999); and R. Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, 1997).

⁵⁴ *Punch*, 17 Feb. 1843.

⁵⁵ *Punch*, 14 Apr. 1843.

⁵⁶ Strachan, 'Early Victorian army', p. 782.

⁵⁷ *Punch*, 13 Dec. 1845.

⁵⁸ *Punch*, 13 Dec. 1845.



Figure 1. 'Mrs Wellington and the military nursery', *Punch*, 13 December 1845.

proposals that then abounded for superseding the musket were satirized through bogus reports of a 'portable cannon.' According to Horace Mayhew, this was such a 'wonderful invention' that it would soon feature in 'portraits of Field Marshals ... as the instrument to point the way to glory' in lieu of a sword.⁵⁹ Five years later, Leigh caricatured the opponents of the adoption to the Minié rifle in 'Opinions of a crack officer on military fire-arms':

How odd that ev'wy fella thinks
We wun such wisk in case of waw!
Why, shawly, British troops can do
Again what they have done befaw;
We licked the French at Waterloo,
And what's the use of saying maw?⁶⁰

It was not until the Crimean War that *Punch* turned on the army's administration. Some of the resulting satire was relatively gentle, such as 'The administration of the army', a fictitious memorandum that asked 'the Commander-in-Chief to tell the Secretary at War to tell the Secretary of State for the Home Department to

⁵⁹ *Punch*, 4 Sept. 1847.

⁶⁰ *Punch*, 31 Jan. 1852.

tell the Secretary of the Commissariat Department, that the troops are required to march immediately and are waiting for shoes.⁶¹ The majority, however, was not. The large cut ‘Scene from a Midsummer Night’s Dream’, for example, parodied Edwin Landseer’s painting, with Titania – played by Queen Victoria – decorating Bottom – dressed in military uniform and played by ‘General Mismanagement’ – with flowers.⁶² *Punch*’s ‘speciality’ of risibly parodying nursery rhymes through a careful insertion of contemporary references was also used to criticize the army.⁶³ A poem by Beckett, ‘Nursery rhymes for field marshals’, was typical:

Hush-a-by, Marshal, on the tree top,
When the storm blows the System will rock:
When the shock comes the System will fall;
Down will come System, Field-Marshal and all.⁶⁴

Much of this satire drew on the radical traditions of earlier decades. A good example is the popularity of the nursery rhyme ‘The house that Jack built’, which possessed the longest association of any rhyme with early nineteenth-century radical pamphleteering.⁶⁵ In 1855 Taylor penned ‘The steamer that none stowed’, to castigate the army’s chronic supply problems:

Here is the steamer that None stow’d
Here is the Freight, Higgle-Piggledy placed,
Aboard the Steamer that None Stow’d

Taylor’s rhyme continued for two full pages, documenting the calamitous journey of the steamer to the Crimea, featuring ‘the Ordnance Department, standing aghast’ at ‘the Crew drunk as fiddlers, before the mast’ and concluding with ‘John Bull atoning by prayer and fast’, at ‘England’s best Blood, that [had] run to waste.’⁶⁶ Parliamentary interest in military reform diminished after 1856, yet *Punch*’s authors refused to revert to their earlier indifference.

The army’s inability to provide value for money was another regular theme in *Punch*, occupying a position midway between its gentle lampooning of the monarchy and its outrage at the army’s failure in the Crimea. Military economy was a prominent issue in contemporary politics, due to the tension between the defence spending that invasion scares necessitated and the radical belief that heavy service estimates oppressed commerce.⁶⁷ In 1849 an article by Leigh proposed ‘to confer new titles upon certain regiments, to be borne until a due economy shall have been effected in our Military Estimates’. The Horse Guards were to be renamed ‘the Heavy Expensive[s]’, the Grenadier Guards were to become ‘the Extravagant’ and the Household Troops were to ‘generally be styled the Ruination Brigade.’⁶⁸ During the Indian Mutiny, the large cut ‘Mr Bull’s expensive toys’ depicted two ‘swells’ mounted on children’s hobby horses outside Horse Guards Parade, unwilling to undertake the soldiering that they were paid for on the grounds that a soldier’s life was ‘a baw’ (Figure 2).⁶⁹ That same year Taylor complained of the nation’s military estimates in a parody of ‘Johnny’s so long at the fair’:

Of course, with the staff we can’t tamper
Of course, we can’t touch the Horse-Guards
We must stand by our friends and relations
And not meddle with well-earned rewards.⁷⁰

⁶¹ *Punch*, 3 June 1854.

⁶² *Punch*, 23 Feb. 1856.

⁶³ Altick, *Punch*, p. 92.

⁶⁴ *Punch*, 3 Nov. 1856.

⁶⁵ Altick, *Punch*, p. 95. William Hone’s satire ‘The political house that Jack built’, for example, ran through over twenty-seven editions in the aftermath of the Peterloo Massacre (W. Hone, ‘The political house that Jack built’, University of Manchester, John Rylands Library, R106162.1).

⁶⁶ *Punch*, 5 May 1855.

⁶⁷ Strachan, ‘Early Victorian army’, p. 792; and J. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830–1886* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 160–70.

⁶⁸ *Punch*, 3 Feb. 1849.

⁶⁹ *Punch*, 31 Oct. 1857.

⁷⁰ *Punch*, 7 March 1857.



MR. BULL'S EXPENSIVE TOYS.

FIRST HOUSEHOLD SWELL. "SHARP WORK IN INDIAW!"

SECOND Do. Do. "YA'AS!—WHAT A BAW A SOLDIER'S LIFE MUST BE!"

Figure 2. 'Mr. Bull's expensive toys', *Punch*, 31 October 1847.

Yet while *Punch* continued to deplore the army's expense, it did moderate its opinion of the purchase system. Purchase required officers to buy their commissions, with prices typically reaching £9,000 for a lieutenant colonelcy, although Lord Cardigan is believed to have paid £40,000 to command the

11th Light Dragoons.⁷¹ While the 1850s are often viewed by historians as the beginning of *Punch*'s 'respectable' years, its loathing of purchase continued well into its second decade.⁷² In 1845 Beckett's entry in the comic series 'Punch's political dictionary' for 'Commission' read, 'An outward sign of military merit that may be had by paying for'. Bravery in battle did nothing to aid the young cornet's chances of promotion, Beckett explained, 'unless he can follow up the act of drawing his sword upon the enemy, by drawing his cheque upon a banker'.⁷³ In 1846 Thackeray's serial 'The snobs of England' looked forward to the day 'when epaulettes are not sold' and the 'Corporal has a chance to have his gallantry rewarded as well as that of [the] Lieutenant'.⁷⁴ In 1850, learning that a colonelcy had been bought for £16,000, Henry Mayhew despaired at how 'the English gentleman becomes a lieutenant-colonel, not by merit, but by money'.⁷⁵ The failings of aristocratic officers in the Crimea provided further proof of the system's inadequacies. In 1855 a large cut entitled 'Shopping' juxtaposed an experienced veteran unable to afford his captaincy with a mother buying her infant son a colonelcy (Figure 3).⁷⁶

In September 1857 *Punch* reversed its position, despite a royal commission having concluded that purchase was 'vicious in principle, repugnant to the public sentiment of the present day [and] irreconcilable with justice'.⁷⁷ Tom Taylor's full-page response to the commission, 'Mr. Punch on purchase', however, argued that purchase was 'worth the money'. 'It would cost £7,000,000 to get rid of it', Taylor complained, adding that 'if we get rid of purchase, it must either be for seniority or selection', neither of which was desirable. Seniority would 'give us captains as grey and gouty as our generals used to be', while selection would lead to nepotism and senior officers, anxious to avoid favouritism, 'will fall back in practice on seniority'. John Bull, Taylor concluded, preferred 'cobbling his old shoes, to flinging them away on the strength of the first advertiser, who promises him first rate stuff for next to nothing'.⁷⁸ Changes to the composition of the *Punch* staff may have contributed to this volte-face. Gilbert à Beckett was dead by September 1857, while Henry Mayhew and William Thackeray had both resigned. Yet Taylor had been a member of the *Punch* staff since 1844 and was no reactionary. As will be discussed below, he shared his colleagues' outrage at the mismanagement of the Crimean War and frequently criticized expensive colonial wars.

If the *Punch* staff were at odds over purchase, they were united in their indifference to an even more damning aspect of the British army's domestic role: the use of military force to quell civil unrest. With the police force in its infancy, the mainstay of public peace in the 1840s and 1850s, in the words of G. M. Young, 'was not the constable but the yeoman, and behind the yeoman ... the soldier'.⁷⁹ The growth of the railway network enabled troops to be rushed to suppress riots and industrial disturbances, from striking brickmakers in Ashton-under-Lyne to carpet weavers in Kidderminster, election day riots and, on one occasion, a crowd attempting to bait an ox on its way to market.⁸⁰ Yet these actions only merited attention from *Punch* when they provided grounds for a clever pun. In August 1842 workers in the manufacturing districts of northern England rose in the 'Plug Riots', Britain's first general strike. In Preston a detachment of Highlanders opened fire on a crowd of strikers, killing four men. The only reference to Preston in *Punch* that summer, however, was a cartoon that depicted workers fighting with saucepans entitled 'The Battle of Preston Pans' – a reference to the battle of the same name that had taken place in the Jacobite Rebellion.⁸¹ In 1851, at the height of *Punch*'s 'no-Popery' campaign, magistrates in Liverpool summoned four companies of infantry to put down a riot of Irish Catholics. Jerrold and Leigh's response to the riot, however, ignored the

⁷¹ Farwell, *For Queen and Country*, pp. 56–9.

⁷² Altick, *Punch*, p. 734.

⁷³ *Punch*, 13 Dec. 1845.

⁷⁴ *Punch*, 2 May 1846.

⁷⁵ *Punch*, 30 Nov. 1850.

⁷⁶ *Punch*, 24 Feb. 1855.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Farwell, *For Queen and Country*, p. 57.

⁷⁸ *Punch*, 5 Sept. 1857.

⁷⁹ G. M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* (2nd edn., London, 1968), p. 38.

⁸⁰ See D. Kent, 'Controlling disorder in the "age of equipoise": troops, trains, and the telegraph', *Social History*, xxxviii (2013), 308–27 at pp. 316–22; and Young, *Portrait of an Age*, p. 38.

⁸¹ *Punch*, 27 Aug. 1842.



SHOPPING!

Figure 3. 'Shopping!', *Punch*, 24 February 1855.

authorities' use of troops and concentrated on blaming the Catholics for the riot, insisting that it was 'an assault on the feelings of Protestant England' for the 'black-robed priesthood' to 'flaunt it in the streets'.⁸² In 1853, when a detachment of soldiers broke a weavers' strike in Wigan, Brooks imagined

⁸² *Punch*, 11 Jan. 1851.

the utilitarian mill owners M.P.s Richard Cobden and John Bright attempting to disperse the weavers: ‘The missionaries of peace and political economy ... reached Wigan, had the military sent away, and ... offered to fight anybody who was irrational.’⁸³ The use of military force to quell unrest, therefore, was one area in which *Punch* truly was a London-centric paper and visited the provinces only ‘for the sake of a laugh.’⁸⁴ Ironically, for a periodical that paid such close attention to the army’s role in colonial wars, the furthest into the provincial Britain that *Punch* ventured in pursuit of the army was Chobham Common. The rain-soaked manoeuvres that the army carried out in the summer of 1853, in which ‘the gallant fellows assembled under canvas’ proved ‘that they can not only stand fire, but they can stand water with an astonishing bravery’, gave Gilbert à Beckett no end of fun.⁸⁵ That aside – and not counting the occasional references in Thackeray’s articles on ‘military snobs’ to fictitious reviews of the ‘North Diddlesex Regiment of Yeomanry Cavalry’ – the army’s role in provincial Britain was a complete blank.⁸⁶

Punch’s depiction of the British army ‘at home’ therefore attests to its refusal to be neatly synopsized with any exactitude. Of course, this should not be viewed in isolation from its stance on other issues. That *Punch* was quiet on matters relating to administrative reform in the 1840s does not mean that the same was applied, for instance, to the morality of war or the use of flogging. Yet *Punch*’s mockery of the army’s organization and administration was in many ways gentler and more ‘respectable’ in the 1840s than it became after the Crimean War. Furthermore, *Punch* maintained a consistent opposition to the army’s cost and, for most of the period, to the purchase system, all the while ignoring the army’s role in quelling unrest. A similar degree of complexity characterized *Punch*’s attitude towards the army’s role abroad.

*

The bellicosity with which *Punch* greeted the outbreak of war with Russia in 1853 is well known, as is the disillusionment that followed. In the first year of the Crimean War, *Punch* cartoons overflowed with martial fervour. ‘What it has come to’ depicted a hapless Aberdeen trying desperately to keep the British lion from pouncing on the Russian bear.⁸⁷ ‘Our guards’ compared an officer inviting a lady to dance at a ball with an image of the same man leading his regiment into a Russian battery. ‘They can play’, the caption read, ‘and by Jove they can fight too.’⁸⁸ Poems were similarly employed to extol the righteousness of the war. In ‘God defend the right’, Taylor waxed lyrical of England’s proud tradition of upholding right against wrong, asking,

What wonder then, if Englishmen are in this faith so bold?
That each man’s hand grips to the brand his father drew of old?
What wonder that, with hearts elate, our soldiers seek the fight,
To the great cry – from the nation’s heart – of ‘God defend the Right!’⁸⁹

When the Allied fleet entered the Black Sea, Tenniel’s large cut ‘The united service’, which depicted a British guardsman arm in arm with a French grenadier, became so popular that it appeared on packets of playing cards (Figure 4).⁹⁰ The war fever reached its zenith in the Leech cartoon ‘Victory of the Alma’, in which three Allied soldiers cheered as they planted their nation’s flags atop the captured Russian redoubts (Figure 5).⁹¹ The victory also prompted another poem from Taylor:

⁸³ *Punch*, 12 Nov. 1853.

⁸⁴ Briggs and Briggs, *Cap and Bell*, p. xxix.

⁸⁵ *Punch*, 30 July 1853.

⁸⁶ *Punch*, 29 Nov. 1845.

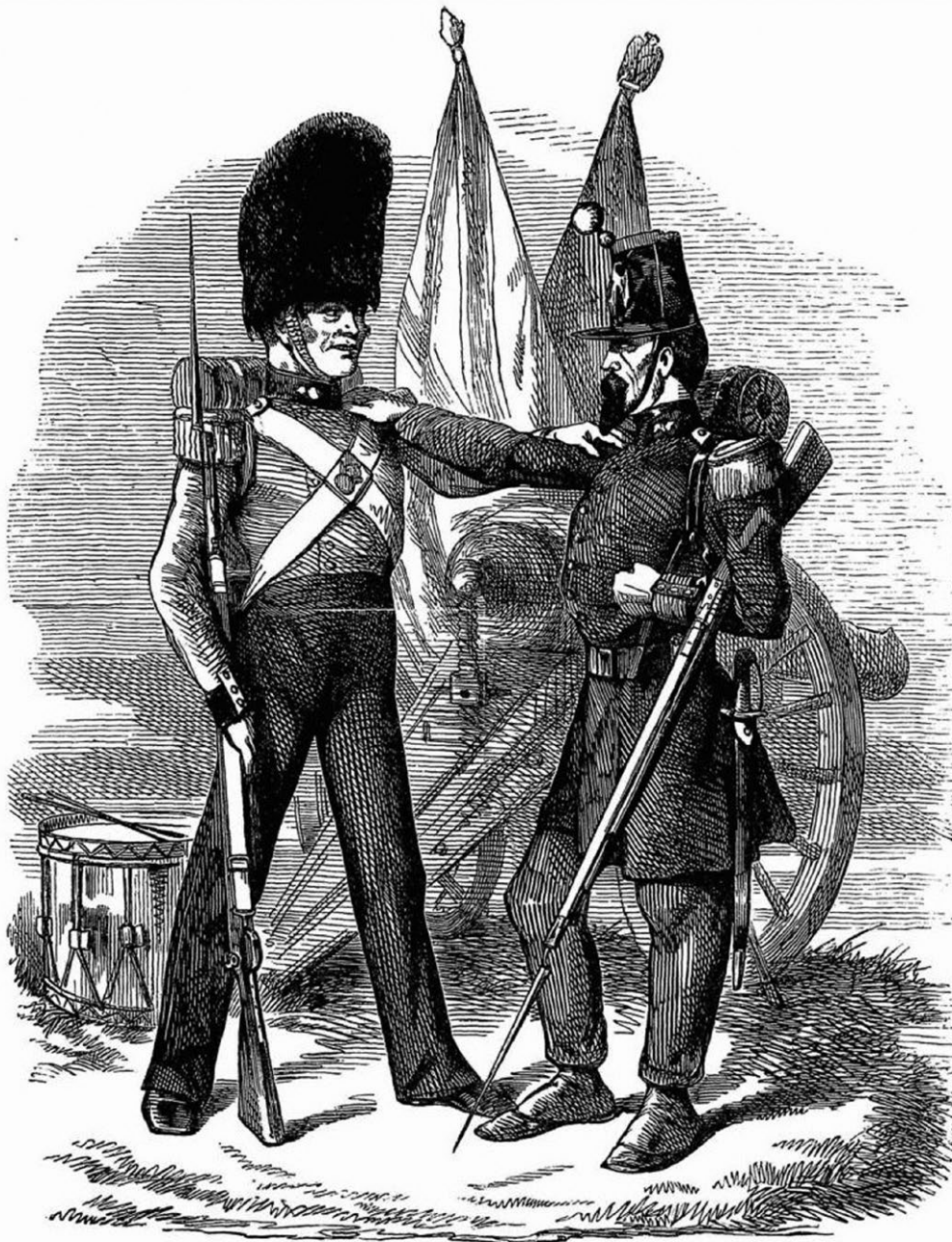
⁸⁷ *Punch*, 18 Feb. 1854.

⁸⁸ *Punch*, 25 Feb. 1854.

⁸⁹ *Punch*, 4 March 1854.

⁹⁰ *Punch*, 4 March 1857; and Bryant, *Wars of Empire in Cartoons*, p. 15.

⁹¹ *Punch*, 14 Oct. 1854.

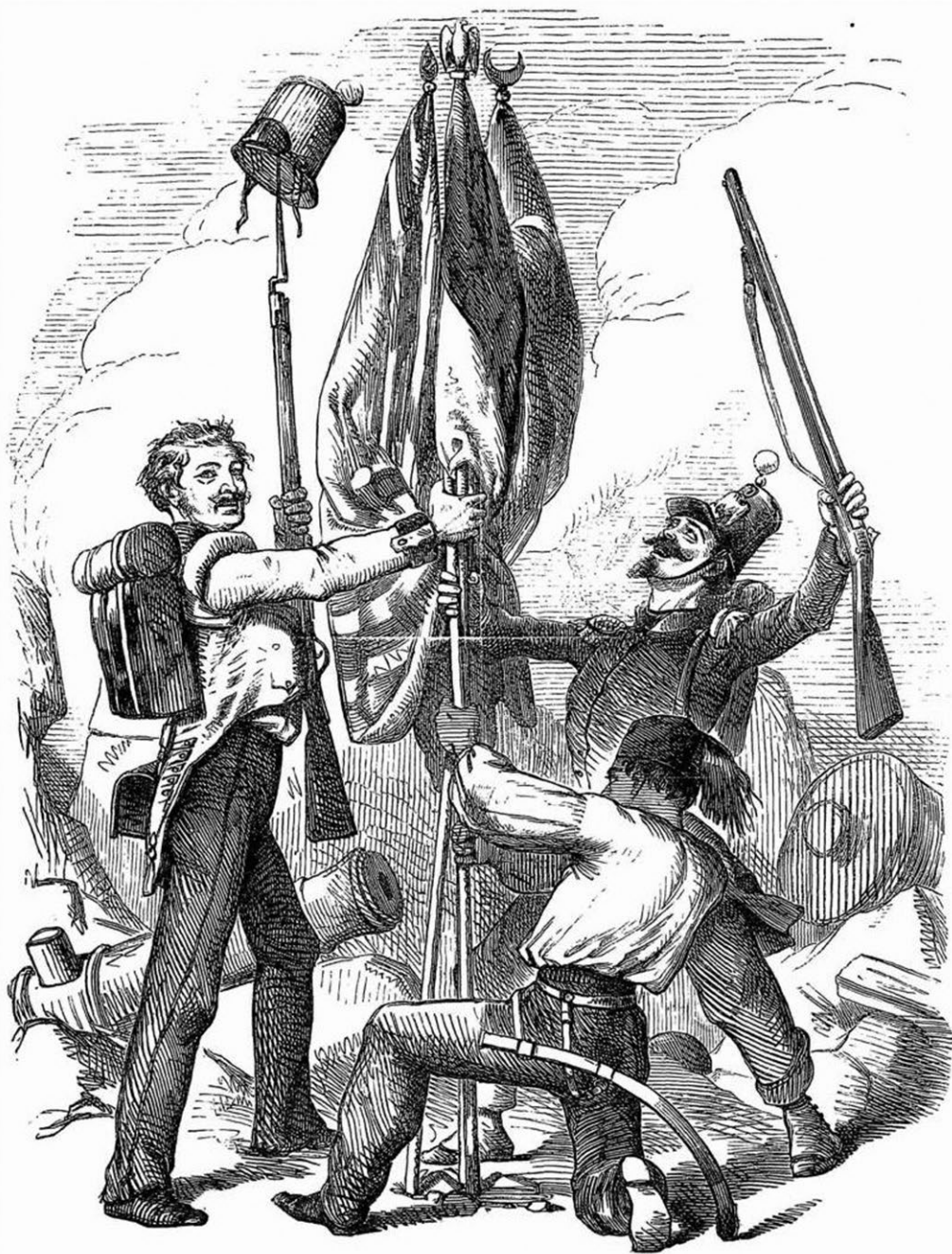


THE UNITED SERVICE.

Figure 4. 'The united service', *Punch*, 4 March 1854.

Thank God, we still have something of the stout old Spartan strain;
 What mother but would sooner learn how that her son was slain,
 Face to the foe, than he should owe his life to flight or fear?
 Better to spare a hero there, than have a coward here.⁹²

⁹² *Punch*, 7 Oct. 1854.



VICTORY OF THE ALMA.

Figure 5. 'Victory of the Alma,' *Punch*, 14 October 1854.

By the winter, *Punch's* outlook had changed dramatically. In February 1855 Leech produced one of his most iconic cartoons, in which two ragged soldiers, identifiable as British only by a single bearskin helmet, discussed news from home in the Crimean winter: 'We're to have a medal.' 'That's very kind.'

Maybe one of these days we'll have a coat to stick it on?' (Figure 6).⁹³ Taylor, dismayed at how Britain's 'starving army haunts us night and day', concluded that war was 'not a thing to be trifled with'.⁹⁴ Its 'horrors', Gilbert à Beckett agreed in an article entitled 'The dangers of playing at war' argued, were 'distasteful ... to all persons of common sense, and common humanity'.⁹⁵

The *Punch* staff devoted over a hundred large cuts to the Crimean War, which have become a common sight in histories of the period.⁹⁶ The narrative of *Punch* 'reflect[ing] the nation's impatience at apparent inaction' and ensuring that 'public clamour for a vigorous opposition to autocracy' forced Aberdeen's cabinet to declare war is all too familiar.⁹⁷ 'Before the war', the argument runs, 'the stereotypical soldier was an aristocratic fop. After it, he was a brave private'.⁹⁸ The tale has been so well told that it is easy to view *Punch*'s transition from war fever to war weariness in 1855 as the epitome of its view on warfare. As recent studies have begun to acknowledge, the reality was more complex.⁹⁹ The bellicosity that characterized *Punch* in the first year of the Crimean War was a marked deviation from the periodical's norms, and at no other point in the mid nineteenth century did *Punch* endorse a foreign war as unconditionally as it did between September 1853 and December 1854.

Throughout its first decade, *Punch* displayed a consistent hostility towards foreign warfare and military adventurism. In 1842 'Laurels at Ningpo' described Britain's involvement in the First Opium War (1839–42) as 'a bloody farce' and 'blush[ed] at the outlay of lead and powder' in the nation's 'fight for opium'.¹⁰⁰ Far from exuding what Matthewson described as a 'sense of playful patriotism' at the expense of the Chinese, *Punch* was convinced that British soldiers 'compelled to cut the throat



"WELL, JACK! HERE'S GOOD NEWS FROM HOME. WE'RE TO HAVE A MEDAL."
"THAT'S VERY KIND. MAYBE ONE OF THESE DAYS WE'LL HAVE A COAT TO STICK IT ON?"

Figure 6. *Punch*, 15 February 1856.

⁹³ *Punch*, 17 Feb. 1855.

⁹⁴ *Punch*, 17 Feb. 1855.

⁹⁵ *Punch*, 24 Aug. 1855.

⁹⁶ Cross, 'Crimean War', p. 471.

⁹⁷ Cross, 'Crimean War', p. 464; and Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 9.

⁹⁸ Markovits, *Crimean War in the British Imagination*, p. 4.

⁹⁹ Scully, 'Cartoon emperor', p. 165.

¹⁰⁰ *Punch*, 17 Sept. 1842.

and blow out the brains of miserable wretches must feel mightily abashed as they pull the trigger'.¹⁰¹ In 1852 *Punch*'s coverage of the Eighth Xhosa War (1850–3) produced no celebration of empire building or glorification of military adventurism. Instead, 'A suggestion for the War Office' recommended that, 'as an elementary lesson for raw recruits commencing practice with firearms, a figure, dressed as a British soldier, should be used as a target', on the grounds that 'it is proved by experience at the Cape, that nothing is easier to hit'.¹⁰² This hatred of warfare was not limited to instances in which British soldiers fought overseas. When the archbishop of Canterbury blessed the colours of the 72nd Highlanders, Jerrold vilified the prelate for 'invoking the spirit of Jesus to bless [and] consecrate the flag of bloodshed and spoilation'.¹⁰³

The best example of *Punch*'s radical anti-militarism, however, is 'Punch's labours of Hercules', an 1843 serial by Percival Leigh in which Hercules' labours were analogous with society's ills. The Augean Stables represented parliament – which Hercules scoured with public opinion – Tartarus represented the workhouse and Pluto and Cerberus took the form of political economists. The Nemean lion, meanwhile, featured as 'a biped brute' with 'a scarlet coat', who 'had desolated Earth and scandalized Heaven for ages' and whose 'name was war'. Men, Leigh lamented, 'committed idolatry to this Lion' by singing 'hymns to his glory' and giving his 'cubs' grand names like 'Colonels, Generals and Field Marshals'. Fortunately, Hercules, armed with his 'Punch Club', was on hand to drive 'out of the heads of the nations the fallacy that there was anything fine in this beast'. By the time Hercules was finished, 'even the French perceived War to be a mistake' and the lion was reduced to a 'savage', which Hercules 'quietly choked'.¹⁰⁴ If articles like this cannot be regarded as 'outcroppings of antimilitarism', it is hard to imagine what can. While the rapid substitution of war fever for anti-militarism might be seen as proof that *Punch* did change its view of warfare in the 1850s, it was extremely rare for *Punch* support a war so unconditionally in the mid century. The period from 1853 to 1854 was an exception to the rule and even then, a heightened sense of patriotism soon gave way to pessimism when the misconduct of the Crimean War was exposed.

Punch continued to criticize the army's activities abroad after the Crimean War, albeit on the grounds of the expense of warfare rather than its inherent immorality. As alluded to above, this was in keeping with the laissez-faire spirit of the age, which regarded expensive foreign commitments as a direct cause of high prices at home.¹⁰⁵ *Punch* was a party to this economy drive. In 1849 Beckett used Major General Sir Hugh Gough's tactical recklessness at the Battle of Chillianwala to criticize the expense of the Second Sikh War (1848–9). 'Lord Gough', Beckett wrote, 'is the greatest military economist of the age, for by his operations in India he has carried into practice the principle of reducing the army to an extent almost without precedent'.¹⁰⁶ In 1853, before the excitement of the Crimean War fully took hold, Leigh criticized the cost of the war in 'The trumpet of battle':

Let the sword leap from the scabbard while the frantic bugles bray,
Draw, England, draw the purse as well that must be flung away,
Charge! And in charging never think how much you'll have to pay;
To the Brave there will be time to talk of that another day!¹⁰⁷

In 1857, in 'Here a war, there a war', a poem 'dedicated to John Bull', Tom Taylor and Shirley Brooks reflected on four years of expensive conflict in Russia, India and China:

Here a War, there a War, Wondering Johnny,
When you've done wondering, pay for the game:
Come, tell us frankly, you, John think it dear, eh?
Punch must inform you that he thinks the same.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Matthewson, *Cartooning China*, p. 80; and *Punch*, 17 Sept. 1842.

¹⁰² *Punch*, 12 June 1852.

¹⁰³ *Punch*, 5 Feb. 1842.

¹⁰⁴ *Punch*, 13 May 1843.

¹⁰⁵ Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, p. 185.

¹⁰⁶ *Punch*, 17 March 1849.

¹⁰⁷ *Punch*, 15 Oct. 1853.

¹⁰⁸ *Punch*, 8 Aug. 1857.

In 1860, when *Punch* endorsed the Second Opium War (1856–60) to a degree unimaginable twenty years previously, it was still uneasy about the expense of the campaign. In ‘Laurels at Ningpo’, *Punch* had talked of ‘a war without glory which, when ended, can give no laurels to the victors’, whose ‘most fitting chaplets will be wreaths of poppies’.¹⁰⁹ In 1860, when an Anglo-French army under Sir James Hope Grant routed the Tartar mercenary Sang Ko Lin Sin, Henry Silver penned the following poem:

If Bulls will rush into China-shops,
And with their jars get entangled
They should feel no dismay when they’re called on to pay
For the crockery they have mangled.¹¹⁰

Even the large cut ‘What we ought to do in China’, which has been cited by Matthewson as proof that *Punch*’s early radicalism ‘subsided into nationalist sentiments and a belief in Britain’s superiority over other nations and races’, was accompanied by complaints about the cost of the war (Figure 7).¹¹¹ The cartoon depicted a classical figure on horseback wielding a flail of cannon balls against dragon with a ‘Mandarin’ moustache, in revenge for the torture of a British diplomat. Yet it was also accompanied by a poem by Taylor, who, though delighted by the victory, was anxious for a swift end to the war and an indemnity to cover the cost:

The Tartar-heap are scattered like sheep
E’en San-ko-lin-tsin can’t find them
May the Allies come home and let Peking alone
But not leave their taels behind them.¹¹²

When reflecting on *Punch*’s attitude towards foreign warfare, therefore, the historian is presented with such a set of apparently contradictory attitudes that, at first glance, there appears little else to do but to ascribe to *Punch*’s editors a commitment to the ‘Fleet Street Formula’ espoused by contemporary journalists. ‘Preach war’, the saying went, and ‘John Bull will throw you down and call you mad. Preach peace and John will approve, but he will think you poor-spirited. But if you preach peace and war, John will praise you, buy you, and dub you his organ’.¹¹³ The key to solving this problem is to understand that *Punch*’s attitude towards foreign war was characterized, not by a sudden shift from anti-militarism to ultra-patriotism that pivoted on the Crimean War, or by a general disinterest in foreign affairs, but by a gradual process of transformation in which the bellicosity of 1854 was an aberration. It was very unusual for *Punch* not to find fault with a foreign war and even by the 1860s it remained deeply uneasy with the expense of colonial warfare. An equally popular subject for criticism was the army’s leadership.

*

It is often suggested that *Punch* was ‘funny without giving offence’.¹¹⁴ This was not true of its depiction of the British officer. Throughout its first twenty years, *Punch* held the ‘military snob’ – the rakish, aristocratic ‘plunger’ who, in Taylor’s words, ‘came into the army to idle, dress and dine’ – in contempt.¹¹⁵ Despite having paid a sizeable sum for his commission, the typical plunger displayed little enthusiasm for soldiering and preferred the delights of London society to the shot and steel of the battlefield. A large cut entitled ‘The drawing room captain’ was accompanied by a poem that described him as follows (Figure 8):

¹⁰⁹ *Punch*, 17 Feb. 1842.

¹¹⁰ *Punch*, 21 July 1860.

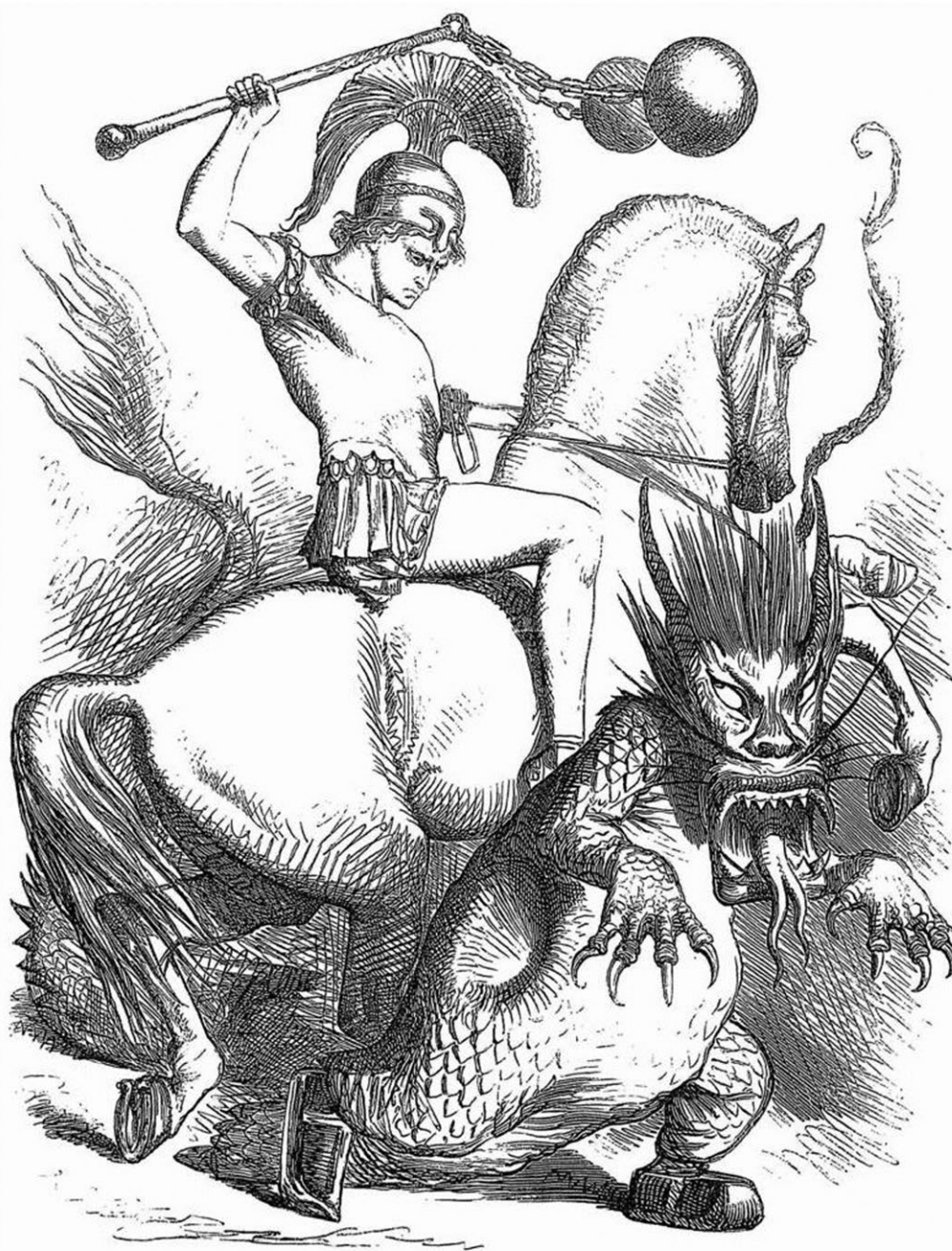
¹¹¹ Altick, *Punch*, p. xix; *Punch*, 22 Dec. 1860; and Matthewson, *Cartooning China*, p. 106.

¹¹² *Punch*, 5 Jan. 1851. A tael was a Chinese unit of currency.

¹¹³ S. E. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, Volume One: the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1981), p. 90.

¹¹⁴ Miller, ‘Problem with *Punch*’, p. 287.

¹¹⁵ C. Woodham-Smith, *The Reason Why* (Harmondsworth, 1968) p. 140; and *Punch*, 11 July 1857.



WHAT WE OUGHT TO DO IN CHINA.

Figure 7. 'What we ought to do in China,' *Punch*, 22 December 1860.

They say you ne'er smelt powder,
Save that call'd 'violet' – that no prouder
Boast is thine of seeking 'bubble reputation',
By a cannon made at billiards; nor rely



Figure 8. ‘The drawing room captain’, *Punch*, 12 February 1842.

On any services you’ve done the nation;
 Except inventing a new hair-dye
 Warranted to make moustaches stand caresses
 Sans peur, especially from heiresses.¹¹⁶

The tropes that *Punch* employed to vilify opulent military snobs remained consistent throughout the period, even after the departure of its more radical writers and artists. There was no better way of ‘training up our soldiers to face danger’, Beckett joked in 1848, than through ‘the most formidable of

¹¹⁶ *Punch*, 12 Feb. 1842.

all encounters, the unsatisfied creditor'.¹¹⁷ In 1857, learning of proposals to introduce examinations for officers' commissions, Horace Mayhew speculated that the 'chief points of examination' would include the candidate's ability 'to make out his name to an I.O.U.' and to 'prove an intimate acquaintance with the locality of all principal casinos'.¹¹⁸ In 1861, by which time he had moderated his tone on other issues, including the purchase system, Leigh continued to complain of the number of 'opulent men' in 'cavalry regiments', hoping that the future would see an army 'which young men will enter with the view of serving their country, and not that of dressing magnificently and inducing in wasteful debauchery'.¹¹⁹

Though military snobs were, as Thackeray complained, 'of such number and variety, that a hundred weeks would not suffice to give an audience to them', individuals were occasionally singled out.¹²⁰ Lord Cardigan, lieutenant colonel of the 11th Hussars and the most notorious plunger of the day, was one of *Punch*'s favourite targets. In 1841, when Cardigan was prosecuted for duelling with one of his officers, *Punch* recommended that he 'follow the example of the officers of Ghent, who have introduced umbrellas into the army', on the grounds that 'some men should gladly avail themselves of any opportunity of hiding their heads'.¹²¹ Cardigan's willingness to spend vast sums of money to dress his regiment in brilliantly coloured uniforms was also mocked. Though not 'particular to a shade' when it came to clothes, Silver regarded the cherry-coloured trousers that the 11th Hussars wore, and which made 'the bearer look as though he had literally been walking through a cherry tart', as fit 'only for a pantomime'.¹²² Even when *Punch* was praising the army as it departed for the Crimea, Leigh could not resist dedicating the following poem 'without permission to the Earl of Cardigan':

Oh, pantaloons of cherry!
Oh, redder than raspberry!
For men to fight in things so tight
It must be trying – very!¹²³

Punch's contempt for military snobs was matched only by its refusal to forgive poor leadership in battle. While it has been suggested that the Victorian media tended to avoid overt criticisms of military failure, preferring instead to reattribute failures 'within the context of heroic and redemptive sacrifice rather than incompetence', *Punch* showed no mercy to officers whose campaigns resulted in unnecessary loss of life.¹²⁴ Occasionally, this led to awkward results, especially before the introduction of the telegraph. When news reached London of Gough's repulse at Chillianwala, Beckett insisted that his replacement by Sir Charles Napier was 'indispensable to prevent further calamity'.¹²⁵ When Napier arrived in India, however, Gough had salvaged his reputation through a decisive victory at Gujarat. The *Punch* staff, to their credit, were happy to mock their own standards. 'Having violently abused Lord Gough for losing the day at Chillianwala', Leigh wrote, '*Punch* outrageously glorifies him for winning the fight at Gujarat ... for Mr. Punch, like many other people, of course looks merely to results; and takes as his only criterion of merit, success'.¹²⁶

The most notorious example of *Punch*'s disdain for poor leadership was the anti-aristocratic sentiment that appeared during the Crimean War.¹²⁷ At first, this attitude was relatively mild. *Punch* was at first willing to regard the Light Brigade's doomed charge as a glorious and ultimately forgivable

¹¹⁷ *Punch*, 12 Aug. 1848.

¹¹⁸ *Punch*, 11 Apr. 1857.

¹¹⁹ *Punch*, 2 Feb. 1861.

¹²⁰ *Punch*, 9 May 1846.

¹²¹ *Punch*, 14 Aug. 1841.

¹²² *Punch*, 30 Sept. 1854.

¹²³ *Punch*, 6 May 1854.

¹²⁴ MacKenzie, 'Heroic myths of empire', in *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, ed. J. MacKenzie (Manchester, 1992) pp. 109–38, at p. 221.

¹²⁵ *Punch*, 7 Apr. 1849.

¹²⁶ *Punch*, 5 May 1849.

¹²⁷ See A. Taylor, *Lords of Misrule: Hostility to Aristocracy in the Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 36–7.

mistake. Leech depicted Cardigan in 'A Trump Card(igan)' as heroically leading his men into the Russian guns.¹²⁸ Taylor asked,

Whose was the blame? Name not his name, but rather seek to hide
If he lives, leave him to conscience – to God, if he has died.¹²⁹

This attitude did not last long. When rumours began to circulate that Cardigan had abandoned his brigade to the Russian battery, Taylor went out of his way to destroy Cardigan's image. In 'Mr. Punch does penance', he begged 'to apologize for the blunder' that, caused by 'the blast of Lord Cardigan's own trumpet', had caused him to accidentally 'represent ... his Lordship as a hero'.¹³⁰ The years 1855 and 1856 saw countless poems by Taylor attacking the army's leadership. 'Pour encourager les autres' – the best example of *Punch*'s anger at military incompetence extending far beyond 'humorous and gently amusing' cartoons – pined for the bygone age of 1757, when Admiral Byng had been executed on the quarterdeck of his own ship after the loss of Minorca.¹³¹

Simpsons, Cardigans, Lucans and Aireys and all,
On whose backs our Crimean discredits must fall –
Bless your stars you have fallen on days when *The Times*
Not Court-Martials and Commons, judge you and your crimes
We are soft now-a-days as our fathers were hard
'To encourage the rest' – where they shot, we reward.¹³²

Conversely, *Punch* held military success in high regard and was happy to praise victorious officers whenever the opportunity arose, especially if their heroism could be juxtaposed to the idleness of military snobs. During the First Sikh War Thackeray complained of 'military snobs ... at home on sick leave', who repaired their health 'by being intoxicated every night'. Such men were contrasted with those 'who fought with brilliant valour' and who, *Punch* assured its readers, were 'not snobs' and were entirely deserving of praise. 'Their country admires them, their Sovereign rewards them, and Mr. Punch takes off his hat and says Heaven save them!'¹³³ When parliament questioned the necessity of awarding Gough and Sir Henry Hardinge, the governor general of India, annuities for their victories against the Sikhs, on the grounds that the pair already received lavish grants from the East India Company, *Punch* depicted Wellington as a petulant child who, jealous of his toy box of medals and titles, 'wouldn't let Master Hardinge and Master Gough have any of the nice things' (Figure 9).¹³⁴ Yet Wellington was no snob. After his death in 1852, the spartan Iron Duke was memorialized by Taylor as the embodiment of the qualities that a British officer ought to possess:

Linger long and learn how, Spartan-like and stern,
He wrote at that poor table and sat in that mean chair,
How, with secretary near, in close toil and severe
He laboured, nor his body nor his mind for age would spare.¹³⁵

'Wellington', Leigh added, never 'conceived that there [was] anything to admire in ... uniforms and parades'; he fought only 'for the sake of that country which now blesses his memory'.¹³⁶ It was not just plungers, however, whom Leigh used Wellington to attack, for Wellington died shortly after Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*. Leigh's dislike of Napoleon III was so intense that Wellington was recast as

¹²⁸ *Punch*, 25 Nov. 1854. For more on this cartoon, see Markovits, *Crimean War in the British Imagination*, pp. 184–6.

¹²⁹ *Punch*, 2 Dec. 1854.

¹³⁰ *Punch*, 16 Feb. 1856.

¹³¹ Cross, 'Crimean War', p. 471.

¹³² *Punch*, 16 Feb. 1856.

¹³³ *Punch*, 9 May 1846.

¹³⁴ *Punch*, 20 June 1846.

¹³⁵ *Punch*, 29 Jan. 1853.

¹³⁶ *Punch*, 2 Oct. 1852.



Figure 9. 'The greedy boy', *Punch*, 20 June 1846.

a soldier in the service of liberty, despite his infamous opposition to reform.¹³⁷ When debate arose over whether the foreign standards captured by Wellington should be displayed in the presence of European dignitaries at his funeral, Leigh insisted that 'now, when Liberty over all Europe is extinct',

¹³⁷ For *Punch*'s depiction of Napoleon III, see Scully, 'Cartoon emperor', p. 161.

it was meet and right to ‘advertise to Continental despots’ the ‘fire conserved and still blazing in this little island’, to which Wellington’s heroism had been in service.¹³⁸

It was also in the 1850s – especially during the Indian Mutiny – that British officers began to acquire a new kind of heroic status in the nation’s media and to embody the moral virtues of the empire.¹³⁹ Of these, Major General Sir Henry Havelock, an intensely religious officer who died after relieving Lucknow, has been identified as the example par excellence.¹⁴⁰ *Punch* played an active role in this myth-making process. Shirley Brooks’s poem ‘Havelock’ featured underneath a cartoon of the British lion faithfully resting its head on the general’s coffin:

Guarded to a soldier’s grave
By the bravest of the brave,
He hath gained a nobler tomb
Than in old Cathedral gloom.
England’s banners o’er him waved.
Dead, he keeps the realm he saved.¹⁴¹

Another officer who became a favourite of *Punch* was Field Marshal Sir Colin Campbell, the hero of the ‘Thin Red Line’ at Balaklava and the commander-in-chief of British forces during the Indian Mutiny. In July 1860 Campbell was the subject of *Punch*’s greatest outburst of approval for the army since the Crimean War. The large cut ‘See the conquering hero comes’ depicted Mr. Punch, Palmerston and Lord Russell dressed as Volunteers, presenting arms to Campbell as he returned home from India at the head of a marching pipe band (Figure 10).¹⁴² Unsurprisingly, given *Punch*’s silence on the issue in the 1840s, the fact that Campbell had trained soldiers to suppress industrial unrest as part of Napier’s Northern Command presented no obstacle to his depiction as a military hero.¹⁴³

‘The gentlemen of whom the army is composed’, Wellington maintained, made ‘the best officers in the world.’¹⁴⁴ Its glorification of Wellington after his death notwithstanding, there is little to suggest that *Punch* shared this opinion of the army’s leadership. Indeed, one of the best examples of the prevalence of a radical streak in *Punch* is its depiction of British officers. By 1861, when *Punch* had modified its opinion of the purchase system and was willing to endorse Grant’s victory in China, the plunger remained an object of contempt. It is true enough that attacks on military snobs did not constitute the entirety of *Punch*’s depiction of military officers. Yet it speaks to the periodical’s enduring radicalism that, in the 1840s and the 1850s, the successes of British officers abroad was so frequently used to highlight the idleness of snobs and plungers at home. This treatment of the foibles and failings of Victorian officers was accompanied by a notably sincere appreciation of the plight of the ranker under his command.

*

Punch’s consistent sympathy with the ranker presents the most significant challenge to arguments that the periodical had no quarrel with the armed forces as an institution, for it was with that institution’s treatment of its soldiers that *Punch* repeatedly quarrelled. This is exemplified by *Punch*’s stance on three issues: flogging, the leather stock that the soldier wore as part of his uniform, and the living conditions of barracks. Flogging was not limited to serious offences until 1859. Until then, it remained a common punishment in the army for crimes as trivial as the failure to answer roll call.¹⁴⁵ To *Punch*, this was nothing short of ‘military torture’, which, as Leigh complained after the Crimean War, caused Britain to differ ‘in barbarity from Russia only in extent and degree.’¹⁴⁶ In 1845 Horace Mayhew,

¹³⁸ *Punch*, 27 Nov. 1852.

¹³⁹ MacKenzie, ‘Heroic myths of empire’, pp. 112–14; and Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ MacKenzie, ‘Heroic myths of empire’, p. 118.

¹⁴¹ *Punch*, 16 Jan. 1858.

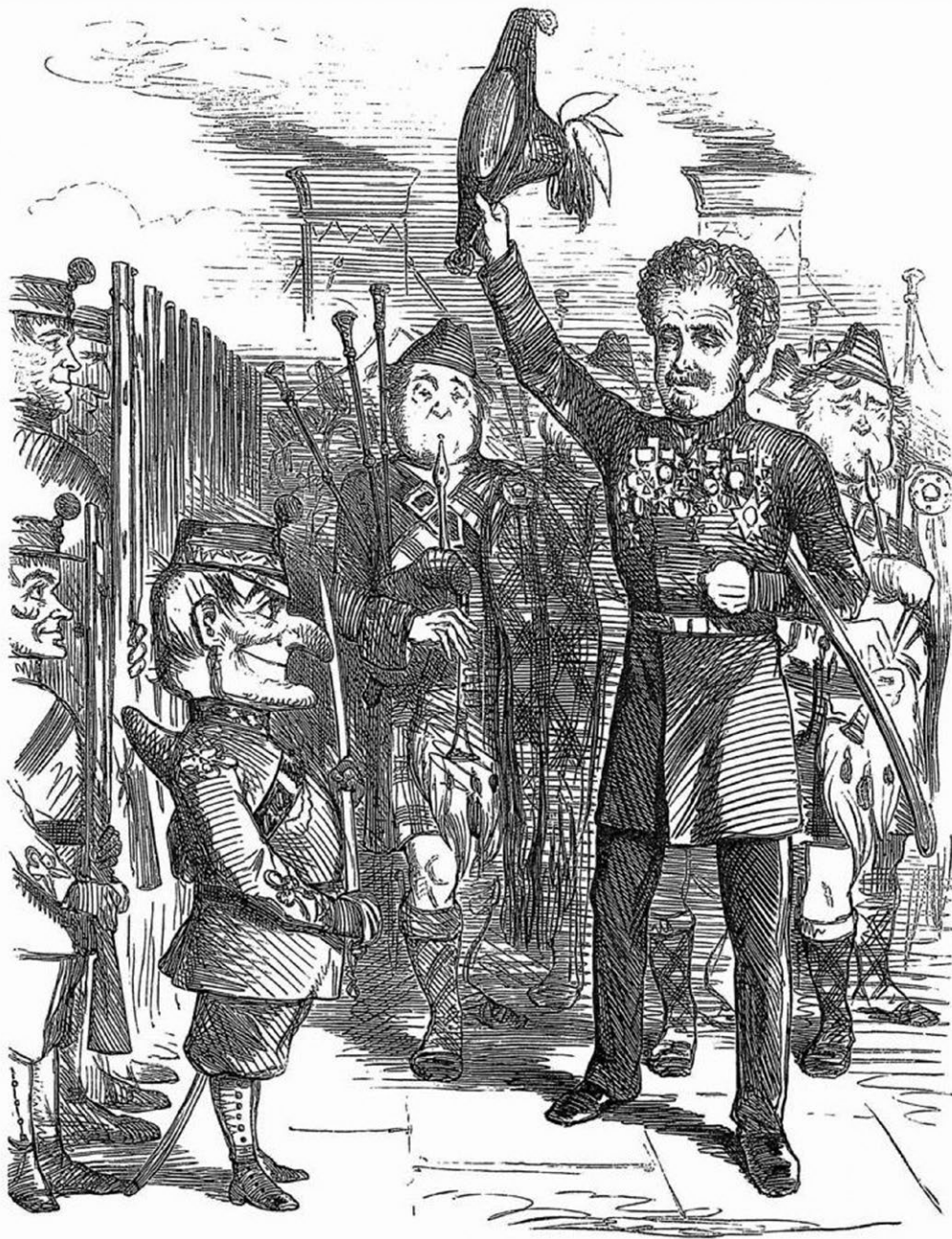
¹⁴² *Punch*, 28 July 1860.

¹⁴³ MacKenzie, ‘Heroic myths of empire’, p. 117.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Farwell, *For Queen and Country*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁵ Farwell, *For Queen and Country*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁶ *Punch*, 13 March 1858.



“SEE THE CONQUERING HERO COMES.”

Figure 10. ‘See the conquering hero comes,’ *Punch*, 28 July 1860.

learning of ‘several revolting cases of military flogging,’ proposed that ‘the figure of Justice be altered for the special use of the army,’ with ‘the cat-o’-nine-tails put into her hand’ instead of the sword. The ‘bandage over her eyes,’ he decided, ought to remain, on the grounds that ‘it would never do for Justice to see cruelties that are practised in the army under her name.’¹⁴⁷ *Punch* repeatedly campaigned

¹⁴⁷ *Punch*, 23 Aug. 1845.

for an end to flogging and vilified those who supported its retention. This typically involved tirades against ‘old military fogies’ who ‘probably enjoy the sight of a flogging’ and would be ‘pleased to see a man’s limbs broken on the wheel’. These ‘fogies’, Leigh noted, had ‘predicted the ruin of the army’ when flogging was limited to fifty lashes, when in fact the opposite had occurred and the army had been ‘highly improved’.¹⁴⁸ Aside from the punishment’s brutality, *Punch* attacked what it saw as the hypocrisy of its employment. In 1846 a cartoon depicted two heavily inebriated officers seated among port decanters, with one declaring, ‘What D----- nawnsense it is of a parcel of people talking about doing away with Flogging in the army! I should just like to know what’s to be done with a man who dwinks?’¹⁴⁹

The leather stock, which the Victorian soldier wore to keep his neck straight until its abolition in 1855 was, in Henry Silver’s words, yet another example of how ‘there are still instruments of torture left among us’.¹⁵⁰ Though Beckett readily conceded that ‘it is desirable that the soldier should never bow [his] head to the enemy’, he took issue with the idea that ‘apoplexy or suffocation should be the price of his erect attitude’.¹⁵¹ Criticism of the stock featured heavily in *Punch*, even at the height of its support for the Crimean War. In 1854, in ‘Serenade for head quarters’, Leigh described the soldier en route to the Crimea:

In face he is almost black;
His eyeballs are like to crack:
To keep him upright,
As well you might
Drive a ramrod down his back.¹⁵²

An accompanying large cut, ‘The black choker’, depicted a guardsman barely able to breathe, let alone hold his rifle, because of his stock (Figure 11).¹⁵³ The large cut for the following week featured guardsmen collapsing and gasping for air, with a caption explaining that this was the ‘striking effect of choking and overloading our guards at a late review’ (Figure 12).¹⁵⁴ To flog the soldier and to simultaneously inflict the stock upon him was, to Silver, a ‘national disgrace’ for a nation that was not living ‘in the Middle Ages’.¹⁵⁵

Finally, *Punch* campaigned for better living conditions and rewards of service for the soldier. After the Crimean War, a series of sanitation committees investigated the conditions of barracks. *Punch* was aghast at their findings, particularly the revelation that prison cells provided more cubic feet of air per man than the average soldier’s barrack.¹⁵⁶ Taylor rewrote ‘The British Grenadiers’ to praise the bravery of the ranker for surviving his own barracks:

Tis not for his defiance of steel or cannon ball,
For guarding of the trenches, or scaling of the wall,
But for living in his barracks, and breathing without fear,
The air that now, now, now, now, now, now, kills the British Grenadier.¹⁵⁷

In the late 1850s, *Punch* returned frequently to the notion that the soldier faced a greater risk of death in his barracks than on the battlefield. ‘To learn to face death’, an article in 1858 concluded, ‘the men must have death put before them, and to this end they are badly fed, badly housed and badly clothed’.

¹⁴⁸ *Punch*, 9 Apr. 1859.

¹⁴⁹ *Punch*, 22 Aug. 1856.

¹⁵⁰ *Punch*, 27 Nov. 1858.

¹⁵¹ *Punch*, 3 June 1854.

¹⁵² *Punch*, 3 June 1854.

¹⁵³ *Punch*, 3 June 1854.

¹⁵⁴ *Punch*, 10 June 1854.

¹⁵⁵ *Punch*, 27 Nov. 1854.

¹⁵⁶ Farwell, *For Queen and Country*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁷ *Punch*, 27 Feb. 1858.

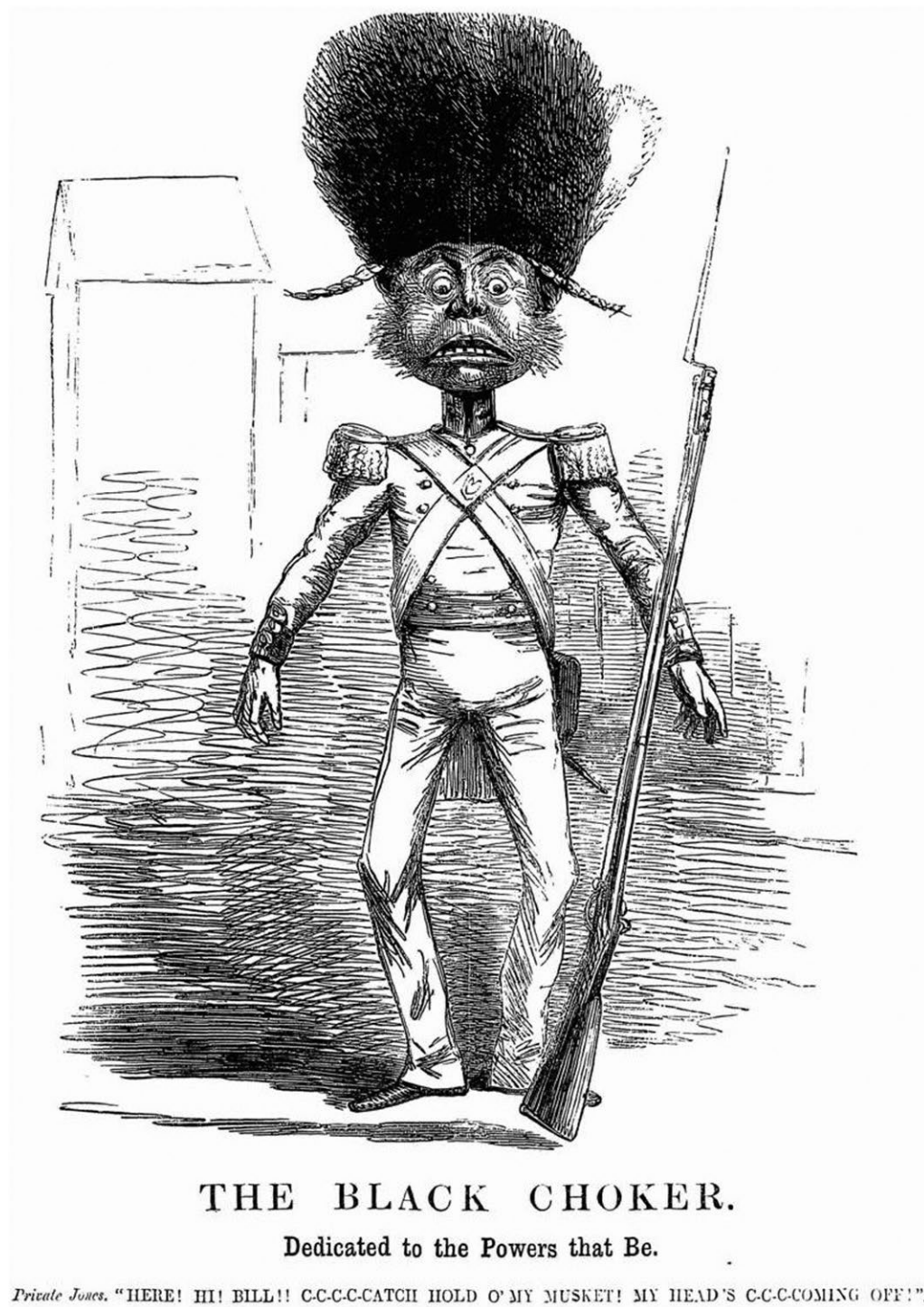


Figure 11. 'The black choker', *Punch*, 3 June 1854.

The result was that 'those who survive are the bravest of the brave' since 'they can have no fear of death, accustomed as they are to meet him regularly'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ *Punch*, 27 March 1858.



STRIKING EFFECT OF CHOKING AND OVERLOADING OUR GUARDS AT A LATE REVIEW.

Figure 12. *Punch*, 10 June 1854.

This sympathy with the ranker may at first glance appear at odds with the distrust of the army outlined above. Yet the reasons behind *Punch*'s sympathy changed considerably over time. For example, in 1858 Leigh responded to the sanitation committee's report by suggesting that it would be a good plan to 'convert all our barracks into gaols' and 'turn all our gaols into barracks', since 'a British soldier ought to be rendered more comfortable than a British convict'.¹⁵⁹ Only ten years previously, however, Leigh had detected so little difference between the soldier and the criminal, that he had recommended that the nation 'do away with the enlistment system altogether, and sentence criminals to the army'.¹⁶⁰ The depiction of the ranker therefore existed in two phases, both of which stood opposed to the brutal treatment that he received.

In *Punch*'s early years, the soldier was depicted as a 'hopeless drudge' and an 'ill-treated, ill-requited mechanic slave', who was kept in a state of destitution to prevent him from questioning his surroundings and enabling him to murder at the beck and call of his officers.¹⁶¹ 'Put a bayonet into a man's hand', Thackeray declared in 1846, and 'he would not naturally thrust it into the belly of a Frenchman'. Rectifying this apparent fact with the realities of battle led Thackeray to conclude that soldiering was 'not like other professions, which require intelligence' and that a man 'one degree removed from idiocy ... may make a distinguished soldier'.¹⁶² To *Punch*, the army's brutal treatment of its soldiers was a deliberate attempt to keep the rank and file in a state of ignorance that would enable them to kill their fellow men without question. Military education schemes were mocked for their perceived inefficiency, with Leigh joking in 1849 that the 'progress of education in the army' had finally enabled 'the arithmetical class' to reach 'twelve times twelve'.¹⁶³ In *Punch*'s 'Labours of Hercules', the Nemean lion was accompanied by his 'cubs', who were 'strictly prohibited from even attempting

¹⁵⁹ *Punch*, 28 Aug. 1858.

¹⁶⁰ *Punch*, 3 Apr. 1847.

¹⁶¹ *Punch*, 3 Apr. 1847.

¹⁶² *Punch*, 1 Aug. 1846.

¹⁶³ *Punch*, 5 Sept. 1846.

to think' and were 'never allowed to 'move except to noisy and boisterous music, which kept them in a state of mental intoxication highly antagonistic to rationality'.¹⁶⁴ Army education was therefore championed in *Punch* on the basis that, as Jerrold wrote in 1847, if the soldier was taught 'to look upon himself as a machine', he would at last 'begin to question the utility' and 'the moral lawfulness of its application'.¹⁶⁵ In 1849, when Wellington declared that ignorance should cease in the army, Horace Mayhew responded by asking, 'When the aforesaid ignorance ceases, how long will the army last? Is it to be expected that some 40,000 men will quietly walk into a field to kill, or to be killed, when they are in a state to reason?'¹⁶⁶

By 1861 the soldier had become a heroic figure who, having risked death in serving his country, deserved far better treatment than he received from the state. It is often assumed that this process pivoted around the Crimean War: the 'watershed' that provided 'the key to publicity for army reform'.¹⁶⁷ The war's ability to challenge contemporary opinions was undoubtedly significant, but *Punch's* modification of its depiction of the ranker was well underway when war broke out. Objections to the soldier's treatment were couched increasingly in terms of the scanty reward that the soldier received for his years of service. In 1850 a poem by Leigh entitled 'A scarecrow to frighten recruits' had the following to say about its chief character, a Peninsula veteran struggling to support his wife and children:

Now what should you imagine is the worn-out hero's pay?
A war-medal, and fivepence to subsist on per day.
Out of this pittance, which can't find them half enough to eat
Rent, and (of all things) taxes, this old soldier has to meet.¹⁶⁸

The Crimean War accelerated this transformation. In 1854, in 'The girls they leave behind them', Leigh emphasized the plight of soldiers' families, and the lot of the ranker who 'half starve[d]' upon his pay and was left with 'not the value of a crumb to be handed over to his wife and children'.¹⁶⁹ In April 1854 the large cut 'The soldier's dream' – an illustrated accompaniment to a poem of the same name – reflected contemporary concerns about the fate of the army's widows and orphans: three exhausted riflemen dreamt of their families, who featured angelically at the top of the page, receiving philanthropic aid from the nation (Figure 13).¹⁷⁰

It was in this way that, although it sought redress for the same issues throughout the period, the reasons behind *Punch's* sympathy for the common soldier changed substantially. To return to the example of flogging, *Punch's* objection to the punishment in the wake of the Crimean War was grounded in the injustice of attempting to keep the soldier from deserting through force alone. Rather than imploring the ranker to question the 'moral lawfulness' of his occupation, Leigh asked in 1859 whether the army was 'so uncomfortable a sphere that, but for the terror of the lash, the soldiers would burst their confines, and break out of it?'¹⁷¹ In stark contrast to his parable of 1843, in which the 'whelps of the Red Lion' needed to be 'tie[d] up to a stake' and have 'the hide whipped off [their] bones ... even for a trifling misdemeanour', Leigh asked whether desertions could be stopped by 'encouraging soldiers to remain in the army' through 'better permanent pay ... the chance of promotion and comfortable quarters?'¹⁷² Within a decade, therefore, the soldier had undergone a considerable transformation in *Punch*. While it had originally despaired at the presence of brutalized 'drudges' in the country, by 1856 *Punch* – literally, in the case of the large cut 'Mr Punch welcomes

¹⁶⁴ *Punch*, 13 May 1843.

¹⁶⁵ *Punch*, 13 March 1847.

¹⁶⁶ *Punch*, 15 Feb. 1849.

¹⁶⁷ Markovits, *Crimean War in the British Imagination*, p. 5; and Strachan, 'Early Victorian army', p. 808.

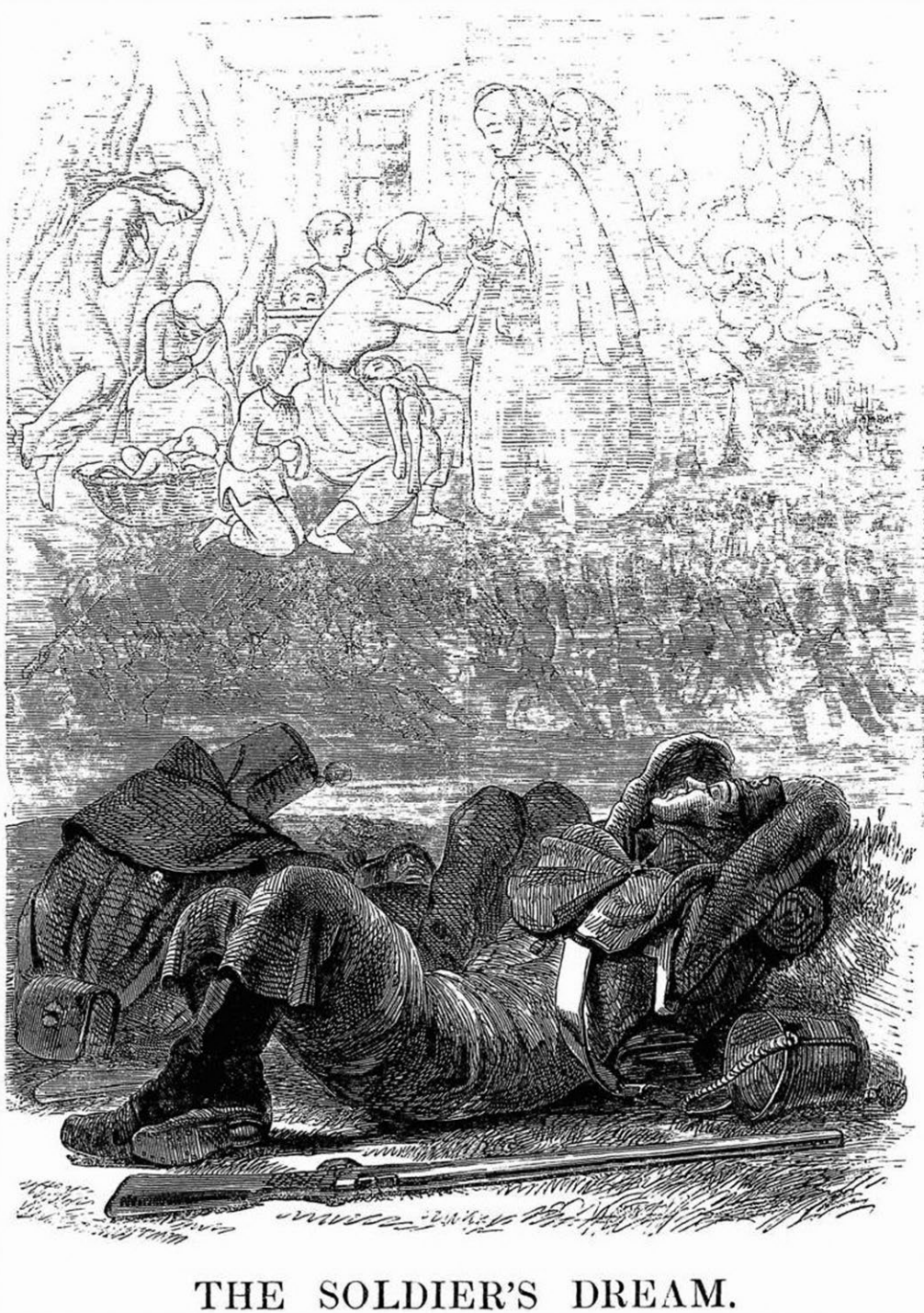
¹⁶⁸ *Punch*, 29 June 1850.

¹⁶⁹ *Punch*, 4 March 1854.

¹⁷⁰ *Punch*, 1 Apr. 1854. See also T.-C. Ho, 'The afterlife of Thomas Campbell and "The Soldier's Dream" in the Crimean War', *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, xx (2015), 1–18.

¹⁷¹ *Punch*, 24 Sept. 1859.

¹⁷² *Punch*, 13 May 1843; and *Punch*, 24 Sept. 1859.



THE SOLDIER'S DREAM.

Figure 13. ‘The soldier’s dream’, *Punch*, 1 April 1854.

the guards’ (Figure 14) – celebrated the return of the nation’s soldiers, hoping that, as Taylor wrote, England might in future ‘reckon sons as true, as these her sons have been.’¹⁷³

¹⁷³ *Punch*, 5 July 1856; and *Punch*, 19 July 1856.

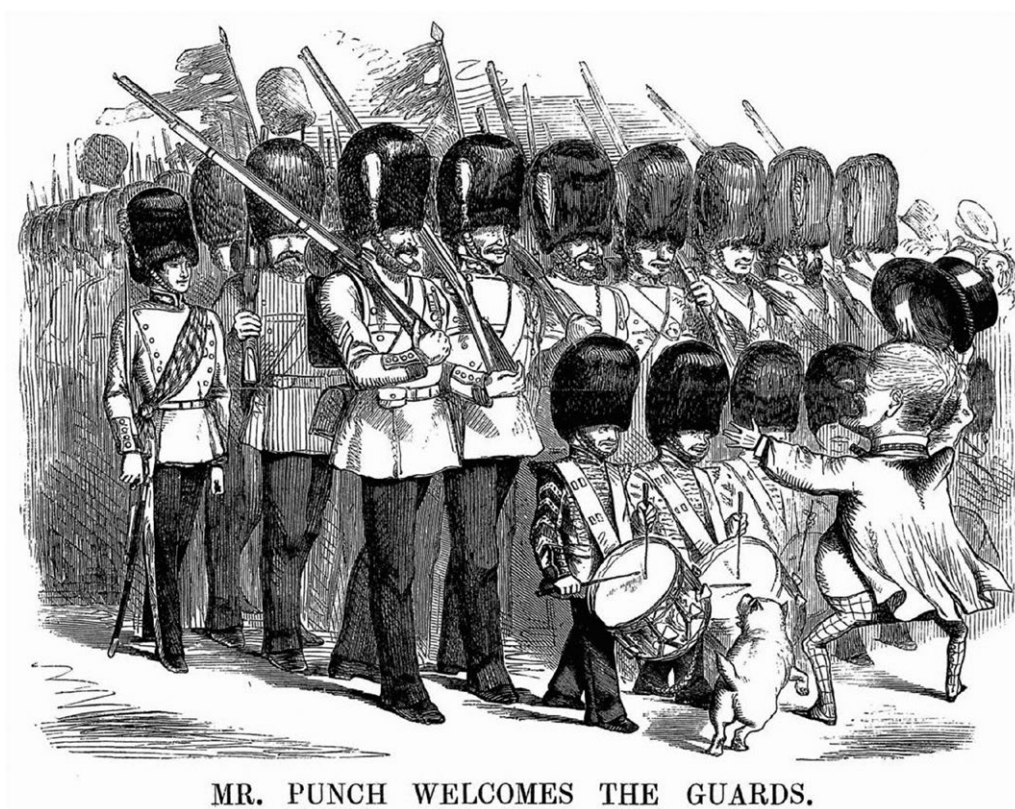


Figure 14. 'Mr. Punch welcomes the guards', *Punch*, 5 July 1856.

*

The nineteenth century was a busy time for the British army, which fought more wars in the reign of Queen Victoria than it had done in the previous two centuries combined.¹⁷⁴ This fact, and its implications for the evolving sense of values associated with the army in Britain, has yet to be fully reflected in histories of Victorian popular culture, for whom the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny and the high noon of empire have proven all too alluring. While the significance of those climactic events is indisputable, this survey of the army's depiction in *Punch* between 1841 and 1861 offers little support to histories that pivot around the battlefields of the Alma, Balaclava, Inkerman, Delhi, Cawnpore, Lucknow, Jhansi and Gwalior, a conclusion that ought not to be questioned on the grounds that *Punch* reflected little more than the social fads of London. It seems inexplicable for *Punch* to have amassed such widespread popularity at home and abroad if the topics that its authors and artists elected to pillory did not resonate with a variety of groups outside the capital. This has in turn preserved for posterity many of the prevailing trends in Victorian popular culture, and allows the following three points to be stated with confidence.

Firstly, the anger that *Punch* directed towards the army in its first twenty years cannot be understated. It has been suggested that 'for anyone accustomed to the extremes of Georgian caricature', *Punch's* depiction of the army was 'mild and decorous'.¹⁷⁵ This is true enough. Yet to dismiss *Punch's* response to the military issues of the day as little more than gentle satire is an error. Nor is it true that, while 'guardsmen, officers and [the] rank and file supplied fodder for amusing cartoons', this did not alter *Punch's* prevailing view that the army was 'indispensable to the nation's security and pride' and deserving of respect from 'every true-born Englishman'.¹⁷⁶ Gentle forms of satire directed against the

¹⁷⁴ Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Cross, 'Crimean War', p. 471.

¹⁷⁶ Altick, *Punch*, p. 216.

army's relationship with the monarchy, debates on reform and the mannerisms of 'plungers' coexisted in the 1840s with vehement attacks on the immorality of bloodshed and outrage at how the British soldier was compelled to 'blow out the brains of miserable wretches' in China.¹⁷⁷ The failings of aristocratic leadership, the idiocy of 'military snobs' and the mistreatment of the ranker were similarly emphasized throughout the period with a degree of intensity that more than justifies the label of anti-militarism.

Secondly, the framing of the Crimean War as a watershed in attitudes towards the British army should not be overdone. To claim that *Punch* 'forgot much as he grew respectable' and that in the 1850s, radicalism was replaced by 'vague' criticisms of society is to overlook the fact that, throughout the decade, *Punch* continued its attacks on 'military snobs' with all the vehemence of the 1840s and did not moderate its view of the purchase system until 1857.¹⁷⁸ Even its gleeful celebration of Hope Grant's victories in 1860 was tempered by unease at the expense of the march on Peking. This is not to dismiss the impact of the Crimean War outright. The army's system of administration was certainly treated with good humour until its failings were exposed in Russia, after which point it was ruthlessly attacked. Conversely, *Punch*'s enthusiasm for the common soldier appeared several years before 1854 and was amplified, not instigated, in the Crimea.

Finally, 'England's little wars' loomed larger in the mid nineteenth century than is commonly believed. It is undeniable that domestic issues featured prominently in *Punch*. Yet in the face of the periodical's outrage at the First Opium War, the juxtaposing of the victors of the Sikh Wars to London's plungers, the large cuts that appeared during the Crimean War, the celebration and martyrization of imperial heroes, and the emphasis on the need for harsh measures towards China in 1860, it cannot be said that Westminster politics and London social fads epitomized *Punch*'s content. *Punch* was cognizant of virtually every foreign war in the period, which were used to call for better treatment of the common soldier and to highlight the failings of military snobs at home. In this regard, *Punch* offers an ideal visual accompaniment to the integration of foreign affairs into studies of domestic political and social debate.¹⁷⁹

What is particularly interesting about this changing depiction of the army is how little it had to do with changes in authorship. As Patrick Leary has noted, one of the advantages of studying *Punch*'s first two decades is the homogeneity of its staff. While other periodicals relied on freelance writers, the *Punch* 'brotherhood' remained a self-contained, select group. It is true that Henry Mayhew left in 1845, as did Richard Doyle in 1850 and William Thackeray in 1851 (he was replaced by Shirley Brooks). Gilbert à Beckett and Douglas Jerrold died in 1856 and 1857, respectively. Yet the rest of the staff – Percival Leigh, Horace Mayhew, Henry Silver, John Tenniel and Tom Taylor – had years and in most cases decades of writing and drawing ahead of them.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, more than half of the prose and poems cited in this article were penned by Leigh and Taylor, who wrote for *Punch* throughout the period. Of course, this does not lessen the work of the rest. None of *Punch*'s military targets – warfare, invasion scares, reforms, institutions, snobs, plungers, stocks, floggings, barracks, heroes, military estimates and the ranker – were the preserve of one man. Nor did the writers who spent less time on the army than their colleagues lack the talent for satire and vitriol that Leigh and Taylor possessed. Douglas Jerrold's parody of the Bayeux Tapestry is a perfect example. Put simply, the changing depiction of the army in *Punch* did not correspond to changes in the *Punch* 'brotherhood'. Attacks on snobs, for instance, were a speciality of Thackeray, but *Punch*'s attacks on opulent military wastrels were continued by Leigh and Horace Mayhew after 1851. Major fault lines in the depiction of the army, therefore, either reflected external events, such as the waves of optimism and pessimism that were triggered by the Crimean War, or the *Punch* staff changing their minds. Taylor certainly changed his mind about Cardigan and the purchase system. Leigh, to whom some of the fiercest anti-militarism of the 1840s – including 'Punch's labours of Hercules' – can be attributed, later became a

¹⁷⁷ *Punch*, 17 Sept. 1842.

¹⁷⁸ Briggs and Briggs, *Cap and Bell*, p. xxvii; and Miller 'Problem with *Punch*', p. 289.

¹⁷⁹ See, e.g., *The Primacy of Foreign Policy in British History, 1660–2000: How Strategic Concerns Shaped Modern Britain*, ed. W. Mulligan and B. Simms (Basingstoke, 2010).

¹⁸⁰ Leary, *Punch Brotherhood*, pp. 14, 28.

defender of the duke of Wellington's memory and an advocate for the soldier's welfare. If *Punch* often changed its mind, therefore, it rarely changed its staff.

In 1860, reflecting on how British military administration had fared in the previous two decades, the Victorian statesman Sir James Graham described the situation as 'chaos'.¹⁸¹ While it is tempting to say the same of the British army's depiction in *Punch*, the following at least can be advanced with certainty: an anti-militaristic strain was present in *Punch* for over a decade before dissipating in the 1850s, but even so, military adventurism was never endorsed unconditionally, except in 1854. *Punch* deplored the immorality and the expense of colonial wars in China and India, and the army's incompetence in Russia and the Cape, but it never followed the army any further into provincial Britain than Chobham Common and was silent on the use of soldiers to shoot strikers in Preston. The army's contribution to the defence of the realm and its activities abroad constituted legitimate targets for ridicule, but military heroism was lauded, and the ranker was an object of sympathy. War was condemned as a moral and financial evil, but the officers responsible for imperial victories were celebrated. The 'military snob' and the incompetent officer were held in contempt, yet successful commanders and imperial heroes were lionized wherever they could be found and – in the case of Wellington and Campbell – regardless of their opposition to the nation's liberties. As a proportion of its content in the mid century, *Punch's* depiction of the army no doubt counted for relatively little. Yet for the historian of the British army in the nineteenth century, there can be no show without *Punch*.

¹⁸¹ Quoted in Bond, 'Late-Victorian army', p. 617.