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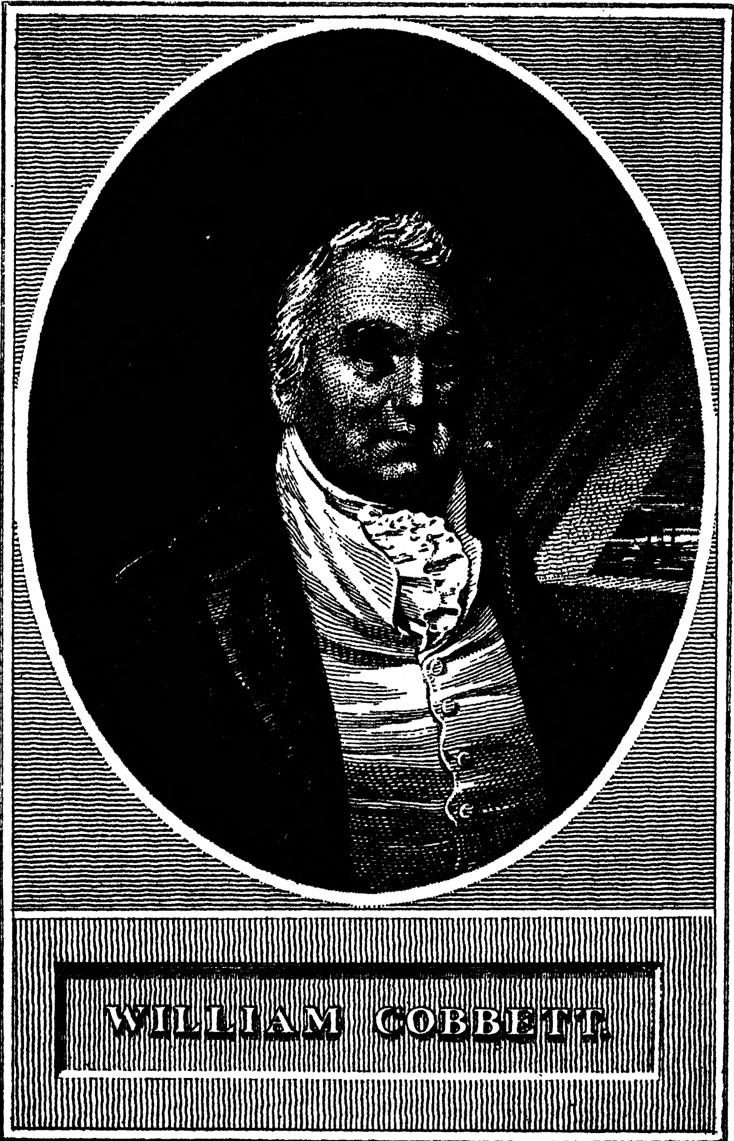
MAKERS OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT



From an engraving in the possession of G. D. H. Cole

MAKERS OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

by

MARGARET COLE

With a Foreword by

THE RT. HON. HUGH DALTON

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FOREWORD

By the Right Honourable Hugh Dalton, M.P.

IN this book Margaret Cole has written of fifteen Pioneers. All these men, each in his own way of life, helped to prepare for the rise to political power of the British Labour and Socialist Movement, which is now changing the social and economic structure of our land and making old Socialist dreams come true.

Since the Labour Party, as an organised political force, is less than fifty years old, many of the earlier pioneers could be no more than forerunners. Yet each made his potent contribution to political and economic thought and agitation. They have all won their immortality.

Of the last five in her list I can speak with personal knowledge. Keir Hardie converted me to Socialism when I was an undergraduate at Cambridge, and when I helped to protect him in a street scuffle after a meeting broken up by Tories. Sidney Webb and his wife I saw often, both at the University and elsewhere, over many years. He taught me, as he taught so many others, not airy theories, but the practical economics of Socialism in modern Britain. Arthur Henderson showed me great kindness and encouragement, when I was a young man entering practical politics. In that field he was my guide and my leader. If he, as so many of us wished, and not MacDonald, had led the Party, our victory of 1945 would have come much sooner. In 1929–31 I served under him at the Foreign Office and learned much from him, not only in his untiring pursuit of international peace but in his most competent handling of a great Government Department. George Lansbury, like Arthur Henderson, helped me much in my political youth. He was a great-hearted Christian idealist. H. G. Wells I knew less well, though I used to meet him from time to time. But his

books, rather than any other practical activity, made Socialists and opened wide new windows on the future that might be.

The memory of all these men should be held in honour now and it is good that Margaret Cole has made it possible for a later generation to recognise its debt to each of them.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

WHATEVER history may hold in the future for Great Britain and the present British Government, no one is likely to forget the day in July 1945 when, contrary to all expectation and almost all prediction, the people of Britain, including the soldiers, sailors and airmen fighting in a war which was not yet over, intimated so definitely to those who had ruled the country for so long, and to the admired war leader, that they would prefer a government of different type and different social provenance. In many countries such a swing of opinion in such circumstances, particularly among the armed forces, might well have meant actual physical revolution; that it did not do so here is both a comment on British politics and a tribute to the democratic tradition in Britain.

For, though the Conservatives lost, the victors did not win merely because they were not Conservatives. They won on a programme, a programme of popular democracy and Socialism which represents a stage, a sharp and significant stage, in the gradual working out for the whole world of the principles, first stated in the *Declaration of Independence,* that men are created equal, with equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that governments exist to secure those rights and derive their powers from the people. They won also because, through long years of difficult and often tragic struggle, innumerable leaders and workers had built up a movement which was conscious of its own traditions and believed itself capable of carrying them on. Churchill, after Dunkirk, effectively rallied the nation by bidding it remember its military heroes of the past—Drake, Nelson, and his own ancestor Marlborough. But Britain has other traditions that are not naval, military or diplomatic; there is a long roll, extending over many centuries, of men and women who fought and died for democracy, social justice and the rights

of the common people. History books make less of them, for history books are mostly written from the point of view of the other side. But they are *our* leaders and *our* pioneers, and we must make them and their lives at least as well known to the world as those of the captains and the kings. That is why this book is written.

It is not complete or comprehensive. If it were, it would be an encyclopedia, not a book. It does not go back to the beginnings; it leaves out John Ball, the hedge-priest who asked so pertinently and so searchingly

When Adam dalv and Evé span,
Who was then the gentleman?

and Thomas More, whose eloquent Latin accused the greedy supporters of Henry VIII of stealing the land from the people; it omits any reference to Milton's fierce republicanism or to Gerrard Winstanley and the soldiers of Cromwell's army who asked simply that "the poorest he" should have equal rights with the greatest, or to William Blake's mordant denunciation of the chartered streets and the dark satanic mills. Neither does it deal, save in one instance,[1] with living men. History does not mix well with contemporary biography, and other pens must write of the leaders of to-day. It begins close upon two hundred years ago, when what we call the Industrial Revolution was bringing to birth modern Britain and the British working class in the modern sense, and when the first declarations of democratic right were taking shape in men's minds; and it ends, to all effect, in the thirties of this century, before the movement had well recovered from its great defeats. This means that of the life-stories here presented a good number are without a happy ending, for happy endings are not the lot of the pioneer; and of those through whose efforts we are now advancing too many died, like Hardie, broken-hearted and "left their bodies by the wall," or at the least had to recognise that the society they were working for lay very far ahead, even if, like Owen, they never for a moment doubted that it would come. But for history the defeated are often more important than the victors.

[1] Sidney Webb died just before these proofs went finally to press. I have left the chapter on him, however, in the form in which he read and approved it before he died.

My choice of names has been made with intention to illustrate the various phases of the history of the battle for democracy and the differing (and sometimes antagonistic) types and movements that went to its making. Thus, Tom Paine stands for the first clear declaration of the democratic faith; Cobbett, that many-sided force, for the political Radicalism of the Reform Act; Place for the first liberation of Trade Unions; Owen for the beginnings of Co-operation, Socialism and free education; and the unfortunate O'Connor for the struggle and defeat of Chartism. John Stuart Mill stands for the middle-class intellectual slowly converted to the need for a system not based on grab and greed; Mitchell the Co-operator and Applegarth the Trade Unionist for the mid-nineteenth century workers painfully building up a new movement out of the ruins of the old. Later, William Morris, designer and poet, represents also the hopeful revolutionism of the 'eighties; Blatchford the gaiety and impudence of *Clarion* Socialism; Hardie the unending self-dedication of the I.L.P.; Webb, the insidious penetrative power of Fabianism; Arthur Henderson the Labour Party; Lansbury the *Daily Herald*, pacifism, feminism, and the many movements of the "left wing"; and H. G. Wells the imaginative ardour of Utopian youth of three generations.

Economically and politically, there is a break in the succession. As I have said in the two chapters called SETTING, the revolution which never happened fixed a gap between the starving desperate men of the early generations and their long-term successors, our own Special Areas and unemployed marchers—a gap bridged by "respectable" Co-operation, "respectable" Trade Unionism, and politics of the "Lib-Lab" type. But in ideas the gap is much less evident. Tom Paine's books go on being reprinted for working men throughout the nineteenth century; the Rochdale Pioneers whom Mitchell joined are half of them Owenites; old Chartists help to found the Social Democratic Federation and the I.L.P.; one of Mill's committeemen in Westminster brings up a son named Sidney Webb; a young teacher called Wells goes to meetings at Hammersmith to listen to William Morris; sons of *Clarion* vanners sit in the House of Commons to-day. The torch is handed on.

I have spoken of the omission of the first pioneers and of the men of to-day. There are, however, many other names left out; some, such as Hyndman, Cunninghame Graham, and Tom Mann, because to tell their lives would have meant much repetition of detail contained in those of others; some, like Mary Macarthur, because they died young with their potentialities unrealised—it is extraordinary how much would have been lost to the movement if Paine, Cobbett, Place, Owen, Morris, Henderson and Webb had been told they were "too old at forty"; but many more because their only record in history is contained in a small pamphlet or a few lines in a long-ago Press report, as in the case of "poor Riley," who in 1817 was imprisoned by Castlereagh in York Gaol and cut his throat on the floor. One day our Movement will itself produce a Biographical Encyclopedia, a worthy collection of the names and lives of those who have served it. May that day be soon, for records are not immortal. Meantime, the title-page of this book dedicates it to their memory.

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SETTING ONE

THIS group of lives falls naturally into two unequal parts, according to the birth-date of its subjects. Those who were born in the eighteenth century belong to the early period, those born after 1820 to the later, with John Stuart Mill bridging the gap; and that gap, though it does not appear in our history books as a break comparable with the years of Cromwell's dictatorship in England, the Revolution and the Directory in France, or the Civil War in the United States, was none the less a real break which, if we were looking for dramatic sub-titles, might be called "The Revolution Which Never Happened." Before about 1850[1] there was in Britain a definite and recurrent fear of a physical revolution such as had happened in France in 1789; the revolutionary material was there, and groups of middle-class and working-class Radicals were continually making efforts to lead this material to a real revolution, a real overturning of society. By 1850 all this was over. The revolutionary movements of all kinds had been decisively defeated; their hopes and their slogans remained as memories—emotionally powerful memories but no more; and though the fears of the possessing classes lingered long, as fears do, to haunt them in their dreams, the danger was never again so great that Governments needed to take any effective notice of it.

This is important to emphasise, because few of our Continental friends or even of those from the U.S.A. appear to understand that there have been *two* working-class movements in this country since the Industrial Revolution, of which the first was beaten practically out of existence, so that the second —our own—grew up in a very different political and economic climate. As, however, there was no revolution there was also

[1] It is obviously impossible to give an exact date for an event which never occurred, and nobody has yet managed to compile a table for the tides in human history. But by the middle of the nineteenth century one can say with fair accuracy that the tide in Britain had turned.

no reaction. There was no Bourbon restoration, no banning or burning of the works of Owen or Cobbett or Paine, no repeal of the Trade Union legislation to which Place had given his life's work; and, consequently, the ideals of the pioneers (though not their methods of organisation) survived unimpaired in the hearts of men, and produced the continuity through discontinuity which is the mark of British labour history in the nineteenth century. But the change in the climate, as I have said, is so great that each period merits a separate note.

The pioneers grew up in an age about which everyone knows a good deal—the early days of the industrial and agrarian revolutions. On the land, the Enclosure Acts, which promoted large-scale farming with improved methods and so enabled both farmers and landowners to prosper immensely during the long period of the Napoleonic Wars, were gradually destroying the small yeoman farmer and the cottager, particularly in the south of England, and replacing him by a race of landless wage-labourers and paupers subsidised out of the rates,[1] whose sufferings have been eloquently described for all time in Mr. and Mrs. Hammond's *Village Labourer*. In the towns, the results of the inventions of Watt, Hargreaves, Cartwright and their fellows were gradually increasing their effect. Machines, of the kind that the angry Luddites broke in 1811 and on other occasions, were destroying the livelihood of the old crafts, in particular that of the handloom weavers, were bringing into the factory the young children and women (whose labour was unregulated by any Factory Acts) as fatal competitors with their husbands and brothers, were forcing the worker into the harsh discipline of factory surroundings, factory overseers and the mill hooter, and were beginning to herd him and his family into the desolations of dirty brick, run up swiftly without building or sanitary regulation, which were dignified with the name of "new factory towns." At the same time, owing mainly to war conditions and the inflationary finance of Pitt's government, prices and employment were fluctuating wildly, so that the troubles inherent in any

[1] The "Speenhamland system," under which low agricultural wages were made up out of the rates to a slowly decreasing average was less universal than some have believed; it was practically confined to the south of England. But its influence, where it existed, was demoralising to all parties alike.

economic change fell with double heaviness on the working class, who could not know from month to month—scarcely even from week to week—what a loaf of bread would cost them, and had no help from any State insurance fund to tide them over when the war industries discharged their hands after Waterloo.

Nor was there any protection for wages. The Act of Elizabeth's reign which laid down that the county magistrates were empowered to fix rates broke down in practice because magistrates, influenced in part, no doubt, by the growing belief[1] that the State should not interfere with the operations of economic law, refused to exercise their powers, and in 1813 Parliament, in a fit of temper at the persistent demands of a group, repealed the inconvenient legislation. A few years earlier, in 1799 and 1800, at the suggestion of William Wilberforce, the champion of negro liberties, Parliament had struck at self-help for employed persons by forbidding "trade combinations": the laws then passed were enforced against workers, sometimes with the infliction of heavy penalties, but not against employers. Of course, the passing of the Combination Acts did not in fact prevent combinations or the growth of what we should call Trade Unions, in cases where a group of workers was in a strong economic position; that is more than an Act of Parliament can achieve. But the majority of workers were not in a strong economic position; and where Trade Unions were formed, they were illegal organisations and at the mercy of any informer who chose to denounce them to the authorities or any spy[2] sent down by Government with the task of egging his fellows on to dangerous action. Any such violent and rapid economic change as that which we call the Industrial Revolution was bound to create hardships and difficulties for "the labouring poor"; their misfortune was that the hardships were immensely increased by a war lasting over twenty years, and that they had no political means of redress.

For the government of the country was entirely in the hands

[1] Called, roughly, *laissez-faire,* and meaning, in practice, let the strongest power have its way unchecked.

[2] Such as the notorious Oliver—see the Hammonds' *The Skilled Labourer.* In Oliver's case the scandal was so great that there was a semi-public exposure. But there were plenty of other spies, whose activity was at its height just before and just after the fall of Napoleon.

of their betters. The countryside was ruled by the landlords in their capacity as squires and magistrates and often as parsons as well. Of the towns, some had no civic government at all, and were ruled by the lords of the manor through a variety of antique and obsolete institutions such as Courts Leet; others were in the hands of ancient—and frequently corrupt—corporations whose ways of conducting their business make astonishing reading in the pages of the report of the Royal Commission on Municipal Corporations (set up after the 1832 Reform Act). It need not be assumed that all these persons and bodies in fact did their jobs badly. Some great landlords were able public-spirited men; some magistrates tried their best to grapple with the hopeless problem of the rural poor; some of the most oddly chosen corporations did a great deal to improve conditions in their own towns. But the point is that whether things were well administered, or badly administered, or not administered at all, depended upon the conscience and the enlightenment of a comparatively small group of owners of property; the administration was in their hands, and, if they lacked energy or public spirit, there was no power which could pull them up.

Parliament, even if it had had the power, certainly had not the will to interfere. For Parliament was in many ways the closest corporation of all. Elected on a system which was based on no sort of logic, which so far as the towns at least were concerned had long ceased to have any kind of relationship with the distribution of population in the country, Parliament was itself the effective preserve of the landowners and the men who had made fortunes in the India trade or through war contracts or stock-jobbing. (The half-dozen constituencies, such as Preston and Westminster, which by historical accident happened to have a large electorate, provided some amusement from time to time as well as letting a little popular steam escape; but they were far too few to have any real influence on policy.) As in the case of the borough corporations, men were elected, particularly in the counties, who were better than the system, men like Whitbread and Romilly, who fought hard against corruption and oppression. But they were few; and even the best of them were liable at any moment to be visited by a panic fear lest if any change were made, any breach

opened in the dyke of the British constitutional system, the people without possessions, the uneducated rabble, might flood in, as they had in France, and destroy law, order and property all together. In 1784 Pitt himself, the Great Commoner, had toyed with the idea of reforming the parliamentary system; but then came 1789, the sack of the Bastille, and in rapid succession the confiscation of the great French estates, the destruction of the Church and the guillotining of the King—and responsible men in England talked no more of Reform, but rather of repression, of forbidding public meetings and the printing of newspapers likely to appeal to the people, and of calling out the military to ride or shoot them down. There were no police forces then, it must be remembered; if ordinary intimidation by their betters failed to disperse a mob, soldiers were the only remedy. It was under these conditions that the first leaders of the democratic movement were brought up, and it was under this pressure that their ideas took shape.

TOM PAINE

(1737–1809)

It is a dangerous attempt in any government to say to a Nation, *Thou shalt not read*. Thought, by some means or other, is got abroad in the world and cannot be restrained, though reading may.

Paine, *Address to the Addressers*

IF they were asked, "Whose name was most feared and execrated in England a hundred and forty years ago?" the majority of people would at once answer "Napoleon's," remembering the rustic pike-bearers who stood on guard on the south coast between the martello towers watching for a fleet of transports to put across from the Channel ports, and remembering how, as we are told, nursemaids used to make naughty children obey them by threatening "Boney'll get you if you don't watch out." Boney has passed into history in a hundred different ways; but not many people remember that in the days of Boney and even a dozen years before there was another man, an Englishman, who was so wildly hated and feared that he was outlawed from his country after a trial for high treason and burnt in effigy as an alternative to Guy Fawkes all over the country.[1] Patriotic gentlemen had his initials set out in nails on their boot-soles so that they could enjoy stamping on them, crockery jars were made in his image in order that they might be smashed, and rhymed lampoons about him were sold in the streets. Seventy years after his death, his American biographer, Moncure Conway, counted in the catalogue of the British Museum Library hundreds of books or other publications attacking him. That man was Thomas Paine, the friend of Washington, of Jefferson and of Benjamin Franklin; and in 1792, when he was outlawed, his crime was that he had actively helped the Americans in their

[1] "As the culprit on whom the populace meant to execute this punishment," said the *Bury Post*, "was Thomas Paine, they were not *interrupted by any power, military or civil.*" (Italics mine.)

struggle against George III and had published a defence of the French Revolution.

Tom Paine was born in 1737, the son of a small Norfolk farmer who also ran a staymaking business in Thetford, to which Tom was apprenticed on leaving the local grammar school at the age of thirteen. His father was a Quaker who stinted himself to provide the boy with the best education he could afford, but otherwise seems to have done little to excite either his gratitude or his affection. " My parents," Paine said afterwards, " were not able to give me a shilling beyond what they gave in education"; and, unlike many who were brought up under Quaker influence, he found the Friends not inspiring, but irritating and depressing.

> "Though I reverence their philanthropy," he wrote, " I cannot help smiling at the conceit, that if the taste of a Quaker had been consulted at the creation, what a silent and drab-coloured creation it would have been! Not a flower would have blossomed its gaieties, nor a bird been permitted to sing."

When, in later years in America, he found that the quietist principles of the American Quakers led them to side with the British Government against the revolting colonists, he angrily said it was just what he might have expected of them and accused the Quakers of Philadelphia of " making a political hobby-horse of their religion."

We do not hear much of what he learnt at school, though it presumably included mathematics, in which he showed a good deal of ability in later life. He did not learn Latin, because the Quakers of Thetford objected on principle to the books which were written in that language; languages he had " no inclination to learn"—even when he became a member of the French Revolutionary Assembly he was unable to speak French. He liked science, which he was probably not taught in school; and he had " some turn, and I believe some talent, for poetry"— this estimate is not borne out by those verses of his which have been preserved. In fact, his schooling appears to have bored him; and the main inspiration of his boyhood years came from " a pleasing natural history of Virginia," which fixed in him a determination some day to cross the Atlantic and may have

been the cause of his twice running away to sea for a brief while.

After his second trial of the sea he did not return home, but worked for two years as a staymaker in London, where he attended lectures on natural science and philosophy and made friends with an astronomer called Dr. Bevis, a member of the Royal Society, who lived in the Temple. He continued to make stays until he was twenty-three, when, on the death of his first wife after a year of marriage, he decided to abandon the trade and to become an exciseman. At the end of 1762 he was appointed to gauge brewers' casks at Grantham and in 1764 to watch smugglers at Alford in Lincolnshire. The nominal salary was fifty pounds a year, but the expenses of keeping a horse and other incidentals reduced it, according to Paine's own calculations, to thirty-two pounds, or one and ninepence-farthing a day.

It does not seem, however, that he worked all day and every day for his one and ninepence-farthing, for he was developing rapidly his interest in science, which took up a good deal of his time, and the owners of the warehouses in which spirits were kept in bond resented very much the detective activities of the excisemen[1] and were anxious at any time to avoid being inspected. Only a year after Paine's appointment the following minute appeared in the proceedings of the Board of Excise:

> "Thomas Paine, officer of Alford, Grantham collection, having on July 11th stamped the whole ride, as appears by the speciments not being signed in any part thereof, though proper entry was shown in journal, and the victualler's stock drawn down in his book as if the same had been surveyed that day, as by William Swallow, Supervisor's teller of 3rd instant, and the collector's report thereon, also by the said Paine's own confession of 13th instant, ordered to be discharged."
>
> (August 27th, 1765.)

Paine thus got the sack; but either conniving at breaches of the law was not regarded as an unpurgeable offence, or (as is more

[1] The excise duty on spirits (of £1 per gallon!) was laid on for the first time in 1746. It was one of the most unpopular actions of Robert Walpole as Prime Minister.

likely) the supply of excisemen of unimpeachable honesty to be obtained for one and ninepence-farthing a day was limited, for within a year he was reinstated on the list and in 1768 we find him settled as excise officer in Lewes. Three years later he married for the second time, the girl being ten years younger than himself; but by 1774, when he was once more in difficulties and discharged from his employment, they were separated, his wife taking back the property which she had brought him; and they never lived together again. What the cause of the difference was we do not know; the history of Paine's marriages, and the few references which he makes to his own parents, at least suggest that the domestic affections did not bulk largely in his life. While at Lewes he showed less interest in his wife than in his friend Thomas Rickman, who wrote under the pseudonym "Clio," and whose political opinions are indicated by the fact that he named his first four children Paine, Washington, Franklin and Rousseau.

Paine's troubles in 1774 were more serious than previously. For some time past various of the excisemen had been grumbling at their lowly wages. They met together—this was before the passing of the Combination Acts—and agreed to present a memorial to Parliament and to subscribe to a fund for agitation. Paine, like an earlier W. J. Brown, undertook to draft the memorial and to organise the agitation, and in the winter of 1772–3 spent a great deal of his time on both efforts. The memorial was tellingly and simply written, and Paine was so pleased with it and with the compliments he received that he presented a copy to Oliver Goldsmith, as a literary connoisseur, with a letter proposing to call and drink a bottle of wine with him. (He did so, and a friendship was established.) But Paine had "commenced agitator" in an unpopular cause. Nobody loved the excisemen and nobody was prepared to stir on their behalf. The memorial never came before Parliament and in April 1774 Paine was dismissed—not openly for agitation, but for neglecting his duties in order to attend to his private affairs. Simultaneously he was sold up as a bankrupt in Lewes. At the age of thirty-seven, unemployed and nearly penniless, he arrived in London.

How he managed to live during the next few months we do not know, possibly by taking odd teaching, of which he had

already had some experience, or clerical work. But his unlucky experience with the excisemen was not all misfortune, for his attempts to get favourable consideration from members of Parliament had brought him several times up to London, where he had made acquaintance not merely with Goldsmith but with Benjamin Franklin and his scientific circle. From the first, Paine was enormously interested in Franklin's electrical experiments, and from discussions of science it was easy to go on to discussions of politics, of the influence of the Crown and the great landowners in Parliament, of the natural rights of man and the corruption of government, and of the question, so soon to become explosive, whether it was right that the American colonies should be taxed by the British Crown against their will. Paine, who according to his own account, had in his early years taken little interest in politics—"it presented to my mind no other idea than is contained in the word jockeyship"—was now thrust all at once into the midst of political discussion of an idealistic and radical kind. Since he took to it so eagerly, since after his two false starts there was little hope of his getting a decent living in England, and since he had already shown an ability to write clearly and persuasively, it occurred to Dr. Franklin that he might do better in the New World. The idea revived the memories of Virginia and his early ambitions. In the autumn of 1774 he set sail, bearing a letter from Dr. Franklin to his son-in-law, Richard Bache, which suggests he might be put in the way of obtaining employment "as a clerk, an assistant tutor in a school, or assistant surveyor, of all of which I think him very capable." Within a very short time he was editor of a journal called the *Pennsylvania Magazine*.

The story of Paine in America is as astonishing as a fairy tale—astonishing not merely in his rapid rise, but in the sudden clarification and expression of his own opinions. He landed practically unknown and obtained work on a journal which cannot have been very prominent, since he had to write a large part of it himself. Yet in these anonymous articles we find Paine putting forward a whole host of suggestions which struck at the roots of the accepted ideas. To take only a few examples: in March 1775 he published a passionate article demanding the abolition of slavery—a month later the first

anti-slavery society was founded in Philadelphia; in May he advocated the abolition of monarchy and of all titles; in August he appealed for equal treatment for the female sex; in other articles he wrote in favour of the abolition of duelling, of international arbitration, and the humane treatment of animals (a suggestion which had occurred to hardly anyone in the eighteenth century). Most remarkable of all, on October 18th, 1775, eight months before the Declaration of Independence, the *Pennsylvania Magazine* proclaimed that the record of British rule overseas, their "horrid cruelties" to the inhabitants of India, their behaviour to the natives of America and their introduction of negro slavery, made it certain that "the Almighty, in compassion to mankind, will curtail the power of Britain . . . and will finally separate America from it." Paine's mind may have been slow in turning itself to politics; but as soon as it did, it showed the rare gift of going directly and lucidly to the heart of things.

Within a very short time this gift of his was to be used in a very much wider field. As he protested in a letter to Franklin, he had hardly settled himself in his new country before it was "set on fire about his ears." Already in 1774 the citizens of Boston had drowned the tea-ships from England in their harbour sooner than pay the duty imposed on tea by the British Government, and all through the following months events were moving towards a head-on collision between Britain and the Americans, of which the first overt sign was the clash of arms at Lexington in the spring of 1775: there was in existence a Continental Congress representative of the several colonies, whose purpose was to co-ordinate resistance to unjust demands of the home government. But many of the members of the Congress were slow to take up the idea of actual separation from Great Britain; what set light to the fire all over America was a pamphlet called *Common Sense* written by Thomas Paine in the autumn of 1775 and published at the beginning of the following year.

Common Sense, which states in language which everyone could understand the simple issues of the forthcoming struggle, sold like hot cakes from the moment of its publication. Since Paine had arrived in the country so recently, his name did not at first appear on it; not that Paine would have

minded, for he had shed his English patriotism, if he ever had any, as easily as he shed his domestic ties, and was wholeheartedly on the side of the Americans. He regarded this pamphlet, it seems, as he did his other direct political writings, as a contribution which a poor man could make to a cause he loved; for he gave the copyright, as he did that of the *Crisis* (see below) to the States' treasury, and did not make a farthing out of any of these publications.[1] *Common Sense* cleared the minds and stiffened the hearts of undecided American politicians, and resulted in the Declaration of Independence of the Fourth of July, 1776, drafted by a committee including Thomas Jefferson, who had become a friend of Paine's.[2] Before the Declaration had been signed by all the States, Paine had become a soldier of the Revolution; he enlisted in a Pennsylvania division of the Flying Camp, and by November he was with the miserable remnants of Washington's army which after the surprise at Fort Lee fled to the cold and mud of Newark in New Jersey. There, in the first hard trial of the Republic, Paine followed up the cool statements of *Common Sense* with a call to endurance whose words ought to strike home to everyone who lived through the summer of 1940. This is the opening of the statement—afterwards printed in the *Crisis*—which was read aloud to Washington's shivering soldiers mustered for the battle of Trenton on Christmas Day:

> "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph; what we obtain too cheap we esteem too lightly; 'tis dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as Freedom should not be highly rated."

[1] His publisher did; this fact may have stimulated Paine to make one of the earliest known pleas for an international law of copyright.

[2] The Declaration, however, omitted a paragraph denouncing the slave trade, which had appeared in the original draft, and was almost certainly drawn up by Jefferson on Paine's advice. Historians may conjecture how different might have been the history of the United States if that paragraph had been allowed to stand.

The soldiers went forward; Trenton was won, and Paine's pen proved to be as valuable an asset to the American cause as Washington's sword.

The words quoted above come from the first and most famous issue of the *Crisis*, but there were sixteen of them, all written between the end of 1776 and 1783 (the last appeared the day after Washington had proclaimed that the war was over), and all pressing some point of strategy or principle of importance to the war. Very soon, in April 1776, Paine's importance had been recognised by his election as Secretary to the Committee of Foreign Affairs, which really meant Foreign Secretary to the infant republic; he was the close associate of Washington, Jefferson and all the other notables, and had the satisfaction of lecturing, in the name of the American people, the British Commissioners who arrived after the surrender of Burgoyne to see whether some sort of arrangement could not be patched up with the tiresome colonists. (*Crisis* No. 6.)

As a politician, however, Paine ran into difficulties not experienced by a simple journalist and soldier. It had occurred to more than one friend of the colonies that the King of France, who had recently been so thoroughly beaten by Britain in the Seven Years' War, would not be indisposed to revenge himself by helping the colonists in their revolt; and the French government, it would seem, was not unwilling. But at this point "politics" came into the affair. The real question was whether the French government was prepared to give a direct subsidy, or to wrap the transaction up in the disguise of a "commercial agreement" made with private persons. Paine, who had without hesitation, given his own earnings to the cause of freedom, could not conceive that Louis XVI could demand any *quid pro quo,* and his innocence involved him in an obscure diplomatic wrangle which forced him to resign his post as Foreign Secretary. Later, however, in 1781, he sailed to France with Colonel Laurens, an aide-de-camp of Washington, and succeeded in bringing back to America a contribution of two and a half million livres of silver as well as military stores, which helped materially in the final defeat of the British. For this service he received neither payment nor overt credit.

Meantime, however, he had lost his paid job with Congress,

such as it was, and had refused overtures of the French Ambassador to provide him with a salary. For a time he had to support himself by taking service as a clerk in the law office of a man named Owen Biddulph; but in November 1779 the Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania elected him as its clerk, in which capacity he quickly drafted a statute abolishing slavery in the State—which involved the immediate freeing of six thousand negroes. The statute became law in the following year. But in 1780 the war was not yet over; and, according to Washington's desperate despatches from Morristown, the main reason for its ill success was the unwillingness of the citizens of would-be-free America to dip their hands in their pockets to pay for clothes and food for the armies which were fighting their battles. Paine rose to the occasion. In the autumn of 1780 he published his *Crisis Extraordinary*, in which he explained to the Americans, again in perfectly simple language, that if they levied themselves thirteen shillings a head they could meet the costs both of the war and of their state governments, whereas to remain subjects of King George would cost them no less than two pounds; before that, however, he had headed the subscription list to relieve Washington's immediate needs with five hundred dollars from the salary which he had only just begun to receive. By December the subscription had already reached a reasonable sum and was funded by Congress.

The war ended; America was free, and the last number of the *Crisis* came out. But its author, who had resigned his paid post in order to write a history of the Revolution (which unfortunately he never did) was in low financial water. He was living in a small house in Bordentown, New Jersey—to which he once invited Washington to come and eat "a few oysters or a crust of bread and cheese." But, as time went on, he began to think that the Revolution owed him more than a few oysters, and to ask that the States whom he had served should make a contribution to his cost of living. Eventually, and after some haggling, this was done; he was given a property at New Rochelle, and voted sums of money by the Pennsylvania Assembly and by Congress. In the course of negotiations, Washington wrote a letter to James Madison, later to become President, which might have given Paine food for thought if he had seen it. It begins: "Dear Sir, Can

nothing be done in our Assembly for poor Paine?" and continues: "His views are moderate—a decent independency is, I believe, all he aims at. Should he not obtain this?"—phrases which certainly do not suggest an overwhelming sense of gratitude.

However, for the present, Paine had got his financial assistance, and for the next three or four years was very happy, living in New York, being lionised by an admiring public, discussing politics with leading republicans and studying science. He was full of scientific inventiveness; he had designs for a smokeless candle, a planing machine, a new type of crane; and long before the invention of the internal combustion engine he had seized upon the notion that if the explosiveness of gunpowder could be harnessed and made to act in small regular strokes it might be a valuable agent in the supply of power. But his main preoccupation was with the construction of his iron bridge. This was to be made in a single span, without piers and arches, so as to be of use on American rivers such as the Schuylkill, which were liable to flood and ice, and for years he worked at models of his bridge and corresponded about it.[1] A public committee was set up in Pennsylvania to investigate the bridge; but no bridge was built, possibly because the American iron industry was not sufficiently far advanced to cope with the technical difficulties. When he went to England, Paine took his plans and models with him, and there was eventually built "a beautiful Iron Bridge, 110 feet long," which was set up at Paddington Green and shown to the public for a shilling a head. But before anything more practical could come out of the beautiful Bridge its designer was again plunged into politics.

Paine left America for Europe in 1787, partly with the purpose of seeing his father—which was prevented by the latter's death—and spent the next three years running to and fro between England and France and acting as a kind of unofficial Ambassador of the States. In both countries he had a very enjoyable time. Apart from the Bridge and his other scientific pursuits, he found respectable public opinion in

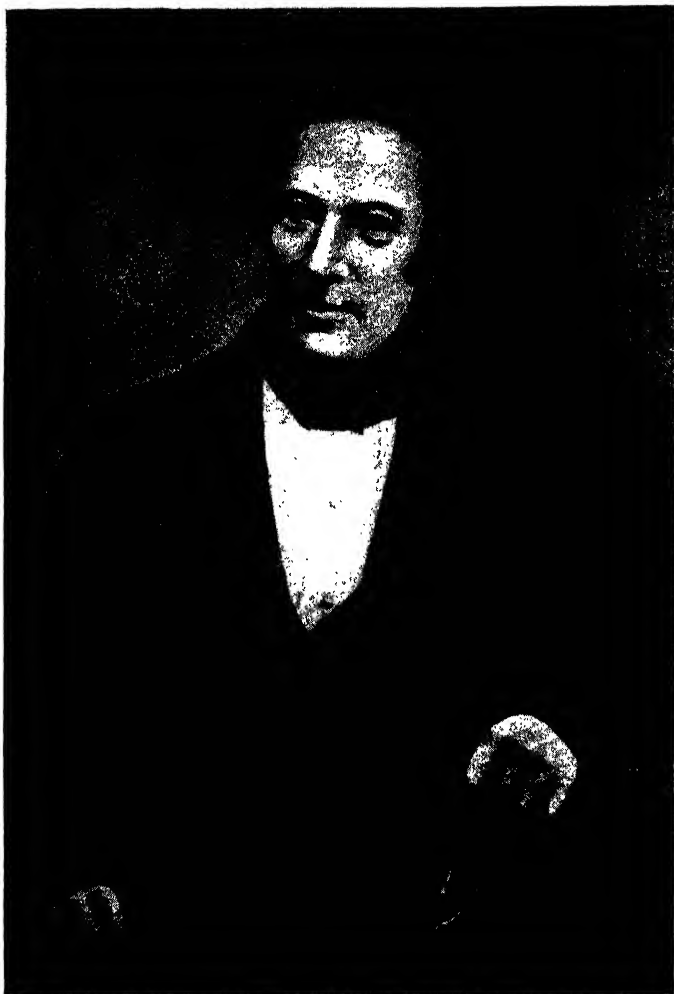
[1] "I saw the Rib of your Bridge," wrote one of his English correspondents. "In point of elegance and beauty, it far exceeded my expectations and is certainly beyond anything I ever saw."

England inclined to be ashamed of the American War and glad to welcome and talk to the States' great champion, whom his biographer describes as "a living Declaration of Independence." He talked with Lord Lansdowne and Lord Fitzwilliam and with Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society; in admiration almost amounting to reverence he went to spend a week with Edmund Burke. In France, even before the Revolution broke out, he was hailed everywhere as the author of *Common Sense* and the forerunner of a Declaration of Independence for France. In the autum of 1789, Lafayette, who had himself fought in the war on the American side, solemnly presented Paine with the key of the Bastille, which Paine forwarded to Washington in a box with six razors made out of the steel used for his bridge. The beginnings of the French Revolution were not received with alarm in England. Revolutions moved more slowly in the eighteenth century, and, as well as the Radicals and democrats who received with delight the news of the fall of the Bastille, ordinary Englishmen were inclined to be pleased that a despotic king who had helped their country's enemies during the late war should be taught a lesson. But one man, and he almost the last who would have been expected to defend despotism and feudalism, saw quite soon whither events might turn, and was frightened out of his wits. In November 1790 Edmund Burke, the defender of the American colonists, published the violent attack entitled, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Paine read it, and was shocked to the core. He sat down and wrote the First Part of *Rights of Man*.

Rights of Man, begun as a defence of the French revolutionaries, turned into a *défense raisonnée* of democratic principle and practice for the whole world—perhaps the most simply eloquent defence that has ever been written. It is based on an assumption of natural rights and equality among all men, and its conclusion is that the people, and the people alone, have the right to decide under what kind of constitution they wish to live, and to set it up. No process of history can alter this natural equality: nor can any generation bind its successors. Civil rights—that is to say, the rights of men living in society—grow out of natural rights, and no civil power can invade men's natural rights. Governments must be

THOMAS PAINE

From the portrait by Romney in the National Portrait Gallery



ROBERT OWEN

From a photograph by the Photographic Co-operative Society, Maidstone, in the possession of G. D. H. Cole

chosen by representative means; all hereditary government and all class privileges are illegitimate; all assumed power is usurpation, and freedom of thought is an absolute natural right.

In these sweeping terms Paine thrust aside tradition, authority and history, to all of which Burke had passionately appealed, telling his eloquent antagonist that to shudder with horror at the ill-treatment of some of the French aristocrats was "to pity the plumage and forget the dying bird." The dying bird, whom Henry Wallace would have called the common man, was, Paine believed, coming to life throughout the world; he had seen it awaking in the United States.[1] Let privilege and despotism get out of the way.

The book was an immediate success. As many copies as could be printed of the first part were sold—Paine, following his own precept, gave the profits to a Radical organisation, the Society for Constitutional Information. A year later he published the Second Part, in which, encouraged by the eager reception given by English Radicals, he turned his full attention to Britain, and produced proposals, not merely for a democratic constitution, but for a thorough economic revolution to be brought about by peaceful means. There is no space here for a description in detail; the *Rights of Man* must be read in full, as it has been by generations of reformers. It must be sufficient to say that, beginning with the proposition that "a nation has a right to establish its own constitution"—a principle very far from being generally accepted in the eighteenth century—he goes on to dispose of monarchy as "the master-fraud which shelters all others," and to argue the case for a fully representative assembly, elected at frequent intervals, and declares that if the executive (the Ministers) are paid, the members should be paid also, for "a nation can have no right to the time and services of any person at his own expense." For his economic revolution Paine has a full programme, the proposals including the abolition of the Poor Law and of indirect taxes, a graded estate duty to finance the country's economy, children's allowances, maternity benefit, old age pensions, State grants

[1] The book was dedicated to Washington, a compliment which the President, who was trying to negotiate a commercial treaty with Britain, soon found distinctly embarrassing.

for education, and Government care for the unemployed—all this a hundred and fifty years ago.

This Second Part was issued more cheaply, so as to reach the masses—"even as a wrapper for children's sweetmeats," the disgusted Attorney-General said at Paine's trial; and its low price may well have sealed his fate. For although anti-revolutionary feeling was growing among the governing class, it had not yet hardened, and Pitt, Prime Minister since 1783 (who, according to his niece, Lady Hester Stanhope, thought that "Tom Paine was perfectly right"), did not worry overmuch about radical opinions circulating among the well-to-do. Godwin's *Political Justice*, published in 1793 and a subversive book if ever there was one, left him calm because its price was three guineas. But cheap pamphlets circulating among the masses and read aloud to cheering audiences in public-houses were another matter altogether, and action had to be taken. On September 13th, 1792, Paine was giving an excited account of a successful speech he had made the previous evening to a society called the Friends of Liberty, when the poet Blake, who was listening, tapped him on the shoulder and said, "You must not go home or you are a dead man." Paine was persuaded to make his way straight to Dover for the French packet, where a letter in his pocket signed George Washington helped him to get through the Customs twenty minutes before an order for his arrest arrived. In his absence he was tried for high treason and outlawed. A letter which he wrote to the Attorney-General referring to "Mr. Guelph and his profligate sons" (meaning the royal family) did not materially help his defence. Paine was still not much of a practical politician.

He arrived in France as a public personage. In August the French National Assembly had conferred the title of French citizen on a number of distinguished persons of different nationalities, including Bentham, Wilberforce, Washington, Priestley, Pestalozzi the educationalist, and Tom Paine. During the following month elections were taking place for the National Convention which was to draw up the constitution for the French Republic—the King had already been deposed—and three departments chose Paine. Eager letters, including one from Hérault, the President of the Assembly, reached him before he fled from London; and he arrived in

Paris as Citizen Paine, Deputy to the National Convention for the Pas de Calais, acclaimed and applauded by mayors and citizens of France, and was almost immediately put on the drafting committee for the new constitution.

It would have been more fortunate for Paine if he had come to Paris sooner. For though, in spite of his ignorance of French, he worked hard at his constitution-making,[1] he could not be happy about the trend of events. The "September massacres" had shown that tempers were running high; and in the winter came the trial of the King. Paine was opposed on principle to capital punishment; and he also believed that the execution of Louis would arouse bitter hostility to the Republic abroad, particularly in the United States. He fought hard and courageously to save Louis' life; he proposed that he should be banished after the war and meantime held in detention as a hostage; he spoke passionately to the Convention, and voted in the large minority that was against the death penalty, thereby incurring the wrath of the extremists. This was a single incident; but the general temper of the Revolution was passing beyond the author of the *Rights of Man.* "Revolutions are not made with rose-water," Danton told him when he protested against the increasing use of the guillotine, and when the Republic was fighting for its life in 1793 it began to develop xenophobia, or at least to pay little account to the views of foreigners, however enlightened.

For some months Paine continued his work, which included the disinterested succouring of people who had managed to get into difficulties with the authorities; but in June the Girondins, most of whom were among his closest friends, were arrested and a law passed against foreigners. Paine, as a deputy, was for the moment immune from its operation; but he had begun to lose heart. He attended the meetings of the Convention less and less frequently; in October, a few weeks before the execution of the Girondins, he was denounced there, and in December he was taken to the Luxembourg prison, where he lay for nearly a year, expecting death. It was a bitter irony that part of the indictment against him was in the handwriting of Robespierre, whom he had admired so much; and an additional hardship that the American Ambassador, Gouver-

[1] He wrote several memoranda which were translated.

neur Morris (who had long disliked him), made no attempt to get him released.[1] Only when Morris had been replaced by James Monroe was Paine claimed as an American citizen and promptly set free. The Committee of Public Instruction offered him a literary pension, which he refused, and in July 1795 he delivered his last speech in the Convention, an indignant protest against a proposal to disfranchise half the nation by confining the vote to direct taxpayers. In the autumn the Convention was succeeded by the Directory. The Revolution was over, and Paine's part in French political life had come to an end. In any event, his health had suffered seriously through his prison experiences.

Before then, however, he had succeeded in convincing his English judges that he was indeed a devil, and an atheistic devil at that. While thinking things over, he had turned his mind from political reform to the obstacles which stood in the way of its realisation and found them in organised religion and superstition. In *The Age of Reason*, of which the first part was completed just before his arrest and the second part written in prison, he applied to the religion of his day the same rational analysis as he had previously applied to politics, and raised a terrific uproar, partly because of his criticism of the Bible stories but more because that criticism was couched in simple downright terms—"coarse and frightful language," said his enemies, forgetful of the far more violent language employed by the Puritan pamphleteers of the seventeenth century. *The Age of Reason* is not in fact an atheistic but a deistic book; and much of it is dull reading nowadays. But for generations it was something of a bible for rationalists, and to print it, or even to be in possession of a copy, a crime in England.

Paine continued to live in France until 1802, when the Peace of Amiens made it possible for him to sail without fear of capture by the British. Though he was not in politics he was not idle: he wrote *The Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance*, a fierce attack on Pitt's "paper-money" inflationary policy, which was translated into all European languages and

[1] And possibly caused Paine's personal appeals to Washington to be intercepted. Washington gave no sign of having received them, a fact which Paine not unnaturally regarded as proof of marble-hearted ingratitude; but it may have been partly due to lack of information.

turned Cobbett into his ardent admirer;[1] he produced a pamphlet on *Agrarian Justice*; he founded a society of "Theophilanthropists," a forerunner of the Ethical and Positivist movements; and he acted as go-between for English and American residents in Paris with the French Government. In 1797 he went to dinner with Bonaparte, who was still then a soldier of the Revolution, and was so impressed with his plans to spread its doctrines that he scraped together all the money he could manage and offered it to the Directory to help finance an invasion of England, which he had come to regard as the great enemy to democratic progress. But he was getting old and tired; he wanted to return to the country he had made his own, where his friend Jefferson was now President.

He got his wish; but though Jefferson was friendly enough, he found that America was no longer the land of the revolution which he had left. Many of his old friends had turned against him because of *The Age of Reason*, and he was hooted by a mob in Trenton. The Constitution of 1787 was too aristocratic for him, and he felt American opinion turning in favour of slavery. He wrote various pamphlets and articles, but fairly soon got into financial difficulties; and he found it a last insult to be refused a vote at New Rochelle in 1806 on the ground that he was not an American citizen. After this his health began gradually to fail, and he died on June 8th, 1809. Shortly before his death two clergymen entered his room and began to expound to him. Paine said: "Let me alone; good morning"—which was afterwards embroidered into a death-bed repentance. The Quakers refused to give his body home in their burying-ground, because of his "atheism"; so he was buried in a field near New Rochelle. Ten years later, Cobbett, trying to atone for his earlier abuse of Paine, dug up his bones and brought them back to England; but after the death of Cobbett's son they were lost.

Tom Paine was a representative Englishman—which is not by any means the same as an average Englishman—who, like some other representative Englishmen, was happier out of England. His active political life was spent in America and France; he knew little at first hand of the sufferings of the

[1] "At his expiring flambeau," wrote Cobbett picturesquely, "I lighted my taper."

Industrial Revolution; and of his important works only one —though possibly the most important—was written in England. Living so much abroad enabled him to be more clear and definite in his suggestions than he might otherwise have been, because he was less subjected to criticism, which he did not really like—a biographer tells us that he was impatient of being questioned. This does not mean that he was in any way "impossible" in practical matters; his record as quasi-ambassador between France and America shows as much, and his warm and wide humanity led him to befriend and help many with whom he personally disagreed. Though not a man of deep personal affections, he was frank and friendly, good company and an entertaining talker. On political principles, however, he made up his mind quickly, stated his belief with sharp lucidity and never changed. For this we have cause to be deeply grateful to him. He died, as he thought, a failure, partly because he put too much faith in human reason and credited all his fellows with his own disinterested passion for justice. But long after his death his work went on; in the dark years when obscure men in dozens went to prison to uphold the freedom of the Press, the books they most commonly printed were *Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*. The town-crier of Bolton, reporting to the magistrates that their town was a well-behaved town and free from political vice, wrote:

> "I have to say I have been right round this place, and have found neither *rights of man* nor *common sense* in it."

—a report which Radicals received with delighted jeers, but is nevertheless an important observation. Paine's name came to mean to the Radicals of his day what Keir Hardie's did to the Socialists of generations after his death; and his economic programme is still the basis of Labour Party legislation. He was the first democrat of the modern world.

WILLIAM COBBETT

(1763–1835)

If, however, your verdict should be . . . one that will consign me to death by sending me to a loathsome dungeon, I will with my last breath pray to God to bless my country and curse the Whigs, and I bequeath my revenge to the children and labourers of England.

Cobbett at his trial in 1831

IF he were alive to-day, William Cobbett would almost certainly make great use of his considerable vocabulary of abuse at finding himself included in a volume called *Makers of the Labour Movement*; for Cobbett was essentially a backward-looking man. He hated most, if not all, of the "progressive" developments which he saw during his long and active life—"I never like to see machinery," he wrote on one occasion, "lest I should be tempted to endeavour to understand it"; and he abused, often most unfairly, nearly all of the reformers of his time—men no less public-spirited than himself. I can guess, though I should not like to put it on paper, what he would have said about the members of the present Labour Cabinet. But none the less, there was one belief in which he never wavered—that the ordinary man, in particular the labouring man of the English countryside, was a real person, not an ignorant fool fitted only to obey the orders of his betters, nor a guineapig upon whom economists and "feelosophers" might freely experiment, but a man who was capable of holding up his head, making up his own mind, and standing up, in the last resort, to any combination of the rich, the well-born, or the better-educated, which aimed at keeping him in his proper place; and that belief, whatever other private fancies its holder may indulge in, is the essence of democracy. In 1833, after the Reform Act, for which he had fought for so long, had disappointed him, Cobbett (who was one of the few Radicals to be elected) set out on a speaking tour through the northern

counties and Scotland. The London newspapers, unexpectedly relieved of the fear of bloody revolution which had hung over the upper classes during the years of 1831 and 1832, set up a happy howl of derision at the thought of the elderly failure running away to meet a handful of his discredited supporters. This picture was far from the truth: wherever Cobbett went, from Newcastle to Glasgow, the still voteless working-men turned out in a body to meet him, and the United Trades of every town came to receive him with welcoming addresses and banners flying. Whether the Act which had just been passed was going to turn out to their advantage or not, the members of those delegations knew very well whose pen it was who had supported their cause in season and out of season in the *Political Register*, in his books and his *Twopenny Trash*, and who had remained their steadfast friend over thirty years of insult and oppression.

William Cobbett was born, appropriately enough, at the Jolly Farmer inn at Farnham in Surrey. His father was a small farmer, who combined that occupation with innkeeping; and as a little boy Cobbett wore a smock frock, learned to scare crows, lift turnips, help the Bishop's gardeners at Farnham Castle, and generally to live as a countryman. When he was a child, the agrarian revolution had not yet effectively reached the Surrey countryside; the pattern of life there was still the same as it had been for two hundred years. There was the squire, who owned a large slice of the land; there were freehold farmers and tenant farmers; and there were small cottagers and labourers who, though less well-off, were yet part of the wide agricultural family and had rights of pasture and woodcutting upon the still-unenclosed common land. All this, as we know, was beginning to change and was to change very fast; but the boy Cobbett, like most children, was quite unconscious of change on the way. After he had left the home where he was born he remembered it as a land of tradition and peace, where the landowner was brought up to love his land, and to interest himself in its productivity and in the work of his tenants rather than in making money out of the Stock Exchange or Army contracts; where the farmer felt responsible for his labourers and the farmer's wife cooked their meals, looked after them when they were sick, made her butter, pickles and preserves

instead of trying to play the piano in the parlour, and where there was plenty of English beef and beer and bacon for all.[1] When, after years of wandering, he came back to his own countryside, he rubbed his eyes angrily and asked what had happened to his inheritance.

Young Cobbett was a countryman, but not by any means a clodhopper sunk in the mud. His first passion—which never left him through life—was for gardens; and at fourteen he ran away to London to get a job at Kew, because he had heard that the Gardens were so fine.[2] He got his job; but though after a time he returned to the farm, he did not stay there. When he was nineteen he tried to run away to sea; a few months later he was on his way to Guildford Fair when he met a public coach going to London. On an impulse, with half a crown in his pocket, he jumped on board and went to London, where for some time he supported himself as a clerk in a lawyer's office, pining for the green fields he had so precipitately left. Unable to endure the confinement, he thought of the sea again; he ran away to Chatham and enlisted, as he thought, in the Marines. He had made a mistake, however; he found himself a soldier in the infantry.

Cobbett was twenty-one when he became a soldier and remained one for seven years. Like Robert Blatchford, whom we shall meet in a later chapter, his character was largely formed in the Army. While still in the Chatham barracks, he joined a circulating library, read everything he could lay hands on, and set himself determinedly to improve his education. He bought an English grammar, learnt it by heart and repeated it to himself while on sentry-go, and out of his allowance of twopence a day (which had also to cover any supplement to the army food for a hungry young man) bought himself pens, ink and paper to train himself to write. At the same time he was a good soldier, in the ordinarily accepted

[1] A good deal of this was no doubt idealised, as men who have had a happy childhood do tend to see their early memories through rosy spectacles. Not all countrymen of southern England were happy and well fed in the middle of the eighteenth century; there was much in their lives that we should think rough, brutal and uncomfortable. Nevertheless it is true that by the standards of the time they were better-off than for many years afterwards.

[2] On the way, he went without supper to spend his last coppers on Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, which became for years his greatest treasure. He had an immense admiration for Swift's writings.

sense. "There is no situation," he wrote in after years, "where merit is so sure to meet reward as in a well disciplined army." Not every soldier would agree with this sweeping statement; but in Cobbett's case it was true enough. He began his soldiering career as copyist (clerk) to the Commandant, and rose rapidly until he became regimental sergeant-major, in which capacity, he tells us, he practically ran the regiment. Modesty was never one of Cobbett's faults; but there is nothing to suggest that this was untrue. His officers seem to have found his efficiency ample compensation for his occasional intractability.[1]

He only soldiered in England for a short while; in 1785 he was sent with his regiment to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and thence to New Brunswick, where he remained until his return to England in 1791. He was mildly interested in the New World scenery—"bogs, rocks, and stumps, and mosquitoes and bull-frogs"—and in the thousands of "respectable" refugees who had fled across the border from the American Revolution and were now willing to do anything to pick up a living. But his most important interest was in the regimental accounts, an interest which eventually resulted in severing his connection with the Army and setting him on the road to Radicalism.

To put the matter briefly, he found that stealing from the regimental funds and from the men's provisions was wide-spread and had been continuing for years. His first amazed complaint met with a reception which convinced him that he must keep quiet for the time being; but he only held his hand. With the help of a Corporal Bestland he copied out long extracts from the regimental accounts which gave clear proof of the corrupt practices, not merely among quartermasters but among officers; and when he got back to England, he procured his discharge, and immediately demanded a court-martial at which he would bring forward his accusations. At that time, he seems to have thought that he had unearthed a wholly exceptional scandal, which the authorities would be only too glad to punish as soon as they knew of it; but he was quickly undeceived. The War Office refused to order the production

[1] "They were kept in awe," he says, "by my inflexible sobriety, impartiality and integrity, by the consciousness of their inferiority to me, and by the real and almost indispensable necessity for the use of my talents"—a very Cobbettian way of putting it.

of the regimental books or to give Corporal Bestland his discharge so that he could testify. At the same time, Cobbett received a hint that he was to be made to pay for his impertinence, that men were being found to swear that he had drunk confusion to the House of Brunswick. He decided he was best out of the way; when the case came on he was in France.[1] This was in March 1792. In August, however, the Revolution (in which Cobbett showed no particular interest) deposed Louis XVI, and it seemed that this would probably mean war with England. Cobbett, possibly influenced by the fact that his father had always been a stout supporter of the American colonists, decided to try his luck in the States. He arrived in the winter, bearing a letter to Jefferson, and a covering note of his own which said:

> "Ambitious to become a citizen of a free state, I have left my native country, England, for America. I bring with me youth, a small family, a few useful literary talents, and that is all."

The "small family" consisted of a wife and newborn son. He had married in February a girl called Ann Reid, an artillery sergeant's daughter, whom he had met while serving in New Brunswick. Three days after he had first seen her, he walked with two other young men past her father's house in the early morning.

> "It was hardly light, but she was out in the snow, scrubbing out a washing-tub. 'That's the girl for me,' I said, when we had got out of her hearing."

They became engaged immediately, but the artillery regiment was sent back to England, and it was four years before Cobbett saw her again. When he did,

> "I found my little girl *a servant of all work* (and hard work it was) at *five pounds a year*, in the house of a Captain Brisac; and without hardly saying a word about the matter,

[1] This was not the only occasion upon which Cobbett thought discretion the better part of valour. He was a hot fighter when he had a chance of success; but he had no taste for martyrdom.

[2] Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men*. This book, and *The Life and Adventures of Peter Porcupine*, are full of vivid stories of Cobbett's early life.

she put into my hands *the whole of my hundred and fifty guineas* [his savings which he had given into her keeping] *unbroken.*"

She was a more faithful soul than Cobbett, for though he wrote,

> "From the day that I first spoke to her, I never had a thought of her being the wife of any other man, more than I had the thought of her being transformed into a *chest of drawers,*"

his fancy did not stay firm. In the interim, he fell very much in love with the daughter of one of the expatriates from America —Cobbett always had an eye for a pretty girl—and the romance was only put a stop to by the return home of his own regiment. However, all ended well. He married his first love; she bore him seven children who survived him, besides others who did not; and he found her, as his letters show, an extremely satisfactory wife, except for a regrettable tendency to wear "flannel next the skin."

> "Pray do leave off some of it," he wrote to her from prison at Newgate. "It rubs you, and it scrubs you, all to pieces. . . . I do not like to see you with *waistcoats* and *breastplates*; but the *breeches* is the worst of all."

Cobbett started to support himself in Philadelphia as a teacher, particularly of English, to the Frenchmen (many of them Girondin *émigrés*) who were flocking to the New World. But he very soon began to fall out with his adopted country. Britain declared war on France in the New Year, and Cobbett was innocently astonished to find that his French pupils, and many of the Americans, thought Britain was in the wrong: worse still, that there were actually Englishmen, such as Tom Paine and Dr. Joseph Priestley (who arrived in the States in 1794), who preferred the French and American governments to those of their own country. Outraged by such traitorous behaviour, Cobbett wrote a violently abusive pamphlet entitled *Observations on Dr. Priestley's Emigration.* It sold widely and created a great commotion; and having found what

he could do best Cobbett delightedly followed it up with more pamphleteering, attacking with great gusto and no impartiality the French and their English and American sympathisers, spreading atrocity stories about the Revolution, and writing a thoroughly scurrilous and uncritical life of Tom Paine. One of his victims called him a porcupine, at which he was highly gratified, and adopted "Peter Porcupine" as his pen-name. In effect, he was an unofficial propagandist in America for the British Government, whose representatives were well pleased with him, though he refused to accept their offered subsidies.

It says a good deal for the tolerance of the Americans that Cobbett was permitted to abuse their public men for years without incurring anything more than unpopularity. A man who opened a shop in the middle of Philadelphia with a huge picture of George III in the window could hardly expect less. But in 1799 he got into more serious trouble. He had had a violent dispute with a famous physician, Dr. Rush, whom he accused first of being a quack and then of murdering George Washington (who undoubtedly died under his care). Rush brought an action for libel, which was certainly well earned, and Cobbett was fined five thousand dollars and his property in Philadelphia sold up. On that he gave up the struggle; in 1800 he returned to England, firing a parting shot at the Americans, who, he declared, had as a nation treated him most ungratefully and unjustly.

> "And with this I depart for my native land, where neither the moth of *Democracy*[1] nor the rust of *Federalism*[1] doth corrupt and where thieves do not, with impunity, break through and steal five thousand dollars a time."

Cobbett was thirty-seven when he returned to England, the same age as Paine was when he left it. Cobbett, however, was not poor and friendless; he was in high favour with the Government, and William Windham was his friend. He met the great; he was offered the editorship of a Government journal, which he refused, wishing to remain independent; but in 1802 Windham and some others put up the money for him to start what was to become the most famous of all Radical

[1] The two American political parties.

journals, the *Political Register*. He also set up a publishing house in London, which, as he was a careless business man, involved him in endless and acrimonious disputes with his partners and agents. But his heart was in the country; and in 1805 he bought a farm and settled down at Botley in Hampshire, where he got a name for paying high wages and arranging sports and comforts for his men.

The *Political Register* began life as a right-wing, not to say reactionary journal. It attacked the Peace of Amiens; it was fiercely opposed to republicanism, the rights of man, and the French, and its early issues came out strongly in favour of bull-baiting and the slave trade. But within a very few years the opinions of its editor and chief author had completely changed: Cobbett had become a Radical.

He changed his opinions because change was forced upon him by what he saw around. As soon as he began to use his own eyes, he observed that England was very far from being the paradise of which he had talked in America; and one abuse after another turned up to enrage him, which abuses gradually came together in his mind to form a picture of a monstrous system, the *Thing*, as he learned to call it, pressing down upon the England that he loved. Cobbett's political opinions were acquired so piecemeal and so much accompanied by ferocious and often unfair abuse of those who disagreed with him on any point that it is sometimes said that he had no principles at all, but a bundle of hatreds. This is untrue: like Dickens, Cobbett had to see an abuse for himself before he knew it was an abuse, but once seen and pointed out he believed that anyone with any ordinary sense of justice would immediately put it right. It was when his indignant exposures failed to move those in high places to action that he smelt conspiracy, and discovered, as others have discovered since his day, that injustice is often produced not by the iniquities of individual men, but by the systems they have set up and refuse to change.

He had had a taste of oppression years before, when his efforts at Army reform were smothered. But now three other factors forced themselves on his notice.

First, there was the question of sinecures and Government placemen and pensions, to which Burke had first drawn atten-

tion twenty years before. In 1802, for example, Addington[1] appointed his twelve-year-old son to a sinecure worth three thousand pounds a year. Cobbett made angry protest; but confidently expected that when Windham and his friends got into power, as they did in 1806 after Pitt's death, they would change all that and purify the administration. Being mostly sinecurists themselves, and in any case unable to secure their fences without a liberal distribution of patronage, they gave Cobbett a shock by doing nothing at all and by entirely ignoring the complete plan for a new and efficient army without corruption which he had presented to Windham, expecting it to be adopted without further ado. Meanwhile, Pitt's friend and political manager, Lord Melville, had been accused of malversing large sums of public money at the Admiralty and had only saved himself through the punishment of those of less influence.

Second came his experience of the National Debt, and Pitt's war finance. Cobbett was not much of an economist, but he could understand inflation and its effects, and he could also see with his own eyes that bankers and stockjobbers—townsmen whom he disliked by instinct—were waxing fat out of the "funds," were buying up estates and seats in Parliament and generally getting themselves into power in the country. It was not till some years later, when he had read Paine's pamphlet,[2] that in *Paper Against Gold* he set out his own ideas on finance; but even in 1806 he was looking confidently to the Ministry of All the Talents to liquidate the debt, restore the currency and let exports, if need be, go hang. "Perish Commerce," he observed cheerfully, if it got in the way of restoring Old England.

But the most important fact was the change in the countryside. When he came home, the enclosure movement was in full swing, and the small farmers were being crowded out, losing their freeholds and their votes together. The Speenhamland system had been ten years in operation when he reached Botley, and already the parish allowances were being reduced. Paupers were to be seen in numbers, and small farmhouses and cottages were abandoned and tumbling down. The parson

[1] Later Lord Sidmouth of the Gagging Acts and the spy system.
[2] See p. 20.

of Botley, the Reverend Mr. Baker, a man of high Tory views who was strict in the exaction of his tithes, was an additional exacerbation.[1]

> "We are daily advancing," Cobbett wrote in 1806, "to that state in which there are but two classes of men, *masters*, and *abject dependants*."

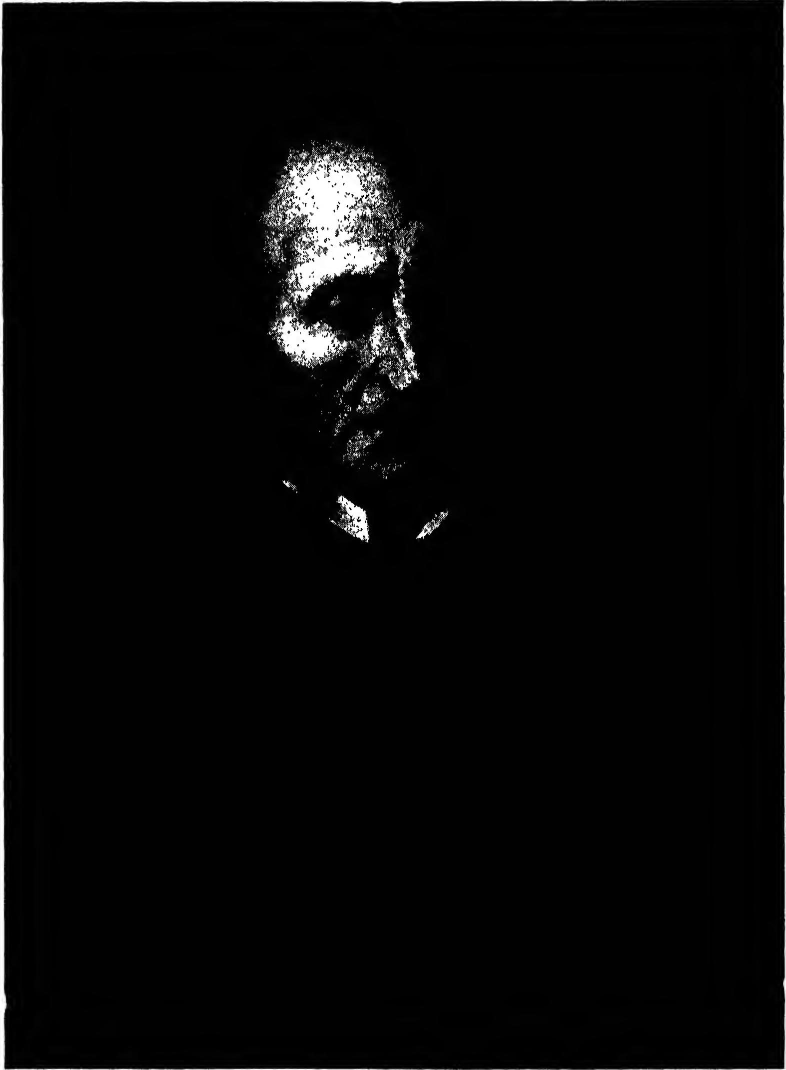
In the long run, his feeling about the labourers, the "chop-sticks," as he called them, was probably the strongest element in his conversion; but it took place gradually. In June 1806 he backed the anti-sinecurist candidature of the sailor Lord Cochrane for Honiton, and the bribery that he saw in that election convinced him of the need for reform of Parliament; and after he had indulged himself in a few more attacks on scandals, such as the selling of Army commissions by the Duke of York's mistress, the Government in 1810 drove home the lesson by prosecuting him for an article on the flogging of British soldiers under guard of German mercenary troops, and got him sent for a couple of years to Newgate. For political offenders imprisonment was not, in 1810, uncomfortable, for one could buy whatever one wanted, conduct one's business and write one's articles. But it was very expensive. Cobbett came out of prison a ruined man; he had to sell his *Parliamentary Debates* (the first "Hansard") to his printer, and his Botley farm. He managed, greatly to the gain of posterity, to keep the *Political Register*; but even so, he became a bankrupt in 1820.

Meanwhile, he wrote and he thought; and a new world came slowly into his ken, the world of the factory workers. Until the end of the French wars, full employment had kept the factory worker comparatively contented, except for occasional angry protests against the price of food. (The Luddite rioters of 1811–12, in whose defence Byron spoke so eloquently in the House of Lords, were mainly handicraftsmen whose livelihood was threatened by new stocking-frames and power-looms.) But when after Waterloo the "great universal consumer," i.e. the

[1] Cobbett was a lifelong member of the Church of England; but as soon as he had found the extent to which the Church's revenues were bound up with the interests of the fundholders he used language which would have befitted its bitterest enemy. The parsons' only consolation was that he liked "canting Methodists" no better!

FEARGUS O'CONNOR

From an engraving in the possession of Common Ground, Ltd.



JOHN STUART MILL

From the portrait by G. F. Watts
in the National Portrait Gallery

Army, consumed no more, unemployment marched through the country, prices—though not the interest on the Debt—fell catastrophically, misery and unrest increased. Cobbett had for some time been watching the conditions in the manufacturing towns and had prophesied what would happen when peace came. In May 1816 he asked, apropos of the rioting, "when did hunger listen to reason?"[1] In November he issued his *Address to the Journeymen and Labourers,* in which he proclaimed the workmen's grievances and told them plainly that their hope lay not in rioting but in the reform of Parliament. This pamphlet, published at twopence instead of the tenpence or a shilling which the Government newspaper tax made it necessary to charge for the ordinary *Register,* had an enormous sale, and Cobbett at once made it into a weekly publication. "Twopenny Trash," his enemies called it, and he accepted the name with delight. Within a very few weeks "Twopenny Trash" had made him the chief leader of the working classes.

He was not the only leader, by any means, or the *Register* the only Radical journal. Riot and agitation were increasing rapidly in every part of the country, and the Government, genuinely terrified, were hunting for an excuse to stamp it out. "They are pining and dying for a PLOT!" Cobbett wrote; and at the end of 1816 an unimportant little demonstration at Spa Fields in London gave them what they wanted. Committees of the Lords and the Commons solemnly reported that there was no doubt that a traitorous conspiracy had been formed to promote a general insurrection. Sidmouth hurriedly suspended the Habeas Corpus Act, rushed through Parliament "gagging bills" to prevent, on pain of death, "seditious" meetings, speeches, or publications, and began the repression which came to its height in 1819, in the Six Acts and the murderous charge of the yeomanry at Peterloo. Cobbett, realising that whoever escaped trial under the new laws, he certainly would not, fled to America and stayed there for two and a half years on a farm at North Hempstead, sending his copy for the *Register* by mail.[2] It is amusing to note that the America which

[1] As Paine had told Burke plainly that any violence of the Paris crowds was a product of human misery, and not a reasoned action.

[2] Cobbett's flight was much criticised by those Radicals, such as Henry Hunt, who stayed and faced the music. But whatever one's opinion of his courage, one must be grateful for the mass of magnificent writing he produced in the States.

he left so angrily in 1792 by 1817 had become, according to his letters, a paradise of free men, where there were "no tax-gatherers, no long-sworded and whiskered captains, no packed juries, no bankers" and "no Wilberforces. Think of *that*! No Wilberforces!"[1]

He returned to England, his American home having been burnt down, a few months after Peterloo, eager to devote his whole energy to the cause of Reform. When he had managed to clear himself of his financial difficulties by bankruptcy, he found that the Radical movement was flowing in an unexpected channel. In January 1820 George III died. His son, who had for years been trying to get rid of his wife Caroline, persuaded the Government to leave her name out of the Prayer Book and her person out of the Coronation, as a penalty for her immoral private life. Such an accusation, coming from a man of George IV's morals, was nothing less than impudent. Caroline hurried to London to claim her rights as Queen; and the English Radicals, whatever their private opinions of Caroline may have been, leapt at so magnificent a chance of attacking the *Thing* at its very apex. For eighteen months, until Caroline's death put an end to it, the rights of the injured Queen, and the baseness of her husband and his Ministry, appeared in the forefront of reform agitation. The *Political Register* could talk of nothing else; for Cobbett, at least, was convinced that Caroline was not merely in the right, but a noble and deeply wronged woman, and that George had disgraced the ancient monarchy to which he owed allegiance. He constituted himself her protector in and out of season; in her honour he dressed himself in his best clothes and put on his best court manners; when she died, he brought out the *Register* with a deep black mourning border. His family were inclined to be amused at his enthusiasm; but there is no doubt that it was sincere. More than that, it strengthened his position as a leader of the working-men, who had no doubts either.

By 1821 the worst of the post-war depression was over, and the political repression, therefore, lightening. There was no reform of Parliament; but there were no more Peterloos.

[1] Cobbett had a particular hatred for Wilberforce, partly because of his introduction of the Combination Acts, but more because he cherished negro slaves above white working-men.

Cobbett, while losing no whit of his interest in Reform, on which he fought a noisy, entertaining but unsuccessful election at Preston in 1826—having earlier stood for Coventry—was able to turn his mind more to writing. He had bought a small farm in Kensington, of which his daughter wrote that it would be "quite enough for Papa's amusement, though not sufficient to drag him into any great expense"; and during his life at that farm he wrote, among many other works, *Cottage Economy, The History of the Protestant Reformation, Advice to Young Men, The English Grammar,* and, above all, *Rural Rides,* that best of all his books, where from horseback he surveys the English countryside, sees how beautiful it is and how prosperous it might be, puts on record what the tax-gatherers, the paper-money men, the tithe-eating parsons and the sinecurists, and all the tribe of agents of the *Thing* have done to it, and meets and harangues, with the voice that could shout down any interrupter, the farmers and the countrymen bent on reform.

In this way, lecturing, writing, working for reform and for Catholic emancipation, attacking everyone whom he did not agree with, from the landowners who set spring guns and man-traps and transported for life a man who had poached a rabbit[1] to those who wished to school the working-man in the accepted principles of political economy (*laissez-faire*) and those who wanted him to live on potatoes because they were cheaper than bread, he filled his life full during the 1820's. Meanwhile, time marched on. The Catholics were freed in 1829; Wellington's government fell, and the Whigs came in; in France the last of the Bourbons was pushed out, almost painlessly. It seemed that Reform must come. At this moment, in 1830, the village labourers, who, unlike the townsmen, had not shared in the economic recovery but were still pressed down in the miseries of Speenhamland, broke out into what has been called "the last labourers' revolt." The immediate occasion was perhaps the introduction into the south of threshing machines, which took away the last chance of earning an odd shilling or two at harvest time; the real cause was starvation.

[1] "There is in the men calling themselves 'English country gentlemen' something superlatively base. They are, I sincerely believe, the most cruel, the most unfeeling, the most brutally insolent, . . . the most base of all creatures that God ever suffered to disgrace the human shape." (*Rural Rides.*)

It was the mildest revolt in history. No blood was shed, and hardly anyone even damaged. Ricks were set on fire and overseers put on carts and ridden out of the village; but the outrage for which Henry Cook of Micheldever paid with his life dealt Bingham Baring (a son of the great banking family) a thump on the head, and severely damaged his hat. The Whig Government, Cobbett thought, would be understanding and merciful; they were not "a fierce crew of hard lawyers, such as we have seen before." He was wrong; the Whigs shook in their shoes at the very idea of seeming to sympathise with disaffection.

They sent soldiers down to stamp out the riots and Special Commissions to try and to hang and transport the rioters; and to fill up the cup, they endeavoured, on the basis of a "confession" procured by very dubious means, to fix on "Mr. Cobbett's lactures" some part of the responsibility for the riots. This was a very foolish move. They failed in their attempt; Cobbett defended himself with great vigour, to the length of producing Brougham, the Lord Chancellor, to testify on his behalf; the jury disagreed, and the Government hastily dropped the prosecution. But, more than that, they had made the leading Radical, who was at least prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt, into their bitter enemy. When their Reform Bill finally appeared, Cobbett supported it as the best that could be got, though it gave no secret ballot and no votes to the town workers or the chopsticks; but he never again trusted its authors.

The Reform Bill passed, and the first elections were held in the new constituencies. At once fears began to be realised. It became clear that the middle classes intended to use their new votes to return really respectable people to Parliament, the well-connected, the men of property, the sound business heads and the sound political economists. Of the Radicals of the left, a mere handful were to be elected. Among them was Cobbett, who shared the representation of Oldham with John Fielden, the Lancashire cotton manufacturer, who was a real Radical all his life: but when he put up for Manchester he found the influence of the Potter brothers[1] was far too strong for him,

[1] Grandfather and great-uncle of Beatrice Webb. Voting in early elections went on for several days, and it was possible to stand for several constituencies.

and withdrew half-way through the voting. "Now," he said, "I belong to the people of Oldham."

His intention was to implement that pledge to the full; but he did not find Parliament a congenial place. He was nearly seventy when he was elected, and the habit of Parliament of not meeting until the afternoon and continuing business sometimes far into the night, under very loose rules of debate, upset his health and annoyed him. "It appears to me," his maiden speech[1] began, "that since I have been sitting here I have listened to a great deal of unprofitable discussion"; and he began to suffer with coughs, colds and influenza, due to the absence of free air. Nor was the mental atmosphere any more congenial to him. On his first entry he characteristically challenged the House by sitting down on the Treasury Bench and by moving a complete alternative programme as an Amendment to the Address, for which he polled twenty-three supporters, twenty of them Irish; and throughout his short Parliamentary life he acted as the representative, not merely of Oldham, but of the unenfranchised millions of the working-class—on one single day, he presented no fewer than thirty petitions from different parts of the country. His best and shortest speech was delivered on an amendment to the Factory Bill of 1833 to reduce the working hours of children from twelve to ten per day, when he bitterly taunted the honourable House with discovering the great truth that the wealth, the capital, the resources, the power and the glory of England depended not upon her shipping, her land or her credit, but on "an eighth part of the labour of three hundred thousand little girls." In the division the little girls were heavily defeated. Cobbett had got into a company of business men and "feelosophers."

Worse, however, was to come. The new Government, in addition to its legislative programme, was finding time to follow the suppression of the rural riots by crushing the great industrial revolts of 1833 and 1834; and hardly had the seal been set by the condemnation of the seven Tolpuddle labourers[2] to Botany Bay when the Bill to reform the Poor Law was hastily rushed through Parliament.

[1] On a motion to re-elect the Speaker of the old unreformed House, which was carried by 240 to 31.

[2] See "Robert Owen."

It was clear, and to nobody clearer than to Cobbett, who had seen its effects all over England, that the old Poor Law was in need of reform. What he refused to admit was that it needed to be reformed by the brutal measures proposed by the Whig Commissioners of Enquiry and their rapidly drawn up report. In the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners and their Bill, *laissez-faire* had its way with a vengeance. The miserable poor relief granted under the old law, which had been steadily decreased in the hard times, was not to be raised; on the contrary, it was to be systematised so as to be reduced to the lowest possible total cost to the rates. Wherever practicable, claimants for relief were to be forced to leave their homes for the workhouses, "the English Bastilles"; and as a crowning insult, husbands and wives, however old, were to be separated in the workhouses lest they should breed and add to the hungry mouths whom Malthus and his fellow economists so feared.

This Bill outraged Cobbett's deepest sentiments of justice and human dignity. He fought it all the way in Parliament, and when it appeared that it would be driven through by enormous majorities, he urged that a national organisation should be set up to prevent its operation. But before this[1] came into being he was dead. After a late sitting in the House he was taken seriously ill; and he died peacefully on June 18th, 1835, after he had been carried round to see for the last time the work on his last home, Normandy Farm, not far from Farnham where he was born.

Cobbett's life is difficult to write in a short space, and that not merely because it was so full of incident, because he crammed into it as many interests and activities—many of which have gone without reference here—as would have been enough for a dozen ordinary men, or even because of his violent and confusing enmities. For all his courage and ability, he was a blustering bullying egotist, whose fury with anyone who dared to disagree with him is exasperating to a biographer to-day and must have been infuriating a century and a half ago. The real difficulty is not this, however, but his apparent failure in all he fought for. He gave his life to the reform of Parliament, only to find it turn to ashes in his mouth; he could not save the chopsticks from the Poor Law; and when he died

[1] See further, "Feargus O'Connor."

England seemed to be plunging into an orgy of *laissez-faire*. He died disappointed, inevitably, because what he wanted was not any possible future, but Old England back again. But disappointment is not necessarily the same as failure. What Cobbett did, what no one but he could have done, was to uphold the rights and strengthen the heart of the common man, sans phrase and without qualification; and he did this in some of the best prose in all English literature, so good that every line he wrote on matters of general interest is worth reading to-day for style alone. No Radical, until we reach Bernard Shaw, has ever written so much or so well as Cobbett; and in imperishable words he "bequeathed" not merely his revenge, but his deep sense of humanity to "the children and labourers of England."

FRANCIS PLACE

(1771–1854)

Few men have done more of the world's work with so little external sign. . . . He loved quiet power for the purpose of promoting good ends.

Spectator—obituary on Francis Place

A man must have a good many projects in hand to accomplish any.

Place, in a letter to Thomas Hodgskin

AFTER the thinker and the agitator comes, rightly, the organiser. Francis Place, the breeches-maker of Charing Cross, was an organiser throughout his active life—perhaps the most effective organiser ever seen in the democratic movement. This does not imply that he had no opinions of his own; he had, but they were mostly derived from other men, such as the great Utilitarian philosophers, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill; and it was just as well for Place's reputation with posterity that he was never placed in an executive position where he could practise on the nation the instruction he had received. Disciples set in authority are apt to be far more dangerous than their masters. Place, however, lives in democratic history as an organiser. His two most outstanding efforts were the repeal of the Combination Acts against Trade Unionism and the London agitation for the first Reform Act; but in the course of his life he had a great many other causes at heart—they included, to mention only a few, the abolition of the stamp duty on newspapers; the repeal or modification of the libel laws, the laws restricting political meetings and political associations, and the law of debtor and creditor; the removal of the duties on printed cottons; the promotion of birth control; and the reform of the National Debt and the Sinking Fund. He was no speaker and, generally speaking, a clumsy and repetitive writer (his autobiography exists in manuscript but is so unreadable that it has never been printed); but in providing material for others to speak and to write, in drafting petitions, organising agitations, and

FRANCIS PLACE
from the portrait by
Daniel Maclise

managing Parliamentary and other committees he was unrivalled. Not until the Webbs,[1] nearly a hundred years later, did the Labour movement throw up a personality with half the organising genius of Francis Place.

It is curious that Place, who throughout most of his life was an extremely respectable person, very abstemious, very hard-working himself and openly contemptuous of others who were not, should be the only one of the subjects of this book to have had a dissolute youth. There was a good deal to account for this. He was born into misery and poverty that were avoidable. His father, originally a working baker, was a drunkard, a gambler and a brute. He was a bailiff of the Marshalsea Prison, known to all readers of Dickens, and kept a "sponging-house," that is to say, a private debtors' prison, near Drury Lane, in which he charged the unfortunate debtors all that they could be induced to pay. By the time that his son Francis was nine years old he had made sufficient money out of this legalised blackmail to open a tavern himself; when his gambling got him into hopeless difficulties, as it did from time to time, he would disappear and tramp the country, leaving his wife to support the family by taking in sewing.

> "He never spoke to any of his children," says his son, "in the way of conversation; the boys never ventured to ask him a question, since the only answer which could be anticipated was a blow. If he were coming along a passage or any narrow place such as a doorway, and was met by either me or my brother, he always made a blow at us with his fist for coming in his way."

This was the early home life of Francis Place. He had some education, at private schools around Fleet Street; but he seems to have learned little, though he became head boy and was employed to teach the others. (The badness of the private-venture schools of the late eighteenth century, with their charges of a few pence a week and their ignorant and miserable teachers, is hardly credible to-day.) His real schooling for life was in the unpoliced streets of London, where he was a leader in street games and street fights, a noted hunter of bullocks in the Strand, and an interested spectator of all the forms of vice

[1] See "Sidney Webb."

to be found in the City of Westminster.[1] When he was just under fourteen he refused to become a lawyer's clerk, whereupon his father went into his own bar-parlour and offered him as an apprentice to anyone who would take him. A maker of leather breeches, a tippling little fellow called France, made an offer of sorts, and Place immediately became an apprentice, spending his evenings and holidays in much the same way as the other apprentices, i.e. as a young tough. He was a member, for example, of an eight-oar cutter crew, whose stroke was later hanged for murder and the coxswain transported. It was a bad period in his life, but nevertheless it burnt into him experience, which he never forgot, of what it felt like to be a man of the working class, even in a comparatively established trade which was not subjected to the cruel slave-driving of the early factories. Long afterwards, roused to anger by one of the common tirades against the idleness of the working classes, he wrote:

> "A labouring man should have no fits of idleness; so says pride, wilfulness, and ignorance. He who of all men, the negro slave excepted, has the fewest inducements to constant, unremitted toil, should be free from idle feelings. This is impossible. . . . I know not how to describe the sickening aversion which at times steals over the working-man, and utterly disables him, for a longer or shorter period, from following his usual occupation, and compels him to indulge in *idleness*. I have felt it, resisted it to the utmost of my power, but have been so completely subdued by it that, spite of very pressing circumstances, I have been obliged to submit and run away from my work. This is the case with every workman I have ever known; and in proportion as a man's case is hopeless will such fits more frequently occur and be of longer duration."[2]

This extract is much better written than the bulk of Place's compositions. The reason is probably that it came straight out

[1] Fleet Street was on the edge of the district called Alsatia, once a sanctuary for debtors and lawbreakers. The special privileges of Alsatia had been abolished by Parliament some time before; but its traditions still remained, and were not so difficult to preserve in the swarming courts and alleys of the "Street."

[2] *Improvement of the Working People*, 1834.

of his early and bitter memories, which prevented him from ever looking at the workers as an economic mass without human characteristics, as was the error of some of his Utilitarian friends; the lesson he draws is not fully learned to-day.

The period of rowdy youth, however, came to an abrupt end in 1790, when, newly out of his time and earning fourteen shillings a week as a journeyman, he married Elizabeth Chadd, a girl of just under seventeen, and went to live "in proud poverty" (his own phrase) in one room in a court off the Strand. From then onwards, all wild oats disappear from the record; Francis Place is a respectable hard-working artisan, studying in his spare time, a husband and father of a family.[1]

It may have been a virtuous, but it was not a very colourful life. The making of leather breeches was a declining trade, and work was very intermittent; even those who, like Place, had the enterprise to use their idle time in making stuff breeches to sell to customers who could not afford leather, were lucky if they earned a guinea in the week. In 1793, when Place's first child was a year old, the members of the Breeches-makers' Benefit Society decided to strike for higher wages. Place, who had joined the Society for what would nowadays be called "friendly benefit" reasons and had never attended a meeting, now found himself discharged along with the other strikers, and the Society with two hundred and fifty pounds in hand and two hundred and fifty members to be supported out of it. The arithmetical calculation was not difficult. Place "commenced organiser" by drawing attention to it, by suggesting that all members who could should leave London with a week's strike pay and a "tramp certificate,"[2] and by proposing that the Society open a shop for the sale of "rag fair" breeches, that is to say, breeches made of spoilt material, to be made up by the workmen on strike. He was at once made manager of the shop and in effect secretary to the strike committee, in which capacity he characteristically proposed (and carried) printing and circulating an address explaining the reasons for the strike.

[1] Fifteen in all, of whom five died in infancy. Place's birth-control propaganda did not extend to his own family.

[2] Which would guarantee him a night's lodging and keep and a chance to start work in any town where there was a branch of his trade. The granting of these "tramp certificates" was an important part of the business of early Trade Unions.

Unfortunately, the breeches-makers had moved on a falling market. Within two months the strike collapsed, and the principal leaders, among whom was Place, were victimised. For eight months he could get no work of any kind, and he and his wife (the baby had died of smallpox at the beginning of the strike) were reduced to the deepest poverty. They pawned everything they had through the wife of a carpenter living in a garret over their heads, since "proud poverty" forbade them to go to the pawnbroker themselves; and when the good woman found that they were giving her no more to pawn, she told the landlady, who "almost forced bread, coals, soup and candles on us." At the end of the year, Place got work again; but it did not last very long. In 1794 he became paid secretary to a reorganised Breeches-makers' Union, and in the following year secured by negotiation the advance that had been refused to the strikers two years before. Shortly after this success, the Union decided that it had no further need of a paid secretary. Place struggled on for some time, by getting work in bits and pieces from private customers; and eventually, after many disappointments, succeeded in setting up his tailor's shop at 16 Charing Cross, in April 1801. It had, he proudly observed, "the largest, if not indeed the first, plate-glass windows in London"; and though from time to time he deeply resented the obsequious attentions which his customers expected of their tailor,[1] he stuck to his business so closely and with such ability that, when he retired sixteen years later and handed over the business to his eldest son, it was already earning him three thousand pounds a year. By that time, however, he was known as a politician rather than a master tailor.

Reading led him to politics. Even in the worst days of his poverty he was an unremitting self-educator, ploughing his way through history, law, anatomy, geography and philosophy. Adam Smith and Locke prepared his mind for the Utilitarians, and the great sceptic David Hume, together with a chance copy of Paine's *Age of Reason*, made him a rationalist. In June 1794 his landlord completed his conversion to Radical-

[1] "The nearer a common tradesman approximates in information and manners to a footman," he wrote scornfully, "the more certainly he will please his well-bred customers; the less he knows beyond his business, the more certain, in general, will be his success." He tried his hardest to ensure that his clientèle should never suspect him of being able to read anything but a newspaper.

ism by inducing him to join the London Corresponding Society.

The London Corresponding Society was the working-class brother of the Society for Constitutional Information (see "Thomas Paine") and similar bodies, whose subscriptions were far too high for artisan pockets. It had been founded three years before by Thomas Hardy, a shoemaker, with the object of supporting the ideals of the French Revolution and "exchanging correspondence with societies and public-spirited individuals."[1] The subscription was a penny a week, with an entrance fee of a shilling; the society had branches in various parts of London, which held weekly discussion meetings, formed branch libraries, and sent delegates up to a central committee. It resembled, in fact, an early version of the Independent Labour Party; and it soon added to its sympathies with the French a political programme of its own, called the Plan of Radical Reform, which advocated manhood suffrage, annual Parliaments and payment of members. This does not strike the modern reader as very extreme; it is far less radical than the suggestions in the *Rights of Man*, and in fact it had been advocated twenty years before by a staunch and lifelong Radical, Major John Cartwright.[2] But in the Parliament of the eighteenth century it struck close enough to the roots of power to make it treasonable as soon as anyone cared to call it treason.

Place was pleased with his new working-class friends, who showed him the existence of a different type of London artisan from the street toughs he had known in his apprentice days. But almost as soon as he had joined it, the Corresponding Society ran into stormy weather. War had been declared upon France the year before; the *Rights of Man*, in spite of its author's outlawry, was circulating freely all over the place; Burke, in a fit of ranting, had denounced the little Corres-

[1] The reason for its name was that the law forbade national political societies, and in order to get round it local societies were formed which "corresponded" with one another. In the time of trouble the societies were naturally accused of "corresponding," not with one another, but with England's enemies.

[2] Place, in later years, found the Old Major a pretty considerable bore. "He was in political matters," he wrote, "exceedingly troublesome and sometimes as exceedingly absurd. He had read but little or to no purpose, and knew nothing of general principles." But Place's judgments on his contemporaries were seldom charitable: Cartwright's long and completely disinterested service in the democratic cause deserved a better epitaph.

ponding Societies as "the source of all the mischief." The Government thought the time had come to strike, and arrested Hardy, with Horne Tooke the outspoken ex-curate and philologist, Thelwall the public lecturer, and several others, on a charge of high treason. The action, however, turned out premature. The Londoners who formed the jury—in the days before the Reform of Parliament, it must be remembered, service on a jury was one of the few undoubtedly legal ways in which an ordinary citizen could publicly express his disagreement with the Government—thought that the case was a frame-up, and after a nine days' trial, whose proceedings form one of the great documents in the history of British civil liberty, they acquitted Hardy, Thelwall and Horne Tooke; and the rest of the prosecutions were hastily abandoned.

Place, not given to enthusiasm, wrote of the "joy in which I partook on hearing the verdict"; but he did not make the mistake of some of his fellows in the Corresponding Society in thinking that the Government, having lost a battle, was ready to collapse, and that all that remained to be done was to hold large menacing meetings until Reform was granted. He advised, rather, the undertaking of quiet educational propaganda. Public meetings were nevertheless held; but their result was not the reform of Parliament, but the passing, in 1795, of the Treason and Sedition Acts, and the suspension of Habeas Corpus. This legislation made it conveniently possible to send to prison a number of reformers without running the gauntlet of a public trial; but it is true also that the barometer of opinion had gone down after a year of war, and that the shopkeepers and artisans of London were now more willing to believe those who told them that French republicanism was a menace to their own hearths. Partly because of this shift in opinion and partly because of the risks and penalties now imposed, the membership of the Corresponding Society fell away, though for a little while, like other bodies in similar circumstances, it talked the bigger the weaker its influence became. In 1799 the Government finally suppressed it by name; Place had left it two years before, and in 1799 he was deep in his private struggle to set up shop.

But he had gained his political faith, and neither the death of the Corresponding Society nor Pitt's crushing of opposition

made him change his mind. Seven or eight years later, his personal affairs being in reasonable order, we find him in the thick of electioneering in the City of Westminster. Westminster, before the Reform Act, was one of the half-dozen constituencies with a really wide franchise, the "scot and lot boroughs," in which every ratepayer, including many of the very poor, cast an open vote; and since Westminster was on the doorstep of the House of Commons, its elections had great publicity value. Up to 1806 contests had been avoided for some years by a kind of "gentlemen's agreement" which gave one seat to Charles James Fox and one to the Tories; but in that year Fox followed Pitt to the grave, and Radicalism began to stir again in Westminster. There was an election in 1806 at which great indignation was aroused by the nomination of a very young aristocrat named Percy, son of the Duke of Northumberland, and the dramatist Sheridan, who by private agreement withdrew half-way through the poll, leaving young Percy a walk-over for the second seat. Place was outraged by the sight of the Duke of Northumberland's footmen, in that nobleman's impressive livery, throwing lumps of bread and cheese to be fought for by electors from the courts and alleys of St. Giles;[1] and he and some of his friends resolved that so shocking an exhibition should not have another free run, if they could help it.

For though the alley-rats who scrambled for the ducal cheese had votes, they had not political sense or organising ability. These were to be found in the groups immediately above them in the economic scale, on the one hand the artisans and craftsmen of whom Place had been one, who had in practice a good deal of independence, at least when times were good, and on the other the body of small masters, traders and shopkeepers who could not aspire to the wealth or political influence of the magnates of the City, but who were respectable and respected within their own sphere. Both these groups were without votes in the vast majority of constituencies, and it was they who provided, up and down the country, the solid thoughtful basis of Radicalism, and—later—the strength of the agitation for

[1] Northern end of the borough, including the district long notorious as Seven Dials. The contrast between the feastings of the rich and the crusts of the poor was as marked in the London of George III as in the Madrid of to-day.

Reform.[1] In Westminster, as well as votes, they had the habit of discussion and combination; and their chance came soon.

In 1807 George III dissolved Parliament rather than grant emancipation to Catholics, and a small meeting held at Place's house decided to run Sir Francis Burdett, husband of the banking heiress Sophia Coutts, and one of the richest men in England, as Radical candidate. Burdett was a flamboyant figure of considerable popularity, who had entered Parliament ten years before and had devoted much energy to pleading popular causes, but after spending a great deal of money on Parliamentary candidatures he was sick of the corruption of both Whigs and Tories, and agreed to sit for Westminster, if elected, provided he spent no money on the contest. The meeting formed an election committee, of which Place was virtually secretary, giving up his whole time—from seven in the morning till midnight, he says—in organisation at the committee-rooms, except for one afternoon when he went canvassing. In the *Political Register*, the recently converted Cobbett's powerful pen came to their aid; and though the committee got off to a slow start, by the time the polling ended on the fifteenth day, Burdett had over five thousand votes, neither official Whig nor official Tory reaching much more than half his total. His intended companion, a man named James Paull, had unfortunately quarrelled with Burdett and fought a duel with him at the beginning of the election; but as the second man elected was Lord Cochrane, of the Honiton by-election,[2] that was little comfort to the Government. The committee were naturally delighted at this resounding success, and after the election they did not dissolve, but formed themselves into what became in effect the recognised political authority in Westminster. They held an annual dinner at the Crown and Anchor, and called public meetings from time to time in Westminster Hall or Palace Yard whenever there seemed a chance of making an effective attack on the Government.

Place himself learned a very great deal from his experiences on the Westminster Reform Committee about methods of organisation and agitation, of what "free and independent

[1] Though few of the artisans or indeed of the smaller tradesmen got votes as a result of the Reform Act.

[2] See page 32.

electors" would do and what they would not, which he could have learned hardly anywhere else in England. The great majority of those who argued about universal suffrage, whether they trembled at the idea or regarded it as the road to Utopia, knew nothing of it in practice; to Place, who had seen it working, it meant simply the extension of the system of Westminster to the whole kingdom, and he thought that a great deal of nonsense was talked about its results.

"The people who are the most dreaded are the most confiding," he wrote in later years. "So long as there is no glaring misconduct in their trustees, and no marked oppression upon themselves, they will not interfere; and, spite of all that has been said of demagogues misleading them, if a man cannot show them that they are really oppressed, treated with contumely and plundered, he can produce no effect upon them. . . . And whenever these circumstances existed, a demagogue would be a very desirable person.

"The truth is, that the vulgarity will not choose men from among themselves; they never do so when left perfectly free to choose. In such case they invariably choose men of property, in whom they expect to find the requisite appropriate talent, honesty, and business-like habits, and they make fewer mistakes than other men are apt to do."

And, on the proposal to hold annual elections,

"It is objected that if men are elected for short periods they will have no time to acquire the necessary experience, but will be continually displaced by others. . . . The very reverse is the fact, and always will be so where the elections are really free, and the periods short, and accountability as perfect as it can be made. It might be decided *a priori* that this must be so. Annual election is election for life if the representative do his duty in a becoming manner. . . . The fact really is, not that they are too clamorous, but that they are too tame and acquiescent." (*Letter to John Cam Hobhouse,* 1830.)

Though this is slightly overstated, our subsequent experience of popular election, not only for Parliament but for all

types of democratic bodies, shows that there is a great deal in it.

But Place's dogmatic dryness did not always make him popular with his contemporaries. He soon quarrelled with Burdett, whom he accused of being a poseur and a coward,[1] and for nine years they were not on speaking terms, though they afterwards made it up. In 1810, moreover, he had the bad luck to be made foreman of the jury which sat on the body of Joseph Sellis, the Duke of Cumberland's valet, who had been found with his throat cut. Place practically took over the conduct of the inquest, and succeeded in convincing all his fellow-jurors that Sellis had killed himself; but the Duke, of all the King's sons, was so deeply hated that the ordinary citizen, who had hoped for a spectacular murder trial and a good blow at the House of Brunswick, became very indignant and accused Place of being a spy and in the pay of the Court. This nonsensical accusation (which was repeated by Burdett) contributed to his withdrawal for a time, both from the Westminster Committee and from other political work. He did not return until after the war, in the time of savage repression, when the Committee persuaded him to come out of his tent and fight, or rather organise, again for Reform. After considerable hard work, during which he was assailed by a strong opposition from the left egged on by Cobbett (who had come to dislike him thoroughly, and called him "Peter Thimble" and his Committee "the Rump"), two Reformers were elected for Westminster at the beginning of 1820, and sat undisturbed until the nation-wide struggle began eleven years later.

The years of his withdrawal Place spent partly in education—he played a great part in Joseph Lancaster's efforts to organise cheap primary education until he was turned off the Committee for being an atheist—and partly in improving his mind in discussion with others. He met Thomas Spence, the first apostle of land nationalisation, that oddity of an ex-schoolmaster, who toured England in a baker's delivery van laden with a strange commodity called Saloup and with bales of his

[1] Poseur he certainly was: when he knew he was to be sent to the Tower on a motion passed by the House of Commons, he arranged to be arrested while instructing his small son in the principles of Magna Carta. The charge of cowardice seems less justified; though he left the Radicals in later years, there is no reason to believe that he had not genuinely changed his mind. The probability is that his political convictions, like those of some others who have embraced the cause of classes not their own, never went very deep.

pamphlets, which he handed out "with strong expressions of hate to the powers that were and prophecies of what would happen to the whole race of landowners"; and agreed with his doctrine but not with his methods of propaganda. He was visited by Robert Owen (q.v.) bearing "Mr. Owen's Plan" for Society, and thought him a most amiable person. But his most important contact was with the philosophers of Utilitarianism, with James Mill and through him with the head and fount of the Utilitarian ideas, the great, simple, inventive Jeremy Bentham.

The world in general, including his eldest son,[1] hardly thinks of James Mill as a lovable man; he was as stiff as a post, a rigid disciplinarian, and almost incapable of abandoning his reserve. But if he unbent to anyone, he unbent to Place, even to the extent of confiding in him about his financial difficulties; and Place in return gave him genuine affection.

> "I do not know," he writes in 1814, "when I experienced more delight than your letter has given me. . . . Could I advise or perform anything which tended to promote your comfort, how inexpressibly happy I should be"

—which is far enough from Place's usual attitude to his fellow mortals to be noteworthy in itself. It is probable that at some time Place lent money to Mill, and certain that they exchanged letters describing the qualities of their respective offspring.[2] At one time, immediately after the end of the war, they had an idea of going to live side by side in France; but that came to nothing, and in 1817 Place was taken to stay at Ford Abbey, the big house in Devonshire which Bentham had bought for himself and his disciples.

Even the industrious Place was a little staggered at the educational routine forced on the Mill children; and he was not spared himself. He was made to spend four hours, and on occasion eight hours a day learning Latin—though he was not, like the Mills, "scolded or cuffed" or made to go without his dinner if his lessons were not learned. But the main result of

[1] See "John Stuart Mill."

[2] A postcard of Place's, sending greetings to Mrs. Mill from his wife and daughter, says: "She is their favourite acquaintance, the more so as she, poor woman, as well as my wife, has a grumpy husband who bites her head off." Maybe that was part of the bond between them.

his stay at Ford Abbey was not the learning of Latin, but the closer acquaintance with Bentham, for whom he then acquired an enormous admiration. When in 1819 Mill, after years of difficulty, obtained an appointment at the India House, Place succeeded to his position as practical adviser to the unworldly Bentham on business and personal matters, as corrector of his proofs and general amanuensis. Bentham was so impressed by his ability as to say on one occasion that "Mr. Place was the most fit man living to become Secretary of State to the Home Department." This judgment may be queried; what is undoubted is that Place swallowed whole the doctrines of the first leaders of Utilitarianism, viz. that the aim of human society is the greatest happiness of the greatest number, that this end can be ascertained by a simple, rational, arithmetical calculation of pleasure and pain, and put into effect by an easy change in human institutions so that vested interests and obsolete objects (such as, for example, an unreformed Parliament and an Established Church) no longer stand in the way; and that, when he returned to politics and organisation, he returned with these principles firmly fixed in his mind.

His most important purpose when he returned was the repeal of the Combination Acts. He had had plenty of experience of the oppression of workmen, both when he was himself a journeyman and when, some time after he became a master tailor, his fellow masters invited him to join them in an attempt to suppress finally combinations in the tailoring trade. He refused this request and, when the proposal came before a committee of the House of Commons, he volunteered evidence which prevented any legislation being passed. Afterwards he began to try and collect evidence against the Acts, but for some time found a good deal of difficulty, partly because the workmen affected were inclined fatalistically to accept the law as a dispensation of nature or of the powers that were, which could not be altered, however hardly it bore upon them, but more because they had learned to fear the informer, and were very chary of supplying information about their associations to an inquiring gentleman from London. Place, however, continued his efforts; he wrote constantly articles for the daily and weekly press, and in 1818 advanced money to John Wade, a woolcomber, for a paper called the *Gorgon* which wrote regularly

on trade questions, including the Combination Acts, and was sent free to those who might be interested; and thus he slowly worked up public feeling. After 1820, the lightening of the political repression and a gradual improvement in trade encouraged the working-men to hope again, and Place's quiet mining operations were reinforced by the trumpet-voice of Cobbett, who had recently discovered the grievance of the factory workers,[1] and of other popular champions. Place himself, and Graham Wallas, his biographer, tend to give him the sole credit for the repeal of the Acts; but though the organisation was his, it would have had much less chance of success without the agitation of the fifty thousand groups which read the *Political Register.*

Nevertheless, Place's own part was impressive enough. He found his ideal pupil in Joseph Hume, M.P., a Benthamite, a short, ugly and humourless man, but a sturdy fighter for many years in all Radical causes, to whom he was first introduced in 1813. "Devoid of information, dull and selfish," was Place's charitable first summing-up of him, which is very unfair and exemplifies Place's patronising judgments of his associates—but it is fortunate that Hume was "dull" enough, or his skin thick enough, to bear with equanimity both the gibes of his political opponents and his master's frequent scoldings. In 1822 Hume announced that he would bring in a Bill to repeal the Acts. His intention was nearly frustrated at the start by another M.P. producing a Bill of his own which threw the House of Commons into a panic; but on Place's advice Hume withdrew, and instead moved for a Committee of Inquiry, which was granted. There the wirepullers were in their element. Their great advantage was that very few in the honourable House knew anything about the Acts or about Trade Unions. This enabled Hume to pack the Committee in the initial stages; and Place, working in the background, to collect the witnesses, arrange what they were to say, and provide Hume with a daily indexed report of all proceedings. The witnesses—mostly workmen—presented a problem. They were anxious to tell the Committee all their grievances.

[1] e.g. "Letter to William Wilberforce, on the State of the Cotton Factory Labourers, and on the speech of ANDREW RYDING, who cut HORROCKS with a cleaver." (Cobbett, *Political Register*, 1823.)

"They were filled with false notions," Place wrote sadly, "all attributing their distresses to wrong causes. . . . Taxes, machinery, laws against combinations, the will of the masters, the conduct of magistrates. . . . All expected a great and sudden rise of wages, when the Combination Laws should be repealed; not one of them had any idea whatever of the connection between wages and population"—

in fact they were neither Benthamites nor Malthusians, and Place had the greatest difficulty in persuading them to confine themselves to saying what he wanted them to say. Even when he had arranged the evidence to his satisfaction, he was still alarmed about the possibilities of a ranging debate which would call attention to many aspects of the question which he hoped would be left in the dark. He instructed Hume not to write a report of the ordinary kind, but instead to submit to the Committee a series of short sharp resolutions which might be passed without amendment, before slow-moving minds had time to realise what was happening. This was successfully done, and Bills were ordered to be drawn up. When the official draftsmen produced Bills which were unsatisfactory, Place and Hume calmly put them aside, and replaced them by drafts of their own. Nobody seems to have questioned this procedure, and Place having persuaded his Parliamentary supporters to refrain from making any speeches, the Bills went through almost unnoticed. Seldom can have so important a change in the law been made so easily and almost by stealth.

This result would hardly have been achieved had not those M.P.s who thought about the subject at all been influenced by the firm conviction of Place's Utilitarian teachers that once the man-made obstacles to Trade Unionism had been removed workmen would not merely cease to combine, they would also cease to strike or to ask for increases in wages, and that all would be "as orderly as even a Quaker could desire."[1] Place believed that as firmly as anyone else; he was all the more disconcerted, therefore, when—1824–5 being a year of mounting trade—the workers used their newly gained liberty to strike

[1] Place, *Letter to Burdett*, 1825. Place did not mean, however, that the small journeymen's associations such as he had known in his youth would disappear; he was thinking of wider combinations (see "Robert Owen"). In any case, he was wrong.

for increased wages all over the country. This nearly led to a reimposition of the Combination Acts in 1825, which Huskisson, then at the Board of Trade, all but promised to a deputation of infuriated shipowners; but Place and Hume rallying their forces and taking full advantage of a slip Huskisson made in bringing in his motion for repeal,[1] succeeded in preventing this, though they had to submit to restrictions on the activities of Trade Unions which took fifty years to remove. Modern Trade Unionism owes, if not its birth, its defence at a critical moment to Francis Place, and owes a deeper debt, perhaps, because he stood firm by its charter even when the enfranchised behaved in a manner entirely contrary to his expectations.

After 1825, Place's world was quiet for a time. Depression followed the temporary prosperity, and after a struggle to prevent wage reductions Trade Union agitation died down. Place, since he retired from business, had engaged himself in accumulating a large library of books, pamphlets, State reports and newspaper cuttings, which he kept, bound and indexed, in rooms behind the shop in Charing Cross, and these rooms, the "Civic Palace," as they were nicknamed, gradually became a sort of political coffee-house, where anyone interested in Radical politics or in the mass of reforms which the Utilitarians were engaged in promoting could drop in for discussion. Place was practically always there, sitting at his desk on a high stool; he would never call upon other people, however great, "unless something which related to others made it necessary, and that happened very seldom." This kind of life was very congenial; but in 1827 his wife died, and he found all his utilitarian philosophy of little comfort. He grieved bitterly, and wrote letters of passionate misery to his son in South America. Three years later, following the example of many another disconsolate widower, he was married again, to an actress at Covent Garden theatre, and for a good many years was fairly happy. (Eventually, however, quarrels about money and about his stepson broke up this ménage, and he died separated from his wife.)

Long before then, however, Place had plunged again into

[1] He asked for an inquiry "respecting the conduct of workmen," which enabled the opposition to call up a mass of evidence rebutting his allegations.

politics. In 1829 the Duke of Wellington, diehard of diehards, had been forced by popular feeling to grant Catholic emancipation; in the following year, William IV's first Parliament produced a large number of members pledged to Reform and within a few months a Whig Ministry headed by Lord Grey. Their Bill appeared in March 1831, and took the Radicals, who had expected some mild tinkering with the system, entirely by surprise. It did not propose a democratic suffrage or secret ballot; but it abolished the bulk of the rotten boroughs,[1] which had made so many Parliamentary seats the private property of the rich and influential; it gave M.P.s to growing towns like Birmingham which had had none at all, and it roughed out in general terms a rational scheme of representation. In short, it was so much more drastic than Place and his friends had expected that he immediately set to work to organise in its support.

He worked, however, under greater difficulties than in the days of his Combination Acts triumph. He was not at all convinced that the Whigs meant to stand by their offer, and had a poor opinion of the well-off Reformer who was full of fine words but never had "the courage to cut his drawing-room friends"; and meantime he was faced with opposition on the left. The extremer wing of the Radicals, whose leader in the country was "Orator" Henry Hunt, the hero of Peterloo and next to Cobbett their most effective speaker and journalist, was crying out against any reform which did not include manhood suffrage and secret ballot; at the same time, the newly freed Trade Unionists and the Co-operators inspired by Robert Owen were asking what good Parliamentary Reform would be to the poor without economic change. In London these two streams of opposition coalesced in a body called the National Union of the Working Classes and Others (nicknamed the Rotundanists because they met at the Rotunda in Blackfriars), which fiercely attacked Place and his "Westminster Rump." Place, like Cobbett, generally gave as good as he got, though without Cobbett's felicity of style; he replied to the Rotundanists in terms which suggest a modern Labour leader discussing the Communist Party.

The disputes ran high, but the behaviour of the House of

[1] Always excepting the City of London.

Lords finally saved the situation. In October the Lords threw out the Bill, and it became clear that the whole force of public opinion would be needed to carry it at all. The workers in the provinces replied by sacking Nottingham Castle and Derby jail and by seizing control of Bristol for several days. In London angry crowds hooted the king's carriage; Place worked furiously at meetings and deputations and successfully prevented his frightened middle-class friends from compromising on the Bill; it was clear that the extremists were a small minority, and Cobbett had already swung his huge following to work for "the Bill, the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill." When in the following year a new Bill was introduced on the same lines and the Lords again threw it out, and the Duke of Wellington came into office prepared, apparently, to rule the country by martial law, the people prepared for revolution. In London, Place was ready, and through the National Political Union,[1] whose governing body he had succeeded in packing so as to exclude the "Rotundanists," he was in command of the agitation.

Place was a realist about physical force. He was always very scornful of persons who cried out for violent action without counting the cost; at the time of the Burdett affair he had caustically asked of the loudest voices whether they were really prepared to embark on civil war. Now he thought the time had come to risk it. But he wished to make the risk as small as possible, and the plans for the rising, which were actually communicated by Place to a meeting of the Cabinet, in order that the Ministers might see clearly what they were up against, are models. The Reformers did not propose to embark on pitched battles; their purpose was to make sure that there was in every centre sufficient popular agitation to keep the soldiers busy and prevent them from coming to the aid of other centres. To this end names and addresses had been collected, addresses and proclamations prepared and placards printed;[2] towns had been ordered to man barricades, set up new municipal governments and close the banks. Trade was already bad; and, as Place pointed out, these measures would in a very few days

[1] A link-up of a number of Reform associations in different parts of the country.
[2] Of which the most famous was TO BEAT THE DUKE GO FOR GOLD. This placard did appear, and the run on the banks which immediately followed played a considerable part in the collapse of the opposition.

create a situation with which no military could cope. The Government, remembering the Bristol riots and fearing financial panic, took fright; William IV gave in and agreed to create peers if necessary; the Lords saw the red light, and the Bill was saved, after the nearest approach to violent revolution that England has seen since the Civil Wars.

Place's major political activity ended with the Reform Act. Immediately after its passing he tried to start agitating for further reform, but found that the middle classes were quite satisfied with what they had won and the Whigs were not to be induced to go further. He then turned his attention to the Poor Law and to the reform of local government. On the latter, he worked very hard at getting evidence for his friend Joseph Parkes of Birmingham who, as secretary of the Commission on Municipal Corporations, produced the great report which caused the ancient and corrupt town oligarchies to be swept away; but efforts made to do the same for London were fruitless. The City Corporation, moving in its own mysterious ways, prevented the report on its activities from even appearing in print; the promised Bill was never brought in, and what Place called "the Court of Aldermen, old men—no, old women, gossiping, guzzling, drinking, cheating, old chandlers'-shop women, elected for life" remain there to this day—guzzling, one hopes, rather less.

On the Poor Law, he took strongly the opposite side to Cobbett, owing to his Benthamite affiliations. He had swallowed whole the dismal doctrine of Malthus that population inevitably tended to outrun the supply of food,[1] so that if the great numbers of the poor were not, by force of persuasion, induced to breed less, they would come to pestilence and starvation. It was one of the few subjects, we are told, on which he would not argue, but said to those who differed from him, "You don't understand political economy; your words have no sense in them." Accordingly, besides his approval of the Poor Law Bill in general, he appreciated the provisions (which moved Cobbett to such fury) designed to discourage the poor from breeding.

[1] Not so absurd a theory at the end of the eighteenth century, before the great changes made by agricultural science, as it sounds to-day. Place had seen the fearful conditions caused by overpopulation on the land in Ireland, and he never forgot them.

> "I wish," he wrote to a friend, "the Lord Chancellor would make me one of the Central Commissioners [of the Poor Law]. . . . I would go into the business and help to carry it on with all my heart and soul, would think nothing of obstacles, and be utterly careless of the abuse which will be showered down in all possible forms on the obnoxious Commissioners."

No doubt he would have been, and his narrow doctrinaire Utilitarianism would have made him a terrible administrator under an Act that was more hated by the working class than any passed since Peterloo. His ghost may well be grateful that his wish was not granted.

This attitude of mind also prevented him from being in real sympathy with the big working-class agitation of the 'forties—Chartism. The story of that movement is told in another section (see "Feargus O'Connor"); here it must suffice to say that though Place supported the "respectable artisan" branch of the movement, which had its home in London, made friends of its chief leaders, thought highly of their intelligence, and helped to draft the Charter—the working-class Bill of Rights—the starving and angry revolutionists of the northern factories were outside his range of sympathy. He wanted them to be "patient, tolerant, and disillusioned." They were none of these things, and not having seen, he did not understand the intolerable conditions against which they were rioting.[1] He soon gave up hope of Chartism, though he still tried to help any working-class leader who was willing to reason with him, and fought hard to mitigate the sentences imposed on Trade Unionists and Chartists who got into trouble with the Government. After 1840 he began to give his mind to the Anti-Corn Law League, which was much more his line of country, though he still worked for Reform whenever it seemed possible.

But he was getting old. His health began to fail in 1841, and in 1844 he had a stroke which laid him low for a couple of years. After some time he made his home with two of his daughters, where he lived quietly, sorting his mass of papers

[1] He even tried to make the Chartists promise that they would not advocate Owen's Socialism or attack the Poor Law, which shows how little he understood of their basic grievances.

until his death in 1854. Few people, by that date, remembered who he was.

Francis Place's was not an original mind, and his habit of harsh judgment, combined with the conviction—perhaps natural in a superb organiser—that he had played the most important part in any movement with which he was connected, does not leave the reader of his literary remains with the impression of a lovable man. Yet he made friends. Mill, that dried stick, loved him—if he could love anyone—and Lovett the Chartist spoke of him as a "clearheaded and warm-hearted old gentleman." He believed with all his heart in the good qualities and the educability of the type of working-man that he knew, and it was not his fault that the second generation of the Industrial Revolution produced in the squalor of Lancashire a type that he did not understand, which went down to heavy defeat in the years of his old age. As a practical organiser he was unsurpassed: he should have been allowed not to die, but to fall asleep and wake up sixty or seventy years later, when an educated working-class farther removed from starvation would have provided him with a new and better opportunity.

ROBERT OWEN

(1771–1858)

Thou needest to be very right, for thou art very positive.
David Dale to Robert Owen

My religious feelings were immediately replaced by the spirit of universal charity—not for a sect or a party, or for a country or a colour—but for the human race, and with a real and ardent desire to do them good.
Robert Owen on himself at the age of fourteen

ROBERT OWEN was born in the same year as Francis Place. Place, however, with all his ability, was essentially a man of use at a particular moment, a particular conjunction of circumstances; whereas Owen the first great Socialist, Owen the pioneer of co-operation and the inspiration of the first nation-wide working-class movement, Owen the factory reformer and the first to lay down principles of education which our own generation is still striving to fulfil—Owen is certainly far more than a man of his own time. For this reason, although his direct leadership of the working class ceased to be effective long before he died, I have set down his life after that of Place.

Until he was past forty, Robert Owen, as far as anyone but himself knew, might almost have sat as model for the portrait of a virtuous self-made manufacturer, one of the heroes of Dr. Smiles's *Self-Help*. He was born in Newtown, Montgomery, the son of a small saddler and ironmonger who was also post-master of that still tiny market town; that is to say, he spent his childhood far outside the influence of the great changes in industry. He was a moral, intelligent and reflective little boy —which did not prevent him from being an athlete as well, "the best runner and leaper, both as to height and distance, that there was in my school";[1] and he was so far above the average child who came under the care of Mr. Thicknesse,

[1] Owen, *Autobiography*. The remaining quotations in this chapter, except where otherwise indicated, are from the same source.

master of the Newtown school, that when he was seven years old he was made "usher," i.e. assistant master. Shortly after that he became friends with three maiden ladies, Methodists, who gave him a number of books, principally on religious subjects, and encouraged him to discourse upon them aloud. He was then eight or nine, and they called him "the little parson." According to the autobiography which he wrote in his old age, it was about that time that, having read largely in the doctrines of all religions, he began to doubt the validity of any of them. He may have put the date a trifle early; but it is certain that he became an atheist—a true atheist, not a Unitarian or a Deist—when he was very young, though it was long before he preached his religious views openly.

Such a boy, however, could not long learn much from Mr. Thicknesse, and when he reached the mature age of ten he persuaded his parents to let him go and seek his fortune. From Welshpool, to which his father conveyed him, he took, all alone, the long coach-journey to London, where his elder brother was in business, and six weeks later was apprenticed to Mr. James McGuffog, a prosperous linen-draper of Stamford in Lincolnshire. "From that period," he tells us, "I maintained myself without ever applying to my parents for additional aid."

Mr. McGuffog was an excellent employer, of the old school of shopkeepers who regarded "shopping" as a joint enterprise, to be performed in a leisurely manner for the benefit of both customer and tradesman—he allowed himself to disapprove of customers, including members of "the higher-class nobility," who wanted to make what he considered unwise purchases, and he insisted on each piece of goods being put tidily away before another was brought to view. He took a great fancy to little Owen, and offered him good employment after his time was out. But Owen wanted experience; in 1784 he got a job at twenty-five pounds a year, all found, with Flint and Palmer's, on old London Bridge, which was a business of a very different stamp. Flint and Palmer's was a great example, for its day, of "hustle." It was all but a fixed-price store.

> "Not much time," wrote Owen in obvious surprise, "was allowed for bargaining, a price being fixed for everything,

and compared with other houses, cheap. If any demur was made, or much hesitation, the article asked for was withdrawn, and, as the shop was generally full from morning to evening, another customer was attended to."

Articles were withdrawn, but not put away, for other customers were waiting; and after ten or ten-thirty in the evening, when the shop closed, the assistants had to spend another two or three hours sorting the confusion of the haberdashery counters to make them ready for the opening at eight o'clock in the morning, by which time young Owen had to be up, dressed, and breakfasted, and with his hair powdered and pomatumed.[1] It is not surprising that though the pay and opportunities were good, and though he made friends with the son of one of the proprietors, he found the place too strenuous, and after a year left to join a Mr. Sattersfield of Manchester, whose business was mainly with the upper middle class—inferior, therefore, to Mr. McGuffog's, but definitely above that of the London house. There he got forty pounds a year. This move to Manchester was the first turning-point in Owen's career. For in 1785—the year after Cartwright had patented his power-loom—Manchester was the most up-and-coming town in Britain. It was the centre of the new cotton trade,[2] the outlet for all the inventions—flying shuttles, spinning jennies, spinning mules and waterframes—which were revolutionising the industry. It was a town where money was waiting in piles for the enterprising man; but it was not, like some other towns of the Industrial Revolution, a place in which nothing but money or cotton was ever mentioned. There was a keen intellectual and philanthropic life: Dr. Percival, the great public-health pioneer, was president of the Literary and Philosophic Society; John Dalton the physicist taught at Manchester New College; and Coleridge was one of those who joined in discussions at the "Lit. and Phil." Readers of *Hard Times* and other books have too often been led to believe that Lancashire

[1] With "two large curls on each side, and a stiff pigtail." Even H. G. Wells, in his shop-assistant days, never had to endure these refinements. Cf. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*. On the other hand, Wells had no opportunity of making friends with his employers' sons.

[2] In 1780 7,600,000 pounds of raw cotton were imported into Manchester; in ten years' time the figure had grown to 31½ million pounds. The population of Manchester and Salford more than doubled in less than thirty years.

manufacturing towns were inhabited exclusively by Gradgrinds; of Manchester at the end of the century this was certainly not true. Owen found in Manchester opportunities for intellectual growth as well as for business enterprise.

His first start took place in 1789, when with a capital of a hundred pounds borrowed from his elder brother William he set up in conjunction with a man named Jones a manufactory of spinning mules, employing forty men and getting materials on credit. But Jones knew nothing of the business, and Owen nothing of machinery—though his early experience had given him a pretty good understanding of textile materials. By "looking very wisely at the men in their different departments," he managed to keep the business side working efficiently, until Jones made acquaintance with a capitalist who induced him to get rid of his first partner. Owen, at nineteen, had the choice between accepting an excellent offer of partnership from Mr. McGuffog (which, though he did not know it at the time, included in effect marriage with McGuffog's niece and heiress) or setting up for himself with six men and three spinning machines—the part price of his relieving Jones of his presence. He chose the latter, and within a year was making a profit of six pounds a week. (Jones, like a character in a moral novel, failed to produce the remainder of the price of Owen's withdrawal, and within a short time his new partnership went bankrupt.)

Such was Owen's entry into business; within a year he had made another leap forward. A rich merchant named Drinkwater, noting the profits to be made in cotton, had bought a fine-spinning mill, relying on a Mr. Lee to manage it, since he himself knew nothing of cotton. But Lee accepted a partnership in another large firm, and Drinkwater in despair advertised for a manager. The advertisement appeared in the press on a Saturday; on the Monday morning Owen heard one of his spinners mention it, and at once, "without saying a word, I put on my hat and proceeded straight to Mr. Drinkwater's counting-house," and asked for the post at a salary of three hundred a year, this being the income he was already making by his own efforts. Drinkwater was dumbfounded at such an application from a pink-faced boy of twenty; but he agreed to come and see Owen's business and to take up his references.

When Owen called upon him the second time, he received the reply:

> "I will give you the three hundred a year, as you ask, and I will take all your machinery at cost price, and I shall require you to take the management of the mill and of the workpeople, about five hundred, immediately."

The business world of Manchester thought Drinkwater must be out of his mind, and I am not sure that Owen did not agree with them; he says candidly,

> "Had I seen the establishment before I applied to manage it, I should never have thought of doing an act so truly presumptuous. Mr. Lee had left the mill the day before I undertook it—Mr. Drinkwater did not come with me to introduce me to any of the people—and thus, uninstructed, I had to take the management of the whole concern . . . to take the whole responsibility of the first fine-cotton spinning establishment by machinery that had ever been erected, commenced by one of the most scientific men of his day."

He knew next to nothing of the greater part of the job he had undertaken, but he set about learning it in his own way.

> "I began at once to examine the outline and detail of what was in progress. I looked grave—inspected everything very minutely—examined the drawings and calculations of the machinery, as left with Mr. Lee. . . . I was with the first in the morning, and I locked up the premises at night, taking the keys with me. I continued this silent inspection and superintendence day by day for six weeks, saying merely yes or no to the questions of what was to be done or otherwise, and during that period I did not give one direct order about anything. But at the end of that time I felt myself so much master of my position as to be ready to give directions in any department."
>
> "The advantages which I possessed," he adds after giving an account of how the new factory prospered under his management, "to counteract my ignorance and inexperience arose from my early training with Mr. McGuffog, amidst fine and superior fabrics, and a knowledge acquired

of human nature *by having early overcome the prejudices of religion*." (My italics.)

I have described in some detail this early adventure of Owen's because it gives so admirable a picture of his method and quality, and of the workings of his mind. Drinkwater was, from the first, very well satisfied with his young manager, who within two years succeeded in more than doubling the fineness of the cotton spun in the mill, and was also one of the first to make use of the famous Sea Island cotton; and he offered him a regular rise in salary leading to a partnership. Owen naturally accepted; but before he had reached the final stage Drinkwater, for private reasons, wished to go back on his bargain, to keep Owen as manager without admitting him to partnership. Owen's reply was characteristic.

> "I have brought the agreement with me," he said, "and here it is. I now put it into the fire, because I never will connect myself with parties who are not desirous to be united with me; but under these circumstances I cannot remain your manager with any salary you can give."

He stuck to his words, only agreeing to stay with Drinkwater until a new manager could be found—which turned out to take nearly a year. After that he entered into a new partnership for producing textiles which would not compete with Drinkwater's.

> "I did not erect the mill and machinery," he wrote, "to enter into competition with Mr. Drinkwater, who had always been kind and liberal to me, except in not being firm to maintain his engagement with me, and therefore I had no wish to injure him."

Throughout his life, it may here be said, Owen never showed the slightest trace of any resentment at bad treatment, or any "wish to injure" any living soul.

He left Drinkwater in 1794, and soon afterwards became a partner in a new venture called the Chorlton Twist Company, which involved him in travelling over Lancashire and even as far as Glasgow. On one visit to Glasgow he happened to meet the sister of a business acquaintance of his walking with a

friend, Miss Caroline Dale, to whom he was introduced. It would seem that he made a quick impression on Miss Dale, for, according to Owen, at that first interview she asked him if he had ever seen the Falls of Clyde, or her father's mills at New Lanark; and when Owen said that he had not, and would very much like to see these sights and to bring a friend with him, she at once promised an introduction to her uncle, who was manager of the mills, and added that "she would like to know what we thought of them, when we returned." This strikes the modern reader as fairly rapid work, and he is not surprised to learn that after this meeting Miss Dale remarked to her friend Miss Spears, who had been responsible for the introduction: "I do not know how it is—but if I ever marry, that is to be my husband." Owen, however, was completely unaware of any unexpressed feelings; he gladly accepted the invitation, and went with his friend to inspect the New Lanark Mills. As he stood outside, he said to his companion:

> "Of all places which I have yet seen, I should prefer this in which to try an experiment I have long contemplated, and have wished to have an opportunity to put into practice."

The prospect seemed distant; in the meantime, he returned to Glasgow to make his promised report to Miss Dale, whom he found in her father's absence about to take a walk along the Clyde with her younger sister. Naturally, Owen was invited to walk with them; and before he left Glasgow he had two or three times repeated the experience, and was cordially invited to renew the acquaintance if ever he came again to the city. He did so more than once; and to cut the story short, on his third visit, in 1798, he ventured to propose marriage to Miss Dale, and was met in a manner "very open and frank," the young lady stipulating only that he must first gain her father's consent. This, as Owen had never met Mr. David Dale, who had been conveniently away from Glasgow on all the occasions of the meetings with his daughter, might have presented some difficulty, but, says Owen

> "at length it occurred to me that I might make a pretence of inquiring whether a report I had heard of his desire to

> sell the New Lanark mills was true, and, if it were true, on what conditions he would part with them. This was a happy thought."

It was indeed; for though David Dale at first received him coldly, both because he was an Englishman, a "landlouper," and because at twenty-six he still looked very young and innocent, he was impressed with Owen's business standing and with his partners in the Chorlton Twist Company, and eventually agreed to sell his mills to Owen and his partners at Owen's own valuation, and to give him his daughter in marriage, both sets of negotiations proceeding simultaneously. Before long, he had become as attached to Owen as though he were his own son.

Owen, in his autobiography, is very naïve about his courtship. What emerges quite clearly is that Caroline Dale made a straight set at this attractive and eligible, but socially very shy young man. She got Miss Spears to act as go-between, and at a suitable moment Miss Spears conveyed to Owen Miss Dale's first appreciation of him. This pretty definite encouragement came at a time when Owen was just ripe for falling in love and setting up a home, and according to himself he did actually fall in love. But it is at least doubtful whether the falling in love was more than a biological interlude. Intellectually, he had very little in common with his wife, and their later correspondence suggests that he quite soon ceased to feel for her more than an affectionate interest. (To his children, in contrast, he was deeply devoted, and they loved him dearly.) Owen's letters to his wife, at least after he became a public character, are factual news-bulletins rather than anything else, whereas hers to him contain pathetic little pleas for an emotional sympathy which he seems never to have given, or even to have realised that he might have given. Even her children were far more his than hers. Unlike Cobbett, Robert Owen does seem to have treated his wife as if she had turned into a chest of drawers; it is one of the penalties, perhaps, which life exacts from women who deliberately marry unadaptable geniuses.

It was on New Year's Day, 1800, when Owen, with his young wife, entered upon the government of the mills at New

Lanark, which was to be his kingdom for nearly thirty years and to make him famous. From the start he intended to create there not merely a model factory but a model community; and at first he was faced with very great difficulties. The population of New Lanark numbered about 1,300 plus about five hundred "pauper apprentices"—children chargeable to the Poor Law, whom economical Overseers of the Poor hired out into virtual slavery in the cotton factories.[1] These children, who were aged about five to ten, were reasonably well fed and lodged by David Dale, who had even engaged a schoolmaster for them; but after a twelve-hour working day schooling was of little use to the poor little creatures, and Owen made up his mind at the earliest possible opportunity to stop taking in pauper children and to recruit labour in the normal way.

The adults also presented a problem. New Lanark was not a homogeneous community, for the natives of the place, like those of many other places to which the "benefits of manufacture" were presented for the first time, would not work in the factories if they could help it, and the bulk of the factory workers came from far away—sullen Highlanders driven from their crofts when the great lairds took them for sheep-runs, and the unemployed dregs of Glasgow and the large towns. Their housing was filthy and insanitary; they were systematically cheated in the shops, and punished for indiscipline in the factory; and they retaliated, naturally, by getting drunk and pilfering from their employer. Their chief pleasure they found in religious battles, of which, since several sects were represented among them, they had plenty. As an additional handicap, Owen's southern accent was nearly unintelligible to the majority. All this Owen set out to change in accordance with his own views. As he says:

> "My first task was to make arrangements to supersede the evil conditions with which the population was surrounded by good conditions. And as soon as society can be made to think rationally on a true foundation, to replace inferior by

[1] One such overseer is recorded as having stipulated that the factories he supplied should agree to receive one idiot for every twelve normal children. It is an illustration of the unexpected difficulties which face reformers that the existence of this "surplus child population" was largely due to the successful efforts of the philanthropist Jonas Hanway to decrease the terrible mortality among London's foundling children.

superior conditions will be found to be the task which society has to learn, and in good earnest to commence in practice....

"This experiment at New Lanark was the first commencement of practical measures with a view to change the fundamental principle on which society has heretofore been based from the beginning; and no experiment could be more successful in proving the truth of this principle that the character is formed *for* and not *by* the individual, and that society now possesses the most ample means and power to well-form the character of everyone, by reconstructing society on its true principle, and making it consistent with that fundamental principle in all its departments and divisions."

The heart of Owen's social creed is in these few sentences—"the grain of mustard seed," as he calls it, "competent to overwhelm in its consequences all other ideas opposed to it." He started by feeling his way, by trying to improve conditions of health and sanitation, by closing down the cheating shops and replacing them with shops of his own at which pure food—and pure whisky!—was sold, and by explaining to "the individuals who had the most influence among the work-people" what his intentions were. But the prejudice against him was very strong, and it was not until 1806, when during a stoppage of the supplies of raw cotton he continued to pay all the workers full rates for four months, at a cost of seven thousand pounds, that he finally won their confidence.[1]

He had won over his workpeople at last. But there were others concerned in the business besides himself and the workers—his partners, who were not philanthropists, but business men; and before long clashes occurred. Owen's idea of "superior conditions" went far beyond clean houses, decent shops and the abolition of punishment;[2] he was deeply con-

[1] A cotton mill, in the Industrial Revolution, could apparently afford to spend £7,000 on keeping up "good-will." If Owen had reflected more deeply upon this fact, and upon the time which it took him to win the confidence of his own workers, he might have made less fantastically optimistic suggestions in his later years. If he had, however, he would not have been Robert Owen, and would have long since been forgotten.

[2] With the exception of fines for drunkenness—later abolished—there were no punishments in Owen's factory, and no one was ever dismissed for "having manfully and conscientiously objected to his measures."

vinced that only by education begun in childhood could the character of the adult be formed, and education was his next great care. In 1809 his partners were startled by proposals to employ no children under ten years old, and, worse still, to build schools—including infant schools—playgrounds and lecture halls, from which they could see no possible profit accruing. And they held eight-ninths of the capital of the mills. The disagreement was at first patched up; but it was obvious that the two points of view were fundamentally opposed, and Owen, refusing to give way, found some new partners and with them bought the mills for £84,000—£24,000 more than had been originally paid for them. The new arrangement, however, was little more satisfactory than the old, though Owen had a larger share in the financial control. The new partners had a respect for Owen as a business man; but found to their dismay that no sooner did he make more profit than he proposed to indulge in additional expense.

> "They objected to the building of the schools, and said they were cotton-spinners and commercial men carrying on business for profit, and had nothing to do with educating children; nobody did it in manufactories; and they set their faces against it, and against all my measures for improving the condition of the workpeople. They objected to all the improvements I had in progress for the increased comforts of the villagers, to my scale of wages for the people, and of salaries to the clerks and superintendents."

Owen then lost his temper—"I was completely tired of partners who were merely trained to buy cheap and sell dear"—and he quarrelled with them thoroughly. Fortunately, by this time he was beginning to be known as a public man with ideals, and while on a visit to London he managed to meet a group who were willing to come in with him in the expectation of a reasonable return on their capital rather than wild profits. They included the rich Quaker William Allen, and another Quaker, James Walker, Michael Gibbs, afterwards Lord Mayor of London, and Jeremy Bentham;[1] and after a

[1] Of whom Owen wrote, "he spent a long life in an endeavour to amend laws, all based on a fundamental error, without discovering this error." So much, in Owen's opinion, for the Utilitarians.

difficult period, during which Owen's late partners were guilty of some very sharp practice, in 1813 the mills were bought for £114,000 at public auction. After the sale, Owen took his new partners over to see New Lanark, but before they had even reached the Old Town, the inhabitants of Old and New Lanark together had come out to take the horses from the carriage and drag it triumphantly home over the steep hills. Though the Quakers were a little disconcerted at this demonstration, it showed them Owen's place in the hearts of his people; and for some years thereafter he had a free hand to put his ideas into practice.

These ideas were by no means new in his mind. As I have already said, when he first saw New Lanark, he acclaimed it as a wonderful place to experiment with, which shows that he must have already had in mind the lines on which he wished to experiment; and as early as the summer of 1802, when he was travelling the Highlands with a friend, he was beginning to try out upon casual contacts the theories which he subsequently called the "New View of Society."

Basically, his New View of Society was simple. He believed that men's character was formed by their environment, that is to say, by the environment in which they grew up, and that if that environment was planned upon lines not of oppression but of mutual co-operation, forbearance and understanding, the result would be harmony, well-being and the attainment of an ideal universe. This made him the first Socialist planner in the history of our country; and even if he thought planning for Socialism was much easier than it has since turned out to be—he started, for example, by modestly demanding "firstly, a really good character for all from birth to death, and secondly, a superfluity of real wealth at all times for all," two postulates which are as yet some way from realisation—this does not make him the less a pioneer.

At New Lanark there was comparatively little to be done for the adults other than might have commended itself to any "good employer" of the present day—though in the cotton trade at the beginning of the nineteenth century "good employers" were comparatively few; but with the children Owen gave his constructive imagination full rein. By the time that the system was in full working order, schools were provided for

the New Lanark children from one to twelve years old, when they were allowed to go into the factory and work the 10¾-hour day which was the shortest that Owen could introduce into his works.[1] For the schools themselves his plans were extraordinarily modern. He did not believe in either punishment, or an excess of book-learning at an early age; he would have the children taught through their senses and interests, by being shown things in which they might be interested, and by dancing, singing and physical training. No expense was spared in the building of the great playroom in which the year-old babies had their first taste of community life, or the geography room with its huge wall-maps, in which the six-year-olds confounded a visiting Admiral with their knowledge of the world; and the children's organised drill, their dancing—"seventy couples at a time, going through all the dances of Europe"—and their singing in harmony the old Scottish songs, were obviously the delight of Owen's heart. To the very end of his life, Owen loved children and understood them; he made mistakes with adults, but none with his own children or with anyone else's.

He had to organise his schools himself from the beginning, for no old Scottish dominie would have any truck with such new-fangled nonsense. He trained up a weaver from the village—who afterwards, unfortunately, made a dreadful mess of an infant school in London to which he was transferred—with the assistance of a girl spinner to run the schools for him; and in a very short time had built them up to such a pitch of perfection that they were visited by thousands of visitors from all over the world,[2] including the Grand Duke Nicholas, later Tsar of all

[1] Ten hours and three-quarters sounds very long to us. But at the time when Owen introduced his reforms, there was *no* legal limitation of hours, and factories were working young children twelve- and even fourteen-hour shifts. Owen's personal opinion was that children ought not to go to work before they were fourteen; but it was not until 1900 that the school-leaving age was raised to twelve, and even then it did not apply to agriculture.

[2] The original publicity for his principles was secured by his book of essays, *A New View of Society*, published in 1812 and 1813, which had played a great part in converting his 1813 partners. It was read with great interest also by such potentates as Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sidmouth, various European sovereigns, and even by Napoleon in Elba! Educational theory was of course very much discussed at the time among the enlightened, Rousseau and Pestalozzi being two great names. But there is little evidence that Owen took his theories from anyone else. Intellectually, as in business, he was a self-made man; after he had left Manchester he read little and thought little of other men's ideas.

the Russias, who was so impressed by what he saw at New Lanark that he offered to provide room, in the wide spaces of his Empire, for *two millions* of England's surplus population to be organised there on Mr. Owen's principles. Owen declined the offer; it is interesting to speculate what would have been the result if he had accepted.

Until about 1815 Owen's career had been one of almost uninterrupted success and esteem. He had proved, it seemed, in his own opinion and that of others, that good wages, reasonable conditions, humane factory discipline, and expenditure on education and child welfare which looked wildly extravagant were perfectly compatible with the earning of a steady profit out of industry; and he had not yet coupled his New View with any definite suggestions for social rather than educational reform, so that men of the governing classes like Liverpool and Sidmouth, who disliked the raw and pushing "cotton lords" only less than they feared their overworked and illiterate hands, were quite ready to extend a welcome to an earnest and persuasive manufacturer who seemed able to perform the miracle of humanising factory industry and to produce a contented industrial population which would not need spies or Gagging Acts, by simply teaching the cotton lords better manners. Neither they nor Owen realised how much he had been helped by the enormous prosperity of the cotton trade —imports, notwithstanding fluctuations, multiplying nearly ten times between 1800 and 1830; and although in several passages which antedate the most modern economic theories Owen explained to his fellow manufacturers that low wages and low consuming power among the mass of the people did them the greatest disservice, it does not appear that he convinced them; and his New View of Society began to come up against the hard facts of society in the days after Waterloo. In 1815 he opened his efforts to extend the benefits of New Lanark to manufacturing Britain as a whole by inviting the Scottish factory-owners to join him in asking the Government to repeal the import taxes on raw cotton and to improve conditions of employment for the children in textile mills of all kinds. Much to his astonishment, the factory-owners were enthusiastic for the first suggestion and unanimously turned down the second; whereupon Owen politely told them he

would have nothing more to do with them, and went up to London to attend to these two matters in person.

He called on Vansittart, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said that he would be delighted to take off most, if not all of the import duty; he also visited leading members of both Houses of Parliament, who—not being textile lords—were equally delighted at the prospect of protecting some of the child victims of the mills and suggested that he should go and see the elder Sir Robert Peel, a cotton manufacturer who had already concerned himself with legislative protection for pauper apprentices. Owen approached Peel, with the draft of a Factory Bill forbidding all employment under ten years old, reducing the hours for those under eighteen to ten and a half a day, and providing a staff of inspectors. Peel accepted the propositions in general, and Owen confidently awaited their translation into legislation. To his death he maintained that, if Peel had tried, he could have made the Bill into an Act within the year. But Sir Robert Peel was no Place or Hume to seize the moment and use rush tactics; he was a prominent industrialist, a politician and father of a Minister of the Crown. He set out to obtain "general consent," which in effect meant giving time to the other industrialists to lobby against the Bill, to get up a campaign of vilification against Owen, his factory, and his proposals, and after more than two years' talk, during which Owen attended almost daily at the House of Commons in an attempt to prevent Peel giving away point after point, the Bill[1] was so mutilated that, in disgust at the delays and the compromises, Owen decided to have nothing more to do with it. He had run his head against his first brick wall; the second appeared almost simultaneously.

In 1815, with the news of Waterloo, "the great customer of the producers died," and the first post-war depression hit an England as unsuspecting and ignorant as the America of the early nineteen-thirties. There was much distress and alarm; a great meeting of notables, held in 1816 at the City of London tavern, decided to start a fund for the relief of distress and to set up a committee to ascertain its causes and remedies. Owen was made a member of this committee, and after making a

[1] It became law in 1819—a miserable little thing in its final form, but of some value as a beginning.

speech at the first meeting which impressed the members he was asked to submit a report in detail. This he agreed to do.

The report, which came to be known as "Mr. Owen's Plan," is one of the most important of Owen's works. It says that the *immediate* cause of the misery is the fall in prices and loss of employment due to the cessation of war demand, but that this is only an incident in a wider process, which is the enormous development of machinery, resulting in a catastrophic fall in the price of human labour.[1] As technical improvement cannot be stopped, the only alternative to the starvation of millions who have lost or will lose their employment to the machines, is "to find advantageous occupation for the poor and unemployed working classes, to whose labour mechanism must be rendered subservient, instead of being applied, as at present, to supersede it."

Here, then, is Owen's demand for Full Employment. His proposals to establish it were based partly on his own experience at New Lanark. He wished to abolish the Poor Law, which by 1816 had become a very expensive burden, and in its stead to settle the unemployed in Villages of Co-operation based on scientific agriculture with ancillary industries, laid out according to plan with schools and "community centres" on New Lanark lines—Owen was, in fact, the first of the modern town-planners—the initial capital cost being found by the Government, by counties and parishes, or even by individuals. After the start, he believed, the communities would be self-supporting in a very short time.

This was Mr. Owen's Report. When he presented it, he says —and we can well believe him—"the Archbishop and the committee appeared to be taken by surprise"; and after some agitated whispering Owen was told that the project was really too big for the committee to handle, and that he would do better to take it to a Commons Committee on the Poor Law which was then in session. Owen obeyed, only to find, after he had waited in an anteroom for two days, that the Committee declined to receive him. It would appear that the Archbishop and the other notables had decided that their pet master-manufacturer must have suddenly gone mad. Owen, however,

[1] Machines, as Sir Thomas More had said of sheep three centuries before, were eating men.

took the rebuff calmly. "It is of little consequence," he said. "I will find means to enable the public to learn my views on this subject."

As a rich man, he had, of course, the means. He printed forty thousand copies of his Report as a pamphlet and bought and distributed thirty thousand copies of the newspapers containing the discussions.[1] In all, he spent over four thousand pounds on publicity, so that it was not surprising that when he announced himself as about to expound his Plan at two public meetings on August 14th and 21st, 1817, the City of London tavern was packed to the doors.

The meetings produced no result. Owen himself believed that this was because at the second one he was suddenly moved to tell his large audience that the reason why the simple recipe for universal well-being which he advocated had not been put into practice was "the errors—the gross errors" of all existing religions; but in fact this affirmation of atheism, though it naturally shocked the Bishops, seems to have been treated as little more than an eccentricity. The real reason for the failure was the opposition of the political Radicals, led by Henry Hunt, the hero of Peterloo, who regarded Owen's schemes as impracticable nonsense aimed at reducing the working classes to a semi-servile existence in "parallelograms of paupers," as Cobbett called his Villages of Co-operation, and dangerous, moreover, in that Owen seemed to have the ear of some members of the Government. They packed the second meeting, and successfully prevented any resolution from being passed. Thereafter, Cobbett pursued Owen with derision and abuse, which was sometimes quite inaccurate—it must be granted that the sight of an influential and philanthropic manufacturer so completely indifferent to the cause of reform or to the political persecution of the post-war years must have been infuriating. The tragedy is that both parties were right in their positive views.

Owen was little perturbed by his rebuff; indeed, from 1817 onwards he seems to have troubled less and less to organise for any acceptance of his views and to have assumed that, if he simply continued to state them to all and sundry, their

[1] On one day, Owen's literature caused all the London mail-coaches to be twenty minutes late in starting.

essential rightness would cause them to be accepted. After a brief return to New Lanark, he set out on a tour of Europe, including the Congress of the Powers at Aix, to which he presented two memorials through Castlereagh. At a dinner at Frankfort, where Owen was expounding his principles, Gentz, secretary to the Congress, impatiently remarked, "We know all that very well; but we do not want the mass to become wealthy and independent. How could we govern them if they were?" This remark, Owen says, "opened my eyes to the facts"; unfortunately it did not open them quite wide enough.

Returning to England, he made another effort to get his plans adopted, and in 1819 laid them before an influential committee headed by the Duke of Kent,[1] which received them with sympathy, though without practical effect; and in the same year he was asked by the County of Lanark to advise them on how to deal with the unemployed, whose numbers had again risen to a great height as the result of post-war deflation —a policy to which Owen was strongly opposed. The *Report to the County of Lanark* is easily the most important of Owen's publications: it takes up the ideas of "Mr. Owen's Plan," and asks that they should be applied to the nation as a whole, that village communities "founded on the principle of united labour, expenditure and property, and equal privileges" should be set up throughout the land; and that instead of money a new "natural" standard of value should be created, based on human labour—here anticipating not only Karl Marx but many later economists who have sought to find some other standard than money for measuring the wealth of a community. This Report impressed the County of Lanark, which appointed a committee to consider it, and unsuccessfully petitioned both Houses of Parliament to take note of Mr. Owen's views; and in 1826 an Owenite community was actually established at Orbiston in Lanark. Its most profound influence, however, was among the working classes.

Owen's proposals for Lanark were Socialist, and in the 1820's the younger generation of workers were ripe for some-

[1] Father of Queen Victoria and always a friend of Owen's, who helped him to straighten out his financial affairs. In old age, when Owen had taken to spiritualism, he found the Duke's shade a most charming and punctual visitor.

thing more constructive than mere political reform. The idealism of Owen caught their imagination, more particularly as it combined co-operation in industry with a return to the land, from which so many of them had only just been torn; and during that decade "co-operation," i.e. Owenite Socialism, became almost a religion among the new groupings of the working class. Co-operative societies which, though primarily trading associations, had for their final purpose the founding of Owenite communities, sprang up on all sides; journals of co-operation were founded; and some of the Trade Unions released by the repeal of the Combination Acts began to establish Co-operative societies.

Owen knew little or nothing of this new surge of enthusiasm for his projects, for he was out of England during its seeding-time. In 1824 he was pushed out of New Lanark because his Quaker partners, though they did not mind his philanthropy, objected to his atheism and, more violently, to the physical training in his schools (which they regarded as militarist) and to dancing or singing anything but psalms. Immediately afterwards he bought an estate in Indiana, which he christened New Harmony, and there made a wholly unsuccessful attempt to establish a Socialist community.[1] New Harmony failed in 1828, and Owen, after travelling in Mexico and the United States (where he dined with the President and the Secretary of State), came back to Britain in 1829, two years before the Reform Bill. He had sunk most of his property in the New Harmony experiment; he had lost his mills and his standing with the influential, who regarded him as a lunatic. He was no longer a "distinguished" man; but he walked straight into a new kingdom—that of the working classes.

Up till that date, Owen, as he candidly admitted, had known very little of working-men except in a patriarchal capacity as benevolent employer; and on his return to his native land he was not at first greatly impressed by the new movements founded on his own teaching. Suddenly, however, with one of the millennial leaps which his mind in his later years became increasingly apt to make, he "saw" the Trade Unions and the

[1] For details see G. D. H. Cole, *Robert Owen*, and R. D. Owen (Owen's son), *Threading My Way*. The main cause of the disaster was Owen's refusal to have any selection made among those who wanted to join.

Co-operatives as agents provided for the rapid transformation of English society to his own ideals, and willingly became their actual leader as well as their inspiration.

The firstfruits of his leadership was the National Equitable Labour Exchange, founded in 1832. This had nothing in common with the twentieth-century labour exchanges set up under the Insurance Acts, but was an attempt to put into practice the standard of "real value" proposed in the *Report to the County of Lanark*. The goods produced by the various Producers' Societies and by individuals were brought to the Exchange in the Grays Inn Road, were there priced on a formula calculated from the cost of material and the time expended by the maker (plus a percentage for the Exchange) and paid for by printed Labour Notes exchangeable for other goods. The idea of issuing one's own private currency was not as strange then as it would be to-day, for, before the establishment of a centralised banking system, local and private banks —and sometimes even big firms—printed their own notes which were good tender over a limited area; and Owen's Labour Notes were quite often accepted by outside shopkeepers. At first the Exchange seemed to be succeeding; a good deal of business was done, a branch opened at the Rotunda (the home of the National Union of the Working Classes), and other Exchanges in Birmingham (then a great centre of Radicalism), Liverpool and Glasgow.[1] But even had it been possible, as it was not, to replace rapidly the monetary system of capitalism by a new standard of value, this would have involved an elaborate and scientific determination of the cost of the labour time involved in each product which the promoters were not equipped to make. Consequently some of the goods were priced much too high for the market; others were in too short supply; and even before the crash of 1834 the Exchanges were finding unsaleable goods left on their hands and their business was falling away.

The events of 1833 and 1834 show quite clearly the tremendous power of Owen as an inspiration, his impossibility as a leader, and the enthusiastic vigour of the working classes. Before the passing of the Reform Act there was, as we have

[1] The main Exchange was taken over in 1833 by a Federation of Trade Unions, but they all came to an end within a year or two.

seen earlier in this chapter, and in the life of Place, a rapid growth of Trade Unions and similar organisations. This movement flung itself, despite the opposition of Hunt and the Rotundanists, into the fight for Reform, and thereby greatly increased its membership. But when the battle was won, the working-class battalions found that in the short run the opposition had been right. The workers did not get the vote; in Westminster, Preston, and elsewhere they lost the votes they had had before. As Place found, the enfranchised middle classes had not the slightest intention of letting in the mass of the people to share their power. Hardly any of the new M.P.s were Radicals. Worse than that, it seemed that they were intending to use that power in their own interests purely; the Factory Bill of 1833 was severely weakened in its passage through Parliament; none of the fruits of Reform which Cobbett had promised made their appearance; the new Parliament was chiefly occupied in preparing a new and cruel Poor Law. Under these circumstances, the Trade Unions, feeling themselves strong but wickedly betrayed, leapt at the suggestion of a new way to power through co-operative Socialism, and Owen and his associates of the Co-operatives seized the chance of missionary work among them.

> "You may accomplish this change," said Owen to the big Union of Operative Builders, "for the whole population of the British Empire *in less than five years,* and essentially ameliorate the condition of the producing class throughout Great Britain and Ireland *in less than five months.*" (My italics.)

In this millennial mood the Operative Builders decided to "commence producer" on the grand scale, to form a Grand National Guild of Builders, organised on Owen's principles, which would undertake building all over the country, abolish competition and money economy, give the existing master-builders a much better chance of a good life than they could have under capitalism, and finally "establish peace, goodwill, and harmony, not only among the Brethren of the Building Guild, but also by their example among the human race for ever."

A few months after this came the formation of the Grand

National Consolidated Trades Union, intended to take over all existing Trade Unions and to band the entire working class into a single body which, by controlling strikes, opening co-operative stores and engaging in production, was to "enable the working classes to secure, protect and establish the rights of industry." As a missionary effort, the Union was an enormous success; it spread like a prairie fire, and by the beginning of 1834 it was estimated that there were at least a million Trade Unionists in Britain, more, as Owen's paper, the *Crisis*, pointed out, than the total of voters for Parliament, and more than were to be found in British Trade Unions until 1889.

It spread like a prairie fire, and like a prairie fire it burnt itself out or was stamped out. Looking back, it is easy to see how Utopian was the idea that a concourse of workers, however big and however devoted and idealistic, could check in spring tide the rush of a growing capitalism with immense potential resources. Only in 1917, against an inefficient capitalism exhausted by war, did a similar movement in Russia succeed in coming to power. But it must be remembered that British capitalism in 1834 did not look, to the ordinary man, nearly so efficient as it turned out to be. Heavy fluctuations in employment, revolting and insanitary towns, a starving population in the countryside—these did not look much like efficiency; and only two years earlier the Government had given way before an agitation of the voteless. There is no need to feel too superior to the Owenites.

The failure, however, was complete. The Guild of Builders found that the master-builders by no means took to the idea of finding a new and better life in a Socialist society, and it had to divert its funds from putting up buildings[1] to financing unsuccessful strikes ending in financial disaster. The "Consolidated," similarly, was faced with an eagerness of its constituents to strike immediately for better conditions, and a determination of the employers to use the opportunity to destroy them. In March 1834 the Tolpuddle Martyrs, six Dorchester labourers who had tried to form a branch, were sentenced to seven years' transportation, and all the strength of the great new force could not even avail to get the sentences

[1] The best-known was the Guild Hall at Birmingham.

reduced.[1] By the end of the year the "Consolidated" was dead, though some of the constituent Unions survived; and Owen, it would seem, had forgotten all about it.

The end was inevitable, but it was hastened by Owen's own leadership. From the first, he showed no desire to understand the material with which he was working. The days in which he "looked very wisely at the men in the different departments" were far behind him. He saw in the Unions not men, not even workers such as he had once at New Lanark known how to manage, but mechanical vehicles for his own ideas. And he would listen to no reason; as a benevolent but undoubtedly exasperating autocrat he parted company with his chief lieutenants, forced atheistic propaganda on the Unions, closed down the *Crisis* when its editor failed to edit according to his dictation, and when the "Consolidated" failed promptly decided to replace it by the "British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity, and Knowledge," and proceeded to use this as his new instrument, noticing the collapse of the former one hardly more than if he had broken his umbrella.

Owen lived on for twenty-four years, but there is little more of his life that concerns us here. A network of Owenite societies survived the catastrophe, and with these to help him Owen continued to preach and teach Socialism and atheism—the Secularist movement of Victorian times is an offshoot of Owenism in its later stages. He was governor for a time of an Owenite community at Queenwood in Hampshire, but had to be extruded because his ideas were too large for the funds to sustain; after that he had no property left, and his sons arranged to provide him an annuity of three hundred and sixty pounds, on which he lived easily, lecturing and speaking continuously, running one journal after another[2] and making one project after another to convert the world to his views. At eighty-two he became a Spiritualist, which enabled him to converse with all the great whom he had known in the past, and at eighty-seven he died peacefully at Newtown, while planning a scheme for reorganising its education.

[1] Cf. the treatment of the labourers after the 1831 riots. Lord Melbourne has the honour of having been Home Secretary in both cases.

[2] The latest being *Robert Owen's Millennial Gazette*—whose name speaks for itself.

The difficulty which some, both in his own day and in ours, have found in judging Owen is that his life falls into two halves—the division coming about 1817, when he publicly proclaimed himself an atheist—during the first of which he was a thoroughly practical organiser with ideas, while during the second his ideas became an inspiration to many, but his sense of the practical gradually vanished altogether. It might have been better for his reputation had he died when he resigned from New Lanark, and left his ideas to bear slower fruit. But even if the crash of 1834 had been less, the Unions could not have been successful, and, if Owen had not met the working-men in person, it is doubtful whether there could have grown up the faith which sustained so many in the dark days to come. His proposals were premature, and often over-simplified; but they contain many truths which now, a hundred years later, we are painfully trying to put in effect. Beside that, he was one of the kindest and most disinterested men who ever lived; even those who found him most difficult—or boring!—could not help liking him, and many others loved him dearly. For his part, he genuinely loved the whole world, and there are not many of whom as much can be said.

FEARGUS O'CONNOR

(1794–1855)

We are bowed down under a load of taxes, which, notwithstanding, fall greatly short of the wants of our rulers; our trades are trembling on the verge of bankruptcy; our workmen are starving; capital brings no profit and labour no remuneration; the home of the artificer is desolate and the warehouse of the pawnbroker is full. . . . Heaven has dealt graciously with our people; but the foolishness of our rulers has made the goodness of God of none effect. . . . The Reform Act has effected a transfer of power from one domineering faction to another, and left the people as helpless as before.

Chartist Petition, 1839

Our movement is a labour movement, originated in the first instance by the fustian jackets, the blistered hands and the unshorn chins.

O'Connor in 1848

THIS chapter will tell of tragedy almost unrelieved; not merely because its subject died mad, and had in all probability been verging on madness for a long time before he was actually certified, but because he was also the unlucky champion of millions who were looking vainly for a quick way out of the destitution, filth and misery into which they had been flung in the second generation of triumphant industrialism—and for whom there was no quick way out. In the ten years of O'Connor's greatest influence, between 1837 and 1847—the years of the Chartist movement—the lot of the great mass of the working class was more wretched than it had been for generations.[1] "England" was growing rich rapidly; but as John Stuart Mill (and of course Carlyle) pointed out, this meant only that a small portion of England's people were growing rich very rapidly; for the rest there was no advancement. In most occupations the general level of real wages actually fell between 1830 and 1840, and for the dying trades, such as the handloom weavers of Yorkshire and Lancashire, the lace-workers and stocking-makers of Nottingham and

[1] It was described in full detail in Friedrich Engels' *Condition of the Working Classes in 1844*, and in recent times has been vividly re-created in the Hammonds' *Age of the Chartists*.

Leicester, they were falling far below starvation level.[1] A few of the workers most in demand, no doubt, were already better off for the changes; but capitalism was not yet prepared with crumbs to hand out to the majority, and trade fluctuations left no margin. In addition, by 1836 the new towns had grown sufficiently to add all the horrors of dirt, smoke, squalor, adulterated food and lack of space or amusement[2] to those of factory life; and the attempts at social reform which were to come were as yet either no more than projects or not yet in case to produce effects. The chief reform which was as yet operative, the new Poor Law, came to the poor as a pure instrument of tyranny, giving relief to the starving only when they had reached the limit of subsistence, and even then, on the principle that he who accepted relief should be worse off than the poorest labourer in work, imposing brutality of conditions and régime, tearing families apart and wives from their husbands; and the stronger grew the influence of industrialism and the profit-and-loss mentality the less chance had the extreme of misery of being alleviated by private charity—which in any case no longer had the poor at its gates as in the old villages, but hidden away in courts and alleys and wynds where they could be neither seen nor smelt. The vast mass of the working class were thus penned in a hopeless prison out of which there was no way; their history, in those black years, is of vainly dashing against one stone wall after another, only to find the aristocracy and the middle classes combined to hold it up. And much—though not all—of the inconsistency, the violent exaggeration, and the shifts and changes of O'Connor, their most vocal leader, which have perplexed and even infuriated historians as well as his contemporaries, is due to the fact that he was in the same case as they. His heart was truly

[1] "The wages are four and sixpence," said a Leicester stockinger to Cooper the Chartist. "Four and sixpence," I said; "well, six fours are twenty-four, and six sixpences are three shillings; that's twenty-seven and sixpence a week (*sic*). The wages are not so bad when you are in work." "What are you talking about?" said they. "You mean four and sixpence a day; but we mean four and sixpence a week." And employment was bad in Leicester then.

[2] At Liverpool, "on Sundays . . . all the public houses are opened, and all the public walks, cemeteries, and zoological and botanical gardens, where the people might amuse themselves innocently, are closed."

"Have the public the right of going to those gardens on any day?"

"Not the public generally; but the cemeteries are opened to the public every day of the week except Sunday."

(Evidence given to Committee on Drunkenness, 1834.)

on fire with indignation for the starving Irish peasants, the starving weavers, and the workers forced into the Bastilles of the Poor Law; but he had no plan which could have helped them and could only lead them desperately to a succession of forlorn hopes or manifest blind alleys.

What was to mitigate eventually their sufferings, and to make it possible to build a new labour movement on the ruins of the first, was just that growth of industrialism and technical progress which O'Connor, unlike Owen, hated so bitterly. But even had he had the foresight to see this, it would have been little comfort to those who were starving with their children in 1840. English manufacturers who believed in *laissez-faire* could not, like Stalin, put forward a Five-Year Plan with statistical promises of goods to be provided for everyone at the end of the lean years—nor, if they had, would anyone have believed that the goods would in fact be provided for the masses. Even had O'Connor been a far better leader than he was, Chartism, like Owenite Trade Unionism, was doomed to failure; the surprising thing is that it stood up to disaster so long and left so strong a legacy of disinterested political faith to answer the call when more fortunate times came. Of the little-known names who worked to build up Applegarth's Trade Unionism, Rochdale co-operation, and the political societies of the latter part of the century, not a few were old Chartists.

Feargus O'Connor was far from being a working-man. All his own accounts of his early life are extravagant and untrustworthy; but it is certain that he was an uncontrolled Irish lad, and instinctively agin any authority of any kind. His father and his uncle were both arrested as members of the United Irishmen during the years when Napoleon was hoping to conquer England through Ireland, and Roger, the father, a considerable landowner, a sceptic and admirer of Voltaire, declared himself a descendant of the ancient kings of Ireland —a belief which was shared by his son—and described himself as "O'Connor Cier-rige, head of his race, and O'Connor, chief of the prostrated people of this Nation." The hyperbolical language often used by Feargus was a direct legacy from his father.

He grew up a wild Irish squire in County Cork, and after

various adventures, which included running away to England and being helped by Sir Francis Burdett,[1] he went to Trinity College, Dublin, and was called to the Bar, whereupon his father disinherited him for taking the oath of allegiance to the English king. So far as we know, he made his first political speech in 1822, at Enniskene, when he denounced the Protestant clergy and the landlords and fled to London to escape the consequences; but he does not appear in practical politics until 1832, when having worked hard since Catholic Emancipation at propaganda among the peasants, at the first election after the Reform Act he headed the poll for County Cork.

He entered Westminster as a follower of the hero of Catholic emancipation, Daniel O'Connell, and as an advanced Radical, willing to vote for any project benefiting the lower classes and against any that oppressed them; he joined heartily in the fight against the Poor Law, and was one of the small handful of M.P.s who could generally be relied upon to vote with Cobbett, Hume and others when they divided the House. In 1833 he began to make contact with English working-class Radicals by lecturing to the National Union of the Working Classes.[2] But O'Connell was not nearly advanced enough for him, and they very soon quarrelled. In the election of 1835 he held his majority, but was disqualified, probably by political manœuvring, from taking his seat; he then on Cobbett's death fought Oldham, but only succeeded in keeping out Cobbett's son. From then until 1847 he was outside Parliament, and free to devote himself to agitation on behalf of the poor.

There was need. In 1836, or early 1837, when O'Connor first went north on an organising tour, creating, according to the historian of Chartism, a Political Union wherever he went, Owen's Grand Trade Union movement had been smashed to bits and the way of industrial agitation bolted and barred; the new constituencies of the middle class had elected a combination of old governing-class, hard-faced men, and philosophical radicals who believed that the poverty of the poor was due to

[1] See page 49.
[2] See page 57. He was made an honorary member of the London Working Men's Association in 1836; but its chief leader, Lovett, principal author of the Charter, not merely distrusted him as an upper-class man, but thoroughly disliked his policy and his methods, and he was very soon helping to found a rival body, the London Democratic Association.

natural laws and their own unrestricted birth-rate; the Factory Bill had been emasculated, and the new Poor Law, having been applied in the south, was now coming to chain up the north. The middle classes, it seemed, having gained their votes, were ready to chastise the workers, their former allies, with scorpions. Henry Hunt, dead in 1835, had been quite right; nothing but the winning of real political power could help the poor. So Political Unions of the unenfranchised began to revive all over the country; and in London Francis Place and William Lovett formed the London Working Men's Association, a hand-picked body of earnest intelligent artisans with a few carefully selected adherents from the middle classes, whose purpose was to discuss in detail plans for a new Reform of Parliament. In February 1837 this body called a meeting at the Crown and Anchor tavern which passed resolutions asking for manhood suffrage, the secret ballot, abolition of the property qualification for M.P.s, payment of members, equal electoral districts, and annual elections. In the following year these (to our eyes) moderate and obvious requests were set out in the People's Charter, which became the banner of the working classes for ten bloody years of strife.

Place and Lovett were convinced that the Charter was the logical sequel of the reforms of 1832, as indeed it was,[1] and that a period of controlled and disciplined agitation, combined with educational propaganda among the workers, would bring it about within a reasonable time. They had little conception of the difficulties in the way: if they had been able to see what their new honorary member was up to in the north they might have had a better understanding. For O'Connor's tour shows quite clearly both what was the real force behind the Chartist movement and the reason why it could not succeed.

When O'Connor went north he was a Radical without a very definite programme, other than to unite all the Radical Political Unions into a new central association—which never came into effective existence. But as soon as he got into the manufacturing districts, he found that the real demand of the masses was not for votes but for social revolution, symbolised

[1] Real reactionaries like the Duke of Wellington saw much more clearly than Whigs like Lord John Russell—"Finality Jack"—that once a country had begun to move towards democracy it could not stop. But the process was slower than the rationalists believed.

by the cry for the ten-hour day and the abolition of the Poor Law.

In the south, the new Poor Law had been accepted without a struggle, partly because the failure of the labourers' revolt and of Owenite Trade Unionism had taken the heart out of the country worker, but partly because it did put an end to what everybody admitted to be an evil—the stagnant pools of surplus labour kept alive out of the rates.[1] But in the towns there were no such stagnant pools. The Poor Law, in the towns, was used, in the very unstable conditions of early nineteenth-century trade, as the substitute for unemployment insurance; and the announcement that no one would henceforward be able to get a little help in hard times except under the penal conditions of the workhouse roused the northern workers—and some of the humaner employers, such as John Fielden of Oldham, Cobbett's friend—to such a pitch of fury that in many districts the enforcement of the Act was prevented for years by the solid resistance of the inhabitants. Half, at any rate, of the Chartist movement of the north was an organisation to fight the Poor Law—the organisation for which Cobbett had been clamouring in the months before his death; and it was just coming into being when O'Connor went touring.

He took it up, of course, instantly and whole-heartedly. Few of the passages in his speeches earned him so much applause as the one in which he envisages Lord Brougham and his wife applying for admission to the workhouse, and "the keeper of the Bastille" saying:

> " 'This is your ward to the right, and this, my lady, is your ward to the left; we are Malthusians here, and are afraid you would breed, therefore you must be kept asunder.' If I saw such a scene as this I might have some pity for Lady Brougham, but little pity would be due to my Lord Harry."

But the Poor Law was the darling of the new Parliament, and it was clear that nothing would induce Parliament to repeal or

[1] Compare the 1934 queues of "long-term unemployed" similarly kept out of rates and taxes combined. But to the villager of 1834 emigration to the city did at least hold out a prospect denied to the Jarrow shipyard men a hundred years later.

modify it.[1] Therefore nothing could be done until the working class themselves seized hold of Parliament and used it to destroy the Poor Law and remodel social institutions to their own ends. Reform of Parliament was thus essential, but would never be secured unless the working class showed themselves strong enough and menacing enough to demand it, by force if need be. Before he had returned to London, and before he had adopted the People's Charter as his political programme, O'Connor had taken the important step of getting hold of a newspaper—a real newspaper, not an unstamped journal without news—to propagate these ideas and to encourage the working men to believe that they themselves, educated or totally uneducated, were capable alike of carrying it out and of running all the government of the country in the interests of themselves and of justice—the two being presumed identical. The *Northern Star*, founded at Leeds in November 1837, soon came to compare in influence—and in violence of expression—with Cobbett's bygone *Political Register*, with this difference, that O'Connor did not edit it himself, and that he wrote much less in it than Cobbett in the *Political Register*.[2] The *Northern Star* contained a very high proportion of working-class meetings and speeches—reported *pour encourager les autres*.

The foregoing summary is briefer than anything contained in O'Connor's own speeches and writing; and it seems unlikely that he ever expressed his purposes so succinctly even to himself. But in fact what the Chartist movement meant to him was principally the attainment of power—power for the people, under his torrential leadership, to do a great many things about whose details he was not particularly clear or consistent—but power above all. This attitude was essentially different from that of Place and Lovett and their friends with their emphasis on education and their confidence that the working classes could *prove* themselves, in the later catch-phrase, "fit to govern." O'Connor wanted them to seize power without more ado and then prove themselves, and later history has shown that there was more to be said for this course than is sometimes

[1] Only a series of workhouse scandals drove Parliament to check the zeal of the Poor Law Commissioners, and that was not until 1847.

[2] Fortunately, for his flamboyant, and often turgid style is far less readable than Cobbett's.

admitted. But his view was found to lead to conflict between him and the "Rationalists"; and it is this deep conflict that was really at the base of the continual quarrels between what were termed "moral force" and "physical force" Chartists. These descriptions are a trifle misleading. The old Reformers, who had been preparing to organise rebellion in 1832, were by no means pacifists or averse to physical conflict, in the last resort, if it looked like having a chance of success; nor was O'Connor, as he showed more than once, at all anxious to lead a hopeless revolt; the difference lay in their several outlooks and in the nature of the audience to which they were appealing.[1]

For the moment, however, disputes were in the future. The Charter was published in May 1838, and the *Northern Star* willingly adopted it as a crystallisation of its own political views, and the London Chartists were well pleased, in spite of Lovett's apprehensions, at the prospect of leading O'Connor's already large and growing public.[2] An uneasy and temporary alliance was therefore made, in the latter part of 1838, between O'Connor and his followers, the London Working Men's Association, and the Birmingham Political Union led by Thomas Attwood, the banking and currency reformer who had played so large a part in the 1832 Reform struggles; and this alliance made arrangements for a representative People's Convention to meet in London in the following February, there to adopt a National Petition drafted by Attwood in favour of the Charter and to present it to Parliament.

The Convention duly met, not without a great deal of preliminary excitement. For the provisions of the law, framed to suppress the Corresponding Societies,[3] forbade the sending of

[1] "My desire is to try moral force as long as possible, even to the fullest extent but I would always have you bear in mind, that it is better to die freemen than to die slaves. Every conquest which is called honourable has been achieved by physical force, but we do not want it, because if all hands are pulling for Universal Suffrage they will soon pull down the stronghold of corruption. I hope and trust that out of the exercise of that judgment which belongs exclusively to the working class, a union will arise, and from that union a moral power be created, sufficient to establish the right of the poor man; but if this fails, then let every man raise his arm in defence of that which his judgment tells him is justice." (O'Connor, speaking in Westminster, September 1838.) A more than usually temperate statement; it was flaming oratory on the lines of the last sentence which roused the masses of the north.

[2] The weekly circulation of the *Northern Star* was 33,000; as most of the copies were taken by shops, clubs and beerhouses, the number of readers must have been much greater.

[3] See page 46.

delegates by local associations, and the delegates to the Convention were accordingly chosen by huge mass meetings often held (owing to the lack of public halls) by torchlight at night on open spaces, to which people marched in thousands with banners and pikes and listened to all manner of inflammatory denunciations. The Reverend Joseph Rayner Stephens, the preacher who correctly described Chartism as a "knife-and-fork"—i.e. economic—movement, was one of the most vigorous of these stump orators, and was arrested for a violent speech on the Poor Law. On this occasion O'Connor said that "if the tyrants shall so far strain their authority as to transport him, his manacled limbs shall never pass to the transport ship but over my lifeless body." (Fortunately, no such sacrifice was required of the leader; Stephens received a comparatively mild prison sentence.) Naturally, the selection of the delegates, and the collection of signatures to the Petition, involved the sending out of a great many "missionaries" into the factory areas, of whom O'Connor was the chief and the most successful; and by the time the Convention met, any hopes Lovett might have entertained of becoming its guide had already disappeared.

But neither the apostles of reason nor the apostles of power had any real idea what to do with the excited delegates when they had got them assembled. They could adopt the Petition, now acquiring at a great rate signatures which were to amount to a million and a quarter in all (nearly twice the number of Parliamentary voters); and they could present it to Parliament. But Parliament was fairly certain to reject it, and what were they to do then? Were they to go home, and set about a gradual patient campaign among the public? Were they to allow the extreme hotheads to stampede them into an armed insurrection? Were they to try and call a general strike—which some of the "moral force" men were willing to accept—for the principles of the Charter? or what were they to do? To disband was impracticable, in view of the temper of the majority of the delegates, and after a great deal of confused oratory, in the course of which a number of the more moderate men withdrew entirely and the Convention transferred itself to Birmingham, a decision was reached to adopt the third course, to proclaim a general strike or "Sacred Month" for August, which, it would seem, was to be combined with a run on the

banks for gold—a reminiscence of Francis Place's Reform placard—a refusal to buy excisable goods, e.g. beer, spirits and sugar, and an attempt to collect arms. Meanwhile Attwood presented the Petition to the House of Commons, which rejected it after debate by 237 to 48.

This should have been the signal for the Sacred Month. But since the exciting days of February heads had had time to cool. It was only five years since the great Trade Union defeat; trade was bad, and such of the workers as were organised were in no mood to try another fall with the manufacturers. Abstention from liquor had at best a partial support, and the bank deposits which it was proposed to turn into gold were not, for the most part, held in the names of Chartists. It became clear, to all but the extremists, that a strike if called could only be a failure, and in September it was decided to abandon it. O'Connor, who had spent the spring and summer in vehement denunciation of all who opposed the Sacred Month as cowards and traitors, swung round at the last moment and voted for its abandonment; he is entitled to what credit he can claim for knowing when the ice would not bear him.

But the effect of his speeches and articles went on after his recantation, for the extremists were in no mood to give in. It is not clear, and perhaps never will be clear, how far O'Connor was privy to the pitiful little insurrection of November which is called the Newport Rising. Certainly he knew that there had been talk of armed rebellion, and he had gone so far as to warn some of his followers not to be rash. Probably, if he had made up his mind more quickly than he did about the trend of events, he could have stopped it altogether, but he left for Ireland in October and so has an alibi for the miserable night when John Frost, ex-Mayor of Newport, led a few thousand untrained half-frozen men to be shot down like cattle by a handful of soldiers in its market square.[1] These events, however, moved the Government to more drastic action. At first they had taken little notice of Chartist meetings. It was not

[1] Similar plans for Yorkshire and Lancashire were frustrated by the cool head and admirable sense of Sir Charles Napier, commander of the troops in the North of England, who thought the bulk of the Chartists unhappy misguided men and was anxious not to shoot them if it could possibly be avoided. His calm indication that he would stand no nonsense but would not move unless forced made the leaders think twice about acting.

from free discussion, said Lord John Russell at Liverpool in September 1838, or from the unchecked declaration of public opinion that governments had anything to fear—but from workmen forced to combine in secret. But workmen combining openly in huge and menacing processions and workmen levying civil war against the Queen were another matter; and action was taken. The leaders of the Newport Rising and some others were sentenced to death—afterwards commuted to transportation—and vast numbers of Chartists condemned to varying terms of imprisonment. Among these was O'Connor, who got eighteen months for seditious libel and in May 1840 disappeared into York Castle.[1]

The Convention had been a fiasco, and the Chartists had received a severe blow—quite as heavy as the condemnation of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. But the result was not the same; it is surprising, and an indication of the real strength of feeling, how quickly the movement rallied—the more surprising in that many of its middle-class and some of its working-class supporters were being drawn away by the Anti-Corn Law League founded by Bright and Cobden between 1838 and 1839 and denounced by O'Connor and by most of the Chartist leaders as a wicked attempt by the manufacturing interest to force down wages on the pretext of obtaining cheap food. O'Connor had scarcely gone to jail when a new body, the National Charter Association, was formed on a national basis, though drawing its main support from the north. Lovett and Attwood and their supporters stood aloof. Propaganda and organisation went with a swing, though not without acrimonious disputes; and when O'Connor emerged in September 1841 he found the ground prepared for him and a second, more vigorously worded Petition in course of collecting signatures. At once he rushed off on a tour of the north, where he received immense ovations. The only fly in his ointment was that the "moral force" men who had seceded from the Convention in 1839 were endeavouring to

[1] On the whole, however, the sentences of 1839 and 1840 were not vindictive particularly considering the fact that the Chartists, though not striking, continued to make vigorous public nuisances of themselves, packing churches on Sunday, demanding that parsons should preach on "he that will not work neither shall he eat," blackmailing local shopkeepers into subscribing to their Prisoners' Defence Funds, and the like.

create a new organisation which would support the principles of the Charter while disclaiming strikes and insurrection—this became the Complete Suffrage Union associated with the name of Joseph Sturge the Birmingham Quaker. For some time, until he decided to capture the new movement, O'Connor directed a stream of abuse at it.

The second Petition—with three million signatures this time—was presented to Parliament in May 1842, and rejected as the first had been. The same problem of action then arose. But this time there was at least a policy of sorts ready to hand. The year 1842 was one of terrible trade depression, and in the summer the employers began systematically to reduce the already miserably low wages in the manufacturing districts. At once spontaneous strikes against the employers and the Poor Law broke out on a wide scale; the strikers marched from town to town and from mill to mill, calling out the workers, quenching the boiler fires and pulling out the plugs. In the whole city of Manchester not a factory chimney smoked. It was undoubtedly a considerable demonstration in force, and the National Charter Association had the very natural notion of turning these ready-to-hand strikes into a new Sacred Month, of inducing the strikers to refuse to return to work until the Charter had become law. A delegate meeting of the Lancashire strikers actually agreed to take this stand.

It was a chimerical proposition. However strongly imbued the strikers were with the idea that the Charter would cure all their woes, they had no money, they were striking on a falling market, and there was not the remotest chance of their threats coercing the High Court of Parliament to admit the rabble to a share in its power. O'Connor, it seems, saw at the outset that the attempt was unlikely to succeed, though as he never willingly set himself in opposition to currents of emotion among the "fustian jackets," he first ascribed the strikes to the wicked manufacturers and the Anti-Corn Law League, who, he asserted, had deliberately fomented them to serve their own purposes. When he found that a conference of the National Charter Association was determined on its course, he swung the *Northern Star* round to support of the strikes; but as they collapsed and the men drifted miserably

back to work he swung it round again and denounced the Chartist leaders who had been primarily responsible for the decision.[1] He had, however, committed himself sufficiently to be tried for seditious libel in the following year.

In the meantime, he decided upon a new line with the Complete Suffrage Union—to embrace it in a lethal hug. Much to Sturge's discomfiture, he supported his Parliamentary candidature for Nottingham, declared him a true friend of the people and nearly got him elected. Later in the year, he persuaded Lovett to join him in packing the Union's December Conference. Sturge had intended that Conference to pass a demand for a "Bill of Rights" which would contain the substance of the Charter without the obnoxious name; but when it was proposed there arose from all sides shouts of "The Charter! The Charter!" To Lovett's supporters hardly less than to O'Connor's, the Charter had become an emotional symbol, a thing for which they were ready to face arrest and Botany Bay, whereas a Bill of Rights, a pet of the constitutional lawyers, meant nothing at all. Sturge was decisively defeated, and the Complete Suffrage Union continued existence as a mainly middle-class group. Shortly afterwards Lovett and O'Connor parted company again, and there was thereafter no single movement working for the Charter; the effective political field was left to Bright and Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League. Industrial action, at least in the form of widespread strikes, offered no hope. Was there anything else that could be tried?

Early in 1843, O'Connor, in common with many others, was brought into court for his part in the agitation of the previous year. He was tried by a remarkably sympathetic judge, and defended himself vigorously and at length, with the result that he was convicted on only one of the nine counts of the indictment—and, even so, was never called up for judgment. But during the months which followed the Complete Suffrage conference his bewildered mind, seeking

[1] O'Connor was not on the Executive of the N.C.A. and therefore technically not responsible for its policy. His seesawings in 1842 have been the occasion of much bewildered and hostile comment; they are, however, easier to understand if one grasps the fact that he was as much the follower as the leader of mass emotion. Whatever his colleagues may justifiably have thought of him, the "fustian jackets" adored him none the less.

wildly for a way out of the hopeless position, reverted suddenly to the agrarianism of his Irish youth; and in April 1843 he began to explain to his followers that the only way to save the working class was to go back to the land, to form an enormous Chartist Co-operative Land Association, by means of which the fields of England would be divided up into peasant holdings where working-men released from the tyranny of factory and Poor Law alike would by intensive "spade husbandry" double the productivity of the soil and once again stand on their own feet and look their oppressors in the face. In order to bring this great emancipation into effect over the whole country legislation, he agreed, would be necessary. But legislation could hardly be expected until some practical demonstration had been given to the legislators; he therefore suggested that Chartists, while continuing to work for the Charter, should devote what money they could raise to the purchase of land for Chartist peasant settlements. In the face of opposition he persuaded the September Conference of the National Charter Association to adopt his scheme.

Economically it was, of course, quite crazy. The main argument he put forward in its favour was that settlement on the land would draw surplus labour out of the manufacturer's reach and thus compel him to offer higher wages.[1] This might work very well under the conditions of the United States, where virgin and productive land lay ready for the taking; in landlord-ridden England, where the great owners were already exacting enormous sums from the new railway companies, it was fantastic; and O'Connor's estimate of the possible productivity of his new holdings and of the time which it would take to spread them over England, was no less so. Within six years, he prophesied, each of his "dear children" of the Chartist movement would be able to have his own cottage and his own plot of land. Owen was not the only millennialist of those years.

But from the psychological angle it was far less ridiculous. The greater part of his wretched audiences were two genera-

[1] Reasoning on the same lines, Trade Unions of the 'forties and 'fifties often tried to promote emigration of their out-of-work members to America or the Colonies.

tions, at most, removed from the land on which, as Cobbett had told them time and again, their forefathers had lived in such happiness, and all the Hebrew prophecy on which they had been brought up had an agrarian setting. The idea that a man might sit under his own vine and his own fig-tree *where none should make him afraid* came to them with the comfort of words heard in childhood. Moreover, the Land Scheme, even more than the Charter, offered the immediate prospect of some real tangible gain for some of them. Not for all, of course; when the land had been secured the Chartist contributors were to ballot for the holdings. But the prospect was at least as good as that which to-day stretches before those who go in for football pools, and anyone who is astonished at the support which O'Connor received ought to consider more seriously the state of mind in which a windfall is the only conceivable means of escape from a dreary and intolerable life.

The support was enthusiastic, not to say frenzied. Almost before the Land Scheme had got going at all money from the downtrodden began to be subscribed; two years later it was streaming in at the rate of two hundred pounds a week, to reach well over one hundred thousand pounds in all. In 1846, when O'Connor's colleagues, horrified at the finance—or, rather, lack of any coherent finance—in his proceedings, endeavoured to get the venture stopped and O'Connor removed from his position, they were met with a storm of furious resolutions from the provinces, in which Cooper, the leader in the revolt, was called a chameleon, a maw-worm, a raving madman, a slanderous scamp, and other equally choice epithets, and was expelled from the Chartist Convention. O'Connor rode out the storm triumphantly; as a consequence, the terms in which he addressed his "dear children" of the working classes, which had always been flowery, became positively Messianic.

Actually, the Land Assocation never came into legal existence. O'Connor's ideas were so large and vague that his past legal training, even with the assistance of a Chartist solicitor of Bath named W. P. Roberts (who subsequently had a long and useful career as standing counsel to the miners' Trade Unions) could not, in the then state of the

law, find a legal form under which it could take shape. In 1846 it was decided to register "the Chartist Co-operative Land Society" as a company under the new Companies Act of 1844; even so the particulars required by the Registrar were not forthcoming—which in view of the facts is hardly surprising—and by the time the Society, now called the National Land Company, was wound up it still had not succeeded in legalising itself.

The mere lack of legal status, however, did not in the least daunt its promoters; in the spring of 1845 the Plan was publicly launched, and subscriptions, of which O'Connor, unfortunately, had full control, began to come in. By 1847, when it was still struggling to become a company, enough money had been raised to buy an estate at Heronsgate near Rickmansworth, where among the modern villas the inn called the Land of Liberty still stands to remind the historian of O'Connor, and in May the settlement was opened with a solemn ceremony, including a poem specially written by Ernest Jones, one of the latest recruits to Chartism, and the most faithful supporter of its principles long after the movement had come to an end. A mortgage was raised on the property, to be used to buy more. In this manner five other estates were acquired, including one at Minster Lovell in Oxfordshire, where some of the original cottages are still standing; but the purchase of the fifth was never finally completed. The holdings were duly balloted for, and the successful ballotees took possession as individual peasant-holders. When the Land Company crashed the mortgagees foreclosed, and the inhabitants of O'Connorville, Charterville and the rest came back into the ordinary circle of economy. Some of them prospered; some of them failed; but there is no trace of any corporate political activity surviving among them. Having attained their vine and their fig-tree they passed out of history.

O'Connor's new gospel had gradually altered his feelings about the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers, to whom he had devoted so much vituperation. For a time he abused them still, for getting in the way of his Land Scheme with a proposition that might be all right when the Scheme was in working order and England once more a country of happy peasants; but

when in 1844 a public debate—for which there was a long-standing demand—was arranged between him and Bright and Cobden, it was by common consent a failure. O'Connor had more or less forgotten the substance of his earlier charges against the Corn Law repealers,[1] and he was not one to follow the intricate economic arguments of his opponents. When, two years later, Peel brought in the Bill to make an end of protection for agriculture, the *Northern Star* amazed its reflective readers by giving him its hearty support. Here again the explanation is simple. O'Connor believed that Peel's Bill would cause a slump in the price of landed property and so make it easier for the National Land Company to buy more estates.

But he had not, in all these activities, altogether lost sight of the Charter and Chartism; and almost immediately afterwards politics took on a new fervour, and the Chartists began to prepare for their final effort. After 1842 trade had revived a little, and unrest had died down. But 1847 was a black year, not only in England but over the continent of Europe, and by the beginning of 1848—the "Year of Revolutions" and the year of the *Communist Manifesto*[2]—it was manifest that everything was stirring. By that time O'Connor was in Parliament; he had been elected in mid-1847 for Nottingham, defeating a Whig Minister, John Cam Hobhouse, and though his supporters included a number of Tories, the result could justifiably be acclaimed as a Chartist triumph. His first act as an M.P. was to demand justice for Ireland and the repeal of the Act of Union, for which the demand had risen more fiercely after the famine; but this only stimulated the Government to pass a new Irish Coercion Act and a Treason and Felony Act (under which the members of "Young Ireland" were transported during the following year). Revolts were imminent in France, Italy, Hungary, Germany and Austria; and in England the Chartists lifted their heads again and started organising mass meetings and yet a third monster

[1] It is a matter of history that the bulk of these charges were not borne out in the event. The immediate result of repeal was not to lower the price of bread, but to iron out the larger fluctuations. Wages did not fall; employment, for various reasons, notably railway-building, improved; and over a long period of years the standard of the working class began to rise.

[2] "You have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to win" are not O'Connor's words, but they exactly express his earlier preachings to the Chartists.

Petition. O'Connor rushed back into the field, crying that he would rather die than give up one particle of the Charter, and that the Charter and the Land Company together would make a new social system in England. It was a tremendously exciting time. In January the Italian democrats forced a constitution from the house of Savoy; the French monarchy fell in February; and in March the Hungarians won their victory and the hated Metternich fled from Vienna. The Chartists, for their part, arranged a colossal demonstration on Kennington Common, from which they announced their intention of marching upon Westminster, headed by O'Connor and bearing the Petition, now said to have nearly six million signatures. London believed that the days of Wat Tyler had come again; the Government collected thousands of soldiers and special constables and put the Duke of Wellington, now seventy-nine years old, in charge of the defence.

Nothing happened. O'Connor was visited in time by fright, or by caution, and decided that the procession must not march. He gave his pledge to the police that he would send the meeting home, and in a speech of well-calculated rhodomontade told his "assembled children" that he, "their honest father and their unpaid bailiff," could not spare one of his children from the feast which the Land Plan and the Charter, if gained without bloodshed, would lay before them—therefore, they must not fight the police and the soldiers. He asked for a vote of confidence and, having secured an overwhelming one, cried, "So help me God, I will die on the floor of the House, or get your rights for you"—and then departed for Westminster, the Petition following him in a fleet of cabs. When Parliament finally considered it, having discovered that a great many of the signatures were bogus, only seventeen votes were mustered in its favour.

As in 1839 and 1842, the disturbances did not end with a single failure. The left wing was still hoping for revolution, and in London and the north there were exposed a number of cases of conspiratorial drillings partly inspired by police spies—an ugly reminiscence of pre-Reform oppression. The Government had had a bad fright, and the sentences imposed on the 1848 Chartists, while less ferocious than those designed to "pacify" famine-stricken Ireland, were distinctly heavier

than those of previous occasions. But the real danger was over; though Chartist groups and Chartist journals continued to exist after 1848, and though resolutions of confidence in O'Connor continued to be sent in for some time, the influence of the great mass leader began to wane from the day of the fiasco on Kennington Common. Chartism was dying.

The Land Company died with it. In 1849 the House of Commons ordered a Committee to inquire into its finances, and the Committee's report showed a condition of hopeless and inextricable confusion. The criticisms of Cooper and others were abundantly confirmed, save that O'Connor had made no profit for himself, but appeared to have lost several thousand pounds. There was nothing to be done but to leave the thing to wind itself up as best it might, which was done by 1851.

For a time, O'Connor had continued to speak and write, but the simultaneous failure of the Petition and the Land Company had left him finally with nowhere to turn and nothing to say. His powers also were beginning to give way; always a roysterer and boon companion, he began to drink heavily, and his speeches became more and more incoherent. In 1852 he made a sudden attack on a fellow member of the House of Commons, and was removed to an asylum. In 1855 he died, and his body was followed to the grave by a crowd estimated at fifty thousand people.

The numbers mentioned in the last paragraph provide, perhaps, as good a clue as any to the significance of O'Connor's life to the Labour movement. He should be looked at in the light, not so much of a leader in the intellectual sense, as of a symbolic figure, a prophet who appeared in the darkest and most hopeless days with a promise of taking his people, like Moses, out of the wilderness into a land of milk and honey. When there is no rational hope, suffering people will turn to anyone who can offer them any hope at all, if only he can make them believe that he understands their sufferings and is strong enough to bear their burdens. This O'Connor, with his six feet of athletic body, his "sort of aristocratical bearing," his immensely powerful voice, his gift of oratory, and his genuinely passionate sympathy with all the outcast and oppressed, was well qualified to

do, and he did it abundantly. Every one of his more intelligent, more scrupulous or more amiable colleagues who tried a fall with him found to their confusion that, however much they believed themselves to be right, the hearts of the masses were in O'Connor's keeping; and not until he had completely lost his own direction—and in part his mind—did he lose his ascendancy. Seen, and seeing himself, in this half-Messianic light, his extravagances appear less astonishing; even the startling verse which he asked the scandalised Lovett to recite at a banquet—

> O'Connor is our chosen chief,
> He's champion of the Charter;
> Our Saviour suffered like a thief
> Because he preached the Charter—

is far less wild than the claims made by the dozens of petty Messiahs who sprang up in England of the 'forties; and O'Connor's Messianic prophecies were of this world, and helped to keep hope alive in its victims for ten years and more.

He failed completely. As I said earlier, he could not possibly have succeeded, and much has been made of the badness of his leadership. But in point of fact, faced with a definite and immediate situation, he quite often did the only thing that could be done; the difficulty was that he never knew what he was going to do until he did it, with the result that his policy often seemed to have no sense or coherence, but to consist of a series of egotistical zigzags. If circumstances had been more favourable, he might well have been much more successful; and it is worth pondering whether his success might not, like that of a later leader who also believed himself the saviour of his people and also relied on intuition rather than consecutive thought, have been an unmitigated disaster to his country. His failure was possibly his best fortune, and the fifty thousand mourners his best epitaph.

JOHN STUART MILL

(1806–1873)

If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

Mill, *On Liberty*

He is in many senses isolated and must sometimes shiver with the cold.

Caroline Fox on Mill

TO turn from O'Connor to John Stuart Mill is to move into a new world, even though Mill was the younger by only a dozen years and had arrived at his full mental stature (partly because of his peculiar education) well before O'Connor burst upon the British political scene. But Mill was not concerned with the past or even, except to a quite small degree, with the turbulent and unhappy present of his first forty years; he was brought up by and among men who were looking towards and very largely assisting to shape the future—the immediate future, at all events— and having once shaken himself free of the narrow dogmatism which his first teachers sought to impose upon him he became, to young thinkers especially, a steady light guiding towards a new dispensation of reason and humanity in politics. The debt which the early Fabians, to take no other example, owed to Mill is apparent in every line they wrote; and for this reason his is the best name to bridge the gap between the old world of labour and the new.

Of all the characters in this book, except possibly Owen and Lansbury, John Stuart Mill was the one most universally agreed by his contemporaries to be not merely virtuous, but also very nice, in the ordinarily accepted sense of the term; and unlike Owen he was neither "very positive" nor a bore. He was one of the most modest of men; in his autobiography he speaks of himself as of "merely average capacity"; and he always listened to what other people had to say and took notice of their arguments without compromising his own principles.

He never, so far as is known, quarrelled with anyone; if the differences appeared too great to be composed he simply withdrew himself, and his published correspondence contains no line which could reasonably hurt anyone's feelings.[1] The worst that can be said of him is that his judgments were sometimes academic and that he was occasionally a bit of a prig; and that, in view of his life and education, is scarcely surprising.

He might easily have turned out something much worse than a prig. For he was, in some ways, a most unfortunate little boy. He had no childhood, properly speaking; almost before he had learned to talk he was subjected to an educational grind so purposeful, so unyielding, and in effect so cruel, that Dr. Blimber could have improved little upon it, and it is a wonder that he survived at all. (His three younger brothers in fact all died prematurely of consumption, and Mill's own health was not unaffected.)

His father was James Mill, a poor boy from rural Perthshire, who followed the tradition of the Scottish lad o' pairts by winning himself an education at the University of Edinburgh, and then came to London to seek his fortune, to maintain himself by writing and journalism, and (eventually) to become the first historian of British India and an official of the East India Company at India House. After a while he made the acquaintance of Jeremy Bentham and Francis Place and others of the group who were subsequently to be known as the Utilitarians, though their earlier appellation was "philosophic Radicals";[2] and it was partly under their influence that he planned the education of his firstborn, though the extreme humourless inflexibility of his own mind carried it to lengths which no one else was likely to have practised.

> "James Mill," says W. L. Courtney, "intended his son to carry on his own work, to be saved the wasteful parts of his own development, to commence at the point which his

[1] "In his case," wrote Alexander Bain, "the *pleasures of malevolence* [a phrase of Bentham's] were extremely refined."

[2] "Feelosophers," Cobbett called them, in angry allusion to the Scots accent of Mill and of Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*. Crude Utilitarianism, with its assumptions that the manufacturing interest knew what was best for the nation, invariably roused Cobbett to fury.

father had reached. Therefore he must start by being a Radical politician, a free-thinker, and a logician."

And there survives a letter from Bentham, dated 1812, when the boy was six years old, which says:

"If you will appoint me guardian to Mr. John Stuart Mill, I will in the event of his father's being disposed of elsewhere, take him to Q.S.P. [Bentham's house in Queen Square Place], and there or elsewhere, by whipping or otherwise, do whatever may seem both necessary and proper, for teaching him to make all proper distinctions such as between the Devil and the Holy Ghost, and how to make codes and Encyclopedias and whatever else may be proper to be made, as long as I remain an inhabitant of this vale of tears."

Bentham's words at least carry a suggestion of joking, but Mill (who at intervals feared the approach of death) replied without jest,

"I take your offer quite seriously, and thus we may perhaps leave a successor worthy of both of us."

Unfortunately James Mill was qualified in little but learning and purpose to bring up a child. He had married, almost immediately after arriving in London, a pretty girl of good family ten years younger than himself, and presented her with nine children, a proceeding which, as his son mournfully notes, ran counter to all the principles of population which he so fervently advocated—particularly as until 1819, when he got his India House appointment, they were all of them dependent on his earnings as a writer.[1] Both as husband and father, Mill was an unattractive character.

"His entering the room," says Bain frankly, "where the family was assembled was observed by strangers to operate as an immediate damper . . . the one really disagreeable trait in Mill's character was the way that he allowed himself to speak and behave to his wife and children before visitors."

[1] Bain, biographer of both Mills, doubts this, and suggests that Mill borrowed from Francis Place. Certainly Place was very much concerned about Mill's poverty.

And greatly as his son admired him in some ways, it is obvious that he was never at ease with him. Writing after his death, he calls him "the most impatient of men," and "constitutionally irritable," speaks of his "lack of tenderness" in his relations with his children, and describes him as an Epicurean who had scarcely any belief in pleasure, who, at any rate, thought very few pleasures worth the price paid for them. Nor had he sympathy with his son's friends—or indeed with people in general. Grote the historian (a Utilitarian himself) wrote in exasperation of "the readiness and seeming preference with which he dwells on the faults and defects of others—even of the greatest men," and in his young manhood John Stuart had to meet outside his home those of his friends of whom his father disapproved. Such was the character of the man who set himself to train up his son as a worthy successor.

He began early and thoroughly enough, when the son was scarcely more than a baby. It is not known when young Mill learnt to read, but at three years old he was learning Greek words from cards written out in Greek and English by his father; and by his eighth year he had read a number of Greek books, including the whole of Herodotus and a highly philosophic dialogue of Plato whose meaning must have been entirely unintelligible to him—all this without a dictionary, asking his father the meaning of any word which he did not know. At the same time he was learning arithmetic, and doing a great deal of private reading, particularly of history books as solid as those of Hume and Gibbon and one forbiddingly entitled *Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History*, about which he had to discourse to his father while walking the lanes near Stoke Newington where they lived. He was allowed a very few "books of amusement," including *Robinson Crusoe*—which he loved—and the *Arabian Nights*; he was not encouraged to read much poetry, though his father urged him to compose English verse, remarking that "people in general attach more value to verse than it deserved, and the power of writing it is, on this account, worth acquiring." The verses so composed, Mill observes, were "the merest rubbish."

At the mature age of eight he began Latin—and at eleven wrote a History of the Roman Government, "as much as would have made an octavo volume!" He learned algebra,

geometry, and higher mathematics, "devouring text-books on chemistry" as a by-product: at twelve he was promoted to the study of logic, and at thirteen to "a complete course of political economy."

> "Though Ricardo's great work was already in print, no didactic treatise embodying its doctrines in a manner fit for learners had yet appeared. My father, therefore, commenced instructing me in the science by a sort of lectures, which he delivered to me in our walks. He expounded each day a portion of the subject, and I gave him each day a written account of it, which he made me revise over and over again until it was clear, precise, and tolerably complete. In this manner I went through the whole extent of the science; and the written outline of it which resulted from my daily *comptes rendus* served him afterwards as notes from which to write his *Elements of Political Economy*."[1]

These walks, with their attendant discourses, were the nearest approach to play in Mill's boyhood; for he took part in no games and was not allowed to mix with other boys, lest he should be corrupted by "vulgar modes of thought and feeling." One result of this was that he never learnt to use his hands, a deprivation which he felt very much in later life.

> "My mind, as well as my hands," he says sadly, "did its work very lamely when it was applied, or ought to have been applied, to the practical details which are the chief interest in life to the majority of men. . . . I was constantly meriting reproof [from his father, who apparently was intelligent in practical matters] by inattention, inobservance, and general slackness of mind in matters of daily life. . . . The education which my father gave me was in itself much more fitted for training me to *know* than to *do*."

At fourteen his formal education ended; but for six years he had already held the rôle of undermaster. Before he was eight he had been made to teach the Latin that he was learning to his younger sister, and "from this time, other sisters and

[1] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*. It will be observed that there was a certain "two-way traffic" about this mode of instruction. James Mill seems to have received as much as he gave.

brothers being successively added as pupils, a considerable part of my day's work consisted of this preparatory teaching." This task he hated above all others; being made preceptor to one's juniors is never the best way of endearing oneself to them, and, in addition, the young tutor was made responsible for his pupils and punished along with them if they did not know their lessons. Francis Place, staying with the Mills at Ford Abbey and observing that John had to go without his dinner because Willie's and Clara's tasks were not well said, commented that young John was no doubt a prodigy, but he would grow up morose and selfish. It is astonishing that he did not; but there is nothing more unseemly recorded of his childhood than that when he was, at five years old, taken to visit Lady Spencer at the Admiralty he treated her to a dissertation on the comparative military merits of Marlborough and Wellington. A period of deep depression, however, which attacked him when he was twenty, when he asked himself whether he would be happy if his ideals were realised, and came to the devastating conclusion that he would not, may be definitely attributed to this early overstrain.[1] He recovered eventually, though at the time he "seemed to have nothing left to live for"; but recollections of that time of despair may have contributed to the great sympathy with young men's problems which he showed in later years.

For the time being, however, he was released from drudgery. His father rejected an offer from his godfather, Sir John Stuart, to send him to Cambridge, declaring (correctly, from his own point of view) that there was nothing that Cambridge could teach him. Instead, he was sent to southern France for a year, as the guest of Sir Samuel Bentham, Jeremy's elder brother, and seems to have blossomed out like a flower. Not only did he feast his eyes on the scenery round Toulouse and climb the Pyrenees; not only did he begin to enjoy the less exalted pleasures of life, trying (though without marked success) to learn to ride, fence, sing and dance; he also lived for a year in the free speculative and intellectual atmosphere of a France not so very far removed from the Revolution—though, surpris-

[1] Very little, even, of the enormous amount of reading imposed upon Mill in his youth makes any show in his own writings: a good deal of the effort seems to have been sheer waste of time.

ingly enough, he does not seem to have heard or read anything about the French Revolution until after his return to England. One of the main fruits of his journey was the conclusion, which, like Matthew Arnold, he maintained for many years, that the French were far superior to the English both in general sociability and in intellectual culture. English society, he thought, was incapable of serious discussion, and though the upper classes were "good even to goodiness," every year showed more and more their lack of even the very moderate amount of intellect possessed by the other classes. For the French—and other Continental—liberals his enthusiasm was rekindled by his second visit to France (see below); he chose Avignon in the south of France as the home of his retirement, and his sentiments did not change until very nearly the end of his life, when the frivolity with which Napoleon III's government rushed into the Franco-Prussian War and the alarming news of the Commune of Paris caused him to express startlingly illiberal sentiments.[1]

Arrived back in London, he turned from being educated to educating himself. In 1821 he began to read for the Bar with John Austin, the famous jurist, himself a Benthamite, but never completed his studies, for in 1823, being then seventeen, he became a clerk in the Office of the Examiner of India Correspondence, under his father. That appointment settled his professional career; he remained in the India Office, rising from post to post, from thirty pounds a year (his modest beginning) up to two thousand pounds, and when the East India Company, much to his indignation, was abolished after the Mutiny and the administration of India taken over by the Crown, he was retired on a comfortable pension of fifteen hundred pounds. His life therefore was that of a professional civil servant, and though there is no evidence that he did not perform his duties thoroughly and efficiently—in fact, there is every evidence that he did—his account of the advantages of the occupation for a man who wished to devote a good part of his life to "private [i.e. non-remunerative] intellectual pursuits" does not suggest that they were very onerous. He arrived at his office in his black dress suit complete with silk tie at ten in the morning, and there breakfasted off tea, bread and

[1] Letters to John Morley, 1870.

butter, and a boiled egg, after which he worked until four in the afternoon. He was apparently able to do a good deal of thinking and even of writing—as other civil servants have since done—in the interstices of his official day; and, though he found the month's holiday given by the India House to its employees insufficient to satisfy his taste for travel, he admits that he was able to spend practically every week-end walking in the country. On the whole, a satisfactory if somewhat over-sheltered life; and he adds that it had the advantage of forcing him to take effective note of the opinions of others and to conciliate them.

> "As a speculative writer, I should have had no one to consult but myself, and should have encountered in my speculations none of the obstacles which would have started up whenever they came to be applied to practice. But as a Secretary conducting political correspondence, I could not issue an order or express an opinion, without satisfying various persons very unlike myself that the thing was fit to be done. I was thus in a good position for finding out by practice the mode of putting a thought which gives it easiest admittance into minds not prepared for it by habit; while I became practically conversant with the difficulties of moving bodies of men, the necessities of compromise, the art of sacrificing the non-essential to preserve the essential. I learnt how to obtain the best I could, when I could not obtain everything; instead of being indignant or dispirited when I could not have entirely my own way, to be pleased and encouraged when I could have the smallest part of it."

It was an excellent training for one who hoped to be an effective advocate of "novel and unpopular opinions"; and though it did not always work when the people to be conciliated were not of Mill's standard of education and reasonableness, it gave him on the whole a happy and useful life.

Concurrently with his new appointment, he was indulging in thought and discussion of a kind to take the place of the university education he had been denied. He was, of course, a Radical and a reformer; he could not well have been anything else, for he had been brought up by Bentham and his father to believe that organised religion and practically every other

established institution was wicked and subversive of human happiness—though it does not seem that he knew much about the actual effects of these institutions on the human creatures of his own day, against which the political reformers were struggling so fiercely; he accepted his instructions rather than examined them. But at sixteen he had found and read with huge delight M. Dumont's *Traité de Legislation,* in which the main lines of Bentham's pleasure-pain philosophy were set out. To a young mind already much attracted by science, particularly by the orderly classifications of botany and chemistry, the idea that it was possible to formulate a science of political government by the simple classification and addition of pleasures and pains seemed for the moment to solve all problems; and as soon as possible he turned into its enthusiastic propagandist. He wrote letters to the Press; he formed, in 1822, a discussion society of young men, meeting at Bentham's house, to which he gave the name Utilitarian, which has come to be the title of the whole Benthamite philosophy; he contributed long articles to the *Westminster Review* (founded in 1823 to give expression to the views of the philosophic Radicals) and to the *Parliamentary History and Review* started two years later; besides the Utilitarian circle he formed from among young men of his own age or slightly older more than one vigorous study group—one of which had a lively debate, lasting over three months, with the London followers of Owen; above all, he spent nearly two years in preparing for the press a treatise of Bentham's on Evidence, which owing to the peculiar way in which Bentham composed his work[1] and the utter unintelligibility of some of his involved and parenthetical sentences, was no light task even for the most faithful of disciples.

It was shortly after the completion of this dour assignment that Mill fell into the melancholia described in a previous paragraph, and one can hardly be surprised. But distressing as this experience was for him, it marked a definite advance in his development; for when the black clouds lifted at length,

[1] "Mr. Bentham had begun this treatise three times, at considerable intervals, each time in a different manner, and each time without reference to the preceding; two of the three times he had gone over nearly the whole subject. These three masses of manuscript it was my business to condense into a single treatise." (*Autobiography.*) It made, in the end, five large volumes.

he discovered that he was no longer a "pure" Benthamite, that he no longer believed that pleasures were all of the same kind and value and could be added and subtracted like so many shillings and pence, but that regard must be given to the quality as well as the quantity of any pleasure. "Better be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied" was his own way of putting it; and though that may seem to us nowadays to be a truism which hardly needs stating, it is of great importance for the development of democracy that the youngest and most persuasive exponent of the powerful Utilitarian point of view so early found out that the real happiness of mankind is to be achieved, not simply by taking together everything that any man would like[1] and adding it up to a grand arithmetical total, but by the much more subtle and difficult process of finding out how each individual could develop what was best in himself and so arranging society as to enable him to do so. It was this experience, and this conviction, which turned the young Mill from what he calls "a reasoning machine" into the eager defender of justice for women, for atheists, for striking workmen, for Jamaican negroes and for other unpopular causes which he afterwards became; it was this which prevented him from turning into an efficient civil servant without imagination.

The next few years were spent largely in thinking out, with the aid partly of discussion and partly of writing, his philosophic and political position; but they produced little for the outside world. He wrote a certain number of review articles, some essays on political economy which he did not publish, and began his treatise on Logic, but finding that he was not yet ready to write it put it aside for some years. In 1830, however, two events provided a further quickening to the emotional side of his life—the French Revolution of 1830 and his meeting with Helen Taylor.

The Revolution of 1830, in which Charles X, stupidest of all the Bourbons, was hustled from his throne after a very mild bout of street fighting, to be replaced by the middle-class king Louis Philippe, was small beer when compared to its great predecessor which had set Tom Paine's heart on fire. But to

[1] Which in practice as often as not meant what people like James Mill and Chadwick of the Poor Law thought he ought to like.

the liberals of Europe it was the first sign of hope, the first cracking of the iron system of reaction into which the 1816 Congress of Vienna had sought to bind the people. In England the miserable agricultural labourers, reading in Cobbett's *Register* the glowing accounts of the barricades and the "Days of July," lifted their heads and rose in their last despairing revolt against the enclosures, the Game Laws, and the parish overseers; political Radicals, their hopes already rising with the carrying of Catholic emancipation and the possible election of a House of Commons pledged to reform, hailed their comrades across the Channel; John Stuart Mill joyfully took his annual holiday from India House and hurried to Paris, where he met the veteran general Lafayette, hero not only of 1789 but before that of the American Revolution, and many other French leaders, and, more important, made personal acquaintance with the Saint-Simonian Socialists.

Just previously he had read some of the works of the Count de Saint-Simon, the father of French Socialism, and had been much impressed by them. He liked Saint-Simon much better than the Owenites, possibly because his ideas had a grand sweep of universality and Utopianism which was absent from the Owenism with which Mill had debated in 1825. In 1830 Enfantin and Bazard, two of the leading disciples of Saint-Simon, presented a letter to the President of the new Chamber of Deputies in which they comprehensively demanded the immediate abolition of all privileges, particularly those of inheritance, and that "tous les instruments du travail, les terres, et les capitaux," should be worked in association, on the principle from each according to his capacity, to each according to his performance—a project much more likely to fire the imagination of an intellectual young man of the comfortable classes than Villages of Co-operation and small associations of producers exchanging their labour. Mill never became a Socialist in the full sense; in 1830 he thought the "anti property doctrines" of the Socialists wrong and had no desire that they should be acted upon, but—a sign of his excitement at the time—he

> "hoped that they would spread widely among the poorer classes . . . in order that the higher classes might be made to

see that they had more to fear from the poor when uneducated than when educated."

Later on he modified this opinion and expressed the view that the only real objections to Socialism lay in the lack of education of the labouring classes and their "unfitness at present for the rights which Socialism would confer and the duties which it would impose." This was written in 1850. It is not surprising that, at that date, a man of Mill's occupation and upbringing, fresh from newspaper reading of the Chartist troubles (which he never went to see for himself) should have produced this first version of the phrase "Labour unfit to govern"; what is more important is that, so early in the century of triumphant individualism, one of its most prominent and most level-headed thinkers should have admitted that the principles of Socialism were right and that the only difficulties lay in its application. Here again Mill is the man of transition, standing between his Benthamite preceptors, to whom the security of property was paramount and Socialism, therefore, anathema, and the Socialism of Keir Hardie and the *Fabian Essays.*

In 1830, also, he met Helen Taylor, and one of the most curious, though not the least real, of nineteenth-century romances began. It must be clear, from the preceding pages, that John Stuart Mill, a warm-hearted though shy person, had been consistently starved in his natural affections. Of his father's treatment of him I have said enough—if their opinions on immediate political questions, such as the reform of Parliament and the Poor Law, had not been the same, they would almost certainly have quarrelled, since the younger Mill's private line of thought was diverging further and further from that of the elder. Of his mother he writes practically nothing; he had been forced to play schoolmaster to his brothers and sisters; and his friendships were the ordinary friendships of young men, fleeting and liable to come to an end through differences of taste, separation in space, or for a hundred other reasons. In 1830, however, when he was just under twenty-five, he met a young woman of twenty-two, Mrs. Helen Taylor, married to a drysalter and wholesale druggist a good deal older than herself, in whose grandfather's garden at

Newington Green Mill she had been taken to play as a child. Mrs. Taylor was delicate, almost an invalid; she had been married very young to a man whom she respected but did not love, and who shared none of her intellectual interests. She was very glad to meet young Mill, and to talk with him of politics, literature and life; and he on his side was delighted. We do not know how rapidly the friendship progressed, for Mill was very reticent about the progress of his own emotions, merely saying that he soon found out that she possessed all the qualities which he had ever admired in anyone else; but we do know that he was soon very deeply in love, and that her husband showed remarkable patience and understanding, always arranging to be out to dinner when Mill came to see his wife.

They were not lovers in the common sense of the term; there was no question of divorce, and they were not married until 1851, two years after Mr. Taylor's death. The friendship, however, was marked enough to cause a good deal of talk: Mill's family did not approve[1]—which cannot have made his life in his father's house any easier for him—and some of his friends drew gradually aside. But any inconveniences were amply repaid him by his passionate appreciation of Mrs. Taylor's qualities. To the end of her life—she died of pneumonia in 1858, just after Mill had retired from the India House—he never ceased to admire her above all created beings and to say so in language, for him, unusually unrestrained. In his autobiography he compares her to Shelley, adding that "Shelley was but a child compared with what she ultimately became"; and his eloquent encomia occasionally amused some of his sympathetic friends, one of whom is on record as remarking "Mrs. Taylor was a clever woman, but nothing like what John took her to be." Be that as it may, she certainly satisfied Mill to the full, both in heart and mind; much of his later writing, notably his two most famous short books, *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*, were composed in collaboration with her. "She made me," he says, "less of a democrat" (by which he meant less of a doctrinaire, head-counting democrat who assumed that people of whatever class and whatever upbringing naturally acted in so rational a manner as to bring about

[1] His mother and sisters refused even to recognise his marriage.

the happiness of themselves and of everybody else, and that all that was needed was to vote oneself into perfection without any fundamental change in institutions) "and more of a Socialist"; and there is no doubt that her penetrating criticism and broad humanity, coupled with her strong and steady support and affection, gave him much of the power he had of continually attacking injustice and standing up for unpopular causes. After her death, his stepdaughter, also a Helen Taylor, continued to perform for him some of her mother's services; she acted as secretary, companion and critic.

In the 'thirties and 'forties, those years of bitter distress and Radical agitation, Mill, the quiet civil servant, was gradually forming his own mind and building up his position with the outside world. His health was not particularly good; in 1836 he had an obscure nervous illness which affected him for some months,[1] and another serious breakdown in 1839, when he was threatened with consumption and had to leave England. These accidents may have slowed down his work; they did not slow down his development. Like others, he was bitterly disappointed by the failure of the Reformed Parliament to go further, though he was still Malthusian enough strongly to defend the new Poor Law. He wrote in a letter to Herford, the coroner of Manchester—which, it will be remembered, was in the heart of the factory districts on which the refusal of outdoor relief had fallen most heavily and cruelly—

> "I am sorry to see in your circular the *ignorant and immoral doctrine* that the separation enforced in the Workhouse is among the sources of degradation and diminished self-respect to the pauper. *I consider it an essential part of the moral training which . . . the reception of public relief affords.*"[2]

He blamed the Radicals in Parliament for their cowardice and sheepishness, for leaving the initiative to hotheads like Hume and O'Connell, not quite understanding the difficulties

[1] Of which his father, unsympathetic as ever, wrote in a letter to another of his children, "John is still in rather a pining way; though, as he does not choose to tell the cause of his pining, he leaves other people to their conjectures."

[2] My italics. This letter was written in 1850; the Poor Law was one of the subjects on which Mill's academic preconceptions died hard. He had never been in the north.

of the great majority of men of property against which they struggled; he endeavoured to influence them by personal appeal and by articles in the Press—as an employee of the India House he was in the fortunate position of enjoying Civil Service conditions without suffering from Civil Service anonymity. At one time he made a serious attempt to turn Lord Durham, who had just quarrelled with the Whig Ministry over the administration of Canada, into the leader of the Radicals. There could have been no more unfortunate choice; for if there is one thing certain about Lord Durham it is that he was no Radical and that his extremely bad temper prevented him from co-operating for any length of time with anyone; but Mill had reason to believe that his backing of Durham's Canadian report at a critical moment ensured it being accepted, and thereby saved the Dominion of Canada from revolting from Britain and the elections at Ottawa from being for ever influenced by cries of "Victoria and Robert Peel!" as those of New York still are by cries of "George III and Lord North!"

For six years, from 1834 to 1840, he spent most of his spare time editing and contributing to another solid Radical periodical, the *London and Westminster Review*, in which, in order to promote the freest possible discussion, he set out the principle, since adopted by the Fabian Society, that every article should bear the name of its writer and should not be taken to bind the other contributors. In 1843, at long last, he published his *System of Logic*, and in 1847 followed it with *Principles of Political Economy*—the latter the first to owe much to the collaboration of Helen Taylor, who, its author tells us, was responsible for the inclusion therein of the important chapter on the future of the working classes.

These two books had a success which astonished Mill's modesty. They are not much read nowadays, for thinking on both subjects has gone a good deal beyond what Mill's contemporaries of the 'forties were discussing, and they have not the perennial freshness of the essay *On Liberty*. But the *Logic*, particularly because of its author's interest in scientific method, helped many to formulate their thoughts and their arguments, and *Political Economy* made sense for those of its own day of the social and political problems of the new indus-

[1] See *Letters of John Stuart Mill*, edited by Hugh Elliott.

trial world which was struggling so painfully into existence. Mill revised *Political Economy* more than once, each time moving further in the direction of Socialism; but although he continued to write articles and to conduct long and earnest correspondence with a great number of people, "many of them quite unknown to me," he published nothing more until *On Liberty*, on which he was working for three years with his wife, who died before the final revision was complete. Immediately afterwards, when thoughts of the second Reform Act were in the air (though not to be brought to earth for eight years), he issued a pamphlet, *Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform*, in which he proposed that additional votes should be given to "proved superiority of education," though without indicating how the superiority was to be proved. Later on he became converted, by the eloquence of a Mr. Hare, to Proportional Representation, and thought no more of plural voting for the intelligent.

In 1860 he published a treatise called *Considerations on Representative Government*, and in the following year a collection of papers on *Utilitarianism*. These, with the *Subjection of Women* (written in 1861 while still strongly under the influence of his wife but not published until 1869) and his deeply interesting and candid autobiography, published in the year of his death, complete the tale of his important published books. In his later life, as through his correspondence he became more and more interested in getting his ideas known and discussed among working-men, he issued at his own expense cheap editions of *Political Economy, Liberty* and *Representative Government.*

In 1858, when he left the India House, having refused the Government's offer of a seat on the new Indian Council of State, and took his wife to Avignon, he believed that he had settled, at the early age of fifty-two, into a purely literary existence. His interest in politics, even what he called "practical politics," had not in the least waned; but he preferred to look at them from a distance, and an amusing and characteristic passage in his autobiography explains how "modern facilities of communication"—i.e. the post—have made it an advantage to a writer on politics to live far off the scene about which he is writing, because he can get all the

facts from the newspapers and need not be distracted and confused by "personal contact with individuals." Others, however, thought otherwise, moved by the strong good sense and courage of his writings on public affairs, particularly during the American Civil War, when he was horrified by "the rush of nearly the whole of the upper and middle classes of my own country, even those who passed for Liberals, into a furious pro-Southern partisanship"—from which, he noted with pleasure, the working classes, even those Lancashire spinners and weavers who suffered the greatest hardship from the cutting-off of the American cotton supply, were immune; and in 1865, when the long-overdue death of Lord Palmerston brought about a general election, he found that his national reputation had risen so high that he received, rather to his surprise, an invitation to stand for Westminster.

Westminster in 1865 was not the exceptional constituency which it had been in the days of Place and Burdett; the Reform Act had deprived the working-class elements of the vote and confined it, as elsewhere, to the middle classes. It seemed doubtful, therefore, whether Mill would stand much chance, particularly as he had no local connections and would stand under no party banner. He accepted the invitation as a public duty; but added to his handicaps by telling the committee which invited him that it was against his principles to spend any of his own money on election costs or to canvass, though he was willing to attend one or two public meetings in order to answer questions about his opinions—other than on religion;[1] that, if elected, he could not undertake to give any time or labour to the local interests of Westminster or the personal interests of the electors; further, that he would regard it as his duty to press in Parliament both for his private love, Proportional Representation, and for the enfranchisement of women on the same terms as men—a proposal which at that date commended itself to no party, which horrified Gladstone, the new Liberal leader, to the marrow of his bones, and made Queen Victoria, in her own words, "so *furious* that the Queen cannot contain herself." On such a programme, said a candid

[1] He had been brought up without religious belief, by a father who believed all religions to be morally wicked; but, like many nineteenth-century unbelievers, he did not discuss his religious views in public.

political observer, the Almighty himself would not stand a chance of election. Mill duly presented himself for public question, but courted no cheap popularity; when asked by an elector whether he had in fact written that the British working class, though differing from those of some other countries in being ashamed of lying, were yet generally liars, he replied stoutly, "Yes, I did," and was greeted with storms of applause. Apparently the Westminster electors of 1865 liked outspoken honesty for a change; the cynical political observer was confounded, and Mill elected by a majority of several hundreds—equal to many thousands on the register of to-day.

Mill sat in Parliament for three years, during which he made it his business, as an independent member, to take on the jobs which nobody else was likely to do, especially in connection with questions on which his views were in advance of official Liberal politicians—which were many. As he grew older, Mill became more and more sceptical about the general run of Liberals, particularly because of their attitude to the American Civil War, their opposition to the Continental revolutions of 1848 and (on quasi-imperialist grounds) to the cutting of the Suez Canal, and their behaviour towards the working classes, and he uttered the rueful reflection that

> "I have learnt from experience that many false opinions may be exchanged for true ones, without in the least altering the habits of which false opinions are the result"

—a lesson which many ardent propagandists have yet to learn.

To-day, the best-remembered of his Parliamentary campaigns is his attempt to secure the enfranchisement of women; in 1866 he presented a petition on their behalf (brought to the House of Commons by the young Emily Davies and the young Elizabeth Garrett[1] and concealed, until Mill appeared to take delivery, under an applewoman's wares); and when the second Reform Bill, which gave the vote to the town artisans, was passing through he moved an amendment to give it on the same terms to women in a speech so compelling that nearly eighty members, including the obstinate opponent John Bright, voted in favour of a suggestion which the influential

[1] The first the founder of Girton College, and the second the first English woman doctor.

Press had considered to be a joke in rather poor taste. But he fought also on behalf of many other causes. Twenty years before the L.C.C. came into existence he tried, almost single-handed and against a dead weight of indifference, to secure a genuine municipal government for London; he defended the Fenian insurgents in Ireland in speeches which infuriated frightened Liberals, and proposed security of tenure and fixed rents for the Irish peasantry—a suggestion implemented by a Liberal Government long afterwards, when it was already too late; he defeated an attempt to destroy the "right of asylum" in Britain by allowing foreign despotisms to extradite at their own will those who were accused of conspiring against them; he tried unsuccessfully to reduce the permitted expenses of candidates at elections and to extend the Bribery Acts to cover corruption in local elections; he took part in the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, which legalised prostitution for the Army,[1] and by acting as a mediator between the London working-class Reformers, who put complete trust in him, and the Government, he persuaded the former not to riot in demanding the vote and the latter to grant it in the end. At the time, however, the effort which gained him most public attention was his attack on Governor Eyre.

Edward John Eyre, an emigrant Australian sheep-farmer who in 1864 became Governor of Jamaica, put down with panic violence local disturbances which he exaggerated into "a premeditated rebellion," executing hundreds by court martial and even out of hand. When the news of his efforts reached England, the majority of unthinking people were at first disposed to exonerate and even to thank the Governor—as in 1919 congratulations were offered to General Dyer, the hero of the Amritsar massacre—for his display of firmness and his efforts to save the British flag. A minority, however, was both shocked and indignant and formed a Jamaica Association of protest, which Mill, who was abroad at the time, hurried home to join, and became its chairman. For two years Mill and the Association carried on the fight, in Parliament and in the courts, to get Eyre brought to justice; and though in the end the solid support of the British middle classes stood by their representative, the grand jury at the Old Bailey throwing out

[1] See page 162.

the bill which would have brought him to trial, they had at least, as Mill says, not without irony,

> "given an emphatic warning to those who might be tempted to similar guilt hereafter that, though they might escape the actual sentence of a criminal tribunal, they were not safe against being put to some trouble and expense in order to avoid it."

Mill was not, it is reported, a very good speaker, but inclined to be shrill and academic. Nevertheless, this is not a bad record for the work of three years only.

The Eyre case earned him a good deal of unpopularity among the stupider of his constituents—the type which writes abusive letters—and when the next general election followed almost immediately the Tories, who had found him a much more awkward M.P. than they had expected, made a determined effort to unseat him; nor were the Liberals, for whom he was far too advanced, anything but lukewarm in his support.[1] What finally settled his fate, however, was his sending a contribution to the election fund of Charles Bradlaugh, that avowed and combatant atheist.

> "I thought," says Mill, "that men of his sort, who, while sharing the democratic feelings of the working classes, judged political questions for themselves, and had courage to assert their individual convictions against popular opposition, were needed in Parliament, and I did not think that Mr. Bradlaugh's anti-religious opinions (even though he had been intemperate in the expression of them) ought to exclude him."

Mill may have thought so, but so did not others; and in 1868 he lost his seat. He was offered several other constituencies, but preferred to accept the Westminster verdict, and retired to Avignon, where five years later he died of a chill following a long walk. As a kind of swan song to his life in Parliament he wrote, in answer to a group of Chelsea working-men who deplored his lost seat, that the Liberal Party ought now to recognise the right of working-men to a fair share of Parlia-

[1] Bain, who liked him, remarks that "his idea of ventilating questions that had as yet hardly any supporters appears to me to have been carried to extremes."

mentary seats, that in double-barrelled constituencies one candidate should be chosen by working-men and in the others the candidate selected by mutual agreement. It was then assumed that any working-class candidate would stand as a Liberal; and if the Liberals had not been too snobbish and class-conscious to take Mill's advice they might have postponed for many years the arrival of a Labour Party.

Mill's life does not make "exciting" reading; he comes within an ace of being the most perfect example of what is called an armchair politician. But he indicates also what an armchair politician who is absolutely unswerving in principle,[1] while prepared to understand other people's points of view and to meet them where possible, can do in influence and even achievement. The great tract *On Liberty,* which Charles Kingsley found in a bookshop and read through at a sitting, rising to say, "It has made me a clearer-headed and braver-minded man on the spot," is as fresh to-day as when it was written, and since Kingsley's day it has performed the same service for many. Its author is one of the best specimens of English liberalism (with a small "l") at its very best; and it is not without significance that his thought was leading him steadily and directly towards Socialism.

[1] In small matters as well as great; while in Parliament he refused an invitation to dine formally with Mr. Speaker because he would not put on the requisite formal attire, and he told the R.S.P.C.A. that he would consent to become their Vice-President when they attacked the cruel pleasures of the rich, e.g. pigeon-shooting, with as much zeal as they did those of the poor.

SETTING TWO

IN the opening chapter of this book I spoke of the revolution which never happened, and in the lives of Owen and O'Connor we have seen the story of its defeat, the failure of the early Co-operatives, the early Trade Unionists, and the Chartists, in their head-on collision with the united upper and middle classes. But the absence of physical revolution does not mean that no change occurs; and in fact between England of the 'forties and England of the late 'fifties and early 'sixties there was a change in the economic and political climate so great as almost to deserve the adjective revolutionary. 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, that darling project of the Prince Consort, which showed the world the advances made by British industrialism during the past half-century,[1] is as good a date as any to mark the change from an era of insecurity, misery and unrest to one of comparative peace and prosperity which lasted for a quarter of a century.

Various factors came together to bring this about. On the economic side they include the discoveries of gold in California and Australia, which raised the level of wholesale prices more rapidly than that of retail prices and so encouraged production, and the beginnings of rapid railway-building in foreign countries, which resulted in expansion of employment in the heavy industries and a huge increase in British overseas investment at handsome profits in enterprises more stable and rational than the South Sea Company or the wild ventures of the eighteen-twenties. (A better balanced economy might have been achieved, and some of the troubles of the end of the century averted, if the investing classes had been less anxious to get rich quick and had employed more of their surplus in promoting production for the home market and in raising the

[1] Not in "mass production," for the steel age was yet to come. Save in engineering, locomotive-building, bridge-construction and deep mining, the Exhibition was for the most part a display of what we should nowadays call craftsmanship and petty industry.

wages of their workers; but they were no longer-sighted than their American counterparts of the inter-war years.)

After the bad times of the 'forties, there was good trade, with only two serious breaks, nearly to the end of the 'seventies. Good trade meant steady employment and fewer periods of sheer starvation; and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, though it did not bring cheap bread until steel had opened up the Western prairie-lands to corn-growing, at least did eliminate the violent fluctuations. The cost of living began relatively to decline, and wages to rise, very slowly at first, but faster later. The increasing wealth of the rich was beginning to filter down to the middle and lower-middle layers, if not to the very bottom, and more goods were being manufactured for the rising wages to buy. At the same time those groups which the Industrial Revolution had superseded had been gradually disappearing; the handloom weavers, the stockingers, and other relics of earlier techniques had been starved out of existence; the ruthless operation of the new Poor Law had succeeded to some extent in redistributing redundant village populations to places where they would at least be utilised; the railway boom of the late 'forties had picked up and employed a fair amount of unskilled "navvy" labour and emigration had drained off some more. The process was very painful and reflected no credit on the humanity of anyone concerned in its direction; but at least the final result was better than previous conditions. Moreover, as industry became more complicated, it began to demand rather more of its workers, at least in the upper grades. Drunkenness, bad timekeeping, and complete illiteracy became a practical nuisance to the employer as well as simply sinful; the worker was encouraged to be respectable, to learn to read and write,[1] and even—after the introduction of limited liability in 1855 and the passing of various Acts to protect friendly society funds—to save and to invest. The "dangerous mob" picture of the people was slowly giving way to that of the potential citizen joining with other potential citizens in respectable law-abiding groups, and being encouraged to take an intelligent interest in public affairs.

Alongside these economic changes went changes in social life. The reformed Parliament, though it obstinately refused

[1] Instead of being told it would put ideas into his head.

to reform itself further until 1867, did go a considerable way towards reform of other institutions. This process had begun, actually, before 1850; the old corrupt town governments died in 1835; the worst horrors of mining were checked by the 1842 Mines Act; and in 1847, the year of blackest depression, the Ten Hours Act gave the first really effective protection to factory employees; the Public Health Commission, dismissed in 1848 partly because of Chadwick's[1] intolerably bureaucratic temper, had yet fought hard against the disease-bearing squalor of the towns. But after the final defeat of Chartism and the 1848 revolutions in Europe, as the red bogy of working-men rising on the French model to murder their masters gradually lost some of its lurid colouring, the process was quicker and went on under Liberal and Tory governments alike. Public-health authorities were set up; the secret ballot was introduced; the terrible delays and expenses of the law were lessened; working-class organisations were given more legal recognition; Adulteration Acts brought some protection against poisoning by shopkeepers; State education was achieved at long last, and even a very small gesture made in the direction of improving the horrible housing of the working classes. Compared with modern standards, of course, the improvement was slight; anyone translated back into the conditions under which most workers lived in 1860 would probably describe them as appalling squalor and oppression. But they were improving; and what was more important they looked as if they would improve still more. There was hope in the 'fifties; in O'Connor's day there was none.

Men like Mitchell and Applegarth had been children in the bad days, but as they grew up they came into the changed climate which, indeed, their own efforts helped to change still further. They, with many others, were building a new Labour movement, and what they made was not lost in the storms of the last quarter of the century, when the pleasant growth of prosperity was violently checked again, in the great depression which began in 1878, when the flood of cheap American corn made British farming stagger, when the great overgrowth of

[1] The same Chadwick who was responsible for the Poor Law. But his public-health efforts were much more imaginative, and produced far less gratuitous suffering.

the heavy industries produced slumps and the beginning of mass unemployment, and led to adventures in imperialism which at length exploded in war, and when the stream of social reforms died down to a trickle. The later characters in this book came in their young manhood into a world which was discovering that neither Victorian inventions nor Victorian virtues had solved the problem of poverty, and that the Labour movement would have to think again—and to think for itself. But the continuity was never broken; the working-class associations formed in the 'fifties were not fought to pieces, as the earlier ones had been; the second Labour movement begins almost with the disappearance of O'Connor from the stage, and continues, growing and changing a great deal, but still essentially the same movement, right down to the present time.

JOHN MITCHELL

(1828–1895)

The three great forces for the improvement of mankind are religion, temperance and co-operation; and, as a commercial force, supported and sustained by the other two, co-operation is the grandest, noblest, and most likely to be successful in the redemption of the industrial classes.

Mitchell, Address to Rochdale Co-operative Congress

If it [the Wholesale's method of organising production] is loyally supported and indefinitely extended it will *solve all social problems, destroy poverty, eradicate crime and secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number.* (My italics.)

Mitchell, quoted in Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship*

THE next two names in this portrait gallery carry us into the heart of mid-Victorianism, far away from the starvation and the ideals of the Corresponding Societies, the Owenites and the Chartists to the days of growing commercial prosperity, when the rapid increase of England's wealth had at last begun to filter through to the industrial workers, and their organisations ceased to agitate for millennial moons but asked instead for strictly limited—though sometimes far-reaching—reforms and set before themselves, above all, the goal of being respectable, safe and strong. John Mitchell, chief leader of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and Robert Applegarth, the carpenters' organiser, who fought Bright and Gladstone over the status of Trade Unionism, will serve as the prototypes of this age—Mitchell, perhaps, the more emphatically, because with all his merits the extreme narrowness of his outlook, his identification of the co-operative ideal in which he believed so strongly with a particular organisation whose development he could control, illustrates very clearly one danger which any movement, however idealistic in origin, must face on its way to strength and power—the danger of valuing the organisation itself above its purposes. Mitchell believed in co-operation; so did Owen, at any rate for a good part of his life. But no two men could well have believed in it more differently. Owen valued the Co-operative Movement

simply as a means to his vision of the good life; when the Co-operative Movement seemed unlikely to achieve his ends he dropped it with no more concern for the wasted effort and the broken hearts of those who had served it than if he were selling an unsatisfactory machine for scrap: Mitchell believed that the C.W.S. *was* the ideal of co-operation, and in his support of it nearly succeeded in taking all the idealism out of the Co-operative Movement as a whole. For this reason, as well as for his many limitations, he is not the most attractive or colourful of characters; but movements are not built up by the romantic alone.

John Thomas Whitehead Mitchell was born out of wedlock to a working woman in Rochdale who let lodgings to working-men and kept a beershop, until her son's earnings enabled her to do without the income from the latter. His mother's people were in the hat trade, and her father one of the members of a past co-operative society started at Rochdale about 1833—ten years before the more famous Pioneers; of his father nothing is known, though he was believed to have been a man of good social position. Mrs. Mitchell's life, a bitter struggle with poverty in the worst years, was entirely devoted to her son, to bringing him up to be healthy, virtuous and a good Christian. Until he began to be a wage-earner, she would scarcely let him out of her sight except to go to the National School in Red Cross Street; she would not let him mix with other boys or join in any games lest it should bring out latent traits of his father; and he on his part repaid her with a single-minded and deep devotion.

> "I used to think it strange," wrote Sir William Maxwell, chairman of the C.W.S., "to hear an elderly man speaking of his mother with such affection."

Otherwise feminine romance had practically no meaning for Mitchell. For some years in middle life, when he was superintendent of Milton Church Sunday school, he seems to have been engaged to a Miss Elizabeth Wynn, a teacher in the same school. She is said to have been "a fine woman, rather like Mr. Mitchell himself in appearance,[1] though very odd at times,"

[1] This, if true, was unfortunate for the lady; for Mitchell was no beauty—bald as a coot at a very early age, big and beefy running to corpulence, with fat fists with which he thumped the table to emphasise his points.

and Mitchell to have been "very kind to her." This does not sound like passionate affection; and after the connection, whatever it was, had gone on for over ten years, Mitchell himself, getting tired of the regular jokes made about it in his Sunday-school circle, went to see the lady, and thereafter, he said, "bothered no more." What happened to Miss Wynn is not known; but Mitchell never again became involved in any degree with a woman. After his mother's death in 1855 he had gone to lodge with a fellow co-operator, Abraham Howard; but shortly afterwards Howard moved to Liverpool, and Mitchell settled himself in a grim little house next door to his own woollen warehouse, being looked after first by caretakers, and later by a man named Thomas Butterworth, whom he had befriended after his serving a prison sentence for stealing from the Rochdale Society. It is a trifle odd, in view of his personal integrity and his worship of the Co-operative Movement, that Mitchell should have been willing to countenance anyone who stole from it; but he was well repaid. Butterworth became his devotee and confidant, and only survived his patron's death by a few days.

Mitchell's mother tried to do the best for her son; but she could not save him for long from working for his living. Before he was twelve he had become a "little piecer" at eighteen-pence a week at the Townshend Cotton Mill, where he worked from six in the morning till seven at night for eight years—his wages presumably rising during the period—until in 1848 he was offered a job in the warehouse of a flannel mill belonging to a Mr. Pagan, teacher of the young men's class at the Sunday school, at sixteen shillings a week. Sixteen shillings is not to our eyes an enormous wage; but in 1848 it was a very respectable remuneration for a lad of twenty, and as Mitchell stayed at Pagan's for nearly twenty years, rising to be manager of the warehouse, until in 1867 he left it to set up in business for himself, it will be seen that he was well removed from grinding poverty—especially as he had no family to support and no tastes which cost him anything worth mentioning.

He began like the perfect "good boy of the industrious classes"; in his few holidays and on Sundays he attended classes, first in reading and writing (which does not suggest that the National School had done much to earn his mother's

pennies) and then in "more serious subjects." In 1846 he joined the Sunday school of the Providence Independent Chapel,[1] and there learned to take part in discussion, with the result that next year he became a teetotaller and signed a total abstinence pledge (from beer as well as from spirits) to the considerable annoyance of his mother, who felt that this was going to quite unnecessary extremes, as well as casting reflection upon her previous method of earning their living; notwithstanding her opposition, however, he found in the Rochdale Temperance Society a very congenial home. He never became, in the remotest sense of the word, a well-read man: his main standby was the Bible, and though he liked *Hudibras* and the poems of Crabbe, and had read some Milton, he would never look at Shakespeare, or Carlyle or Ruskin or any other of the social preachers whose words were rousing working-men in the 'sixties and 'seventies. In later years he read the *Economist*, the Free Trade publications of the Cobden Club, and, of course, the publications of the Co-operative Movement. His enthusiastic biographer, Percy Redfern, says that "with the ideals of the prophets in his soul and a close grip upon what was to him a perfect material means to their realisation, he could surpass Shakespeare's exiled dukes and find poetry in balance sheets"; the suggestion is unconvincing. In 1853 he joined the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers' Society; and, though at first he played no prominent part in it, he was on the Committee in 1856, and in 1857 became its part-time secretary. Though he never deserted either the Sunday school or the cause of temperance, he had now found his main life's work.

The Rochdale Pioneers, founded in 1844 at the famous shop in Toad Lane, and generally regarded as the fathers of the modern Co-operative Movement, were already by 1853 a body very different from the earlier co-operative societies which Owen had blithely ordered to form a new social world. It was not so much that their original intentions were different, for, as G. D. H. Cole has pointed out in *A Century of Co-operation*, about half of the original twenty-eight Pioneers were Owenite Socialists who, like Owen, intended to found as soon as they could a co-operative living community—though

[1] In 1854 he became a teacher in the school, and later its superintendent until his death.

on a rather less magnificent and expensive scale than Owen's venture at Queenwood—and the "dividend on purchase," which is commonly supposed to be the great distinction between the old co-operative societies and the new, was not invented by them, but had been practised by more than one society in the early days. But whatever their intentions, they were working under very different circumstances; the older co-operation had been beaten along with the older Trade Unionism, and the strikes and petitions of Chartism had also gone down to defeat. Co-operative communities were at the most a hope for the far distant future, even though the Pioneers included the founding of a community in their first statement of purposes; in the meantime, mutual trade and pure food were the immediate ideals.

A Century of Co-operation gives a list of the guiding principles of the twenty-eight working-men (the majority of them flannel-weavers) who on December 21st, 1844, with a trading capital of twenty-eight pounds, opened, on two evenings a week, a shop slenderly stocked with a narrow range of groceries—tea and tobacco were added in the New Year, and butcher's meat a year later. They were: first, democratic control, each member of the Society having one vote and one vote only in its administration, a practice which is in direct contradiction to that of trading companies and which still holds good in the enormous Co-operative Movement of to-day; second, membership on equal terms to all who chose to join, subject to a minimum purchase of five pounds' worth of shares (which might be bought by instalments); third, a fixed or limited interest on all share capital; fourth, the distribution of the surplus, when collective costs, including the share interest and the two and a half per cent earmarked for "education," had been met, by payment of a dividend to all members in proportion to the amount of their purchases. This device of the "divi," though not new,[1] was the greatest single factor in the growth of co-operation from 1850 onwards. It encouraged the members to stand by their societies and whenever they could afford it to plough back their small savings into the

[1] It had been known in the Owenite days. But Owen and his chief supporters tended to dislike it, as they wished to see all surpluses devoted to the building of communities and not put back into the members' pockets. But Owen was not generally impressed by such humdrum activities as shopkeeping.

business by acquiring new shares; while perfectly democratic in operation, it nevertheless held out the hope of reward to those who exhibited co-operative virtue by spending more at "t'Store";[1] moreover, since the housewife was generally the chief purchaser, even when her husband was the actual member, the "divi" provided an easy means of saving up for such "capital expenditure" as children's boots or a frying-pan (or a Christmas treat) without the risk of plain theft which attached to private goose or slate clubs. (The Rochdale Society was further assisted by the failure in 1849 of the Rochdale Savings Bank, many of whose defrauded depositors turned to the Co-op.)

The fifth principle was cash trading and no credit, which was very important in the days when so many working-class families were permanently in debt to their tradesmen—even though it did inevitably exclude the poorest strata, who never knew where to turn, from the benefits of co-operation. Mid-Victorian co-operation, like mid-Victorian Trade Unionism, benefited the better-off workers, whose numbers were steadily increasing. The sixth was to sell only pure and unadulterated foods—vital in the days before the Adulteration Acts and the inspectorate, when the city-dwelling poor were at the mercy of fraudulent tommy-shops and the sand-in-the-sugar grocer. The Pioneers were under no temptation to earn higher dividends by poisoning themselves and their fellows. The seventh was the education of members in co-operative principles—which has been implemented in very differing degree by different societies; and the eighth was "religious and political neutrality," which implied that the Pioneers refused to label themselves Owenite atheists, and that they intended to remain officially neutral as between the various political faiths—Socialism, Chartism, anti-Corn Law Leaguism—which in the 'forties were competing for working-class support. It did not mean that their members were Tories, for before the second Reform Act Tories were not soliciting the votes of working-men. In practice, most co-operators tended to be Liberals, verging towards Labour after the foundation of the Labour

[1] At a very early stage, the question of penalising those members who dealt also with other tradesmen was mooted, but rejected. The Rochdale men preferred to rely on the consciences of their members rather than on compulsion.

Party; but until 1917, when Lloyd George's government suggested that the "divi" should be subjected to income tax, they had, as a body, no political policy at all.

These principles would certainly not have fired the imagination of Owen, and are not, indeed, themselves very breathtaking; they are a coral-insect programme, designed to appeal to those who had seen more ambitious edifices crumble to pieces almost before they had been started. But to the coral insects themselves the appeal was real enough, and even emotional. The running of the co-operative store was a joint venture in which all alike shared duty and responsibility—the item in the minutes, dated ten years after the opening of Toad Lane, which runs "That Cooper, the cashier, be exempt from coffee-grinding," shows how strictly the principle was interpreted: in addition, the society provided its members with social life, discussion and amusement, all on a basis of morality and equality. "Toad Lane on Saturday night," wrote G. J. Holyoake, the historian of the Pioneers, "while as gay as the Lowther Arcade in Piccadilly, is ten times more moral"; and, if this be reckoned rather exuberant partisanship, an unbiased witness, the young woman who afterwards became Mrs. Sidney Webb, visiting forty years later another small Lancashire town, noted[1] to what an extent its whole social life depended upon "t'owd Store" and the chapel. Mitchell himself was one of "t'Store's" most unyielding advocates; almost at the end of his life, when a well-meaning Rochdale minister had preached a sermon during the session of the Co-operative Congress in which he urged the members of the movement to aim at more than keeping grocery stores, to extend their principles to industry and the land, and to such social questions as housing and education, Mitchell denounced him from his seat as chairman of the Congress as one who was "a capital adviser on spiritual matters but not altogether reliable on co-operation," and, thumping the rostrum with his fist, shouted to the assembled delegates, "I say to you all—never despise the Store!"

In the early days of the movement, so restricted a view of its scope was by no means universal. We have seen that one of the original aims of the Rochdale Pioneers was to found an Owen-

[1] Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship.*

ite community on a modest scale when the time should be ripe; and their earliest financial resources were lessened by the fact that many of their members had taken up shares in O'Connor's illfated Land Company. In the late 'forties and early 'fifties, moreover, a group of middle-class "Christian Socialists," the best-known of whom were Frederick Denison Maurice, Charles Kingsley, Tom Hughes, the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, J. M. F. Ludlow and Edward Vansittart Neale, were fired[1] with the idea of an economic revolution carried out by non-violent means, i.e. without strikes and Chartist risings; and, alongside other groups, such as the Leeds Redemption Society, set about trying to form societies of co-operative producers all over the country and even a central agency for disposing of their products. The Christian Socialists were eloquent and appealing propagandists, and in Ludlow they had a tireless organiser of genius; at the beginning they gained a good deal of support among the working class, and even persuaded the new-founded Amalgamated Society of Engineers[2] to embark on co-operative production (unsuccessfully in the end). But the trend of events was not with them. Societies of industrial producers were not strong enough to compete with growing capitalism, even had they been able to solve for themselves the very difficult problems of how to govern themselves and how to divide the surplus, whether equally, or on a basis of earnings or of hours worked; and there were further troubles about the influence which the original capital, largely lent by middle-class supporters, was to be allowed to exercise, and about the impracticable desire of the promoters, particularly Maurice and Ludlow, to apply tests of Christianity to would-be members and reject those who did not come up to their own moral and theological standards. The movement, as a movement, came to an end in 1854. Societies of co-operative producers survive in a small way to this day, but the enormous extension of "co-operative principles" to industry has not come about through them but through "t'Store" itself commencing manufacturer *via* the C.W.S. The Christian Socialists had done the movement great

[1] Partly because of a visit of Ludlow to France, where in the early months of the 1848 Revolution the workers, under the inspiration of Louis Blanc, were trying to found self-governing societies of producers.

[2] See "Robert Applegarth."

service by helping it to get legal protection for its funds,[1] but were unable to persuade it to accept their views about morality in industry.

Ludlow and Neale stood staunchly by the co-operators when their fellows lost interest, and the latter was for many years secretary of the Co-operative Union (founded 1873). The first regular Co-operative Conference, held in London in 1869, attracted a good many middle-class wellwishers, including John Stuart Mill, the Earl of Lichfield and Florence Nightingale; but the end of the Christian Socialist connection spelt the gradual disappearance of middle-class interest and influence in the movement. Apart from the Irish agricultural societies, which stand on a quite different footing, the sole exception for a couple of generations was the magnificent and ill-recognised work of the late Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the chief maker of the Women's Co-operative Guild. (Beatrice Webb's brief interest as an observer hardly counts.) The modern Co-operative Movement grew up as an almost purely working-class affair; this certainly helped to produce its remarkable stability, but in the years to come, when it sought to expand into fields of production where design and imagination were important, its restricted outlook—"working-class boots, working-class brains, working-class margarine," as John Burns once crossly said—proved something of a handicap.

Mitchell's attitude to the Christian Socialists is not known; it may be inferred, however, both from his later attitude to the surviving productive societies,[2] and in the "bounty to labour" dispute which exercised the Co-operative Movement up to 1862. Eight years previously, the Rochdale Pioneers decided to go into the business of production by building a cotton mill at Mitchell Hey, west of the town. In a mill, there could be no dividend on purchases for the members; accordingly, the co-operative character of the undertaking was thought to be secured by giving a share in the profits, calculated on the amount of their wages, to the workers in the mill. This "bounty to labour" was at first fixed at four shillings in the

[1] Notably in the 1852 Industrial and Provident Societies Act.

[2] "There is *no higher form of co-operative production in the world*," he indignantly told Tom Hughes in 1887, "than the Wholesale Society manifested in its Co-operative Works!"

pound against two shillings in the pound to the shareholders (who might, of course, be workers in the mill as well); but the proportion was gradually altered in favour of the shareholders until after a long and acrimonious struggle the whole system was abolished in 1862. Rochdale men thus gave the lead to the Co-operative Movement to set its face against profit-sharing by employees, which had been one of the tenets of the Christian Socialists and was one of the favourite industrial panaceas of later "good employers." Mitchell, who had been one of the founders of the Manufacturing Society which ran the mill and was its chairman in 1860 and 1862, was strongly in favour of the abolition of the "bounty," and thereby earned the scorn and enmity of Holyoake. There is no evidence, however, that Mitchell did more than support the views of the majority of the shareholders, who in 1862 outnumbered their workers by ten to one, and who, being themselves working-men living on a working-man's wage, tended to regard the "bounty" as an unwarrantable subsidy taken from the mouths of themselves and their wives and children. The attitude is understandable enough, and the opposition to profit-sharing then manifested was an opposition shared by both Trade Unionists and Socialists; nevertheless the feeling was that it was wrong for employees of the Co-operative Movement to be better off financially than its members for many years hampered both that movement itself and the new Trade Unionism (as well as offshoots such as the Labour Party) in obtaining efficient service after they had begun to grow beyond the coral-reef stage. "The proportion of the salaries they pay to their receipts is very small," says Holyoake of the Pioneers. This was true, and continued to be true for many years for all co-operative institutions; it does not, however, redound wholly to the credit of the co-operators, or make for imaginative efficiency. Mitchell himself was a business man of great ability for whom the ordinary rewards of business ability held no temptations; but not all potential Co-operative officials were Mitchells.

Mitchell had won himself some reputation, both as secretary of the Pioneers and through his connection with the Manufacturing Society. But his development into a national leader and the most forceful of Co-operative personalities did not take place until after the establishment in 1862–4 of the C.W.S., to

whose board he was elected in 1869, becoming chairman in 1874 and remaining chairman until his death.

He did not invent wholesale co-operative trading. As far back as 1853 the Rochdale minutes succinctly order "Joseph Clegg to look after the wholesale department" for serving members who wanted to buy in bulk; but the Rochdale wholesale department went through a number of vicissitudes, and no real development of wholesale trade was possible until an amendment of the law,[1] procured largely through the efforts of middle-class Parliamentary supporters such as John Bright, had extended to co-operative societies the privilege of limited liability and given them powers to federate or to act jointly. As a result of this Act the Co-operative Wholesale Society came into being. It was not founded by Mitchell, but by William Cooper and Abraham Greenwood, an eager ex-Chartist who joined the Rochdale Society in 1846, undertook a great deal of pioneering work in the provision of education, newsrooms and discussion meetings, was president for a long time of a productive venture, the Rochdale Corn Mill Society, and had been planning and agitating for a wholesale society for years. Greenwood was one of the liveliest personalities among the early working-class co-operators; but for some reason, possibly because he was a strong supporter of the rejected practice of the "bounty to labour," he soon ceased to carry the same weight as Mitchell, though they were close colleagues. He left the chairmanship of the C.W.S. in 1870, to become later the manager of its banking department.

This chapter cannot chronicle in detail the steady and almost uniform growth through all their difficulties of the consumers' Co-operative Movement and its wholesale organ during the twenty years of Mitchell's chairmanship. (He was never a full-time official; in 1867, in order to get more freedom, he had resigned his job as manager and set up on his own as a merchant, selling mostly cotton cloth woven at the Mitchell Hey mill, but he never regarded his business as more than a useful occupation which enabled him to live and move about without becoming a charge on the co-operators.[2]) Suffice it to

[1] Industrial and Provident Societies Act, 1862.

[2] In 1885, the members of the Board were promoted to receive 7s. 6d. per meeting and second-class railway fares. Percy Redfern reckons that Mitchell may have received £150 a year from this source; Beatrice Webb puts it at less.

say that the growth was rapid. The banking department had been opened two years before he became chairman, though as a member of the Board he had to take a part in the very considerable troubles of its early days; in the following year (1873) the C.W.S., having decided to go into manufacture, bought a biscuit works and a boot factory, and thereafter proceeded to mill corn, to make cloth, cocoa and clothing, to enter cabinet-making, and (in the year before Mitchell's death) to start a printing works. In 1876 it acquired its first ship, the *Plover*, forerunner of a considerable merchant fleet; and in the same year it opened in New York the first of a series of overseas depôts. Its affiliated membership rose in the twenty years from 198,000 to nearly a million, and its net sales from two to ten million pounds.

Mitchell was thus presiding over an up-and-coming concern, on whose policy he succeeded in impressing his own principles and methods. There is considerable evidence to show that as a chairman he was as dictatorial as a strong personality with a loud commanding voice can be in a democratic assembly of tough working-men.

> "He could instinctively feel when to take a vote," wrote Mr. Goodwin, manager of the C.W.S. Bank in 1923. "Summing up a discussion in a few words, he would obtain a decision—of course, the decision desired by the chair—before the delegates fully realised what had happened";

and others have recorded their recollection of his roaring "Sit down! sit *down!*" to delegates who tried to prolong a discussion which he thought had gone on long enough. But he was not in the least an irresponsible autocrat. His policy was clear and definite: first to promote and increase C.W.S. expansion wherever it seemed politic and reasonably safe, which included some enterprises which seemed unsafe to the more timid of his colleagues; second, to advance the interests of the individual co-operative societies out of which the C.W.S. was built, and the interests of the individual co-operators out of whose pence the societies were built; third, to uphold production by the C.W.S. as against "producers' co-operation"[1] or self-governing

[1] In this connection he took a leading and acrimonious part in the violent quarrel which ended in the severance of the Irish co-operative movement, led by Sir Horace Plunkett, from the C.W.S. Mitchell knew nothing about farming and, like the Webbs before they went to the U.S.S.R., could not realise that, in a peasant country, producers' co-operation was both natural and inevitable.

workshops; fourth, to oppose consistently any suggestion to apply the bounty system or any form of profit-sharing to C.W.S. employment; fifth, to make the C.W.S. a "good employer" by capitalist standards. In this last endeavour he was sometimes in advance of his own colleagues, as when, in 1887, he vainly endeavoured to induce them to establish a superannuation scheme, observing characteristically that the idea was "not merely benevolent but prudent." His colleagues disagreed, and thought it absurd extravagance; it was inevitable that as the Co-operative Movement became an association of consumers, and not very well-off consumers, it should, however good its intention, develop to some extent the mentality of small employers. Nevertheless Mitchell stoutly maintained—and believed—that the happiest lot for any workman was to be employed by co-operators; and when, in 1886, the workers in the C.W.S. boot factory at Leicester showed their disagreement with this view by going on strike and the remnants of the Christian Socialists declared that this showed the soullessness and iniquity of C.W.S. production, he lost his temper and shouted that "the Wholesale had been grievously slandered."

Teetotalism and the Sunday school apart, the Co-operative Movement was Mitchell's whole life. He never contemplated a political career, though in 1893 and 1894 he contested the local elections in Rochdale, but was defeated by the rising resentment of the local tradesmen.[1] His devotion to co-operation is sometimes slightly comic, as when, on going on a deputation to the United States, he had made for him a bag specially designed to hold copies of the C.W.S. balance sheets, of which he presented one, with enormous satisfaction, to the President. The only honorific decoration which he ever received was the order of the Golden Cross presented to him by the King of Greece—as a recognition of the C.W.S.'s large purchase of currants. But the devotion was unswerving; he never took a halfpenny from the movement beyond what he had legitimately earned; and when he died practically in harness the total sum of his estate was three hundred and fifty pounds. Seldom

[1] In the early days, Rochdale shopkeepers were not unfriendly to the Pioneers, possibly regarding them as too insignificant to be serious rivals. One remarked that he could remove the whole of the Toad Lane stock in a wheelbarrow, which was very nearly true. But, as the movement grew in strength, they began to develop the alarmed hostility which is exploited by the millionaire Press of to-day.

in industrial history has a man of Mitchell's business capacity and hardheadedness deliberately died so poor. His fellow-townsmen expressed their appreciation of his merits at his death. "Honoured in life," wrote the *Rochdale Observer*, "when he died he was buried like a king"; a more apposite comment, possibly, is that of the old lady who was heard to remark, "Eh! that *were* a funeral!"

No slap-up funeral can make Mitchell into a glamorous figure. He was unhandsome in a heavy lower-middle-class style; Beatrice Potter, a young woman of perhaps undue fastidiousness, criticised his social habits:

> "Mitchell, having delivered himself of his usual tea-party peroration . . . relapsed into the enjoyment of highly-sugared tea and much-buttered toast: his huge corpulent form, shining bald head, clean-shaven face, exhibiting a full good-tempered mouth, largely developed jaw and determined chin, so completely affirmed the force of his argument in favour of organised consumption, that it seemed useless to draw from him further verbal expression of it."[1]

He never understood any ideals but his own, that is to say the co-operative ideal, which he believed to be identical with the welfare of the working class, the vast majority of the human race; and he pursued it with steadfast selflessness, with due regard to the processes of democracy—but without imagination. His strong will, his abilities, and his general friendliness within the limits of his own sympathy, made him the leader of the Co-operative Movement for twenty years and impressed much of his personality upon it. Unless the social historian understands the mind and character of Mitchell and his entourage, he will fail to understand the modern Co-operative Movement with its millions of members—most of them Trade Unionists or wives of Trade Unionists and many members of the Labour Party—and will thus fail to take account of one of the important elements in the make-up of the British movement as a whole.

[1] Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship*. The book contains several thumbnail sketches of Mitchell.

ROBERT APPLEGARTH

(1834–1924)

My claim in speaking for the working classes is that I have worked with them and for them all the days of my life.

Applegarth at a public meeting in 1869

I set out from the first day I took office with the determination that I would not have anything to do with the violation of the law, and if there were any violation of the law in connection with our Society I would bottom it.

Applegarth before the Royal Commission on Trade Unions

ROBERT APPLEGARTH lived to be very old, and for many years before his death he had withdrawn from any practical part in working-class organisation. Those who, in his later years, were introduced to the lively, white-haired, bright-eyed little man who took so friendly an interest in "rebel" movements would have had difficulty in identifying him with the truculent, unscrupulous organiser of the 'sixties to whom rebels were anathema. They were the same man; but it is the brief years of Applegarth's secretaryship of the Carpenters and Joiners, and his membership of the London clique of Trade Union leaders whom the Webbs have called the Junta, not his long later life, which count in British Labour history.

Applegarth was born in Hull, the son of a Greenland whaler who was quartermaster to the Clark Ross expedition which went to search for the explorer Franklin. He had a little education at a dame-school; but his father's earnings—and even his father's presence—were so uncertain that at ten years old, the year of the foundation of the Rochdale Pioneers, he was sent out to work, as a bootmaker's errand and odd-job boy, for half a crown a week. Soon afterwards he managed to double this income as office-boy in a general merchant's, and later got a job in a joinery works. He was not apprenticed, but his longing to be a woodworker was partially satisfied; and after four years, at the end of which he was earning ten shillings a week, he took his mother away to Sheffield and there earned his and her

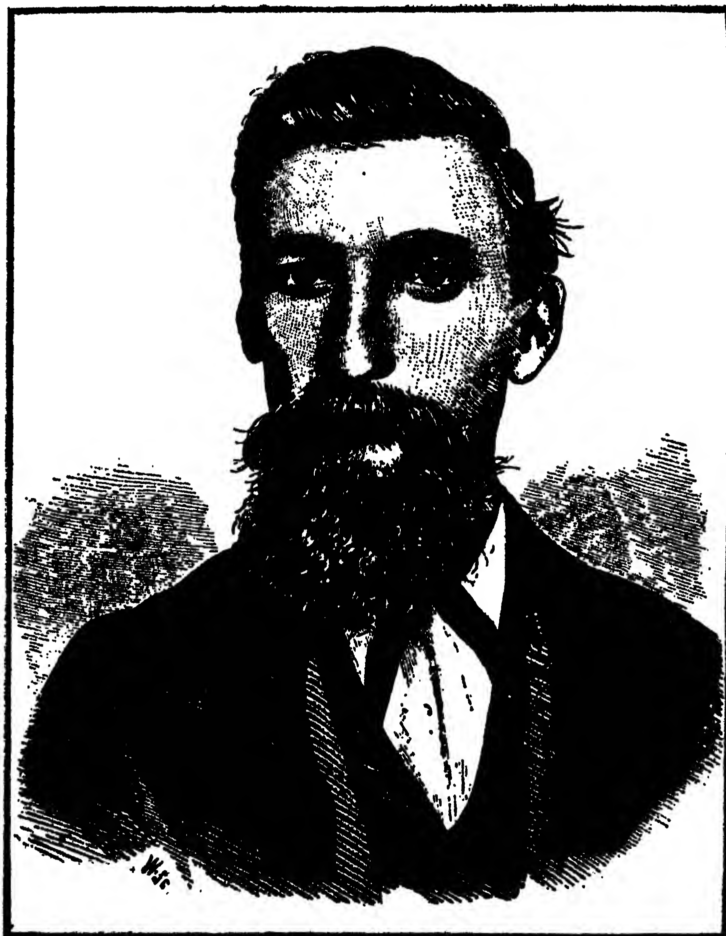
living in the joinery trade until she died a year later. In 1854 he married, on an adult wage of twenty-four shillings, for which he had at one time to walk thirteen miles to and from work.

Times were rather better than they had been in the hungry 'forties. But trade in Sheffield, when Applegarth married, was none too good; and before the year was out he had been stimulated by articles and songs appearing in *Reynolds' Newspaper*[1] to try and make his fortune in the New World. The attempt was not wholly unsuccessful; after roughing it for a time he got work making window-sashes on the Chicago and Burlington Railway at the rate, startling to an Englishman, of two and a half dollars a day. But by the time he had saved enough money to bring his wife out to join him he found that she was too ill to make the crossing—no joke for poor emigrants in the 'fifties—and he had to return. He arrived, unfortunately for him, in 1857, the one panic year of a long period of comparative prosperity; and the welcome his native land gave him was to send him tramping from Sheffield to Manchester and back again in search of work. While in Manchester, he tells us, he met in a pub a small group of men who had come from Rochdale in Lancashire and were talking about a new kind of shop, run in the interests of the workers, that was flourishing in Rochdale. "Eh, laads, it 'ud be fine if were a Co-op i' Manchester." The pub is gone, and upon its site in Balloon Street, Manchester, stand the present headquarters of the Co-operative Wholesale Society; the young man who listened to the discussion became one of the founders of the modern Sheffield Co-operative Society. In 1858 Applegarth found work at his trade in Sheffield; in May of that year he joined a local Sheffield society connected with the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners and soon became its secretary. It is characteristic of Applegarth and of the "new model Unionism" which he did so much to build up that his first Trade Union activity was to persuade his fellow members to hold their meetings in a reading-room instead of a pub.

The "new Unionism" is generally dated from the foundation of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (now the

[1] Founded in 1850 by a Chartist, G. W. M. Reynolds. Applegarth was a subscriber from the beginning.

Amalgamated Engineering Union) in 1851, although it did not become really powerful or get into the public eye much until some years after that date. After the disasters of 1833 and



ROBERT APPLEGARTH

from an engraving in the possession of the T.U.C.

1834 the Unions were in a bad way; the spectacular collapse of Owen's Consolidated and that of the great Builders' Union had left a general unwillingness to take aggressive action

except where absolutely unavoidable, or to form "Trades Unions," i.e. combinations of workers in more than one craft or occupation, which might excite the hostile attention of employers. Strikes like the Chartist strikes of the early 'forties were simply blind revolts against increasing misery; and though after 1844 miners and cotton-workers began to organise again, and a national movement, the National Union of Amalgamated Trades, was formed, it was not very effective, and did not satisfy the needs of the slowly growing body of skilled workers.

For those workers, indeed, the machinery of what survived of the older Unions was already obsolete for the purposes of a Victorian world. They were very loosely organised; their meetings, particularly in the building trades, were often held in pubs, and were occasions for conviviality as much as business. They had very little central finance; in the case of Unions with branches (or lodges) the branches retained the bulk of the funds in their own hands which meant, first, that the unfortunate man who was general secretary had often to go cap in hand to recalcitrant branches in order to get them to pay their legitimate dues for the upkeep of his own office, and secondly, that no concerted policy for the financing of strike movements was possible. There were few "friendly" benefits —sick, funeral, or superannuation; the general wage-level of the 'thirties and 'forties would hardly have allowed the payment of the necessary contributions, except in a few fortunate trades. Few Unions had a central executive of any authority; some actually changed the location of their head office from year to year, which hardly made for efficiency or even continuity in administration. Only when there happened to be elected a general secretary of exceptional power and drive, such as Richard Harnott of the Stonemasons, who ruled his members by the sheer force of a bullying personality, was anything like a coherent policy achieved—and Harnott received as his reward a present of a noose from an indignant lodge. If the methods of class war, having most signally failed in both economic and political fields, were to be abandoned and to be substituted by the methods of bargaining to secure the best terms from a middle class assumed to be in permanent power both in industry and politics, then the "industrious classes"—

so felt the younger men—must so organise themselves as to appear competent and in control of their organisations, and so order themselves as to appear the kind of persons with whom it was possible to negotiate in a boardroom. They must be respectworthy and respected. Collars and ties, temperance and literacy, were fully as important as sound finance and regularised rather than spasmodic democracy in organisation. Applegarth, very clean and respectable, with a keen interest in reading and in social conditions, and an admirably quick and determined brain of the kind which would have brought him success at the Bar, was exactly the type which was needed.

He did not initiate the new Unionism, even in his own trade. The pioneers were the pillars of the new machine civilisation—the engineers. In 1851 William Allan, secretary of the Journeymen Steam Engine Makers (founded in 1826),[1] succeeded in persuading five other engineering Unions to join with his own in the formation of a new "Amalgamated" Society of Engineers, with a membership of eleven thousand—twice that of any other Union at that date—a subscription of a shilling a week as compared with the twopence and threepence of earlier organisations, a whole range of friendly benefits, and a centralised constitution and official staff taken almost bodily from Allan's own Union. The branches retained a fair amount of apparent autonomy, but hedged about with rules on expenditure of funds, etc., carefully designed to prevent any sort of stampede or reckless behaviour; and Allan and his chief colleague, William Newton, set themselves to bring their new society to the notice of the respectable, sending to the Press its monthly reports, etc. (while the Stonemasons and other Unions still kept theirs a deadly secret from the public), writing letters, delivering lectures upon their principles, reading papers to Social Science Congresses, and the like.

The new society was not very fortunate at its beginning. In the first year after its foundation it endeavoured to put a ban upon overtime, in order both to shorten the long working day and to share out the work more evenly; and the employers of London and Lancashire, two of the most important areas, declared a general lock-out, and announced that they would

[1] Not the same as the Steam Engine Makers, which refused to join the amalgamation and continued its separate existence until 1920.

make formal renunciation of Union membership—"signing the document" it was called—a condition of re-employment. In the three months' struggle which followed the A.S.E., in spite of its "sound" finance and the support which it received from other Unions, was decisively beaten. In reminiscence of Owenism and under the influence of the Christian Socialists, it had previously contemplated using its funds to undertake co-operative production and had actually begun negotiating for the purchase of a foundry at Liverpool; and at the beginning of the lock-out ninety per cent of the membership voted in favour of devoting a large sum to the financing of co-operative works—a view which they reaffirmed after their defeat, when there was no money left to finance anything at all.

But to the general astonishment, the A.S.E., which ought by all the canons to have been crushed by this beating, seemed to have taken scarcely any harm. The members signed the "document" under duress, and disregarded it; their numbers dropped by only two thousand, and they started immediately to rebuild their funds. In 1859, only seven years after the defeat, they amazed the public by contributing three thousand pounds in three weeks to the lock-out chest of the London builders. There seemed to be some solid merit in the new type of organisation.

The 1859 lock-out brought the "new model" to the building trades. It arose in the first instance out of a number of half-coordinated attempts by the London building workers to obtain a nine-hour working day. These irritated the employers, and eventually one of the largest firms, Trollope's of Pimlico (now Trollope and Colls), sacked a stonemason who had presented a petition to them. The Masons' Union then struck, and were supported by their fellow employees, whereupon the master builders locked out all their workers, to the number of twenty-four thousand, and announced that they would not employ any man unless he signed the "document." The London building workers were sketchily organised, and the outlook at first was not hopeful. But Trade Unionism, as a whole, was stronger than seven years before; contributions flowed in from many sources, including the A.S.E., and early in the following year the "document" was unconditionally

withdrawn. Some of the workers, however, realised quite clearly that their victory had been gained not through the strength of their own organisation, but by support from outside which could not of its nature be permanent; and in 1860 the woodworkers founded, on the model of the A.S.E., the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. Far away in Sheffield, Robert Applegarth, whose orderly and far-seeing mind was already considerably irritated by the irresponsible behaviour of his own society, shepherded it bodily into the new Union, where it became the Sheffield No. 1 Branch. In June 1862 he went to a London conference of the A.S.C.& J. as delegate from Sheffield, and in August, after a sordid little dispute about the counting of votes, he was elected general secretary and came to live in Lambeth. He was paid 33/- a week, and was allowed 7s. 6d. a week towards the 13/- rent of his office room.

The new Society began with a constitution, subscriptions and benefits very closely resembling those of its model, the A.S.E.; but it was nothing like so large. It called itself "Amalgamated";[1] but unlike the A.S.E. it was not formed as a confederation of strongish Unions, but out of small groups mostly functioning in and around London. An older Union, the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, to which Applegarth had originally belonged, had a considerably larger membership and proposed to itself to swallow the impertinent newcomer. Worse, the most influential writer among the London working classes, George Potter, editor of the *Beehive*, was strongly opposed both to the new methods and to Applegarth personally and the other men who became his colleagues on the London Trades Council. Potter belonged to the older and more tumultuous Trade Unionism. Secretary of a small London society, he had by his abilities as journalist and orator worked himself into the position of leader of the nine-hours movement in London. His opposition to Applegarth and his allies was not one of political principles—he was not a Socialist or anything like one—but due to a fundamental difference of method. Potter, in short, enjoyed strikes and oratory as forms

[1] "Amalgamated Societies" came to be the general term for the new type of Unions, even when they were scarcely amalgamations and did not actually include the word in their titles.

of Trade Union activity; Applegarth and the A.S.E. did not. For a time Potter bulked more largely in Labour history than his rivals; but he was one man without a real policy, fighting a combination who knew quite clearly what they wanted and meant to have it without compromise. After a considerable struggle, involving a good deal of personal abuse, Potter lost the battle. He was driven out of the London Trades Council in 1865 and, though he continued a lively agitation for the next couple of years, shortly afterwards he lost the editorship of the *Beehive* and with it his influence.

The London Trades Council, founded in 1860, became in that decade the dominant force in the Labour world, and the strongest support of the new Unionism. Its leaders, principally Allan and Applegarth, Daniel Guile of the Ironfounders, Edwin Coulson of the Bricklayers, and George Odger the shoemaker Radical, who made up the group called the Junta, with some others in London and some corresponding spirits in the provinces succeeded in formulating, and persuading the skilled worker section of British Trade Unionism to accept, a coherent and steadily pursued policy in both industrial and political affairs which was on the whole markedly successful for its time. They were able to do this partly because they were themselves men of unusual ability, skilled and hardheaded negotiators and adept at presenting a case in the way in which it would be best appreciated by the English middle class, but also because they came gradually to control the sinews of war. Trades Councils—groupings of the Trade Unions in particular towns—existed before 1860; but the London Trades Council included the leaders of most of the Unions—not, of course, those of the miners or the textile workers of the north—which were strong and financially sound, and which had their branches under firm control. Accordingly, the success or failure of a strike or other forward movement, not only in London but in many other towns, depended very much on whether the London leaders were willing to countenance it, to allow their branches to strike, or to contribute to the funds of other trades on strike; and this gave them a very large say on industrial policy.

Their policy, on the whole, was against strikes. It is not true to say that they were peace-at-any-price men; they set their

faces against compulsory arbitration of disputes,[1] and they were always prepared to stand up to the employers as a necessary last resort. But they intended that it should be a last resort. They believed that in a time of good trade, when exports were rising, orders were plentiful, and the country rapidly becoming richer, the right policy for the better class of workers—they were not interested in the bottom strata, who could no more afford a shilling a week than they could afford to join the co-operative societies—was to keep the numbers seeking employment down by trade rules and apprenticeship rules[2] and to extract from their employers the best terms they could by voluntary means, realising that the majority of employers did not want their profits reduced by strikes unless it was unavoidable. So vanished, though not of course entirely, since workers in shop and bench did not cease to be human beings, the days of the sudden "turn-out," the whip-round and the torchlight procession; a branch of Applegarth's Union which wished for "the support of the Society in endeavouring to improve their social position" (the phraseology is itself revealing) had to fill up a formidable questionnaire of twenty-one items,[3] which would itself act as a considerable deterrent to the impulsive; and Applegarth himself laid down his views in perfectly clear terms.

> "With regard to strikes," he said to his members at Chester in 1866, "he would tell them at once that he did not approve of that way of doing business, except in cases of absolute necessity and when every other means had been tried and failed to accomplish the desired object. If they had any grievances they should write to their employers, and if they refused to agree to their terms, or took no notice of their appeals, the best thing was not to strike but to lay their claims before the public; and the masters would then be compelled to state their objections, on which the public would pass their opinion, which they might consider the verdict of a jury,"[4]

and if his instructions were disobeyed he showed no mercy,

[1] Not against voluntary conciliation, of which they were strong supporters.
[2] And, to a very small extent, by emigration to America or the colonies.
[3] Quoted in R. W. Postgate, *The Builders' History*. [4] ibid.

but ordered the men, sometimes in the harshest possible terms, to go back to work.

> "I tell you," he said to a group of recalcitrants who had refused to go back to work unless the employers posted a formal notice of withdrawal of obnoxious conditions which they had in fact abandoned, "I tell you honestly that if I had been in Birmingham I should have been at my bench side on Monday morning last. Whenever the employers have tried to humiliate you and bring you to your knees I have been in the front to defend you; now you are trying to humiliate the employers I will be no party to it."

These words, uttered in 1864, could not have been found on the lips of a Chartist or indeed of any prominent working-class leader before that generation; they clearly mark a great change of climate. But the change, however great, proved right in the conditions of the time; by the middle of the 'seventies, before the first great world depression caused a setback, the general level of wages was over fifty per cent above 1850.

Applegarth was not only concerned with improving his members' wages; he wanted passionately to turn them into better and more worth-while citizens. He was himself "a great reader"; as soon as he could he began to use his Union's monthly circular for recommending books to the membership; he was a founder of and lecturer for the National Education League, started in 1868 to demand universal elementary education;[1] and in the same year he persuaded the Union to finance technical classes in its branches—a modest forerunner of things to come. He was not alone among his colleagues in this advocacy of this policy, though he was the most eloquent and the most effective. All the new Union leaders believed in education for self-help and for the advancement of the human race; and if the two aims sometimes became a little comically confused, that is only a part of the general Victorian ideal.

During the nine years of his secretaryship, Applegarth raised

[1] The League was successful in getting the first English measure of State elementary education, the Forster Act of 1870, put on the statute-book—a poor enough thing in itself, but better than the confusion produced by the sectarian determination of church and chapel each to drive the other out of the educational field, which had resulted in nearly half the poor getting no education at all. Applegarth stood for the London School Board set up under the Act, but without success, though one Trade Unionist, Benjamin Lucraft of the Cabinet-makers, was elected.

the membership of the A.S.C.& J. by over one thousand per cent—from nine hundred and forty-nine to close on eleven thousand. But this quiet success in industry is overshadowed by his work on the political scene—in which he undoubtedly applied the spur to his colleagues. Recollections of the 'forties had made the new Unionists into burnt children as regards politics; in 1861 the London Trades Council replied to an inquiry from Italian workmen about political action in these terms:

> "We [i.e. the British people] have organisations for political purposes of every description, and those who like can join one or many, according to their views and desires. But we must inform you that our trade societies are not constituted upon a political basis. . . . Their objects are to promote the well-being of their members in all matters appertaining to their daily toil."

As soon as he had become secretary of the A.S.C.& J., Applegarth confided to William Allan his intention of persuading his Union to take up political action, and, in spite of Allan's horrified caution against involving industrial societies in political questions, he persevered. It must be emphasised that the political action suggested for the Unions was very mild in scope. Applegarth had no notion of founding a Labour Party: the political policy advocated by him was that of the middle-class Radicals. What he hoped—as Mill hoped—was that the middle class would be kind enough to allow one or two working-men to sit in Parliament in order to express a point of view (not a policy) which was too often overlooked; and, more important, that Parliament should be persuaded to alter the law in certain respects so as to make it more favourable to the workmen. When Applegarth began his work, the most important of these demands, apart from the extension of the vote, which was naturally supported by all Radicals,[1] was for the extension and strengthening of the Factory Acts and the

[1] This agitation, in which various Trade Union leaders took part—a Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association, for example, was founded in 1862 with Applegarth's co-operation—eventually bore fruit in Disraeli's Reform Act of 1867, which enfranchised the town worker, but left out the miners and the workers in country districts. The secret ballot—which Mill somewhat perversely opposed—was conceded five years later.

amendment of the flagrantly unjust Master and Servant Acts, under which, to put the point briefly, a workman who left his work and broke his contract of employment was treated as a criminal and could be sent to prison without even being allowed to give evidence on his own behalf, while an employer who wrongfully dismissed a man could only be sued in damages and could give his own evidence. The opportunities which these Acts gave for petty class tyranny, exercised through a magistrate who as like as not was himself the workmen's own employer, were deeply and widely resented. On both these matters some concessions, though not enough to satisfy working-class feeling, were made during the 'sixties, largely as a result of the effective pressure of Applegarth and his friends. But in the mid-decade political action suddenly took on a new urgency; the Unions found that they must fight for their lives.

The storm broke first in Sheffield, Applegarth's old home, but broke in a manner most distasteful to his principles. Not all the existing Unions, by any means, had accepted the Junta's adjurations to be respectable and law-abiding; some held by older and less peaceful methods, and in 1866 the newspaper-reading world was horrified to learn of the explosion of a tin of gunpowder in the house of a Sheffield non-unionist. This, it transpired, was only one of a variety of "incidents" (including incitement to murder) by which some of the trade clubs, particularly among the grinders, thought fit to impress their views on their fellow workers. For a moment the Amalgamated Unions thought it might be sufficient to withdraw their skirts from the offenders (who were eventually proved to be a very small minority) by issuing condemnations of violence and "the abominable practice of rattening" (stealing or damaging workmen's tools). But they very soon saw that, if they did not bestir themselves more seriously, the many employers who thought any sort of Trade Union a wicked and impertinent nuisance would seize the opportunity of the Sheffield outrages to get Parliament to restore the Combination Acts or worse; and Applegarth, who had previously written a long and reasoned letter to Gladstone, went to call upon Walpole, the Home Secretary, and secured a promise of a Royal Commission of Enquiry before any action was taken.

Even before the Commission had been appointed the Amalgamated Unions were faced with a quite new and direct menace to themselves. In January 1867 the Court of Queen's Bench, in the case of *Hornby* v. *Close*, decided that Trade Unions could not, as everyone had hitherto believed, secure protection for their funds against embezzlement by depositing their rules with the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, but that, being societies "in restraint of trade," they had in fact no protection at all, and anyone might steal freely from them. This could have been a mortal blow to the Amalgamated Unions, with their large funds, and their interest in a Royal Commission was at once enormously increased. The suggestion was made, and supported by a petition from the London Trades Council, that the membership of the Commission should include one or two working-men; but that was too much for Victorian "public opinion" to swallow.

> "I should inform the House," said the outraged Home Secretary, "that a petition has been presented from the working-men of London urging that some of their fellow working-men should be put on this Commission, or, if not, that one or two persons should be placed on it in whom they might have confidence. My answer to them was that I had endeavoured to avoid having a Commission with anything of a partisan spirit about it"—i.e. to compose it out of members of the non-working-classes.

The House of Commons replied with suitable applause; the Commission did, however, include Tom Hughes, the Christian Socialist—who was an M.P. and could hardly be excluded—and Frederic Harrison, the Positivist and friend of Beatrice Webb. The Trade Unions were also allowed to have a representative—naturally, Applegarth—present with a "watching brief" during the sittings of the Commission; and on Applegarth's representations an indemnity was promised to anyone who would give evidence about the crimes at Sheffield. This was a sensible decision; as Applegarth said, "men will lie a foot thick to save their necks, and you will not get at the truth by putting a rope round one or two." It also favoured the Junta by enabling them to prove what a tiny handful of Trade Unionists were concerned in any deeds of violence.

The Commission was appointed. Applegarth was marshalling evidence and presenting it to Hughes and Harrison; it almost seemed that the triumph of Place and Hume might be repeated. But the old casual days could not come again; a serious Royal Commission could not be stampeded as Place had stampeded the Commons Committee on the Combination Acts. Applegarth had to prove his case, and in his enthusiasm he proved too much. He was concerned to show in his evidence that good Trade Unions could be financially sound propositions—with which everyone agreed by the time he had done;[1] that, with very few exceptions, they set their faces against violent practices and intimidation—which he proved to the hilt; and that they strongly disliked strikes.

> "Is your Executive," he was asked, "in the habit of counselling or suggesting a strike?"—"It never does so."

This last contention was nearly Applegarth's undoing. For the Commission took him at his word. If Trade Unions were really such sound and beneficial bodies, and if they only indulged in strikes because their pacific Executive Committees had their hands forced by their hotheaded members, the logical course was to give legal protection to Trade Unions, but only to Trade Unions which were in effect friendly societies merely, which did not try to interfere with employers by, for instance, restricting apprenticeship or opposing piece-work. Strikes, incitements to strike, picketing in strikes, or helping workers on strike, should be put beyond the pale of the law, so that the Unions should no longer be embarrassed by having to countenance them.

This was the gist of the Majority Report of the Commission —there was also a Minority Report signed by Hughes, Harrison and the Earl of Lichfield, which recommended a "straight" legitimisation of Trade Unions; and it was on this report that the Gladstone government, which came into office in 1868, acted. Two Acts were passed in 1871; the first legal-

[1] "Nothing," said Gladstone with characteristic unctuousness, "is more satisfactory and congenial, nothing more harmonious with the best English ideas than to see men of the labouring classes associating together, in the true and real spirit of self-government for the purpose of providing against the contingencies of old age, sickness and death; *and on societies of such a sacred character I would not lay a finger.*" Which sounds very nice; but Applegarth had no intention of allowing his Union to be turned into a burial club.

ised all Unions whose rules did not infringe the criminal law and gave their funds legal protection; the second provided fierce penalties for anyone guilty of "molestation," "obstruction," "intimidation" or "picketing" in a strike. Under the second Act, which became law in spite of a furious agitation conducted by all Unions, now united in the Trades Union Congress, whose official birthday is 1868,[1] strikes were legal, but practically anything done in pursuance of a strike was criminal. Women were jailed for saying "Baa!" to a blackleg; in 1872 the gas-stokers at Beckton in East London were sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment for merely indicating to the employers their intention to strike.[2] The anger of the Trade Unionists, caught in a trap partly of their own contrivance, was immense; but Gladstone, as Prime Minister, refused to make any concessions. Two years after the Beckton affair the Liberal Party had to face a general election. The angry Trade Unionists called upon their members (now equipped with votes in the towns) to punish the authors of the 1871 Acts, and actually ran fifteen "working-men candidates" themselves, of whom two miners, Thomas Burt and Alexander Macdonald, were elected with Liberal support. The 1874 débâcle of the Liberals was probably due as much to the wrath of brewers against licensing policy as to working-class indignation over the Trade Union Acts; nevertheless, the working class had been taught, to some extent, that the radicalism of the Liberal Party went no further than the (very moderate) extension of the franchise, and Disraeli, the new Prime Minister, hastened to reward his unexpected allies by altering the obnoxious law. An Act of 1875 allowed strikes and "peaceful picketing" to proceed unhampered for a long time to come. But by the time it was passed Applegarth had ceased to be a Trade Union official.

The circumstances of Applegarth's losing his Union job are entirely creditable to him. But to appreciate them we must go a little way back in our tracks and take note by the way of a

[1] It was in fact founded some years earlier. But the first meetings were called by the undesirable Potter, and it was not until the dangers of 1866–8 had made solidarity essential that the Junta decided to support it and give it respectable status.

[2] John Stuart Mill, in almost his last public utterance, protested against the "iniquitous sentence on the Beckton gas-stokers." Applegarth helped a number of them to escape conviction by fleeing overseas.

curious episode in British Trade Union history. Applegarth was a Radical to the bone; he had grown up reading the speeches of Ernest Jones, the last of the Chartists, and in his few years in America (before the Civil War) he had been fired by Frederick Douglas, the negro orator, and by the sight of a slave market on the Mississippi. However cautious his day-to-day policy as Trade Unionist and negotiator, he never ceased to believe whole-heartedly in the rights of man, the struggle against injustice, and the triumph of human reason. In 1862, when he was already an official of importance, he joined a society which bore the resounding title of the Universal League for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Peoples of All Nations (shades of Owen!), and became secretary to its membership of six. It is not therefore surprising that in 1864 Applegarth, along with other members of the Junta, joined the general council of an organisation founded by an exiled German professor, the International Working Men's Association—the First International.

Some of them can certainly have had little idea of what they were joining. Marx, the organiser of the International, had published in 1848 the *Communist Manifesto* which became its bible. But even if Guile and Allan had read the adjuration to the workers of the world to unite, for they had nothing to lose but their chains, they did not apply it to themselves; they did not feel themselves to be in chains and they definitely had something to lose.

> "We in England," Applegarth told the Brussels Congress of the International, "have no need to creep into holes and corners lest a policeman should see us. We can meet in open daylight and organise ourselves, and treat of any questions which affect us without fear."

They had, indeed, a generous sympathy for unfortunate foreign workers who did literally run the risk of being put in chains, and were ready to send them financial help and to aid them in protestation;[1] they were also glad to help them to organise Trade Unions for themselves where possible, partly on grounds of principle and partly for the highly practical

[1] Particularly Poles oppressed by the Russian Government. The Polish League in London was largely run by the working classes.

reason of preventing British strikes from being broken by the importation of blacklegs from abroad.[1] For the rest, they tended to look on the discussion of Communist theory in the International and the fight between the Marxists and the Anarchists led by the giant Bakunin as debating-society stuff which did not concern practical men; and they were entirely unaware of the sardonic chuckles with which Marx, in his correspondence with Engels, related how he had manœuvred these unsuspecting sheep into supporting the most extreme statements of policy.

Applegarth understood the real position much better than some of his colleagues; he had not accepted the capitalist order of mid-Victorianism as eternal, but advocated land nationalisation (which earned him a severe lecture from the *Times*), and looked forward to the replacement of wage labour by "free labour in association." He joined the International at the beginning of 1865, receiving a membership card signed Karl Marx, which he was proud to exhibit in his old age; two years later he took his Trade Union into affiliation, and in 1868 was chairman of the General Council. Even when, in 1870–1, the other British Trade Unionists, horrified to find that their names were being used in support of the fighting French workers in the Commune of Paris,[2] repudiated the International in a body, thereby infuriating Marx, who said, not untruly, that they had "offered up the principle of Trade Unionism on the altar of middle-class legitimisation"—even then Applegarth, who had seen something of the Franco-Prussian War at first hand as a correspondent and strongly agreed with the International's manifesto declaring the opposition of the common people to all wars, did not leave with the rest. When he did resign is uncertain; but as the International, torn by dissensions, removed to New York in 1872 and dissolved a few years afterwards, the point is unimportant.

It was not his connection with the International, however, which lost Applegarth his post, but the narrow-mindedness of

[1] On one occasion, the engineers' strike of 1871, the International did perform this function.

[2] The thirty thousand who were slaughtered by Thiers and the French *bourgeoisie* in revenge for the Commune are martyrs now; at the time they were red devils in the eyes of all but a very few—certainly no fit associates for the Trade Unions as they had described themselves to the Royal Commission.

his Executive Council. In 1870 Applegarth, with their consent, became a member of the Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Acts,[1] the Council saying—and reaffirming their view the following year—that his appointment, the first appointment of a working-man to a Royal Commission, was "an honour done to our Society," and that the business of the Society would not suffer by his temporary absences. Some of the branches, however, particularly in London, thought otherwise, and in April 1871 a newly elected Council passed a resolution denying that inquiry "into such a loathsome subject" could do honour to anyone, alleged that the election of the Executive Council had been delayed and made more expensive by the neglect of the General Secretary, ordered him to attend no meetings held in office hours, and ended by saying that saving the funds of the Society[2] "was of far greater moment to the members than any amount of Royal Commissions." On receipt of this ultimatum Applegarth, whose wife had just died leaving him with five young children, promptly resigned; and, though the membership rallied round him and after a dispute expelled its Executive Council, he did not return to office. He refused to accept an offer of his friend, the philanthropic employer and educational enthusiast, A. J. Mundella, to get him a post in the Board of Trade; after a few months he became English agent and demonstrated for a French firm called Denayrouze et Cie, which manufactured an apparatus for diving and another designed for breathing in poisonous atmospheres.

When still under forty, therefore, Applegarth left his craft as well as his office, and turned from carpenter to engineer. He demonstrated for Denayrouze for several years; upon one occasion he was nearly killed by his own apparatus and received so severe a fright that, according to his own story, his black hair had turned to white when he was released. In 1876 he took out an English patent for electric light—christened Jablochkoff's Candle after the Russian who worked on it in

[1] Acts passed for the setting up of licensed brothels on Continental models for the use of men in seaport and garrison towns. Mainly owing to the unremitting efforts of Josephine Butler, an agitation was set up for their repeal, in which Applegarth joined after he had found out the facts at the Royal Commission. They were finally abolished in 1886.

[2] "Office assistance" cost the awful sum of £40 in a single year!

the Denayrouze laboratories—and thereafter became a business pioneer in the electric-lighting world; he persuaded the *Times* to light its machine-room by this method, and the Crystal Palace to hold an Electrical Exhibition. He was an ingeniously inventive creature; much later, when he bought a small property in Kent, he tapped a stream to make himself an ornamental water with locks and bridge, and for his chickens he made a special up-to-date poultry house and patented an incubator-heater, thereby earning himself several national awards as a poultry farmer. In 1907 he finally sold the electrical business of Applegarth and Co., and lived at Thornton Heath, full of interest and inquiringness, until his death.

From 1871 Applegarth ceased to have more than a spectator's interest in Trade Unionism. In the long run, this seems to have been an advantage, both for himself and his reputation. He certainly found his life as engineer and business man more remunerative and quite as interesting as his Trade Union post; and he had effectively done his work for Trade Unionism. He had built up a strong and stable society; he had participated in a "Cabinet of Labour" which guided the movement strongly and effectively through an important period; and he had won for the Unions a status and position which sufficed them for a long time. Leaving when and as he did, he avoided the temptation to fall in love with his type of organisation for its own sake and to care for nothing but its preservation. When, in the economic conditions of a later day, the cautious and nearsighted craftsmen of the "Amalgamated" stood like aged obstacles in the way of progress, Applegarth was not among them; he was able to listen to the new ideas with interest and appreciation, and say to workers in his old age

> "Isn't it time you stopped talking of woodworkers and ironworkers and other sorts of workers, dropped Amalgamated this, Associated that, and Equitable the other, and all banded in one giant organisation called the United Workers?"

Moreover, he had his hands free for public "causes," though notwithstanding offers he never stood for Parliament.

He fought against the Contagious Diseases Acts, for Joseph Arch's Agricultural Labourers' Union—when he scandalised a well-meaning vicar by telling his audience of labourers that, if he only earned thirteen shillings a week and could purchase oblivion by drink, he would certainly blue the whole lot rather than take to thrift; he effectively backed up Samuel Plimsoll in his struggle to save the lives of seamen, and endeavoured to get better safety legislation for mines and factories. He led a successful agitation to remove the tolls from the bridges across the Thames, and another to prevent the Grand Stand Association from keeping the poor off Epsom Downs. To the end of his energy he worked hard for public and technical education, and among other things was the prime mover in raising the money to preserve George Howell's fine library of Trade Union and Labour documents. He died at last a happy, interested, friendly old man.

WILLIAM MORRIS

(1834–1896)

"What are you?"
"I am an artist and a literary man, pretty well known, I think, throughout Europe."

William Morris at Thames Police Court, September 1885

Our friend who lies here has had a hard life, and met with a hard death; and if society had been differently constituted, his life might have been a delightful, a beautiful, and a happy one. It is our business to begin to organise for the purpose of seeing that such things shall not happen; to try and make this earth a beautiful and happy place.

Morris at the funeral of Alfred Linnell, killed in the Trafalgar Square fighting, 1887

WILLIAM MORRIS was born in the same year as Applegarth, and, as in Applegarth's case, the period of his direct connection and office in the Labour movement was very brief. There, however, the chance resemblance ends. Applegarth worked in the mid-Victorian heyday, when sensible capitalists were prepared to find it to their interests to come to terms with "sensible" workmen, and he built a solid Victorian edifice which, like some other Victorian edifices, outlasted its usefulness. Morris, coming to politics when the long prosperity had crashed, when "mass unemployment" was returning again to cities now far larger and fuller than in the 'forties, and the armies of unskilled and semi-skilled workers for whom the "Amalgamated Societies" cared nothing were troubling the air with demands for better conditions and a better social policy, built no organisations at all and saw those he tried to build crumble in his hand. But his life, his personality, his enthusiasm, his eager faith in beauty and the common people and his power to write these down in words as simple and as appealing as Cobbett's, irradiated the movement which failed him, and no Socialist who was alive in the years of his best work has ever ventured to repudiate his debt to Morris.

He was born in Walthamstow, not then the desolation of

yellow brick boxes with slate lids which it has since become, and when he was six the family moved to a big house called Woodford Hall, on the high road from London to Epping. His first experience of the southern countryside of England which, like Cobbett, he so passionately loved, was the great hornbeam thickets and woodland rides of Epping Forest, through which he rambled long and often on foot or on Shetland pony;[1] one of the indignant outbursts of his later years was against those who pollarded the Epping hornbeams. He learnt to read earlier than he could remember, and at four years old was devouring the *Waverley Novels,* which set his interest, before he could well think, towards the living past and especially towards England of the Middle Ages.

Morris's father was a gentleman of substance, who, when William was ten, became a gentleman of considerable substance, through the sudden prosperity of the copper mine called the Devon Great Consols, which raised his modest holding of 272 one-pound shares to the remarkable value of two hundred thousand pounds. Morris therefore was brought up a gentleman, to succeed to nine hundred pounds a year at twenty-one;[2] he was sent to preparatory schools and then to Marlborough, which, fortunately for him, was at that time extremely inefficiently ruled in comparison with a modern public-school, there being no prefects and very little athletics, so that Morris was disciplined by nobody, ranged freely over Savernake Forest and the bare Marlborough downs, read omnivorously on archæology and church architecture, and became an Anglo-Catholic. A schoolfellow describes him at that time as "a thick-set, strong-looking boy, with a high colour and black curly hair,[3] good-natured and kind, but with a fearful temper"; and talks of the endless restlessness of his fingers, which must always be handling something, and of his pouring forth endless stories "about knights and fairies" on walks and in his dormitory at night. (These characteristics, including the

[1] Morris, strong and active man as he became, was a delicate child, and his formal education was delayed. This meant that a great deal of his early life was spent out of doors, using his eyes and ears on the birds, trees, and flowers of the country. "To this day," he once said, "when I smell a may-tree I think of going to bed by daylight."

[2] In later years this diminished considerably, as the Devon copper seam ceased to pay. Morris was comfortably off all his life, but he earned most of his income.

[3] Whence his college friends called him "Topsy" or "Top."

stormy gusts of rage and the restlessness which, when he had to sit still, destroyed so many legs and backs of chairs in his own and other people's houses, stayed with him all his life.) The laxness of Marlborough was an advantage to him; but when he was nearly eighteen it reached the extreme of an organised rebellion against the headmaster, and Morris was taken away to work with a tutor until he was able to pass the entrance examination for Oxford. This he did in the following summer, and in January 1853 went into residence at Exeter College in company with another boy of his own age, Edward Burne-Jones.

Morris was not, after his university days, a man of deep and intimate friendships; though he appreciated human creatures immensely and set much store by fellowship, it was a generalised rather than a particular emotion. Many who had great affection for him, such as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, felt that they did not receive back what they gave. As Scawen Blunt put it, he was always friendly and generous, but sparing of his time; he had too many things to do to spend his precious hours on personal intimacies, and though he loved his daughters—and presumably his wife—even his home was more of a workshop and discussion shop than an Englishman's castle. The same observer noted in his diary that at Kelmscott Manor "all going to and fro from the tapestried living-room had to pass through Morris's bedroom," and that he seemed to find nothing inconvenient in this. But Burne-Jones (and to a less extent Charles Faulkner) is the exception to the rule; he and Morris came together at first meeting and were friends for life. To the end of his days anyone who criticised Burne-Jones to Morris could reckon on an exhibition of the famous temper.

They were immensely excited by physical Oxford and disgusted by its intellectual side. Oxford in the 'fifties was still almost a perfect medieval city, "a vision of grey-roofed houses and a long winding street, and the sound of many bells." The railway had only recently come there; a later William Morris had not yet been born to turn the southern suburbs into an ugly industrial town, nor had the smug respectability which is now called North Oxford started a-building. The ordinary houses in the streets were largely fifteenth-century, and "on all sides," wrote Burne-Jones, "except where it touched the

railway, the city came to an end abruptly as if a wall had been about it, and you came suddenly upon the meadows." The buildings—churches, colleges and streets—came as a fresh delight to Morris, who had already fallen in love with English medieval architecture and was soon to see Rouen and Chartres cathedrals for the first time; and in the summer he added to his countryside memories of Epping and Marlborough the beauties of the Thames, particularly the upper Thames, and the villages of Cotswold stone, which recur again and again in his panegyrics on the land of England. The intellectual fare provided for him was however another matter. The University, after the storms of Newman and the High Churchmen, seemed to have settled back into apathy and had nothing to offer eager young men. Lectures were depressing and gave no learning; the Fellows of Exeter paid no attention to the undergraduates, and Morris's own tutor noted him down as "a rather rough and unpolished youth, who exhibited no special literary tastes or capacity, but had no difficulty in mastering the usual subjects of examination"—an opinion which Morris repaid, in later years, by using the word "don" as a synonym for all that was narrow, ignorant and pedantic.

The two young men were deeply resentful and bored—at least, they would have been bored had they not met with other young men, particularly three or four from Pembroke College who had been at school with Burne-Jones, and begun to talk, read and discuss with them. Even fifty years later members of the group remembered the heady delights of the evening sessions in the rooms of the senior among them, when one Fulford read in a rolling voice from Tennyson, then the most exciting of poets, or when they all joined in reading Shakespeare, or when Morris (who disliked being read aloud to but liked to read himself) insisted on chanting, rather than reading, to his fellows two books which he had just discovered and which he admired to the end of his life, Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and *Stones of Venice*.

"The description of the Slave Ship, or of Turner's skies, with the burden 'Has Claude given *this*?' were declaimed by him in a manner that made them seem as if they had been written for no end but that he should hurl them in

thunder on the head of the base criminal who had never seen what Turner saw in the skies."[1]

This tempestuous enthusiasm was extremely characteristic of Morris; nor were his friends cooler in their expressions. On one evening, when the writer of the words quoted above entered Burne-Jones's rooms at Exeter, the owner shouted at him, "He's a big poet!" "Who?" "Topsy!" And then and there Morris read aloud the first poem he had ever written in his life, called "The Willow and the Red Cliff," which his friends hailed as a masterpiece. "Well," said Morris, "if this is poetry, it's very easy to write."[2] Meantime, under the influence of Burne-Jones, whose drawings were already the talk of the town, he had begun to "scribble," i.e. to make drawings of windows, arches, and gables, and floriated ornament, and during his first long vacation he went to Belgium and northern France and there fell in love with Dürer, Van Eyck and Memling; he was finding his way to be an artist.

Not, however, quite immediately. Few people now remember that both Morris and Burne-Jones, when they went to Oxford, were intending to be clergymen. This purpose, however, waned in face of the spiritual discouragingness of the University, and was replaced by the idea of founding a medievalist monastery, a celibate community for the study and practice of religious art. In a letter which would have delighted G. K. Chesterton, Burne-Jones, after partaking in riotous May Day celebrations, wrote to a friend who was just coming up to Oxford:

> "I have just been pouring basins of water on the crowd below from Dixon's garret—such fun, by Jove! . . . I have set my heart on our founding a Brotherhood. Learn [Tennyson's] *Sir Galahad* by heart; he is to be the patron of our Order. I have enlisted one in the project up here, heart and soul."

[1] Canon Dixon (a member of the group). Quoted in Mackail, *Life of William Morris*.

[2] The text of this poem is lost. Morris destroyed it, as he did a good many other poems which he disliked on re-reading. But he never departed from the opinion that poetry *was* "very easy to write." "If a chap can't compose an epic poem," he said many years after, "while he's weaving tapestry, he had better shut up, he'll never do any good at all."

The "enlisted one" was Morris. It was not an unnatural ambition for eager young men brought up in the Church, in the days when that Church was undergoing soul-stirrings about spiritual and social duty, when "dedication" was in the air, when Ruskin was writing his strong tirades against the ugliness and immorality of the new capitalist society and the Christian Socialists were at their zenith.[1] But a monastic brotherhood would never have been the place for Morris, with his large humanity; and it is fortunate that in 1855, after a tour on the Continent, he and Burne-Jones formed a new purpose and swore to devote their lives to art—Burne-Jones to be a painter, and Morris an architect. They returned to England and to Oxford, to break the news to their relatives and instructors.

In fact, as soon as he had taken his degree, Morris articled himself to an architect, G. S. Street (who enjoys now a dubious notoriety as the creator of the ugly and apparently indestructible Law Courts in the Strand). Morris never qualified, for inside of a year a strong personality had swept him away. He made many things, but he only once designed a house. And yet it is entirely in character that his first impulse should have been to build houses; for in all Morris's work and all his writing about art it is the house as a whole to which he keeps returning. He wanted a perfect house for himself; he wanted everybody else to have perfect houses, and when he thinks and talks about wallpaper, curtains, tapestries, carpets, tiles, pottery, furniture—even gardens!—he is seeing all these things not as extraneous museum pieces but as contributory elements to the perfection of the house.[2] "Have nothing in your house," he wrote, "that you do not either know to be useful or believe to be beautiful"—in its place, he meant; and while he admitted some use for museums and in later years became adviser to South Kensington, he always declared that museums were a wretched substitute for making ordinary things beautiful for and in the houses of ordinary men.

[1] The Lushington brothers, both Christian Socialists, were college friends of Morris's, and he read Kingsley with appreciation.

[2] See, particularly, the fascinating paper on "Making the Best of It" (reprinted in *Hopes and Fears for Art*), which contains Morris's grand onslaught on "scarlet geraniums and yellow calceolarias."

In their last term at Oxford the group began work on a periodical called the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, which ran for a year and is chiefly remembered for having published a good deal of Morris's early writings. In the autumn and winter Morris was working hard at architecture and trying his hand at a number of crafts, clay-modelling, carving, wood-engraving, and illuminating, as well as "scribbling" and reading eagerly in Chaucer and the mythology of the North. But just before Christmas 1855 Burne-Jones was introduced to Rossetti, who in the course of a long conversation asked him about a man called William Morris.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, poet, painter, and vehement critic, was then perhaps at the height of his powers. Seven years earlier, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, of whom the most famous members were Rossetti himself, Millais, Woolner the sculptor, and Holman Hunt, had been formed; their new principles of art had created a din among the notables and Ruskin's powerful pen was defending them. The young men from Oxford had seen something, though not much, of their work, and were naturally interested; but as soon as they met Rossetti they became his ardent disciples. Rossetti, it has been well said, divided people into two classes, those who painted and those who bought paintings. Morris, he decided, could and must paint—though as he had an independent income he should buy some paintings as well. Morris accordingly gave up his architecture and went to live with Burne-Jones in London, where he worked away at painting until in 1857 Rossetti took both of them to Oxford to decorate, under his direction, the walls and roof of the new Union Society debating-hall with tempera paintings.[1] While in Oxford Morris published his first book of poems, *The Defence of Guenevere*, which attracted attention and praise though its sales were low. He also met a girl called Jane Burden, very beautiful according to a type seldom found in England: Rossetti seized on her for a model, thereby making her face known to the world for all time, and Morris married her in 1859.

Morris's marriage, at twenty-five, was the real starting-point of his life as an artist. For the first thing which, being Morris,

[1] The craft was so little understood then that the paintings all perished in a very short time.

he wanted was a beautiful home, and there was no house in existence which would serve. He bought at Bexley Heath, three miles from Abbey Wood, a piece of ground which the local inhabitants (to Rossetti's enormous delight) knew as "Hog's Hole," and, as he had never become an architect, he asked Philip Webb, his friend and erstwhile fellow-student, to build him there a perfect house, the Red House. Webb's designs were all that Morris could ask; but when it came to the plenishings of the house he found that, in the current state of taste and production in England, there was not a thing—wallpaper, curtain stuff, chair, table, jug or glass—to be bought ready-made which he did not consider absolutely hideous. Before he could begin to furnish his house he had to get Webb and other friends to design for him specially almost everything that was to be put into it; and out of the experience and the co-operation which this involved grew quite naturally the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., founded in 1861[1]—and the many-sided work of Morris as a craftsman.

It would take a book and not a chapter of a book to chronicle in any detail the work of the new firm, in which, right from the beginning, Morris played by far the largest part. It began with stained glass, painted tiles, wallpapers, cabinet-making and embroideries; it went on to weaving chintzes, cretonnes and other materials; to dyeing and printing stuffs; to carpets and to tapestries: and as if that were not enough, in the last years of his life Morris took up printing and book-production and produced from the Kelmscott Press books which are now rare collectors' pieces. It had works at Red Lion Square in Holborn, then at Queen Square in Bloomsbury, and afterwards at Merton Abbey on the River Wandle (with subsidiary workshops at Morris's own house in Hammersmith); starting with the minimum of capital and an arrogant prospectus inspired by Rossetti—and hoping, according to Morris's own letters, to get some orders from "clergymen and others, to whom it *might* be of use to send a circular"—it succeeded, within a generation, in radically changing the taste of the middle class in

[1] In 1875, after some rather unfortunate disputes, on which there is no need to enlarge, this firm became simply William Morris & Co. It long outlasted Morris's life, and only came to an end during the late war.

household decoration; and, though its products were generally speaking too expensive to come within the compass of small purses,[1] it broke the domination of expensive ugliness and encrustation of ornament for ornament's sake. Almost all common *objects*, from books to teacups, made in the mid-Victorian age were thoroughly and indefensibly ugly. Morris and his fellow workers fought and beat this ugliness and made it possible for mass production, when it came, to provide, in so far as the big commercial firms consented to learn from his teaching, goods for the homes of the millions that were not hideous, vulgar or fussy: the man who could never own a Morris tapestry or a Kelmscott book yet owed a debt to Morris every time he bought (before the war) a pleasant glass dish from Woolworths or a sixpenny Penguin.

This does not of course imply that twentieth-century designers have copied Morris, or even that Morris himself would necessarily have admired the Woolworth glass or the Penguin. Fashions in taste change, and not everyone nowadays likes Morris's patterns or his type-founts; some in fact are as harsh to his work as he was to Christopher Wren and eighteenth-century houses—he called St. Paul's a "silly old building" which the inhabitants of his Utopian England kept as a horrible example, a "sort of foil to the beautiful buildings we put up now."[2] Much more important than these personal preferences, if we want to understand Morris's work as a decorator, is to realise three facts. First, it all hung together as part of a "design for living." It was none of it capricious or the hobby of a well-to-do man. As he created Morris and Company because no existing firm could make the things he considered fit to find in a decent house, so he commenced dyer because no one else could colour his materials to his satisfaction, and took to weaving so as to be able to make his own materials. Secondly, he learnt practically every trade which he took up, sometimes, as in the case of dyeing and tapestry-weaving, taking a great deal of time and trouble over it; he was not merely a designer or even a draughtsman, he was a working embroiderer, weaver,

[1] Partly because Morris refused to be a "good business man" in the strict sense, to sack his workers as soon as their immediate usefulness had passed—which enabled others less scrupulous to undercut him; and partly because he so strongly disliked mechanical reproduction of his designs.

[2] *News from Nowhere*, ch. v.

dyer, painter and what not—a craftsman; and he had the craftsman's pride and the craftsman's attitude to his material.

> "Up to a certain point you must be the master of your material," he wrote in *Hopes and Fears for Art,* "but you must never be so much the master as to turn it surly, so to say. You must not make it your slave, or presently you will be a slave also. You must master it so far as to make it express a meaning, and to serve your aim at beauty. You may go beyond that necessary point for your own pleasure and amusement, and still be in the right way; but if you go on after that merely to make people stare at your dexterity in dealing with a difficult thing, you have forgotten art along with the rights of your material, and you will not make a work of art, but a mere toy; you are no longer an artist, but a juggler."

This is the craftsman's attitude, complete and perfect; and it is easy to see why a man who felt thus believed work to be the greatest joy, and believed, further, that society both could and should make it possible for everyone to obtain joy in work. This is the third fact, most important of the three, for it was this which made Morris into a Socialist, or, to speak with strict accuracy, showed him, as soon as he began to think about it, that he already was a Socialist; and it makes his approach to Socialism in some sense unique. Many have become Socialists out of indignation with the greed and cruelty of capitalism, its slums, filth and poverty and its legal oppression. Morris admitted all these and when his eye lit on them he could deliver tirades as fierce as any Marxist; but what outraged him above all was that under capitalism the worker was not merely unable to possess beautiful things, he was not even allowed to make them—and that, he believed, was the worst hell of all. The point is a great one, even though Morris assumed a little too easily that there existed in everyone the immense creative energy—immense by any standards—which animated himself, and that all work which had to be done in society could either be made thoroughly enjoyable, or, in cases where that proved impossible, be reduced to such dimensions that a small amount of universal conscription—everybody, as it were, doing the

social washing-up before he started on his day of joyful labour[1] —would get it performed without trouble; his insistence on it ranges him on the side of Cobbett and the dignity of man and against the Fascists and the Servile State.

In 1861, however, Socialism and politics were far in the future, and the next fifteen years or so were spent happily growing from craft to craft and from strength to strength, with tremendously excited discussions among the partners and their friends. It was a sad thing that the Red House, into which Morris had put so much and where he was so happy—"he has only kicked one panel out of a door in a twelvemonth," commented a friend—proved in the end unhealthy and too awkward of access, and had to be abandoned. Morris could not bear ever to set eyes on it again; but a few years later found ample compensation in being able to acquire Kelmscott Manor near Lechlade on the upper Thames, the lovely Elizabethan stone house which was his country home until his death. For a few years Rossetti was his co-tenant; but the leader of the Pre-Raphaelites was growing more and more difficult to live with, and in 1874, just before the break-up of the original Morris firm, they parted by mutual consent. Kelmscott Manor was only a country house, of course; since his work lay in London Morris had to live there also, and after trying more than one district finally came to rest in another Kelmscott, a Georgian house in Upper Mall, Hammersmith, looking on to the river, where he set up a tapestry loom for himself and carpet-looms

[1] Morris never made it quite clear by what methods, in an ideal society, the jobs which he thought no man with any pride in labour could possibly want to do would get done—nor indeed has anyone yet found the solution, as Russian experience and our own coal problem clearly show. At times he seems to suggest "voluntary conscription" for such work as mining, overlooking the awkward fact that hewing coal is a skilled process which needs to be learnt, and that putting everyone to do a spot or two of mining in the day or the month or the year might be highly equalitarian but would be unlikely to produce much coal; at others he says that a reasonable society would find unnecessary great masses of wares which are now produced and which nobody really wants, so that much machine-toil would disappear of itself. Morris did not like machines, though he tried to be fair to them; his own Utopians, in *News from Nowhere*, though they have plenty to eat—and to drink!—appear to have dispensed even with agricultural machinery, and his Golden Dustman does not seem to find any dirt to cart. *News from Nowhere* is, of course, the golden dream of a summer's day, where everyone is happy and beautiful doing just what pleases him, and its economics must not be pressed too seriously. But it is fair to say that Morris's conception of craft, while it included the builder, entirely excluded the engineer; the craft pride of a worker in Rolls-Royce, or an 'Enery Straker, or the man who has learnt to manage a combined harvester, was a sealed book to him.

in the old coachhouse. Kelmscott House came to be the place of rendezvous which all London and some provincial Socialists knew and loved; but it was Kelmscott Manor which held Morris's heart. He painted it in his Utopia as a perfect house in a country made perfect, and when he had to be in London he consoled himself with the thought that the water which flowed past Kelmscott House had come to him from Kelmscott Manor far upstream.

In spite of the loss of the Red House and the troubles with his partners, Morris's life in the 'sixties and 'seventies was a very happy one, at least until 1876, when his elder daughter, then fifteen, had a breakdown from which she never recovered. Besides his varied progress as a decorator, he had suddenly become a distinguished poet. *The Life and Death of Jason,* his long verse story of the Argonauts, came out in 1867 and met with an enthusiastic reception; it was followed by *The Earthly Paradise,* his most famous book of poetry, in which like a second Chaucer and a loving disciple of the first[1] he told in some of the most readable of all verse tales which he had gathered from all parts of the world's folk-lore. "The men in the shop thought a good deal of *The Earthly Paradise* while it was coming out"; this must have delighted Morris. *The Earthly Paradise* had an even greater success than *Jason*; and he followed it, within the next eight years, with translations of the Aeneid, of the Northern sagas which he had long loved and loved more deeply after he had been on a long visit to Iceland, and with his own northern epic, *Sigurd the Volsung,* published in 1876. It seemed as if there was nothing he could not turn his hand to and succeed at—even if sneerers did call him "the poetic upholsterer." In 1882, it may be added, just before he was about to shock his class and his clients by becoming an avowed Socialist, his old college set on him an ill-timed seal of respectability by making him an Honorary Fellow—a distinction generally reserved for the really great, such as Privy

[1] O Master, O thou great of heart and tongue,
Thou well mayst ask me why I wander here,
In raiment rent of stories oft besung.
But of thy gentleness draw thou anear,
And then the heart of one who held thee dear
Mayst thou behold! So near as that I lay
The idle singer of an empty day.
"Envoi" to *The Earthly Paradise.*

JOHN MITCHELL

From a photograph in the possession of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, Ltd.

WILLIAM MORRIS

From a photograph by Emery Walker

ROBERT BLATCHFORD

From a pencil drawing by C. de Vise

Councillors and Bishops. But events, and his own convictions, were at work to drive him out into a less congenial and more disappointing world than that of Kelmscott or Merton Abbey.

He "commenced public man," it is true, in a cause arising directly out of his work. With his deep love of medieval architecture, not merely in itself but as a piece of living history, the work and legacy of the nameless craftsmen of an age which he believed to be happier than his own, he was always indignant when ancient buildings were pulled down, allowed carelessly to fall into ruin, or, what to his mind was worse because more dishonest, "restored" by people who had the impudence to believe that they knew what the old masterpieces ought to look like.[1] The mid-nineteenth century had a mania for "restoration," as any modern guide to our cathedrals and parish churches proves; and in 1877 Morris, who had been privately protesting for years, was roused to fury by reading that Sir Gilbert Scott, chief and most pretentious of the vandal architects, had been commissioned to "restore," i.e. to ruin, the lovely Minster of Tewkesbury. He wrote an angry and eloquent letter to the Press, at what seems to have been the right moment, for within a few weeks there had been formed, with the support of such public figures as Thomas Carlyle, the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings,[2] which had so long and so useful a career in awakening the English public to appreciate and to care for the monuments of their own past history. Morris was the effective founder of the S.P.A.B., and its strongest pillar for the rest of his life, even to his own financial loss. (He refused, as Morris and Co., to put new stained glass into old buildings, on the ground that it could not but do violence to the old work, and thus lost an appreciable amount of commissions.) But he certainly got as much as he gave; beside the satisfaction of success in his object, out of the public interest aroused by the S.P.A.B. grew

[1] "It," he wrote indignantly of a particularly preposterous proposal, "it was the work of an inseparable body of men who worked, as they lived, because they could do no otherwise, and unless you can bring these men back from the dead, you cannot 'restore' one verse of their epic. Rewrite the lost trilogies of Aeschylus, put a beginning and an end to the Fight at Finsbury, finish the *Squire's Tale* for Chaucer, and if you can succeed in that, you may then 'restore' Westminster Abbey!"

[2] It later acquired the pet name of Anti-Scrape Society, in allusion to its insistence that the fabric and texture of anicent buildings should not be wantonly interfered with.

the Art Workers' Guild and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, and all his work as adviser, teacher, lecturer on arts and crafts, which includes some of the best prose and the soundest social criticism which he ever wrote.[1]

At the same time the "Bulgarian Massacres," which excited the temporary fury of Liberals and sent Gladstone trumpeting all over the north in his Midlothian campaign, drew Morris for a time into politics proper; he became treasurer of the shortlived Eastern Question Association and wrote a letter to the *Daily News* in which he proudly wrote himself down "an hysterical sentimentalist." This agitation soon died away; but its important result for Morris was that it brought him directly into contact with the Radicals and the working class of London,[2] just at the time when new movements were stirring.

There has been some discussion on what actually "converted" Morris to Socialism.[3] He himself sometimes said that it was reading a paper by John Stuart Mill on the fallacies of Fourier, which propelled him in the opposite direction. He was certainly deeply influenced by Ruskin, whose instinctive views both on art and on what constituted good social life were so nearly akin to his own and who in books like *Unto This Last*, which Morris read in 1862, came so near to a Socialist philosophy without quite taking the final step. But in truth all Morris's convictions about art and all his feelings about craftsmanship and fellowship were leading him straight in that direction, as soon as he began to consider as a whole the obstacles which England of 1880 put in the way of art and fellowship.

> "I found," he says in the preface to *Signs of Change*, "as I strove to stir up people to reform, that the causes of the vulgarities of civilisation lay deeper than I had thought, and little by little I was driven to the conclusion that all these uglinesses are but the outward expression of the innate moral baseness into which we are forced by our

[1] Collected in *William Morris*, by May Morris, vol. i.

[2] "Wake, London Lads," his first political poem, forerunner of "All for the Cause," and his other famous Socialist songs, was written for this campaign.

[3] More correctly, to Anarchist-Communism. Communism, in the sense of the final goal of a classless society, not that of the discipline of a party, was Morris's real aim.

present form of society, and that it is futile to attempt to deal with them from the outside."

Like Cobbett, he had found a Thing which was the cause of all—a capitalist Thing which had to be fought. And he also found allies with whom to fight it; in 1883 he joined H. M. Hyndman's Democratic Federation as "William Morris, designer." Characteristically, he proposed to learn his new trade of agitator as humbly and thoroughly as he had learnt weaving or dyeing. Under Hyndman's tuition he forced himself to read *Das Kapital*, which he found very heavy going, remarking that he did not need a Labour Theory of Value to tell him that the rich robbed the poor, for he could see that with his own eyes; he studied with Hyndman, Belfort Bax, and others, the history of class-struggle; he prepared himself to pay his whack as a rich comrade to the costs of agitation,[1] to take on the unlovely life of the propagandist, travelling to speak and lecture in dreary town after dreary town, collecting knots of people at street corners and trying to excite their interest and sell them journals and pamphlets. He was really willing to work and learn; it was unfortunate that those who were to be his teachers knew their own craft so ill.

The Labour scene in 1880 had changed a good deal—for the better or for the worse, according to your point of view—since Applegarth left it. With the passing of the Acts of 1871 and 1875 the "new" Unions had got more or less what they wanted from the Government, and were content to sit down and consolidate their position; the Co-operators had got what they wanted several years earlier. There was still, of course, a demand for social legislation; but the appetite of the Liberal Party for reform, on which both sets of leaders mainly relied, was fading;[2] the older Radical movement was losing its vigour after the 1867 Reform Act, and Gladstone was driving into the difficulties of the new imperialism—so soon to take practical shape in the occupation of Egypt—and the storms of Irish Home Rule. Meantime, economic shadows were falling heavily; the period of sunshine came to an end with the fearful

[1] He sold a number of his rare books to make his original contribution; and first and last the S.D.F. and the Socialist League cost him a considerable sum.

[2] Chamberlain's mayoralty of Birmingham, from 1873 to 1875, more or less marks its high water.

depression of 1878–9, which was mitigated only during the ensuing years. Thousands of workmen were again on the streets or driven to the Poor Law; wages went down with a rush,[1] particularly for the less skilled; the Amalgamateds, which had little concern with the less skilled, could barely keep their own members' heads above water, and the Unions of the less skilled, such as gas workers and agricultural labourers, which had been born in the sunny years, fell on melancholy days. Under such circumstances, something had clearly gone wrong with the policy of making oneself respectable, contributing to superannuation funds and negotiating improvement of conditions with the employers—and as industry grew and towns grew the number of ill-paid and half-skilled, to whom this policy had never meant much, became rapidly greater. People began to ask themselves whether their lives could really be improved unless the whole system were altered—and the Socialists told them that they could not. Back to England, along with the cry of the American Henry George for "the land for the people," came the half-forgotten teachings of the *Communist Manifesto* and the First International.

More than one organisation was born during the 'eighties with the purpose of preaching Socialism. The Fabian Society—the gradualist, middle-class, "gas-and-water" Socialists—is described in a later chapter.[2] The Fabians were never congenial company for Morris, partly because they were non-revolutionary, but even more, I believe, because they were so extremely inartistic; with the great exception of Bernard Shaw, not one of the early Fabians cared a hoot for art of any kind, or craft, or "joy in labour"; the group which Morris joined was revolutionary, doctrinaire, and led by the highly autocratic Hyndman.

Henry Mayers Hyndman, the old Etonian with the flowing beard—"he seemed to have been born in a frock-coat and top hat," says Shaw, "and in old age looked like God in Blake's illustrations to Job"—who had the advantage, because of his upper-class connections and education, of knowing a great deal more about European countries than other English

[1] Real wages, owing to the fall in prices, dropped much less. But that fact was of little immediate consolation to the unemployed.
[2] See "Sidney Webb."

Socialists, had read Marx and been inspired by him. In 1881 he published a version of Marxism for England under the title, *England for All,* which was widely read, and set about turning the Democratic Federation,[1] founded in the same year, into a body for bringing about a revolution in Britain, which its members believed would be accompanied by similar uprisings in many Continental countries.

It is always easy to be wise after the event; and we who know that the revolution did not happen can afford to smile at those who thought with Marx that "increasing misery" in the working classes would of itself produce revolution, and mistook the temporary though unexpected setback in the growth of prosperity for the beginning of the death-throes of capitalism, who believed that a few hundreds or thousands of determined Socialists could act the part of Lenin and Trotsky and guide the uprisen proletariat to a new world where all would be brothers,[2] and who confidently predicted the outbreak for somewhere about 1889—a century after the Bastille. But at the time it did not seem so improbable. In the first years of Morris's membership of it, the Social Democratic Federation had little influence. Working-men, even Radical working-men, found its Marxist language unintelligible and unappetising, and were puzzled and put off by the Socialists' denunciation of Parliament, the Trade Unions and the co-operative societies as one and all hopeless organisations, agents in fact of capitalism and the profit-making ideal. But in the black winter of 1885–6 the Social Democratic Federation turned to organise the unemployed of London to demand relief. A procession, led by Hyndman and John Burns of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, turned aside by the police from Trafalgar Square, in its resentment broke the windows of some clubs in Pall Mall, and so alarmed respectable London that contributions to the Lord Mayor's Fund trebled within a few days. Hyndman and Burns, who had made violent speeches, were prosecuted by the police and acquitted. In the following year,

[1] It became the Social Democratic Federation three years later, though as Hyndman, for reasons of his own, had not mentioned Marx by name in *England for All*, it long enjoyed Marx's personal hostility.

[2] See the chapter of *News from Nowhere* on "How the Change Came" for Morris's own imaginative reconstruction of a revolution—which passed in his own day as very realistic. It was certainly more realistic than Owen's dream; but to twentieth-century experience it is, alas, no less of a dream.

when distress was even greater, the Socialists collected a great mass of the unemployed to march to Trafalgar Square in face of police prohibition. The authorities, fearing serious rioting, lined the Square with soldiers and set police to charge the approaching columns with great violence; in the ensuing fracas a man named Alfred Linnell was killed. The unrest was damped down; but two years later Burns, with Ben Tillett and Tom Mann, led one of the worst-off trades of London into battle for the Dockers' Tanner (sixpence an hour), and won it after an epic struggle which reverberated round the world. The year 1889 provided no revolution, but a sizeable Labour victory for the unskilled.

Morris, who had already come into collision with the police over their attempts to prevent free open-air speaking in London,[1] watched, as an observer and a marcher, the battles of Trafalgar Square; and after "Bloody Sunday" delivered the address at Linnell's funeral, and wrote the famous dirge which contains the lines

> They will not learn; they have no ears to hearken,
> They turn their faces from the eye of fate,
> Their gay-lit halls shut out the skies that darken,
> But lo! this dead man knocking at the gate.

But by 1889, though naturally glad at the dockers' victory, he was already sceptical of the near approach of revolution. His experience in the Social Democratic Federation had not been happy; he had found their perpetual squabbles on points of theory and organisation difficult to get along with, and Hyndman a dictator who insisted on having his own way. Morris was ready to learn, but not to be dragooned; and at the end of 1884, in the course of a dispute whose details do not matter now, he lost his temper completely and walked out with a number of others to form the Socialist League. He edited the League's journal, *Commonweal*, paying its expenses largely out of his own pocket, and contributing to its pages much of the best of his Socialist writing, including "Pilgrims of Hope," the long poem inspired by the Commune of Paris, and

[1] The "Dod Street Affair" of 1885 which provoked Morris to the declaration that heads this chapter. Attempts of this kind helped the Socialists in the following years by outraging Liberal and Radical sentiment.

his beautiful story of revolt in the Middle Ages, "The Dream of John Ball." To the Socialist League Morris gave much of his heart, money and time.

> "You see, my dear," he wrote to Burne-Jones's wife, who was typical of the friends who thought he must have gone completely mad, "I can't help it. The ideas which have taken hold of me will not let me rest; nor can I see anything else worth thinking about. How can it be otherwise, when to me society, which to many seems an orderly arrangement for allowing decent people to get through their lives creditably and with some pleasure, seems mere cannibalism? . . . One must turn to hope, and only in one direction do I see it now—on the road to Revolution: everything else is gone now. And now at last, when the corruption of society seems complete, there is arising a definite conception of the new order, with its demands in some sort formulated."

"In some sort," but in no very disciplined or effective sort—as Morris sadly noted when the attacks on Trafalgar Square were so easily disposed of. The neurotic quarrels of the Social Democratic Federation reappeared in the Socialist League, and in 1889 a group of Anarchists captured it, and turned Morris out of the editorship of *Commonweal*—thereby sealing their own doom as an organisation, although Morris continued for nearly a year to carry the paper financially, and gave it *News from Nowhere* as a serial. He himself, with a small group of loyalists, retired to form the Hammersmith Socialist Society, which continued to meet until his death and afterwards, and gave their first taste of Socialism to many eager young men, in the impressively Morrisian surroundings of Kelmscott House. He never ceased to be a Socialist or to demand a fundamental change in society; but after 1890 he abandoned the propagandist grind of the past seven years, and occupied himself with his new craft of printer—the Kelmscott Press was founded in 1890—and with writing the series of prose romances, bearing names like *The Sundering Flood* or *The Well at the World's End*, which make up the tale of his life's work. In 1891 he had a bad attack of gout, from which he never fully recovered; and though he continued to write articles, and even to join in efforts to secure collaboration

between the various groups of Socialists,[1] the mainspring was running down. In 1896, after another visit to Iceland in a vain hope of recovering health, he died in his sleep. He was little more than sixty years old; his heavy toil—there is no other word for it—in the cause of Socialism undoubtedly contributed to his early death, though it was no more than an extreme instance (bearing, however, especially heavily on him because of his own years and its ill-success) of his uncalculating expenditure of himself on anything for which he cared. He was buried in the little churchyard at Kelmscott, drawn from Lechlade station to his grave in a red-and-yellow farm wagon covered with boughs of willow.

Morris's experiences in the Socialist movement cannot be said to have given him either much happiness or much return. But his importance to it is much greater than his achievements in it would suggest. Apart from what he wrote—no small contribution to a movement not rich in literary expression—the scale of values which he brought into it in a hideous age was invaluable and gave generous inspiration to the young and the downtrodden. Above all, he gave to it his whole personality—his explosive rages which were so elemental and so passing as to be funny, and his occasional prejudices, as against Christopher Wren and Japanese art, as well as his reasoned preferences. Nobody could come into contact with him without realising that he had met a great man, a man who might have been almost anything, including Poet Laureate,[2] and who had become of his own will a Socialist—and not an armchair theoriser, but a fellow-worker on equal terms with all the others. "*Fellowship is heaven,*" he made his John Ball say, "*and lack of fellowship is hell.*" Morris's fellowship was Socialism.

[1] Resulting, in 1893, in the drafting of a Joint Manifesto for the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society, and the Hammersmith Socialists, of which Shaw says "it was the only document that the three of us [Hyndman, Morris and himself] had ever signed and published that was not worth a farthing."

[2] He was "approached" on the death of Tennyson, but refused.

ROBERT BLATCHFORD

(1851–1944)

Dear Mr. Smith,—I am sorry to hear that you look upon Socialism as a base or foolish thing, and upon Socialists as foolish or base men. Nevertheless, since in you lies the hope of the world, I shall try to change your opinion.

Blatchford, opening of *Merrie England*

Robert Blatchford, who can manufacture Socialists more quickly than anyone else.

G. R. S. Taylor in the *New Age*

ROBERT PEEL GLANVILLE makes a group of Christian names such as, one would think, might be bestowed by a serious Victorian politician on his eldest-born. Actually, the recipient of this sonorous string was the second son of an unsuccessful strolling player named John Blatchford, married to an equally unsuccessful small-part actress of half-Italian blood. John Blatchford's opinions, in so far as he had any, were those of a strong Churchman and vehement Tory, and he had the actor's feeling for a good resounding name. He died when the young creature was two years old, and can hardly, therefore, have influenced him much; but there are things in Robert Blatchford's career and writing which remind one that he came of stage stock on both sides.

Not that the stage gave him anything to be thankful for. Louisa Blatchford, unsuccessful in her career, was even less successful as a widow with two little boys, the younger a sickly creature whose life was often despaired of. The family drifted from small town to small town, sometimes attached to a little touring company, sometimes seeking employment by themselves. They went by train if they could afford it; if not, which was often the case, they trekked on foot. They were hungry, sometimes almost to starvation point; and above all, they were cold. Robert, when a very tiny boy, was made to get up early and hunt through the street dustbins in the hope of finding old bottles which might be sold to buy coal; throughout his

life he always remembered cold as the bitterest and cruellest enemy of the very poor.

And they were very poor. Of all my makers of the Labour movement except Keir Hardie, Blatchford had most experience of the life of the really bottom dog. What this meant, in monetary terms, can be judged from the family's standard of living when it became better-off. After nine years of this vagabond life, some distant relatives of Louisa Blatchford told her that, if she could get to Halifax, they thought they could find her work as a dressmaker. The Blatchfords were then at Bradford; having no money, they tramped to Halifax, and there Louisa succeeded in getting work which brought her in eight shillings a week, of which five shillings went in rent for two rooms. This does not sound affluence, but there were compensations. Now that the Blatchfords were settled, the men of the family could go out to earn. Montague, three years the elder, became a law-stationer's errand-boy at two shillings a week; Robert obtained a job as odd-boy (meaning beer-fetcher for the men) at a colour-printing works, for which he received eighteen pence a week for a twelve-hour day. Total to keep three persons in all but lodging, six-and-six a week. Even in 1862, the "mid-Victorian prosperity" had not reached down to the Blatchford layer; if there was a Co-op. in Halifax, they were not members of it.

Nor was Mrs. Blatchford, however much she loved her children and however hard she worked for them, a perfect mother in the mid-Victorian sense; she had no time to be, when she was wage-earner as well. She had plenty of individuality.

> "She was not a good-tempered woman," says her son. "Her temper was most uncertain. She would be agreeable for weeks, and then the nether fires would blaze up, and she was impossible for a day or so.... She was not a Bohemian at all, but very respectable and strict, and she did not like the stage. Her aversion to the idea of her sons being actors was very strong [no wonder!], and she made great sacrifices and worked very hard to keep us out of the Bohemian environment. She taught us religion and her ideas of politics, and used to read and sing to us, and tell us stories. She hated

humbug and snobbery, and she was rather satirical and not at all romantic. . . .

"She was almost like a witch with animals. Her cats followed her to church: her chickens slept on the hearthrug, and the milkman's horse would stop her in the streets and ask for cakes. She was brave and obstinate and persevering and practical, and she wore the oddest bonnets."

The little, dark, square-shouldered woman of whom this is a sketch impressed herself vividly on her sons by her character —but intermittently. She did not educate them; in fact, they were hardly educated at all, though Robert had some casual schooling, learned to read by the time he was eight, and has recorded that after he had completed his working day at the colour-factory, done his mother's errands and washed up the supper-things (if there was any supper), he read and re-read the *Pilgrim's Progress* and any stories about "Nelson and Wellington and battles" that he could get hold of. But he had no formal education and no "stuffing" with "literature." In after years, when he wrote about books for his *Clarion* public, he announced his discovery of any book, White's *Selborne* or Theocritus's *Fifteenth Idyll* or what not, in the excited terms of a man who has made a great find all by himself—wherein he resembles Cobbett. There is nothing in Blatchford's writing on literature of that faintly musty second-hand smell which all too often distinguishes the writing of those who have been thoroughly taught in early years what they ought to like.

He did not remain an odd-boy. Louisa Blatchford, determined that her sons should have a "trade," a regular job to keep them from the tramp's life and the temptations of the stage, at fourteen apprenticed him to a brushmaker, a hard and dirty job from which his principal relaxation was going to chapel—where, when he was sixteen, he met the girl whom thirteen years later he married. For some years he worked away, except for intermissions due to illness, at this depressing occupation; but there was a restlessness stirring in his bones. In 1871, when he was only a year away from having served his indentures, he arrived one morning five minutes late for the 6 a.m. clock-in. This meant that he was locked out until 9 o'clock, and during the interval of enforced leisure he went

for a walk into the country round Halifax, stared at the city from a bridge above it, and decided that it was a horrid hole and he was damned if he would go back into it. He walked to Hull, where he worked for a few weeks, then went by sea to Yarmouth, and from there, like a young Dick Whittington, walked to London. Unlike Whittington, however, he found London unkind to him. There were no jobs and therefore no food; and the great city was full of outcasts who had no home and had never heard of an Amalgamated Trade Union or its benefits. Robert Blatchford fought for work at the dock-gates without success, and sold all the clothes he could spare. With another starveling, a boy called Harry Fielding, he foraged the streets for food and slept huddled in doorways. After one night so spent he woke to find himself alone, a note pinned to his coat which read,

> "Good-bye; I'm off. Thank you for being so good to me. Look to yourself. I will try the road. Keep up your spirits.—Yours, HARRY. P.S.: If you can't hold out, try the soldiers."[1]

After holding out a little longer, Harry's comrade took the last bit of advice. On the glorious First of June, 1871, he accepted the Queen's Shilling at St. George's Barracks, and became a soldier. The sergeant who was responsible for his enrolment held out to him the splendours of a cavalry regiment, open to anyone over five feet six.

> "When I said I was only five feet five, the gallant sergeant, with a blush, congratulated the upper windows of a shop upon that fact. 'So much the better,' said he. 'You shall have your pick of seventy crack infantry regiments—best in the Service. Far easier life than cavalry life. More time to spare; no brute beast for a master.'"[2]

So the brushmaker's apprentice joined the 103rd Regiment, Dublin Fusiliers (pet name, the Ramchunders) and remained there for six years.

The Army was Blatchford's university; that is to say, it did for him all and more than all that a university education is supposed to do for his social superiors. In the first place, it

[1] Blatchford, *A Son of the Forge*.
[2] Blatchford, *My Eighty Years*. See also *Tales for the Marines*.

turned him from a sickly lad into a strong and healthy man; it also, by bringing out in him physical aptitudes which he had not known he possessed, gave him the basic confidence in himself which is so valuable a possession. "'E shoots like an angel!" his fellow-rookies rather inappropriately remarked; he liked drilling and mock-fighting, and he discovered in himself a talent for cricket which in after life got him an invitation to bowl for the county of Cheshire. He learned to stand upright, to keep himself clean, the religion of *esprit de corps* and the value of collective action. Above all, he found in the Army comradeship and human nature; he was loved by his fellows, even though he surprised them by refusing to drink or swear or pick up girls, and he loved them, and developed a portrait-painter's eye for their qualities. Some of the very best of Blatchford's writing is in his sketches of Army life and in those stories, or "cuffers," to use the Army word, which are told in the barrack-room after lights out.

> "The form of procedure," said Blatchford in the preface to *Tales for the Marines*, "is much the same in all regiments. Private Noakes requests Private Stokes to 'spin a cuffer.' Stokes calls 'Attention!' and then says 'Boots,' to which the men reply in chorus 'Spurs!' The 'cuffer' then begins, the spinner testing the interest and wakefulness of his audience by interjecting the word 'Boots!' at such intervals as may seem desirable."

After the *Clarion* was founded, members of the Clarion Fellowship paid tribute to its founder, and expressed their own comradely feelings, by using "Boots!" and "Spurs!" as a kind of Masonic greeting in public places.

Like Cobbett, Blatchford got a great deal out of the Army; and, like Cobbett, even after nearly a hundred years he found peculation still rampant in the financial side of military affairs, in the faking of accounts and the manipulation of canteen finance. Unlike Cobbett, however, he did not set himself up as a reformer; he, along with his companions, shrugged his shoulders and noted for future reference the fact that persons placed in authority had a persistent inclination to fleece the defenceless creatures beneath them. In 1878, having reached the rank of sergeant and acquired a "certificate of education"

which stated that No. 4231 possessed the capacity to read and write, also the requisite proficiency in numeration "and no more," he left the Army and obtained work as timekeeper to the Weaver Navigation Company at Northwich in Cheshire, where, as an enthusiastic subordinate recollected, "he *was* gifted; if you went into the office he could do your photograph with blacklead in a jiffy."[1] His remuneration was thirty shillings a week, which was not affluence; but being regular helped to save him from the industrial depression of the following years. In 1880 he married Sarah Crossley, the girl from Halifax. "It seems," he wrote, "as though my wife and I were born married."

For the next few years there is little to chronicle in Blatchford's life. He tried his hand at writing stories, one or two of which were published, and by 1884 we find him employed to produce a weekly column of notes for a semi-comic paper called the *Leeds Toby*. This was not a gold-mine, for he had to write four or five thousand words a week for the huge sum of one guinea; its importance in his life is that it gave him experience of journalism sufficient for A. M. Thompson to obtain him his first full-time job.

Alex. M. Thompson, lifelong friend and survivor of Blatchford, was in 1884 a very young journalist in Manchester with, as he has said, a pretty good opinion of himself. He made the acquaintance of Blatchford through an old Army friend of the latter, by name Norris, who, finding the society of the Ramchunders dull after Blatchford had left them, secured his own discharge and went first to Northwich and then to Manchester. There he found and made a friend of young Thompson and talked with him on all subjects. But the recurrent burden of his conversation was the brilliance and attainments of the other ex-sergeant. "You think *you* know," was his daily refrain, "—but wait until you meet Bob Blatchford." Exasperated, the very cultured and knowledgeable young man pestered Norris to arrange a meeting, which eventually took place in Manchester, in Thompson's bedroom, where Thompson—presumably with the hope of impressing a mere

[1] Blatchford, like the late Prime Minister, had the good fortune to be able to relax and to solace himself with drawing and painting; when visited with a fit of depression it was his habit to go and paint landscapes, mostly in cobalt blue.

ex-sergeant employed by the Weaver Navigation Company—was lying in bed reading the Koran. "He reminded me," said Blatchford, "of the song 'My Sweetheart when a Boy,' so young, so innocent did he appear." His youthful exhibitionism, however, met with short shrift when he began to talk to the older man. In his own words,[1]

> "I figuratively threw a chest, and told him all about journalism and literature. He puffed at his pipe and gazed at me in what I took to be dreamy admiration till I came to mention the shining lights of the Profession, intellectual giants like Byron Webber and Clement Scott. Then . . . he proceeded to signify in crisp, plain terms that he didn't think much of my idols. When I asked for reasons, he answered with a remark which was quite new to my ideas of journalistic requirements and struck me at the moment as absurdly incongruous: 'The men you mention don't seem, for one thing, to have any principles. How can a man write clearly unless he thinks clearly? And how can he think clearly unless he starts from some sort of philosophic basis?' "

Blatchford's own philosophic basis was not yet Socialism; he was not converted until some years later, when an indignant working-class reader of one of his articles told him that he had condemned the Socialists without knowing anything about them and sent him to books to find out;[2] he was merely a thoroughgoing Radical who detested injustice to anyone, particularly the lowest classes. But in the conversations and correspondence which followed this interview both Blatchford and Thompson educated each other to a ready acceptance of the Socialist doctrine when they knew what it was.

In 1885 Edward Hulton, Thompson's employer and grandfather of the present proprietor of *Picture Post*, bought a London paper called *Bell's Life*, and offered Blatchford a job on it at four pounds a week to write a column signed "Nunquam Dormio"; he accepted and moved to London. His work was enjoyable and satisfactory—not least because he there met for the first time the third of the great *Clarion* team,

[1] A. M. Thompson, *Here I Lie*.
[2] His final conversion, he tells us, was due to a pamphlet signed by Morris and Hyndman, called *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism*.

the astonishing E. F. Fay; but the paper, under a too exuberant editor, before long came to grief; and in 1887 Hulton brought him back to Manchester to write for a new venture of his, the *Sunday Chronicle*. Thompson was on its staff and Fay its London correspondent.

The *Sunday Chronicle* made the reputation of "Nunquam"—he now dropped the "Dormio." As leader-writer and as weekly columnist on social questions he appealed immediately to the tough heads of the north, and quite quickly became so popular that by 1891 he was earning a thousand a year. But his success was not exactly what his proprietor had envisaged. What Hulton had meant to supply was a comfortable Sunday edition of his daily papers, something which a sportsman could read in peace after his Sunday dinner; what he got, week by week, were vivid and furious denunciations of social conditions, of which a series of articles on the slums of Manchester ilustrated by one W. Palmer is as good an example as any.[1] No doubt they helped to sell the paper, but to whom? And matters were made no better when the eloquent "Nunquam" was converted to Socialism, announced his conversion in the *Chronicle*, and proceeded to throw its columns open, as far as he was concerned, to a debate on Socialism in which Fabians and members of the Social Democratic Federation made hay with the opposition. The last straw came in 1891, when Blatchford announced that he had told the Socialists of East Bradford that he would stand for that division at the next election as a Socialist. Hulton said "No Socialism in my paper"; Blatchford replied, "Then no Nunquam." He resigned, and was followed by three other members of the *Chronicle* staff—his brother Montague, Thompson and Fay. On December 12th of that year these four, with a clerk named R. B. Suthers and an advertisement manager named Tom Wilkinson, brought out the first number of the *Clarion*.

If there was ever a sacrifice of money for principle, it was Blatchford's in 1891. He was not in a strong financial position; he had a wife and young family, and, though he had a good salary, he had spent a great deal on his prospective candidature for Bradford—which never came off—and on a comic opera, his sole venture into the profession of his parents, which was a

[1] "Whiffley Puncto" of the *Clarion*, father of the present Lord Rusholme.

KEIR HARDIE

From a photograph by
Barratt's Photo Press Agency, Ltd.

GEORGE LANSBURY

From a photograph by Press Portraits Bureau

ARTHUR HENDERSON

From a photograph by Press Portraits Bureau

failure. To lose a good job, even in the company of his friends, with the certainty that no newspaper in England was likely to want to employ him, was a serious matter; and to start—and try to live by—a new Socialist journal, with the financial struggles of *Justice* and *Commonweal* in mind, was even more serious.

The foundation of the *Clarion* was magnificently characteristic of its history. Its name even was an accident; when the founders began to discuss it Fay thought *The Perisher* would sound nice. Thompson suggested *Champion*, and Fay, mishearing, cried "Haw! That's it, *Clarion!*" and *Clarion* it became. Its finance was in keeping. Somehow—mainly by borrowing on their insurance policies—the four of them raised four hundred pounds' worth of capital between them, and an unknown young actor, Robert Courtneidge, an acquaintance of Thompson's, lent them a hundred pounds free of interest. Then it had to be produced, which was a matter of considerable difficulty, because the available printers did not find its financial backing or its prospects sufficiently attractive to take the risk. Eventually the *Co-operative News* plant agreed to print, and Thompson found a man who would supply paper. Unfortunately, when the paper arrived it proved to be heavily loaded with china clay, which stuck in lumps to the cylinders, so that great packets of the first issue of the *Clarion* arrived either torn in strips or covered with an unreadable blur meant to be print—upon which a number of advertising contracts which had been painfully secured were promptly cancelled. To crown the tale of trouble, in Manchester on the eve of publication day the open-air posters, on which the founders had spent all their available cash, were washed out and swept away in a record rainstorm.

Nevertheless, the *Clarion* came out. Nearly forty thousand people tried to buy its mutilated first issue, and thereafter it had a steady sale of about thirty-five thousand for some years. It was not a lucrative proposition, of course; Blatchford's income from it was far below what he had earned on the *Chronicle*, (he wrote also in other papers) but its readers stuck to it, and brought more readers. Its sales were steadily rising when the serialisation of Blatchford's books, beginning with *Merrie England*, sent them leaping up; at its peak they reached just

under a hundred thousand—far more than any Socialist weekly had dreamed of.

This success came about because the *Clarion* was a unique paper, produced by remarkable people in a remarkably individual way, for an audience which appreciated its individuality and loved it with a personal love. Take the producers first. The four protagonists were: Blatchford, who wrote as "Nunquam," and was the editor—though, Thompson tells us, he often did not even trouble to read his contributors' contributions, much less censor them in any editorial way; Thompson himself, whose signature was "Dangle"; Montague Blatchford ("Mong Blong"); and Fay ("The Bounder"). Many others, including journalists of great distinction, wrote for the *Clarion* in its heyday. But so long as the four were together, it was they who made the paper; and of the four the one who most coloured it, after Blatchford, was Fay.

Edward Francis Fay, bearded giant of six feet two, dressed in a huge shabby great overcoat with his hat on the back of his head and an enormous heavy-headed bamboo cane under his arm, was more like a character out of Dickens than anything else. Even his ordinary speech suggested Alfred Jingle—

> "Haw! You behold in me one out o' suits with fortune. Pestilential person with the scythe hovers over domestic oasis with lethal O.P. optic fixed on first-born. Ha! Fate hath dealt knock like Sullivan at twelve stone six. Poor blooming gentleman has copped the auctioneer. Very snide poor sportsman is. Haw! The poor blooming gentleman. And I that sucked the honey of his musie fizz must feel the deep damnation of his taking off,"

was Fay's way of informing his colleagues that his elder brother was at the point of death and he must go home and look after him. He loved food and drink, a good story, and good fellowship; his favourite doctor's prescription was "Take a long time over your meals—and eat very fast," and he is reputed to have gone into a vegetarian restaurant, asked for some of every dish they had in the place, eaten it and then inquired where he could get a porterhouse steak. He was the great stand-by of all meetings of the Clarion Fellowship and all parties of the

Cinderella Clubs, handled the paper's business with London wholesalers to an accompaniment of violent language and even violent deeds which brought him near an action for assault,[1] and thought up highly original ways of advertising it, one of which was to slap sticky labels with the legend *Read the CLARION* on the flanks of unsuspecting cows.

Such was "The Bounder," who died in 1896, just after the *Clarion* had moved to London, and of such a kind was the paper for which he wrote. There never was a paper like it; it was not in the least the preconceived idea of a Socialist journal. It was not solemn; it was not high-brow; it did not deal in theoretical discussion, or inculcate dreary isms. It was full of stories, jokes and verses—sometimes pretty bad verses and pretty bad jokes—as well as articles. It was written in language that anyone could understand, "with no middle-class unction," to quote an unemployed carpenter friend of Thompson's; it believed that anyone, whatever his condition or education, who could read plain English could be made into a Socialist, and that Socialism was not a difficult dogma, but a way of living and thinking which could make all men behave like brothers in the ordinary pursuits of life. In the confidence that its readers would back it up, it carried Morris's gospel of fellowship through the industrial areas in homely terms which Morris would never have been able to use; it made Socialism seem as simple and universal as a pint of bitter. It is pleasant to notice that Morris, two years before his death, expressed his appreciation of "Mr. Blatchford's *Clarion*."

And its readers backed it up, not merely by buying copies of it, but in action. One of the remarkable things about the *Clarion* is the number of spontaneous organisations which grew up around it. The Clarion Fellowship, whose members greeted one another with the pass-word "Boots!" answered by "Spurs!" was the chief of these; but there were also the Clarion Vans, which rushed about the countryside with pamphlets and soap-box speakers,[2] the Clarion Cycling Clubs,

[1] "Our Mr. Fay thereupon took the newspaper merchant by the cravat and the waistband, swayed him gently off his feet, bumped him three times with measured beat against his own counter, tossed him into a corner, kicked him, and departed." Thompson, *Here I Lie*.

[2] Serving also, in times of distress, as soup-kitchens, distribution centres for clothes, and what not.

started by Tom Groom to introduce "Clarionettes" to the pleasures of the countryside and the countryside to the *Clarion*, the Clarion Glee Clubs, whose inspirer and chief organiser was Montague Blatchford, the Clarion Cinderella Clubs, which gave immense Christmas parties to poor children, and the variegated host of activities—they included Nursing Guilds, Handicraft Guilds, Correspondence Circles, an Anti-Cruelty Crusade and an Early Shopping League—which were associated with the name of Julia Dawson (died 1946). Some of these things were also done by branches of the I.L.P. after its foundation, but nothing like so many. The Clarion Fellowship, in the full life which it offered its members, reminds one more of some of the Continental Socialist movements, in Austria for example, before the great wars, though without the dogma; it manufactured Socialists and semi-Socialists of one kind and another wherever it went, and when it died something went out of the British movement that has never come back again.

However brilliant his contributors and however much they divagated in particular opinions from his own, Blatchford was the *Clarion*, and the paper "Mr. Blatchford's"—the more so after he had definitely turned away from organised political action. At one time he had had political ambitions. At the beginning of the 'nineties, after the revelations of Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People of London* had shocked all consciences that were shockable, and the great Dock Strike had shown that there was a new strength stirring among the underdogs, there began to grow a demand for a workers' political party independent of all others. This demand, which resulted in the formation of the I.L.P., is described more fully in the chapter on Keir Hardie; here it suffices to say that in 1892 Blatchford and a few others took some preliminary steps towards founding an independent Labour political party, but soon found themselves in opposition to Hardie and the majority of those concerned on what was known as the "Fourth Clause," i.e. on whether Socialists ought to vote under any circumstances for candidates of any other political party. Blatchford and his group, who had a great contempt and dislike for Gladstone and the Liberal leaders, thought that it was a denial of Socialist faith—as well as being completely useless

—to vote for anyone who was not a Socialist in any election to any representative body, but they could not carry their point; and when the I.L.P. was formed in the following year Blatchford played no part in it.

Instead, he gave his mind to making more Socialists through the written word, and in 1894 *Merrie England* began to appear serially in the *Clarion*, whose circulation immediately rose by ten thousand. This encouraged the *Clarion* to reissue the articles as a shilling book, which surprised everyone by instantly selling twenty thousand copies; it was then decided to take the much greater risk of publishing at a penny. Within the year three-quarters of a million copies had been disposed of, without counting numerous pirated editions circulating in the United States which must have amounted to at least as many again; and it was translated into Welsh, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, French, Spanish, and Hebrew. Never had any book on Socialism had so instant and so wide an appeal. Thompson says that within a year of its publication the number of Socialists in Lancashire had multiplied by a hundred. Thompson may be a biased witness; but the staid *Manchester Guardian*, writing many years later, calculated that "for every convert made by *Das Kapital* there were a hundred made by *Merrie England*," which is certainly not an overstatement.

Merrie England is not Blatchford's only political book. In 1899 he followed it up by *Dismal England*, an exposé of conditions as they were, not as they might be, and three years later by *Britain for the British*, in which he further expounded his original thesis. (He also wrote, in *The Sorcery Shop*, a cheerful sketch of a teetotal and vegetarian Utopia, which includes some good Socratic dialogues.) But *Merrie England* is by far the most important and the most influential. It contains little or no dogma, no disquisitions, in the manner of Marx or Hyndman, on how the maldistribution of property which we call Riches and Poverty has come about, nor blue-prints of how it is to be ended, by a dictatorship of the proletariat or otherwise. It is written in the form of letter to "Dear John Smith," i.e. Mr. Everybody, who knows no economics and no history and has never heard of the proletariat, but who can see with his own eyes, once Blatchford has opened them a little, that

poverty is a wicked thing which ought not to exist in a civilised society, that it results in individual cruelties committed personally on millions of John Smiths and Mary Smiths which would make any John and Mary sick and furious if they saw them for themselves, and that poverty and suffering could be banished if people would only make up their minds to get rid of capitalism and the profit-makers and to use the bounty of earth for the happiness of the people who live in it—all in a manner and in words which the simplest reader could understand. Here are two samples, one of Blatchford's method of explaining an economic question, the second of his denunciation of non-Socialist standards of value.

"The capitalist is not capital. He is the person who owns capital. He is the person who lends capital. He is the person who charges for the use of capital. This 'capital' which he lends at usury! *He* did not produce it. *He* does not use it. He only *charges* for it. . . . To say that we could not work without capital is as true as to say we could not mow without a scythe. To say that we could not work without a capitalist is as false as to say that we could not mow a meadow unless all the scythes belonged to one man. Nay, it is as false as to say that we could not mow unless all the scythes belonged to one man and *he* took a third of the harvest as payment for them. . . . In our State is much capital, but there are no capitalists. The manager of a mine is necessary, the owner of a mine is not necessary; the captain of a ship is useful, the owner of a ship is useless."

* * *

"In my Utopia, when Cain asked, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' he would be answered with a stern affirmative. In my Utopia a thing would be considered cheap or dear according to the price it *cost*; and not according to the price that was paid for it. Matches may be *dear*—from a Utopian point of view—at 2½d. per 100; because, you see, it may be necessary to *add* a few items to the cost of production which are *not* charged for in the retail price. As thus:

Item.—100 women done to death by labour before their time.

Item.—200 children killed by preventable disease, in the slums.
Item.—Say, 10 boys driven into a career of crime by hunger and neglect.
Item.—Say, 6 girls driven to a life of shame by similar causes.
Item.—The cost of keeping several broken old male and female paupers.
Item.—Pauper graves for the same.
Item.—Cost of fat beadle kept to superintend the above old wrecks.
Item.—An increase of rates for police and prison officials.
Item.—The parish doctor, the dealer in adulterated gin, the scripture reader, the coffin maker, and a fraction of the Cabinet Minister's time spent in proving that 'you cannot interfere with the freedom of contract' nor 'tamper with the economic balance between producer and consumer.'

"Add all these items on to the match bill, Mr. Smith, and tell me if you call those matches 'cheap.' "

The catalogue in the second of these extracts is a very fair sample of Blatchford's vigorous personal style.

Blatchford, like Owen before him and many others since, exaggerated the immediately possible increase in the productive powers of the world and brushed aside all the difficulties which subsequent generations have found to lie in the path of equal distribution; but his strong plea for justice and humanity fell on many willing ears in his own. If Hyndman and the ardent Marxists had been right and the social revolution had been waiting just round the corner, the public Blatchford had created would have been a tremendous asset to its leaders.

The years immediately after the appearance of *Merrie England* marked the height of the influence of Blatchford and the *Clarion*, which moved to London in 1895 and opened a bookshop in Fleet Street. Its circulation went on growing, but its support of the South African War—on which the ex-sergeant of the 103rd took much the same view as Rudyard Kipling—lost it much popularity in the movement; and early in the new century its editor administered a further shock.

Reviewing, and heartily recommending, Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* to his readers, he stated categorically that

> "the book demolishes the entire structure upon which the religions of the world are based. There is no escape from that conclusion. The case for science is complete."

He met the cries of anguished readers with a defiant series of atheistic articles which he subsequently reissued in a book called *God and My Neighbour*, followed by another on similar lines called *Not Guilty*. The subsequent row did not hurt the circulation of the paper; violent controversy seldom has that effect. But it did bring out the eclecticism of the *Clarion*—expressed in the complete lack of editorial control or editorial policy—which in the end caused the break-up of the movement. Two further causes of disruption appeared shortly afterwards.

Blatchford, of course, wrote on any subject that he pleased at any time. But his direct interest in Labour politics had grown intermittent—the *Clarion* did not even notice the landslide election of 1906; he despised the new Labour Party and disliked both Keir Hardie and MacDonald, and had left the running of the political side of the paper to a wild young man named Victor Grayson, who in 1908 fought a runaway election in Colne Valley on a Socialist programme in face of the opposition of the Party leaders.[1] Three years later Grayson induced a number of *Clarion* supporters to join with him a wing of the I.L.P. which disliked the Labour Party, and the S.D.F., to form a new body called the British Socialist Party—in which, owing to the dominating mind of Hyndman and the discipline of his followers, the S.D.F. became the effective element.[2] As if this were not confusing enough, Blatchford, during those years, had become convinced of the imminent menace of German militarism and not merely in the *Clarion*, but, what was much more staggering for his supporters, in Harmsworth's *Daily Mail*, wrote articles prophesying war and

[1] Except Philip Snowden, who however changed his mind later. After a brief and turbulent Parliamentary career, Grayson was ejected from the House. He subsequently went to pieces and took to drink, and his final fate is one of the unsolved mysteries of the Labour movement.

[2] After many vicissitudes and violent changes of policy, the B.S.P. finally disappeared into the Communist Party.

demanding military and naval preparations. This, to a Labour movement brought up to believe that the pacific co-operation of all the peoples of the world was at hand, was the last straw; the combination of atheism, political extremism, and "war-mongering" with all the *Clarion*'s outraging of Nonconformist consciences, could not possibly make a coherent policy, and the outbreak of war finished its influence. In dropping to one-tenth of its 1913 circulation it only suffered along with other Labour papers such as the *Daily Herald*; but Labour sentiment, reawakening as the war went on, was increasingly in favour of ending it, and a strongly anti-German periodical had little chance. The *Clarion* struggled on for some years after the war was over; but eventually it died. Blatchford continued his journalistic activities for many years, mostly in the yellower Sunday press. In 1931 he produced his chatty autobiography, *My Eighty Years*; he died in 1944.

Robert Blatchford's name is apt to be omitted from, or lightly passed over, in histories of the Labour movement, for the simple reason that he fits into no organisational niche. He is not in the line of descent either from Paine through Mill to the Fabians or from the Chartists to the S.D.F. and the Syndicalists, and he never became anything but a lukewarm supporter (when he was not its vehement critic) of the Labour Party; he stands by himself and ends, as far as his Socialism is concerned, alone. But it would be a great mistake to underrate him or his influence. In a day when most people thought that Socialism ought to mean conscientious study of difficult documents (like the S.D.F.) or cunning wire-pulling on town councils, like the Fabians, or at most, like the I.L.P., grave and passionate denunciation of social evils, Blatchford and his Clarionettes thought it ought also to be *fun*, to mix colour with life as well as indignation. And he wanted to spread the colour as well as the indignation as widely as possible; that is why he took so much pains to get himself a good and simple style. Thompson has told us that in order to learn shorthand he wrote out in shorthand the greater part of *Webster's Dictionary*, which taught him the meaning of a great many long words; later, in order to gain command of shorter ones, he spent two years in intensive study of the Bible, writing out passages from memory, and noting the difference when he had

written down a longer or weaker word than that used in the original. In this self-training, as in many others, he reminds one of Cobbett. He never attained to Cobbett's mastery of English; his verse is mostly doggerel, his taste is not impeccable, and he is capable of such atrocities as "the girl sang the simple sweet old song, sang it *in a rich winy voice with a throb in it*" (my italics). But even his verse had a straightforward appeal which went over to his audiences;[1] he alone could have written, had he chosen, boys' stories with a Socialist moral which were neither dreary nor dreadful; and at his best he was in the front rank of living writers of English prose.

With his style, his gusto, and his simple convictions, he made the unique creation called the Clarion Fellowship. Perhaps it was inevitable that the Fellowship should not endure; its looseness of organisation and its capability of finding room for dozens of different opinions loudly expressed suited an age of mental ease and irresponsibility when men may have been poor and wretched in their lives, but did not have to contemplate an atom bomb if they ceased to keep their ranks taut and toe the party line. But as the Radical Socialism of the latter quarter of the nineteenth century drew some of its faith and some of its workers from the ranks of those who had once been Chartists, so, in the inter-war years, many of those who worked at building up the new Labour Party had had their baptism of propaganda and brickbats in Edwardian days, standing up to harangue a hostile audience on the tailboard of a Clarion van.

[1] The best of it is *A New Song of the Shirt*, republished in *What's All This?* The worst is in his poems for children, of which the less said the better.

JAMES KEIR HARDIE

(1856–1915)

Socialism, by placing the land and the instruments of production in the hands of the community, will eliminate only the idle and useless classes at both ends of the scale. . . . We are called upon to decide the question propounded in the Sermon on the Mount, as to whether we will worship God or Mammon.

Keir Hardie in the House of Commons, April 23rd, 1901

The moving impulse of Keir Hardie's work was a profound belief in the common people. He believed in their capacity, and he burned with indignation at their unmerited sufferings.

Snowden on Keir Hardie

THERE is only one name in this gallery which is certain to be known to every British Labour grouping any time, anywhere, of whomsoever composed, and that is the name which heads this chapter. Those who know something of literature or the democratic story think with gratitude of Paine or Cobbett, Morris or Owen; stalwarts of the Labour Party will have ready cheers for the names of "Uncle Arthur" Henderson or the Webbs; but say "Keir Hardie" and the room rises at you. The task of this chapter is to show how this man, no great thinker, a good but not outstanding speaker, as a writer much inferior to Cobbett or even Blatchford, without any of the Webbs' flair for political intrigue—and who died broken-hearted among what seemed the ruin of all his hopes—has come to occupy that unique position in the hearts of his countrymen.

Keir Hardie the Lanarkshire miner who formed the I.L.P. and the Labour Party, had Radicalism in his bones; his ancestor Andrew Hardie was hanged after the Bonnymuir riot of 1820, when Lord Sidmouth's spies egged on a wretched handful of colliers to take up arms against the military, and his grandfather died of cholera in circumstances of avoidable misery which left a deep mark on the family mind. He was not originally a miner; his father was a ship's carpenter who had come to a little village near Holytown in order to marry his

mother, a farm servant who worked both before and after Keir's birth;[1] and at seven years old he went out to work as an errand-boy in Glasgow, where his father had taken a shore job in Napier's shipbuilding yard. For three years he was employed in one place after another; in 1866 there was a great lock-out in the Clyde shipyards, in which strike pay fell to two shillings and one-and-sixpence a week, and for some time all that the Hardie household had to live on was this plus Keir's wage of four-and-sixpence a week for a twelve-hour day. After this experience the family moved to Quarter, in the colliery area, and in 1867, at ten and a half years old, Keir went down the mine as a trapper.

The Hardies left Glasgow with no very kindly feelings for their betters. The lock-out had been long and bitter, and in addition Keir had been given the sack, at the grimmest moment, by his employer, a prosperous and pious baker, under circumstances which even eighty years afterwards make one's blood boil. He had been late twice to work, partly because he had been up half the night looking after his dying brother, and on the second occasion, when he reached the bakery on a winter morning, drenched with rain and without breakfast, there being no food in the house, he was told that the master wanted him upstairs.

> "Outside the dining-room a servant bade me wait till 'master had finished prayers.' At length the girl opened the door, and the sight of that room is fresh in my memory even as I write, nearly fifty years after. Round a great mahogany table sat the members of the family, with the father at the top. In front of him was a very wonderful-looking coffee boiler, in the great glass bowl of which the coffee was bubbling. The table was loaded with bacon and eggs and other dainties. My master looked at me over his glasses, and said, in quite a pleasant voice: 'Boy, this is the second morning you have been late, and my customers leave me if they are kept waiting for their hot breakfast rolls. I therefore dismiss you, and, to make you more careful in future, I have decided to fine you a week's wages.' . . .
>
> "As I passed through the shop the girl in charge gave me a roll and said a kind word. I knew my mother was waiting

[1] Keir was the eldest of nine; one died during the lock-out.

for my wages. As the afternoon was drawing to a close, I returned home and told her what had happened. It seemed to be the last blow. The roll was still under my vest, but soaked with rain. That night the baby was born, and the sun rose on the first of January, 1867, over a home in which there was neither fire nor food, though, fortunately, help came before the day had reached its noon."[1]

This unctuous brutality might have been taken as an exceptional instance, although Hardie's favourite writer, Robert Burns, had long ago inveighed against the nauseating tyranny of the Scots unco' guid. But, when the Hardies migrated to the coalfields, they moved into an atmosphere of class war naked and unashamed.

Mining workers, as we have all good cause to know by now, have had an experience exceptional in the history of industrial labour. Miners, for the most part, do not live in towns, like London or even Manchester, where workers in other trades and middle-class sympathisers with the unjustly oppressed are to be found, who might stand their friends, as Cardinal Manning did to the London dockers in the 1889 strike, when it comes to a fight with their employers. Miners in the nineteenth century at all events lived in colliery villages, owned and controlled by the men who owned their livelihoods. The houses they lived in belonged to the coal-owners; except in the few cases where a Co-op. existed, any shops there were either belonged to the coal-owners or were dependent on their good will; if they transgressed the law they were brought up before a magistrates' bench, consisting of coal-owners.[2] Most of them, as they did not live in towns, had no votes before 1884; and the literary public was inclined to regard them as social pests —a Victorian novel tells of a young man having inherited a property which unfortunately contained "a great many miners"—as one might say Colorado beetles. Life was traditionally cheap in the mines and disasters frequent; up till 1814

[1] Hardie in *Merthyr Pioneer*, February 1st, 1915.

[2] As late as 1920, I asked Herbert Smith, President of the Miners' Federation, why the miners did not pay for an advertising campaign to inform the public about their conditions, as the railwaymen had successfully done the year before. "Lass," said that tough Yorkshireman, "there's no pooblic in mining villages. There's just t'owners, and us; and why should we pay to tell t'owners what our wages is? *They know.*"

no inquests were held on miners killed at work. Under such circumstances it was impossible for the industrial policy of the miners to be as calm and statesmanlike as the ideals of Robert Applegarth and the Junta; even Alexander Macdonald, secretary of the National Union of Miners and the Junta's friend, who believed stoutly in the improvement of mining conditions through legislation, had to organise strikes and lock-outs for his members.

In Scotland, where in the eighteenth century miners had been actual serfs, the class difference was as sharp as anywhere except in South Wales, and any miner of spirit was almost bound to find himself an "agitator" for the many grievances under which his fellows laboured—and therefore a marked man. When Hardie first went to Quarter times were not too bad, apart from the misery (which he remembered all his life) of the long dark hours underground and the continuous dangers. Trade was on the upgrade; wages were fairly good; and he had a chance to improve his mind by discussion in the Evangelical Church[1] and in the Good Templars Union. He also learned to read and write, though when he joined the Templars at seventeen he was still unable to sign his name. But notwithstanding the good times there was much to object to in the conditions of the pits, and as Hardie grew up he found his mates putting him forward in the chair at protest meetings, sending him to head deputations to the management on grievances, etc. This led him on by stages to become a voluntary organiser of Trade Unionism, which after a good start had fallen badly away in the Scottish coalfields, and when the prosperous days were over and wages were cut (in some cases to as little as two shillings a day) to make efforts to mitigate their fall. In 1878, however, when trade was very bad, he was sharply reminded of the risks of an agitator's life. One morning he arrived at work to be met by a furious manager who ordered him and his two younger brothers off the premises with the words, "We'll hae nae damned Hardies in this pit!" This meant victimisation and boycott through the whole Lanarkshire coalfield. Hardie went to his mother, who

[1] Hardie's parents became atheists after their experience of the Glasgow baker, but Hardie himself was a Christian of a non-dogmatic kind, and the Sermon on the Mount is the basis of much of his Socialism.

had moved to set up a small grocer's shop at Low Waters near Hamilton, and started next-door to her as a tobacconist and newsagent, eking out his receipts by getting himself appointed local correspondent to the *Glasgow Weekly News* and by writing an odd article here and there. He never went back underground; at twenty-three the Quarter pits had done their best to take his living away from him, and had made him an "agitator" for life.

He began "agitating" in 1879, as unpaid secretary to a local society, the Hamilton Miners' Union, which was attempting to reunite the fragments of older Trade Unionism into a Lanarkshire Union, and was sent by them as delegate to a Conference of Scottish miners. In the autumn of that year he became National Secretary to the Scottish Miners—a title more high-sounding than the reality. For there was no Scottish Miners' Union; it was Hardie's business to make one. But the times were not propitious. Early in the following year, as trade seemed to be lifting a little from the deep depression, local strikes for wage improvements broke out in different parts of Lanarkshire, and colliery brass bands toured Scotland asking for support. But the employers were too strong; the men were all forced back to work. Hardie succeeded in preventing blacklegs from coming over from Ayrshire, but that was the most he could do. He had married a girl named Lillie Wilson, and strove to keep his shop and his mother's shop going; but as their customers were mostly miners the Hardies nearly starved along with them.

After the strike his position in Lanark became impossible, and at the beginning of 1881, having received an invitation from the miners of Ayrshire to organise an Ayrshire Union, he moved with his wife to a cottage in New Cumnock, which remained his home for many years. His efforts were so far successful that when in October the Ayrshire miners struck for a wage advance the stoppage was universal over the whole county; and though the men were beaten in the end after a six months' struggle—mining strikes are mostly long and dour—in which Hardie worked untiringly begging for help, setting up soup-kitchens and asking for gifts of potatoes from the farmers to keep the miners' bodies and souls together—when it was all over the organisation still held firm, and

Hardie as a leader had made his name. For some years afterwards he was the Union's unpaid president, managing somehow to support himself and a young family by writing articles for Scottish Liberal journals; in the summer of 1886 he became secretary, at seventy-five pounds a year, of a reorganised and much stronger Union, and in the autumn of a still rather embryonic Scottish Miners' Federation. The following January he started his first paper, *The Miner*, which a year later turned into the journal always associated with his name, *The Labour Leader*.

Hardie, during these years, was moving towards Socialism; but his conversion was a slow process. When he began his work at Old Cumnock, indeed, there was no Socialism to be converted to. Marx's International was gone, and Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation yet to come; Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* had not been published in Britain; the nearest approaches to Socialism were the demands for land reform made by the Irish Land League and the dispossessed Highland crofters, whose champions were Dr. G. B. Clark, afterwards a lifelong Socialist of the Left, and the wild picturesque Scottish laird, Robert Cunninghame Graham. But these were still Liberals; when Cunninghame Graham in 1886 fought and won a vigorous election in North-west Lanark, with the support of the miners, on a programme which included the nationalisation of minerals, he fought as a Liberal, albeit a Liberal at temporary variance with his leader; and in the miners' lodges, the local kirks where Keir Hardie often preached, and the Good Templars' Lodge of which he was Grand Worthy Chief, those who thought earnestly about politics were Liberals. It was only a few years since the great Midlothian campaign; the miners believed that the Liberal Party was the party which stood for freedom and justice and that it only needed some judicious pressure to set about meeting the just claims of the workers. Meanwhile, in England, the Amalgamated type of Trade Unionist, subdued and shaken by the great depression, was hardly daring to demand even so much; in the election of 1880 the three successful Trade Unionists (Thomas Burt and Alexander Macdonald, both miners, and Henry Broadhurst, secretary of the Stonemasons) stood as Liberals.

What Hardie and his comrades who were ardent members of the Ayrshire Liberal Association wanted of the Liberal Party was quite simple—the franchise, better safety legislation and an eight-hour day for miners, and the adoption by the Party of candidates, some of them, perhaps, even working-class candidates, who really understood the problems of the working-man and were prepared to press in Parliament for his reasonable rights. These modest demands were not to be gratified. They did get the vote, as was inevitable; once the town workers had it it was impossible that obscurantist land-and-coal-owners should hold out indefinitely. (Incidentally, the Act of 1884 which granted it put a final end to the purely political Radical movement, since, secret ballot having been made law in 1872 and no one except freaks like Mill caring seriously about the women, there was nothing left to fight for.) But safety legislation they were only to secure against furious opposition by employers who contended that it was a violation of the elementary rights of human liberty, and the eight-hour day not at all—it was a demand which only red revolutionaries would make.

This is not an over-statement. To us, living in a day when shorter working hours are discussed purely in terms of efficiency, it is astonishing to realise that even Marx himself thought that the eight-hour day would be a distant step towards revolution, and others felt much more strongly. Trade Unionists of the Junta type believed it to be a dangerous flying in the face of nature; Broadhurst voted against it in Parliament; and even miners, on the north-east coast, were opposed. Hardie's propaganda made no headway; nearly thirty years were to pass before a nation-wide agitation won the eight-hour day at last.

The request for working-class candidates, which Marx would certainly not have thought revolutionary, met with no better success. On this point, the short-sightedness of the Liberal Party is really amazing; with the Unions in such respectful mood and the thinking workers so nearly at one with what they believed to be the policy of Liberalism, the Liberals could probably, at the price of a tithe of the concessions suggested by John Stuart Mill,[1] have postponed the

[1] See page 125.

creation of a Labour Party, if not indefinitely, at least for many years. But it happened that the ingrained snobbishness of the British middle class combined exactly at the crucial moment with the creation in the Liberal Party of a dictatorial caucus under Joseph Chamberlain before his defection, and his lieutenant Schnadhorst, which prevented local Liberal Associations from even making mild experiments on their own. The modesty of the working-class demands can be seen from Hardie's remarks, when he had been adopted the miners' candidate for North Ayr, on Sir William Wedderburn, the nominee of the Liberal head office.

> "Your betters have chosen the men, and they now send them down to you to have them returned. What would you think if the Miners' Executive Council were to meet in Kilmarnock and appoint a secretary to the miners of Ayrshire in that way? Your candidate ought to be selected by the voice and vote of the mass of the people. We are told that Sir William Wedderburn is a good Radical and that he is sound on the Liberal programme. It may be all true, but we do not know whether it is or not. Will he, for example, support an Eight Hours Bill? Nobody has asked him, and nobody cares except ourselves. Is he prepared to establish a wage court that would secure to the workman a just reward for his labour? Nobody knows whether he is or not. . . .
>
> "When the time comes for an election, I will judge how far circumstances justify me in going forward. If the working-men are true to themselves, I will insist on a plebiscite being taken between myself and the Liberal candidate, and then that the man who gets most support go to the poll. If the Liberal Association refuses to take the course, working-men will then see how much their professions of friendship are worth. I am not specially anxious to go to Parliament, but I am anxious and determined that the wants and the wishes of the working classes shall be made known and attended to there."

And this was in 1888, when Hardie had already made acquaintance with Socialism, and had even been to London and received the blessing and instruction of Friedrich Engels. It is true that the ideas of the Trades Union Congress of the

mid-eighties on Parliamentary action offered little more attraction; only the year before Hardie, reviewing the programme of its Labour Electoral Committee (later the Labour Electoral Association) in the *Miner*, had asked scornfully what was the use of a working-man being returned to Parliament if he had no programme, but was just "a dumb dog who dare not bark, and will follow the leader under any circumstances." Nevertheless, the chance which the Liberal Party missed, and which never recurred, is sufficiently clear.

By this time Hardie was moving rapidly towards open opposition, both to the cautious industrial policy of the old Trade Unionists on the Trades Union Congress and to their "Lib-Lab" politics. In the former battle he was to be joined for a time by John Burns, the "Man with the Red Flag" who led the Dock Strike and believed himself destined to be the leader of a great Trade Union Labour Party, and up to a point to succeed. The latter came to a head in the Mid-Lanark election of 1888, in which the Labour Electoral Association, having first encouraged Hardie's candidature, sold him out to the Liberal caucus with a bribe of a salary if he withdrew. Hardie indignantly refused and fought the election on a Radical—not a Socialist—programme, and was heavily defeated. A few months afterwards, with the help of Dr. Clark and Cunninghame Graham, he founded the Scottish Labour Party, which had nationalisation of banks, minerals and transport in the forefront of its programme. In 1890 he and Burns succeeded in carrying through the T.U.C. a resolution for establishing by law the eight-hour day—a test question which resulted in Broadhurst's resignation[1]—and a number of others demanding State intervention on one subject or another; but their proposals for general nationalisation were defeated by a large majority. The time for a Labour Party was not yet.

All this while Hardie had been the servant and propagandist of the miners (who in 1888 succeeded in forming a national federation which fifty years later became the National Union of Mineworkers); but in 1891 he felt the calls of political work too strong and resigned his office, maintaining

[1] Broadhurst was perhaps unfortunate in his career. When younger, he was as vigorous a Trade Unionist as Applegarth; but events overtook him, and he ended as an Under-Secretary in a Liberal Government.

himself by journalism and in various other ways. He was now really anxious to sit in Parliament as an independent Labour M.P., and in the general election of the following year the chance came. He stood for South West Ham; the Liberal organisation, after offering him official support which he declined along with a financial offer from the millionaire Carnegie, stood aside; and he was elected by a comfortable majority. John Burns was returned, also as an Independent, for Battersea; a third Independent M.P. soon afterwards joined the Liberals.

Hardie's arrival in Westminster caused a minor sensation. The London public had accustomed itself by this time to John Burns, who, indeed, was already beginning to move towards the respectability which fourteen years later landed him with a seat in the Cabinet;[1] but the uncouth Scot from the northern coalfields, already leader of a new Labour Party there, was another matter. Hardie's supporters, wishing to make an occasion of it (and probably not without the connivance of Hardie, who was by no means so simple as he sometimes liked to appear) escorted him to the House in a charabanc with either a cornet-player or a small brass band—accounts differ—and wearing instead of morning dress his usual get-up of brown trousers, blue cloth jacket, purple muffler and deer-stalker cap. The London Press raised an outcry; but more serious matters were to come.

Trade was on the decline again, and unemployment heavy. In the New Year Hardie moved an amendment to the Address asking that Parliament "be directed to legislate promptly and effectively in the interests of the unemployed," and drew a large curious attendance. Burns was not in the House, but the motion mustered 109 votes against 276. Hardie had begun his Parliamentary career with one of the subjects dearest to his heart, the unemployed, whose cause he upheld with such persistence as to win for himself the honourable nickname of "M.P. for the Unemployed"; next year he was able to demonstrate on behalf of the other—the miners.

"If miners," he had said when he was first appointed for

[1] "Bravo!" the modest man said to the Prime Minister on that occasion. "This is the most popular thing you have done!"—in which he was mistaken. For an outline of Burns's disappointing career see G. D. H. Cole's Fabian pamphlet, *John Burns*.

> Ayrshire, "were Highland crofters or African slaves or Bulgarian natives, people would be found on every hand getting up indignation meetings to protest against the wrongs inflicted on them by the capitalists, but because they are *only miners* nobody heeds them."

This indignant charge now received unexpected proof.

It happened that a colliery explosion of more than unusual severity at Cilfynydd in South Wales, involving two hundred and sixty deaths, had got into the papers along with the much more exciting news of the assassination of the French President and the birth of the future Edward VIII. Sir William Harcourt, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, moved in the House for a vote of condolence to the French people and of congratulation to the Queen. On the first motion, Hardie asked whether the Government would also move to condole with the dead miners' wives and children.

> "Oh," said Sir William. "I can dispose of that at once by saying that the House does sympathise with these poor people."

The patronisingly off-hand tone of this reply, so reminiscent of his early days in Glasgow, stirred Hardie to a fury, and he immediately moved an amendment to the Queen's vote asking Her Majesty to express her own sympathy with the victims and the House to declare its abhorrence of the system which bereaved them. Such a "loyal address" could hardly in any event have been presented; but Hardie's colleagues literally rose to the occasion. They screamed and catcalled and abused him, standing alone, so that a reporter said it was worse than a wild beast show at feeding-time—or a football crowd when a referee had given a wrong decision. Such was the "goodwill atmosphere" which the first independent Socialist M.P. had to face from the representatives of the nation; it must have been with relief that, having listened unwillingly—if they were in the House and not in the smoking-room—to his championship of a dock strike at Hull and the first miners' strike for a minimum wage, they learned that he, along with many Liberals, had gone down to defeat in 1895, after Home Rule had split their Party. Burns, secure in his popularity among

his Battersea constituents, who raised the John Burns Parliamentary Fund to maintain him, stayed where he was.[1]

Hardie was out of Parliament for five years (he stood for East Bradford at a by-election in 1896, but was defeated); but between 1890 and 1900 he rose to the stature of a national leader. Defeated for the moment in his endeavour to persuade the Trades Union Congress to form an independent working-class political party, he decided to do the next best thing, to unite the Socialist political groups which were springing up all over the country. At Bradford, in January 1893, there assembled a large conference of delegates from a goodly number of organisations, including the Fabian Society, Morris's Socialist League, some branches of the Social Democratic Federation, Blatchford's Clarionettes from Manchester, Labour churches and Socialist societies in several towns, as well as Hardie's own Scottish Labour Party. With Hardie in the chair, this conference proceeded to found the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.).

The I.L.P., Hardie's creation and his darling to the day of his death, was something of a compromise even in its beginning—something less than Hyndman and the purists could countenance. Its name, to begin with, was settled against the wishes of those who wanted to call it "Socialist Labour Party" right away;[2] and its objectives (which were definitely Socialist) were only settled after a good deal of discussion. The hardest fight, however, came over the question of exclusiveness. Some delegates wished membership to be forbidden to any member of any organisation "connected with" any other political body, a restriction which Bernard Shaw, speaking for a body whose principal political method was "permeation" of Liberal and Tory groups by Fabians,[3] thought ridiculous; and the *Clarion* group put forward a resolution (known as the Fourth Clause) to the effect that

[1] Salaries for M.P.s were not introduced until 1911, though the Chartists had asked for them seventy years before. Until then, a poor man could not possibly sit in Parliament unless he could find friends to support him, or had a gift for journalism.

[2] In the next century, a "Socialist Labour Party" did come into being, composed mainly of the followers of Daniel De Leon, an American Syndicalist. Its membership, though vigorous, was small outside Glasgow, where it originated, and in 1920 it disappeared, along with the British Socialist Party mentioned in the last chapter, into the Communist Party.

[3] See "Sidney Webb."

"all members of the I.L.P. shall pledge themselves to abstain from voting for any candidate for election to any representative body who is in any way a nominee of the Liberal, Liberal Unionist, or Conservative Party."

The adoption of this resolution would have meant the practical disfranchisement of Socialists in the hundreds of constituencies in which there was no possibility of a Socialist candidate for a very long time, and Hardie's emphasis of this unpalatable fact[1] caused it to be rejected—upon which Blatchford and his supporters withdrew their skirts in scorn. Nevertheless, the extremist or if you will impossibilist position had many supporters among those who, like the Suffragettes of later years, were sickened at the contrast between the pretensions and the performance of the Liberal Party; the "Fourth Clause" became a hardy annual at I.L.P. Conferences, and in the 1895 election the Party endeavoured to inspire its followers with a command ABSTAIN FROM VOTING! —except in twenty-nine constituencies. The results were not inspiring.

Hardie was elected first chairman of the I.L.P., and held that office for seven not very exhilarating years, during which, after its first bright start, the number of branches remained more or less stationary and Parliamentary representation was nil. The only hopeful spots were the increasing number of I.L.P. members elected (on programmes provided by the Fabians) to local authorities, and their effective work in aiding Trade Unionists on strike. In one outstanding case, the 1898 strike of miners in South Wales—which like so many other mining disputes lasted six months and ended in defeat of the men but strengthening of their organisation—the comradely assistance of the I.L.P. membership resulted in the increase of their branches in South Wales from six to thirty-one, and the offer to their leader of a nearly safe seat in Merthyr Tydfil, that revolting expression in brick and slate of unrestricted capitalist enterprise. Generally speaking, however, the I.L.P. in the 'nineties was in the doldrums; it was the South African

[1] "Frankly," he said, "I am opposed to any such wholesale disfranchisement, nor do I believe that an order to this effect would be obeyed. The British worker is too astute to thus throw away an instrument which his forefathers fought so hard to secure for him."

War, when in contrast to the hedging of the Fabians and the imperialism of the *Clarion* it took up an emotional anti-Rhodes stand which appealed to outraged Liberals, that put it on the political map and brought its chairman back into Parliament in 1900, the only Socialist to be elected in the "khaki" election, along with the millionaire coal-owner, D. A. Thomas (Lord Rhondda) as anti-War member for Merthyr.

Hardie was easily moved by emotion; his indignation at the sordid *exposé* of "The Man Behind the Gun"[1] in Cape Town and Johannesburg was no pretence. But he knew well enough that his establishment of the Independent Labour Party had only won half the battle. He wanted a real political party of the whole of the working class—and for that he still wanted the Trade Unions. He had been driven off the Parliamentary Committee (the executive body, in so far as there was one, of the T.U.C.) in 1895, by a cunning last-minute manœuvre by the remnant of the old Amalgamated gang;[2] but he was not daunted. In 1899, the T.U.C. was at last induced to pass, by a five to four vote, a resolution in favour of calling a conference of "Co-operative, Socialistic, Trade Union, and other working-class organisations" in order to consider ways and means of returning more Labour members to Parliament, and in the following February a conference was called and set up the Labour Representation Committee, which became the Labour Party.

This body, again, was the result of a compromise between those who wanted a Party pledged to out-and-out Socialism and those who would have preferred Trade Union "dumb dogs." Hardie, after a long debate, moved the final resolution, which ran as follows:

> "That this Conference is in favour of establishing a distinct Labour Group in Parliament who shall have their own Whips and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any party which, for the time being, may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interest of Labour, and be equally ready to associate

[1] Cartoon by Will Dyson, the Australian Socialist.

[2] This Congress also excluded the Trades Councils and established the Union block vote—two very far-reaching changes.

themselves with any party in opposing measures having an opposite tendency."

This resolution is not very exciting; it does not contain a clarion call to action, or even express a policy. Hardie had succeeded in committing the leaders of Trade Unionism to independent political action, and that was about all. The new Committee—it did not call itself a Party until 1906—was only a federation of interested bodies, in whose counsels the Socialist organisations carried rather more weight than their numerical strength would warrant. It had no individual membership; individuals who wanted to support the Labour cause had to join the I.L.P. or the Fabian Society (itself then at rather a low ebb). It appointed as secretary a little-known young Scottish member of the I.L.P., James Ramsay MacDonald; but nobody, not even the Socialists, was deeply interested in its doings. In these conditions it is not surprising that only two of its candidates—Hardie himself, and a very mild railway Trade Unionist who soon joined the Liberals—came home in the 1900 khaki election. Hardie, in the new Parliament, offered to submit himself to the "whip" of John Burns, who continued to hold his seat: there was no response. The Labour Representation Committee, in 1900–1, was very small beer, just, but only just, worth the attention of the intelligentsia of the Fabian Society; it was the House of Lords which in the famous Taff Vale decision[1] gratuitously underlined all the arguments of Hardie and others, sent up the affiliated membership of the Labour Representation Committee by leaps and bounds, and in the election of 1906 provided Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal leader, with an unwanted tail of thirty avowed Labour M.P.s.

Hardie was not idle during these interim years. Apart from his work for internationalism, to which reference is made later, he moved the rejection of the Civil List, on the grounds both of republican objections to royalty[2] and of wastefulness;

[1] The Taff Vale Railway Company sued the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants for repayment of losses suffered by the Company owing to a strike, and carried the case right through the courts to the House of Lords, which in 1901 decided in its favour. The Union had to pay £23,000—the cheque is still preserved in the archives of the National Union of Railwaymen. This decision meant that strikes though legal were rendered practically impossible without ruining the Unions.

[2] These, in fact, did not go very deep; he expressed admiration for Queen Victoria.

he made the first speech advocating Socialism ever heard in the House of Commons—the debate on it stood adjourned for twenty-two years, until Philip Snowden took up the tale; when Joseph Chamberlain launched his Tariff Reform campaign he seized the opportunity to promulgate a Socialist alternative to both Free Trade and Tariff Reform; and he struggled unceasingly, and almost alone,[1] for the eight-hour day and better treatment for the unemployed. In 1905, when a recurrence of bad trade had led to demonstrations and processions which made those with long memories wonder whether "Bloody Sunday" was about to be repeated, his persistent pressure forced the supine government of Arthur Balfour to admit, in the Unemployed Workmen Act of that year, a very faint and half-hearted responsibility for the casualties of industrial depression.

But his health was beginning to suffer under the strain of constant overwork. In 1894 he had turned the *Labour Leader* into a weekly, which involved a heavy strain in writing and editing; while chairman of the I.L.P. he spent himself without stint on lectures, demonstrations and committee meetings—one page of his diary[2] showed a total of nineteen meetings in eleven days, including two rail trips from London to the north and back again; furthermore, he had his living to earn. In 1901, after his election for Merthyr, the I.L.P. managed to find him one hundred and fifty pounds a year, and he saved some wear and tear by moving his household to London, to a small house in Nevill's Court, off Fetter Lane, for which he paid six-and-sixpence a week; but he still needed to supplement his income by (very modest) fees for lecturing. It was an additional bitterness to be accused, sometimes by colleagues or quasi-colleagues who should have known better, of living on "Tory gold."[3] It is not surprising, therefore, that he broke down; he fell ill in 1901, and in 1903 he had appendicitis (from which he never fully recovered) and was obliged to go on a sea voyage and give over the *Labour Leader* to other

[1] Three L.R.C. candidates, David Shackleton, Arthur Henderson (*q.v.*) and Will Crooks, came into Parliament at by-elections.

[2] Quoted in W. Stewart, *J. Keir Hardie*.

[3] Throughout his life, Hardie was pursued by calumny; he was accused—he, the most loving of husbands—of being twice divorced, and of owning a large "secret" estate in Scotland. These may be the rewards expected for a pioneer; they hurt him, nevertheless.

hands. He returned, in apparent health, for the 1906 election, and was chosen leader of the new Parliamentary Labour Party by a majority of one (which does not say much for the gratitude of the new Labour members to the creator of their Party): during the ensuing session he enjoyed the debates on the Trade Disputes Act, that electioneering debt which the great new Liberal Government paid with such distaste. But in 1907 he fell ill again, and was sent on a world voyage, in the course of which he visited India, and, being Keir Hardie, there made speeches in support of Indian nationalism which caused true-blue reporters to cry at his heels wherever he went.[1] He returned in 1908; but he had resigned the leadership and never resumed it.

Indeed, he would not have been happy as leader of the Parliamentary Party in the years before the 1914–18 war; he was too much of a fighter and too much of a Socialist. He was not nearly so much impressed as others with the "great Liberal victory"; though he liked some members of the new Ministry, he regarded both Asquith and Haldane as cold-blooded reactionaries of the most dangerous type; and the Party which he had created, albeit thirty strong (increased to forty-two when the miners agreed to add their very Lib-Lab representatives to the tale) was only in name independent of the Liberals. What the Labour M.P.s wanted was, first, the reversal of Taff Vale, which they got at once in the Trade Disputes Act; secondly, some help for the aged poor, who in 1908 were given five shillings a week when they were seventy;[2] and thirdly, such other social reforms as might come. The Party had, as has been stated, no definite programme; its Parliamentary members were for the most part solid Trade Unionists of little imagination, who thought, as far as they thought at all, that the unemployed should be more kindly treated, but could not envisage any drastic change; they were horrified by Victor Grayson's loud and tactless demands that unemployment itself should be abolished—now—by the introduction of Socialism. It must be admitted that Grayson *was* both very tactless and a hopeless politician; he quarrelled

[1] See Hardie, *India: Impressions and Suggestions*.

[2] The stubborn resistance which those brought up in *laissez-faire* tradition, even philanthropists, put up against this "deterrent to honest work" would hardly be credited nowadays.

with the leaders of the I.L.P., his only possible Parliamentary allies; he suffered from swelled head, intolerance and contemptuousness. Even Hardie, who had a good deal of sympathy with his intentions, was constrained to say that his behaviour in Parliament was "most uncomradely"; and when in 1909 Grayson unexpectedly carried the day at the national conference of the I.L.P., Hardie, along with Snowden and MacDonald, resigned from its governing body.

Whatever Grayson's personal faults, however, an attitude of blank negation to all he stood for was not inspiring—and if he stood alone in Parliament he did not stand alone in the country. After the first two or three years of the Liberals, discontent and "unrest" began to rise strongly. Syndicalism, Industrial Unionism and other militant theories which had little use for Parliament were taking hold on the thinking workers, especially the underpaid railwaymen, dockers and seamen, and the miners around Hardie's own constituency. Strikes of a size and fierceness which had not been known for generations broke out from 1911 onwards, culminating in the great Dublin struggles of 1913, when Jim Larkin deployed his battalions of starving Irishmen as if he were conducting military operations, and forced the English Trade Unions, after a half-hearted attempt to look the other way, to declare themselves in his support; meanwhile, the two elections of 1910,[1] in which the great Liberal majority was heavily reduced, had made the Parliamentary Party even less independent, since if it voted against the Government the result might well be a victory for the Conservatives. Hardie, though he toiled away inside and outside Parliament on behalf of the working classes, defending the right of railway employees to sit on town councils, pressing, at Mary Macarthur's instigation, the wrongs of sweated London women, endeavouring to amend the mining Eight Hours' Bill, protesting at recurrent disasters, championing the cause of strikers deported from South Africa etc.,[2] he felt increasingly

[1] On Lloyd George's Budget and the powers of the House of Lords.

[2] Hardie's work for women's suffrage, culminating in his lone protest against the Cat and Mouse Bill of 1912, under which imprisoned suffragettes who went on hunger-strike were to be released for long enough to recover their health and then rearrested, was enough to fill pages in itself. He was its lifelong supporter and champion, trying hard to push the Labour Party into definite action and to keep the peace between militants and non-militants; this made it all the more

that the support he received was miserably inadequate, and his later years in Parliament were not happy. "The Labour Party," he remarked miserably, "has ceased to count"—and he knew of no alternative. Moreover, as time went on a greater shadow than industrial unrest, the shadow of war, was looming over him.

To understand how great and unmitigated a disaster 1914 appeared to Hardie we must retrace our steps some years and look at his relations with foreign Socialists. In 1888, the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress having at length been persuaded to convene an international conference of Trade Unionists in London, Hardie attended it and there moved a resolution for international organisation of the world Trade Union movement based on national and international Unions for each trade and a system of federated General Trade Union Councils which, though it was not carried at the time, formed the basis of the International Federation of Trade Unions formed thirteen years later; the following year, accompanied by Cunninghame Graham and William Morris, he went to Paris to attend the Conference which formed the Second International.

The International Socialist Bureau, the "Second International," was from its birth a very different kind of body from the First. Though its founding conference was called by Marxists, and all its member parties were supposed to adhere to the principles of the class war,[1] it was not intended to be an underground society of revolutionaries, plotting to free workers from their chains; it was based upon a tacit assumption that the chains were in course of removal, that the working-class organisations in different countries were now strong enough and recognised enough to stand in open daylight upon their own feet and to come together in a loose

bitter for him when in 1914 a section of the militants outdid any man in wild war propaganda. But his biographer has well noted "how instinctively those in revolt, whether in South Africa or elsewhere, looked to Hardie for championship." As far back as 1906 he warned English politicians against treating the Sinn Fein movement with contempt.

[1] This led to a rather comic decision, when the British Labour Party, which certainly had no principles about class war, applied for admission and no one wanted to exclude it. The Bureau decided that it could be admitted, on the highly dubious argument that though it did not believe in the class war it acted as though it did!

federal organisation which would be able to thrash out a common policy for the Socialists of all nations, of which policy one of the most important items, naturally, would be the prevention of fratricidal war between workers in different countries; it was, in fact, to be a League of Nations for the peoples.

As in the case of Morris and his fellow revolutionaries, it is easy to be wise now, to watch, with an informed smile, the little victims planning their brave new world all unconscious of the menace of militarist capitalism and militarist nationalism, and to forget that even up to the very verge of war educated and influential thinkers believed that the obvious irrationality of international conflict would suffice to prevent it. The leaders of the British workers, who could see no possible advantage, and a great deal of probable suffering, accruing to any of their supporters as a result of war, were in the forefront of those who thought that universal peace only required a certain amount of thought and organisation to turn it from an aspiration into a fact. Nevertheless, had its promoters been able to read between the lines, the International Socialist Bureau, like the League of Nations, contained within itself seeds of fatal weakness. Even at its birth in Paris there was a rival international conference, called by a rival section of the French Socialists, in session; and though when the great French Socialist Jean Jaurès had persuaded his warring factions to terms that difficulty was surmounted, it was only to be followed in 1896 by another battle in which the Anarchist element, which did not believe in parliaments, fought the Parliamentarians and after a bitter wrangle was finally excluded from the Congress. It was at this Congress, held in London, that Hardie discussed the possibility of using industrial as well as political action for the achievement of Socialism—being perhaps influenced by a recent visit to the United States where, then as now, the working-men were full of strike energy but politically all but impotent. He proposed, seriously, that the Labour movements of all countries should make plans for a world-wide strike to secure the eight-hour day; but as in order to secure success the ground should be carefully prepared in advance he suggested—so optimistic were the times—a postponement for four years while the plans were laid. This proposal was not carried, though it had results

in attempts by French and English Socialists to get a general strike sanctioned as a means of preventing war; at the last pre-war Congress of the International (at Copenhagen in 1910) a resolution to this effect was moved by the I.L.P. and referred to the Executive to consider.

But whatever might be suggested, the International Socialist Bureau in reality had no power to enforce any decisions, and there was no consistent overall policy. The basic trouble was that countries at different stages of industrial and political development produced Socialist movements with widely differing ideas of tactics, and the range from those suffering under completely autocratic governments who saw no hope save in class war *à l'outrance*, through those who like Hardie waged a day-to-day class war while believing that the political machine might be peacefully captured, to the extreme Parliamentarians who were willing to collaborate to almost any extent with the other side, was so enormous as effectively to prevent any common policy. The ideological and tactical battles raged up and down; but when the 1904 Congress, at Jaurès' instigation, decided that each national section must be left free to determine its own general course in view of its own national circumstances, the cause of international working-class unity, whatever seemed the case on the surface, was in fact lost,[1] and, having failed to reach agreement on peacetime tactics, it was hardly to be expected that the Socialists would be able to find a joint policy for the prevention of war. The Congresses of 1907 and 1910 did, indeed, pass a resolution (bearing many marks of compromise) which said that

> "in case of war being imminent, the working classes and their Parliamentary representatives . . . shall be bound, with the assistance of the International Socialist Bureau, to do all they can to prevent the outbreak of war. . . .
>
> "In case war should break out notwithstanding, they shall be bound to intervene, that it may be brought to a speedy end, and to employ all their forces for utilising the economical and political crisis created by the war, in order

[1] It could not have been won. Jaurès unified his own French movement at the expense of the International, but that does not mean that a split French Socialism would have been any more effective in world affairs.

to rouse the masses of the people, and to hasten the downfall of the predominance of the capitalist class.

"For the proper execution of these measures the Congress directs the Bureau, in the event of a war menace, to take immediate steps to bring about an immediate agreement among the Labour parties . . . for united action."

It will be observed, however, that this resolution carefully refrains from any suggestion as to what the "immediate steps" ought to be; and when "war did break out notwithstanding," events moved far too fast for the Bureau even to consult, let alone "take steps to bring about agreement." Jaurès, with real tragic irony, was assassinated in Paris at the beginning of August 1914; August Bebel, Hardie's chief friend among the Socialists of Germany, had died a few months earlier. The British movement held out long enough for Hardie to draft a manifesto, signed by himself and Arthur Henderson, calling upon the men and women of Britain to prevent the war, which was presented to a crowded demonstration in Trafalgar Square on August 2nd; but within forty-eight hours the actual declaration of war and the German invasion of Belgium had swept all resistance away. Within a very few weeks Hardie himself was sorrowfully admitting (in the *Merthyr Pioneer*) that it was too late now for pacifist agitation—this did not save him from being howled down in Aberdare by his own constituents.

When he drafted the August manifesto, Hardie was again chairman of the I.L.P. After thirteen years out of office he had been brought back in 1913–14, to preside over its coming-of-age Conference. It was a tribute which, wearied and ill as he was,[1] he appreciated; and in his presidential address he had a word for those who were coming after him which is so characteristic that it must be quoted here:

"I said the other day that those of us who are advanced in years may easily become cumberers of the ground. I am not going to die if I can help it, but there is a dead spirit which blocks the path of the young. I am not going to stand in their way. I shall die, as I have lived, a member of the

[1] Hardie worked himself out very young. He was under sixty when he died, but even at forty-five he "looked an old man."

I.L.P., but I want the Party to have freedom to grow, and I do not want young men and young women to say, 'We might have done this or that if it had not been for old Keir.' I will accept no position which will give me standing over you."

Immediately afterwards came the war, and the breaking of all his hopes. During the following winter he struggled along for a little while, helping Sylvia Pankhurst—his friend of Suffrage days—in her fight to secure decent treatment for the East End soldiers' wives; but he was a dying man. In February 1915 he made his last speech in Parliament, against a suggestion made in the name of the war effort to take children of ten and eleven away from school and put them to work on the land. In April he wrote his last article for the Press, and at the Easter conference of the I.L.P. he attacked Lloyd George for accusing the workers in munition plants of being "drunken wasters." This was his last public utterance; in September he died.

Keir Hardie's great strength was that he was so representative of the classes for whom he fought. His undogmatic Christianity, his advocacy of temperance, his idealism, his abomination of war, even the serious note in all his propaganda, was exactly what was wanted, not merely by Ayrshire miners descended from a Covenanting tradition, but by the majority of those industrial workers who were prepared to spend their scanty leisure—as he spent his own—on the day-in-and-day-out grind which the life of a propagandist demands. When Alex Thompson, on behalf of the Clarion Clubs, invited him to make the I.L.P. more bonhomous, and suggested that a Labour Party need not be a hard-labour Party, he replied with pain that the Labour Movement was too serious for frivolities; and to a large extent he had gauged what his clients wanted. (Not that he was completely and absolutely "dour"; like all Scots he could dance reels, and at I.L.P. gatherings he was expected to sing "Annie Laurie" and "Bonnie Mary of Argyle"; but such rational diversion after labour was a long way from "the Bounder's" careless roistering.) His assets were his single-mindedness, his incorruptibility and scorn of snobbery, and his simple-mindedness—

though simple-minded did not, as some of his adversaries found to their discomfiture, mean gullible. Like George Lansbury, he had a good hard head as well as an idealist's heart. He served his class all his life, and believed deeply in its capabilities without thinking that it must liquidate its opponents. Though disillusioned about the Parliamentary Labour Party, he served it faithfully and died in harness. After his death, Philip, Viscount Snowden, who of all men least felt the temptation to gush over his fellows, wrote of him: "He was the greatest product of the democracy of our times."

SIDNEY WEBB

(1859–1947)

THIS chapter, of necessity, tells the tale of only half a life—indeed, of much less than half. When Sidney Webb was endeavouring to persuade Beatrice Potter to marry him, one of the arguments he adduced was that "one and one, placed in a sufficiently integrated relationship, make not two but eleven." The truth of this observation was abundantly proved in the fifty years of the Webb partnership; and there is no space, here, either to describe in detail that elevenfold achievement or to do more than touch upon the specific contributions of Sidney's wife;[1] nevertheless, the man who, with Bernard Shaw and the other Fabian Essayists, made the Fabian Society, who sat for fifty years on its Executive Committee and wrote for it innumerable books, tracts, manifestos and other documents, who, with Arthur Henderson, refashioned the Labour Party into a modern political instrument and provided it with its first statement of Socialist policy—that man cannot possibly be excluded from a book calling itself "Makers of the Labour Movement."

Sidney James Webb, according to his wife,[2] "was born of parents neither rich nor poor, neither professional brain-workers nor manual workers, neither captains of industry nor hired hands." His grandfather, a vigorous Radical who succeeded in both bringing up a large family and retiring with a reasonable competence, kept a village pub in Kent; his mother's people were small property-owners—farmers, stock-breeders, or traders in fishing smacks and merchant vessels—in Essex and Suffolk; the only family relative to attain any external distinction was Fred Webb, the Derby winner, who was a first cousin. Sidney's mother, before her marriage in

[1] For those, and for other details omitted here, see my *Beatrice Webb*.
[2] Introduction to *Our Partnership*, by Beatrice Webb.

1854, had been lent a few hundred pounds to buy a retail shop for ladies in Cranbourn Street, Leicester Square, and after her marriage to his father, a frail Radical of indomitable public spirit,[1] by profession an accountant, who was always ready to do a hand's turn to help any friend or society which had got into trouble, her shop was still the mainstay of them and their three children, of whom Sidney was the middle one. The elder Mrs. Webb was a woman of considerable character and capacity; she trained her children in health and good habits, and at some sacrifice sent the two boys abroad to learn languages in Germany and Switzerland—an investment which was well repaid, for Sidney's brother became foreign correspondence clerk to Marshall and Snelgrove and thereafter had a successful career in business, and Sidney himself, after a period spent in the City office of a Colonial broker, with the aid of evening classes equipped himself to sit for the Civil Service Open Examination and—to cut the story short—in 1882 passed high into the First Division and selected the Colonial Office, in which he continued to serve for ten years until just before his marriage he decided to give it up and to live on his savings and what he could earn by journalism.

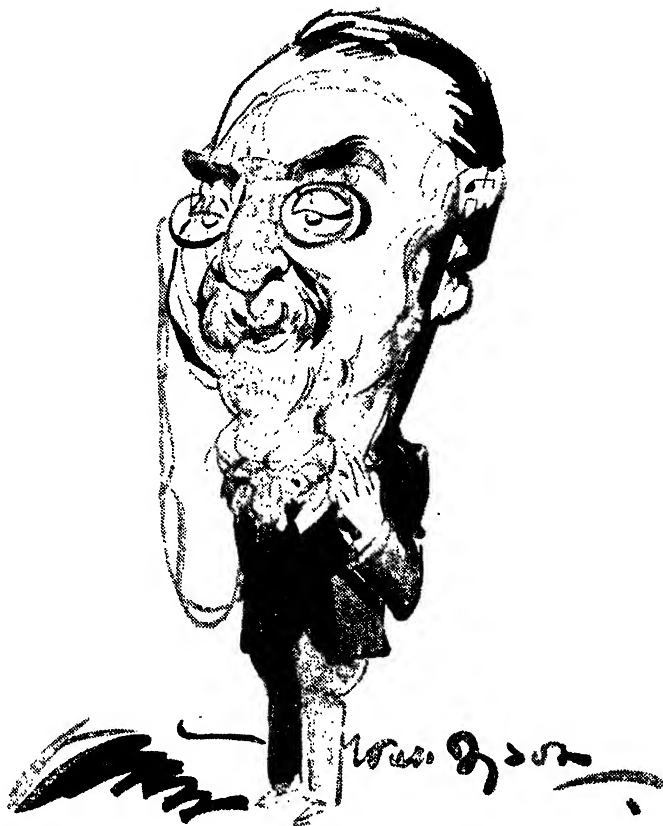
He was thus a London boy, living in a small family group which had a good many intellectual interests[2] but little personal ambition. The income of the household was somewhere between three hundred pounds and five hundred pounds a year, and it is quite clear that his fiancée, when she made their acquaintance, was agreeably astonished to discover that its members neither desired to have a great deal more money themselves, nor envied those who had. (If Sidney was typical of them, they certainly lacked the urge for luxury, for possessions, even for things good to look at, which is one of the reasons for acquisitiveness; few people can ever have been more indifferent than he was to art, for example, or what is normally called pleasure.) But as a London boy he had at least a local inheritance of which he was not unconscious. In one of his very rare incursions into autobiography,[3] he has emphasised this.

[1] He strongly supported John Stuart Mill's candidature for Westminster in 1865.

[2] Not social interests; the Webb household tended to "keep itself to itself."

[3] "Reminiscences," *St. Martin's Review*, December 1928.

"After a few lessons at my mother's knee, which I do not remember, I had taught myself to read at an early age, very largely from the books and notices displayed in the shop



SIDNEY WEBB

from a drawing by Will Dyson made during the 1919 railway strike and given to the author

windows. It used to take me a full hour to get the whole length of Fleet Street, so absorbing were the pages of the periodicals there exposed to view. I found more instruction in the reputedly arid pages of *Kelly's London Directory* than in any other single volume to which my childhood had

access. . . . In short, I grew up a patriotic Londoner, very early declaring that no place on earth (I knew nothing about any other place) would content me for habitation, other than the very middle of London which I knew."

Such was his upbringing; but he did not stop there. From his earliest years, as the passage quoted above indicates, he possessed both a phenomenal memory and an uncanny gift for acquiring and retaining any kind of information which might prove useful. In his schooldays these abilities won him rows of prizes; afterwards they enabled him to pass without difficulty any examinations—including those for the Bar, to which he was called at Gray's Inn in 1885—to give unpaid lectures on history, politics and economics to the London Workingmen's College in Crowndale Road, and to make his mark rapidly in any debating society which he frequented. The first of these, so far as we know, was the Zetetical Society of Hampstead, where in 1879, being just twenty years old, he came into contact with a slightly older man who had joined it in order to practise public speaking, a lean, struggling, arrogant journalist named Bernard Shaw; and in the Zetetical Society the foundations of a sixty-year friendship were laid.

"He knew all about the subject of the debate," wrote Shaw in subsequent recollection; "he knew more than the lecturer; knew more than anybody present; had read everything that had ever been written on the subject; and remembered all the facts that bore upon it."

Except that Webb, with his magnificent instinct for selection of the useful, could never conceivably have wasted time reading *everything* that had been written on any subject, this panegyric is correct enough; and throughout his public life, his accurate memory and his command of detail were the strongest part of his controversial armoury.

He made friends with Shaw, who, apart from Beatrice, was almost the only personal friend he ever had in his life;[1] he went with him on walking tours in England and on the Continent, in the course of one of which he suddenly displayed an

[1] Like his family, Webb kept himself to himself. He was amiable to many, but felt personal affection for almost none. This gave him a peculiar and almost inhuman detachment.

intimate knowledge of the French postal regulations which reduced to pulp a recalcitrant official—after which, as Shaw observed, he could have posted the whole of his laundry home without question asked; and after a few years' acquaintance, he allowed Shaw to take him to a meeting of the newly formed Fabian Society.

The Fabian Society, founded at the beginning of 1884, was one of the products of the fermentation of the 'eighties of which the Social Democratic Federation was another; but it was far more modest in its beginnings. It budded off from another organisation, the "Fellowship of the New Life," founded by an eccentric called Thomas Davidson, which included among its comprehensive purposes "the attainment of a perfect character by all and each." Some of the score or so of the original members found this object a little beyond their immediate reach; and nine of them slipped quietly aside (with an initial capital of thirteen shillings and sevenpence) to engage in more limited and mundane discussion.[1] In May of 1884 Shaw made his first appearance as a member of this group; in September he produced for it a manifesto (Fabian Tract No. 2), which contains the unmistakably Shavian phrase, "That the established Government has no more right to call itself the State than the smoke of London has to call itself the weather"; in the following year he and Webb were both members of the little Society's tiny Executive Committee; two years later Webb wrote for the Society its Tract No. 5, *Facts for Socialists*—now in its sixteenth edition.

Until about 1886 the Fabians had hardly differentiated themselves in any way from the other Socialist or semi-Socialist groups—except in having a rather smaller membership; they denounced capitalists as thieves, they were not sure whether they were Communists or Anarchists or a bit of both, and they discussed solemnly the imminent approach of revolution. When Webb and Podmore (the biographer of Robert Owen) wrote a report on how to deal with unemployment, the forty members who then composed the Society thought it so mealymouthed that they refused to give it their official countenance and it appeared in print with only the authors' names

[1] The Fellowship itself continued an unobtrusive existence for many years, during some of which its secretary was Ramsay MacDonald.

attached to it. But *Facts for Socialists* marks the beginning of a change; it is the first expression of the Society's faith (provided for it mainly by Webb and Shaw)[1] that the capitalist system had become an irrational anachronism, and that, by making use of the available records and statistics, Socialists could convict their enemies in their own words, so to speak, of inefficiency as well as of immorality, and leave them without an argumentative leg to stand on. Other Socialists had cried out that capitalism was wicked, to be met with the reply that it might not be an ideally perfect system, but at least it worked. Shaw—with Webb beside him supplying facts like a conveyor-belt—answered coolly and effectively "It may be a perfect system, for all I know or care; but *it does not work.*" In the midst of depression, when Charles Booth's revelations about the squalor of London were being supplemented by similar facts from all the great cities, the indictment was in fact unanswerable. One half of the work of the Fabian Society, during the sixty years which have since elapsed, as well as a large part of the writings of the Webb partnership, has been an enormous expansion and reiteration of *Facts for Socialists.*

But it is not sufficient to be in possession of unanswerable arguments unless you can use them in the right places and to the right persons, and unless you are prepared with practical suggestions for remedying the ills of which you complain; the Fabian Society, therefore, moved rapidly from generalised denunciations of capitalism to proposals for the immediate remedying of some of the evils to which it gave rise—and to intensive persuasion of selected persons and groups of persons who might be able to put these proposals into practical effect. This policy—once famous under the name of "permeating the Peers"—was not perfected all at once; indeed, its full expression was only realised by the Webbs themselves in the decade during which they had hopes of persuading the younger leaders of Liberalism and Toryism to turn into Socialists unawares. But even in the earlier days—let Webb speak for himself—

"We did not confine our propaganda to the slowly

[1] Assisted by the two other members of the famous Fabian quartet, Graham Wallas and Sydney (later Lord) Olivier.

emerging Labour Party, or to those who were prepared to call themselves Socialists, or to the manual workers or to any particular class. We put our proposals, one by one, as persuasively as possible, before all who would listen to them —Conservatives whenever we could gain access to them, the churches and chapels of all denominations, the various Universities, and Liberals and Radicals, together with the other Socialist Societies at all times. . . . We realised, more vividly than most of our colleagues, that, at any rate in Britain, no political Party, however 'proletarian' its composition or its sympathies, could ever carry far-reaching reforms in Parliament by the support merely of the members whom it enrolled, or even of its sympathisers at elections. Nothing of importance, we thought, could be effected in social transformation unless public opinion generally, and all the other Parliamentary Parties, had been 'prepared' by prolonged 'education' to entertain and consider definite and detailed projects—even when they were continuing, with apparent determination, to offer to them the most uncompromising opposition."[1]

To carry out this programme the early Fabian Society was exceptionally well fitted. It was numerically very small, and never tried to become large; candidates for membership were admitted individually by the Executive Committee. (There was a brief period at the beginning of the 'nineties, just after the publication of *Fabian Essays*, when there was an uprush of Fabian Societies in the provinces; but after the foundation of the I.L.P. the great majority of these found a more congenial home in the latter body.) But the members, particularly the leading members, were people of extraordinary energy and single-mindedness, who worked together as a team, and who thought no detail beneath their attention and no drudgery too great which reasonably served their end.

"A man's Socialistic acquisitiveness," wrote Shaw in the *Early History of the Fabian Society*, "must be keen enough

[1] *St. Martin's Review*, February 1929. Here, full-blown, is the famous thesis of "the inevitability of gradualism" associated with Webb's name, which caused so much heated controversy in the dreary days when "gradualism" in the Labour Party appeared to be synonymous with stagnation or even retrogression. It was the policy of the Fabian Society, at least from 1889, and may help to account for its obstinate vitality after sixty years.

> to make him actually prefer spending two or three nights a week in speaking and debating, or in picking up social information even in the most dingy and scrappy way, to going to the theatre, or drinking, or even sweethearting, if he is to become a really competent propagandist"

—and the acquisitiveness of the early Fabians was certainly keen enough. Their effectiveness was further increased by their social homogeneity—an important fact sometimes overlooked by historians. The Fabian Society was nominally open to all comers; but as it was in fact thoroughly middle-class and "met in middle-class drawing-rooms where a labourer would have been unbearably uncomfortable" (Shaw)[1] it became a Society of educational equals, "whose minds worked at the same speed, by the same methods, on the same common stock of acquired ideas." This saved an enormous amount of time and friction; though it caused the Fabians to be called "middle-class snobs"—an accusation which did not worry them in the least—it enabled them to work together in a discipline, imposed by their own common sense and not by any rule, found in no British Socialist body until the arrival of the Communist Party. It should be emphasised, however, that the exclusiveness of the Fabian Society was a functional not a dogmatic exclusiveness; the Fabians never for a moment thought that their Society was the only road to salvation and that all others should be damned. They were quite ready to confer and to co-operate where possible, as at the foundation of the Labour Party, with other groups of Socialists; they only reserved their right to remark, sometimes with considerable incisiveness, that the Social Democratic Federation or the I.L.P. were silly asses—which must occasionally have been more infuriating than angry opposition.

Finally, they had—not immediately, but after some years of working together—arrived at a formulation of Socialism which was definite enough and practical enough to appeal to the intelligent non-revolutionary minds which they sought to influence without being so dogmatic or so detailed as to

[1] The Fabian Society of 1884 contained one undoubtedly working-class member, W. L. Phillips, a house-painter who actually drafted Tract No. 1. The stressing of this fact in Pease's *History of the Fabian Society* is itself significant. As the Society grew, Trade Union officials like Henderson joined it—but they were by then not working-men.

frighten them away. *Fabian Essays in Socialism,* the reprint of a course of public lectures delivered by seven members of the Fabian Society, including Shaw and Webb, came out in 1889—the year fixed by Hyndman for the Revolution!—and is still selling to-day. Later in the same year the Progressive Party (Liberals) swept the election board for the newly created London County Council on a programme and questionnaires provided for them, unasked, by Sidney Webb.

Fabian Essays comes down fair and square on the side of a Utilitarian philosophy for Socialism and a gradualist approach to it. It does not refute Marxist economics or catastrophist tactics; it ignores them. It bases itself squarely on Jevons and Ricardo in economics and in politics on Bentham and John Stuart Mill. For Webb, who wrote the political chapter, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" is a good enough slogan; he only points out that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is to be secured by Socialism alone. And by Socialism, he explains carefully, he does not mean anarchist-communism or a dreamland Utopia, but a definite and easily imaginable (if rather prosaic) organisation of society in which through publicly owned institutions, national and local, the people's interests will be served by their representatives without the intervention of capitalists or the profit-motive.

The Fabians—the "gas-and-water" Socialists, as more romantic spirits rudely termed them—were deeply interested in municipal socialism, which the reorganisation of local government, including the establishment of County Councils and the elimination of many obsolete and undemocratic bodies, had brought within the bounds of possibility. They had learned largely from Joseph Chamberlain, who was all but a municipal Socialist[1] until he suddenly became a rather sordid kind of imperialist; they studied very seriously the tasks of local government (not in London alone) and the problem of getting really good councillors elected; and the policies and propaganda they produced were of immense value to I.L.P. branches in the 'nineties. One thing, however, which strikes the modern reader of *Fabian Essays* is that its philo-

[1] See his "Unauthorised Programme" for the Liberals of 1885—a Socialistic document which the Fabians of that day could not have bettered.

sophy is pure, though democratic, Etatisme. The producers' interests are assumed to be absolutely identical with those of the consumers, acting through Parliament and local Councils; Trade Unions and professional organisations might almost not have existed—and this though Annie Besant, one of the Essayists, had just brought to unexpected victory a strike of the matchgirls at Bryant and May. This ignorance may be explained, if not excused, by two facts—the middle-class character of the Fabians, already mentioned, and the unimpressiveness of Trade Unionism at the date when the *Essays* were written. The London Dock Strike had not yet burst upon the London public, and the Essayists' conception of Trade Unions, if Graham Wallas's contribution is to be taken at its face value, was that of antisocial monopoly groups endeavouring to obtain a specially privileged position for their own members.[1] Whatever the excuse, the lacuna was a serious one, but it was shortly to be corrected from outside the charmed circle. At the beginning of 1890 a youngish woman of the upper-middle classes, who while working at a study of co-operation had reached the conclusion that Trade Unions were a much more important element in society than Co-operative pundits like John Mitchell would admit, was trying to find out something about working-class organisations in the eighteenth century. She was referred to a man called Sidney Webb, "who literally pours out information." A meeting was arranged; "sources" were written down for her on a sheet of paper in a "faultless handwriting"; a newly published pamphlet on *The Rate of Interest* (!) was sent by post; and a month later this fountain of information was bidden to dine at the London house of Mr. Richard Potter, father of Beatrice.

The story of the courtship and marriage of the Webbs has been told often enough. Here suffice it to say that he, as was only to be expected, made up his mind very promptly; but the beautiful and talented Miss Potter, coming from a much higher social stratum, required a longer time before she became convinced that the ugly, stocky little man in the shiny suit, with the bulging eyes and the pince-nez, the scrubby

[1] So also said Engels, and the judgment was not without foundation. But times were changing and Broadhurst's day was over.

little beard, and the weak voice,[1] was the best possible husband she could find. It was eighteen months before she gave in to a realisation that, quite apart from the satisfaction that working with him instead of by herself would be, his patience, his affection, his utter disinterestedness and his cheerfully tranquil spirit, were exactly what she needed in a life's companion. A year later, in June 1892, *Fabian News* laconically announced, "Sidney Webb was married to Beatrice Potter on 27th ult."; and the two started off on honeymoon together to gather more "facts for Socialists"—in this instance, to look up old Trade Union records in Dublin and Glasgow.

The immense corpus of the Webbs' historical and social research, which began then with the *History of Trade Unionism* and *Industrial Democracy* and continued steadily until the appearance of *Soviet Communism* in 1935, important as it was for the development of the social sciences, falls outside the scope of this chapter, which must proceed next to Sidney's educational and political work in London and the Webb ménage in Grosvenor Road, Westminster.

In 1891 Sidney, as already related, had decided to leave the Civil Service and earn his living by journalism. Marriage to a wife with a comfortable private income rendered the latter course unnecessary, and in 1892 he stood for the L.C.C. as a Progressive, and was returned for Deptford by a comfortable majority, thereafter devoting a great deal of his time to unpaid work for the Council, on which he sat until 1910. Of all the many activities of his long life, if we are to judge by his own writings, particularly the collection of essays called *The London Programme*, what he was able to do for London gave him the most personal satisfaction. He had grown up "a patriotic Londoner," a Londoner who wanted to make his city as fine a possession as Florence or Pisa; but not a Londoner who thought its present state perfect beyond criticism.

"The slums," he wrote in angry recollection: "the all-pervading stenches: the alternating seas of mud and clouds of poisonous dust of the macadamised streets; the floating

[1] Shaw says that Sidney in his youth looked like Napoleon III; Beatrice, in the introduction to *Our Partnership*, that his head is "not only remarkable but attractive" if looked at sideways and without his body. But that is a lover's impression.

'blacks' that darkened the air; the scantiness and impurity of the water supply, with the Thames an open sewer; the recurring pestilences of enteric fever and small-pox; the chronic tuberculosis and rheumatism; the perpetual ill-health and appalling infantile mortality of the London of my childhood cannot be imagined to-day" (1928).

By the end of the 'eighties conditions had improved a little, but not very much, as Charles Booth's survey showed; and under Fabian leadership the new County Council set itself the task of making London a decent place to live in.

To that task Webb's own chief contribution (though he was concerned with many services) was in education, where the standard of provision, both elementary and higher, was shockingly low. When he was elected to the Council, it was not concerned with elementary education, which was managed by a separately elected body, the London School Board; he therefore began his campaign with the post-primary grades which were the province of the Council. There was in those days no State system of secondary education; but under the Technical Instruction Acts a committee of the Council (called the Technical Education Board) had certain powers of aiding and inspecting schools, which powers until Webb's advent it had scarcely used at all. Immediately upon his election, Webb was made chairman of the Board and "induced a friendly Board of Education so to define the Council's scope as to include as technical education the teaching of every conceivable subject (other than ancient Greek and theology) elsewhere than in a public elementary school." This remarkable decision—a good example of Fabian "permeation"—at once made the L.C.C. *the* body for London secondary education; and though, of course, it was many years before schools were built to satisfy more than a tithe of the need, the whole of the huge secondary education budget of the L.C.C. of to-day derives directly from Webb's efforts. Alongside with all this he was founding—out of one-half of a legacy of ten thousand pounds left to the Fabian Society in 1895—the London School of Economics, and creating a revived and reorganised University of London with the help of the late Lord Haldane.

The campaign for secondary education met with the

approval of all "advanced" elements; its only opponents were the dead weight of reactionaries and of those who quite simply did not want to "burden the rates." In primary education the story was less happy. The inquiries which Webb had set on foot had convinced him that the primary schools of London were in an appalling state, particularly the "voluntary schools" run by the Churches, and that they could never be effectively improved nor public education for London made real unless both primary and secondary schools were brought under the purview of a single authority. By means of many discussions with officials, and of a Fabian pamphlet (written by himself) called *The Education Muddle and the Way Out*, he converted the Tory Government to his views, and the 1902 Education Act which set up public secondary education abolished the School Boards and made the L.C.C. the overall authority for London. But it also created a hullabaloo; the School Boards (which contained many Fabians) did not like being abolished; and, what was more serious, under the new Act schools run by Roman Catholics and Anglicans were to receive subventions out of the rates. The Nonconformists started a furious resistance—under which some of them refused to pay their rate demands and earned a mild martyrdom by having their household goods distrained; and one result of the Act, whatever its merits, was a sharp decline in Webb's personal popularity.

While all this was going on, Webb was a member of an active Fabian Executive, which met twice weekly and exacted from its ranks a continuous stint of lectures, tracts, answering questions and giving advice, and "permeating" public and other bodies—among its many other activities of the 'nineties, it started educational correspondence courses and travelling book-boxes long before the days of Ruskin College or the Carnegie libraries. At the same time, he and his wife were busy, in the intervals of writing and research, with more private "permeation" in more exalted circles. Round about the time of the South African War, when the Liberal Party looked to be almost on the verge of disintegration, it seemed possible that a new grouping might be created of intelligent Tories and discontented Liberals which could be persuaded to adopt and to put into force suitable instalments of Fabian

Socialism. Accordingly, the Webbs' social life—directed, like all their activities, to a severely practical end—came to include small dinners and gatherings to which political figures like Arthur Balfour (the "intelligent Tory") and Haldane (the discontented Liberal) were bidden to come and talk. These particular efforts came to little in the end (though it was Balfour's Government which passed the Education Act), because their promoters had literally reckoned without the hosts (of electors) who in 1906 pushed Tories, intellectual and stupid, alike out of the way and returned a Liberal Government with a majority so thumping as to be independent of wirepullers.

The Webbs were rather surprised by this uprush of political Radicalism—like Blatchford, although for different reasons, they did not take very much stock in elections; but Webb's extreme imperturbability (a lifelong characteristic which often astonished opponents who found that what they had believed to be a crushing blow or an unforgivable insult had left him quite unharmed) prevented him from being in any way disconcerted; he turned to pressing upon the Liberal Government, through a Fabian Society whose membership rose with the Radical tide, a series of reforms such as old-age pensions, endowment of motherhood, school nurseries and municipal socialisation. In 1909, when Beatrice had delivered to the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws her famous Minority Report—written out, in fact, by her husband—he and she started a raging tearing campaign, in which all Fabians and hundreds of other people of Radical or semi-Radical views were pressed into active service, for the Prevention of Destitution and for what is nowadays called Social Security.

Social Security is now as near as no matter the law of the land, established in 1945–6 with little more than exhausted squeaks from the defenders of the right of every Briton to be free to starve. So much have times changed in less than forty years. But in 1909 the rude educational processes of war and Nazism had not yet brought home to the better-off classes the social menace of poverty; the propaganda of the Webbs and their friends made a noise, but impressed only the impressible, and Lloyd George, hastily borrowing advice from Bismarck's

Germany, sidestepped the abolition of the Poor Law with a "ninepence-for-fourpence" contributory Insurance Act. "All the steam went out" of the enthusiastic National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution. Beatrice and Sidney went for a tour round the world, returning convinced that "permeation" and *ad hoc* agitation had both had their day, and that what was now required was an organised and permanent Socialist Party.

It must be recalled that the Labour Party of the pre-war years had no established policy, Socialist or otherwise; and such as it was, in 1912–13 it was in the doldrums. Neither the active Fabians nor any other active Socialists paid it more than lip-service. The first effort of the Webbs on their return was directed, therefore, to the Fabian Society, whose executive committee Beatrice had joined in 1912.[1] But the Fabian Society, whose increasing membership was strongly affected by the winds of doctrine—syndicalist, suffragette, Guild Socialist—which were blowing through Britain in those years, was in a resistant mood; the long reign of the Fabian Essayists was over, and the more vigorous of the Society's younger minds were in revolt against their narrow collectivism. Battles were developing as fiercely as, though on a much smaller front than, the great industrial strikes of the same years;[2] but before any major issue was settled all the pieces on the board were violently shuffled by the outbreak of war.

The Labour Party entered the 1914 war as a tolerated sect; it came out as an organised political party which two months after the Armistice was His Majesty's official Opposition—even if not a very inspiring opposition. Many factors contributed to this result, one being the enormous growth of Trade Unionism in the war industries and the necessity, if production were to be maintained, of national recognition of the producers' organisations, and another the final splitting of the Liberal Party between Asquith and Lloyd George; but the two men to whom the Labour Party owes its structural reconstruction were Arthur Henderson and Sidney Webb. In the early days of August 1914 Webb, representing the Fabian

[1] She had been a member for twenty years, but had felt little urge to play a directing part, until her experiences over the Poor Law induced her to commence organiser.

[2] See pages 276 ff.

Society, attended a conference[1] of delegates from the principal working-class bodies, the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress, the Co-operative Movement, the Socialist Societies, the elementary-school teachers and the most important of the Trade Unions, which discussed what measures could be taken to protect working-class interests during time of war. The committee set up by this conference, which bore the clumsy name of "War Emergency: Workers' National Committee," was in fact the first all-inclusive executive of the working classes; Henderson became its chairman and Webb its guide and chief draftsman.

Webb was extremely busy throughout the war, in the Labour movement and outside. His peculiar abilities, added to his civil service experience, had caused him even before the war to be appointed to serve on various Government bodies such as the Royal Commissions on Labour and on Trade Union Law, Departmental Committees on Technical Education, Agricultural Settlement, and the Territorial Army, etc.; and in 1916 he became a member of the vast After-War Reconstruction Committee. The experience gained there and elsewhere he used to write several books—some of them, such as *The Works Manager of To-day*, raising problems still unsolved in 1947—as well as pamphlets and policies for the War Workers' Committee and the Labour Party; and when, by the end of 1917, it had become clear that the Labour Party must before long shake itself free of the wartime Coalition and face an election, not as a congeries of groups without a programme, but as a national party which an individual could join and understand clearly what he was joining, Webb was at hand to draft a new constitution and a Socialist programme, *Labour and the New Social Order*, which has been in fact the mainspring of Labour policy ever since.

The constitution was adopted in June 1918; in November the war ended and the Party—not without a lively debate in which Shaw pulverised the office-holding limpets in a brilliant speech—ordered its members out of the Government; in the crazy coupon election at the end of the year Webb stood for the University of London, came within a fraction of success,

[1] Called originally to discuss ways and means of preventing the war in accordance with the resolution of the International referred to in the last chapter. But events had moved too fast for this to be even mentioned.

and watched the Party lose all its leading men but yet come out ahead of the Asquithian Liberals. The Webbs prepared to turn back to propaganda; but in the meantime came the Sankey Commission.

As in 1945, so in 1918, one of the greatest national problems was the problem of coal. Even before the war, there had been bitter dissatisfaction with the conditions of the mining industry; safety regulations, a shorter working day, nationalisation and the abolition of the stranglehold of royalty-owners, had been loudly demanded; and during the war the miners, as suppliers of an absolutely essential commodity, had begun to feel their strength. When the war was over the many thousands of them who returned from Army service found conditions little better than they had left them; early in 1919 they threatened a national strike. The Government, short of coal and entirely unprepared, offered a Commission, under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Sankey, to consider all their demands. The Miners' Federation was to appoint three of its own members to this Commission and to nominate also three experts from outside its ranks; and Bonar Law, the acting Prime Minister, pledged the Government to carry out "in the spirit and in the letter" its recommendations, whatever they should be. The Miners' Federation agreed to the Commission, postponed their strike notices, and appointed as one of their experts Sidney Webb.

The story of the Sankey Commission—which is only one episode in a long and discreditable history—ought to be read in full detail and pondered over by all those who are inclined to wonder why miners' officials seem so suspicious of the good intentions of the nation towards them, and why so many miners' sons, during the past twenty years, have been unwilling to enter the pits. To summarise, the Commission reported hurriedly in favour of increased wages and a reduction in hours, upon which the strike notices were withdrawn and the immediate danger-point thus passed. Some months later, after prolonged discussions, a Majority Report, signed by the Chairman among others, pronounced in favour of nationalisation; the Government, however, in spite of repeated appeals, yielded to the coal-owners, ignoring its own public promise, and nothing was done. Before long came the

post-war depression; the mines were handed back to the private control of the owners, and in 1921 the miners, after a long-fought strike, were forced back to work, having lost all and more than the concessions of two years back.

The sittings of the Sankey Commission in the House of Lords, however, aroused immense public interest. Sidney Webb, with R. H. Tawney and Robert Smillie the miners' leader, pressed forward the case against private ownership of the mines with great fire and wealth of detail and harried and browbeat the coal-owners' witnesses—Smillie, like a Hardie come from the grave, recalling the long history of oppression; Tawney arraigning them at the bar of human justice; and Webb driving their statisticians from point to point. Whatever the immediate result, the moral victory of the miners' champions was clear enough, and the Miners' Federation showed their gratitude to Webb, first by returning him at the head of the list for the Executive Committee of the Labour Party (of which he was chairman in 1923), and then by adopting him as Parliamentary candidate for the Seaham division of the County of Durham. When the next election came, his popularity, added to the intensive work which he and his wife had devoted to educating the Seaham electorate in the principles and policy of Labour, brought him in with the then amazing majority of 11,200.[1] Here he could have had a safe seat, had he wished it, until his death; he held it from 1922 to 1928, during which period he was President of the Board of Trade in the first Labour Government. By then he was beginning to feel his years, and with the simple words, "It is too much for me, and in two years' time it will be very much too much for me," he resigned his seat to Ramsay MacDonald. He was not, however, permitted to give up political life; when the second Labour Government, with two hundred and eighty-seven supporters in the House of Commons, was formed in 1929, at MacDonald's earnest request he accepted a peerage as Lord Passfield and the seals of the Colonial Office, and remained there until the crash of 1931. Then, and not till then, he retired from active participation in Parliament.

Sidney Webb would be the first to agree that the best work

[1] Too amazing for the compositors of the *Times*, who printed the result as a row of noughts.

of his life was not done in the House of Commons. He had never aspired to Parliament; he did not get there until he was sixty-three, too old to learn new tricks; the procedure and routine of the place was distasteful to his orderly mind—apart from the separations which it entailed from Beatrice and from the work which he loved so much better; he was not a great success as a speaker except on subjects, such as the long overdue reform of local government, which he had made peculiarly his own, and as a Minister, though of course competent, he was not especially outstanding. But neither were the two Labour Governments particularly outstanding; and one of the tasks which the Webbs, who had had a fair slice of experience of the older governing groups, set themselves in the 'teens and the 'twenties was to help build up a cadre of Labour politicians who should be really, in so far as knowledge could make them, "fit to govern." It should be remembered that before 1918 no one of any importance really considered the possibility of the Labour Party producing a live working administration; Henderson was brought into the War Cabinet as a sort of hostage for the workers' good behaviour, and kicked out without ceremony when he became a nuisance. Churchill, in saying to the Labour Party in the 1918 election,[1] "You couldn't wear this Hat; you'd look So Silly in it," was only expressing what most people believed without thought.

The Webbs worked very hard indeed. Instead of the bourgeois politicians and educationalists of twenty years back, Grosvenor Road was filled with gatherings of Labour M.P.s, Labour candidates, Socialist writers and even Labour and Trade Union wives being groomed and educated—through Beatrice's slightly comic Half-circle Club—to play a real part in politics.[2] Beatrice made it her duty to have all the Labour M.P.s (even the huge phalanx of 1929) to lunch, as well as anyone who might be supposed to be a coming young man; they looked endlessly for new talent—some of which has since abundantly repaid their patient seeking; and in propagandist books, such as the *Constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth* and *The Decay of Capitalist Civilisation*, as well as in

[1] According to Poy, the *Evening News* cartoonist.

[2] Some of them rather resented the grooming process; maybe Beatrice let her conviction of its necessity show a little too obviously.

studies of the Co-operative movement and a revised issue of the *History of Trade Unionism,* they strove to make new entrants understand both the nature of the instrument and the purposes which it might achieve. And, continually and endlessly, they urged upon all the crying need for a great increase in the study of social science, and the application of their standards of "Measurement and Publicity" to public affairs.

They were, however, getting on in years, and could not keep up the pace for ever. The strain of life in London began to tell heavily, and in 1929 they transferred their residence to the small country house at Passfield Corner, in Hampshire, to which so many of their friends came in after years to spend a pleasant week-end in long talks about the U.S.S.R. and other less burning topics. Moreover, the second Labour Government, as it moved towards the world slump and its own destruction, became more and more disappointing to them. Neither Webb nor his wife had ever really liked or trusted MacDonald, and when the catastrophe came they did not find it too unthinkable or too hard to bear. Instead, they turned their eyes eastward. In 1932, after a good deal of stiff preliminary study, they arrived in Leningrad as the honoured guests of the U.S.S.R.,[1] just when the first Five-Year Plan was nearing completion; and in that country they found, at long last, a Fabian paradise, run and controlled by a dedicated Order, the Communist Party—which they had long thought the only kind of political expedient which could save inter-war Britain. In 1935 they produced *Soviet Communism: a New Civilisation,* the most immense political guide-book in literature; and thereafter were among the stoutest and most unflinching supporters of the Soviet Union.

In 1943, after a very brief illness, Beatrice died. Shortly afterwards, in explicit recognition of the work of the partnership, the National Government conferred the Order of Merit on her husband.

It is not easy to write of a living man in a book devoted to dead ones. Perhaps only in the case of Sidney Webb could it

[1] Honoured, especially, because it was their *Trade Unionism* which Lenin had translated in the hours of his exile—and nothing was too good for them. "We seem," said Webb, "to be a kind of minor Royalty."

be done at all without risk of recriminations. For of men who have served the Socialist movement of our day, Webb has been of all the least rancorous, the least resentful of any criticism, general or personal, just or unjust, coming from any source whatever. To this large-mindedness he was no doubt assisted both by natural good health and serenity of temper (he has always been a very happy man) and by the love and intimacy which he found in the longest and greatest partnership in English social history; but whatever the cause, both the fact and its value are plain enough. The Webbs were targets for a good deal of sharp criticism, particularly during the "permeating" years;[1] their judgments, like other people's judgments, were not always right, nor their proposals always possible of achievement; the magnificent sweep of their thought and inquiry left out altogether some sides of life, particularly the aesthetic. But they always endeavoured to be right, as far as possible; they attended to criticism even when they finally disagreed with it; they strove to understand the nature of the political instruments with which they had to deal, and not to lose their tempers, for example, with Trade Union branch officials because they were not disinterested Socialist archangels or even Fabian Essayists; above all, they never considered that they had said the last word or that truth and progress would die with them—they were unceasingly interested in new blood and the shape of things to come. These lessons they, with Bernard Shaw, taught to the early Fabian Society, thereby helping to make it the most influential body, for its size, in British social history; and though in 1929 Webb changed his name, becoming as his wife said, "the fantastic personage known as Lord Passfield," he will always, by those who know his work in the Labour movement, be remembered as Sidney Webb.

[1] See "H. G. Wells."

ARTHUR HENDERSON

(1863–1935)

Henderson is one of the most deceptive men we have ever met. Like Ulysses, when he is seated you would take him for no one in particular. . . . In a small group he is without salience. But when the herd-cries of a thousand strong men (representing two and a half million men) pierce through to the layers of his stored vitality, hidden under a commonplace exterior, something awakens and he puts on power, and rays it out on the mass till they obey him.

Kellogg and Gleason, two American Socialists, on Henderson in 1917

He cared for the Party as most people can care only for persons.

M. A. Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson*

"UNCLE ARTHUR," secretary and chief organiser for the Labour Party over a generation, was born a Scot, son of a general labourer in Glasgow, and lived in that city for the first ten or eleven years of his life. His parents were poor; at nine years old he went to work in a photographer's shop. Then his father died, and after a brief period of struggle his mother married a man named Robert Heath, who shortly afterwards moved, with his wife and stepchildren, to Newcastle. There young Arthur, having the fortune to be born a little later than some other characters in this book, came under the operation of the first national Education Act, and was sent back to school until he attained the mature age of twelve, when he was apprenticed to the trade of iron-moulder, and shortly afterwards entered the big firm of Robert Stephenson and Son (descendants of George Stephenson who built the *Rocket*).

There was not much to distinguish Arthur Henderson in his early youth. He was a strong, biggish boy, with excellent health—which he retained for many years—steady at his work, becoming quite soon a "good clean moulder," good at quoits and football, which were the main sports of his mates, but comparatively inarticulate and unremarkable. "Before his conversion," his elder brother told his biographer, "Arthur was just an ordinary boy." But when he was sixteen years old he came across the Wesleyan Methodists, in the person of their

fiery young evangelist, Gipsy Smith,[1] and became a changed creature. Not merely did he give up drink and betting, to neither of which had he been deeply addicted; but he found in Wesleyan Christianity a strong fountain of inspiration which lasted him all his days. Different minds have been predisposed to Socialism by many causes, as this book shows; in Henderson's case, as in that of thousands of lesser men who helped to build the Labour Party, the predisposing factor was Methodism.

His conversion gradually resulted in an increased seriousness and responsibility. He took to reading, and became a kind of Radical news-purveyor to his fellow-workers, studying events in the Radical *Newcastle Chronicle* and passing on his digest of politics. In 1880, when he came out of his time, he joined his Trade Union, the Friendly Society of Ironfounders, almost immediately becoming secretary of his local lodge, and by 1892—to anticipate a little—he had won himself a position of such respect that he was appointed a paid officer, organising district delegate, at fifty shillings a week. By then he had also become a regular lay preacher for the Wesleyans; and in 1888, after two long spells of unemployment during the bad years, he married the girl to whom he had been engaged for some time, and settled down to become a family man.[2]

The Friendly Society of Ironfounders, when Henderson joined it, still had as its General Secretary Daniel Guile, a member of the Junta of the 'sixties, and a strong adherent of pacific policies in Trade Unionism. It could not, of course, dispense with strikes altogether; but its inclination was always to be on the best possible terms with its employers. Henderson, while still working at the trade, had been a strong advocate of establishing regular conciliation machinery; and after he became organising district delegate he worked vigorously to this end, with the result that in 1894 a Conciliation Board—of which he became chairman in 1908—was set up for the whole area of the north-east coast, which went on functioning, with only an occasional hitch, until 1914, and during the entire period was successful in preventing any

[1] Still living when these words were written; he died in 1947.

[2] He had three sons and a daughter. The eldest son was killed in 1916; the two younger both took to politics. One (William) is now Lord Henderson; the other (Arthur) Minister of State for Commonwealth Relations.

strikes in the industry.[1] There was, in fact, a good deal more "co-operativism with employers" among some of the workers in the north-east than in other areas: the engineers, it is true, fought a long and fierce battle in 1897, but the miners of Northumberland and Durham adhered to the sliding scale,[2] and were so averse to such demands as the eight-hour day that up till 1908 they refused to be associated with either the Labour Party or the national Miners' Federation. In industry as well as in politics, Henderson grew up in an atmosphere of Liberalism.

He was a Liberal, with a Radical tinge—his conversion to Socialism was a very gradual process. The north-east coast, in the 'eighties and 'nineties, was a stronghold of Liberalism; and we soon find Henderson playing a considerable local part in it. In the election of 1892 he spoke for the first time on a big public platform in favour of John Morley, who patted the speaker on the back in words whose patronising ring he probably did not observe.

> "You have heard a speech to-night from a man who is not a right honourable. That speech—I do not say it because it was in favour of my candidature—was a speech that had in it the ring of the true democrat *and a workman who respects his work and respects his order.*"

In the same year he was elected to the Town Council as a Liberal, in 1897 (after his removal to Darlington) to the Durham County Council, and to the Darlington Town Council in the following year. But in 1895 an incident had occurred which made an unpleasant impression on him and began the undermining of his simple faith in the Liberal Party.

He had come into considerable prominence by his work in the 1892 election, and since then he had been a Councillor for three years and run the Tyneside Debating Society. When, therefore (Newcastle being a two-member constituency), the local Liberals wanted to find a partner for Morley, their committee, which was well alive to the importance of the working-

[1] It was in keeping with this tradition that in 1919 he agreed to become chairman (with G. D. H. Cole as secretary) of the National Industrial Conference of Trade Unionists and employers which endeavoured to arrive at an agreed policy—vainly, since when the immediate crisis was past the Government ignored its findings.

[2] Wages rising and falling according to the selling price of coal.

class vote, by a majority of twenty-eight to one recommended the adoption of the young ironmoulder, who spoke, according to a journalist named J. L. Garvin, "not in tones of petition to the top-hatted, but on direct labour representation as a right." But behind the committee was the main mass of the Liberal Party, who held the purse-strings, and who had no intention of having a working-man foisted on them. At the formal adoption meeting, held six weeks later, the name of Arthur Henderson was not mentioned; a man of property, a Mr. James Craig, was presented and accepted. The election followed almost immediately; the Liberals lost both seats.

Henderson did not leave the Liberal Party after this snub; there was, indeed, nowhere else for him to turn. He was not yet a Socialist, and therefore the I.L.P. was not for him; and though discussions in the Trades Union Congress (which he attended in 1894 as Ironfounders' delegate) were tending towards the formation of a Labour Party, there were five years yet to go. So far from leaving the Liberals, at the beginning of 1896 he gave up his Trade Union job to become full-time Liberal agent—at nearly twice the salary—for Sir Joseph Pease, the great coal-owner who sat for Barnard Castle, and moved his home to Darlington. As agent he was well worth his pay; in the Boer War election, when so many Liberals were defeated, he brought Sir Joseph triumphantly home with a doubled majority.

But the behaviour of the Liberals at Newcastle had made him angry under the surface. He regarded it as an insult not so much to himself—all through his life, Henderson was singularly unready to take offence on matters of personal prestige—as to the class which he represented. He said nothing, but he refused to come forward a second time as a prospective candidate; he was not going to risk any further rebuffs. When the Labour Representation Committee was at length formed, he was heartily in favour of "independent working-class candidates"; he induced the Ironfounders to affiliate with it; and at the 1903 Conference, when the Taff Vale decision had spurred the Unions on to the actual point of contributing to a Parliamentary fund, he made a strong speech urging the necessity of getting adequate financial support, and moved a motion that the affiliation fee should be fourpence per member instead of

a penny. The motion was not carried—if it had been, some of the financial struggles of the Labour Party, both then and in after years, might have been avoided; but the Conference, behaving in a manner highly characterestic of British Labour, chose the mover of the motion as treasurer of the fund they had refused to increase. A few months later, the Ironfounders' Society decided themselves to run Parliamentary candidates under Labour Representation Committee auspices and to pay their expenses, put at the head of their list the name of Arthur Henderson, and instructed him to fight Barnard Castle when the time came.

It came much sooner than anyone had expected. Only two months after Henderson's name had appeared on the published list of Labour Representation Committee candidates—there were not as yet a great many of them—Sir Joseph Pease died suddenly. His son, Sir John, summoned the agent and intimated to him that the local Liberal Association was proposing to do Mr. Henderson the great honour of putting him up as Liberal candidate in the coming by-election; to his amazed indignation, Mr. Henderson pointed out to him that his name had been published as Labour candidate for Barnard Castle—and as Labour he proposed to stand.

There followed a hullabaloo. The Liberals felt that they had a great grievance; that it was ridiculous to expect an important man like Sir John ever to have heard of the Labour Representation Committee or to have studied its miserable circulars, and that Henderson had been disgracefully double-faced with his employers. It is true that his position as Liberal agent and Labour candidate simultaneously was open to question. He would almost certainly have regularised this before long, had the by-election not come so suddenly; but one cannot help feeling that he believed he had a very happy and suitable revenge for the Newcastle affair—more particularly when he won the seat in a three-cornered contest with a hastily imported Liberal candidate well at the bottom of the poll.

It was an infinitesimal group that he found in Westminster. Keir Hardie was the lone Socialist who had survived the khaki election—and was nearly as much disliked by the half-dozen Liberal Trade Unionist M.P.s as by the Tories. John Burns

would associate with none of his fellows. There were only two Labour Representation Committee men, Will Crooks and David Shackleton—both, like Henderson, elected on a wave of working-class indignation at the Taff Vale judgment; the three of them started to learn their job together. Henderson, who had not risked moving his home, but shared lodgings with Shackleton,[1] made his speeches and asked his questions, and outside the House worked in the dismal little office of the Labour Representation Committee, helping Ramsay MacDonald, who at this early stage realised quite clearly that he had acquired a strong and steady coadjutor who could be relied upon never to dispute the limelight with him.[2] He also set himself to study working-class conditions over a wider field than ironfounding; in particular, through Sir Charles Dilke and Gertrude Tuckwell, he was brought into the struggle for better conditions for the worse-paid, for shop assistants and sweated women workers, and became convinced, as the majority of his fellow Trade Union officials were not at that stage convinced, that the State ought to intervene to fix minimum wages for the unprotected. (It was on this subject that he had his first clash with MacDonald at a Party Conference; on that occasion he won.) He gave strong support to the Women's Trade Union League, and when in 1905 the British Section of the International Association for Labour Legislation was founded, he became its honorary treasurer—his first international contact. It may be noted as an indication of character that throughout his life organisations displayed a tendency to ask Henderson to be their treasurer.

In 1906 came the landslide election, when Free Traders, pacifists and anti-imperialists, Nonconformists angry at the Education Act and Trade Unionists angry at Taff Vale combined to give Arthur Balfour such a trouncing as was never received by a Premier before or since. Henderson won comfortably in Barnard Castle, moved his family to Clapham Park, his home for the rest of his life, and in February presided

[1] Shackleton, who had started life as a little piecer in Lancashire, was also a Wesleyan and a Trade Unionist and very much akin to Henderson in character. In 1910 he left Parliament to become a civil servant.

[2] Henderson at this time had a great admiration for MacDonald's gifts, though not always for his judgment, but he was on terms of real friendship with his wife Margaret, whose early death was such a disaster.

at the great after-the-poll Conference where the Labour movemen rejoiced on the raising of its Parliamentary representation from four to thirty members.[1]

> "The wage-earners," he said from the chair, "have, at last, declared themselves in favour of definite, united, independent political action, and we this morning can rejoice in an electoral triumph which, having regard to all the circumstances, can be safely pronounced phenomenal. We can congratulate ourselves to-day that a real, live Labour Party, having its own chairman, its own deputy-chairman, and its own whips, is now an accomplished fact in British politics."

To have one's own chairman and deputy-chairman may to-day sound rather small beer, but there is no doubt that it came as a smack in the face for the illiberal Liberals. It is interesting, moreover, to observe that after the Conference had refused by a large majority to confine the membership of the Parliamentary Party to Socialists and (by a narrow majority) to confine it to Trade Unionists, its chairman declared that "the return of Labour members to Parliament marks an important epoch in the progress of Socialism." He was a Socialist by then, converted mainly by Fabian Tracts, though he did not actually join the Society until 1912.

Henderson, in 1906, was forty-three, and so far had done little to suggest that any attention need be paid to him by posterity. He had gained a reputation for solid sense, reliability and competence, and that was about all. He was not a particularly good speaker, having no gift of phrase and a tendency to speak in an overloud monotone. (His only platform gesture was to shoot his starched cuffs with a noise like a pistol-shot.) He was generally thought to be rather stiff in private intercourse, with a tendency to ride roughshod over his subordinates; as to ideas, he was not supposed to have any. "A capable, honest man unusually devoid of self-seeking," was what he appeared—an admirable organiser for a struggling little Party whose Secretary (MacDonald) was a bit mercurial, and its leader (Hardie) too much of a lone Socialist wolf for the majority. If Henderson had died in 1907, people

[1] Mostly, of course, elected in three-cornered contests. The days of winning against Liberals and Tories in combination were yet to come.

would have said it was a bit of bad luck for the new Labour Party—no more.

He certainly was a capable organiser. As the Party's treasurer, and its Chief Whip in Parliament, he worked patiently away during the years between 1906 and 1914, at building it up, squeezing, not without difficulty, a modicum of office assistance out of the slender funds.[1] His most noticeable effort—which had very far-reaching results—was to get MacDonald appointed Party leader. Hardie had resigned in 1907, to be succeeded after a year by Henderson. But Henderson regarded himself as a stopgap, and believed that MacDonald possessed exactly the qualities required in a leader. In 1911 he persuaded the Party to agree with him and to adopt MacDonald; at the same time he changed offices with him, becoming the General Secretary, with MacDonald as Treasurer, and in order to ensure the new leader a safe position in the counsels of the Executive Committee, he further persuaded the Conference to rule that in future the Treasurer should not be appointed by the Executive but elected by the Conference as a whole. This highly important decision meant that the Treasurer, unless defeated by a straight vote (which subsequent experience has shown to be highly unlikely), was assured of a safe seat for as long as he liked; it enabled MacDonald to remain a member of the Executive right through the war while publicly expressing pacifist views which were anathema to the majority of his colleagues. This security MacDonald owed to Henderson, and to Henderson alone; it was not the last time that he received such service.

As we have seen, in "Keir Hardie," the work of building up was carried on under increasing difficulties. There were heated discussions within the Party on the question of women's suffrage; the purists who would consider nothing but universal suffrage and the sweeping away of all pro-

[1] Made much slenderer by the Osborne Judgment of 1909, in which the legal wisdom of the House of Lords laid down that Trade Unions could not lawfully spend their money on political objects. This one-sided and surprising decision was partly rescinded by an Act of 1913, and again partly restored by the Trade Union Act of 1927 (passed in reprisal for the General Strike of the previous year and repealed in 1946). One immediate result of the judgment was the introduction of payment for M.P.s; another was the practical hamstringing of the Labour Party, which wanted the Liberals to remain in office to reverse the Judgment.

perty qualifications (which would certainly not have been conceded) quarrelled with those who wanted to go for the first step of putting women upon an immediate electoral equality with men (which was not conceded either), and Mrs. Pankhurst's militants, whose tactics Henderson detested, quarrelled with the constitutional suffragists of whom he heartily approved. Trade Unionists, puzzled and exasperated by the steady rise in the cost of living and the apparent inability of the Labour Party to bring about any improvement in their material condition, grumbled, agitated and struck; in 1911 the Party itself was deeply split on the question of Lloyd George's Insurance Act. Meanwhile, events outside Britain marched on to war, and to the last manifesto of the International,[1] signed by Hardie and by Henderson, who as Party secretary was *ex officio* secretary to its British section.

The manifesto came too late. Before it could have been acted upon in any way, the Germans had marched into Belgium and had thereby convinced Henderson, along with the vast majority of those whom he represented, that there was no alternative but to fight them. Strikes were called off; workers poured into the recruiting stations at a rate far outrunning the capacity of the War Office organisation to deal with it; even Hardie and MacDonald stopped preaching pacifism for the moment. Henderson was asked if the Labour Party would take official part in recruiting campaigns, and after consultation with his colleagues agreed that it should. At the same time, however, he resisted any attempt at "totalitarianism." He worked hard with Webb on the War Workers' Committee for the preservation of working-class standards against a drive to submerge them in a welter of patriotic effort, and—a more difficult task, since in it his opponents were his own people—he stoutly set his face against any attempt to split the Party by turning out the war-resisters. MacDonald had to resign the leadership, of course, but thanks to Henderson's efforts he was still a member.

[1] See page 224. At this date, however, notwithstanding his office, Henderson had very little understanding of foreign affairs. He spoke no language but his own (nor ever did); he never went abroad until 1912, when he organised a visit o English Socialists to Germany. It was on this trip that Pete Curran, in humorous resistance to a slight over-shepherding on the part of the organiser, cried, "Don't worry; we'll be there, Uncle Arthur"—a name which stuck.

In January 1915 Henderson was made a Privy Councillor in recognition of the part played by the Labour Party in recruiting; and in May, when the first Coalition Government was formed under Asquith, he was offered a post as President of the Board of Education. After consultation he accepted, not without doubts, for he knew that the abandonment of Labour's independence would cause heartburnings among many; and he knew also that education was a war casualty and that the President would be unable to help it. The latter apprehension was fulfilled; after sharp and ungenerous attacks from MacDonald and others he asked to be relieved of the post and to be called simply Labour Adviser to the Cabinet, which he had always been in fact; and the request was granted. His fears on the first score, however, were increased when at the end of 1916 he accepted office in a War Cabinet headed by a politician whom he had always distrusted, David Lloyd George.

The fears were not ill-founded. We of to-day, fresh from a war in which working-class real interest (as distinct from emotional indignation) was deeply engaged from the start, and willing working-class co-operation so much a *sine qua non* of its effective prosecution that millions of pounds were spent without hesitation on cost-of-living subsidies, for example, may find it hard to realise how little consideration, apart from parading brass bands and military recruiting songs,[1] was given to that class in 1914, how many of the comfortably-off believed that patriotism was its own reward and should remain so, and even that the war was a heaven-sent opportunity for putting back in their places uppish members of the proletariat. When discussion upon the wages to be paid to women dilutees in the engineering trades was in progress, *The Engineer*, an important trade journal, delivered itself of this utterance (my italics):

"The fact of the matter is, really, not that women are paid too little, *but that men are paid too much* for work that

[1] e.g.

Ow, we don't want—ter lose yer,
But we think yer—oughter *go*;
For yer King and—yer country
Both need yer *so*.

See books like Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Home Front* for the other side of the story, the incredibly mean and miserly treatment of soldiers' wives and families.

> can be done without previous training. High wages are paid on the false assumption, *now almost obscured by Trade Union regulations,* that it takes long to learn the craft. Everyone knows now that . . . *the whole argument of high wages based on long training has been carried by the board.*"

If this piece of pontification, produced at a time when the Unions were desperately struggling, with only partial success, to secure a minimum of *£1 a week* for women dilutees, means anything at all, it is a clear adjuration to employers to use the war emergency as a means of breaking down the standards and destroying the organisation of the men away in France; and it is hardly surprising that Labour's representative in the Cabinet, who had the task of persuading engineers and other munition workers to allow low-paid women to enter their trades, and of convincing angry shop stewards from the Clyde and the Tyne and South Wales that the agreement their officers had made to give up the use of the strike weapon in "essential industries" was not a simple surrender to the foe within, should have incurred a good deal of unpopularity, which was not mitigated when he had to defend measures of military conscription which went clean against all liberal and democratic traditions in Britain. He stuck to his guns, faced his critics and gave as good as he got. "I am not resigning," he told an angry conference at Cardiff. "I should be resigning every day if I were to please some of you; but I am not here to please either myself or you; I am here to see the war through." But he must have been relieved at heart, however immediately chagrined, when the events of 1917 put him back once more among his own people.

In March 1917 the war-exhausted Russian people rose and threw out the Tsar, and the hearts of every Radical and every democrat, weary already with the huge and inconclusive slaughter of the Somme and beginning to suspect that what their rulers hoped to achieve at the end of the war was something very far from their own hopes, leapt up suddenly. The attitude of the Government was naturally different; their main preoccupation was to secure that, if possible, Russia did not go out of the war. Lloyd George, in one of his intermittent

fits of imagination, thought it might be a good idea for Allied Socialists to get into touch with the Russian revolutionaries—to prevent the disaster of German Socialists being the first to fraternise—and at the end of May Henderson was sent on a mission to Petrograd, with a letter in his pocket authorising him to supersede the British Ambassador if he thought fit. This deeply shocked his sense of propriety and straight dealing.

Henderson did not much enjoy his stay in Russia. He found Moscow uncomfortable and the revolution messy and untidy. He disliked the Bolsheviks, who were to take control in the October Revolution, at sight, and a stiff speech which he made to the Petrograd Soviet, urging them to stay in the war "for the ideals of an association of free democracies, which have been made sacred to us by the blood of our sons," fell on unresponsive ears. The Petrograd workers were concerned with peace and bread, not with a League of Nations.

What the Russian leaders did want, however, was a meeting of Socialists of all countries—allied, neutral and enemy—to discuss among themselves terms of peace and the making of a new world after the war. With this, the once world-famous Stockholm[1] proposal, Henderson came to feel hearty sympathy (as against Lenin, who wanted a Left-wing conference which would exclude the "social chauvinists"), and for a time he believed he had the support of the British Premier. But during the summer Lloyd George's mood changed, and after a good deal of coming and going the Cabinet decided against Stockholm at a meeting from which Henderson, though a member, was excluded and kept waiting "on the door-mat" until a decision was made. He was extremely angry, both at the decision and at the insult to the representative of the Labour Party,[2] so angry that he resigned his post at once, and refused to be made a Companion of Honour; and it is not too much to say that the Stockholm affair, in itself unimportant, altered

[1] It was suggested that the conference should be held in Stockholm, capital of the chief neutral country.

[2] Lloyd George's *Memoirs*, with remarkable inaccuracy, state that "fresh from the glow of that atmosphere of emotionalism and exaltation which great revolutions inspire, Mr. Henderson was out of tune with the stern but frigid sense of responsibility and self-control which was dominant here. . . . He had more than a touch of revolutionary malaria." Henderson's letters from Russia prove this to be stark nonsense.

the whole direction of his life. From then on he had two fixed purposes—to build up the Labour Party into a really strong political instrument, and to work with democrats of other countries for international peace.

The new constitution for the Labour Party was formulated in January 1918 and accepted in June; it proclaimed the Party as the political organisation for the "workers by hand and brain," gave it a Socialist programme, and made it possible for sympathisers to join it individually, through a local Labour Party as well as through one of the Socialist Societies—thereby, in the end, cutting away the main support of the I.L.P. Its first baptism of fire, in the coupon election of 1918, when cries of *Hang the Kaiser* and *Make the Germans Pay* plastered the hoardings, was not very encouraging. Only the most belligerent of Labour candidates were returned; Henderson, along with most of the brains of the Party, lost his seat, though he got in again at a by-election in the following year. As an experienced agent and campaigner, however, he had in large measure anticipated the result; and he was not too disappointed, observing that the Liberals had split and that Asquith's dissident handful had secured fewer seats than Labour. He set himself again to the task of building up the Party organisation—incidentally having a running fight with the Communists, for whom he never had any sympathy whatsoever—and when the Tories elbowed Lloyd George out of the way he reaped his reward in the return to Parliament of a Labour Party nearly doubled in numbers and more than doubled in intellectual calibre.

Meantime, he had been working hard at recreating the Second International, beginning nine months before the end of the war, with an inter-Allied Socialist Conference in London at which he told the world

> "We are not influenced by Imperialist ambitions or selfish national interests. We seek a victory, but it must be a victory for international moral and spiritual forces, finding its expression in a peace based upon the inalienable rights of common humanity"

—a statement subsequently elaborated into a long pamphlet on *Labour's War Aims*, wherein a League of Nations was

strongly advocated. Very soon after the Armistice, a conference at Berne, which, unlike the conference soon to be in session at Versailles, refused to make a pronouncement on "war-guilt," re-established an organisation of sorts which gradually got on its feet, although the fundamental difference between the parliamentarians and the revolutionaries was never resolved and the feud between Henderson's International and the Comintern founded by Lenin continued to divide the working-class movements.[1] The Berne Conference had convinced Henderson that international co-operation alone could bring peace to the world.

In 1922 MacDonald, with Henderson's support, was elected leader of the Party, Henderson himself becoming Chief Whip. This meant that at the beginning of 1924, when Baldwin's premature attempt to introduce a Protectionist policy had failed to commend itself to the electors, MacDonald became Prime Minister of the first minority Labour Government. With characteristic ingratitude, he offered to Henderson no office, but the chairmanship of the Committee of Ways and Means; and only when that was indignantly refused did he bring him into the Cabinet as Home Secretary. In the summer of that year Henderson had his first experience of real international negotiation, when he took part as reconciler in the discussions on the Dawes Plan which staunched for a time the running sore of German reparations; a little later he was busily engaged at Geneva drafting a Protocol for the prevention of war, with the hearty co-operation of Aristide Briand; his Government, however, delayed signature, and before it could sign it was a Government no longer.

The first Labour Government did not last long; the Liberals turned it out, and in the subsequent election a Press scare over Communist propaganda (the once notorious "Zinoviev Letter") beat the Labour Party. The extraordinary behaviour of MacDonald over this scare—he wrapped himself in Olympian silence until the harm had been done—undoubtedly contributed considerably to the defeat; and the Socialists tried to remove him from the leadership. Henderson,

[1] The British movement never split, as did Continental Socialists; the influence of the Comintern was never strong enough. But the struggle of the ideologies meant much wasted effort in the inter-war years.

with commendable loyalty but rather less prescience, set his face against any such attempts. MacDonald was the leader, and the Party must stand by him; they must not play into Tory hands by advertising internal dissensions. He had his way; and armed with this authority he forced MacDonald (much against that cloudy thinker's inclination) to accept the formulation of a much more detailed programme for the Party, entitled *Labour and the Nation*. On this programme Labour fought the cheerful summer election of 1929 and came back two hundred and eighty-seven strong; after some not very creditable havering MacDonald, Premier for the second time, appointed Henderson his Foreign Secretary.[1]

The Foreign Office was the height of Henderson's ambition. He believed—as it was not unreasonable to believe in that last hopeful summer before the wind of economic depression blew out of America—that there was a real chance of getting, at long last, an enduring peace in Europe; and he went into the odd building in Whitehall with a clear, definite, and, he thought, perfectly feasible set of instructions, the Labour Party's foreign policy as laid down in Conference resolutions and in *Labour and the Nation*. Immediately upon arrival, he called together his higher officials, circulated the pamphlet to them and explained that this was the new policy and that he was certain that he could rely on their loyal co-operation in carrying it out; at the same time he made it clear that he did not propose to spend his days immersed in petty details or endless drafting. He had long experience of administrative organisation and knew how it ought to be done. Sir Walford Selby, who was his principal private secretary, later called him "the most expert decentraliser I have ever known"; and the machine of the Foreign Office found him very satisfactory to work under—though he did once observe with mild surprise, "These chaps don't seem to have *heard* of our Conference decisions."

For he never forgot for a moment that he was the representa-

[1] Henderson's loyalty to MacDonald, over twenty years and more, is really amazing. On several occasions, besides those mentioned here, MacDonald repudiated him or otherwise let him down; nevertheless, he remained faithful, and did no more than protest (in September 1929) that he had not experienced "that confidence which one is entitled to expect." This attitude must have made the events of 1931 a very bitter shock.

tive of the Labour Party, and that in his faith the Labour Party was the right party and members of the Labour Party the people with the right ideas. He always insisted that questions from Labour M.P.s should receive specially courteous and informative replies—"no member of the Labour Party should be referred back to a previous answer, without the substance of the answer being repeated"; he regularly attended, as MacDonald did not, meetings of the Party in the House; and though he had to hand over the running of the Labour Party headquarters to J. S. Middleton, he remained its secretary until 1934, and every day looked in and gave instructions and advice before going to the Foreign Office.

In 1929 the omens for Labour's foreign policy looked favourable. Briand and Herriot, men after Henderson's own heart, were in control in France, and Stresemann, who longed equally for a settlement, in Germany. Briand's scheme for a United States of Europe seemed to have a real chance of being adopted. After an initial hitch, due to Philip Snowden's sudden decision to get very tough with the French over their share of reparations, the work of conciliation went ahead smoothly; and in September Henderson, having set on foot negotiations for re-establishing the relations with Soviet Russia which had been severed by the Tories, left for Geneva, to attend the Assembly of the League of Nations.

The League was his hope for the world; but he was also personally happy in Geneva. Briand and Stresemann, both men of the people, had the kind of minds with which he could get on; and his biographer, Mrs. Hamilton, is quite correct in saying that the moral climate of the place, "at once elevated and dowdy," suited him.[1] He made a deep impression at Geneva, far more favourable than that previously made by MacDonald, and returned to England with the conviction that he had achieved a real advance in the direction of world disarmament and world peace. But history was not on the side of the peacemakers. In the late autumn the inflated Wall Street market burst, and prices came tumbling down. Flighty American investment rushed out of a Europe whose economy so largely

[1] "He was at home in the Hotel Beau Rivage, with its aspidistras and antimacassars, its Brighton-like views over the blue lake, and its furniture and appurtenances like those of any large hotel in which he had stayed during Annual Conferences." (M. A. Hamilton, *Arthur Henderson.*)

and so unfortunately depended on it; and the inevitable political consequences followed. By the time the next League Assembly met, there were five millions out of work in Germany, and Hitler's following in the Reichstag had increased to one hundred and seven.

Henderson continued his efforts unabated. Early in 1931 he negotiated the settlement of a long-standing dispute between Germans and Poles about Upper Silesia, and forced the League to take effective notice of the grievances of Ukrainians within the Polish State; he signed, on behalf of Great Britain, two promises to refer disputes to arbitration; he also, after a great deal of argument, induced its Council to fix February 1932 for the opening of a great general Disarmament Conference, and agreed himself to become its chairman. Nobody could have foreseen that, by the time that date arrived, Henderson would be out of office and out of Parliament, a lunatic near to power in Berlin, and disarmament of any kind as Utopian an idea as anything in *News from Nowhere*.

The story of 1931 has been many times told; and Henderson played little part in it until nearly the last moment. It must suffice to say that the Labour Government, elected in the belief that it would be able to cure unemployment, had no idea at all how to deal with the catastrophic and unprecedented unemployment which spread like a plague over the whole world from the middle of 1930 onwards; and fell an easy prey to its enemies. The May Committee (appointed by the Government itself, which allowed its report to appear without any warning and to burst like a bomb on the heads of an unsuspecting public) declared that Great Britain was all but bankrupt and could only be saved by violent cuts in wages, social services and allowances to the unemployed. The pound began to stagger; bankers and industrialists began to move against the Government; the external situation went from bad to worse. In August MacDonald, having failed to get the majority of the Cabinet to agree to cut unemployment pay, received their resignations; the next morning they were stupefied to learn from him that he was already Prime Minister of a new National Government which included just three of his late colleagues, the other members being Liberals and Tories. At a panic election in October, fought on a cam-

paign to knock out the Labour Party once and for all (*Times* leader) and to give the National Government a "doctor's mandate" to do anything it liked in order to save the country from inflation and nameless horrors, and fought with a great deal of vilification of the Labour Party by its former Ministers, this new alignment was overwhelmingly endorsed. Henderson, leader of the Party since August, went down with over two hundred others. The Party did seem to be knocked out, for a time if not for ever; and Henderson had the extremely difficult choice—difficult when one takes into consideration his principles and his history—between trying to weld together afresh its broken and angry fragments, or making an effort to bring peace to a world rendered more nationalistic than ever by its economic disorders. He chose the Disarmament Conference.

He could hardly have done otherwise; for—in spite of the ominous failure of the League to produce any effect upon the Japanese grab at Manchuria—no one could have ventured to say then that the cause of peace was hopeless, and if peace could by a miracle have been secured there would have been little need to fear for the Labour Party. But the result was nothing but tragedy. The national representatives quarrelled and haggled; the Germans left with gestures of contempt; the French were roused to a fury of fear; the Government of Great Britain gave Henderson little support. Literally, the only events to cheer him during the years of the Conference were the adhesion of the U.S.S.R. to the League of Nations, and the award to him personally of the Nobel Peace Prize. His health began to deteriorate rapidly; his cheeks fell in, the pouches under his eyes grew heavier, and his ruddy healthy complexion turned to yellow; he seemed to be dying along with the chances of peace. In 1932 he resigned his leadership of the Party to George Lansbury, and in 1934 finally surrendered the post of Party secretary; in that year he gave his last Christmas party for the staff of Transport House. In 1935 the Disarmament Conference finally died ignominiously away, and in October Henderson died also. The Abyssinian war was just begun.

Arthur Henderson represents, in the history of the Labour movement, the highest achievement of the typical Trade Unionist brought up in the tradition of Liberalism and Non-

conformity. His plain living, his bourgeois standard—even his lifelong interest in football!—were characteristic of his class; unswerving loyalty to the organisation and to the people with whom he had worked is one of the distinguishing marks of the good Trade Unionist. It frequently annoys the intellectual convert always anxious to be remoulding the Party nearer to his intellect's desire; it drove H. G. Wells, to cite a distinguished example, to exasperation, and it is at least arguable that Henderson's obstinate and ill-repaid fidelity to MacDonald[1] was a mistake for which the Party paid dearly, and that his affectionate clinging to his post as secretary and still more as guide when he had the Foreign Office and the Disarmament Conference on his hands was in fact a disservice and prevented younger men from having a chance. But he acted always up to his lights, his conscience and his convictions; and his patient labours for peace and international understanding, no matter what the obstacles, are in the very best tradition of English Nonconformity.

Moreover, he could learn, and he could grow. At forty he was a man of middling account and middling interest; at sixty-six he had grown into a statesman on whom the Socialists of Europe pinned their hopes. Unlike lesser men from the Unions, he could understand and appreciate the brain-workers; when Harold Laski, twenty years ago, said in an angry speech that the Party ought to get rid of men like Henderson who despised the young intellectuals, he did not lose his temper, but sent for Laski and asked him how they could best co-operate. He could be stiff and apparently unsympathetic, until suddenly his face would crinkle under the pouches, his voice would change entirely, and he would become completely human. In accepting the leadership for the last time in 1931, he said

> "I am under no illusions as to the task which I personally have in hand, but with all the strength that God gives me, I will try to lead, not unconscious of many limitations. Though I may not be able to rise to standards of brilliance,

[1] After the 1931 disaster, his was the only hand raised against the expulsion of MacDonald from the Party; he never received a gracious word in return from either MacDonald or Snowden.

I will yield to none in my fidelity to the ideals and principles of our great Movement."

These words are his real epitaph; and though he died when both the causes which he had served so faithfully were at their lowest ebb all Party workers would agree that the Labour triumph of 1945 was largely of his making.

GEORGE LANSBURY

(1859–1940)

I believe in the common people.

Lansbury, *Looking Backwards and Forwards*

I am blessed with a pugnacious disposition, am always up in arms against injustice. My general philosophy is that most, if not all, people who find themselves prisoners or liable to attack are innocent, and in all circumstances my sympathy goes to the "bottom dog," whether he is a native of Africa or a dweller in a city slum.

Lansbury, *My Life*

IN the short preface which opens his autobiography, *My Life*, George Lansbury lists no fewer than eighty names of persons who were his friends and who worked alongside with him, in one way and another, in the people's cause. These names range from the handful widely known in democratic history to those of dockers and other labourers whom no one save a few old East End Socialists will now remember; and the longest list ends with the words "and crowds of others, known and unknown, whose works do follow them, and whose names shall live for evermore."

These lists give perhaps the first and most important clue to "G.L." as a personality. He was the *friendliest* man alive; he called everyone (except those he recognised certainly to be enemies of the common people) "brother," and he meant it. He loved his comrades even in the rare cases when they did not love him; and he never for a minute believed that any co-worker in the cause was not doing his best according to his lights, even if his best was pretty poor and his lights inadequate and sometimes misleading.

This, to anyone who ever knew G. L. personally, is the most important clue; it explains why 39 Bow Road, Poplar, where he lived so long, was a port and a haven for so many. But there is another, to be found in the second quotation which heads this chapter and in the tale of organisations with which he was

associated during his long and active life. Looking through his reminiscences and through reference books, I have compiled a certainly incomplete list, which includes the Ethical Union, the League against Imperialism, the *Daily Herald* League, the Social Democratic Federation, the I.L.P., the Fabian Society, the Socialist League, the Church Socialist League, the National Guilds League, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Union of Democratic Control, and the Theosophical Society. There must be a great many more; but the point is that, with the exception of the last-named[1] they were all struggling bodies, all chronically hard-up for cash, all working for the "underdog," and all made up, for the most part, of the heroic cranks whom Henry Nevinson called the Stage Army of the Good. For this reason, they were most of them unsuccessful, in the short term, at all events; but Lansbury never believed in success.[2] If Wells was the prophet, Lansbury was the great standby of the perverse, Utopian but vital Left.

He is generally thought of as a Londoner of the proletarian East End: it was in Poplar that for so many years his heart lay and his ascendancy was unquestioned. But he was not born within sound of Bow Bells, nor did he turn Cockney for a good long time. His father was a Warwickshire lad, who became timekeeper to Thomas Brassey, the big railroad contractor, and at eighteen ran away with a sixteen-year old servant girl from Radnorshire in Wales; and George was born in a Suffolk tollhouse between Halesworth and Lowestoft. The family, which was numerous, moved continually from place to place, following railroad construction, and George's earliest recollections were of living near Sydenham in Kent and watching the funeral of navvies killed by the collapse of the tunnel at Chelsfield. (One of those crushed was his own uncle.) Later they

[1] The Theosophical Society is a peculiar case. Lansbury was brought into it partly through his old admiration for Annie Besant in her Socialist days (see my *Women of To-day*) and partly through H. Baillie-Weaver, that very remarkable man who for so many years persuaded the rich men of the Society to give grants for "good" causes, and whose death was so great a loss. Lansbury was a lifelong Anglican; but he sat loosely enough to the Church to be able without spiritual difficulty to pay tribute to Bradlaugh the atheist, and to join the ethical societies and the Theosophists when he felt their social beliefs to be in harmony with his own.

[2] This does not imply that he believed in incompetence for its own sake; he often expressed exasperation with groups which aspired to run the universe and failed to display ability sufficient to run a whelk-stall.

moved to Greenwich, and thence to Bethnal Green and Whitechapel.

Little George's parents did not neglect his education. While at Sydenham, in the intervals of gaping at the Crystal Palace, he went to an old-style dame school, kept by "an old lady with a big granny's cap, who allowed us to thread her needle"; thence to schools in Greenwich and Bethnal Green, where "we were inspected regularly to see that our vaccination marks were plain," and finally to St. Mary's, Whitechapel, where the future agitator had his first baptism, getting up a round-robin petition to ask that the respectable children whose parents paid fourpence a week for their education should have a weekly half-holiday like the "charity sprats" at the Davenant School next-door—the petition was successful. At the same time his religious education was proceeding, through the Church of England in the ordinary way, though when the children had been particularly naughty (had, for instance, been guilty of listening in to the open-air freethinking preachers in Bonner Fields) they were taken on Sunday to the Methodist Chapel for a dose of hellfire and brimstone; and also, in a variety of ways, his political education. His mother was a staunch Radical, and by the time he was eleven he knew the names of the great Liberal leaders of those days, had attended political meetings in the old Tower Hamlets division and was (more surprisingly) well informed on the causes of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. He made friends with John Hales, then British secretary of the dying First International; and his heart went out to the slaughtered Communards of Paris.

Schooling, intermitted by short periods of work, went on until he was fourteen, when it finally terminated, and after holding a few odd jobs he joined an elder brother on a contract for unloading coals, where he stayed until 1883. In the meantime, however, he had got married to a girl named Bessie Brine, with whom he started "walking out" in 1875, when he was sixteen and she not quite fifteen. They were married in 1880, and had in all twelve children, of whom eight survived him. He had also gone more deeply and more actively into politics, and was engaged in stormy demonstrations in favour of Gladstone's "Bulgarian atrocities" campaign and against

Disraeli's imperialism of the late 'seventies. In one large meeting in Hyde Park, organised by the Radical clubs of London, he has recorded that "as has happened so very often on similar occasions, my pacifist principles would not work, so I made one with others to clear a passage for the speakers ... a good many black eyes and bloody noses were indiscriminately dealt out on both sides." The police, he believed, were on the side of the howling crowd and against the protestants.

In 1884, tired of the coal-unloading partnership and of various semi-indoor occupations which had succeeded it, Lansbury decided to try his luck in Australia, and emigrated to Brisbane with his wife, three tiny children, and a twelve-year-old young brother. Their experience was not happy; they were not the first to be deceived by advertising propaganda, and after a thoroughly uncomfortable time, during which Lansbury tried his hand at a good many jobs, including stone-breaking, driving carcasses of meat from the slaughterhouses (from which he resigned because he refused to work on Sundays), working as a farm servant and as parcels-delivery man, he brought them back to England, and took a job at his father-in-law's sawmill and veneering works in Whitechapel, at thirty shillings a week. This was in 1885, the year in which unemployment was beginning to swell in London.

His Australian experiences gave him his first direct personal entry into politics. He was very indignant at the treatment he had received, and immediately on his return he started an agitation against emigration, holding meetings every night on Mile End Waste and other suitable spaces in London, and writing for the *Echo* and other London papers. This agitation caused a storm, in the course of which the Agent-General for Queensland[1] publicly accused him of being "work-shy," an accusation which roused him to such indignant eloquence that he ran away with the conference at which it was put forward. One result was the setting up by the Colonial Office of the Emigrants' Information Department, which collected for display in public places such as post-offices facts about demand and opportunities for emigrants, thereby preventing at any rate some avoidable disappointments; another was a tempor-

[1] Australia had not then been federated as a Dominion

ary job for the agitator as election agent in Bow to Samuel Montagu, who later became Lord Swaythling. Montagu was a Liberal, and Lansbury at that date (1886) became honorary secretary to the Liberal party organisation which—as well as its candidate—had strong feelings of sympathy with Trade Unionism and the working class. Mr. Montagu was "milked" by the honorary secretary for handsome support to various strike funds; and the local party itself was very independent in feeling and had adopted as its motto "a happier, and more moral, and more equal life for each."

Lansbury seems to have slipped over from Liberalism to Socialism by an easy process. One of the chief steps in his conversion was a visit which he and a dozen other Radical working-men of East London paid to Ireland in 1887, to visit the Irish Nationalists and to learn at first hand what were their grievances against England. (Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill had just been defeated.) While he was there, Lansbury discovered that the Irish movement was an economic one directed against landlordism as much as a political one, and he guilelessly inquired of his English Liberal friends why, if they supported so heartily the fixing by the State of fair rents for Irish peasants, they were so hot against the fixing of fair hours and fair wages for English wage-workers. They could not answer him and when the Bow and Bromley branch, which he had converted "by sheer vehemence and persistence," sent him to the National Liberal Federation's conference at Manchester with a resolution to that effect, the Liberal pundits on the platform dealt with the matter by pushing him down the steps—an argument which got rid of the eight-hour day for the moment, but certainly neither disposed of the question permanently nor endeared their supporter to them.

The main thing which converted him, however, was simply living in East London, as a worker among workers, during the black years of the 'eighties. In 1886 and 1887, the winters of unemployment, he was there; he was with the marchers in Trafalgar Square; he heard Burns and Hyndman and Cunninghame Graham make their speeches and saw the subscriptions to the Lord Mayor's Fund leap up in panic. He observed Annie Besant writing articles about the dreadful conditions of the matchgirls, and when her informant was dis-

missed, bringing the oppressed and ill-paid creatures out on strike *and winning*; when the great dock strike was declared he joined its local committee and collected funds from door to door every Saturday as long as it lasted—and helped a group of "dressers" of bass-brooms to organise successfully in emulation; at the same time he joined Will Thorne's Gas Workers' Union,[1] of which he remained a member for a great many years, long after he had become an employer; he also associated himself with the May Day demonstrations for the eight-hour day organised by the Second International. It was quite obvious, with all these connections, that he would not long remain a Liberal.

At some point, however, he had to make up his mind; and the decision was forced upon him through his own growing reputation. It was suggested that he might go forward for adoption as Liberal candidate for Warwickshire; almost simultaneously, just after the election of the first London County Council, some wealthy London women, who had been impressed by his work in securing the election of a woman for Bow and Bromley,[2] persuaded a group to offer him a maintenance fund if he would stand for the second seat. In spite of Samuel Montagu's adjurations, Lansbury turned down both suggestions, saying that if he stood it could only be as a Socialist. Not wishing, however, to let down Murray MacDonald, the Liberal Parliamentary candidate, who had always treated him very kindly, he retained his office as agent long enough to fight the election of 1892—and to get his man returned.

> "The following night we who had become Socialists packed up, left the Liberals, and formed the Bow and Bromley branch of the Social Democratic Federation."

In the same year he was elected for the first time to the Poplar Board of Guardians, on which he served for more than thirty years, learning the rules of that body, he tells us, as Parnell learned the rules of the House of Commons, viz., by breaking them: it may be added here, to complete the table

[1] Nucleus of the present huge National Union of General and Municipal Workers.

[2] Jane Cobden, afterwards Mrs. Fisher Unwin.

of his services to local government, that in 1903 he became a member of the Poplar Borough Council (won by Labour in 1919) and remained a member until close on his death, and from 1909 to 1912 he sat for Poplar on the London County Council as a Socialist, to the annoyance of the Fabian leaders, who preferred permeation of the Progressives to independent candidatures. He had thus a very long working life as an unpaid servant on public bodies, which he was only able to keep up because he had ceased to be a wage-earner. In 1896 he succeeded to his father-in-law's veneering business, and after 1904 he, in common with a great many other "good causes," was helped by the American Single-taxer, Joseph Fels,[1] and his wife, whose generosity to the Good was so great.

He did not confine himself to local government. In 1895 he fought a Parliamentary by-election as a Social Democratic Federation candidate for the Walworth Division in South London. It was an eager contest, in which the Social Democratic Federation branch, fortified by speeches from all the leading Socialists of the movement made to halls packed with young men and women and sympathisers from all parts of London, thought they had a real chance of winning; they polled, however, 347 votes as against 2,676 for the Tory and 2,105 for the Liberal, and at the general election which followed in the same year this figure was reduced to 203. This might fairly be described as a bucket of very cold water for Socialist hopes; but Lansbury and his comrades were not in the least downhearted—"we marched along singing the Red Flag and the Marseillaise just as if we had won." In the khaki election of 1900 he put up for Bow, his Parliamentary home for so much of his life, as a straight Socialist and pacifist; he polled much better than as a Social Democratic Federation candidate, but was still soundly beaten. In 1906 he stood for Middlesbrough for the I.L.P. and came out bottom of the poll; and at the beginning of 1910 came second in Bow, where the retirement of the Liberal allowed him at last to enter Parliament at the end of that year. He did not, however, stay there long, for in 1912 he resigned his seat in protest against the Government's treatment of the suffrage question, and lost it

[1] Of the once-famous Fels-Naphtha soap and cleansers. Single-taxer = disciple of Henry George.

by a narrow majority at the by-election.[1] He did not get back again until 1922, by which time Bow had become almost his pocket borough and was his—even in 1931—for the rest of his life.

This list of dates and constituencies has taken us momentarily ahead of the tale of Lansbury's public life, which really reaches back long before his election as a Guardian. For what had originally persuaded him to stand was his recollection of the inhuman behaviour of the Whitechapel Board of Guardians in his youth and of the body so ironically named the Charity Organisation Society. He and all his family and friends had grown up in the belief that neighbour helped neighbour when times were bad, and he still remembered with fury how the Whitechapel Clerk had written to his mother a curt official note requesting her not to give food and other assistance to certain poor people, as that kept them from destitution and so prevented his Board from sending them to the workhouse. With four companions, elected at the same time, Lansbury set himself to humanise the Poor Law.

It was not, and never became, possible really to humanise the Poor Law; the only remedy, at long last adopted, was to abolish it. But at least Lansbury and his friends, acting as a determined group, achieved a good deal. They reformed the workhouse from top to bottom; they made the workhouse food eatable[2] and the workhouse clothes wearable, and got rid of careless and corrupt officials; they raised the miserable allowance given to the old people (one-and-six to two-and-six a week) two- and threefold; in conjunction with Keir Hardie they carried on the agitation for finding work for the starving unemployed which bore a small fruit in the Unemployed

[1] A year later an angry speech made in defence of suffragettes arrested as militants earned him his first, though not his last, term of imprisonment. He went on hunger-strike, and shortly afterwards was released and welcomed by great processions of East Londoners.

[2] "On one visit I inspected the supper of oatmeal porridge . . . served up with pieces of black stuff floating around. On examination we discovered it to be rat and mice manure. I called for the chief officer, who immediately argued against me, saying the porridge was good and wholesome. 'Very good, madam,' said I, taking up a basinful and a spoon, 'here you are, eat one mouthful and I will acknowledge I am wrong.' 'Oh dear no,' said the lady, 'the food is not for me, and is good and wholesome enough for those who want it.' I stamped and shouted around till both doctor and master arrived, both of whom pleaded it was all a mistake and promptly served cocoa and bread and margarine." (*My Life*.) This was a good example of G. L.'s direct methods.

Workmen Act of 1905; at Laindon and Hollesley Bay they ran colonies for training out-of-work men to grow food; and they reorganised the dismal Poor Law schools, abolishing the horrible uniforms and the corporal punishments, letting the girls grow their hair and the boys make up football teams. Above all, however, they tried to make their Board *friends* as well as Guardians of the poor—instead of guardians of the ratepayers' cash, as many Boards were; their London homes were places to which any worker could come at any time for help and counsel, knowing that he (or she) was certain to get the counsel, and if he could not get the help at least he would know the reason why.

As a result of all this Lansbury was made a Member of the Poor Law Commission,[1] and though he did not see eye to eye with Beatrice Webb on all points,[2] he was one of the four who signed the famous Minority Report, and he took a large part in the campaign which followed. By this time, as he says, he was absolutely and completely convinced that Socialism was the only remedy for human ills, and that Socialism would never come about unless the oppressed themselves made efforts and protests—if necessary noisy and offensive efforts and protests—and were helped by all Socialists of whatever brand. G. L. himself was a Socialist of no brand—"Socialism," he wrote, "is to me the finest and fullest expression of religion"—and that is about as near as he ever came to a definition. This catholicism made it possible for him to be the staunch supporter, without any shade of hypocrisy, of many with whom he disagreed on details.

From 1910 onwards, as has already been said, the efforts and the protests were growing fast. The women, balked of the vote, were turning to militancy; the Irish Nationalists, balked of Home Rule and threatened by civil-warmongers in Ulster, were turning to drilling and preparations for armed resistance. Puzzled and angry Trade Unionists were beginning to listen to Syndicalists, who told them that the way to end capitalism was for the workers to organise together and to strike,

[1] See page 240.

[2] He always respected the integrity and persistent work of the Webbs; what his various criticisms of them really amounted to was that he felt they had too much faith in well-chosen officials, and too little feeling for human personality—especially among the uneducated.

industry by industry, until resistance was nearly paralysed, when a final general strike would transfer power effectively into their hands; or a little later to Guild Socialists who said that the right way to organise society was by a partnership between industries run by democratic guilds of workers and a democratic state. With all these movements Lansbury was in instinctive sympathy; and the *Daily Herald*, founded on April 15th, 1912, was an explosive supporter of all of them.

The *Daily Herald*, "the miracle of Fleet Street," first saw the light in 1911, as a halfpenny bulletin issued on four days in the week by London printers on strike. Even then, however, it was a little more than an ephemeral strike sheet; it opened its first issue with Morris's song,

> What is this the sound and rumour? what is this that all men hear
> Like the wind in hollow valleys when the storm is drawing near,
> Like the rolling of the thunder in the eventide of fear?
> 'Tis the people marching on;

throughout its three months' life it endeavoured to spread the news of "Strikes! Strikes Everywhere"; and the impression it created was strong enough to produce the infinitesimal capital of *three hundred pounds* to launch a national Socialist daily.[1] Lansbury was not its first editor, though he was one of the chief shareholders; he began his occupation of the editorial chair in October 1913 and continued it until 1922, when the paper, which since 1919 had put up a brave but losing struggle as a daily, was taken over by the official Labour Movement and eventually by Odham's Press. Characteristically, one of Lansbury's first acts as editor was to ban racing tips in the paper, which lost it some circulation, but did not bring it down.[2]

The abolition of the racing tips, of course, was only possible

[1] As might be expected, throughout its life the *Daily Herald* was fantastically short of money; on more than one occasion the death-sentence was pronounced, and only a last-minute subvention enabled the paper to come out next day. Nevertheless it survived until the outbreak of war in 1914, and even as a weekly through the war, whereas its respectable Trade Union-sponsored rival, the *Daily Citizen*, succumbed altogether.

[2] In 1919, however, he had to give way on this point.

because the *Herald* was not an ordinary newspaper, aiming to attract readers by offering the same features as other newspapers, with a little bit of its own added. It was a political journal first and foremost; it gave the news which the rebels wanted—and which the other papers often suppressed altogether—and other news as seen from the underside. Two days after its first appearance it came out with an editorial cheering on men of the Great Northern Railway who had come out on strike against the advice of their officials; the day after that it was "featuring" the trial of Tom Mann and others for publishing the DON'T SHOOT leaflet which urged members of the Armed Forces not to fire on their comrades on strike. Almost simultaneously the scandal of the sinking of the *Titanic*, where so many of the first-class passengers were hurriedly saved while the third-class were left to drown, was exposed in its pages; and the first national coal strike ever seen in Britain, as well as dock strikes in the Port of London and many disputes in industry elsewhere, gave it plenty of copy. It campaigned heartily for the militant suffragettes and against the Insurance Acts; it enjoyed itself immensely over the Marconi scandals; it raised a clamour on behalf of South African strike leaders deported from the Rand; when Larkin called out his legions in Dublin the monster meetings run by the *Daily Herald* and the Herald League (which stood to the paper as the Clarion Vanners stood to the *Clarion*) played a great part in forcing unwilling Trade Union and Co-operative leaders to take up the cause of the Dublin workers.

Besides this news and agitation, it was also a journal of thought. It had a remarkably brilliant team of contributors who mostly received some payment some time. G. K. Chesterton, abandoning the *Daily News* in disgust with the Liberals, wrote some of his best social journalism for it; the Australian Will Dyson contributed cartoons of a strength and ferocity unknown to British politics since the far-off days of Gillray and Rowlandson; G. D. H. Cole and William Mellor produced articles on the new philosophies of Syndicalism and Guild Socialism; there was always some sort of controversy raging in its pages. It was jubilant, irreverent—and sometimes very rude indeed; it thought the official leaders of Labour and the Trade Unions were no good and said so:

"J. R. MacDonald," says Lansbury,[1] "Philip Snowden, the Webbs, Shaw and all the Fabian family were stripped bare, shorn of all their glory and treated like ordinary, stupid, or on occasion rather cunning people."

With such a policy and such an attitude it is not surprising that the *Herald* was not popular with the great; had the law of libel been as great a menace then as it is now, the paper would have been sunk a dozen times over. But it was moving with the tide of conscious feeling among the workers; it went gaily on until war put a dead stop to strikers, suffragettes and Home Rulers all at once.

Neither the *Herald* nor its editor, who was as convinced a pacifist as he was a Socialist, felt any doubts that war was wrong; and throughout the next four years they maintained steadfastly that peace ought to be made at the earliest possible opportunity, and published leaders and articles showing up the horrors of war and of lying war propaganda—which naturally caused them to be accused with no truth of being in German pay.[2] But the weekly *Herald* was not merely an anti-war sheet or a support for conscientious objectors. It had not abated in the least its general Socialist belief; it was quite certain that, national unity or no national unity, the employers would continue to try to get the better of the workers, as they had in the past, and that the nominal leaders of Labour would have to be kicked into resistance. Accordingly, right from the beginning, the *Herald* set itself continually to preach Socialism, particularly Guild Socialism, which spread fast among the war-workers, to expose war-profiteering and the imposition of scandalous conditions, such as the almost entire neglect in the early period of safety provisions for the women brought into disease-bearing trades, and to support heartily the shop stewards' movement in protest and resistance—and for that matter almost any strike, anywhere. The accusations of working-class greed, exemplified in Press stories about miners and munition workers buying pianos and fur coats for their wives, made the *Herald* almost

[1] *The Miracle of Fleet Street.*
[2] "To the Tower with Lansbury!" shouted Bottomley's *John Bull*; G. L. did not turn a hair.

burst with indignation; later on, when food shortage and food prices were becoming a problem, it sent out Francis Meynell and another man on an expedition to discover just how well they could do themselves at expensive restaurants, and published the result in a well-starred article headed *Starving at the Ritz*. Sometimes, no doubt, it gave officials who were laboriously negotiating agreements with the "hard-faced" men and their Government stooges less credit than they deserved, and Henderson can have loved it no better than did MacDonald in the far-off days when it observed (in the middle of an election) that except on the score of good looks there was nothing to differentiate between him and any Liberal or Tory candidate; but when, about the beginning of 1917, the mood of the people began to change and "war-weariness" and therewith suspicion of the motives of the war-wagers to grow, the *Herald* came into its own.

It crowed with joy at the March Revolution in Russia, founding through the Herald League an Anglo-Russian Democratic Alliance, and hiring the Albert Hall for a monster meeting at which tried Socialists and democrats came to shout from the rostrum (no microphone then!) and wept unashamed to Clara Butt's singing; it exposed unceasingly the political chicanery over the Stockholm Conference. In June, fired by the reports of the part played by the Russian Soviets in the Revolution, the Alliance called an enormous representative gathering at Leeds which, in reply to a telegram from Kerensky's Government, declared that

> "the largest and greatest convention of Labour, Socialist, and Democratic bodies held in Great Britain during this generation has to-day endorsed Russia's declaration of foreign policy and war aims, and has pledged itself to work through its newly-constituted Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils[1] for an immediate and democratic peace."

In August the *Herald* promulgated a new Workers' Charter of nine items, beginning with "Conscription of Wealth. A

[1] These bodies never came into effective existence. The ending of the war, the Hang-the-Kaiser mood, and the split in the Alliance which made itself gradually apparent after the Bolshevist Revolution, combined to prevent it. But for about a year hopes ran high.

Pound a Day is the Worker's Pay," and ending with "peace without indemnities or annexations; self-determination and disarmament."

Early in the following year, along with the *Manchester Guardian*, it published the text of the secret treaties of the Allies which Trotsky had found in the Tsarist archives, and kept up an agitation for a "people's peace" throughout the summer. As soon as the war was over it supported the demand that Labour's representatives should leave the Coalition; after a little hesitation it hailed the second Revolution in Russia—and fought stoutly against all the attempts to defeat it by counter-revolution and blockade which are bearing such bitter fruits to-day; and when the Peace Conference opened it sent Lansbury to Paris as its special correspondent and unofficial ambassador of left-wing Britain. It was at Paris, in the intervals of meeting President Wilson and the other great, that Lansbury, the lifelong teetotaller, drank a cup of coffee into which someone had maliciously emptied a cognac, smacked his lips and asked for "more of that jolly good coffee"—a story against himself which he took great pleasure in repeating.

The first weeks after the end of the war were a great time of excitement and hopes, which gradually faded away under the cold douches of the coupon election, the Sankey Commission, and other like events. Lansbury continued to edit the *Herald*, now a daily again, until 1922 and to be connected with it until 1925, but he found it rather a disheartening struggle against financial troubles, falling circulation and disputes about policy, and his heart turned more and more to East London, where in 1919 Labour won both the Poplar Board of Guardians and the Poplar Council, and made him Mayor of Poplar. In 1922 began the battle of "Poplarism."

London is the only city in Britain which is not, financially, a unified area. Even within the administrative County of London twenty-eight separate boroughs separately levy their own separate rates, paying a contribution for services communally used by all, such as education and police—the amount and cost of which has of course been greatly increased since 1922. This meant that, when Lansbury took office, whereas in Manchester and Liverpool the cost of the poor rate was met by equal levy on all ratepayers, in London the rich of Kensington and West-

minster paid only a tiny contribution[1] to the poor rates of the East End, so that the cost of any severe unemployment fell most heavily on the poorest areas which were the least able to bear it. In 1922 unemployment was very heavy; the post-war boom had collapsed the year before; savings were exhausted, insurance benefit where it existed inadequate; people came flocking to the Guardians, and it looked as though the rates would go up to over thirty shillings in the pound.[2] Lansbury, Mayor and shortly to be M.P. for Bow, suggested that the only course open to the Councillors was to refuse on grounds of poverty to pay the demands made by the L.C.C., the Metropolitan Police and other bodies for communal services, and this was agreed. Long months of discussion with the authorities followed, but, as nothing would induce the Poplar Councillors to pay the thousands of pounds which by law they owed, a case was brought against them in the High Court of Justice —to which they marched in procession headed by Sam March, who had succeeded Lansbury as Mayor, with chain and mace-bearer—and were packed off to Brixton and Holloway jails[3] for contempt of court. As prisoners on such a charge can remain locked up until their contempt is "purged," and as the Councillors had no intention of paying up, it looked as though they might be there for ever.

Of course, this did not happen. The Councillors of Poplar were not prisoners whom any jailer was anxious to retain. They broke all the rules they could manage to break; they would not have prison baths or do any work; they protested against all their food till it was improved; they demanded (and got!) footballs; when any one of them was maltreated in any way the others created pandemonium in the prison. They caused their cell-mates to send in round robins demanding footballs too. Moreover, they had plenty of friends outside, who marched round the prison singing Socialist songs and crying "Speech! Speech!" when they saw Lansbury's face at the window. In the event, their imprisonment lasted six weeks; they were then let out to confer with the Whitehall

[1] Through the Metropolitan Common Poor Fund. The contribution was to "outdoor relief" (i.e. in workhouses) only.

[2] As they actually did in some unfortunate mining and manufacturing areas which had not Poplar's chance of a remedy.

[3] Twenty-four men at Brixton and six women at Holloway. The women had the less encouraging time.

authorities, and a settlement was reached under which the whole of the cost of outdoor relief and a large part of that of indoor relief was levied over London as a whole.

Poplar thus benefited many other poor boroughs beside itself; but gratitude was not by any means universal. Some of the principal Labour leaders were very indignant at the form of direct action employed by the Councillors, and "Poplarism" was for some time a term of political abuse; but Lansbury and his followers were so clearly right in their main contention that the uproar gradually died down, and subsequent developments have in fact gone a long way to extend the principle of "Poplarism" over a much wider field—in the Local Government Act of 1929, in the aid given to "Special Areas" of heavy unemployment, and last but not least in the extension of social insurance. But the Poplar Councillors were the first to make a really practical demonstration and to go to prison for their convictions, as they nearly did upon another occasion when the District Auditor disallowed as too high some of the wages they were paying. (In this case the surcharge made by the Auditor was remitted by the first Labour Government.)

Alongside of his work in Poplar and on the *Herald* Lansbury was taking a keen interest in the U.S.S.R. As I said, he was a strong supporter of the October Revolution, and in 1920 accepted an invitation to go and see for himself. Warned on all hands that the atheistic criminals who had made the Revolution would probably eat him alive, he set off via Denmark and Finland—where he received the additional advice not to mix with any humans in Russia, as he would become lousy, catch smallpox or an unnamed number of fevers. All these warnings, being Lansbury, he ignored—"I mixed with all sorts and conditions of people, was never properly fed, went in and out of overcrowded, tsarist tenements, slums, factories and railways, and never saw a flea, bug, or louse or caught any fever"—but he did catch a fever of admiration for the people who were struggling under immense difficulties to bring a new life and a new social system to their war-and-invasion-shattered country.[1] He talked at length with Lenin, who possibly

[1] In 1926, when he went on a second visit, he was greatly impressed by what had been achieved in six years.

remembered with gratitude how, more than a dozen years back, Lansbury had raised from Joseph Fels the money to enable him to hold an emigré conference of Russian Socialists in London—and ever thereafter thought of him as one of the greatest men he had ever met; he sent a cable to Lloyd George (which was never answered) begging him to go to Moscow himself and make terms with the Soviets; he wrote for the *Herald* the first newspaper articles to come direct out of revolutionary Russia; he understood the dangers which threatened the new régime from without and within, and the necessity of drastic measures to cope with them. However much he disliked coercion—and he did all his life—he was neither a fool nor an anarchist, and recognised its inevitability in a world governed by force; and he told the philosophic anarchists whom he found in a state of seething indignation that Russia was not a free Socialist country and that they would have been better advised to stay away while the struggle was going on. He returned to England just in time to take a large and eager part in the spontaneous demonstrations (co-ordinated in the Councils of Action) which prevented the British Government from the final lunacy of sending troops to Poland to take part in a new invasion of Russia.

From 1922 onwards, while not abating his work in Poplar, Lansbury became increasingly involved in national politics.[1] He was kept out of the first Labour Government by being offered a job without Cabinet rank, which he refused; but his importance and influence were growing. He was on the Executive Committee of the Labour Party and its chairman in 1927; he was on the executive of the Parliamentary Party and chairman of the Commonwealth Labour Group which in the 'twenties worked out for the Party its first scheme for State bulk purchase of food and other commodities. By 1929 it was clear that he was a major leader. As Viscount Snowden put it with his customary charity:[2]

> "What to do with Lansbury was something of a problem . . . we all agreed that some Cabinet office would have to be found for him in the new Government. . . . I suggested that

[1] In 1925, after he first left the *Herald*, he ran for two years a vigorous journal called *Lansbury's Labour Weekly*.

[2] *Viscount Snowden's Autobiography*.

he might be given the Office of Works. I thought that this post would suit him admirably. He would not have much opportunity for squandering money, but he would be able to do a good many small things which would improve the amenities of Government buildings and the public parks."

The offer was certainly not intended to be a handsome one; but Lansbury accepted it, took the seals,[1] made the best of it, and was extremely popular both in his department and outside. The bathing-ground in Hyde Park, which was called Lansbury's Lido, remains as a monument to his tenure of office. But like every other Socialist, he grew more and more distressed as the second Labour Government went its way; and his discomfort was not lessened by having to serve on a farcical committee consisting of himself, Tom Johnston, J. H. Thomas and Oswald Mosley (!), which was instructed to find out some easy way of curing the growing world-unemployment. When the crisis came and the National Government, he had of course not a moment's doubt on which side he stood, and in the débâcle of the election Bow stayed faithful and sent him back to Westminster, the only Cabinet Minister to survive the storm. Inevitably, therefore, he became deputy-leader and leader when Henderson resigned—owing to Henderson's other commitments he was in practice leader all the time.

It was an inevitable choice—it was also a fortunate one. For in the gloom and heart-searching which followed the crash what the disconsolate few needed to help them to stand up in the face of the hostile phalanxes was exactly Lansbury's staunch, unshakable, and in the last resort irrational optimism. He never believed that all was lost, that it was no use going on; and during the dismal years his Father Christmas face and his loud cheery voice[2] came almost to stand for hope and salvation for the Party; and it is not surprising that when he broke his leg in the winter of 1934 and lay in bed for six months his hospital was thronged as though he had been a

[1] Being adjured by friends to remember not to slap his Sovereign on the back or greet him as "brother."

[2] G. L. never could *whisper*. As he never realised this, his asides were upon occasion disconcertingly audible to those for whom they were not intended.

film star. But events were on the way which were to be too much even for his optimism.

By the beginning of 1935 the Disarmament Conference was staggering to its close, and Henderson obviously near death. The world was beginning patently to rearm, and the Labour movement, which the experience of 1914–18 had imbued to its backbone with a hatred of war and armaments and a belief in international co-operation, had slowly to make up its mind whether, in the face of the new menace of Fascism, those beliefs would have to go by the board. The decision was eventually made before September 1939; but it was a long and painful process, made more painful by the very real doubt whether, if the Baldwin-Chamberlain Government were given powers to make weapons and to conscript workers, the guns would in fact be used against Fascism—or in other directions. Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia and the demand that the League of Nations should apply "sanctions" brought the matter to a head—and Lansbury's own lifelong pacifism set him against the rising tide. At the Party Conference of 1935, after some of the most savage speeches ever heard there, the pacifists lost the day, and Lansbury resigned the leadership. He did not cease to fight for peace, or to believe that it might still be saved by appealing to the better selves of men; as late as 1937 he made a personal journey to see Hitler and to ask him to stop. He was kindly received; but the time for influencing Hitler for good was in his cradle, not when he was master of Germany. Lansbury had to go home and watch the war coming nearer and nearer. He lived to hear it declared; his friends can only be glad that he did not live to see the invasion of Norway or the bombing of his own East London.

People's memories are short, particularly for those who are not writers and whose impress upon their contemporaries is made by the spoken word and the force of their personalities. G. L. left an autobiography of sorts and two or three books of reminiscences; but he was no hand with a pen, and the books are like blurred snapshots—they only serve as reminders to those who knew the original; and the true picture is already growing dim. He was essentially a *big* man, big physically—"I was always able to tuck away enough food for a horse," he says somewhere—big in his affections, and big in his ideals.

He was completely democratic, in the sense that he believed that everyone had an equal claim on his time or his attention, and extremely modest about himself. He was so tolerant of fellow Socialists and Communists who differed from him and of their violent means of expressing those differences that a few sometimes drew the conclusion that he was a gullible goose —and were proportionately indignant when they found he was not. He was no intellectual, but he had a shrewd judgment of practical matters and of the kind of common people whom he knew; and many intellectuals who could make rings round him in argument did well to take notice when he said, "No, my boy, that'll never work," and take back their proposals to think over again. His gift for working with all sorts of "ornery" left-wingers until they became so "ornery" that they could work with nobody at all was unrivalled; it served to keep comradeship alive among many convinced "comrades" who might otherwise have flown miles apart; and he had the largest heart and the strongest simple faith of any Socialist I have ever known.

H. G. WELLS

(1866–1946)

H. G. WELLS died while I was writing this book. No one could have wished his life to be prolonged; he was old and tired and ill, and he had said many times, sometimes in friendly, sometimes in furious, terms all that he had to say. Nevertheless, to judge from the meeting which in October 1946 assembled at the Royal Institution in a chamber hallowed by the memory of his great hero Thomas Henry Huxley, at least three generations from Lord Beveridge downwards shared my first feeling of sharp immediate personal loss. "H. G." in his lifetime inspired countless thousands of the eager self-immolatory young with the faith that freedom-with-democracy-and-Socialism *could* be realised "in our time," as the I.L.P. used to say. Like Cobbett, he would probably rise in fury at being described as a "maker of the Labour movement," which at times he so ardently desired to *un*make; but his ghost must try to lie quiet under the tribute. He was the leaven—the anarchic, human leaven—which prevented, and still prevents, our movement from becoming a soulless organisation; and I am comforted to know that, whatever he said in his angrier moments about the Labour Party, in 1945, when he was already near to dying, he had himself conveyed to the poll to register a cross for it in St. Marylebone.

Eugenists and students of heredity will not be able to make much of Herbert George Wells as a subject. His grandfather, Joseph Wells, was head gardener to Lord de Lisle at Penshurst Place in Kent, and had a fine row of children, among whom another Joseph, H. G.'s father, was the youngest of the sons. The younger Joseph was also a gardener, but an unsuccessful one, who at one time formed an unfulfilled project of emigrating, subsequently bought a small glass and crockery shop

called Atlas House in Bromley High Street, which struggled on for some years before it was finally sold up—and attained distinction in nothing but professional cricket.[1] He married a lady's maid from Up Park in Kent,[2] a respectable young person who understood gentility and coped gallantly but ineffectually with the tasks of a housewife and mother whose breadwinner was incompetent and steadily going down hill. "She was," says her son, "the kind of woman who is an incorrigibly bad cook." Save for an inclination of his father's to read freely and to discuss widely and discursively with his son as he grew up, there is little of H. G. to be traced in either of his parents—or, indeed, in the "podgy little boy" with his flaxen hair "curled along the top of his head in a longitudinal curl which was finally abolished at his own earnest request," who spent his early years clattering and bawling about the uncarpeted stairs of the hideous, inconvenient, badly built house in Bromley. The impression made on little Bertie by the unnecessary ugliness and squalor of his earliest home[3]—it was, *inter alia*, bug-infested—by its subterranean kitchen, its coal cellar right in the middle of the house, its grim "yard," thirty feet by forty, containing the dustbin and the brick closet, which was all the playground the small boy had, can be read in dozens of mordant diatribes against the living conditions which the nineteenth century, to say nothing of the twentieth, thought desirable for all save a favoured very few.

There were two elder brothers, and a sister who possessed all the qualities of precocious intelligence and piety which the Victorians so cherished—and in true Victorian tradition died before Bertie was born, leaving Mrs. Wells with the not-to-be-realised hope that the little son to come would take Fanny's place in the eyes of his mother and of God.[4] All through his childhood, the little shop in Bromley was going down in the world. Bromley, once a country village, was being inexorably

[1] A trade advertisement of his begins CRICKET! CRICKET! CRICKET! advertises bats, etc., and only descends to crockery in its last line.

[2] For Up Park and its life, see the astonishingly vivid description of "Bladesover" in the first chapter of *Tono-Bungay*.

[3] It is fully described in *Experiment in Autobiography*.

[4] He evinced his convictions by squalling, at the moment of baptism, "with a vehemence unprecedented in the history of the family"; and in very early years, as he tells us, while not as yet questioning the existence of God the Father, he came to the conclusion that the All-seeing Eye was the eye of an Old Sneak.

sucked into the suburban sprawl of London, and the delivery vans of "multiples" such as the Army and Navy Stores were continually draining away its best customers. Joseph Wells, the inefficient fatalist, did little to stop the trend—there was, in fact, nothing that he could have done. He drifted away from his wife's complaints to the more congenial atmosphere of cronies and cricketers; in 1880, after a very difficult three years following a fall while trying to prune a grape-vine, which resulted in a compound fracture of his leg, he got into a hopeless tangle. His wife, by an intervention of Providence, returned to Up Park for thirteen years as housekeeper; and he after some years settled down in a cottage near Rogate on an allowance paid by her.

Bertie was fourteen when his mother moved to Up Park; but he had already completed his official education, and was ready to start in the world. His mother had done the best for him under her circumstances. She began his instruction in reading, sent him to a dame school kept by a totally unqualified old lady named Mrs. Knott, at seven years old to a little private school for boys in Bromley High Street—with the rather hampering injunction that he was never to take off his coat, even to play games, because his undergarments were not up to the standard she thought proper to his station—and a year later to Mr. Thomas Morley's Commercial Academy for Boys.

Mr. Morley was a straightforward product of the nineteenth-century capitalist tradition which the mature H. G. abhorred. He existed in order to play on the vicarious acquisitive instincts of parents like Mrs. Joseph Wells, to extract from them hard-earned shillings on the undertaking that their sons would be thereby enabled to "better themselves." He advertised instruction in "Writing in both plain and ornamental style, Arithmetic logically, and History with special reference to Ancient Egypt." His teaching methods were frightful, by all H. G.'s later standards; his highest ambition was to push as many pupils as possible through the very accommodating examinations of the College of Preceptors,[1] and the proclama-

[1] Founded in 1846, mainly in order to enable governesses and pupils of private-venture schools to acquire qualifications of a sort, it examined my own daughter in 1933. In the standardless welter of English nineteenth-century education it performed a service which should not be despised.

tion in 1879 of Bertie Wells as first in all England for book-keeping (!) must have been worth many shillings to him. But it should be recorded, and it is to H. G.'s abiding credit that

H. G. WELLS

from a drawing by Low

he does record it, that Mr. Morley, inadequate as was his instruction by modern standards, class-snobbish as was his outlook, yet did better for his boys than the cheap and nasty sausage-machines called Board Schools which were the

immediate results of Forster's cheap-and-nasty Education Act. Americans, whose primary education was, fortunately for them, a real product of democracy, a system wherein the better townships vied with one another, not in order to keep down the rates, but to put up the standards of education, often fail to realise that the start of "public" education in England had as its purpose, not the stimulation of civic pride, but the national enforcement (through a crude system of financial reward and punishment) of a bare minimum of instruction for the hewers and drawers, resulting in a fearful heritage of manners and squalor for the present generation. Mrs. Joseph Wells, in supporting private enterprise, was undoubtedly doing the best for her boy at the time.

When he was seven years old, H. G. himself broke his leg; and in his enforced convalescence did a great deal of reading which, he believed, had a permanent result in setting his mind towards story-telling. But for a long time this influence had little effect, because he had to earn his living. In 1880 he followed his elder brothers into the retail trade, and was bound apprentice to Messrs. Rodgers and Denyers of Windsor, opposite the Castle. He stayed there for two months only, after which he was dismissed, as "a general sort of little misfit," and thereafter put in a few months as pupil-assistant to an uncle who had somehow managed to become principal of a small National School at Wookey in Somerset. But Uncle Williams was a shocking failure—much of H. G.'s earliest and deepest experiences were of people who were shocking failures; and within a very few months he was living with his mother at Up Park, producing a magazine, *The Uppark Alarmist*, and acquiring much information about "Bladesover." Early in the following year he was fixed up temporarily in a chemist's shop at Midhurst (from which he drew more material for use in *Tono-Bungay*.) His lack of the Latin necessary to cope with prescriptions caused him to be sent for a while to the Midhurst Grammar School, where under a headmaster called Byatt he got his first introduction to science. But "further education" was no part of Mrs. Wells's programme for her boys; a *trade* was what was wanted. In 1881 Bertie was apprenticed once more, to Mr. Edwin Hyde's drapery emporium in King's Road, Southsea. There he stayed for two years, until an offer of an

assistantship to Mr. Byatt induced him to break his indentures, and shortly afterwards he obtained through examination a free studentship at the Normal College of Science, South Kensington, as a "teacher in training." He was to have a guinea a week to keep him, and he was to begin by attending a course in biology given by Professor Huxley. This was in 1884.

Here I have no space to describe his life in the haberdashery; those who have not found it in the adventures of Art Kipps, H. G.'s simplest and most moving hero,[1] must look for it in his own autobiography. Quite simply, he hated it; and his recollections of it are made up of a clamjamfrey of adjurations.

> "Get on with it Wells." "Wells forward." "Has anyone seen Wells?" "Sign!" "You haven't shown the lady the gingham at six-three." "The young man has made a mistake, Moddum; we have exactly what you require." "A parcel like that will fall to pieces, man, before it gets home."

"And at the back of my mind, growing larger and more vivid, until it was like the word of the Lord coming to one of his prophets, was the injunction, 'Get out of this trade before it is too late.' " He got out, not without giving great cause for agitation to his mother, and in his own words,

> "the day when I walked from my lodgings in Westbourne Park across Kensington Gardens to the Normal School of Science, signed on at the entrance to that burly red-brick and terra-cotta building and went up by the lift to the biological laboratory was one of the great days of my life. . . . Here I was under the shadow of Huxley, the acutest observer, the ablest generaliser, the great teacher, the most valiant and lucid of controversialists. I had been assigned to his course in Elementary Biology and afterwards I was to go on with Zoology under him."

Huxley must have been a teacher of outstanding quality; the inspiration he gave to H. G. lasted throughout his life. But South Kensington was not staffed exclusively with

[1] For all that his creator unkindly describes him as a "caricature" (*Experiment in Autobiography*, p. 499).

Huxleys; the professors of Physics and of Geology, who succeeded Huxley in the training of that ardent young mind, failed entirely to come up to its expectations.[1] H. G. became rapidly and completely bored with their limitations and the limitations which they imposed on their subjects; he found himself incapable of attention, and in 1887 he failed his final examination. (He obtained, none the less, a B.Sc. three years later; and his passionate interest in science survived all practical discouragement.) He had, however, to make a living somehow; and though he had not maintained his initial success at South Kensington, he had qualifications enough to get into the Grub Street of the scholastic world. In 1887 he took on a dreary job in a dreary place, the Holt Academy at Wrexham in North Wales—where he enjoyed his first recorded flirtation, with a girl on the staff. A crushed kidney, sustained during a game of football which he played with desperation but without skill, led to a suspicion of consumption[2] and released him from that bondage. After a period of convalescence next-door to the housekeeper's room at Up Park he returned, with five pounds in his pocket, to struggle for a living in London. For a while he narrowly kept wolves from his door by collaborating with an old fellow-student named Jennings in a scratch establishment for coaching in biology; but in 1889 he became a Licentiate of the College of Preceptors (with a number of prizes) and took a post as assistant master in Kilburn, at one of the better private schools, whose head was J. V. Milne, father of the creator of Christopher Robin, and its star pupil Alfred Harmsworth, who afterwards became Lord Northcliffe. One extract must serve to give an idea of the standards of Henley House School and of H. G.'s teaching methods.

He had been given a golden sovereign to purchase whatever apparatus he might require. He examined carefully the vestiges of his predecessor's experiments, which apparently consisted of a large number of shattered Florentine flasks, and "what seemed an attempt to make carbon dioxide out of black-

[1] Throughout his life, H. G. tended to suffer from the assumption that outstanding minds ought to be found much more frequently than in fact they are.

[2] Tuberculosis, being a comparatively "nice" disease, figures so largely in Victorian novels that modern readers tend to forget what a real menace it was to the lives of all below the top income levels.

board chalk—an attempt foredoomed to failure because blackboard chalk is not chalk and contains no carbon dioxide." He approached his headmaster.

"'Mr. Milne,' I said, 'I think experimental demonstrations before a class are a great mistake.' 'They certainly have a very bad effect on discipline,' he remarked. 'I propose,' I said, 'with your permission, to draw all my experiments upon the blackboard—in coloured chalks which I shall buy out of this pound—to explain clearly and fully exactly what happens and to make the class copy out these experiments in a note-book. I have never known an experiment on a blackboard go wrong. On the other hand, these attempts at an excessive realism——'

"'I am quite of your mind,' he said.

"'Later on, however, I may dissect a rabbit....'

"'It will not be—indelicate?'

"'It need not be. I will show them what to see on the blackboard.'

". . . In this way I contrived, without extravagance, to train my classes to draw, write, and understand about a great many things that would have been much more puzzling for them if they had encountered them in all the rich confusion of actuality."[1]

To complete the tale of H. G.'s adventures in teaching proper, one must add that in 1890 he associated himself with one William Briggs in a highly effective crammers' establishment called the University Correspondence College—material there for one of the few novels which he never wrote!—in which capacity he rendered valuable service to many subsequently distinguished persons such as Lord Horder and Edwin Montagu, once Secretary of State for India. While he was associated with Briggs his first published work, a textbook of biology, appeared; and through acquaintances he made then, in particular Walter Low, brother of Sir Sidney Low of the *Dictionary of National Biography* and father of Madame Litvinov, he gravitated by degrees from cramming into journalism, which was to put him on his financial feet in a very short

[1] *Experiment in Autobiography.*

time. (The transition was aided by a serious breakdown from overwork which occurred early in 1893.) It must never be forgotten, however, that H. G. was for three years an enthusiastic and promising student of science[1] and for six years a hard-working full-time teacher. These early practical experiences colour all his later writing.

He was not, however, wholly a student or wholly a teacher; he was also an inquiring and experimental young man. While still a shop assistant he had considered, weighed and rejected the Roman Church; when he came to London he was eagerly absorbing Plato and Henry George together; in London he went to Hammersmith to hear William Morris talk—but was not at all attracted by Golden Dustmen and non-mechanistic Utopias; he discovered the young Fabian Society, and found it, even in those early days, curiously unsatisfying. In his autobiography he tends to "read back" into the Fabian Society of the 'eighties some features which were not then there—such as the Webbs' ménage at Grosvenor Road and their political dinners. What really irritated him was first the assumption of the leading Fabians that they knew better than anyone else, secondly their grinding away at dull work in depressing surroundings among drab people, and the conviction of people like Shaw that anyone who was to be of any use must actually *prefer* such occupations to common human pleasures; and thirdly the airy confidence with which all Socialists (the Fabians, in fact, less than many) denounced existing institutions without having any clear conception of what *authority* they would put in its stead. Often anarchical in his own behaviour, Wells was nothing whatever of an anarchist in his political views; he kept complaining that the Socialists had no plans for what he called the "competent receiver," the firm informed guide who would tidy up society and resolve all the muddles into which the Kippses and Mr. Lewishams of the world could manage to get themselves.

He was not clear of muddles himself. He started life in London, through a mistake of his mother's, in a lodging-house in Westbourne Park which was not very far from being a bawdy-house. From that he was rescued by a cousin, a shop assistant in Derry and Toms, who transferred him to another

[1] See *Love and Mr. Lewisham.*

and much more respectable lodging with an aunt in the Euston Road. There he stayed until he took his Wrexham job, and thither he returned a year or two later, when he was a lonely young man back again in London, to "look up," and to have tea with, his cousin Isabel. In October 1891 he married her—and in January 1894 he ran away to live with a girl student of his, Amy Catherine Robbins, whom his friends knew for thirty years as "Jane Wells."

Wells's first marriage is important only for the first-hand experience it gave him (experience which he used in many novels) of the painfully foolish things which young creatures who lack understanding of the world and of themselves can do without any evil intentions. It is impossible not to be sorry for the nice girl pushed into marriage by an importunate young man driven by an urge to be loved and companioned which took no pains to ascertain whether she was at all likely to be a suitable companion, who tried to settle down so nicely in a nice little house, found that half the time she did not understand what her husband was talking about, and that when she did he appeared to be violently angry about something she did not understand—and then saw him rush off without intelligible explanation to another woman to whom, it seemed, he intended to Talk for the rest of his life; but it is perfectly clear that the ending of the marriage was a very desirable thing and that in his second attempt Wells was extremely fortunate—more so, perhaps, than he had any right to expect. When he went off to live with Amy Catherine Robbins in cheap rooms near the Cobden Statue they were not, it seems, what he would have called passionately in love; they were not even sure if they were ever going to marry, for the health of both was rather precarious and they thought they might well die very young. They were just two loving friends and companions who wanted to live together. But that companionship turned into marriage in 1895, and went on until "Jane's" death in 1927; "Jane" was the mother of his sons, his agent and business manager, the power and the influence which made and kept together the home and the circle-of-living at Woking, at Worcester Park, at Spade House, Sandgate, and finally at Easton Glebe; and through all H. G.'s emotional adventures (which were not inconsiderable) "Jane" continued both to keep un-

impaired her own personality and to give her genius of a husband something no one else could ever give. The debt is acknowledged fully in the Introduction to *The Book of Catherine Wells* and in the *Autobiography*.

By the time he left Isabel H. G. was a professional writer. He had "scribbled" earlier; he had written, while at South Kensington, for the *Science Schools Journal*, and at Wrexham he had produced short stories, of which one or two saw light in print; in 1891 he had had a serious contribution, the "Rediscovery of the Unique," published in Frank Harris's *Fortnightly Review*. In the summer of 1893 he suddenly found out that he could turn out popular journalism for the *Pall Mall Gazette*—"in a couple of months I was earning more than I had ever earned in my class-teaching days." He went on with this, added short stories, and furbished up his earliest scientific romance to appear serially as *The Time Machine*. It came out in 1895, when W. T. Stead was already saying in the *Review of Reviews*, "H. G. Wells is a man of genius." By the end of that year he was in a position to give up regular journalism. The grub had soared out of Grub Street in a rush.

The years between 1895 and 1912, when he settled at Easton Glebe on the Essex estate of Frances Countess of Warwick, Socialist and friend of Edward VII, the scene for so many years of the ball-game in the barn, the charades, the murderous mixed-hockey matches,[1] the games and gatherings and discussions which so many will remember all their lives, are the years of greatest importance for Wells's work. They saw the production of all but a few of the short stories and all the scientific romances. The most famous and enduring of his novels proper—some, like *The Wheels of Chance, Love and Mr. Lewisham* and *Kipps*, coming out cheek by jowl with the fantasies—belong to this period; and the main lines of his thought on social and political subjects were already drawn before he stamped furiously out of the Fabian Society and fired at its leaders, as a parting salvo, the envenomed picture of Mr. and Mrs. Webb as Oscar and Altiora Bailey which gives point to that rather long-winded novel, *The New Machiavelli*. He wrote, of course, much more, both of novels and politico-social tracts, which can still be read with pleasure and profit to-day;

[1] See *Mr. Britling Sees it Through*.

but the only really new ground which he broke after 1912 was the magnificent attempt to provide a corpus of essential knowledge for the human race which began in 1920 with the *Outline of History* (purchased, according to his biographer, by more than a million and a half people in all), and continued with *The Science of Life* (1929, with his biologist son G. P. Wells and Julian Huxley), *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1932), and his many efforts to get someone to found an international library of *all* knowledge. In these books Wells the schoolmaster comes to life again. The *Outline of History* was intended to supersede all history text-books, which it never did; but the vast sales of it and its successors taught both the teachers and the pupils who had failed to get help from them.

H. G.'s social prescriptions and prognostications, which as time went on spilled over more and more from political works into novels, so that in a book like *The World of William Clissold* the reader is often uncertain whether he is reading a story, a tract, or the draft of a text-book on social anthropology,[1] varied in detail from time to time; but the essential lines did not change from those drawn in *Anticipations* (1901) and *A Modern Utopia* (1905), and the imaginative fantasies which so delighted Edwardian youth came to an end with *The War in the Air* (1908), and only made a half-reappearance in the nightmarish (and not very accurate) prophesying of *The Shape of Things to Come*. The Wells to whom people came again and again to be instructed, amused, inspired and exasperated was fully grown by the time the last ink was dry on the calumnious campaign which raged around *Ann Veronica*.

This Wells was something quite unique, both in novel-writing and in social thought, which he always insisted were inseparable. He was emphatically of the opinion that "The Novel" was not an art-form but a container which must contain anything he chose to put into it; and though he had the gift of words and long lived almost next-door to those meticulous painstaking artists Henry James, Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, he never had any patience with the cult of style

[1] As Desmond MacCarthy said in an obituary notice, his mind was like a cart full of miscellaneous produce, whose tailboard he would suddenly drop and overwhelm you with the contents.

for style's sake. In defence, he called himself a journalist to his literary friends. But journalist or whatever he chose to be, he combined inside one skull gifts more various than were to be seen together in any other writer.

He was, in the first place, a superb story-teller—until he forgot or learned to despise the art. The array of short stories, beginning with "The Stolen Bacillus," which fills four or five volumes and ranges from the lovely fooling of "The Man Who Could Work Miracles" and "The Truth About Pyecraft" to the horror of "The Red Room" and "The Case of Mr. Elvesham," are almost without exception competent, original in the sense that no one else could have written them,[1] and exciting. There is hardly one of them which is unreadable to-day. The same is true of the scientific romances and of the early novels; the reader wants to know what happened to the Sleeper when he awoke, to Cavor on the moon, to Mr. Hoopdriver when he fell off his bicycle,[2] and to Ann Veronica. This was H. G.'s first great gift.

His second—also shown particularly in the work of the first half of his life—was his realisation of the fact that *things,* even fantastic Utopian things, happen to *people,* to individuals like your uncle and my regrettably unsatisfactory child. Of all the early novels, scientific and "straight" alike, this is true. The Martians in *The War of the Worlds* do not attack a generalised Briton; their impact falls on a particular curate and a particular rifleman; Cavor, the intellectually innocent inventor who zuzzooed as he walked, and Bedford, his shady collaborator,[3] are as real as the newspaper they took with them in their Cavorite sphere, with its small advertisement that "a lady in distress wishes to dispose of some fish knives and forks at a great sacrifice"; Kipps is already one of the world's possessions.

He had, of course, his limitations. He is always much more successful with the semi-comic characters whom one can metaphorically pat on the back than with the wholly serious ones; the love-making of his superior persons, such as the dreadful woman in *The Research Magnificent* who called her husband "Cheetah!", makes painful reading, whereas Kipps weeping

[1] e.g. the long-short story, called *Miss Winchelsea's Heart,* whose plot might have been taken from Gissing—but which would have read very differently if it had been written by Gissing.

[2] *The Wheels of Chance.*

[3] *The First Men in the Moon.*

to his Ann, "I *been* so mis'bel" goes to everyone's heart at once. Moreover, the range of people and types whom he knew well was limited, like the range of Dickens—limited, curiously, in much the same way. He has never[1] drawn a credible "industrial worker in steady employment," or a credible ordinary business man—though he can manage a crook or an adventurer; his business men such as Clissold are sticks or pegs for argument. He can only do a politician from the outside, and an administrator of power and ability, the type who would have to run the planned state for which he cried out, he cannot do at all. What he did know to perfection was the Little Man, the little man with aspirations and imagination, frustrated in youth as H. G. had been frustrated in youth, and in middle age battered and struggling with circumstances as H. G.'s relations and neighbours had battled and struggled with circumstances—and the Bladesover types which held him down. It is the struggling shopman, the struggling teacher, the struggling student, and the girl fighting the weight of prejudice, who rouse his sympathy and make his world; and it is an important and a sad comment, on the development both of society and of H. G.'s thought, that whereas in the 1900's Kipps and Mr. Polly were both allowed by their creator to have a happy end to their troubles, in the 'twenties another Mr. Polly, hero of *Christina Alberta's Father*,[2] was clapped in an asylum and killed of pneumonia because the world had no place for him. (In the 'thirties he would probably have become a Nazi.)

Thirdly, his scientific training made him the only figure in all English literature who has been able to put science at the service of his imagination and to get a great many of his guesses right. There is a wonderful plausibility even in his wilder dreams, in the horrid story of "The Food of the Gods," for example, with the giant nettles and the giant leeches; in the making of Cavorite, the substance impermeable to gravitation; and in the fourth dimension of *The Time Machine*. But where he prophesied more seriously a vast number of his suggestions have turned to fact—mainly because he did really

[1] "Never" is possibly a rash word to use of an author with so great an output. But I cannot find one that is memorable.

[2] Christina Alberta herself is an Ann Veronica who got away with it easily. For the girls at least the path had become much smoother.

know what the scientists of his day were trying to do, and could see in his imagination what their success might mean. He anticipated tanks, aviation (even, in a little-known story called "Filmer," remote control), the release of atomic energy, air-conditioning, plastics, localised heating—like the bed exhibited in "Britain Can Make It"—and a host of other things. In 1901 (mark the date) he could write about the possibilities of future war:

> "Once the command of the air is obtained by one of the contending armies the war in the air must become a conflict between a seeing host and one that is blind . . . the moral effect of this predominance will be enormous. All over the losing country, not simply at his frontier but everywhere, the victor will soar. Everybody everywhere will be perpetually and continually looking up, with a sense of loss and insecurity, with a vague stress of painful anticipations. By day the victor's aeroplanes will sweep down upon the apparatus of all sorts in the adversary's rear, and will drop explosives and incendiary matter upon them, so that no apparatus or camp or shelter will any longer be safe. At night his high-floating searchlights will go to and fro. . . . And now men on the losing side will thank God for the reprieve of a pitiless wind, for lightning, thunder and rain, for any elemental disorder that will for a moment lift the descending scale"[1]

—a passage which describes, not the war which was coming soon, but the war which came in 1940. This gift made him the novelist of all the young, of every boy to whom Harmsworth, Arthur Mee and other purveyors were expounding the Wonders of Science; and his Utopianism bound the best of them to him with a double bond.

Almost as soon as he started to write seriously he started also to demand the rebuilding of the world, the refashioning of its out-of-date social and political machinery so as to fit the modern "powers of production" which he saw growing. This is part of the underlying structure of Marxism, though H. G.

[1] *Anticipations*. The only modern invention which curiously failed to stimulate his imagination was radio. The babble machines of *The Sleeper Awakes* are not radios, but huge gramophones centrally operated; and even after the establishment of the B.B.C. the most he could find to say about it was that it ought to supersede inefficient schoolmasters.

was no Marxist and indeed had a violent personal dislike of Marx and his beard, and thought the Marxists of his early days silly impatient revolutionaries, who wanted to pull down everything without any idea what they would put in its place. He himself wanted, in fact, to pull down a great deal more than they did—not merely kings[1] and existing political governments—including parliaments—but local governments also, of the kind which got in his way when he was building a house at Sandgate, narrow-gauge railways, the education system, the Catholic Church, the marriage laws, most present-day buildings, horse-drawn traffic, pet animals, individual cooking and feeding, playing-cards, patent medicines, competitive industry—and of course poverty. (Like almost all his contemporaries, his Utopian imaginings did not effectively extend beyond the Western world; the casual phrase in *A Modern Utopia*, "deaths outright from exposure and starvation are now perhaps uncommon," is revealing in its limitation.) And in its place he knew just what he wanted to put—a planned Socialistic society working on scientific and harmonious lines, guided by leaders who knew what needed to be done—and also knew that no society could be static but must be always growing and changing if it were not to die—and worked by happy citizens who under the plans of the rulers and themselves had as much self-government—or co-operation in planning—as each of them wanted or was fit for. The only thing to be settled was how to get the rulers and how to make the change.

On these two rather vital points, Wells's opinions changed from time to time, as the world and his view of his fellow-creatures changed—but not fundamentally. At heart, he was always a disciple of Plato and student of the *Republic*; he desired a society wherein the kings should be philosophers and the philosophers kings, and as the kings of his own day were so patently not philosophers, he had to find the philosophers and make them kings. The Samurai of *A Modern Utopia* are the clearest description of the sort of philosophers he envisages, but they are foreshadowed in *Anticipations* and turn up again in *The World Set Free, The Shape of Things to Come* and

[1] He said of monarchs, "So long as you suffer any man to call himself your shepherd sooner or later you will find a crook around your ankle."

elsewhere. The real difficulty was to find them in this world. When H. G. met existing social philosophers in a group, he did not like them at all; he resigned indignantly from the Fabian Society; and when he saw the rulers of Soviet Russia, who might not inaccurately be described as philosophers become kings, he denounced them as illiberal obscurantists. At times he thought the saviours of the world might be scientists or even (therein agreeing with Rudyard Kipling!) aviators—his young enthusiasm for Huxley seems to have long blinded him to the illiberalism of many scientists; occasionally he seems to have believed in the possibilities of enterprising and enlightened business men,[1] and it was unfortunate that one of those of whom he thought most highly was the swindling Swedish match king, Ivar Kreuger. In the later years of his life he gave up relying on any particular group and in books like *The Open Conspiracy* pinned his hopes to the belief that the kingdom of Utopia would be built by a great number of persons, many at present unknown to one another, who were all working to the same end. On the question of the mode of transition, he was uncertain also. Once or twice he seemed to foreshadow violent revolution; but on the whole he believed violence to be extremely uncomfortable and destructive both of material and of morals—in which he was probably more correct than Morris—and less likely to end in a free society than in a new form of enslavement;[2] but as he put little faith in parliamentary processes, he saw no other obvious means save in the gradual spontaneous conversion of many minds, the kingdom of Utopia coming like a thief in the night. In one book, the beautiful fairy story called *In the Days of the Comet*, it does happen so: the Great Star touches the earth with its breath, and everyone falls into a trance and wakes up free from evil thoughts and ready to organise the world for good—"it was so simple," says one of the characters. This is more Utopian even than Utopia; but Wells never left off working towards it. He saw himself as a teacher for the world of Kippses and Pollys and Ponderevos and Clissolds, telling them in and out of season that they could have a different world, a world of peace and comfort and plenty and liberty if only they wanted it enough; and almost to the very last he

[1] As in *The World of William Clissold.* [2] See *The Sleeper Awakes.*

never gave up hope that that idiot *Homo sapiens* would somehow find his way out in time from the muddles he had created.

From the time when he became a successful writer, Wells's non-literary life, energetic though it was, is of comparatively small importance. Temperamentally, he was an inspiration, a critic, and a social irritant rather than a collaborator, and he could never remain integrated with any group of his fellow creatures (particularly if they were really engaged in planning!) for any length of time. Nevertheless, his vitality was so great that no group but felt the strong wind of his passing. For some years after his marriage he did little but write, and get himself finally recovered from the ailments of his earlier years; but in 1901 he published *Anticipations*—"new as a new-laid egg," he says "and sold as well as a novel"—and shortly afterwards appeared before his house-door two figures, "Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb riding very rapidly upon bicycles, from the direction of London, offering certain criticisms of my general forecast and urging me to join and stimulate the Fabians." He did so; and wrote for the Fabian Society some suggestions for the regionalisation of local government[1] which still have point to-day and a brilliant Socialist tract entitled *This Misery of Boots*. Very soon, however, he discovered that the little Fabian Society (little even after the influx of membership which followed the 1906 election) with its group of expert and decided leaders, its gas-and-water aims, its rigid economy in expenditure and its refusal to take on the whole world as its province, was no real place for him. He read to it in 1906 a fierce paper called "The Faults of the Fabian," in which he indicted the Society as a scrubby collection of scrubby-minded people who could not realise that if they intended to put over Socialism on English society they must set out to be very much more impressive and to make much more of a splash in the world than they had done hitherto. Because of his reputation among the eager recruits of 1906–7 his campaign succeeded up to a point; a special committee (whose members he unwisely insisted on nominating himself) was set up to consider his proposals; but when the battle with the Fabian Executive was finally joined he lost to the superior debating strength of Shaw and Webb.

[1] Leading to the "New Heptarchy" series of Fabian pamphlets.

Even so, the members of the Society elected him to its Committee; but after trouble about a by-election in Burnley, where he rushed to support the Liberal candidate, whose name was Winston Churchill,[1] against Dan Irving the Socialist, and a further dispute about Fabian views on women and the family, he resigned, saying that "I think the opportunity for propaganda to the British middle classes on Fabian lines is at an end."

His incursion, however, was not without effect. It gave a strong fillip to the women's movement within the Fabian Society, which in contrast to the I.L.P. had hitherto given little attention to its women members—possibly because its most brilliant woman, Beatrice Webb, had been an anti-suffragist in her youth and publicly recanted only in the middle of the Wells affair; it probably also influenced veterans such as Shaw to retire from active control in the following years so as to make room for younger members; it undoubtedly heartened many others who disliked and distrusted the Collectivism of Shaw and the Webbs to lead further revolts. H. G. himself was very resentful, partly at being steam-rollered by superior forces and partly at Mrs. Webb's open disapproval of his views on sex, marriage and life in general. After the rude reception of *Ann Veronica* (1909)—the only book of his to receive really scurrilous reviews—he hit back at the Webb *entourage* in the bitterest of all his books, *The New Machiavelli*:

> "With all this administrative fizzle, this pseudo-scientific administrative chatter, dying away in your head, out you went into the limitless grimy chaos of London streets and squares, roads and avenues lined with teeming houses, each larger than the Chambers Street house [i.e. 41 Grosvenor Road] and at least equally alive, you saw the chaotic clamour of hoardings, the jumble of traffic, the coming and going of mysterious myriads, you heard the rumble of traffic like the noise of a torrent; a vague incessant murmur of cries and voices, wanton crimes and accidents, bawled at you from the placards; imperative unaccountable fashions swaggered

[1] Churchill did not get in; the successful candidate was Joynson-Hicks, long amous as an inveterate enemy of the "Reds."

triumphantly in the dazzling windows of the shops; and you found yourself swaying back to the opposite conviction that the huge formless spirit of the world it was that held the strings and danced the puppets on the Bailey [Webb] stage."[1]

When the war came Wells swung with the tide, both to and fro. He was inflamed by the German violation of Belgium, and yearned to establish a kind of Home Guard in Essex. His reactions to the war as it went on can be best studied in *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* and *Joan and Peter*—which latter contains in addition a slab of propaganda about education. He was at first deeply impressed with President Wilson and the proposals for a League of Nations; early in 1918 he joined Northcliffe's propaganda bureau at Crewe House, but resigned in July of that year because to his honour he could not reconcile the statement of war aims which he was concerned to communicate to the United States with the violent hate-propaganda of Northcliffe's own papers. He was a member of the original committee of the League of Nations Union, but walked out (slamming the door) at the beginning of 1919; and before the League was fairly in being he had already cast his personal vote against it as being merely another collection of time-serving, ignorant, wall-eyed politicians; his prejudice against it went so far that when in 1921 he was employed as special correspondent in Washington to the *New York World* the only politician he found to praise was that dreadful he-man apostle of normalcy and isolationism, Warren Gamaliel Harding. For a while he was an active member of the Labour Party, and in 1922 and 1923 stood unsuccessfully as Labour candidate for the University of London; but shortly afterwards he quarrelled with the Party because of its refusal (owing largely to apprehensions about its Catholic members and the Catholic vote) to give wholehearted support to birth-control. He exchanged some cross letters with Henderson on this subject and upon education, and finally resigned. Thereafter he was not committed to any organisation—even to the Samurai and/or Wells Societies which had been cropping up

[1] *The New Machiavelli.* A fair criticism of what the Fabian view of life tended to leave out.

at intervals from 1907 onwards; but he was immensely interested in any new ideas on social or political questions which seemed to him to have value, in Dunne's *Experiment with Time*, Ogden's Basic English, Douglas's Social Credit, and Hogben's social biology, for example. After Jane's death in 1927, Easton Glebe was sold. H. G. continued for some years to keep up a house in the south of France as well as a flat in London; but eventually gave it up. He wrote novels, film-scripts, tracts, articles and exhortations, almost to the day of his death.

Herbert George Wells was an impossibilist all his life, an anarchical creature who cried aloud for a Plan and visited with vituperation any group of persons who in his lifetime co-operated to make any plan at all. But this is no condemnation of him; for his anarchism was at bottom no more than perfectionism. He wanted a World Set Free, and he knew that nothing save a real passion for liberty could in the long run set the world free. He looked for short cuts where there were no short cuts, and he over-estimated, maybe, the dispassionate human endeavour of scientists and business men. But he knew to whom, at long last, appeals for generous effort must be addressed. Forty-four years ago he wrote, in *Mankind in the Making*,

> "Without the high resolve of youth, without the constant accession of youth, no sustained movement is possible in this world. It is to youth, therefore, that this book is finally addressed, to the adolescents, to the students, to those who are yet in the schools and who will presently come to read it, to those who, being still plastic, can understand the infinite plasticity of the world. It is those who are yet unmade who must become the makers."

As he got older he, like Bernard Shaw, came to believe that men's minds ought to remain plastic beyond their physical youth, as his own had done. But essentially this passage is as true to-day as when it was written; and as one who in youth was converted to Socialism by H. G. Wells, upon that note I close this book.

NOTE ON BOOKS

THIS is not a bibliography, but a list of suggestions for readers of this book who may want to know more about its subjects and the conditions under which they lived. In addition to the books listed, and others mentioned in the text, much collateral information can be got from autobiographies of contemporaries such as Hyndman (*Record of an Adventurous Life*), Snowden (*Autobiography*), and others far too numerous to catalogue.

General Historical Background

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Halévy, E., *History of the English People.*

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Clayton, J., *Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain.*

Hammond, J. L. and B., *The Town Labourer; The Village Labourer; Rise of Modern Industry*, etc.

Paine

Conway, Moncure D., *Life of Thomas Paine* (full, but very clumsily put together).

Best, M. A., *Thomas Paine.*

Paine, Thomas, *Common Sense, Select Political Writings of Thomas Paine* (Watts and Co.).

Paine, Thomas, *Rights of Man, The Age of Reason* (Rationalist Press editions).

Cobbett

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Also
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Owen

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Cole, G. D. H., *Life of Robert Owen.*
Podmore, Frank, *Robert Owen* (longer than the foregoing, with full accounts of Owen's later religious phases).
Owen, Robert, *New View of Society,* etc. (Everyman's Library); includes most of Owen's other important writings.

Place

Wallas, Graham, *Life of Francis Place* (No reprints of Place's own writing).

O'Connor

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Also
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Mill

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Mitchell

Redfern, Percy, *John Mitchell; History of the C.W.S.*
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Cole, G. D. H., *A Century of Co-operation*
and references to Mitchell in
Webb, B., *My Apprenticeship.*

Applegarth

Humphrey, A. W., *Robert Applegarth.*

Postgate, R. W., *The Builders' History.*
Howell, G., *Labour Legislation, Labour Movements, Labour Leaders.*

Morris

Mackail, J. W., *Life of William Morris.*
Glasier, J. Bruce, *William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement.*
The Nonesuch edition of Morris's writings, (ed. Cole), is a comprehensive collection of Morris's shorter prose, including *News from Nowhere.*

Blatchford

(No good life of Blatchford.)
Blatchford, R., *My Eighty Years* (very sketchy autobiography); *Merrie England; Britain for the British; Tales for the Marines*; etc.

Hardie

Stewart, W., *J. Keir Hardie.*
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