



# GEORGOFILI WORLD

Newsletter of the Georgofili Accademy

## RICHARD COBDEN AND THE “HEALTHY PROPENSITY FOR PEACE”

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2015 – a year of anniversaries and of events.

Among the first anniversaries are the 100th anniversary of Italy’s disastrous entry into the

First World War on 24 May 1915, the 70th of the Liberation from German occupation, and the 150th of Florence as capital of the new unified Italy. As for events, we clearly think immediately of “EXPO 2015, Feed the Planet, Energy for Life”, which opened just a few days ago and which is probably the biggest media event of the year.

However 2015 marks another anniversary that perhaps most people do not know of, the anniversary of Richard Cobden’s death, the English father of liberalism and a promoter of free trade among nations, on 2 April 1865.

Faithful to its origins, the Florentine Georgofili Academy could not help but admire the man who tried to steer England from an ironclad protectionist policy to broader horizons characterized by the cooperation and generosity between peoples.

On 2 May 1847 Cobden was received “in the utmost glory” at the Georgofili where, the day before, he had been made an honorary member. On that solemn occasion, Cobden had uttered impassioned words in defense of economic freedom, which he saw as not only a means to make countries rich,

but – and above all – as a “tool of justice between peoples”, i.e. able to “remove prejudices of birth, color, religion and language”.

What better venue for these words than that of the Georgofili, whose “ardor” and “passion” was acknowledged by Cobden, to be found nowhere else. “Economic policy has both its heart and head in Italy. You put flesh and blood on the dry bones of science.” This was his message to the oldest agricultural academy in the world, one that had always fought for economic freedom seeing it as an opportunity to unify peoples “through the ties of brotherhood and reciprocal goodwill”.

In his address, Academy president Cosimo Ridolfi proclaimed the English Cobden to be a member of the large Florentine family, gathered to celebrate the man whose example, they hoped, would, and should be emulated.

the Cobden Club was founded in London in his memory one year after his death. It chose a most unusual logo for the times, whose emblem summed up his “healthy propensity for peace” with the words “Free trade – Peace - Goodwill amongst nations”.

Besides keeping the great Cobden’s memory alive, the club sponsored conferences and meetings inspired by his principles. The first dates were in London and Antwerp followed by Amsterdam, scheduled for 9-11 September 1914, and covering a profound and broad range of topics. The Georgofili were warmly invited to participate, as “partisans italiens du système de la libre-échange, dont la lutte contre le protectionisme est suivie par les libre-échangistes étrangers avec le plus vif intérêt”.

Among the themes discussed at this third round was also that of the direct relationship between free trade and the end of the “querelles internationales”, by eliminating their grounds.

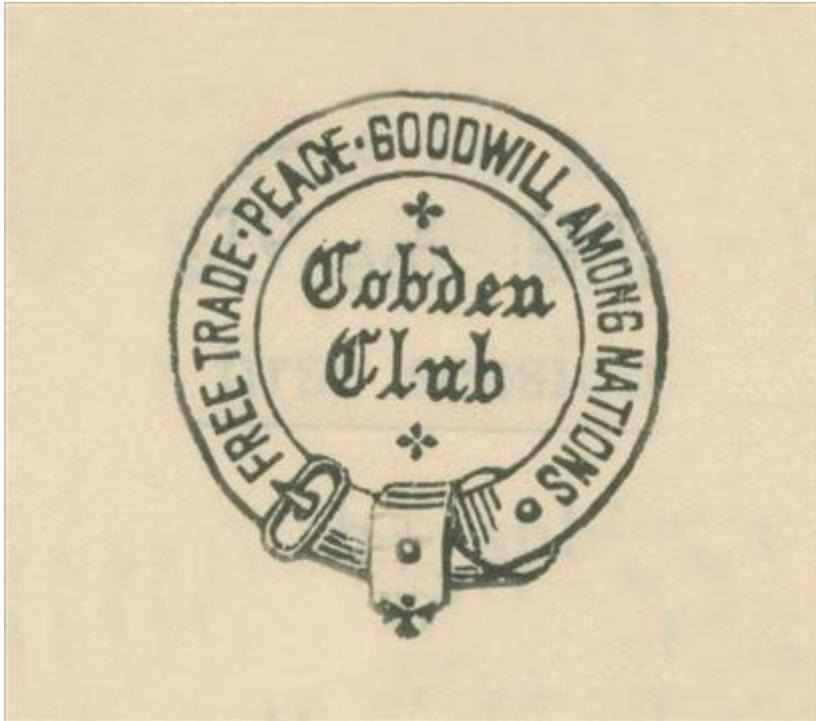
But history followed a different path, first on 28 June in Sarajevo and then on 28 July with the outbreak of the First World War.

As for EXPO 2015, we can quote Cobden himself whose considerations 170 years earlier, seem to cut across what the great event in Milan should be in the third millennium.

*Europe's population is growing by three or four million per year and each year it requires a corresponding increase in the amount of food it needs. The first duty of governments in such circumstances is to remove all obstacles that hinder the free circulation of grains. It is not sufficient that all restrictions be abolished when an alarm is raised by crop failures. The grains trade should always be free, so that the means to make up for shortages may constantly increase*

It is a different geographical context but the problem is the same: to feed all the people on the planet.

***Logo of the Cobden Club, founded in London in 1866 in Richard Cobden's honour  
(Georgofili Academy, Modern Archives)***



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