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THE CHRISTIAN ORIGINS
OF SOCIAL REVOLT

THE CHRISTIAN ORIGINS OF SOCIAL REVOLT

by

WILLIAM DALE MORRIS

Fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship
is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellow-
ship is death: and the deeds that ye do upon
the earth, it is for fellowship's sake that ye
do them, and the life that is in it, that shall
live on and on for ever, and each one of you
part of it, while many a man's life upon
the earth from the earth shall wane.
A Dream of John Ball WILLIAM MORRIS

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WILLIAM DALE MORRIS

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL HERESIES OF THE MIDDLE AGES

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

LUKE, I, 52 and 53.

THE GENOBITES

Like all mass movements Christianity had many sources, and many currents flowed to make it a social force. In the first century large numbers of slaves and poor handworkers became converts to the new faith because it satisfied their thirst for social justice and freedom from oppression. Others were attracted to Christianity because it served their spiritual needs. The old religions and philosophies had largely lost their meaning, and educated Hellenes, Romans and Jews were seeking some new belief. Because of their education and superior social status these converts tended to become the teachers and leaders of the movement, just as middle-class intellectuals such as Marx and Lenin have been the main architects of Socialist theory.*

Until the middle of the second century the constitution of the Christian communities was democratic and equalitarian. The whole of the members, in so far as they possessed the necessary qualifications, were eligible for the priestly office. They were called Elders (*Presbyteroi*, whence priests), and the most prominent members of the Elders were called Overseers (*Episkopoi*, whence bishop). Moreover, no distinction was made between clergy and laity; and it was only with the numerical growth of the Church, and the elaboration of the simple Christian teachings into a theological system that the clergy became a special class invested with ever greater powers as the Church won a position of importance and influence in the state. Then

the primitive Christian presbyters transformed themselves into a sacred oligarchy with privileges and special attributes: the small and persecuted community of poor fishermen and handworkers,

* "The theory of Socialism . . . grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. The founders of modern scientific Socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia".

What is to be Done, Lenin.

practising piety and renunciation, became a powerful and affluent State Church. (*Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*, M. Beer, pp. 70-71.)

Christianity (like modern Socialism) became more and more popular and respectable, and by the third century Christians were to be found in every walk of life—in the army and in government positions, at court, and among scholars, students and business men. For a time intermittent persecutions tended to purge the Church of insincere elements,

but the storms soon passed, and the secularization of Christianity went ahead to the great grief of the old comrades and the pious ones who lived in the traditions of primitive Christianity. (*Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*, M. Beer, p. 74.)

Even in the latter half of the third century, before the Church made its alliance with the Emperor Constantine, there were many Christians who became dissatisfied with the worldliness of the Church, and who withdrew from the world, renouncing all earthly goods in order to pass their lives in solitude and contemplation. Prominent among these anchorites was Saint Anthony, who, about the year 276, gave away his possessions and went to live in the Egyptian desert. Some years later, probably in 320, his disciple, Pachomius, united the anchorites, and founded the first cloistral-communistic colony, or cenoby,* on the Nile island of Tabenna, laying down strict rules for its regulation. These rules included the renunciation of private property.

After Christianity made its peace with the Roman Empire (in the first quarter of the fourth century) it assumed to an ever increasing degree, the character of an organized state religion, and more and more Christians who were disturbed by this development, sought escape in monasticism. Others embraced various heresies.

In some ways these early monastic communities resembled the communist colonies of modern times, for in both cases the members cut themselves off from the rest of society, and tried to create self-contained communities where they would be free to put their social and ethical ideas into practice.

During the first centuries of monastic history, monks and nuns were not counted among the clergy but belonged to the laity. They were at liberty to return to the world, and many of them lived in the married state.

*Cenoby from the Greek *Koinobion* (literally "place where people live in common"), from *koinos*—"shared in common," and *bios*—life.

The cloisters were then merely pious, communistic settlements Even in the sixth century, married life was not a rare phenomenon among the cenobites. It was not until later that celibacy became an absolute rule of monasticism. The high value which was placed on asceticism, as well as the danger of cleavage to which communistic institutions would be exposed by increases in families, eventually led to celibacy being imposed as a rule. (*Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*, M. Beer, p. 77.)

The cenobite system, or the establishment of cloister-communistic settlements flourished most rapidly in North Africa: thence it spread to Palestine, Syria, Armenia, Cappadocia, and throughout the Eastern Empire, and people thronged to the cloisters in such numbers that the Emperor Valens (375-378) tried to check the movement, but without success.

Christians of all classes joined the cenobite settlements, but at the time of Saint Augustine (354-430) it was the working class, the unfree and manumitted peasants, handworkers and the like, who furnished the greatest number of recruits.

Later, the monastic system spread to the West, where Benedict of Nursia (480-543), founded the Benedictine Order. He established a monastery on Mount Cassino, in the Italian Campania, and in the year 529 furnished it with a set of rules. These not only laid it down that the cenoby should endeavour to provide all the means of life by its own common labour: they also insisted upon chastity, and prohibited members from leaving the monastery once they had definitely embraced the monastic life.

The discipline and common labour of the monks proved superior both to the slave economy of the Roman Empire and to the feudal economy which took its place. The monastic orders spread rapidly throughout Christendom, and grew wealthy and powerful. As they did so

Worldliness penetrated into the cloister. . . . The ascetic features of early monasticism became rarer. . . . The cloisters were no longer filled with persons from the labouring and oppressed classes, but filled with scions of the nobility and the higher classes generally. (*Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*, p. 83.)

Attempts at reform were made, but how far short of success these fell is evidenced by the ordinances of the Paris Synod of the year 1212, which were directed to the moral improvement of the cloisters. Among these ordinances we find the declaration that no monk may have property; the bishops must brick up all suspicious doors and rooms in the cloisters; no monk may have his bedroom situated outside the general dormitory; all visits of female persons are forbidden, as are games, hawking, hunting,

etc.; and no two monks may sleep in one bed, but each in his own bed, and in the prescribed clothing.

HERETICAL-SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Long before Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517 there had been heretical movements which frequently combined the teaching and practice of communistic ideas with a denunciation of the Church for its laxity of morals and its love of wealth and temporal power. During the Middle Ages these heretical-social movements appeared at one time or another throughout Western and Central Europe. In the main they arose in the towns among poor handworkers—weavers, carpenters, cobblers, masons, and the like—who found themselves oppressed by the rising bourgeoisie, and turned to the traditions of primitive Christianity in their longing for a more just social order. “At the turn of the 12th century”, says Max Beer (*Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*, p. 124),

the towns of Western and Central Europe were honeycombed by heretical sects. The Balkan Peninsula, North and Central Italy, France, Spain, the whole Rhine Valley from Alsace to the Netherlands, a wide tract of Central Germany from Cologne to Goslar, were agitated by sectarian movements, which adopted an antagonistic attitude towards the Church. . . . The sects were known by the general name of Cathari (from the Greek *katharoi*—pure). From the beginning of the 11th century we read of decisions of various ecclesiastical synods and sentences of condemnation against the Cathari, who were then known by numerous other appellations, such as Piphilians, textores (weavers), Paterenians, the Poor of Lombardy, Paulicians, the Poor of Lyons, Leonists, Waldensians, Albigensians, Bogumilians, Bulgarians, Arnoldists, Passengers, the Humble, Communiati. . . . Later their numbers were swelled by the Beguines and the Beghards, who were not heretics originally. These appellations are partly of local, partly of personal origin. The individual heretical movements or organisations were named after the locality where they had their headquarters, or after their most prominent leader, or after their character.

From the time of the episcopal synod of Orleans, in 1022, (where thirteen heretics were accused of “free love”, and eleven were condemned to be burned) prosecutions are continuous until at the end of the Middle Ages. In 1025 heretics were summoned before the Synod of Arras because they had asserted that the essence of religion is the performance of good works, and that life should be supported by manual labour, and that whoever

puts these principles into practice needs neither church nor sacrament. Again, in 1030, heretics were charged at Montforte, in Turin, with having rejected the ecclesiastical mode of life, and having advocated celibacy, community of earthly possessions, and the prohibition of animal slaughter; and in 1052 heretics were burnt at Goslar because they were opposed to war and the killing of living creatures, including the slaughter of animals.

The Catharian movement was split into sects which were as numerous and as sharply divided as the parties and groups and factions which make up the modern Socialist movement. But two main philosophic tendencies manifested themselves, that of Gnostic-Manichean dualism, and that of Amalrician pantheism. The former was inclined to asceticism and the subjugation of the flesh; the latter went to the other extreme, and those who embraced these tenets claimed to live as supermen, beyond good and evil. In the mass, however, the Catharian sectaries lived austere lives.

But whatever doctrinal differences might separate the various Catharian sects, they had certain basic ideas in common. All were opposed to the worldliness of the Church and the monastic orders, and all of them rejected most of the sacraments, dogmas and authorities of official Christianity. Most of them also advocated evangelical poverty and a communal life.

Many of the sects were divided into two classes, the "Perfect" and the "Faithful". While the former strictly observed the tenets of their faith, and lived ascetic lives in poverty or in communism, the latter were content to separate themselves from the official Church, but otherwise lived normal lives, waiting and hoping for the day when all men would accept and practise their social ethics. In general all the Catharian sectaries were opposed to the use of force, and they even opposed the Crusades for this reason. Only in the last extremity when threatened by literal destruction, would they resort to arms.

Bernard Gui, an experienced inquisitor of the early 14th century, says of the Albigenses (in the *Inquisitor's Guide*), that

they usually say of themselves that they are good Christians, who do not swear, or lie, or speak evil of others; that they do not kill any man or animal, or anything having the breath of life, and that they hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel as Christ and his apostles taught. . . . Of baptism, they assert that water is material and corruptible, and is therefore the creation of the evil power and cannot sanctify the soul, but that the churchmen sell this water out of avarice, just as they sell earth for the

burial of the dead, and oil to the sick when they anoint them, and as they sell the confession of sins as made to the priests.

Hence they claim that confession made to the priests of the Roman Church is useless, and that, since the priests may be sinners, they cannot loose nor bind, and, being unclean themselves, they cannot make others clean. They assert, moreover, that the cross of Christ should not be adored or venerated, because, as they urge, no man would venerate or adore the gallows upon which a father, relative, or friend had been hung. . . . Moreover they read from the Gospels and the Epistles in the vulgar tongue, applying and expounding them in their favour and against the condition of the Roman Church.

For our knowledge of the Cathari we have to rely largely upon accounts such as these made by those who opposed and persecuted them. The inquisitors were chiefly concerned with the theological ideas of the heretics, and largely indifferent to their views on economics and their social aspirations. Thus, though the anti-Catharian writings contain detailed information concerning the religious heresies of the Cathari, they provide scanty information about their social-economic theories. Nevertheless, it is clear from a study of this anti-Catharian literature that the Cathari looked on private property as an evil and advocated communal property or evangelical poverty. Thus, the 12th century theologian, Alanus, who wrote a polemic against the Cathari, charged them with saying that the marriage tie is against the laws of nature which ordain that all things be in common: and the same accusation is contained in an indictment drawn up in Strassburg in the years 1210-1213 against about eighty Waldensians. Article 15 of this indictment reads: "So that their heresy might gain wider support, they have put all their goods into a common store"; and Article 16 accused them of "free love". The leader of the accused, Johannes, repudiated the charge of unchastity, and said that the money they collected was for the support of the poor, who were very numerous among them. The Dominican, Stephan of Bourbon (d.1261) declared that the Waldensians condemned all possessors of earthly goods, and said all things should be in common; and the same charge is made by the English prelate, Walter Map, who officiated as examiner and reporter at the third Lateran Council, held in Rome, in 1179. A deputation of Waldensians appeared before this congress, and were questioned about their teachings. According to Walter Map it was their habit to go barefoot and to clothe themselves in the woollen garments of repentance, and they had no personal property but held all things in common.

Wherever these movements assumed dangerous dimensions they were ruthlessly persecuted by Church and State, for their teachings threatened not merely the authority of the Church but the whole social structure of their day. The Church historian Dollinger says of them:

Every heretical doctrine which arose in the Middle Ages had explicitly or implicitly a revolutionary character. . . . Those Gnostic sects, the Cathari and the Albigenses, which specially provoked the harsh and ruthless legislation of the Middle Ages, and had to be put down in a series of bloody struggles, were the Socialists and Communists of that time. They attacked marriage, the family, and property.

Partly because of its vast wealth the Church was the main bulwark of the feudal order of society, and as the forces of social change stirred in Europe they came more and more into conflict with it. Temporal rulers were commanded by the Popes to exterminate the Cathari with fire and sword; and in the 13th century the Spiritual Inquisition undertook the systematic extermination of heretics, whom it excommunicated, and delivered over to the secular arm—for theoretically no priest might shed blood.

The Inquisition assumed its most cruel and effective form in France and Spain. In Germany its activities were only sporadic: in England and Bohemia it could obtain no foothold.

But the number of persons who were burned at the stake for heretical opinions was small compared with the multitude who perished in the crusades which the Church launched against whole districts. Thousands of heretics were slaughtered in these religious wars, and thousands more endured torture or lifelong imprisonment. Even death did not save the heretics from the wrath of the Church: in many cases their bones were dug up and burnt, and their property was sequestrated.

By means of such bloody violence the Medieval Church stamped out, time and time again, heresies which threatened its privileged position in society, and, indeed, the very foundations of that society.

THE BOGOMILI

One of the earliest Catharian heresies appeared in Bulgaria, where it took its name from a priest, Bogomil (Beloved of God). The movement spread to Serbia, where it found many ardent supporters, particularly in Bosnia; and by the close of the 10th century the orthodox priests were complaining that the Bogomili

preached disobedience to the authorities, denounced the feudal lords and the wealthy, and "stirred up discontent among slaves and prevented them from serving their masters".

The Bogomoli had the usual two orders of the Catharian sects. There were the Perfect, who lived in communal settlements, and the Faithful who gave general support to their doctrines without attempting to practise them fully.

The persecution of the Bogomili began at the end of the 11th century by the orders of the Popes Innocent III and Honorius III, and was continued by means of bloody crusades from Hungary. In 1234 Bosnia was laid waste by these Hungarian crusaders; but the heretics defended themselves with vigour, and survived many defeats. Indeed, about the year 1400 Catharism was proclaimed the State religion in Bosnia, and it required a Hungarian-Polish crusade, in which some 60,000 combatants took part, to break the power of the Bosnian Cathari. When the Turks invaded Bosnia in 1463 the bitterness which the Bogomili felt against official Christendom induced many of them to become Mohammedans.

THE FRANCISCANS AND THE "ZEALOTS"

When St. Francis of Assisi founded his Franciscan Order it was his hope to create a body of missionaries who would reform the world by their zeal and example. He did not demand excessive asceticism from his followers, although they were to live in evangelical poverty, and to earn their living by manual labour, or, when that was impossible, by mendicancy.

The number of his followers grew rapidly, and in the year 1221 the Tertiaries, an accessory order consisting of laymen, was formed. The Tertiaries were mostly workers who lived outside the cloister and devoted themselves to the social work of the Order, and they became a connecting link between the Franciscans and the wider heretical social reform movement.

After the death of St. Francis, in 1226, dissensions arose among his followers, and (to use the modern jargon) a left and a right wing developed. The former were known as the "Zealots" and they desired a strict maintenance of evangelical poverty, manual labour, and mendicancy. The right wing, on the other hand, sought to make the Franciscans an ordinary monastic order. Between these two extremes there was a centre party (the majority, at first) who advocated a monastic order possessing common property, and devoted to the cultivation of theology

In the year 1247 the Zcalots ousted the centre party from control, and their leader, John of Parma, was elected General of the Franciscans. John of Parma supported the "Eternal Gospel" of Joachim of Floris,* and his most intimate supporter was Gerard of San Donnino, author of an Introduction (*Introductorius*) to the doctrines of Joachim.

In 1254 the *Introductorius*, which was critical of the Papacy, was declared heretical, and Gerard of San Donnino was imprisoned. John of Parma was deposed; but the Franciscan "left" continued to hold to the "Eternal Gospel", and to condemn the Church and the Papacy for their love of worldly possessions.

At a later date the struggle against the Papacy was carried on by the "Spirituals"; and in the 14th century over a hundred of them died at the stake for advocating evangelical poverty and for denouncing the rapacity of the Church in defiance of the Bull of Pope John XXII. Another offshoot of the Franciscan "left" was the Apostolic Brethren, who supported the heretical-communist movements in Lombardy and southern France.

THE ARNOLDISTS

In the Middle Ages the towns of northern Italy were the clearing-houses for European trade with the East, and capitalist methods of production developed there, with factories and a proletariat or wage-earning class. This was true of the manufacture of wool as early as the 13th century.

The manufacture of cloth . . . was the most advanced and the most active industry of the Middle Ages, with its appliances already half mechanical, supplying distant customers scattered all over the world. . . . The wholesale cloth merchants no longer worked with their own hands; they confined themselves to giving orders and superintending everything . . . they often provided the appliances for work; they undertook the sale and distribution of goods. . . . Already they were capitalists, fulfilling all the functions of captains of industry. . . . The washers, beaters and carders of wool, the fullers and the soapboilers, who formed the

*Joachim of Floris was born in Southern Italy about the year 1130 (some accounts say 1145), and he died about 1202. He made a pilgrimage to Palestine, and later became an abbot and devoted himself to the study of the Scriptures. At Floris in Calabria, he founded an Order vowed to a life of strict asceticism, which devoted much time to manual labour, and laid great stress on purity. His chief writings were the *Concordia* (a Concordance of the Old and New Testaments), a commentary upon the Revelation of St. John, and a psalter which treated of the Trinity. His guiding idea was that God has divided the world period into three ages, of which the Third Age will be a state of freedom, peace and communism, without classes or social distinctions. The writings of Joachim, or extracts from them, were known as the "Eternal Gospel," and were condemned as heretical. His doctrine of the Third Age was in line with the millennial ideas of primitive Christianity.

lowest grade of the labouring classes (were) a true industrial proletariat—wage-earners already living under the regime of modern manufacture. They were crowded together in large workshops, subjected to rigorous discipline, compelled to come and go at the sound of a bell, paid at the will of the masters—and always in silver or copper, or in small coin which was often debased—supervised by foremen, and placed under the authority of an external official who was a sort of industrial magistrate or policeman . . . empowered to inflict fines, discharges, and punishments, and even imprisonment and torture. In addition, these tools or subjects of the guilds were absolutely forbidden to combine, to act in concert, to assemble together, or even to emigrate. They were the victims of an almost perfect system of slavery. (*Guilds in the Middle Ages*, Georges Renard, pp. 23-26.)

These conditions bred a dangerous discontent, a class struggle which split society into rich and poor, "fat and lean, good and bad", as the chroniclers (who usually belonged to the leisured class) described them; and the latter half of the 14th century in particular witnessed a series of uprisings, notably among the textile workers.

But long before then the misery of these wretched wage-slaves (who were denied all civil rights, and had no hope of worldly improvement) was fertile ground for the breeding of social-heretical movements, critical alike of the social order and the corrupt and wealthy Church which supported it with all the terrors of religion.

The towns and villages of Lombardy became the centres of propagation and the asylums of the Cathari. As early as the year 1130 we hear of episcopal courts to put down heretics, who were also known by the name of Patereni—apparently after the poor quarter of Milan. (*Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*, M. Beer, p. 158.)

Faced by this common danger, the Pope and Emperor patched up their long-standing quarrel, and made common cause against the heretics. A Council was summoned at Verona in 1184, where Pope Lucius III and Frederick I, Barbarossa, promulgated a severe edict against heresy, established the episcopal inquisition, and imposed upon the secular authorities the duty of executing the inquisitorial sentences against heretics.

But Catharism survived this persecution: as it was suppressed in one town, it appeared in another, and at the beginning of the 13th century there appear to have been Paterenian organisations in Florence, Milan, Verona, Prato, Ferrara, Rimini, Piacenza, Viterbo and Treviso.

In 1207 a Papal Bull commanded all believers to institute the death penalty for heresy; but though similar Bulls were issued from time to time they met with little success. Lombardy, and especially Milan, became the centre of Catharism in Europe, and when the Albigenses were persecuted in France many of them found refuge in Lombardy. Something like an international organisation may have existed, for when eighty Waldensian heretics were tried in Strassburg one of the indictments against them was that they had sent money to Pickard, the heretic leader of Milan.

One of these Lombardian sects was the Arnoldists, founded by the priest Arnold of Brescia. He taught that all ownership of goods by the Church was wrong, and his sermons were immensely popular with the people. His teachings were considered by the Lateran Council in 1139, and Arnold was removed from his office, and expelled from Italy. He sought the help of Abelard in Paris; but when the Pope issued orders for their books to be burnt Abelard submitted to the papal discipline. Arnold was made of tougher stuff: he pursued his campaign so vigorously, and won such a following in France that none of the French bishops dared move against him. Eventually the King of France was persuaded to take measures against him; whereupon Arnold left for Germany, and later made his way to Switzerland. Finally he returned to Italy, and attacked the Cardinals, whom he denounced as Scribes and Pharisees, whilst he likened their College to a house of business or a den of thieves. As for the Pope, he "was not an apostolic shepherd of souls but a bloodhound who maintained his rule by murder and fire, coerced the Church, oppressed the innocent, filled his coffers and emptied those of others". •

The Pope was helpless, and it was finally Frederick I, Barbarossa, who, coming to Italy in 1155 for his coronation, seized and hanged Arnold. His bones were burnt, and the ashes thrown into the Tiber. The Pope repaid Barbarossa by crowning him Roman Emperor, without the knowledge of the Romans. Arnold left many followers, especially among the workers, who were organised in religious communities and self-help associations.

THE APOSTOLIC BRETHERN

One of the most interesting of the Italian social-heretical sects was the Apostolic Brethren, whose leader was a peasant named Gerard Segarelli. In 1248 he tried to enter the Franciscan Order,

but was rejected for being too much of a simpleton. Thereupon he chose the garb of the Apostles, as he had seen it depicted in pictures (white mantle and sandals), let his beard and hair grow long, and sold all his belongings which he gave away to crowds in the market-place.

Gerard quickly won a body of supporters, who lived in poverty, and preached the coming of God's Kingdom, by which they appear to have understood an order based on equality, peace and justice.

Alarmed by the growing influence of the Apostolic Brethren (as they called themselves), the Council of Lyons (1274) ordered them to accept no more novices; but the sect continued to grow; and in 1286 a Papal Bull commanded archbishops and bishops to suppress them. Eventually, about the year 1300, Segarelli was burnt at the stake on a charge of heresy.

But that was not the end of the Apostolic Brethren. Segarelli's place was taken by one of his disciples, Dolcino, who showed considerable ability as a leader, and carried on the struggle against the Church in spite of Council decisions and Papal Bulls. "His struggles against his persecuting enemies", says M. Beer in his *Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*, "are in their way not less worthy of admiration than those of Spartacus against the Romans". For a time he led a roving life in the Trentino, "preaching the community of goods and women", and he seems to have expected the early coming of the millennium and an era of peace and brotherhood.

Later he returned to his native province of Novara, and though his followers were persecuted by the Inquisition, Dolcino never lacked secret supporters who always gave him timely warning of his enemies' plans. In 1305 he withdrew to the mountains with some of his followers, and established a settlement; and when Pope Clement V launched a crusade against him he was warned, as usual, and gave the crusading army the slip. After that the Apostolic Brethren founded a new settlement in the district of Varallo, and heretics flocked to them from Savoy, Lombardy and the south of France. Once again a crusading army marched against the Brethren; and this time Dolcino gave battle and defeated the crusaders with heavy losses. However, the Pope issued fresh appeals to the counts and bishops of Novara to extirpate the heretics, and again and again armies marched against them, always to be repulsed with bloody losses. But they were barren victories, for the Apostolic Brethren

remained isolated from the outside world, and suffered badly from lack of food, even though they were able on occasion to ransom some of their prisoners for supplies. In the end they were overwhelmed on the 23rd March, 1307, in a battle on Mount Zebello, which lasted the whole day, and only ended when the majority of the heretics had been slaughtered. One hundred and fifty, all that were left, surrendered when their arms "slipped from their hands, enfeebled by cold and hunger". Dolcino and his wife, Margharita, were among the prisoners, and Church and State vented their vengeance upon them by putting them to death under dreadful tortures.

THE WALDENSES

Catharist influence existed in France as early as the first quarter of the 11th century; but it was a Lyons merchant, Peter Waldus, who, about the year 1170, created a heretical-social movement which secured a mass following. Beginning in the cities of southern France (where, as in Italy, commerce and industry developed earlier than in most parts of western Europe) the Waldenses or Waldensians spread to Italy and Germany. We hear of them in Bohemia, Moravia, Poland, Hungary, Saxony, Pomerania and Swabia. In the year 1315 they are said to have had 80,000 members in Austria, whilst in the diocese of Passau (which comprised eastern Bavaria and northern Austria) there were forty-one schools of Waldensian communes, whose members were almost exclusively peasants or handicraft workers. In Lombardy they combined with the Humiliati (whose support came mainly from poor weavers); and in France, too, they recruited their members mainly from weavers and other artisans.

According to tradition Peter Waldus was a wealthy merchant who distributed his possessions among the poor, and began to preach a primitive Christianity. His followers called themselves "the Poor Men of Lyons" and adopted a distinctive dress. It was not their intention to secede from the Church, but rather to form an order somewhat like that which St. Francis was to establish a generation later. However, their free interpretation of the Gospels, and their calling into doubt some of the dogmas of the Medieval Church resulted in a cruel persecution. About the year 1213 we hear of the charge being made against them of holding goods in common and of practising "free love", and several were condemned to the stake. Others were burned at Strassburg, in 1229; and in 1390 several Waldenses were tortured

in the episcopal prison in Mainz to force them to betray the names of their comrades. A couple of years later, in 1392, we hear of thirty-six Waldenses being burned alive at Bingen. Finally the Council of Verona condemned them as heretics, and in 1477 Pope Sixtus IV called for a crusade against them. This persecution continued down to the 18th century: indeed, it was only in 1848 that they attained civil rights and religious freedom in Piedmont and Savoy. Thousands went to the stake or were tortured to death, others rotted away their lives in noisome dungeons.

The Waldenses were divided into the usual two groups, the Perfect, and the Friends or Believers. The former were the teachers and leaders of the movement, and communism and celibacy were obligatory upon them. The Believers, however, were allowed to marry and own property. The Waldenses refused to perform military service or to take an oath, and one inquisitor describes them thus:

The heretics can be recognised by their morals and their speech, for they are modest and live in well-ordered relationship. They are not ostentatious in their clothing, which is neither costly nor soiled. To avoid lies, oaths, and deceits, they refrain from engaging in trade, but live by the labour of their hands. Shoemakers are their teachers. They do not heap up treasures, but are content to have what is necessary. They are chaste and temperate in eating and drinking. They do not visit inns or balls or other resorts of pleasure. They abstain from anger, labour constantly, teach and learn, consequently they indulge in few prayers. They may be recognized by their modesty and their careful language, as they particularly avoid vulgarities, calumnies, and frivolous speeches.

The Waldenses translated the Bible and studied and learned long passages from it by heart.

The laborious men and women who belonged to this sect used, after a hard day's work, to meet together in order to devote their evenings to study. And if a number of comrades found it difficult to follow or profit by the instruction, the teachers used to say: 'Learn one word every day, then thou wilt know three hundred and sixty words in a year, and thus shall we triumph'. (*Social Struggles in the Middle Ages*, M. Beer, p. 179.)

THE ALBIGENSES

In the 12th and 13th centuries heresy was rife in Languedoc in southern France, which at that time was one of the most economically advanced and prosperous parts of France. Trade and industry flourished there, together with art and science,

and there was religious toleration. Albi was one of the most important centres of the heretical movement, and in Languedoc the Catharist sectaries became known as Albigenses. They preached Apostolic Christianity and were called the "good men". Many of the nobles supported the movement, which seems to have laid little stress upon social and economic questions, and to have been mainly anti-ecclesiastical.

The Albigenses were charged with denying the doctrine of the Trinity and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in 1119 Pope Calixtus II excommunicated them and summoned the faithful to undertake a crusade against them promising as a reward the absolution of their sins. The first crusade was launched against the Albigenses in 1180, but repulsed by the Counts of Languedoc. In 1195 Count Raymond VI of Toulouse was put under the papal ban, and in 1209 Pope Innocent III organised another crusade, and thus provoked a ferocious religious war which lasted for some twenty years and devastated the south of France. This holy war was waged with utter ruthlessness. Thus, when the crusaders took the city of Béziers they massacred 20,000 of the inhabitants. In the course of the struggle hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives; and when at last peace was concluded in 1229 the once-wealthy south was ruined.

The stubborn resistance of the Albigenses is largely explained by the fact that they were helped in their struggle against the Papacy by many of the feudal lords; but the war broke the practically independent power of the Counts of Languedoc, and in 1232 it was possible to introduce the Inquisition and to extirpate the Albigenses.

THE BEGHARDS AND THE BEGUINS

We have no definite information about the Catharist movements in Flanders much earlier than the 12th century. A measure of religious toleration existed in Flanders, and the inquisitorial processes which might have supplied us with documentary evidence about the movement did not begin till the 11th century.

The social-heretical sects peculiar to Flanders were the Beguins and the Beghards. According to one account they derived their names from Lambert le Bègue (Lambert the Stammerer), a priest of Liège, who, about the year 1180, began to denounce the Church for its corruption and worldliness, and suffered death for these attacks. It is more probable, however, that the names Beguin and Beghard were derived from the old Saxon word *beg*.

The Beguins were a lay sisterhood whose members lived in apostolic poverty and were sworn to chastity. They were required to contribute either by labour or by begging to their common maintenance, and to nurse the sick.

In course of time their example was followed by men, who formed communities, where unmarried men could live and work co-operatively and study the Bible. They became especially popular among the poorer workers in the industrial cities of Flanders, and many of their recruits were weavers. In the main they were encouraged by both Church and lay authorities.

Some Beghards and Beguins, however, became mendicant preachers, and these were soon denounced as heretics and savagely persecuted. It seems that in the course of their wanderings these mendicants came into contact with other Catharist sects and absorbed Amalrician* freethinking ideas, and the millennial notions of the left-wing Franciscans.

The Beghards and the Beguins spread throughout the Rhine valley, and by the middle of the 13th century they were numerous in Mainz, Strassburg, Cologne, and Metz. The movement was also carried to England by Flemish weavers who migrated here, and probably had something to do with making Norfolk (the centre of the woollen industry) a stronghold of Lollardy, another social-heretical movement which had much in common with the Beghards.

*Amalrich (died 1204) was born at Bena in France. He and his disciples taught that God is manifest in heathen thinkers and teachers as well as in Jesus Christ. The Amalricians were opposed to ritualism, the adoration of saints, and the praying to relics. They called the Pope the Anti-Christ, and Rome Babylon. They held that those who were partakers of the Holy Spirit were above the law; and marriage and property laws were invalid in their eyes. Their doctrines were borrowed, in some measure, from the Franciscan left wing.

CHAPTER 2

THE LOLLARDS

When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?

JOHN WIKLIF

One of the most formidable of the heretical movements of the Middle Ages was Lollardy* or Lollery. The Lollard movement was made up of divers elements, for

all the religious and social discontent of the times floated instinctively to this new centre; the socialist dreams of the peasantry, the new and keener spirit of personal morality, the hatred of the friars, the jealousy of the great lords towards the prelacy, the fanaticism of the Puritan zealot were blended together in a common hostility to the Church. . . . Women as well as men became the preachers of the new sect. Its numbers increased till to the frenzied panic of the Churchmen it seemed as if every third man in the street was a Lollard. The movement had its own schools, its own books; its pamphlets were passed everywhere from hand to hand; scurrilous ballads . . . upon the wealth and luxury of the clergy, were sung at every corner. Nobles, like the Earl of Salisbury, and at a later time Sir John Oldcastle, placed themselves openly at the head of the cause and threw open their gates as a refuge for its missionaries. London in its hatred of the clergy was fiercely Lollard, and defended a Lollard preacher who had ventured to advocate the new doctrines from the pulpit of St. Paul's. Its mayor, John of Northampton, showed the influence of the new morality in the Puritan spirit with which he dealt with the morals of the city. Compelled to act, as he said, by the remissness of the clergy, who connived for money at every kind of debauchery, he arrested the loose women, cut off their hair, and carted them through the streets as an object of public scorn. (*A Short History of the English People*, J. R. Green, Everyman edition, p. 243).

In a formal petition to Parliament in 1395 the Lollards mingled denunciations of the wealth and worldliness of the clergy with a profession of disbelief in confession, transubstantiation, pilgrimages, and image worship, together with a demand "which illustrates the strange medley of opinion which jostled together in the new movement" (*A Short History of the English People*, J. R.

*"Lollard" may have been derived from *Lollaerd*, one who mumbles prayers or hymns, and was used as a scornful nickname meaning "idler" or "idle babbler".

Green, Everyman edition, p. 244), that war be declared unchristian and trades such as those of the goldsmith and the armourer which, were contrary to apostolic poverty, be banished from the realm.*

John Wiclif is usually regarded as the founder of Lollardy, although, of course, the religious revolt with which he is associated was part of the much wider heretical movement which manifested itself in varying forms throughout the Middle Ages in almost every part of Christendom.

Born about the year 1320, at a small village in Yorkshire (from which his name is derived), he went to study at Oxford. In 1357 he was a fellow of Merton College, and in 1361 Master of Balliol. As is generally known, he translated the Bible into English. He died on December 31st, 1384, by which time he had a vast following. People came to hear him from all parts of Europe; among them many Bohemians who, carrying his books and tenets back to their native country, contributed largely to the growth of the Hussite movement.

The Lollards had a strong party in the Lower House of the Parliament of 1394 (even though a dozen years before many of Wiclif's opinions had been condemned as heretical by the Earthquake† Council); and Lollardy even found favour at Court, for it was largely through the patronage of Richard II's first queen, Anne of Bohemia, that the tracts and Bible of Wiclif were introduced to her native land. Moreover, the head of the sect was the Earl of Salisbury, who "was of all the English nobles the most favoured by and the most faithful to the king." (*A Short History of the English People*, J. R. Green, Everyman edition, p. 247.)

But, above all, Wiclif's teachings, with their denunciation of the Pope and papal exactions, and their claim that all ecclesiastics should be subject to the civil power, were admirably suited to the economic needs of the city merchants and wealthy burgesses who represented the emergent capitalism of the period. They needed above all a strong and stable central government if they were to develop commerce and industry, and in the circumstances of the times such a government could take only the form of an absolute national monarchy. But that conception of sovereignty clashed with the medieval notion of the unity of Christendom, and the right of the Papacy to meddle in the internal affairs of

*The Lollard petition contended that the revenues of the Church would be sufficient to enable the King to maintain fifteen earls, fifteen hundred knights, and six thousand squires, besides endowing hospitals for the relief of the poor.

†So called from a great earthquake shock which did much damage in England while the Lambeth Council was sitting in May, 1382.

the kingdom. Moreover, the economic development of the country was hampered by the drain of papal tribute (which Parliament complained was five times the amount of the taxes paid to the king); and the bourgeoisie could give hearty approval to Wiclif's attack upon the monastic orders for their profligacy and love of luxury, and his advocacy that the monasteries be heavily taxed or their property confiscated outright. That policy, like the claim to make the secular state supreme at the expense of the Church, was also in accord with the needs of the nascent capitalist economy, which badly wanted the vast amounts of capital locked up in the Church.

It was this provision of an ideology suited to the needs of the economically progressive bourgeoisie, together with the support which it found in the rising discontent of the peasants, that gave Lollardy its social significance. It is true that Wiclif's doctrines "preclude all sedition, rebellion, violence, and even party and faction fights" (*A History of British Socialism*, M. Beer, p. 25); but like many other religious reformers—notably Luther—he helped to loose social forces that went far beyond anything he anticipated or approved.* Some of Wiclif's followers drew from his teachings conclusions which seemed to threaten the whole fabric of medieval society. Lollard propagandists preached to the peasantry and the poor artisans and labourers of the towns that both lay and ecclesiastical possessions should become common property: they urged the poor to pay neither dues nor tithes to the clergy, but they also appealed to servants not to work for their masters. And by their advocacy of a peasant communism they played no inconsiderable part in the great Peasant Revolt of 1381.

Wiclif's attitude towards the Peasants' Revolt was similar to, though less violent than, that of Martin Luther towards the German Bauernkrieg (1525); and John Hus would, in all probability, have taken up the same attitude towards the Taborite wars in Bohemia, had he lived to witness them. The chief leaders of the Reformation brought their reforming zeal to bear upon ecclesiastical and national affairs and left social grievances to be removed by the operation of ethical endeavour . . . however . . . the Reformation movement was in all three countries accompanied by social upheavals. (*A History of British Socialism*, M. Beer, p. 26.)

*The Waldensian movement developed the same divergent class tendencies. The poorer peasantry and the poor artisans and labourers of the towns (the forerunners of the modern proletariat) found hope and consolation for the hardships of their lives in communist dreams which they derived from the traditions of primitive Christianity. Where the wealthier peasants and the urban middle class were dominant the movement was mainly concerned with a criticism of the Church.

THE POOR PRIESTS

It was Wiclif's "poor priests" who carried his doctrines to extremes which must have shocked him. To counteract the influence of the begging friars (who were devoted to the Pope), Wiclif created his own order of itinerant preachers, whom he clothed in russet (cloth made of undyed black wool), and sent about the country barefoot to preach his ideas. These poor priests

were responsible to no authority, and . . . it does not seem that they were to make any place their special residence, nor were they to report themselves to any person, nor to have any restraint put on their utterances . . . It is easy to see how passionate, earnest and sympathetic men could gain influence by these teachings. . . . Wiclif had created an order of ecclesiastics on whom he had imposed no discipline; and these men speedily emancipated themselves from all control. Their violence of language, their contempt of authority, their advocacy of equality, in its coarsest and homeliest form, soon distinguished them, and disgusted those who had at first favoured the movement. (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, Thorold Rogers, pp. 250-251.)

One can imagine with what angry dismay, and even downright horror wealthy London Lollards may have listened to the sermon which John Ball preached on Blackheath, on June 13th, 1381, when he declared that

In the beginning all men were created equal: servitude of man to man was introduced by the unjust dealings of the wicked, and (was) contrary to God's will. For if God had intended some to be serfs and others lords, He would have made a distinction between them at the beginning.

Englishmen had now an opportunity given them, if they chose to take it, of casting off the yoke they had borne so long, and winning the freedom that they had always desired. Wherefore they should take good courage, and behave like the wise husbandman of scripture, who gathered the wheat into his barn, but uprooted and burned the tares that had half-choked the good grain. The tares of England were her oppressive rulers, and harvest-time had come, in which it was their duty to pluck up and make away with them all—evil lords, unjust judges, lawyers, every man who was dangerous to the common good. Then they would have peace for the present and security for the future; for when the great ones had been cut off, all men would enjoy equal freedom, all would have the same nobility, rank, and power. (*The Great Revolt of 1381*, Sir Charles Oman, pp. 51-52.)*

*Professor Oman comments that this "version of his discourse that the chroniclers have preserved for us is no doubt drawn in the most lurid colours, but the main thesis is probably correct".

And so the commonplace of history happened: many who had supported Wiclif's demands for moderate reforms, without perceiving their possible revolutionary implications, were shocked and terrified into renouncing them when the peasantry and the poor craftsmen of the towns pressed Wiclif's teachings into a demand for social equality and freedom, that went far beyond his demand for the partial expropriation of the Church. After the great peasant insurrection of 1381 (which seemed for a time to shake the whole feudal order to its foundations) a general sympathy for Wiclif among the propertied classes changed into hatred. Oxford University condemned his Twelve Articles, and although Wiclif was permitted to die a natural death, a Church Council held at Constance in 1415 (thirty-one years after his death) decided to burn his remains.

One might find many a modern parallel, too, for the way

Some of the most violent of Wiclif's poor priests ultimately deserted the cause they had taken up, conformed to the existing order of things anew, rose to high rank in the Church, and persecuted that which they had aforetime preached. (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, Thorold Rogers, p. 251.)

THE GREAT PEASANT REVOLT

The English peasantry had substantial grievances which made them give a ready ear to the teachings of the poor priests. Over a long period of years they had slowly won a measure of social and economic freedom which did not dispose them to submit tamely when the lords of the manors sought to reimpose the cruder forms of serfdom from which considerable numbers had freed themselves.

Long before 1381 many serfs had made bargains with their lords whereby payment in kind or in personal services for their holdings was commuted for a money rent.

During the reign of Edward II the practice became increasingly general to accept money compensations in lieu of labour rents, and by the end of the first quarter of the [14th] century the rule had become almost universal. . . . These commutations would be entered in the manor rental, and would tend to assimilate the tenure of the serf, now increasingly called a tenant by copy or custom, with that of the freeholder. . . . Ultimately the money payments would be deemed fixed and determinate liabilities, the satisfaction of which was a discharge of all the old labour rents, and the proffer of which was a tender which the steward was bound to accept. (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, pp. 218-219.)

'At the close of Edward III's reign', says J. R. Green, 'the Lord of the manor had been reduced over a large part of England to the position of a modern landlord, receiving a rental of money from his tenants, and dependent for the cultivation of his own demesne on hired labour; while the wealthier of the tenants themselves often took the demesne on lease as its farmers, and thus created a new class intermediate between the larger proprietors and the customary tenants, (*A Short History of the English People*, J. R. Green, Everyman Edition, p. 233.)

These commutations of labour rent for rent in money or kind suited both the manorial lords and the peasants until the Black Death created a serious shortage of labour. This plague, which is believed to have had its origin in the centre of China about the year 1333, swept across Europe, and devastated one country after another. At length it made its appearance in the seaport towns of Dorsetshire, in August, 1348, whence it soon spread throughout the country.

It is probable that the Black Death killed off between one-third and one-half of the population of England; and the immediate consequence was a serious dearth of labour, and a difficulty in collecting in the harvests of those landowners who depended on hired labour. We are told that crops were often suffered to rot in the fields for want of labour, that land went out of cultivation, and that sheep and cattle roamed at will over the country for lack of herdsman.

And thus, at

a stroke, the labourer, both peasant and artisan, became the master of the situation in England. The change was as universal as it was sudden. The lord found on all sides a stationary or retrograde market for every kind of produce, in which he dealt as a seller, and a rapidly advancing market for everything he needed as a buyer. . . . Everything he wished to buy . . . had risen by 50 or 100 or even 200 per cent. . . . Besides, he was not the only dealer. A number of industrious and prosperous tenants were settled round his manor house, who tilled their own lands, from which they could not be evicted; on the profits and improvements of which he could not, as long as they paid their dues, lay his clutches, and it was certain that if he strove to force an enhanced price for what his bailiff had to sell, they would undersell him. They were protected against him, as he was against the king, by custom,—a custom which he dared not break if he could, and could not if he dared. . . . The peasant farmer shared the new charges which were put on his calling, but not in the same degree. . . . He found his own labour on his own holding, and hired none. Besides, he could, after his work was over, hire himself and his children out at the enhanced rates;

or, if he had thriven and saved, he could double his own holding, and that on easy terms, for the lord was seeking tenants, not tenants seeking lords. . . . The free labourer, and for the matter of that, the serf, was, in his way, still better off. Everything he needed was as cheap as ever, and his labour was daily rising in value. He had bargained for his labour rent, and was free to seek his market. If the bailiff would give him his price, well; if not, there were plenty of hands wanted in the next village, or a short distance off. If an attempt was made to restrain him . . . the woods were near, and he could soon get into another county. There was no fear in these times that the lord could spare to follow him, or that they who wanted his service would freely give him up. He had slaved and laboured . . . and now his chance was come. (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, pp. 240-242.)

In these circumstances it was natural enough that the lords should try to rescind their old agreements and force the peasants back into serfdom. These attempts were the more galling that the peasant had to plead his case in the manor-court* where it was decided by the very person whose interest it was to give judgment in the lord's favour.

Parliament, too, sought by legal enactment to force down wages. Parliament had broken up when the plague was raging, but in 1349 the king issued a proclamation in which he directed that wages no higher than the customary should be paid, under penalty of a fine. This ordinance, however, was everywhere ignored, for landowners were compelled either to pay higher wages or see their crops ungathered. Heavy penalties were laid on abbots, priors, barons and crown tenants if they paid more than the customary wages, and many labourers were thrown into prison for defying the ban, whilst others were fined. But all in vain : labour was scarce, and wages continued to rise.

As soon as Parliament met the royal proclamation was reduced to the form of a statute, which contained eight clauses :

(1) No person under sixty years of age, whether serf or free, shall decline to undertake farm labour at the wages which had been customary in the king's twentieth year (1347), except they

*The "halimoot", a court of the manor, came into existence in the 11th or 12th century, and lost much of its power after the 14th. This moot or court assembled usually every three weeks, and holders of land in the manor were bound to attend. Besides dealing with various offences, this court settled questions concerning the rules and customs of the manor, e.g. the introduction of a new tenant on the death of his predecessor, the transfer of land, the rents, services and obligations of the tenants. The lord of the manor or his representative acted as president of the court, but the peasantry were the judges, and decisions were often left to an appointed committee or jury of six or twelve men. However, notwithstanding this fact, the absence of any effective right of appeal against arbitrary action by the lord of the manor gave him a predominant influence.

lived by merchandize, were regularly engaged in some mechanical craft, were possessed of private means, or were occupiers of land. The lord was to have the first claim to the labour of his serfs, and those who declined to work for him or for others were to be sent to the common gaol.

(2) Imprisonment is to be decreed against all persons who may quit service before the time which is fixed in their agreements.

(3) No other than the old wages are to be given, and the remedy against those who seek to get more is to be sought in the lord's court.

(4) Lords of manors paying more than the customary amount are to be liable to treble damages.

(5) Artificers are to be liable to the same conditions, the artificers' enumerated being saddlers, tanners, farriers, shoemakers, tailors, smiths, carpenters, masons, tilers, pargetters, carters, and others.

(6) Food must be sold at reasonable prices.

(7) Alms are strictly forbidden to able-bodied labourers.

(8) Any excess of wages taken or paid can be seized for the king's use towards the payment of a fifteenth and tenth lately granted.

The statute provided for the difference between summer and winter wages, and forbade the emigration of the town population to country places in summer.

THE PEASANTS COMBINE

The attempt to control wages by legal enactment failed. Year after year Parliament complained that the Statute of Labourers was not being kept and re-enacted it with even harsher penalties. But their efforts were in vain: not infrequently the bailiffs themselves connived at breaches of the law.

But though the attempt to restrict wages was largely ineffectual, it nevertheless provoked resentment and strikes among the poorer craftsmen of the towns, and was met by combination by the peasantry. They organised themselves, and subscribed considerable sums for the defence of serfs who broke the law, and for the payment of fines.

Men like the English peasants of that time, whether farmers or labourers, belonging as they did to a class that had co-operated in their work and their pleasures from the earliest times, would have had little difficulty in organizing themselves for the purposes of this struggle. Nothing definite is known of their organisation, though there are occasional references in contemporary records to

a 'Great Society'. Possibly the organisation of the craft gilds may have been utilized; undoubtedly the village artisans or craftsmen, such as the millers, tilers and carters, most of whom would have been gildsmen, took a leading part in the rising of 1381. In any case, in those days it would be easy to find in a village men with special capacity for organisation. Such men would come quickly to the front. It is, indeed, not too much to assume that, in the years that preceded the revolt of 1381, there was some one in most villages in the South and East of England who corresponded to the trade union secretary of the somewhat similar movement which took place under Joseph Arch, five centuries later. (*A Short History of English Rural Life*, Montague Fordham, pp. 57-58.)

Thorold Rogers has suggested that the "poor priests" played the chief part in organising something like a national movement among the English peasantry.

Now a combination such as that which is described by contemporary writers, and which the chroniclers certainly could not have invented, must have needed agents who could be trusted, and who could keep the particulars of their organisation secret, if they could not the fact. But the peasants could not have done this among themselves. Any conferences which they might have held would have been detected, suspected, and punished. The essence of medieval society was that, in every manor, everyone knew everything about his neighbour. The lords, armed with the forces of the law, would never have suffered a conspiracy against the interests of property to have been hatched at their doors. They would have brought their retainers, or some of the discharged soldiers, down on these wretched, isolated helots, and have slain them without mercy, if they had found that they were collecting money, making deposits of arms, and conspiring against the state. (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, pp. 252-253.)

Now the poor priests came mainly from the peasantry and felt a natural sympathy with their economic and social ambitions. Wandering the country, as they did, these "Known-men" had every opportunity to organise a widespread resistance among the peasants. They could be trusted with subscriptions, and they could carry messages from one group of conspirators to another.

Wicklif's poor priests had honeycombed the minds of the upland folk (peasants) with what may be called religious socialism. By Wicklif's labours, the Bible men had been introduced to the new world of the Old Testament, to the history of the human race, to the primeval garden and to the young world, where the first parents of all mankind lived by simple toil, and were the ancestors of the proud noble and knight, as well as the down-trodden serf and despised burgher. They read of the brave times when there was no king in Israel, when every man did that which was right in his own eyes, and sat under his own vine and his own fig-tree, none daring make him afraid. . . . The God of Israel had bade

his people be husbandmen, and not mounted knights and men-at-arms. . . . We are told that many learnt to read when they were old that they might tell the Bible story. . . . The preacher would discourse . . . of the natural equality of men, of the fact that all, kings, lords, and priests, live by the fruits of the earth and the labour of the husbandman, and that it would be better for them to die with arms in their hands than to be thrust back, without an effort on their part, into the shameful slavery from which they had been delivered. And as their eyes kindled, and they grasped their staves, he could tell them to keep their ears open for the news of their deliverance, that on the password being given, they were at once to hie to the appointed place. . . . This was the way in which the communications were kept up, and the organisation made ready to be called into activity at a moment's notice. The secret was well kept. The storm, which no politician of the time anticipated, burst on June 10th, 1381. The uprising of the upland folk was simultaneous. It extended from the coast of Kent to Scarborough, all through the Eastern towns, Norwich, the richest English town of the fourteenth century after London, full of thriving artisans, who were the disciples of the poor priests, as the county was subsequently their hiding-place, fully shared in the insurrection, for the rioters took Norwich and stormed the castle. On the west it extended from Hampshire to Lancashire. (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, pp. 254-256.)

PEASANT COMMUNISM

John Ball was one of the most famous of the poor priests. "A mad priest of Kent," the courtly Froissart calls him. Three times imprisoned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and once excommunicated, he was hanged, drawn and quartered after the collapse of the Peasants' Revolt. Unlike Wiclif,* John Ball seems to have come from the people, and to have addressed himself in the main to social problems. During the years which intervened between the Black Death and the Peasant Rising he spent much of his time wandering through the south and south-east of England, preaching in churchyards and by roadsides. The pith of his teaching is comprised in the well-known couplet :

"When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?"

The same ideas run through the fragment of his speech which Froissart has preserved for us :

Things cannot go well in England, nor ever will, until all goods are held in common, and until there will be neither serfs nor gentlemen, and we shall all be equal. For what reason have they, whom we call lords, got the best of us? How did they deserve it? Why do

*According to Sir Charles Oman "John Ball had been preaching his peculiar doctrines many years before Wiclif was known outside Oxford".

(*The Great Revolt of 1381*, p. 19.)

they keep us in bondage? If we all descended from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve, how can they assert or prove that they are more masters than ourselves? Except perhaps that they make us work and produce for them to spend! They are clothed in velvets and in coats garnished with ermine and fur, while we wear coarse linen. They have wine, spices, and good bread, while we get rye-bread, offal, straw, and water. They have residences, handsome manors, and we the trouble and the work, and must brave the rain and the wind in the fields. And it is from us and our labour that they get the means to support their pomp; yet we are called serfs and are promptly beaten if we fail to do their bidding.

PERSECUTION OF THE LOLLARDS

It is possible that some of the peasant leaders planned much more than the remedy of grievances and the extinction of serfdom. Thorold Rogers has suggested that they contemplated "the reconstruction of English society."

It is said, in the confession of some among his companions, that he (Wat Tyler) intended to secure the King's person, to upset the system of feudal dependence, and to establish in its room a government of county districts, over each of which was to be put a person of like principles with himself. The monasteries would provide ample funds for these major-generals of the fourteenth century. It is curious that the scheme was adopted in the seventeenth century by Cromwell. (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*).

Whatever truth there may be in this, the revolt terrified the ruling class. For three days a peasant army held London and were masters of the situation. In the end they were defeated by trickery and false promises made by the king, and the rising was drowned in blood.

But the memory of *Hurling-time* haunted the ruling class for many a year afterwards, and they shed whatever sympathy they had had for Lollery. The Lollards were driven from Oxford by a royal edict which ordered the instant banishment of all Wiclif's supporters, together with the destruction of all Lollard books on pain of the forfeiture of the University's privileges. The threat produced its effect. Within Oxford—where many of the students had supported the heretical teachings of Wiclif—the suppression of Lollardy was complete. Their preachers were silenced, or, at least, rendered more circumspect. Many fled the country; but some recanted and became bishops or cardinals. And, as is often the way with such renegades, they became persecutors of the cause they had once advocated. But many Lollards still remained in spite of the growing severity with which

they were persecuted. You cannot meet five people talking together, said a monkish historian, but three of them are Lollards.

The strength of the movement is shown by the very ferocity of the persecution that was directed against it. In the first Convocation of his reign Henry IV announced himself to be the protector of the Church, and ordered the prelates to take measures for the suppression of heresy and of the wandering friars. An Act of Parliament gave the bishops power to arrest on common rumour, to put the accused to purgation, and to punish with imprisonment. This, however, was but a prelude to the more formidable provisions of the Statute of Heretics (1401), by the provisions of which bishops were not only permitted to arrest and imprison (so long as their heresy should last) all preachers of heresy, all schoolmasters infected with heretical teachings, and all writers or owners of heretical books, but in the event of such heretics refusing to abjure their heresy, or after a relapse following such an abjuration, they were to hand the offender over to the civil officers, and by these he was to be burnt on a high place before the people.

But the new statute was defied, and produced a succession of revolts and conspiracies. The death of the Earl of Salisbury in one of these risings, transferred the leadership of the Lollard movement to Sir John Oldcastle, "one of the foremost warriors of his time". (Green's *Short History of the English People*). He sheltered the Lollard preachers in his castle at Cowling, and defied the bishops and their sentences. Eventually, he was besieged, and taken as a prisoner to the Tower of London.

His escape was a signal for the revolt of his sect. A secret command summoned the Lollards to assemble in St. Giles' Fields. We gather, if not the real aims of the rising, at least the terror that it caused, from Henry's statement that its purpose was 'to destroy himself, his brothers, and several of the spiritual and temporal lords'; but the vigilance of the young King (Henry V) prevented the junction of the Lollards of London with their friends in the country by securing the city gates, and those who appeared at the place of meeting were dispersed by the royal forces. On the failure of the rising, the law was rendered more rigorous . . . and the execution of thirty-nine prominent Lollards was followed after some years by the arrest of Oldcastle himself. In spite of his rank and of old friendship with the King (he) . . . was hung alive in chains and a fire kindled slowly under his feet. (*A Short History of the English People*, J. R. Green.)

Persecution succeeded in destroying much of the vigour which Lollardy had once displayed, but it lived on; and nine years after

the accession of King Henry VI we hear of the Duke of Gloucester travelling the country with a troop of men-at-arms for the purpose of repressing its risings and hindering its invectives against the clergy.

Lollardy prepared the way for the Protestant Reformation in this country. Like Calvinism two centuries later, it was in many ways a sour and opinionative creed, and it displayed the same ruthless intolerance. "All Lollards", says one chronicler, "hated images; they even called the image of our Lady at Lincoln the witch of Lincoln". One of the poor priests is said to have lighted the fire at the lepers' chapel at Leicester with an image of St. Catherine. Others cut down the crucifix at Westcheam and threw it into a sewer. Yet these stiff-necked sectaries must command our respect, for they were ready, in many cases, to sacrifice material possessions, and even life, for their beliefs. Many, too, believed passionately in social justice, and devoted their lives to serving the peasants and the poor artisans of the towns and manufacturing districts where they found their most steadfast supporters. Indeed, among the town labourers and poorer peasantry Lollardy took on something of the character of a mass movement for social reform, and may be regarded in some ways as a forerunner of the great working class movements of modern times—Chartism and Socialism.

I have no doubt (says Thorold Rogers) that the services which the poor priests, Bible-men, and Lollard preachers had done in and about the great crisis of 1381, is the explanation, in some degree at least, of the passionate persistence with which Lollard tenets were secretly cherished during the whole of the fifteenth century . . . the upland folk and the village artisans favoured, protected, and concealed an organisation which was reputed to be hostile to the rights of property. (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, p. 272.)

Through the long years of persecution the villagers and craftsmen hid the poor priests and helped them to avoid arrest. William White, for example, one of the most audacious, preached for years in Norfolk, and seemed to bear a charmed life. For years the weavers of Norfolk hid him from his enemies; and it was not until 1427 that he was taken and burnt at Norwich.

Lollardy lingered on among the lower strata of the working people long after 1381, as is proven by pamphlets appearing even at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries, such as "The Ploughman's Prayer" and "The Lanthorne of Light".

CHAPTER 3

THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH AND THE PEASANT

He who would live for a day in delight, let him cook a hen; for two days, a goose; for a whole week, a pig; for a whole month, an ox. If he would be happy for a whole year, let him take a wife; but if he would live in pleasure his whole life long, he must take to the priesthood.

Old Proverb

THE CHURCH AND FEUDALISM

In the "Age of Faith", when the Church occupied a dominating position in Europe, it was inevitable that popular longings for a juster economic and social order should clothe themselves in theological language and find justification in the Scriptures. Christianity, as interpreted by the "poor priests" and other social heretics, had a revolutionary significance, and provided the theoretical justification for the social aspirations of the poor peasant and artisan. But the Church itself—the wealthiest and most powerful organisation in Europe—was the main bulwark of reaction, and treated its serfs no better than the lay lords did.

This is evidenced by the way many monasteries and religious houses were attacked in the Great Peasant Revolt of 1381. At St. Albans, after a long lawsuit, the millstones had been placed within the abbey cloisters as a witness that no burgess had the right to grind corn within the bounds of the abbot's domain. Headed by William Grindcob, the insurgents burst into the cloisters, and broke the millstones into small pieces "like blessed bread in church", so that each man might carry away something "to show of the day when their freedom was won". At Bury St. Edmunds, where the prior had made himself very unpopular by maintaining the rights of the abbey against the townsfolk, it was his own serfs who condemned him to death and beheaded him: and Archbishop Sudbury suffered a like fate when the peasant army entered London. All over the country similar incidents occurred, for the peasants had smarted for many a long year under the oppression of the ecclesiastical landlords, and saw in them one of the main obstacles to the better world they desired.

Dr. G. G. Coulton, in his carefully documented study of *The Medieval Village*, gives many instances of the age-long struggle between the church and its serfs. In 1229, for instance, the tenants of Dunstable refused to pay tallage to the monks who were their overlords, and "ceased not from their original fury and malice" even when the Church threatened them with excommunication, but declared "they would rather go down to hell than be beaten". In 1280, the tenants of Mickleover had a similar quarrel with the abbot, who impounded the whole livestock of the village, and told the peasants that they were his serfs and therefore possessed nothing but their own bellies. The struggle went on for some time, with the peasants appealing to the king, and following him about from place to place with their wives and children (we are told) until they got a writ for the restoration of the 800 oxen, sheep and pigs which the abbot had confiscated. They got three such writs in all; but despite this royal patronage they were forced eventually to submit to the abbot, who had the strict law on his side.

THE CHURCH AND SERFDOM

Dr. Coulton also adduces an impressive weight of evidence to disprove the claim which is sometimes made that the Church was mainly responsible for the decline of chattel slavery and serfdom. "The great centuries of serfdom" (he writes) "were the great centuries of clerical, and especially of monastic power".

Even before Christianity became the State religion it had conformed to the social system of the day, and accepted endowments in the form not merely of land, money and houses, but also of slaves who went with the land. Thus, from very early times the Church owned many bondmen, and had a vested interest in slavery and serfdom. And so it is not surprising that there should be no reliable evidence to prove that the Church helped to abolish either chattel slavery or serfdom. Gregory the Great is sometimes said to have signed the death warrant of slavery in his preamble to a deed of enfranchisement, when he declared:

Seeing that the Redeemer and Creator of the world vouchsafed to take on man's flesh in order by grace of freedom to break the chain of our servitude and to restore us to our first liberty, therefore we act well and wholesomely in restoring the blessing of original liberty to men whom nature hath made free, and whom human laws have bowed under the yoke of servitude. Wherefore we declare you, Montanus and Thomas, servants of the Holy Roman Church which we also serve by God's help,

free from henceforth and Roman citizens ; and we leave unto you all your savings.

But, as Dr. Coulton points out

The fact that this single papal announcement is always quoted as a convincing argument speaks volumes for the weakness of the case. . . Gregory in person possessed at least hundreds, and probably thousands, of slaves whom he did not free. Again, as pope, he was trustee for the possession of thousands more, chattels of the Roman Church ; yet he initiated no general papal movement for the liberation of Church serfs. . . . The churchman's general attitude did not . . . differ perceptibly from the layman's . . . and canon law, no less definitely than civil law, treated the bondman as a chattel. (*The Medieval Village*, pp. 151-153).

At a much later date Thomas Aquinas justified slavery as economically and morally defensible (basing himself upon Aristotle rather than the Bible), and other Schoolmen took the same view. The truth is that

in practice, no less than in theory, lay benevolence . . . outstripped that of the ecclesiastic. In Germany the Church was mainly responsible for those reservations which made absolute manumission almost unknown during the Middle Ages proper. . . . In earlier France it was the same. (*The Medieval Village*, pp. 155-56).

The Church sometimes encouraged wholesale enfranchisements by pious and philanthropic lay lords; but there is no reliable evidence that it ever followed their example. Lay folk were impelled to free their serfs for "the health of their souls", but the clergy felt sufficiently assured of their eternal welfare to grant freedom only for hard cash. And thus

"Monastic manumissions are almost always recorded as definite matters of business ; the serf, like other monastic properties, was sold, exchanged, or embezzled," and "no ecclesiastic had a legal right to free a serf bound to his church, any more than he had a legal right to alienate any other part of his endowment, except at his or its full market value." (*The Medieval Village*, pp. 158-166).

Dr. Coulton sums up his conclusions by saying that

It would, I believe, be quite impossible to produce any instance of the gratuitous emancipation of even half a dozen serfs by any ecclesiastical corporation, except in very early times ; for indeed the thing was strictly forbidden in canon law. Nobody denies that serfdom lingered longest on ecclesiastical, and especially on monastic estates. In 1789, the French Church still possessed very large numbers of bondmen ; 300,000 seems a moderate computation. (*The Medieval Village*, pp. 162-163).

Indeed, far from the Church helping to enfranchise slaves, canon law actually enslaved those whom civil law would have left free. Thus, the Council of Toledo promulgated a decree :

Seeing that the Fathers have hitherto promulgated many decisions concerning the incontinence of the clerical order, and it hath yet been impossible to bring about the correction of their morals, the guilt which they have perpetrated hath so far enlarged the sentence of their judges that vengeance should now strike not only the authors of these iniquities, but also the progeny of those who are condemned. Wherefore from this time forward, whosoever from among these dignitaries, from the bishop down to the subdeacon, shall have begotten children by a detestable marriage with either a bondwoman or a freewoman, those who are proved to be the parents shall be condemned to the canonical penalty ; and the children of this polluted union shall not only be incapable of inheriting from their parents but shall also remain, by an eternal law, as bondfolk of the church of whose priest or minister they are the ignominious offspring.

Again, in 1051, a Council of Rome enacted that the wives of priests should be given to serve the Church as slaves ; and Urban II repeated this decree in 1089. The first Synod of Santa Fe published a similar decree in 1556.

It was also quite common for the Pope to declare a whole community slaves for some rebellion against the Church. Boniface VIII did this in 1303 in his feud with the Colonna family ; and Clement V condemned the entire population of Venice to slavery in 1309. A couple of generations later Gregory XI used the same weapon against the Florentines ; and similar decrees were issued at various times against Bologna, Venice and Florence. When Henry VIII broke with the Papacy Paul III condemned to servitude all Englishmen who took the king's side. Later still, Nicholas IV in bulls of 1452 and 1454 granted to the King of Portugal the right of slavery over all the heathen whom he captured ; and Alexander VI, in 1493, gave the aborigines of South America over to the Spaniards on terms which were interpreted by theologians to include slavery.

THE CHURCH AS LANDLORD

The Medieval Church was certainly not more liberal than the secular lords in its treatment of tenants. Here again Dr. Coulton has adduced a mass of evidence which leads him to the general conclusion

that it was possibly about 5 per cent. better for the peasant, on an average, to live on a monastic than on a lay estate ; except,

that is, on a royal estate, where the conditions were distinctly more favourable than on the monastic. This is proved most clearly by the constant attempts of peasants to escape from monastic bondage by pleading that they were originally of 'ancient demesne,' that is to say the king's own peasants. (*The Medieval Village*, p. 178).

He adds that while

it is rash to generalize at this present stage of research . . . my impression is that monastic conservatism and the comparatively strong financial position of the monasteries, enabled them to maintain the earlier and harsher burdens from which the peasant had long bought himself free on other estates. (*The Medieval Village*, p. 175).

However,

the monastery, in spite of its frequent and sometimes desperate financial shifts, was generally somewhat less indebted and less rapacious than the knight or squire; the cellarer had generally a little more compassion for his labourers than the lay bailiff; that conservatism which kept the serf longer in his monastic servitude would sometimes suffer him to jog along at the same old rent, which had now become far lighter with the falling value of money. (*The Medieval Village*, p. 145).

THE CHURCH AND ENCLOSURES

Finally, in the matter of enclosures there was nothing to distinguish ecclesiastical from lay lords. Monasteries were among the earliest landlords to enclose common land. In Germany whole villages were "laid down" by the Cistercians; and in the case of France Guiot de Provins made this accusation, in 1206:

The (Cistercian) priests who used to handle the Lord's Body are now sheepshearers . . . I could tell you of a thousand churches where they have their granges built; everywhere they have villages and parishes and lands and houses and estates, far more than they had of old. There are so many sheep and wethers bleating, and oxen and cows lowing, that we have wondrous fear. In the churchyards, over men's bodies, they have built their pigstyes; and their asses lie where men were wont to chant Mass . . . much fear do they give to the poor folk whom they cast away from their lands; for they drive them all forth to seek their bread (elsewhere).

It was the same in this country: monastic enclosures took place long before the practice became so general as to result in governmental attempts to put an end to it. In the 15th and 16th centuries the chief reason for enclosures lay in the fact that it had become very profitable to rear sheep for their wool*. Arable land

*Wool reached its maximum price between 1450 and 1550.

was allowed to go to grass, and whole hamlets were sometimes destroyed in order to create sheep-walks. Sir Thomas More, in his *Utopia*, was forced to protest that

sheep, which are naturally mild, and easily kept in order, may be said now to devour men, and unpeople, not only villages, but towns.

And he denounced those who

stop the course of agriculture, destroying houses and towns, reserving only the churches . . . that they may lodge their sheep in them.

Tenants (he explained) are turned out of their possessions, by tricks, or by main force, or being wearied out with ill usage, they are forced to sell them. By which means those miserable people, both men and women, married and unmarried, old and young, with their poor but numerous families (since country business requires many hands), are all forced to change their seats, not knowing whither to go ; and they must sell almost for nothing their household stuff, which could not bring them much money, even though they might stay for a buyer. When that little money is at an end, for it will soon be spent ; what is left for them to do, but either to steal and so be hanged (God knows how justly), or to go about and beg. And if they do this, they are put in prison as idle vagabonds ; while they would willingly work, but can find none that will hire them ; for there is no more occasion for country labour, to which they have been bred, when there is no arable ground left. One shepherd can look after a flock, which will stock an extent of ground that would require many hands, if it were to be ploughed and reaped.

The Church was as ruthless in carrying out enclosures as the most rapacious of lay lords. In Peterborough the abbot enclosed much arable land for sheep-runs, and in one place he "caused six cottages to be destroyed and decayed, and 24 persons are thus lost from the land"; in another instance he

enlarged his park called Meldesworth, and keepeth wild beasts now in these tenements ; and by what he hath taken one plough has been put down and 50 persons who were wont to dwell in the messuage and cottages aforesaid have gone forth and have been compelled to seek their dwelling elsewhere ; and, what is sadder still, the aforesaid graveyard wherein the bodies of the faithful were buried and rest is now made into a pasture for wild beasts.

In short, the Medieval Church was enormously wealthy, and despite what individual priests or monks might think or do, it was governed by the property relations of the times, and its practice and teachings were utterly remote from those of the poor carpenter of Nazareth.

CHAPTER 4

THE HUSSITES

He gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow.

Isaiah XLI, 2.

JOHN HUSS

The writings and teachings of John Wiclif found their way to Bohemia at a time when the Catholic Church was steadily losing authority among the masses, and when a strong national feeling was developing, fostered by the growing wealth and power of the middle class.

The economic development of Bohemia in the 14th century had been largely helped by its silver mines; but, owing to the abundance of silver, a price revolution took place which occasioned much distress among the poor artisans and peasants, and disposed them to a ready acceptance of radical social ideas. As in England, there was much popular discontent with the Church because of the luxury and immorality of its clergy and its practice of simony; whilst livings and benefices had multiplied to such an extent in Bohemia and Moravia that even small churches supported numerous priests in idleness. The religious and social struggles of the period were further complicated by the fact that whilst the common people were largely Czechs, the ruling class (both lay and ecclesiastical lords) were mainly Germans.

Wiclif's ideas were enthusiastically received by the reform party among the clergy, and when an attempt was made to suppress them John Huss became their most formidable defender. Born in 1369 of a well-to-do peasant family, Huss had been a leading figure among the lecturers at the university of Prague since 1396. As preacher in the Bethlehem chapel at Prague he enjoyed an unexampled popularity among all classes. He was excommunicated by the Pope in 1412, but continued his work with undiminished zeal; and was eventually summoned before the Council of Constance in November 1414. Despite the fact that Huss had been guaranteed a safe passage and return, he was thrown into prison, deprived of his spiritual office by the

Council, and burned at the stake on July 6th, 1415. His ashes were thrown into the Rhine.

Some of his disciples suffered a like fate, but the blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the Church, and persecution served only to strengthen the Hussite movement, and to make an armed struggle inevitable.

"A chalice for the layman!" became the slogan of the movement. This was inspired by the fact that the rites of the Catholic Church gave to the layman in communion bread only, but bread and wine to the priest; and the claim for equality in communion became a symbol of the determination of the masses to end the privileges of the Church.

All classes joined in the struggle against the Pope for religious reform, and in the struggle against the Germans for national independence; but each class pursued its own class interests. Thus the nobility seized the opportunity to annex the lands of the Church (which owned about one-quarter of the land); whilst the rich bourgeoisie saw in the Hussite wars a means of spoiling the clergy and gaining possession of the German Catholic cities, of which Kuttenberg, with its famous silver mines, was the most desirable.

TABORITES AND CALIXTINS

The nobility and the rich bourgeoisie who joined the Hussite movement formed the "moderate" party, known as the Calixtins (chalicemen) or Utraquists, from their demand of the Cup for the laity in communion, i.e. "Communion in both kinds," *in utraque specie*. They were also known as Pragers, from the fact that the Prague school was their spiritual centre.

But there were other factions who went far beyond anything that John Huss had taught, just as many English Lollards had carried Wiclif's teachings to an extreme which he had never contemplated. They became known as Taborites, from Mount Tabor, which was their stronghold, and the centre of their propaganda. Tabor was located in the vicinity of gold mines, and trade and industry flourished there.

In the main the Taborites drew their strength from the peasants (who wanted to become free owners of land, just as the English peasants did), and from the lower middle class and proletarian elements of the smaller cities of Bohemia. They preached a primitive Christianity, and their political and social opinions grew steadily more radical. They declared that the

Millennium of Christ was come, and that there "should be no kings, no masters, no subjects on earth, and that taxes and duties should be abolished." They called each other brother and sister, and recognized no difference between "thine" and "mine". Things, they said, should be held in common, and they taught that he who possesses property commits a mortal sin. But their communism was limited to consumption, and did not extend to the sphere of production. Every family worked for itself, and contributed its surplus to the general treasury.

There were among the Taborites (as there always is in revolutionary sects or parties) some extremists who would tolerate no compromise whatsoever with worldliness, and who denounced even the family. These "brothers and sisters of the free spirit" called themselves Adamites; but never won more than a small minority of the Taborites to their extreme views.

Tabor became an international centre—a 15th-century Moscow—where Beghards and Waldenses, and heretics from all parts of Europe found their spiritual home and a refuge from persecution.

Many crusades were launched against the Taborites by the Church and the Empire; but for nearly a generation they more than held their own. The Taborite army was well organised and disciplined, and is said to have been the first to use artillery in battle. Above all the Taborites had that fanatical zeal which two centuries later was to make Cromwell's New Model irresistible. Like the Ironsides, they knew what they fought for, and loved what they knew.

THE HUSSITE WARS

In the summer of 1419, a few days before the death of King Wenzel (the "Good King Wenceslas" of the Christmas carol), public disturbances and street fighting broke out in Prague, beginning when the Catholics insulted a procession. The Hussites, under their leader Ziska, stormed the parliament house in the Neustadt, and threw some of the Catholic councillors out of the windows, after which the wretched men were stabbed and beaten to death by an angry mob. King Wenzel's death is said to have been occasioned by "a fearful access of fury at the outbreak of the revolution".

His heir was his brother, the Emperor Sigismund, king of Hungary.

Knowing that he might expect a bitter opposition so long as he maintained his hostility to the Hussites, Sigismund did not

immediately proceed to Bohemia, but entrusted the government of the country to the Dowager-queen Sophie. In December 1419 he appeared in Brünn, where he received an embassy from Bohemia which asked for his recognition of the four articles of belief which had been drawn up by the Hussites a short time previously. They were freedom of preaching, communion in both kinds, the observance of apostolic poverty by the clergy, and the suppression and punishment of deadly sins. Sigismund was evasive, however, and refused to declare his position.

From Brünn the Emperor proceeded to Breslau, making a formal entry into the town on January 5th, 1420. Towards the close of King Wenzel's reign the artisans of Breslau had followed the example of the Hussites of Prague and had raised a revolt against the aristocratic council and the whole system of royal administration. Sigismund executed 23 of the ringleaders in the public square and condemned many other fugitives to death in their absence, besides declaring their rights and property forfeited. In a little while his hostility towards the Hussite movement became abundantly clear, for on March 15th he had a Bohemian Hussite publicly burned as a heretic, and two days later he ordered the bull which Pope Martin V had issued calling for a crusade against the heretics to be read from the pulpits of the Breslau churches.

In face of this threat from their common enemy, the Calixtins and the Taborites achieved an uneasy unity. Sigismund entered Bohemia with an army 80,000 strong, composed chiefly of Germans and Silesians. He laid unsuccessful siege to Prague from May to June, and finally suffered a shattering defeat on November 1st, 1420.

In February, 1421, the Emperor again invaded Bohemia; but once more the Hussites under their formidable general Ziska put him to ignominious flight.

By this time the Taborites had gained the upper hand in the Hussite movement, and they were no longer content to await attack, but took the offensive and conquered a number of towns and fiefs which had remained Catholic.

In September, 1421, Sigismund made yet another invasion of Bohemia at the head of a crusading army said to have numbered 200,000; but as on previous occasions the Hussites inflicted heavy losses upon the crusaders, and soon compelled them to withdraw across the frontier. After that several years passed before any further attack was made upon the Taborites.

On October 11th, 1424, Ziska died of some kind of plague, and the quarrels which had always divided the Hussite factions grew more serious. Ziska's own adherents, who were known as the "Orphans", broke with the Taborites, whose leadership passed to Prokop Rasa (Rasa, the Shorn One). Under his energetic leadership the Hussite Wars spread to Austria, Hungary, Silesia, Saxony, Brandenburg, the Palatinate and Franconia.

The Taborites now began to leave permanent garrisons in the towns and castles which they conquered, and such was the terror which their successes spread among the princes of the Empire they were once more persuaded to undertake a crusade, in the summer of 1427, at a time when the Emperor Sigismund was occupied with the war against the Turks. Once again the crusaders were defeated, and fled panic-stricken before the Taborite army, which it seemed no mortal power could subdue.

In 1431, the Pope, Martin V, summoned a General Council of the Church at Basle, which launched yet another crusade against the Taborites. Like all its predecessors, however, it ended with the overwhelming defeat of the Germans at Taus, on August 14th, 1431.

After this victory at Taus the invincible Hussite armies swept through Austria, Northern Hungary, Silesia, Saxony and Brandenburg, and seemed to threaten all Christendom. But now a split took place between the Calixtins and the Taborites and Orphans. The Bohemian nobles, who supported the more moderate faction, had been quite willing to appropriate the Church lands, but they had no liking for the dangerous social theories of the Taborites, and no desire to wage war against king, pope and the whole of Europe.

The Calixtins started negotiations with the enemy, and Tabor itself was divided. The lower middle-class and the peasantry were largely indifferent to the communist programme: they wanted peace. The truth is that Tabor's communism was unstable. It was communism of consumption, without a foundation in communist production, and the result was that equality of the means of subsistence soon disappeared. There were rich and poor in Tabor.

At the same time the corruption which seems inevitable to all revolutionary movements once they achieve a measure of success, now overtook the Taborites. Their army ceased to consist of honest fanatics prepared to give their lives for the cause; it became crowded by "crooks and riff-raff of all nations".

These mercenaries speedily deserted to the nobility when the latter raised an army for war against Tabor and offered better terms than the Taborites did.

These factors combined to overthrow Tabor. On May 30th, 1434, they suffered a crushing defeat near Lipan in Bohemia, when out of 18,000 Taborite soldiers 13,000 were killed.

In 1437 they were compelled to conclude a treaty with Sigismund, who guaranteed them independence; but in spite of this the communist community of Tabor soon disappeared.

In the circumstances of the time that was bound to have happened sooner or later. The Taborites were many centuries before their time: communism was not possible until capitalism had overthrown the feudal order, and had accumulated the capital which made possible the industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Men, consciously or unconsciously, derive their moral ideas in the last resort from . . . the economic relations in which they carry on production and exchange.

Anti-Dühring, Frederick Engels.

THE REFORMATION

Important though Lollardy and the Hussite movement were as threats to the supremacy of the Catholic Church, it was not until the coming of Capitalism in the 16th century that economic conditions made a successful challenge possible.

It has already been pointed out that capitalist methods of production existed in Northern Italy as early as the 13th century, but it was not until the 16th century that such methods became widespread in Europe. Then bricks, beer and glass began to be manufactured in England in great plants that needed much capital, and great metal works sprang up, operated by blast-bellows. At the same time the manufacture of cloth became highly organised, and coal began to take the place of wood as fuel, deep mines being sunk (three hundred feet or more), with timbered underground ways, and expensive pumps to keep them from being flooded.

There were many reasons why the Medieval Church was not compatible with this new capitalist economy. Medieval civilization was founded upon agriculture—upon the manor as a largely self-contained economic and political unit, where serf labour produced a surplus that went to maintain a hierarchy of lords and clergy. Feudalism was a traditional, authoritarian society, with elaborate rules for regulating the social relationships of its members even to the details of their dress, and there was little movement of men from one social class to another. Though there were notable exceptions, most men who were born serfs died serfs.

And the Church was the great bulwark of this order.

It surrounded feudal institutions with the halo of divine consecration. It had organised its own hierarchy on the feudal model, and . . . it was by far the most powerful feudal lord, holding, as it did, fully one-third of the soil of the Catholic world. Before profane

feudalism could be successfully attacked in each country . . . its sacred central organisation, had to be destroyed. (*Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, Frederick Engels).

Even within the towns which had bought the right to govern themselves or had extorted a charter from some feudal lord by armed revolt, the old order imposed a multitude of regulations and restrictions which hampered the growth of a new economy, for the whole pattern of medieval thought was riddled with ideas that were alien to capitalist notions of "free" competition and beggar-my-neighbour individualism. There was the conception of a "just wage" to be fixed by statute or regulation, and the belief that no man had the right to profit through his neighbours' loss. Thus, the guild statutes forbade their members to buy up raw materials for their own profit.

If the arrival of fresh fish, hay, wine, wheat or leather was announced, no one might forestall the others and buy cheaply to sell dearly ; all should profit by the natural course of events . . . often the maximum amount which an individual might acquire was strictly laid down. . . . With a view to equalizing matters between masters, the cornering of the supply of labour was forbidden, and not only was it forbidden to tempt away a rival's workmen by the offer of higher wages, but as a rule a man might not keep more apprentices than others . . . Again it was forbidden to monopolize customers, to invite into your own shop the people who had stopped before a neighbour's display of goods, to call in the passers-by, or to send a piece of cloth on approbation to a customer's house. All individual advertisement was looked on as tending to the detriment of others. . . . Equally open to punishment was the merchant who obtained possession of another man's shop by offering the landlord a higher rent. . . . Any bonus offered to a buyer was considered an unlawful and dishonest bait. (*Guilds in the Middle Ages*, Georges Renard).

In short, the guilds tried to reduce, or, if possible, to do away with competition.

What was equally an hindrance to the development of the productive forces, they discouraged innovation.

Invention could not have free play ; it was accused of outraging healthy tradition ; it was considered dangerous to set out to create anything new. In Florence in 1286 a cooper complained of being boycotted by his guild because in making his barrels he bent his staves by means of water. . . . At Paris it was forbidden to mould seals with letters engraved on them. . . . Who knows . . . whether this prohibition did not retard the invention of printing, to which—when a method of making them movable had been discovered—these engraved letters gave birth? (*Guilds in the Middle Ages*, Georges Renard).

Thus, the guild system, which at one time had fostered the growth of petty industry, now became a fetter on further development: "the material productive forces of society . . . came into opposition with the old conditions of production," in the phrase used by Marx in his *Preface to The Critique of Political Economy*.

But the medieval guilds were an essential part of that static, traditional society which the Church sanctified with the tremendous weight of her age-old authority, and their rules often included moral and religious injunctions. To become a member a man had to be respected for his piety and have a good reputation for honesty.

To be received as a master, it was necessary almost everywhere to make a profession of the Catholic faith and to take the oath, in order that heretics such as the Patarini and Albigenses might be kept out. Punishments were inflicted upon blasphemers. . . . It was obligatory to stop work on Sundays and holidays, and to take part with great pomp and banners unfurled in the feasts of the patron saint of the town and of the guild, not to mention a host of other saints of whom a list was given. The statutes often begin by enumerating the alms it was thought necessary to bestow on certain monasteries and works of mercy and instruction which they promised to support out of their funds. (*Guilds in the Middle Ages*, Georges Renard).

The guild system, along with the medieval notions of trade and industry which were associated with it, had to be destroyed before capitalism was free to develop; but for their destruction it was necessary to discredit and sweep away the whole system of ideas for which the Church stood. It is no accident that when the monasteries were dissolved and plundered of their wealth at the Reformation the guilds also were pillaged. In this country a statute passed in the reign of Edward VI confiscated such part of the property of the guilds as was employed in religious purposes, and many guilds were suppressed.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the medieval Church stood for a way of looking at things—for an ideology, to use modern jargon, that was opposed to the whole trend of the new economic order that was struggling to develop. Capitalism, like every other economic system, needs its own code of ethics, its own philosophy, its own set of social values: and that, in the 16th century, meant a new religion. A religion which would not frown upon usury (or the lending of money at interest), or preach (even if the princes of the Church had failed to practise) the virtues of Christian poverty. A religion that would

laud the bourgeois virtues of thrift, sobriety, and hard work, and the making of money to the greater glory of the Lord.

To develop its own characteristic morality capitalism had to break the Catholic Church which claimed to be the sole authority in morals, and which, being rooted in an agrarian civilization, looked askance at the rising middle class who sought wealth and power in trade and industry. It had to insist, therefore, that man needed no infallible Church to interpret the Scriptures, or to mediate between himself and his Maker. To break the all-pervading, conservative power of the Church it had to assert that a man's conscience is sufficient guide in matters of faith and ethics. In brief, it had to carry through the Reformation, and shatter the unity and power of the Medieval Church.

It is not suggested, of course, that the Protestant reformers were conscious hypocrites who advocated a new religious outlook because it suited their economic interest to do so; or even that they were conscious that Protestantism could subserve their class interests. No one who knows with what merciless ferocity the religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries were waged can doubt that the men who hanged, and burned, and tortured one another were in deadly earnest about the doctrinal controversies which divided them.

As little as we judge an individual by what he thinks he is, just as little can we judge such a revolutionary epoch by its own consciousness. (*The Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx).

But Protestantism was a religion eminently suited to the needs of the trading and manufacturing class in their struggle with feudalism, and in general it triumphed wherever they became dominant.

THE GROWTH OF NATIONALISM

On every count Catholicism was incompatible with the new capitalist system. In the first place it was opposed to the rising nationalism which everywhere accompanied the growth of capitalism. Just as the guild system had once fostered the growth of industry, and had then become a fetter on its further development, so the medieval city economy had served at one stage to develop the forces of production, but was now become too narrow and exclusive for their further development. And so the city economy—the production of goods for a very limited local market—had to be replaced by a national economy and (eventually) the world market, since only thus could industry develop.

And that meant the creation of a strong central government in place of a host of petty princelings and feudal lords ; a national government strong enough to suppress the outlaws and the robber-barons who preyed upon the merchants as they moved about the country with their trains of merchandise. One, too, that was able to impose the same language, money, weights and measures over a wide area, and could sweep away the network of local tolls which hindered trade by obstructing the roads and rivers.

But with these economic and political changes there went, inevitably, changes in men's ideas. They began to develop a loyalty wider than to their native village or town: to think of themselves as Englishmen or Frenchmen, as the case might be.

And along with this growth of a strong national sentiment came a weakening of the authority of the universal church. With all its shortcomings and the scandalous abuses which so often discredited it, the Church did give a certain cultural unity to Christendom which transcended local loyalties. As Engels points out in the *Introduction* to his *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*:

The great international centre of feudalism was the Roman Catholic Church. It united the whole of feudalised Western Europe, in spite of all internal wars, into one grand political system opposed as much to the schismatic Greeks as to the Mohammedan countries.

When it became necessary to transcend the political limitations of feudalism so that capitalism might develop, this "sacred central organisation" had also to be shattered.

There was another way in which the attack on the Catholic Church benefited the rising capitalist economy. The Medieval Church was enormously wealthy. Besides owning about one-third of the arable land in Western Europe, it had vast accumulations of precious metals and stones with which the pious and superstitious in every age had sought its help and blessing. The rising capitalist class were hampered by lack of capital, and, plundering the Church helped to solve that problem. Thus the wealth of the Church was confiscated wherever the Reformation triumphed. When the English monasteries were dissolved and their manors and other property confiscated, Henry VIII announced his intention of disposing of these estates "to the honour of God and the wealth of the nation". He had, however, somewhat curious notions of piety and national wellbeing, for he sold or distributed most of these estates among his courtiers

and favourites; and the remainder were sold at derisory prices to speculative farmers and townsmen, who hunted the copyholders off the land, and threw their separate holdings into huge estates. Some historians estimate that one-fifteenth of the land of England changed hands in this manner in the course of a few years: others have put the proportion even higher.

It was the same in Sweden, where Gustavas Vasa took all the property of the Roman Church in 1527; and in Denmark, where Christian III confiscated Church property in 1536.

Church property was attacked partly to destroy the Church's power of resistance, but chiefly to transfer land and capital from people who were wasting it into the hands of the middle class who were crying out for capital to sink in remunerative ventures like mines and works. (*An Outline of Man's History*, Patrick Gordon Walker).

The Reformation also helped in the more intensive exploitation of labour (which the new capitalist economy required), by abolishing many of the Saints' Days which had been holidays in the Middle Ages.

"Pilgrimages, saints' days and monasteries," says Luther, "are an excuse for idleness and must be suppressed. Vagrants must be either banished or compelled to labour."

The same viewpoint is expressed in a treatise entitled *Policies to Reduce this Realme of Englande to a Prosperous Wealth and Estate*, written in 1549 by an anonymous author, who demands that the common people must be set to work so that England can export twice as many goods as heretofore. It can be done, the writer argues, considering that in the past

a great nombre of Monkes, Channons, Friars, and Chantrye priestes with their servants were mayntayned in Idleness; when the Abbeyes dyd stande; and the realme did also bestow them in idleness and idell workes in goeing of pilgrimagis, keeping of Idell holly days: carvings, painting and gilding of images, and yet the artificers and laborers in those days did all the worke . . . for the tilling and manuring and for the victualling and clothing all the people in the holl realme.

The anonymous author wants these superfluous holidays abolished, "for there is yet standing beside the Sundays thirty-five holidays, whereof twenty-five may be well put downe". (Quoted by M. Beer in his *Early British Economics*.)

THE CHURCH AND USURY

But perhaps the greatest service which the Reformation rendered to capitalism was that it ended the medieval notion

that usury and money-making is un-Christian, and that the possession of property is a hindrance to salvation. The Church had taught that

to take usury is contrary to Scripture ; it is contrary to Aristotle ; it is contrary to nature, for it is to live without labour ; it is to sell time, which belongs to God, for the advantage of wicked men ; it is to rob those who use the money lent, and to whom, since they make it profitable, the profits should belong. (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, R. H. Tawney).

"Some of the Fathers," writes M. Beer (*Early British Economics*), "looked upon commerce as sinful, or as easily conducive to sin and therefore disreputable. Many disputations were argued out on this head, in which the English schoolmen, Alexander of Hales, Ricardus de Media Villa, Duns Scotus, and Ockham took a prominent part. Even as late as in the year 1078 a Roman Council, presided over by Gregory VII, promulgated Canons, the fifth of which declared that whereas soldiers and merchants could not carry on their trade without sin, there was no salvation for them unless they turned to other occupations."

Usury was prohibited in Anglo-Saxon times, King Alfred basing this prohibition upon the Bible (*Exod. xxii, 25: If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury*); and the laws of Edward the Confessor declared that no usurer should be permitted to live in England. In Stephen's reign, John of Salisbury could declare that "the love of wealth and possessions is even worse than Epicureanism, since the passion it excites is the more violent. Property chains men to worldly things".

Trade was severely condemned by the Roman Synod of 1078, which was attended by Roman and Gallican bishops, and presided over by Gregory VII. Among the resolutions (or canons) which were adopted, the fifth stated that the business of the soldier and of the merchant could not be carried on without sin, and that no expiation was possible short of giving up these occupations.

In the 11th and 13th centuries Councils of the Church forbid usury to be taken by the clergy or the laity, and

lay down rules for dealing with offenders. Clergy who lend money to persons in need, take their possessions in pawn, and receive profits beyond the capital sum lent, are to be deprived of their office. Manifest usurers are not to be admitted to communion or Christian burial ; their offerings are not to be accepted ; and ecclesiastics who fail to punish them are to be suspended until they make satisfaction to their bishop. The high-water mark of the ecclesiastical attack on usury was probably reached in the legislation of the Councils of Lyons (1274) and of Vienne (1312).

The former re-enacted the measures laid down by the third Lateran Council (1175), and supplemented them by rules which virtually make the money-lender an outlaw. No individual or society, under pain of excommunication or interdict, was to let houses to usurers, but was to expel them (had they been admitted) within three months. They were to be refused confession, absolution, and Christian burial, until they had made restitution, and their wills were to be invalid. The legislation of the Council of Vienne was even more sweeping. Declaring that it had learned with dismay that there are communities which, contrary to human and divine law, sanction usury and compel debtors to observe usurious contracts, it declares that all rulers and magistrates knowingly maintaining such laws are to incur excommunication, and requires the legislation in question to be revoked within three months. . . . Any person obstinately declaring that usury is not a sin is to be punished as a heretic, and inquisitors are to proceed against him. (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, R. H. Tawney).

As time went on the medieval schoolmen distinguished between lawful trading and usury. Thus, Alexander of Hales (d. 1245) declared that usury is prohibited by divine and moral laws, but that if the debtor is unable to repay the loan on the date agreed upon then the creditor is rightfully entitled to be indemnified for the delay, and that such indemnification is not usury. Ricardus de Media Villa, or Richard Middleton (1249-1307) says that

a trade agreement and a loan agreement differ essentially from one another. In trade both parties expect gain, in a loan the intention of gain is prohibited, for the Gospel admonishes the lender to the loan without hope of gain. (*Luke vi*). It is not the money but the man who produces the increase through his labour and industry, and . . . the increase belongs rightfully to him and not to the lender.

However, like Alexander of Hales, Ricardus de Media Villa permits a fine to be paid by the debtor for not fulfilling the provisions of the agreement, and allows the creditor to be indemnified for the loss entailed in lending money which he might have employed for his own purpose.

One of the greatest of the English schoolmen, Duns Scotus (1265-1308), permits trade and commerce so long as they are carried on with a proper regard for the welfare of all. But trade must be carried on without fraud, and at prices freely and justly agreed upon by buyer and seller. Merchants who neither work up, nor transport, nor store goods for regular trade, but who forestall, regrade and engross them in order to make supplies scarce, and thus to raise prices, are to be condemned. Duns

Scotus refers to the Old Testament prohibition of usury, as well as to Luke vi. (*"And if ye lend them of whom ye hope to receive, what thanks have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great"*). He argues that a loan is essentially a work of Christian charity to a fellow-man in need, and no material gain should be expected from it. But though every additional payment over the principal is usury, there are a few cases in which such additional payment is lawful, *viz.* a fine for non-payment of the loan on maturity, and indemnification for any loss caused to the creditor owing to delay in repayment, or in the case of risk of losing the principal.

Gratian was another authority who distinguished between lawful and unlawful trading.

"Whosoever," he said, "buys a thing, not that he may sell it whole unchanged, but that it may be a material for fashioning something, he is no merchant. But the man who buys it in order that he may gain by selling it again unchanged and as he bought it, that man is of the buyers and sellers who are cast forth from God's temple."

Sufficient has been quoted, perhaps, to show the gulf which exists between the ideas which the Medieval Church held regarding trade and money-making, and those which capitalist ethics take for granted. And it must be remembered that in the Age of Faith the Church was able to impose its ideas upon secular governments. Florence was the financial centre of medieval Europe, yet even there the secular authorities fined bankers for usury in the middle of the 14th century, and later, first prohibited credit transactions altogether, then imported Jews to conduct a business forbidden to Christians.

More than that, the Church permeated the whole of Christendom with this hatred and contempt for usury, as is shown by

innumerable fables of the usurer who was prematurely carried to hell, or whose money turned to withered leaves in his strong box, or who (as the scrupulous recorder remarks) 'about the year 1240', on entering a church to be married, was crushed by a stone falling from the porch, which proved by the grace of God to be a carving of another usurer and his money-bags being carried off by the devil. (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, R. H. Tawney).

Indeed, the medieval usurer (like the modern profiteer) was so unpopular in the Middle Ages

that most unpopular characters could be called usurers, and by the average practical man almost any form of bargain which he thought oppressive would be classed as usurious . . . Not only the

taking of interest for a loan, but the raising of prices by a monopolist, the beating down of prices by a keen bargainer, the rack-renting of land by a landlord, the sub-letting of land by a tenant at a rent higher than he himself paid, the cutting of wages and the paying of wages in truck, the refusal of discount to a tardy debtor, the insistence on unreasonably good security for a loan, the excessive profits of a middleman—all these had been denounced as usury in the very practical thirteenth-century manual of St. Raymond. (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, R. H. Tawney).

The Medieval Church, then, barely tolerated commerce, condemned the taking of undue profits by the cornering of supplies and similar expedients which are the commonplace of capitalist ethics, and, above, all, denounced the taking of interest on loans. True, as Mr. Tawney says:

the Church could not dispense with commercial wickedness in high places. It was too convenient. . . . No reasonable judgment of the medieval denunciation of usury is possible, unless it is remembered that whole ranges of financial business escaped from it altogether. It was rarely applied to the large-scale transactions of kings, feudal magnates, bishops and abbots. . . . Popes regularly employed the international banking-houses of the day, with a singular indifference, as was frequently complained, to the morality of their business methods, took them under their special protection, and sometimes enforced the payment of debts by the threat of excommunication. As a rule, in spite of some qualms the international money-market escaped the ban of usury; in the fourteenth century Italy was full of banking-houses doing foreign exchange business in every commercial centre from Constantinople to London, and in the great fairs, such as those of Champagne, a special period was regularly set aside for the negotiation of loans and the settlement of debts. It was not that transactions of this type were expressly excepted; on the contrary, each of them from time to time evoked the protests of moralists. Nor was it mere hypocrisy which caused the traditional doctrine to be repeated by writers who were perfectly aware that neither commerce nor government could be carried on without credit. It was that the whole body of intellectual assumptions and practical interests, on which the prohibition of usury was based, had reference to a quite different order of economic activities from that represented by loans from great banking-houses to the merchants and potentates who were their clients. Its object was simple and direct—to prevent the well-to-do money-lender from exploiting the necessities of the peasant or the craftsman.

The prohibition of usury by the Church was part of the morality of an agrarian society, and for capitalism to develop it became more and more necessary to compromise this old morality. But that could not be done without discrediting and finally overthrowing the whole elaborate theological system on

which medieval morality rested. In other words, the economic needs of the new order demanded a new religious and ethical outlook such as could be achieved only by disrupting the Catholic Church, and carrying through a radical reformation.

LUTHER AND CALVIN

We have already noted that capitalism called into being the modern nation-state, with a strong central government, which in this country, for instance, resulted in the Tudor absolutism. Lutheranism was admirably suited to the needs of absolute monarchy.

"The Lutheran Reformation", says Engels, "produced a new creed indeed, a religion adapted to absolute monarchy. No sooner were the peasants of north-east Germany converted to Lutheranism than they were from freemen reduced to serfs.

(Socialism, Utopian and Scientific.)

That is no exaggeration. When the peasants revolted, and Luther had to choose between them and the princes he did not hesitate. "Better the death of all the peasants than of the princes," he said; and urged the nobles to annihilate the rebels, saying:

He who slays a rioter . . . does what is right. . . Therefore whoever can should smite, strangle or stab, secretly or publicly . . . If you are killed in this struggle, you are indeed to be felicitated, as no nobler death could befall anyone.

Luther strengthened the princes of Germany (even the Catholic ones) by his fierce denunciation of revolution.

Luther

created a model religion for the early despotic monarch; and during his lifetime a type of national religion was established in those countries neighbouring Germany where similar conditions prevailed . . . The countries where this happened were England, Denmark and Sweden . . . in all three a national religion similar to Lutheranism was used to help the growth into nationhood.

(The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, P. C. Gordon Walker.)

But it was in Calvinism that the new middle class found the religion best suited to their class interests when they were waging a revolutionary struggle for power.

God, Calvin taught, not only foresaw the fall of the first man, but chose as his Elect certain individuals predestined to salvation from eternity by "his gratuitous mercy, totally irrespective of human merit". None others could be saved by any means whatsoever.

One might have imagined that such a doctrine would have bred a licentious abandon and disregard for all morality, but it

had precisely the opposite effect. Above all things the Calvinist wanted to have the assurance that he was numbered among the Elect, and so he tried to live as he supposed a man chosen by God would do. The good life was not a *means* to salvation, but a *sign* of salvation. If a Catholic committed a sin he might still hope for forgiveness; but for the Calvinist there was no forgiveness: the commission of a sin was a sign that he was damned, and nothing, no repentance, no church, not even Almighty God himself, could alter that dread fact. And thus it was that Calvinism laid a much stricter insistence upon morality than the Catholic Church had ever done.

In this way Calvinism sanctified just those qualities and virtues—frugality, sobriety, thrift, and diligence in business—which the new commercial civilization needed if it was to accumulate the capital necessary for its development. It looked with a jaundiced eye on the vanities and fripperies of this world, and taught the worthiness of hard work. The Calvinist with his industrious habits could not help making money, but he had nothing to spend it on save the necessities of a sober life, for all pleasures and luxuries were banned to him. And so the profits which he made went back into his business.

The Roman Church, it was held, through the example of its rulers, had encouraged luxury and ostentation: the members of the Reformed Church must be economical and modest. It had sanctioned the spurious charity of indiscriminate almsgiving: the true Christian must repress mendicancy and insist upon the virtues of industry and thrift. . . . Such teaching, whatever its theological merits or defects, was admirably designed to liberate economic energies, and to weld into a disciplined social force the rising bourgeoisie, conscious of the contrast between its own standards and those of a laxer world, proud of its vocation as the standard-bearer of the economic virtues, and determined to vindicate an open road for its own way of life by the use of every weapon, including political revolution and war, because the issue which was at stake was not merely convenience or self-interest but the will of God.

(*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, R. H. Tawney).

The Calvinist devoted himself to business because (with most other activities barred to him as sinful) that was the best way of occupying his time, and escaping the temptations of the flesh. "To the Puritan", writes R. H. Tawney, "mundane toil becomes itself a kind of sacrament".

In 1525, when he drafted a plan for the reorganisation of poor relief at Zurich, Zwingli wrote that "Labour is a thing so good

and godlike". One hears there the authentic note of capitalist morality. Calvin, too, quoted with approval the words of St. Paul: "If a man will not work neither shall he eat", and urged that the ecclesiastical authorities should regularly visit every family to ascertain whether its members were idle or drunken.

Calvin glorified business as an end in itself demanding the devotion of every moment's leisure; for the worst that could befall a Calvinist was to find that he was not one of the elect; the only way he could make sure was never to slack off for a moment in doing those things that were the marks of one of the elect. . . . A single sin was a sign that he was damned eternally. For fear of finding he was not one of the elect, the Calvinist had to devote himself incessantly to his duty . . . But what, in terms of daily life, was this duty that a Calvinist had to observe so desperately? In the end it turns out to be nothing less than steady application to business; for Calvinism ruthlessly strips away all other occupations of life. Art, music, all luxury and distraction are artificial props just as ungodly as the sacraments of the Catholic Church. The Calvinist was left with nothing to do in his supreme task of proving to himself that he was one of the elect but to devote himself to his trade, which became the noblest occupation of all, indeed the only occupation for a man of God.

(*The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, P. C. Gordon Walker.)

Moreover, just as labour became "a thing so good and godlike", so too did the acquisition of capital.

"He who has enough to satisfy his wants", wrote a schoolman of the fourteenth century, "and nevertheless ceaselessly labours to acquire riches, either in order to obtain a higher social position or that subsequently he may have enough to live without labour, or that his sons may become men of wealth and importance—all such are incited by a damnable avarice, sensuality or pride".

Baxter, the 17th-century Puritan, could write the exact opposite:

If God shows you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way (without wrong to your soul or to any other), if you refuse this and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your Calling, and you refuse to be God's steward.

CALVINISM AND THE ANABAPTISTS

Calvinism rendered another great service to the rising capitalist class: it helped to lay the spectre of Anabaptism. Anabaptism was not an organised religion, but rather the closely related beliefs of a number of small sects who were united only in the belief that man's conscience (or the Inner Light, as they termed it) should be the sole guide to his actions. They were called Anabaptists because they denied the validity of infant baptism,

arguing that a Christian should not be baptised until he was old enough to choose his own church. By putting forward this claim the Anabaptists struck at all organised churches, whether Protestant or Roman, and

this, in the sixteenth century was to attack the very organisation of society, for . . . an organised Church was indispensable to society.

(*The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, P. C. Gordon Walker.)

This religion spread wherever the new proletariat was numerous. It had its adherents in urban Switzerland, in south-west Germany, in the towns of south-east England (the old stronghold of Lollardy), and above all in the Netherlands, where the new propertyless working class which capitalism was calling into being was at one and the same time the most miserable and most developed. There, in 1533, Anabaptism broke into open revolt, and for a while won and held political power.

Calvinism was admirably suited to help the capitalist in his struggle with the Anabaptists and to discipline the new proletariat. Its classification of souls into a minority of Elect and a majority of Damned corresponded with the economic division into a few employers and a mass of workers.

In a theological system which insisted that mankind had already been divided into classes by the arbitrary decree of the Lord, the middle classes found their sanction for a class division that economic development was crystallizing. . . . God, they reasoned, who has already chosen those who are to enjoy the blessing of Heaven, is unlikely to frown on His Chosen while they still tread the earth. And how else could He smile on the elect but by conferring on them the good things of life? A class consciousness bred of material success was purified by the cleansing waters of theological doctrine to become a conviction of innate superiority. The poverty of the unfortunate became an indication of their moral failure. For if riches were proof of election, poverty was the yellow badge of damnation decreed by God and beyond any human power to revoke. . . . Poverty and suffering, once an eloquent reproach to the luxury of the wealthy and a powerful prick to their conscience, became merely confirmation of their own righteousness. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, David W. Petegorsky, pp. 23-24.)

"The rich artificiall theeves doe rob the poore and that under a fained show of justice and seeming holiness," wrote a seventeenth-century pamphleteer. "And when they have done it most impiously they say and affirm that God's providence hath made them rich and those they have robbed poore; for they say that God's providence maketh rich and pore." (*Tyrannopocrit discovered with all his wiles wherewith he vanquisheth*. 1649).

Calvinism taught that not only was it the duty of the Elect to discipline themselves, but also that it was their obligation to see that even the Damned honoured God's will. And so, wherever the Calvinist secured power his conscience drove him to use the full force of government to compel the common people (the Unelect) to the same self-denial and sobriety of behaviour that he (as one of the Elect) practised. In puritan England, as Macaulay tells us,

The theatres were closed. The players were flogged. The press was put under the guardianship of austere licensers.

It was the same in Geneva, Scotland, Amsterdam: wherever the Calvinists controlled the government a merciless law was set into action against adultery, gambling, drinking, and all such irregularities.

The discipline of the masses no less than the self-discipline of the merchant was the key-note of Calvinism. (*The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, P. C. Gordon Walker).

Not only did Calvin provide the rising capitalist class with precisely the kind of ideology they needed: he also gave them an organisation for carrying his ideas into effect. His followers were organised into compact, disciplined groups or congregations, each with its minister and elected elders; and these congregations maintained close association one with another, and met from time to time in national synods which put a nation-wide organisation at their disposal. In England these congregations were called presbyteries, which gave the name Presbyterians* to the English Calvinists. The Government was so alarmed by the strength of these organisations that Queen Elizabeth persecuted the Presbyterians more sternly than the Catholics, and admitted Calvinist doctrines into her compromised Anglican religion. In France the Huguenots could raise an army more quickly than the Government itself; and in Scotland and the Netherlands the synods were richer than the Government.

Calvinism was in every respect a creed admirably suited to the revolutionary bourgeoisie: by its grim doctrine of predestination and the Elect of God it gave them just the self-confidence as a class which they needed in their struggles with the feudal aristocracy and the monarchy. Within the shadow of this gloomy creed royal blood or noble lineage dwindled to

*The elders (or presbyters) were laymen appointed to watch over the morals of their fellows, and are so conspicuous in Calvin's plans of organisation that they have given their name to the Presbyterian Church.

small account: king or noble might be destined to eternal damnation, whilst the humble merchant or yeoman was of God's elect company. Calvinism gave to the rising middle class a fanatical sense of their own worthiness with which they were able to confront the haughty self-confidence of the born aristocrat. It gave them the certain assurance of ultimate victory; the sense of being an instrument in the hands of Destiny to humble

"The haughty and the strong, who sate in the high places,
and slew the saints of God."

Historical analogies can easily be misleading and dangerous; nevertheless one can agree with Mr. Tawney when he says that

It is not wholly fanciful to say that, on a narrower stage but with not less formidable weapons, Calvin did for the bourgeoisie of the sixteenth century what Marx did for the proletariat of the nineteenth, or that the doctrine of predestination satisfied the same hunger for an assurance that the forces of the universe are on the side of the elect as was to be assuaged in a different age by the theory of historical materialism. . . . Like the modern proletarian, who feels that, whatever his personal misery and his present disappointments, the Cause is rolled forward to victory by the irresistible forces of an inevitable evolution, the Puritan bourgeoisie knew that against the chosen people the gates of hell could not prevail. The Lord prospered their doings. (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*).

CHAPTER 6

THE PEASANT WAR IN GERMANY

There should be no serfs because Christ has freed us all! What is that we hear? . . . A worldly realm cannot stand where there is no inequality; some must be free, others bond; some rulers, others subject.

Martin Luther on the "Twelve Articles", May 1525.

HANS THE PIPER

About fifty years after the collapse of the Hussite movement a number of revolutionary conspiracies occurred among the German peasantry, all of which took to some extent a religious form.

The first of these risings took place in 1476, in the bishopric of Würzburg, a country impoverished (we are told) "by bad government, manifold taxes, payments, feuds, enmity, war, fires, murder, prison, and the like". A young shepherd and musician, Hans Böheim of Niklashausen, known as Hans the Piper, or Hans the Drum-Beater, appeared in Taubergrund, and declared that the Virgin had appeared to him in a vision, and that she had commanded him to burn his drum and to summon the people to penance. Everybody (he preached) must purge themselves of sin and the vain lusts of the world, forsake all adornments, and undertake a pilgrimage to the Madonna of Niklashausen to seek forgiveness for their sins.

Hans the Piper's call to repentance evoked a wide response, and masses of people joined in pilgrimages to Niklashausen. As his influence extended the young piper expounded a more and more revolutionary doctrine. The Madonna of Niklashausen, he said, had announced to him that henceforth there should be neither king nor princes, nor pope nor any other lay or ecclesiastical authority. All men should be brothers and earn their bread by the toil of their hands, and none should possess more than his neighbour. All taxes, ground rents, serf duties, and tolls must be abolished, and forests, meadows and waters made free to all.

Needless to say, such a gospel was enthusiastically received by the peasantry, and "the message of our Mother" spread far and wide. Hosts of pilgrims came from Bavaria, Suabia and the Rhine. Soon it was reputed that the Piper could perform miracles, and people fell on their knees before him and prayed to him as

to a saint. Others fought, we are told, for small strips from his cap as for amulets or holy relics. The priests denounced his visions as devilish delusions, and his miracles as hellish swindles; but the number of his believers continued to increase, and the Sunday sermons of the young revolutionary attracted gatherings which are said to have numbered 40,000 and more.

Hans the Piper continued to preach for several months. Meanwhile he was in secret communication with the priest of Niklashausen and with two knights, Kunz of Thunfeld and his son Michael, who accepted his teaching, and were to be the military leaders of the insurrection which he planned.

Finally, on the Sunday before St. Kilian's Day, Hans gave the signal to his followers. At the close of his sermon he said;

And now go home, and weigh in your mind what our Holiest Madonna has announced to you, and on the coming Saturday leave your wives and children and old men at home, but you, you men, come back here to Niklashausen on the day of St. Margaret, which is next Saturday, and bring with you your brothers and friends, as many as they may be. Do not come with pilgrims' staves, but covered with weapons and ammunition, in one hand a candle, in the other a sword and a pike or halberd, and the Holy Virgin will then announce to you what she wishes you to do.

However, before the day appointed for the rebellion the Bishop of Würzburg seized the Piper and carried him off to his castle. 34,000 peasants appeared on the day appointed by Hans, but the majority were disheartened and returned home when they heard of his arrest. Some 16,000 remained, and threatened the castle under the leadership of Kunz of Thunfeld and his son: but the bishop persuaded them to go home by means of ample promises. No sooner did they disperse, however, than he sent his men-at-arms to attack them. Hans the Piper was burned alive, and Kunz of Thunfeld fled, and only made his peace with the bishop by forfeiting all his estates.

THE UNION SHOE

For some years after the death of Hans the Piper the German peasants seem to have made no further attempt to improve their lot by revolutionary action; but towards the turn of the century their conspiracies began afresh, one of the causes of their renewed unrest being the rise in the prices of commodities.

By 1493 there was a secret union in Alsace of peasants and poor townworkers, together with a sprinkling of the middle-class,

and even some support, or at least sympathy, from the lower nobility. The conspirators demanded, among other things, the plundering and extermination of the Jews, the introduction of a jubilee year to cancel all debts, the reduction of priests' incomes to a prebend of fifty or sixty guilders, the abolition of auricular confession, the right to ratify taxation, and the abolition of the ecclesiastical and imperial courts and the establishment in the communities of courts elected by themselves.

The conspirators planned to seize the town of Schlettstadt, and to use that as a base from which to rouse the whole of Alsace. They marched under the banner of the *Bundschuh*, or peasant's clog bound with thongs up to the calf (in contra-distinction to the riding-boot or the open shoe of the richer classes) and this symbol of poverty was used in a whole series of peasant risings during the next two decades.

The Union Shoe conspirators held their meetings at night on the lonely Hungerberg, and initiation into membership appears to have been accompanied by mysterious ceremonies and dread threats of punishment against those who turned traitor. (One is reminded of the similar initiation rites of the early trade union movement in this country). However, in spite of these precautions, the authorities got wind of the conspiracy about Easter Week, 1493, which was the time appointed for the rising. Some of the ringleaders were seized and tortured before being executed, and others were crippled by the chopping off of their hands or fingers.

Many, however, escaped into Switzerland, and the Union Shoe maintained a secret organisation. Missionaries spread its ideas through Switzerland and South Germany, where they found the same oppression of the peasantry and the same inclination to revolt.

The greatest admiration (says Engels) is due to the tenacity and endurance with which the peasants of upper Germany conspired for thirty years after 1493, with which they overcame the obstacles to a more centralized organisation in spite of the fact that they were scattered over the countryside, and with which, after numberless dispersions, defeats, executions of leaders, they renewed their conspiracies over and over again, until an opportunity came for a mass upheaval. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, pp. 78-79).

In 1502 there was a secret movement among the peasants in the bishopric of Speyer. About 7,000 men joined the Union Shoe organisation, whose articles included the following:

No ground rent, tithe, tax or toll to be paid to the princes, the nobility or the clergy; serfdom to be abolished; monasteries and other church estates to be confiscated and divided among the people, and no other authority to be recognised apart from the emperor.

These two demands (confiscation of the Church estates in favour of the people, and a unified Germany) figure regularly in the reforms demanded by the more advanced sections of the German peasants and workers until Thomas Münzer carried them a stage further by demanding not the division of Church property among the peasantry but its conversion into common property, and a unified republic in place of a unified German monarchy.

As in the case of the earlier conspiracy, the new Union Shoe movement had its secret meeting place, its initiation ceremony and oath of silence, and its *Bundschuh* banner, with the legend *Nothing but God's Justice*. The course which the conspiracy ran was also very similar. There was a plan to seize the town of Burchsal, where most of the population was sympathetic to the Union, after which a Union army was to be organised and sent to rouse the peasants in the neighbouring principalities.

But once again the conspiracy was betrayed (this time by a priest to whom one of the Union Shoe supporters revealed it in the confessional) and the authorities broke the movement by mass arrests. How widespread the conspiracy had become is evidenced by the terror which seized the governments of the various imperial estates in Alsace and the Union of Suabia; but though here and there peasant armies assembled and offered armed resistance they were speedily overcome by trained troops. Some of the conspirators were executed: others fled into neighbouring countries.

JOSS FRITZ

Another period of apparent pacification followed, although actually the movement continued in secret. During this period Joss Fritz of Untergrombach played a great part in building up the Union. He was (like Wat Tyler) an old soldier, and a fugitive from the 1502 conspiracy, and he showed a remarkable knack in involving the most divergent elements in the Union. "Knights, priests, burghers, plebeians and peasants . . . all serviceable elements were utilized with the greatest circumspection and skill". (*The Peasant War in Germany*, F. Engels, p. 82). Besides the regular emissaries of the Union who travelled the country in various disguises, Joss Fritz made extensive use of the beggars and

vagrants, who abounded in such numbers in the first half of the 16th century in Germany, and the "beggar kings" were bribed with 2,000 guilders to take part in the rising with a force of 2,000 men.

Joss Fritz and his chief lieutenant, Stoffel of Freiburg, continually travelled the country, reviewing the rebel armies by night, and the investigations which took place after the suppression of the movement show that it had wide support in the Upper Rhine and Black Forest regions. Most of its adherents were peasants and poor journeymen, but there were in addition a number of innkeepers and unemployed Lansquenets (German mercenaries), and even a few priests and nobles.

The aims of the Union were set forth in Fourteen Articles. There were to be no masters save the emperor (or, according to some accounts, the pope); and the Rottweil imperial court was to be abolished. All interest which had been paid so long that it equalled the capital was to be ended, and 5 per cent. interest on loans was to be the highest permitted. The peasants were to have freedom of hunting, fishing, grazing and wood cutting. Priests were to be limited to one prebend each, and all church estates and monastery gems were to be confiscated in favour of the Union. All inequitable taxes and tolls were to be abolished. There was to be eternal peace within Christendom, but energetic action against all the enemies of the Union.

The conspirators planned to seize the city of Freiburg, to serve as a centre for the Union; and thereafter to open negotiations with the Emperor, or with Switzerland should the Emperor refuse to come to terms with them.

The insurrection was planned to begin in the autumn of 1513, and Joss Fritz went to Heilbrunn to have a Union banner painted. This included, besides various emblems and pictures, the Union Shoe and the words *God help thy divine justice*.

Unfortunately, during Joss Fritz's absence a premature and unsuccessful attempt was made to seize Freiburg, and a number of Union members were arrested, put to the torture, and executed. Once more the movement collapsed.

POOR KONRAD

Simultaneously with the Union Shoe movement in Baden, and seemingly in direct connection with it, another conspiracy occurred in Württemberg. It originated in 1503, and when the name Union Shoe became too dangerous after the Untergrombach

conspirators were discovered, it adopted the name of *Poor Konrad*. To the discontent caused by the famine years was added the new grievances resulting from newly imposed taxes on wine, meat and bread, together with a capital tax of one penny yearly for every guilder.

As was common with most of these conspiracies, the insurrectionists planned to seize a strong city as a base for their movement. In this case it was Schorndorf. The rebellion broke out in the spring of 1514, when 3,000 (some accounts say 5,000) peasants appeared before the city.

Duke Ulrich contrived to pacify them by promising to abolish the new taxes and to convene a Diet to examine grievances; but the leaders of Poor Konrad were convinced that he was only seeking to gain time while he collected sufficient troops to impose his will by force. They issued a summons to a Union Congress, which was held in Unterürkheim on May 20th, and was attended by representatives from all parts of Württemberg. The Duke was compelled to yield; but even whilst he was calling the promised Diet for June 25th, he was corresponding with the neighbouring princes and free cities, asking for their aid to suppress an uprising which (he said) threatened all princes, nobles and authorities in the empire.

The Diet, which represented the cities and was also attended by delegates from the peasantry, decided to punish the three most hated councillors of the Duke, and to confiscate the property and endowments of the monasteries in favour of the State treasury.

But before these decisions could be operated Duke Ulrich (having gathered troops and been promised military aid by the Elector Palatine and others) felt himself strong enough to strike. On June 21st he appeared in Tübingen with sufficient forces to terrorize the burghers, who deserted their allies the peasants. The Poor Konrad movement collapsed, and offered resistance only in the valley of Rems, where a peasant camp was formed on the mountain of Koppel. The Duke attacked and defeated this peasant army, 1,600 of whom were taken prisoners. Sixteen of them were decapitated, and the rest sentenced to pay heavy fines. Many languished in prison, and a number of penal laws were passed to prevent a rebirth of the organisation, whilst the nobility of Suabia formed a union to suppress all future attempts of an insurrection.

Despite all these setbacks the Union Shoe movement persisted, and developed great activity in 1517 in the Black Forest. Joss

Fritz traversed that district, carrying with him the Union Shoe banner of 1513; but once more the movement was discovered by the authorities, and many of its leaders were seized and executed. Others fled, among them being Joss Fritz, who seems to have died soon afterwards in Switzerland.

CLASS FORCES IN GERMANY

The various Union Shoe conspiracies which occurred in Germany were a prelude to the Great Peasant War of 1525. This took place in two main areas: in the Tyrol and Austria, where it lasted until 1526, and in south-west Germany, where Thomas Münzer's influence was strong, and where communism was preached and sometimes put into practice. Here the rising was suppressed within the year.

The great revolt took place at a time when capitalism was beginning to supplant the medieval economy, and a developing industry in the towns was no longer producing for a local market but for ever more remote markets. The middle class of the cities (who represented the rising capitalist economy) chafed at the limitations of the feudal system, and united in a vague national movement with the lower orders against feudalism.

The old feudal empire was falling to pieces, and the great feudal vassals were becoming practically independent princes who levied taxes, maintained standing armies, and made war of their own accord. With the development of their sovereignty, and a growing taste for luxury came mounting costs of administration. Taxes were oppressive, and (the cities being protected for the most part by privileges) the main weight of this taxation fell upon the peasants.

It was the peasant who carried the burden of all the other strata of society: princes, officialdom, nobility, clergy, patricians and middle-class. Whether the peasant was the subject of a prince, an imperial baron, a bishop, a monastery or a city, he was everywhere treated as a 'beast of burden, and worse. If he was a serf, he was entirely at the mercy of his master. If he was a bondsman, the legal deliveries stipulated by agreement were sufficient to crush him; even they were being daily increased. Most of his time, he had to work on his master's estate. Out of that which he earned in his few free hours, he had to pay tithes, dues, ground rents, war taxes, land taxes, imperial taxes, and other payments. He could neither marry nor die without paying the master. Aside from his regular work for the master, he had to gather litter, pick strawberries, collect snail-shells, drive the game for the hunting, chop wood, and so on. The peasant saw his

crop destroyed by the wild game. The community meadows and woods of the peasants had almost everywhere been forcibly taken away by the masters. And in the same manner as the master reigned over the peasant's property, he extended his wilfulness over his person, his wife and daughters. He possessed the right of the first night. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, F. Engels, pp. 47-48).

Meanwhile the clergy was more and more ceasing to perform any real social function.

The invention of the art of printing, and the requirements of extended commerce robbed the clergy not only of its monopoly of reading and writing, but also of that of higher education... The newly arising class of jurists drove the clergy out of a series of influential positions. The clergy was also beginning to become largely superfluous, and it acknowledged this fact by growing lazier and more ignorant. The more superfluous it became, the more it grew in numbers, thanks to the enormous riches which it still kept on augmenting by fair means or foul. . . . They (the high Church dignitaries) . . . not only exploited their subjects as recklessly as the knighthood and the princes, but they practised this in an even more shameful manner. They used not only brutal force, but all the intrigues of religion as well; not only the horrors of the rack, but also the horror of excommunication, or refusal of absolution; they used all the intricacies of the confessional in order to extract from their subjects the last penny, or to increase the estates of the church. Forging of documents was a widespread and beloved means of extortion in the hands of these worthy men. . . . The manufacture of miracle-producing saints' effigies and relics, the organisation of praying-centres endowed with the power of salvation, the trade in indulgences was resorted to in order to squeeze more payments out of the people. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, pp. 40-41).

It was no wonder, then, that the Church dignitaries became an object of hatred not only to the peasantry, but even to the nobility who envied them their many fat livings.

The clergy were, however, divided into two distinct groups. The higher hierarchy—archbishops, bishops, abbots and priors—formed an aristocracy. They were either imperial princes themselves, or ruled as vassals over large areas with numerous serfs and bondsmen. Besides this wealthy hierarchy there were the rural and urban clergy who enjoyed none of the riches of the Church. They received modest prebends, and being of peasant or middle class origin they were nearer the life of the masses and sympathised largely with their aspirations, in much the same way as Wiclif's Poor Priests had sympathised with the English peasantry of their day.

While the participation of the monks in the movements of their time was the exception, that of the plebeian clergy was the rule. They gave the movement its theorists and ideologists, and many of them, representatives of the plebeians and peasants, died on the scaffold. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, Engels, p. 42.)

LUTHER AND THE PEASANTS

Martin Luther, with his vague declaration of human liberty and German brotherhood, found adherents both among the peasantry and the middle class; though this uneasy unity quickly vanished when the peasants took violent measures to carry into effect what they held to be the implications of Luther's teachings.

The Edict of Worms (1521) had denounced Luther as an opponent of law and a breeder of sedition, and there had been some justification for this view since the early Luther had not hesitated to preach the revolutionary use of violence.

"If the raging madness (of the Roman Church) were to continue," he wrote, "it seems to me no better counsel and remedy could be found against it than that kings and princes apply force, arm themselves, attack those evil people who have poisoned the entire world, and once for all make an end to this game, with arms, not with words. If thieves are being punished with swords, murderers with ropes, and heretics with fire, why do we not seize, with arms in hands, all those evil teachers of perdition, those popes, bishops, cardinals, and the entire crew of Roman Sodom? Why do we not wash our hands in their blood?"

It was a different thing, however, when the peasants acted on this advice, and began burning castles. Luther denounced them in unbridled language.

Dear Gentlemen, (he cried) hearken here, save there, stab, knock, strangle them at will, and if thou diest, thou art blessed; no better death canst thou ever attain.

It is true that at first he attacked the governments as well, declaring that the revolts had been provoked by oppression; also he advised both parties to come to a peaceful understanding.

I have told you, (he wrote) that you are both wrong and are fighting for the wrong. You nobles are not fighting against Christians, for Christians would not oppose you, but would suffer all. You are fighting against robbers and blasphemers of Christ's name; those that die among them shall be eternally damned. But neither are the peasants fighting Christians, but tyrants, enemies of God, and persecutors of men, murderers of the Holy Ghost. Those of them that die shall also be eternally damned.

But when he had to choose between prince and peasant, between defence of the established social order and social revolution, he never hesitated. The whole weight of his authority was flung into the scale against the peasantry. "The only way to make Herr Omnes (i.e. Mr. Everyman, his nickname for the peasants) do what he ought is to constrain him by law and the sword to a semblance of piety as one holds wild beasts by chains and cages," he said; and again: "Better the death of all the peasants than of the princes." He urged the princes to strangle the rebels "as you would mad dogs"; and when the insurrection was finally quelled he bragged that it was he who had killed the peasants because he had given the orders to kill. "All their blood is upon me," he said.

Luther's translation of the Bible had been a powerful weapon in the hands of those who demanded freedom and social justice; now he turned the same weapon against the peasants, and found a sanction for serfdom in it.

There should be no serfs because Christ has freed us all! What is that we hear? That is to make Christian freedom wholly bodily. Did not Abraham and the other patriarchs and prophets have serfs? Read what St. Paul says of servants, who in all times have been serfs. So this article is straight against the gospel, and moreover it is robbery, since each man would take his person from his lord to whom it belongs. A serf can be a good Christian and enjoy Christian liberty, just as a prisoner or a sick man may be a Christian although he is not free. This article would make all men equal and convert the spiritual kingdom of Christ into an external worldly one; but that is impossible, for a worldly realm cannot stand where there is no inequality; some must be free, others bond; some rulers, others subjects. (Martin Luther on the *Twelve Articles*, May, 1525.)

THOMAS MÜNZER

Thomas Münzer was the ideologist of the Peasant War. He took Luther's proclamation of freedom for all men seriously, and when he discovered that Luther was, in fact, trying to limit this universal liberty to the princes and the middle class, he broke with him and denounced him as a deceiver of the people.

Münzer was in many respects a greater man than Luther, and he certainly possessed much more intellectual honesty. Born in Stolberg, in 1498, his scholarly attainments in the theology of the times gained him his doctor's degree, and the position of a chaplain in a Halle nunnery.

In 1520 he went to Zwickau, where he came into contact with the Anabaptists, whose leader was a cloth-maker named Nicholas Storch.* The Anabaptists preached that the Day of Judgment and the Millennium was at hand, and they had "visions, convulsions, and the spirit of prophecy." But beneath an appearance of humility and unconcern for worldly things, they concealed the growing opposition of the poorer classes to the existing social order, and they came into conflict with the Council of Zwickau. Múnzer had influenced them considerably (although he had not joined them) and now he defended them. However, they were compelled to leave the city, and Múnzer departed with them towards the end of 1521.

He went to Prague and attempted to join the remnant of the Hussite movement, but his unconventional opinions soon compelled him to flee from Bohemia, and in 1522 he became a preacher at Altstedt, in Thuringia. Here he ordered the entire Bible to be read to the people in their own tongue. Supporters flocked to him from all parts, and Altstedt soon became the centre of the popular anti-priest movement for the whole of Thuringia.

Up to this time Múnzer was directing most of his attacks against the Roman priests, and appealing to the princes and people to rise in arms against them.

If you wish to be the servants of God (he said), you must drive out and destroy the evil ones who stand in the way of the Gospel. . . . We must destroy those who stand in the way of God's revelation, we must do it mercilessly, as Hezekiah, Cyrus, Josiah, Daniel and Elias destroyed the priests of Baal, else the Christian Church will never come back to its origins. We must root the weeds in God's vineyard at the time when the crops are ripe. God said in the Fifth Book of Moses, 7, 'Thou shalt not show mercy unto the idolators, but ye shall break down their altars, dash in pieces their graven images and burn them with fire that I shall not be wroth at you'.

These appeals to the princes were of no avail; and Múnzer turned to the peasants and workers who were already (as we have

*Zwickau was a centre of Anabaptism in Switzerland, where Nicholas Storch, a cloth-maker, preached a religious communism. Múnzer came under his influence, and is reputed to have said that Storch knew the Bible better than all the priests combined. A whole community, including twelve apostles, gathered around him, and his disciples believed that the truth was revealed to him in divine revelations. In 1522 Storch settled in Thuringia, and he became one of the leaders of the Peasant War. In collaboration with Múnzer, Pfeifer and others, he composed a programme of demands, which declared that property belonged to all alike since God had created all men equally bare, and had given to them everything on the land, in the water, and under the sky. Nicholas Storch died in Munich, in 1525.

seen) in a state of unrest and revolt. He "began to pick up the threads of the sporadic revolts of the last half-century and to organise and co-ordinate them." (*The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, P. C. Gordon Walker, p. 101.) At the same time his ideas became more definite, and, under cover of Christian phraseology, he preached a kind of pantheism: indeed, in some of his speeches and pamphlets he became practically an atheist. He denied that the Bible was the only infallible revelation. The only revelation (he said) was reason, which has existed among all peoples at all times. Christ (he taught) was not God, but a man—a prophet and a teacher; and his Lord's Supper nothing but a plain meal of commemoration during which bread and wine are consumed with mystic additions. Heaven was to be sought in this life, and not in some world after death; and, just as there is no Heaven in the beyond, so there is no Hell, and no damnation. Devils are but the evil desires and cravings of Man.

Münzer gave a direction to the vague gospel feeling for equality which he found among the peasantry and turned it into his own communism. Engels wrote of him:

There is more than one communist sect of modern times which . . . did not possess a theoretical equipment as rich as that of Münzer of the Sixteenth Century. His programme [was] less a compilation of the demands of the then existing plebeians than a genius's anticipation of the conditions for the emancipation of the proletarian elements that had just begun to develop among the plebeians.
(*The Peasant War in Germany*, pp. 66-67.)

Thomas Münzer desired the immediate establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth, by which he understood a free society without class differences or private property. He declared that all existing authorities which refused to join in the revolution must be overthrown, and work and property must be shared in common; and that in order to realise this programme a Union of the people was necessary throughout the whole of Christendom. Princes and nobles were to be invited to join this Union, and where they refused they were to be overthrown by force.

Münzer laboured with tireless energy to organise such a Union among the peasants of the south and south-west of Germany, seeing in them the class that could carry his ideals of liberty and equality into practice. He travelled widely, giving direction and conscious purpose to blind, spontaneous revolt, and his preaching assumed an ever more revolutionary character.

Clergy, princes, the nobility, and the patricians of the cities, were all denounced, and

he pictured in burning colours the existing oppression, and contrasted it with the vision of the millennium of social republican equality which he created out of his imagination. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, p. 67.)

He wrote pamphlet after pamphlet, and sent out emissaries in all directions to preach his revolutionary doctrines. It was among the Anabaptists that

he found invaluable agents. This sect, having no definite dogmas, held together by the common symbol of a second baptism, ascetic in their mode of living, untiring, fanatic and intrepid in propaganda, had grouped itself more closely around Münzer. Made homeless by constant persecutions, its members wandered over the length and breadth of Germany, announcing everywhere the new gospel wherein Münzer had made clear to them their own demands and wishes. Numberless Anabaptists were put on the rack, burned or otherwise executed. But the courage and endurance of these emissaries was unshaken, and the success of their activities amidst the rapidly rising agitation of the people was enormous. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, p. 71.)

Some of Münzer's followers destroyed St. Mary's Chapel in Mellerbach, near Altstedt, claiming that they were carrying out the Biblical injunction "Ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire." (*Deuteronomy*, vii, 5). When this happened the princes of Saxony came in person to Altstedt to quell the disturbances. They summoned Münzer before them, when he delivered a sermon the like of which they had never heard from "that easy-living flesh of Wittenberg", as Münzer called Luther. He told them that ungodly rulers, and especially priests and monks who treat the Gospel as heresy, must be killed, and he justified this drastic policy by reference to the New Testament. The sources of the evils of usury, thievery and robbery (he said) were the princes and masters who had taken all creatures into their private possession—the fishes in the water, the birds in the air, the plants in the soil. These usurers preached to the poor the commandment *Thou shalt not steal*, yet they robbed the peasant and artisan. If they (the lords and masters) did not remove the causes of discontent how could things improve? "Oh! dear gentlemen, (he cried) how the Lord will smite with an iron rod all these old pots! When I say so, I am considered rebellious. So be it!"

Münzer had this sermon printed in Alstedt; whereupon the printer was punished with banishment by Duke Johann of Saxony. Münzer's writings were now subject to censorship by the ducal government of Weimar, but he was not to be intimidated, and published in the city of Mühlhausen a provocative pamphlet which concluded with the words:

All the world must suffer a big jolt . . . the ungodly will be thrown off their seats and the downtrodden will rise.

When Münzer published this Luther denounced him in his "Letter to the Princes of Saxony against the Rebellious Spirit", and declared him to be an instrument of Satan. Moreover, Union letters in Münzer's handwriting were intercepted wherein he called upon the subjects of Duke Georg of Saxony to offer armed resistance to the enemies of the Gospel, and the Duke demanded his extradition. Münzer was forced to leave Altstedt.

He went to Nürnberg, where he printed his reply to Luther, whom he charged with flattering the princes. "The people will free themselves in spite of everything," he wrote, "and then the fate of Dr. Luther will be that of a captive fox." The city council confiscated the paper, and Münzer was forced to quit the city.

He made a propaganda trip through Suabia to Alsace, and thence to Switzerland, and back to the Upper Black Forest. There is no doubt that this mission

added much to the organisation of the people's party, to a clear formulation of its demands, and to the final general outbreak of the insurrection in April, 1525. It was through this trip that the dual nature of Münzer's activities became more and more pronounced—on the one hand, his propaganda among the people whom he approached in the only language then comprehensible to the masses, that of religious prophecy; on the other hand, his contact with the initiated, to whom he could disclose his ultimate aims. Even previous to this journey he had grouped around himself in Thuringia a circle of the most determined persons, not only from among the people, but also from among the lower clergy, a circle whom he had put at the head of a secret organisation. (*The Peasant War*, F. Engels, pp. 71-72.)

Münzer became the centre of a revolutionary movement which spread throughout south-west Germany, with connections between Saxony and Thuringia, through Franconia and Suabia up to Alsace and the Swiss frontier. Finally, when the general outbreak was at hand, he returned to Thuringia, where he wished to lead the movement personally.

THE MISTAKES OF THE PEASANTS

The revolt began on October 24th, 1525, with a rising in the Margraviate of Stühlinger. The peasants refused deliveries to the Landgrave, and, assembling in considerable numbers, they marched on Waldshut. Here they formed a Union with the city middle class, and emissaries were sent to rouse the peasants of the Moselle, the Upper Rhine, and Franconia. The aims of the Union were proclaimed to be the abolition of feudal power, the destruction of all castles and monasteries, and the elimination of all masters save the Emperor. The German tri-colour was the banner of the Union.

The rising spread rapidly, and at first the nobles of Upper Suabia (whose troops were fighting in Italy against Francis I of France) were paralyzed with fear and incapable of offering any real resistance. The peasants sacked and burned castles and monasteries ("priests' nests," as they called them), and they paid off many a long-standing debt of hatred, torturing and killing many of the nobles who fell into their hands. Count Ludwig von Helfenstein (who had given orders for the summary execution of all the rebels who fell into his hands) was himself put to death with fourteen of his knights. They were made to run the gauntlet under the blows and jeers of the peasants, that being the most humiliating death the rebels could devise for them.

Some interesting glimpses of the conduct of the insurgents during the spring of 1525 are given by Michael Eisenhart, a citizen of Rothenburg on the Tauber, where the rule of the honourables (or patricians)* was overthrown by the lower middle class and the plebeians who set up their own provisional government.

March 21. The working classes in the town now begin to revolt. They cease to obey the authorities and form a committee of thirty-six to manage affairs.

March 24. This evening . . . some one knocked off the head of Christ's image on a crucifix and struck off the arms.

*These patrician families controlled the city council and held all the city offices. They administered all the city revenues, and exploited both the poorer classes of the city and the peasants who came under their jurisdiction. They practised usury in money and grain, enjoyed various monopolies, and gradually deprived their fellow citizens of every right to use the city forests and meadows, and used them for their own private gain. They imposed road, bridge and gate payments and other duties; sold trade and guild privileges, and master and citizen rights. "The peasants of the city area were treated by them with no more consideration than by the nobility and the clergy. On the contrary, the city magistrates and bailiffs, mostly patricians, brought into the villages, together with aristocratic rigidity and avarice, a certain bureaucratic punctuality in collecting duties". (*The Peasant War in Germany*, pp. 49, F. Engels).

March 26. Chrishainz, the baker, knocked the missal out of the priest's hand in the chapel of Our Lady and drove away the priest from mass . . . The following Monday, while the priest was performing service in the parish church and chanting "Adjuva nos, Deus salutaris noster," Ernfried Kumpf addressed him rudely, saying that if he wished to save himself he would better leave the altar. Kumpf then knocked the missal on the floor, and drove the scholars out of the choir . . . On Friday . . . all the artisans were to lay all their complaints and demands before a committee. The taxes, wages and methods of weighing were discussed . . . *Friday, April 7,* Küplein, during the sermon, threw the lighted lamps about the church . . . On Holy Easter . . . in the night some millers attacked the church at Cobenzell and threw the pictures and images into the Tauber . . . Thursday after Easter, the women run up and down Hafengasse with forks and sticks, declaring they will plunder all the priests' houses, but are prevented. (From *Readings in European History*, James Harvey Robinson, pp. 288-289.)

But the peasants proved incapable of carrying through the revolutionary task which they had undertaken. Sectional interests divided them, and one district refused to help another, so that they were defeated in one battle after another by armies which were very much smaller than the total number of the rebels. They were jealous of the towns, and the towns of them; and it was only in the neighbourhood of Mühlhausen where Münzer's influence was strong, that any stable co-operation between the peasants and the city proletariat was achieved. There a primitive form of communism was attempted.

After their first panic the princes and nobles gained time by engaging in protracted negotiations with the rebels the while they collected their forces. The Suabian Union (which united the princes, nobles and the imperial cities of south-west Germany) promised the peasants a peaceful settlement of their grievances, and an investigation of their complaints; but when at last the promised court of enquiry met in December, it was composed entirely of nobles, and the proceedings dragged on interminably.

By February, 1525, even the peasants' slow patience was exhausted, and the storm really broke. The peasants gathered in a number of camps, and by the beginning of March some 30,000 or 40,000 were assembled in six camps in Upper Suabia.

The most outspoken and extreme section of the rebels were in the main Münzer's followers, and although they were everywhere in a minority they formed the backbone of the peasant armies. The mass of the peasantry were generally only too ready to make compacts with their masters. Moreover, as the struggle dragged

on many of the peasants became weary and went home. Added to all these difficulties

was the fact that the vagabond masses of the low grade proletariat had joined the (peasant) troops. This made discipline more difficult and demoralised the peasants, as the vagabonds were an unreliable element, coming and going all the time. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, p. 105.)

But the greatest mistake which the peasants made was to remain everywhere on the defensive and to enter into fruitless negotiations with the ruling class, thus giving the princes time to bring reinforcements from Italy where Charles V had just won the battle of Pavia.

THE TWELVE ARTICLES

The peasants submitted their demands in the famous Twelve Articles, the authorship of which was ascribed to Münzer by contemporary historians, although actually they were not composed by him. He had issued a much more revolutionary manifesto to the insurgent peasants.

The demands made in the Twelve Articles were relatively moderate. They demanded: (1) that the communities should have the right to choose and appoint their own pastor, and should be free to depose him "should he conduct himself improperly": (2) the utilization of the great tithe for communal purposes after payment from it of the pastor's maintenance. "What remains over shall be given to the poor of the place, as the circumstances and the general opinion demand. Should anything farther remain, let it be kept lest anyone should leave the country from poverty. Provision should also be made from this surplus to avoid laying any land tax on the poor." The abolition of the small tithes, whether ecclesiastical or lay, since "the Lord God created cattle for the free use of man (and) we will not . . . pay . . . an unseemly tithe which is of man's invention": (3) the abolition of serfdom "unless it should be shown us from the Gospel that we are serfs". "Not that we would wish to be absolutely free and under no authority. . . . God does not teach us that we should lead a disorderly life in the lusts of the flesh . . . (and) we are . . . ready to yield obedience according to God's law to our elected and regular authorities in all proper things becoming to a Christian": (4) the abolition of the lords' fishing and hunting rights. For "in some places the authorities preserve the game to our great annoyance and loss, recklessly permitting the unreasoning

animals to destroy to no purpose our crops which God suffers to grow for the use of man. . . . This is neither godly nor neighbourly. For when God created man he gave him dominion over all the animals, over the birds of the air and over the fish in the water": (5) the freedom for "every member of the community to help himself to such firewood as he needs in his home. Also, if a man requires wood for carpentry purposes he should have it free, but with the knowledge of a person appointed by the community for that purpose": (6) the limitation of excessive bonded labour "that we shall not continue to be oppressed . . . since our forefathers were required only to serve according to the word of God": (7) the abolition of forced services or dues from the peasant without payment: (8) the reduction of rents "so that the peasants shall not work for nothing, since the labourer is worthy of his hire": (9) justice in the administration of the law since "we are burdened with a great evil in the constant making of new laws . . . we should be judged according to the old written law so that the case shall be decided according to its merits, and not with partiality": (10) the restitution to the communities of meadows and fields which have been wrongfully appropriated "by individuals": (11) the abolition of the due called *Todfall* (heriot) since "we will no longer endure it, nor allow widows and orphans to be thus shamefully robbed against God's will, and in violation of justice and right": (12) "In the twelfth place it is our conclusion and final resolution, that if any one or more of the articles here set forth should not be in agreement with the word of God, as we think they are, such article we will willingly recede from when it is proved really to be against the word of God by a clear explanation of Scripture. Or if articles should now be conceded to us that are hereafter discovered to be unjust, from that hour they shall be dead and null and without force. Likewise, if more complaints should be discovered which are based upon truth and the Scriptures and relate to offences against God and our neighbour, we have determined to reserve the right to present these also, and to exercise ourselves in all Christian teaching. For this we shall pray God, since He can grant these, and He alone, The peace of Christ abide with us all".

The Twelve Articles were much less extreme than the demands which the radical section had formulated in an earlier programme, the *Letter of Articles*. This was an open letter to all the peasantry urging them to join "the Christian Alliance and Brotherhood" for the purpose of removing all burdens either by goodness,

"which will hardly happen", or by force, and threatening all those who refused to join with the "lay anathema", that is expulsion from the society and from any intercourse with the Union members. All castles, monasteries and priests' endowments were to be placed under lay anathema unless the nobility, priests and monks relinquished them of their own accord, moved into ordinary houses, and joined the Christian Alliance.

THE REVOLT COLLAPSES

As soon as the princes and nobility felt themselves strong enough to take the field against the rebellious peasantry they wasted no more time in words. They proceeded to the suppression of the rising, and destroyed the divided peasant forces in detail.

They took, too, a dreadful revenge for the fright they had suffered. Thousands of wretched peasants were slaughtered in cold blood, and scores of villages were burned to the ground. "We played bowls in our turn with the heads of the peasants", one of the princes grimly declared. Jäcklein Rohrbach, an innkeeper who had been a prominent rebel leader, was chained to a post, and slowly roasted to death, whilst his tormentors feasted nearby and gloated over his sufferings.

Münzer had established his headquarters in the free imperial city of Mühlhausen, where whole masses of the lower middle class had been won over to his doctrines. Mühlhausen had had its revolution on March 17th, 1525, before the general uprising in Southern Germany. The old patrician council had been overthrown, and power had passed to a newly elected "Eternal Council", with Pfeifer, a representative of the middle class, at its head.

Münzer made heroic efforts to widen and organise the revolt. But

the worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which he represents and for the realisation of the measures which that domination would imply . . . He finds himself in a dilemma. What he *can* do is in contrast to all his actions as hitherto practised; to all his principles and to the present interest of his party; what he *ought* to do cannot be achieved. In a word, he is compelled to represent not his party or his class, but the class for whom conditions are ripe for domination . . . he is compelled to defend the interests of an alien class, and to feed his own class with phrases and promises, with the assertion that the interests of that alien

class are their own interests. Whoever puts himself in this awkward position is irrevocably lost. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, pp. 135-6, F. Engels.)

This was the weakness of Münzer's position.

Not only the movement of his time, but the whole century, was not ripe for the realisation of the ideas for which he himself had only begun to grope. The class which he represented not only was not developed enough and incapable of subduing and transforming the whole of society, but it was just beginning to come into existence. The social transformation that he pictured in his fantasy was so little grounded in the then existing economic conditions that the latter were a preparation for a social system diametrically opposed to that of which he dreamt. Nevertheless, he was bound to his preachings of Christian equality and evangelical community of possessions. He was at least compelled to make an attempt at their realization. Community of all possessions, universal and equal labour duty, and the abolition of all authority were proclaimed. In reality Mühlhausen remained a republican imperial city with a somewhat democratic constitution, with a senate elected by universal suffrage and under the control of a forum, and with the hastily improvised feeding of the poor. The social change, which so horrified the Protestant middle-class contemporaries, in reality never went beyond a feeble and unconscious attempt prematurely to establish the bourgeois society of a later period. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, pp. 136-7, F. Engels.)

Münzer, however, flung himself into the struggle with fanatical energy: his letters became more and more revolutionary.

Incessantly he fanned the flame of hatred against the ruling classes. He spurred the wildest passions, using forceful terms of expression the like of which religious and nationalist delirium had put into the mouths of the Old Testament prophets. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, p. 137.)

His efforts were in vain. The peasant revolt gradually collapsed, and the Landgrave Philipp of Hesse, together with Saxon troops, marched upon Mühlhausen. Münzer assembled his forces at Frankenhausen. He had several cannon, and some 8,000 men, but they counted few ex-soldiers among them, and sorely lacked military experience.

The tragic end came on the mountain which is still called Mount Battle (Schlachtberg). Münzer and his people entrenched themselves behind a barricade of wagons and awaited the assault of their enemies. The princes offered them an amnesty if they would betray Münzer alive into captivity, and Münzer gathered his followers into a circle that they might debate the offer. A

priest and a knight were in favour of accepting it; but they were brought to the centre of the circle and beheaded as traitors.

Meanwhile, the princes' troops had encircled the mountain, and now they began to advance. The trained troops speedily broke through the barricade of wagons, and the peasant army fled in wild disorder. They had numbered, it is said, 8,000; and 5,000 were slaughtered in the pitiless pursuit which followed.

The survivors sought refuge in the town of Frankenhausen, but the city quickly fell to the princes' troops, and Münzer (who had been wounded in the head) was discovered in a house and taken prisoner. He was first racked in the presence of the princes, and then beheaded. He died with courage and dignity.

Thomas Münzer failed, but he occupies a significant place in the history of working class revolt. Throughout the Middle Ages there was a fairly continuous current of what may be called peasant-plebeian heresies, which denounced the privileges of the nobility and the city patricians, and sought the abolition of serfdom and (at least) the more flagrant inequalities of property. These social heresies found their theoretical justification in the Christian doctrine that all men are the children of God and equal in His sight.

During the feudal period these heresies were hardly to be distinguished from the body of heretical doctrine which represented in some measure the economic interest of the emergent middle-class, and which culminated in the Protestant Reformation. This was true, for instance, of the Albigenses. But in the 14th and 15th centuries the social heresies of the poor peasantry and town workers came more and more plainly to represent their hopes and interests, and went far beyond anything that the bourgeoisie desired in the way of social equality and freedom. This was true, as we have seen, of the teaching of John Ball and the poor priests, who voiced the aspirations of peasant and proletarian in the Lollard movement; and it was equally true of the Taborites in the Hussite movement. Finally, in Thomas Münzer's teachings communist ideas were definitely formulated as expressing the hope of an exploited class, and thereafter they were

found in every great convulsion of the people, until gradually they merged with the modern proletarian movement. (*The Peasant War in Germany*, pp. 56).

CHAPTER 7

THE REIGN OF THE SAINTS

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.

REVELATION, xxi, I.

THE ANABAPTISTS

The history of the Anabaptists in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the hatred and horror with which their revolutionary doctrines filled the bourgeoisie of that period, invite comparison with the rather similar role of bogey man to capitalism which the Bolsheviks played in the years immediately succeeding the October Revolution. There were even the same charges of gross sexual immorality levelled against them; and in both cases the fearful imagination of the men of property saw their sinister influence in every social disturbance and in every expression of working class discontent.

It has already been pointed out (page 62) that Anabaptism was not an organised Church, but consisted rather of a number of small sects who held certain beliefs in common, and who took their generic name from the fact that they all denied the validity of infant baptism.

The Anabaptist doctrine was but one of an endless variety of ideas, many of which had long been current. . . . They denied the right of the secular magistrates to interfere in religious matters, and themselves withdrew in varying degrees from concern in the affairs of this world. Some, anticipating the Quakers, refused to bear arms; the Gartnerbrüder of Salzburg endeavoured to live in the pattern of primitive simplicity. One sect denied the humanity of Christ; another, of whom Ludwig Hetzer was the chief, began by regarding Jesus as a leader and teacher rather than an object of worship, and ended by denying his divinity. (*The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. II, p. 223).

Most of the Anabaptists indulged in Apocalyptic dreams of the Millennium; and again one is tempted to compare these chiliastic visions with the belief in the imminence of the World Revolution which the Bolsheviks held in the years immediately following their conquest of power in Russia.

Everywhere the Anabaptists were savagely persecuted.

Zwingli himself was hostile to them, and repressive measures were taken against their Swiss adherents; but in most parts of Germany they were condemned to wholesale death. Six hundred executions are said to have taken place at Ensisheim in Upper Elsass, a thousand in Tyrol and Gorz, and the Swabian League butchered whole bands of them without trial or sentence. Many were beheaded in Saxony with the express approbation of Luther, who regarded their heroism in the face of death as proof of diabolic possession. Duke William of Bavaria made a distinction between those who recanted and those who remained obdurate; the latter were burnt, the former were only beheaded. . . . Philip of Hesse was the only Prince of sufficient moderation to be content with the heretics' incarceration. (*The Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II, p. 224).

Under these ruthless persecutions the Anabaptist doctrine of passive resistance to evil broke down. Their sufferings began "to set their hands as well as their minds in motion" (*Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II, p. 224), and the conviction grew among them that it was their duty to assist in bringing in the Heavenly Kingdom on Earth which they believed to be imminent.

In Augsburg, Hans Hut proclaimed the necessity incumbent upon the saints to purify the world with a double-edged sword, and his disciple, Augustin Bader, prepared a crown, insignia, and jewels for his future kingdom in Israel. Melchior Hofmann told Frederick I of Denmark that he was one of the two sovereigns at whose hands all the firstborn of Egypt should be slain. (*Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II, p. 224.)

JAN OF LEYDEN

From 1529 onwards there were Anabaptist outbreaks in a number of north German towns, including Minden, Herford, Lippstadt, and Soest; but it was at Münster that Anabaptism achieved a brief spell of political power.

Münster had longed witnessed a struggle between Catholics and Protestants. Bernard Rottman, the most prominent of the Reforming divines, had been expelled from the city, but had returned and established himself in the suburbs; and the Reformers had eventually obtained a majority in the City Council. Finally the Catholics were forced to accept an arrangement under which Lutheranism was to be tolerated in the six parish churches, and Catholicism in the Cathedral and the centre of the city.

But whilst Lutheranism suited the wealthier members of the reforming party, it no longer satisfied Rottman and the artisans who were his chief supporters, and in 1533 he resolved to strengthen his position by inviting some Anabaptists from Holland to settle in the city. Chief among them were Jan Matthys, a baker of Haarlem, and Jan Beuckelssen or Bockelsohn, of Leyden (popularly known as Jan of Leyden). Matthys had declared himself to be the Enoch of the New Dispensation, and had appointed Twelve Apostles to proselytise the six neighbouring provinces; Beuckelssen was one of these. As a journeyman tailor he had travelled over Europe "from Lübeck to Lisbon" before he was thirty, and had finally abandoned tailoring to become an inn-keeper at Leyden. There he came under the influence of the Anabaptists, and in January, 1534, he travelled to Münster as Matthys' representative.

Soon after his arrival in Münster civil war broke out, on February 9th; but for the time being the forces of conservatism proved too strong for the revolutionaries. However, their fanatical zeal made thousands of new converts, especially among the women; besides which the legal immunities which the Anabaptists enjoyed in Münster attracted many of the sectaries from Holland and the neighbouring German towns. Presently Jan Matthys himself arrived in Münster; and at the next municipal election the Anabaptists secured a majority on the City Council. One of their members, Knipperdollinck, became burgomaster; and six days later, at a great prayer meeting in the Town Hall, Matthys demanded the expulsion of all who refused to accept the doctrines of Anabaptism. This was done, and the Reign of the Saints began.

Like the earliest Christians they sought to have all things in common, and as a commencement they confiscated the goods of the exiles. To ensure primitive simplicity of worship they next destroyed all images, pictures, manuscripts, and musical instruments on which they could lay their hands. Tailors and Shoemakers were enjoined to introduce no new fashions in wearing apparel; gold and silver and jewels were surrendered to the common use; and there was an idea of pushing the communistic principle to its logical extreme by repudiating private property in wives. The last was apparently offensive to public opinion . . . and the nearest approach to it effected in practice was polygamy, which was not introduced without some sanguinary opposition, and did not probably extend far beyond the circle of Beuckelssen and the leaders of the movement. (*The Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II, p. 226).

The Anabaptists of Münster found their chief inspiration in the *Book of Revelation*, and all these measures were regarded as being a preparation for the second coming of Christ. Alarmed lest these subversive ideas should spread still more widely, the German princes laid siege to Münster, but the Anabaptists' fanatical conviction that they were doing the will of God, and their firm belief in the imminence of the Second Coming of Christ steeled them to hold out for eighteen months against all the forces that their enemies could bring against them. Indeed, for a time it looked as though the movement might spread to the neighbouring towns of Liège, Köln, and Utrecht, and even to Amsterdam.

Jan Matthys was killed leading a sortie at Easter, and Jan of Leyden took his place. He dispensed with the Twelve Elders who had been the nominal rulers of the New Israel, and announced, by the mouth of his prophet Dusentschur, that it was the will of God that he should become King of all the world, and establish the Fifth Monarchy* of the Apocalypse.

On August 30th, 1534, he beat off the besiegers with heavy losses when they tried to storm the city; and in October of the same year he sent out 28 apostles to preach the New Kingdom to the neighbouring cities. Most of them were seized and put to death, among them being a young woman who attempted to "play the part of Judith to the Holofernes of the Bishop of Münster". (*The Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II, p. 227.)

THE FALL OF MUNSTER

Jan of Leyden's attempt to rouse the thousands of Anabaptists who were scattered through North Germany and the Netherlands resulted only in sporadic risings, all of which were bloodily suppressed; but Münster was saved for a time by the mutual jealousies of the German princes, and by dissensions between Catholics and Protestants, together with the general fear that Charles V would exploit the opportunity to extend his Burgundian domains by annexing Münster.

In the end, however, their common hatred of the Anabaptists proved more powerful than their mutual suspicions, and a joint expedition was made against the Saints. Münster offered a desperate resistance, and in the end fell only through treachery, on

*The Fifth Monarchy was to be the last in the series of which Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome were the preceding four.

the night of June 24th, 1535. A frightful slaughter followed, and Jan of Leyden and Knipperdollinck were tortured to death with red-hot pincers in the market-place. Jan's chief wife, Divara, was also executed. Münster was deprived of its privileges as an imperial city, and Catholicism was re-established. The Anabaptists were dispersed into many lands, and their doctrines exercised a powerful influence in England and America in the following century, being represented in this country by the Fifth Monarchy men who attempted two unsuccessful risings in 1657 and 1661.

CHAPTER 8,

THE LEVELLERS

These kind of Vermin swarm like Caterpillars And hold Conventicles in Barnes and Sellars. Some preach (or prate) in Woods, in fields, in stables In hollow trees, in tubs, on tops of tables. *A Swarme of Sectaries and Schismatiques; wherein is discovered the strange preaching (or prating) of such as are by their trades Coblers, Tinkers, Pedlers, Weavers, Sow-Gelders and Chymney-Sweepers.*

John Taylor (1641).

THE GREAT REBELLION

The polemics of the English Revolution of the 17th century were largely phrased in theological language. Fundamentally, however, the struggle was between the royal absolutism which had arisen upon the ruins of feudalism after the Wars of the Roses (and which, for a time, had served the class interests of the bourgeoisie) and an expanding capitalism which sought the political and social conditions necessary for its growth. It was natural, therefore, that on the whole the old feudal aristocracy and the squirearchy should support the King, whilst middle class traders and manufacturers supported Parliament. London headed the opposition to the King, and largely financed the Parliamentary forces, and the Eastern Counties ("the home of Lollardism, where sectarians of all kinds abounded", *Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein, p. 48) were banded together in an Eastern Association, of which Cromwell was soon to become the leading spirit. The clothing towns of the West Riding (Bradford, Leeds and Halifax) were centres of opposition to the Crown amidst Royalist Yorkshire, and in Lancashire the clothing towns, "the Genevas of Lancashire", were also islands of Parliamentary opposition in a sea of Royalist sympathisers. In the west Gloucester, Taunton and Exeter, centres of the west of England textile industry, were all Parliamentary strongholds.

The Royalist faction included Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and a few Presbyterians; whilst the supporters of Parliament can be divided into two main groups, Presbyterians and Independents. Of these the former, being in the main wealthy City merchants, were the more conservative.

Social theories manifested themselves at that time in a religious form. Consequently the majority of comfortable citizens would be unconsciously biased in favour of that form of religion which was the most acceptable to the existing order, and the religion that met this requirement was in those days Presbyterian Puritanism. (*Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein, pp. 51-52).

The Independents were the more radical section of the Parliamentary faction, and the name is used to describe a number of sects who (on a variety of grounds) were opposed to a centralized religious authority. They included such extremists as the Anabaptists, the Familists (who "would have all things common not only goods and cattell but wife and children", if the author of *The Divisions of the Church of England* (1642), is to be believed), Fifth Monarchy Men, who aimed at the establishment of a monarchy of Christ as foreshadowed in the Book of Daniel; and the Ranters, some of whom were alleged to practise "free love".

There were, however, two broad tendencies among the Independents; the one represented by the "Gentlemen Independents" or "Grandeers", as they came to be called, of whom Cromwell, Ireton and Fairfax were the outstanding personalities, and a left wing (if one may use modern jargon) known as the Levellers, of whom John Lilburne ("Freeborn John") was the leader. The Levellers were all agreed upon wanting more than a mere victory of the City of London over the King, but (and again one is reminded of the modern Socialist movement, and its endless capacity to produce left splinter groups) it had its own extreme wing, the True Levellers (or Diggers, as they were nicknamed) who held communist ideas far in advance of their day.

The economic issues behind the "Great Rebellion" are obvious enough: a struggle between the old decaying feudal order of society and the new, progressive capitalist economy. But it is easy to over-simplify what was happening. The middle class were chafing against what were essentially medieval conceptions of government which hindered their economic progress, and they were seeking a new political system more in consonance with their economic needs. They were, however, largely supported by the poor craftsmen and labourers of the towns and by the lesser peasantry, although the purely *economic* interests of these classes lay rather with the Crown which stood for the old traditional society, with its notion (for example) of a fair wage guaranteed by statute, and which had resisted with some measure of success the progress of the enclosures which bore so hardly upon the peasant.

It is at this point that religious controversies play such an important part in the struggle between King and Parliament, for the bourgeoisie could scarcely have dared challenge the Crown and the old order without the help of peasant and working class allies, and that help was secured by appealing not to their economic or material interests but to their religious sentiments.

The close union of Church and State enabled the bourgeoisie to turn opposition to the former into revolt against the latter. Occasionally sincerely urged, as often as not skilfully and deliberately manipulated, the appeal to men's religious convictions obscured and distorted—for some years at any rate—the fundamental issues in conflict. Large sections of the population whose material interests should have allied them with the Crown were to rally to Parliament because they thought it was struggling to exorcise the devils the former had introduced into England . . . anti-Catholic sentiment . . . was fostered and aggravated by those opposed to the Crown in order to win the support of groups, particularly the peasants and labourers, who might otherwise have rallied behind the monarchy. . . Its success may be seen in the extent of the popular outcry against the alleged Catholic plots and sympathies of the Government during 1640-3. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, David W. Petegorsky, pp. 43-46).

LEVELLERS AND DIGGERS

In matters of religion there was not much to distinguish the majority of the Levellers from the other Independents. A few, however, professed a rationalist deism, if not atheism. There was Richard Overton, for example, who wrote a pamphlet on the immortality of the soul, the first edition of which appeared anonymously in 1643. Twelve years later a revised edition appeared, bearing the title *Man wholly mortal, or a Treatise wherein 'tis proved, both Theologically and Philosophically, that as whole man sinned, so whole man died; contrary to that common distinction of Soul and Body; and that the present going of the Soul into Heaven or hell is a mere fiction: And that at the Resurrection is the beginning of our immortality; and then actual condemnation and Salvation and not before. With Doubts and Objections answered and resolved, both by Scripture and Reason; discovering the multitude of Blasphemies and Absurdities that arise from the Fancie of the Soul.*

Overton admits a resurrection at the end of time, but this was probably a concession to popular prejudice or in order to avoid a charge of atheism, for he treats this part of his subject superficially. The theological argument consists of a number of

biblical texts referring to the complete perishing of the individual after death; and in his philosophical proof he compares Man with animals, and argues that if the human soul survive the death of the body so too must the soul of an animal.

"It is interesting," comments Bernstein, "to recognise in Overton the first representative of the school of thought which combined systematic rationalism, or even materialism, with political and social radicalism in England." (*Cromwell and Communism*, p. 90.)

Another of the Levellers who held advanced rationalist views was Walwyn. No independent writings by him have survived, but he is said to have corrupted "young people" with his religious and political ideas, and to have asked them what better proof they had for the divine authorship of the Bible than the Turk had for the Koran. It was also his habit to take young people on Sundays from one church to another that they might hear various preachers railing one against the other, and, having thus sown doubt in their minds, he would declare "the great mysteries of life and salvation through Jesus Christ as well as the doctrine of justification through His death, resurrection, sanctification, and condemnation by His spirit as mere fancies, as ridiculous, nonsensical, vapid and empty conception". Walwyn was accused of having said that the "Song of Songs" was a poem written by Solomon "about one of his whores", and that King David and the patriarch Jacob had been a couple of sly foxes and cunning knaves: also that hell is nothing but the bad conscience of evil men, and the only true religion to consist in helping the poor.*

On social and political questions his opinions were no less heterodox, for he is reputed as saying "What an inequitable thing it is for one man to have thousands and another want bread". Also that "the world shall never be well until all things be in common". Moreover, he expressed the revolutionary opinion that "a very few diligent and valiant spirits may turn the world upside down if they observe the seasons and shall with life and courage engage accordingly". To the objection that this revolution would overturn all government, he is said to have answered that "there would then be less need of Government; for then there would be no thieves, no covetous persons, no deceiving and abuse of one another, and so no need of Government. If any difference do fall out, take a cobbler from his seat,

*A venomous exposition of these and similar charges is contained in a pamphlet published in April, 1649, and entitled *Walwins Wiles: or The Manifestators Manifested*.

or any other tradesman that is an honest and just man, and let him hear the case and determine the same, and then betake himself to his work again”.

One of the most popular pamphlets issued by the Levellers (in 1648) bore the title: *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire, or A Discovery of the main ground, original cause of all the slavery in the world but chiefly in England; presented by way of Declaration of many of the well-affected in the country, to all their poor, oppressed countrymen of England; and also to the consideration of the present army under the conduct of Lord Fairfax*.*

This pamphlet took for its motto the text *Arise, O God, judge Thou the earth*, and, in common with most Leveller literature, it based its argument on the assertion that in creating Man God had given him dominion over “inferior creatures” but had not intended him to exercise arbitrary authority over his fellow-men. But whereas most Leveller pamphleteers reasoned from this that men should have equal political rights *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* maintained that it implied equality of property.

All men being alike privileged by birth so all men were to enjoy the creatures alike without properties one more than the other . . . that is to say no man was to lord or command over his own kind; neither to enclose the creatures to his own use to the impoverishing of his neighbours.

By means of violence and murder (the argument continues) some men robbed their fellows of their share of the earth, enclosing land and setting themselves up as Lords of the Manors. The rest of the people, thus deprived of the means of life, were forced to become the slaves of those who had plundered them; since when the landlords have lived, not as God intended they should do, upon the fruits of their own labours, but by the servitude and exploitation of those whom they have robbed. Moreover, in order to secure their ill-gotten gains, they introduced that “heathenish innovation”, the monarchy, and legalised their robbery by charters, monopolies, tenures, patents, and enclosures issued in the name of the King, and thus, “all tyranny shelters

*It has been assumed by Berens, James, Bernstein and others that *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* was a Digger Tract, and that Winstanley, the leader of the True Levellers or Diggers, was the author (or part author) of it. Petegorsky suggests, however, that it was the work of a number of peasants who had been affected by Leveller propaganda, and he points out in support of this contention, that “its language and argument are generally derived from Leveller literature”, and that whereas the Diggers held communist views, the tract “is essentially a plea for equal rather than common ownership”. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, pp. 138-139.) *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* does, however, seem to have profoundly influenced Winstanley.

itself under the King's wings". At the same time lawyers were created to help in this exploitation by complicating the legal system; whilst the clergy was called into being to preach submission to the people. All these functionaries—lawyers, judges, clergymen—have a vested interest in the maintenance of the monarchy, for to question it is to attack the very source of their own power and privileges. The common people (the pamphlet roundly asserts) have no need of a king. What they need is (1) "a just portion for each man to live so that none need to beg or steal for want but every man may live comfortably": (2) "a just rule for each man to go by, which rule is to be the Scriptures": (3) government by "Judges called Elders", these to be elected by the people: and (4) the confiscation of bishops' lands and forest and Crown lands to provide a public fund for the maintenance of the needy. For

in Israel if a man were poor, then a publicke maintenance and stocks was to be provided to raise him again. So would all Bishops' Lands, Forrest Lands, and Crown Lands, do in our Land, which the apostate Parliament-men give one to another, and to maintain the needlesse thing called a king, and every seven years the whole Land was to the poor, the fatherless, widows and strangers, and at every crop a portion allowed them. Mark this, poor people, what the Levellers would do for you.

The pamphlet ends significantly with the biblical text:

What portion have we in David ? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel. I KINGS, xii, 16.

A few months later a second pamphlet appeared entitled *More of the Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, which described how the common people had been enslaved by the Norman Conquest, and robbed by the usurpations of the lords and by the enclosure of common lands.

Both these pamphlets are forthright in their denunciation of the monarchy, the church, the nobility (who "come from the outlandish Norman bastard"), and the rich. They are particularly vehement in their attack on the lawyers, "these caterpillars of society", as they call them. "O soldiers, you could never do a better piece of service than to put down the lawyers", declares *More of the Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*.

THE MECHANICK PREACHERS

After 1640 there was a tremendous outburst of sectarian activity. "Sects bred and multiplied and seemed to fill the earth". (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, David W. Petegorsky,

and the author of *Mercurius Rusticus or the Countries Complaint of the barbarous outrages Committed by the Sectaries of this late flourishing Kingdome* (1642), having asserted that Chelmsford was being governed by a tinker, two tailors, two cobblers, and two pedlars, declares that they teach

That the relation of master and servant hath no ground or warrant in the New Testament but rather the contrary . . . that one man should have a thousand pounds a yeere and another not one pound perhaps not as much but must live by the sweat of his browes and labour before he eate, hath no ground neither in Nature or in Scripture. . . . That the common people heretofore kept under blindnesse and ignorance have a long time yeelded themselves servants, nay slaves to the nobility and gentry; but God hath now opened their eyes and discovered unto them their Christian liberty; and therefore it is now fit that the Nobility and Gentry should serve their servants or at least worke for their owne maintenance; and if they will not worke, they ought not to eate.

That Parliament was seriously concerned by the growth and activities of the sectaries is evidenced by the Ordinance of both Houses of February 4, 1647

Concerning the growth and spreading of Errors, Heresies, and Blasphemies and for setting aside a day of Publike Humiliation to seeke God's assistance for the suppressing and preventing the same because of the perillouse condition that this Kingdome is in through the abominable blasphemies and damnable heresies vented and spread abroad therein.

THE AGITATORS

After the decisive defeat of King Charles at Naseby, on June 14th, 1645, there was increasing discontent in the army and widespread criticism of the aristocratic character of the House of Commons. In the counties the suffrage was limited to a minority of land-owners, and in many towns to the members of the corporations, or even to their officers alone, whilst many towns and boroughs which had remained stationary or had even declined in population and importance had the same parliamentary representation as important centres of commerce.

Moreover, the lower middle and working classes still smarted under economic grievances which Parliament (composed in the main of members of wealthy families) did nothing to remedy. The monopolies granted by the king had been cancelled, but the privileges of the great trading companies remained untouched.

Feudal obligations, such as the royal right to dispose of wardships (a right "oppressing to all the considerable families") had been abolished or fallen into desuetude, but the game laws, tithes and excise by which "inconsiderable" families were oppressed still remained, and the tradesmen, small business men and apprentices who formed the backbone of the Leveller movement were clamorous for some relief of their economic distress.

Oh that the cravings of our Stomacks could be heard by the Parliament and the city! they exclaim in *The Mournfull Cryes of many thousand poor Tradesmen, who are ready to famish through decay of Trade*. Oh that it were known that we sell our Beds and Cloaths for Bread! . . . O you Members of Parliament and rich men in the City, that are at ease, and drink Wine in Bowls, and stretch yourselves upon Beds of Down, you that grind our faces, and flay off our skins. Will no man amongst you regard, will no man behold our faces black with Sorrow and Famine?

Now there was no longer any reason to fear a Royalist victory, Parliament (in which the landowning and wealthy bourgeois interests were dominant) looked with waning enthusiasm upon the Army, which was mainly recruited from the peasantry and artisans, and officered (since the Self-Denying Ordinance had got rid of the aristocratic Presbyterian generals) partly by men promoted from the ranks and partly by the more radical members of the possessing classes. Differences were already arising within the Army itself, but for the time being these were held in check by the common antagonism to Parliament—an antagonism which was exacerbated by the fact that nearly a year's pay was owing to the Army, and that no provision was being made for the disabled and for widows and orphans of the men who had fallen in the Civil War.

Parliament sought to lessen the influence of the Army by trying to disband some of the regiments, and distributing the others in different places; but the rank-and-file countered this by creating a thoroughly democratic institution, the "Agitators". The name, (which is first met with in an address to General Fairfax, dated May 29th, 1647) had originally the same significance as the word "delegate" has today, for the Agitators were the agents or representatives of the common soldiers. The officers and general staff were forced to recognise them, and it was agreed that each regiment should elect two Agitators to be chosen from the ranks of the non-commissioned officers, who, with two officers appointed for each regiment, were to constitute the Council of the Army.

This Council held its first meeting in the church at Saffron Walden, in Essex, in May, 1647, to consider the proposals of the Commissioners of Disbandment sent down from Parliament, and negotiations proceeded between it and Parliament. These proving abortive, a great Convention was held on Newmarket Heath, on June 4th, 1647, when a manifesto was drawn up asserting that the Army was no troop of mercenaries, but "free commoners of England drawn together and continued in arms in judgment and conscience for defence of their own and the people's rights and liberties". Officers and men alike pledged themselves not to disband nor suffer themselves to be disbanded until they were assured that "we as private men, or other the freeborn people of England, shall not remain subject to the like oppression, injury, or abuse as has been attempted".

Six days later there was a still bigger demonstration on Triploe Heath, near Cambridge, at which over 20,000 were present; and finally, on August 7th, 1647, the Army occupied London "in order to protect Parliament". Eleven Presbyterians who had made themselves particularly obnoxious with resolutions against the Army were expelled from the House, and a number of others remained away from the sitting for some time. Thus the Independents became more and more dominant in Parliament.

But the Army was still riddled with discontent, and on September 10th, 1647, there appeared a pamphlet which expressed a deep sense of the blood and confusion that threatens the Nation by reason of the delays of removing the people's burdens, and clearing and securing their Rights and Freedoms. (*The Resolution of the Agitators of the Army, concerning the prosecution of their late remonstrance and the protestation against the sitting of the late usurpers of parliamentary power in this parliament; with the reasons constraining them so resolutely to adhere to that their protestation; as they presented them to his Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax.*)

Meanwhile Charles was exercising his not inconsiderable gift for intrigue by trying to play off Parliament against the Army, and negotiating in turn with the Presbyterians and the Independents. The sight of their leaders exchanging courtesies with the "Man of Blood" added fuel to the discontent of the rank-and-file of the Army, and it was about this time that the terms "Gentlemen Independents" and "Grandeens" began to be applied to the high officers of the Army. The latter retorted by charging the Agitators with being destructive "Levellers". One Cromwellian newspaper (with a curiously modern gift for invective) referred to the Levellers as "these Switzerising anarchists".

THE AGREEMENT OF THE PEOPLE

The discontent which existed in the Army found expression in a manifesto entitled the *Agreement of the People, upon Grounds of Common Right, for uniting of all unprejudiced people therein*. This manifesto (which was further elaborated and published under the same title early in 1649) demanded that the supreme authority of the nation should be vested in a representative body of 400 members, to be elected by manhood suffrage. Those in receipt of wages or alms were, however, to be excluded from the suffrage. This restriction of the franchise is less undemocratic than appears at first sight since at that time

an industrial proletariat in the modern sense of the word did not exist. The journeyman in the handicrafts were usually in the transition stage between apprentice and master. To extend the suffrage to the agricultural labourers would, in the then circumstances, have strengthened the reactionary party. (*Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein, p. 87).

The *Agreement of the People* was a remarkable programme for the times in which it was formulated, and it anticipated most of the demands that were advanced two centuries later by the Chartists. It called for Annual Parliaments, the members of which were not to be eligible to sit in the two succeeding Parliaments; nor were salaried officials to be eligible for election, whilst lawyers sitting in Parliament were not to practise. There were to be no religious tests, and no coercive laws regarding religion; conscientious objection to military or naval service was to be respected, and a national militia was to take the place of the standing army. All polls, taxes and tithes were to be replaced by a direct tax on every pound's worth of real and personal estate. Each county was to elect its own officials, and measures were to be taken to ensure work and decent maintenance for the poor, the aged, and the sick.

Parliament declared the *Agreement* to be seditious and its authors liable to punishment; but the discontent grew. Some officers supported the *Agreement of the People*, and whole regiments were won over. Finally Cromwell decided to test the strength of the opposition by a series of meetings.

The first of these was held in the middle of November at Corkbush Fields, near Ware, in Hertfordshire, and a majority of the soldiers wore sea-green ribbons (the Levellers' colours) in their hats, together with copies of the *Agreement of the People*. Cromwell succeeded in winning over the more moderate regi-

ments, and the men removed the Levellers' emblems from their hats. Others, however, met him with defiant shouts and taunts and in the end Cromwell arrested fourteen of the ringleaders as mutineers, and a court martial passed sentence of death on three of them. They drew lots, and two were reprieved; but the third, Richard Arnold, was executed. His memory was cherished by the Levellers as a martyr.

Two other meetings were held without untoward incident, and after that Cromwell proceeded to weed out the unruly elements from the Army.

Meanwhile the Scots had assembled an army of 40,000 to invade England; and there were Royalist risings in Kent, Essex and Wales. Fairfax crushed the Kentish and Essex rebels, whilst Cromwell marched first against the Welsh and then against the Scots. Having ruthlessly crushed the Welsh rising, he inflicted a signal defeat upon the Scottish army at Preston, on August 17th, 1648.

JOHN LILBURNE

Now that the Royalist cause was hopelessly lost the Levellers pressed more vigorously than ever for the *Agreement of the People* to be implemented, and eventually four representatives of each side met to discuss the matter. One of those chosen by the Levellers was John Lilburne, their greatest leader: a man of unyielding, tempestuous character, whose writings (it has been said) "read like the verbatim report of a man talking vehemently all night in an inn".

Born at Greenwich about the year 1615, he came to London in 1630 as an apprentice to a city merchant, a linendraper, named Thomas Hewson. He was soon drawn into the political life of the metropolis, and, at the age of twenty, fell foul of the Government for distributing literature which had been printed in Holland and smuggled into this country. At that time the Calvinists were in power in Holland, and many of their co-religionists who were persecuted in England, found refuge there. Thither now John Lilburne fled to avoid arrest.

In December, 1637 he thought it safe to return to this country, but he was arrested and charged with having caused to be printed in the towns of Rotterdam and Delft various "scandalous" pamphlets, and having smuggled them into England. He was condemned to a fine of £500, to be whipped from Fleet Bridge (Ludgate Circus) to Westminster, and then to stand in the pillory

for an hour and a half, and thereafter to be imprisoned in the Fleet.

Lilburne lay in gaol for more than two years, and it was not until the victory of the Long Parliament over the King in the winter of 1640-41 that he was set at liberty.

Lilburne fought for Parliament in the Civil War, and was twice wounded; but in 1644 he refused to sign the Covenant which Parliament had made with the Scots, and left the Army rather than compromise his conscience.

On his return to civil life Lilburne became a regular frequenter of the meetings of the London Independents, which were held in City taverns, and where much criticism was heard of the aristocratic character of the House of Commons. He also took to writing, and was several times imprisoned because of pamphlets which Parliament declared to be "scurrilous, libellous, and seditious".

Lilburne was a natural choice when the Levellers were selecting their four representatives to meet the Grandees. One of his fellow delegates was the William Walwyn to whom reference has already been made; and when John Price, one of the Gentlemen Independents, objected to him, Lilburne retorted with characteristic vehemence that Walwyn had more honour and honesty in his little finger than Price had in his whole body, and that he would rather resign from the committee than serve on it without Walwyn. In the end both Price and Walwyn retired; and the Committee (now reduced to six members) agreed on November 15th that a Committee should be formed consisting of representatives of the Army and delegates of the "Well-affected" in the country (i.e. supporters of Parliament as against the disaffected Royalists) which should formulate a scheme for the "foundation of a just government", this scheme then to be submitted to and voted upon by all the well-affected throughout the country. Protracted negotiations followed, and eventually a new Committee of Levellers and Gentlemen Independents was set up to draft a fresh *Agreement*.

This mixed commission was still engaged on its task when matters moved to a dramatic climax. On December 6th, Colonel Pride expelled the Presbyterian members from the House of Commons, and on January 19th, 1649, Charles was brought before a Special Court (on which Lilburne was offered a seat, but refused to serve), and was sentenced to death, on January 27th. Three days later he was executed; and on February 6th a

resolution was carried by Parliament abolishing the House of Lords as "useless and dangerous". On May 19th, by resolution of Parliament, England was declared a Free Commonwealth.

By this time the mixed Commission of Levellers and Gentlemen Independents had prepared the new *Agreement*; but difficulties arose with the General Staff, and the question of religious toleration was discussed at great length. Finally, on December 21st, a compromise was reached under which all Christian sects which did not disturb the public peace were not to be interfered with by the State, Roman Catholics and Episcopal State Churchmen alone being excepted.

However, the real stumbling-block was the dissolution of Parliament. Cromwell, realist that he was, opposed the idea of fixing an early date for this, and, though he was in a minority upon this point on the Council of Officers, he carried his point of view that the revised *Agreement* should not be sent to Parliament for signature and subsequent circulation, but should be further considered, and that only so much of the *Agreement* be circulated as Parliament might deem fit. From his own point of view Cromwell was acting soundly enough: the elements in the country hostile to the Independents and the Army were far too numerous to risk a new election. Even in such counties as Norfolk and Suffolk most of the middle class and the gentry were opposed to the Independents and the Army, and these classes set the example in most of the counties. Like the peasantry, they were anxious to get rid of the military burden, and elections might easily have resulted in a predominantly Royalist Parliament.

Lilburne and his friends retired from the commission about the middle of January, 1649; and on January 20th Parliament shelved the *Agreement of the People* by declaring that it would "take it into consideration as soon as the necessity of the present weighty and urgent affairs would permit."

It was during these acrimonious negotiations

that the difference in aim between the Grandee Independents and the Levellers came most consciously to light. Apart from the Levellers the only member who had a clear and coherent view of the situation was Commissary-General Ireton . . . and his was consciously bourgeois to a remarkable degree. By saying that he was against the manhood suffrage desired by the Levellers because all Constitutions were primarily intended to safeguard property he somewhat nonplussed the Leveller members. (*The Levellers and the English Revolution*, Henry Holorenschaw, pp. 65-66).

The Levellers were very bitter in the reproaches which they

hurled at the Grandees, and at Cromwell in particular.

Was there ever a generation of men so Apostate so false and so perjur'd as these? did ever men pretend an higher degree of Holinesse, Religion, and Zeal to God and their Country than these? these preach, these fast, these pray, these have nothing more frequent than the sentences of sacred Scripture, the name of God and of Christ in their mouthes: You shall scarce speak to *Cromwell* about any thing, but he will lay his hand on his breast, elevate his eyes, and call God to record, he will weep, howl and repent even while he doth smite you under the first rib. (*The Hunting of the Foxes*. Probably written by Richard Overton.)

To Lilburne and his friends Cromwell was a malevolent, self-seeking hypocrite; but the truth is that together with his ambition and class prejudices he had a practical cast of mind averse to abstract thinking. He was, above all else, a practical politician who shaped his policy according to the possibilities of the times. The "Levellers were the ideologues of the movement. They started from abstract political theories, and accordingly saw facts through the spectacles of these theories". (*Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein, pp. 86-87). They were two centuries and more before their time. The class whose interests they championed was still too immature to win and hold political power.

THE REVOLT IN THE ARMY

Soon after the *Agreement* had been shelved, the new Council of War endeavoured to deal with the growing discontent in the Army by forbidding soldiers to address petitions to Parliament or to any one save their officers, or to correspond with any civilians on political matters. The Council further resolved to apply to Parliament for authority to try by court martial and to hang any one who incited the Army to mutiny.

Lilburne headed a deputation of London citizens who presented themselves at the House of Commons to petition against these measures, and protests were soon forthcoming from the Army itself. On March 1st, 1649, there appeared a *Letter to General Fairfax and his Council of Officers*, signed by eight soldiers, in which were set out the complaints of the Army against its leaders. It charged Cromwell with aspiring to royal dignity, called Parliament a mere reflector of the Council of War, and this latter a tool of Cromwell, Ireton, and Harrison.

We are English soldiers engaged for the freedom of England (it declared) and not outlandish mercenaries to butcher the people for pay, to serve the pernicious ends of ambition and will in any person under Heaven.

The *Letter* demanded the immediate ratification of the *Agreement* of Newmarket Heath, and concluded by "freely and gladly" endorsing Lilburne's petition.

The authors of this protest were court-martialled, when three retracted and were pardoned. The remaining five stood firm, and were sentenced to be led past the heads of their detachments seated backward on a wooden horse, to have their swords broken over their heads, and to be expelled from the Army.

This sentence was carried out on March 6th, but failed to quell the revolt: rather it goaded the Levellers to more energetic action. A new pamphlet appeared denouncing the proceedings which had been taken against the five soldiers, and repeating the main charges against the Army chiefs.

We have not the change of a Kingdome to a Commonwealth; we are onely the old cheat, the transmutation of names but with the addition of New Tyrannies to the old. (*The Hunting of the Foxes from New-Market and Triploe-Heaths to Whitehall by Five Small Beagles* (March, 1649)).

On Sunday, March 25th, Lilburne read a scathing denunciation of Cromwell and his Staff to an enormous crowd which assembled in front of his house. Signed by Lilburne, Overton, Prince and Walwyn, it demanded the election of a new Parliament, and bore the title *The Second Part of England's New Chains Discovered*.

The Council of State attempted to persuade their Foreign Secretary, John Milton, to write an answer to this pamphlet; but Milton (who probably sympathised with the Levellers' defence of personal liberty) refused to do so, and the Council took other steps to deal with the malcontents. Lilburne and his co-signatories were committed to the Tower, and a petition to Parliament in favour of the arrested men (which is said to have been signed by 80,000 people, an extraordinarily high figure when the circumstances of the time are considered) was ignored. A deputation of citizens who spoke on their behalf met with a sharp rebuke from the Speaker for their "seditious proposals", and a deputation of women was dismissed with the brusque reply that the matter was beyond their understanding, and they had better return home and wash their dishes.

About this time Charles' son was proclaimed king in Ireland and Scotland, and in practically every continental court the Royalists were plotting against the young republic. In these circumstances that supreme realist, Cromwell, did not hesitate to suppress by sheer violence an agitation which threatened to

disrupt the Army—the mainstay of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of the day. He did make a last attempt to win Lilburne over to his point of view, but without success.

As is usual when political agitation wins mass support, much of the dissatisfaction of the times was economic in origin. The poor harvest of 1648 sent prices rocketing to famine levels, and there “was a great dearth in the country.” “Never was there in England so many in want of relief as now,” the people of London complained in March 1649 (*The Humble Petition of Divers Inhabitants of the City of London and Places Adjacent in the behalfe of the Poore of this Nation*). Moreover, while Parliament was granting extraordinary salaries to the Grandees of the Army and the Council State, the soldiers’ pay was constantly in arrears. Finally, the Government was making payment in paper notes, which soon fell to one-fourth of their nominal value.

Matters came to a head in April, 1649, when a detachment of dragoons belonging to Colonel Whalley’s regiment refused to proceed to Ireland until their demands had been met. Cromwell, by intimidation and persuasion broke the mutiny, and five of the mutineers were sentenced to death. Only one man, Robert Lockyer (chosen by lot) was actually shot in April, and before his execution he is reported as saying to his comrades, “Let not this death of mine be a discouragement, but rather an encouragement, for never man died more comfortably than I do.”

His funeral was the occasion of an imposing demonstration, for thousands of craftsmen and labourers, with their wives and daughters, followed the coffin, which was decked in rosemary, one bundle being dipped in the blood of the “Martyr of the Army”. They wore sea-green and black ribbons, and outside the city they were joined by many more mourners who had not cared to demonstrate openly within its precincts.

But the revolt was far from being over; for even whilst Cromwell was winning over the troops quartered in London by his astute oratory, news came from Banbury that Captain Thompson, with 200 troopers from Colonel Whalley’s regiment, had revolted, and issued a manifesto entitled *England’s Standard Advanced*, in which they demanded the application of the revised *Agreement*.

On May 10th came even more ominous news. In Salisbury almost the whole of Colonel Scroope’s regiment had also declared in favour of the *Agreement*, and had placed themselves under the command of Ensign Thompson, the brother of Captain

Thompson. The greater part of Ireton's regiment, which was stationed in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, together with Harrison's and Skippon's regiments were also in revolt; and the mutineers were intending to join forces and to resist being sent to Ireland until the long-promised reforms had been carried out. Nearly all the rebels were tried veterans of the Civil War, and they declared in a dignified manifesto that they had sold up their farms or given up their businesses in order to fight against the tyranny of king and bishops, and that they would not allow a new tyranny to arise.

Cromwell acted with characteristic energy. Collecting all the reliable troops that were available, he and Fairfax proceeded by forced marches towards Salisbury, and the mutineers (now some 1,200 strong) were surprised (by treachery it is said) and overwhelmed in a night attack at Burford. Over 400 of the mutineers surrendered; but despite the promises of clemency which had been made, four of them, including Ensign Thompson, were sentenced to be shot. Thompson and two corporals died courageously: the fourth man, Ensign Dean or Denne, was "very contrite", and was pardoned.

After the executions Cromwell delivered one of his half-religious, half-political addresses, as a result of which the remaining prisoners promised to abandon all further seditious attempts to enforce their desires. They were presently reinstated in their regiments, and the following summer were sent to Ireland.

In the afternoon of the day of the executions, Cromwell and Fairfax proceeded to Oxford, where the University conferred degrees upon them. Parliament also thanked them, and the great City merchants (who had execrated Cromwell often enough in the past) hailed him as their saviour, and entertained him to a splendid banquet on June 7th, 1649, in the Grocers' Hall, at which Cromwell and Fairfax were presented with gold dishes and plates. At the same time a frivolous attempt was made to remedy some of the economic grievances which nourished the Levellers' movement, by providing £400 to be distributed among the poor of London. The wealthy City merchants had been in a state of panic, and the most extravagant rumours were afoot concerning the plans of the Levellers. They were charged with atheism and denying the immortality of the soul: but what was even more frightening to men of property, it was said "they will have no man call anything his, for it is tyranny that a man should have any proper land; particular property is devillish". Thus declared

England's Discoverie, or the Levellers Creed, which was published a few days before the banquet in the Grocers' Hall. This pamphlet asseverated that

their emissaries (are) specially sent to raise the servant against the master, the tenant against the landlord, the buyer against the seller, the borrower against the lender, the poor against the rich, for encouragement every beggar shall be set on horseback.

After Burford the Levellers steadily lost influence, though they still had friends in the Army, and many supporters among the London populace.

LILBURNE'S LAST DAYS

The closing years of Lilburne's life were no less stormy than his earlier days had been. In 1652 he was banished, and went to Holland, and when he returned to England in 1653 (after Cromwell had dismissed the "Rump" of the Long Parliament which had sentenced him to banishment) he was arrested and tried for "breach of exile". The hearing of his case at the Old Bailey Court of Assizes dragged on for weeks, but he was eventually acquitted; and after being kept in close custody by the Council of State for some time, he was sent to Jersey in March, 1654, and held there as a prisoner of state.

In the autumn of 1654 he was transferred to Dover Castle, and a few weeks later London newspapers received a report that he had joined the Quakers. He died on August 19th, 1657.

Lilburne was the protagonist of the poor peasants and the craftsmen and artisans of his day—the class from which the modern proletariat was presently to evolve. Cromwell, on the other hand, was devoted to the interests of the propertied classes. This ~~comes~~ comes out clearly in the speech which he made on the dissolution of Parliament on January 22nd, 1655, when he used the most violent language against the Levellers.

It is some satisfaction (he said) if a Commonwealth must perish, that it perish by men and not by the hands of persons differing little from beasts! That if it must need suffer, it should rather suffer from rich men than from poor men, who, as Solomon says, "when they oppress leave nothing behind them, but are a sweeping rain."

After the collapse of the revolt in the Army many of the radical elements must have despaired of bringing about the social and political changes which they desired by their own powers, and turned to the Almighty to accomplish what they had failed to achieve. After 1649 there is a fresh outburst of mystical

religion and sectarian activity; and "it is to this period that the origins of such groups as the Quakers and the Fifth Monarchy Men are to be traced". (*Left Wing Democracy in the Civil War*, p. 115.) With the failure of political agitation and the repressive measures that were taken by the government to crush the revolt,

social aspirations . . . were translated into the terms of religious radicalism. The angels may enter where men may not venture to tread; and what political activity has failed to achieve, Divine intervention would surely effect. The rights of the individual which society should guarantee became the privileges of the Saints which God would assure; and a social order in which legislation was to abolish inequality and injustice became instead a world in which as a result of the inner spiritual regeneration of mankind, men would cease to oppress their fellows. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, pp. 115-116)*

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LEVELLERS

It is not easy to assess the real strength and influence of the Levellers' movement. Undoubtedly its main support was in and around London, although it appears that propagandists carried its doctrines to remote parts of the country, and that it found some adherents in the North of England. To what extent it was an organised movement it is difficult to say: the Levellers' own publications throw no light on this problem, and the accounts of their opponents are inaccurate and often contradictory. The term Leveller was not even a strict party appellation, but was applied indiscriminately to those taking part in civil commotions of a purely local character which had little to do with the political aims of Lilburne and his friends. Indeed, the Leveller leaders often protested against the nickname (which was applied to them by their enemies), and were at pains to explain that they did not wish to "levell mens Estates, destroy Propriety, or make all things common". (The second *Agreement of the People*, Dec. 15th, 1648): This unequivocal declaration was repeated in the third *Agreement* of May 1st, 1649, which represents the final development of their political and social theories.

From July, 1648, to the end of September, 1649, information about the movement is provided by a journal which was described as the organ of the Levellers, and which produced most of the

*Winstanley's mystical and theological writings (see following chapter) are a product of this period. He too, protests, that "sharp punishing laws were made to forbid fishermen, shepherds, husbandmen, and tradesmen for ever preaching of God any more but schollars bred up in humane letters only should do that worke". *The Breaking of the Day of God* (May, 1648).

proclamations and pamphlets which the Levellers published during that period. This paper was entitled *The Moderate*, the name being intended to indicate the calm impartiality of its style. In its issue of July 31st to August 7th, 1649, it comments upon the execution of some cattle thieves, and blames the institution of private property for the death of these criminals, arguing that if private property did not exist there would be no need for men to steal.

From the issue for the last week in August, 1649, we learn that the Leveller movement numbered many miners in its ranks, especially in Derbyshire, where they are reported to be in dispute with the Earl of Rutland, and determined, if Parliament fails to give them justice, to have recourse to "natural law". With their friends and sympathisers they were said to number twelve thousand, and they threatened "in default of a hearing to form a resolute army". The *Moderate* declared that "the Party of the Levellers in Town promises them assistance in the prosecution of their just demands". The strength of this discontent movement was possibly overrated: at any rate, a few days later a letter from the "Freeholders and Miners, etc." of the Derbyshire mining district published in a Cromwellian paper, states that the miners numbered at most four thousand, and that the Levellers did not have a dozen followers in Derbyshire.

The last issue of the *Moderate* appeared in September, 1649, when Parliament enacted a press law which re-established the system of licences, and prescribed heavy penalties for the publication of abusive and libellous matter.

Can we regard the Levellers as constituting a working class movement? Hardly, for at that period the industrial working class had ~~hardly~~ barely begun to develop in this country. Britain was still in the main an agricultural country in spite of the growing importance of commerce and manufacture. According to Gregory King, who wrote at the end of the 17th century (*Natural and Political Observations*, 1694) about 30 per cent of the country population consisted of peasant freeholders and tenants, and no really formidable agrarian movement was possible on such a basis. Moreover, there was still a good deal of common land available for squatters, and this helped blur the sharp edges of discontent. It was not until after the Restoration (and especially after the "Glorious Revolution" of 1689) that conditions were created which might have resulted in a revolutionary agrarian movement.

The Levellers were the extreme left of the middle-class revolution. "Like all extreme parties, they tend here and there to overstep the boundary at which they stand, but they remain finally in the middle-class camp". (*Cromwell and Communism*, p. 171 *).

*It is interesting to note that when the Chartists took up the struggle for adult suffrage two centuries later their demands were hardly more advanced than those of the Levellers.

CHAPTER 9

THE DIGGERS

While men are gazing up to heaven, imagining after a happiness or fearing a hell after they are dead, their eyes are put out, that they see not what is their birth-right, and what is to be done by them here on earth while they are living.

The Law of Freedom in a Platform, or True Magistracy Restored.
Gerrard Winstanley.

GERRARD WINSTANLEY

"The Digger Movement (says M. Beer) although small in the number of its adherents, was an agrarian revolt on a surprisingly extensive theoretical basis. It was as if all the Peasant Wars of the past had suddenly become articulate". (*A History of British Socialism*, p. 60.) Though it lasted little more than a year—April 1649 to Easter 1650—it produced a number of remarkable manifestoes and pamphlets, most of which were written by Gerrard Winstanley.

Little is known about the life of Winstanley. He was born at Wigan, in 1609, and came to London at the age of twenty, where he served his apprenticeship under the widow of a member of the Merchant Taylors Company. He became a freeman in 1637, but gave up his business about a year after the outbreak of the Civil War "by reason of the badness of the times". Later he became acquainted with William Everard, who seems to have played an important part in turning his thoughts to politics. Everard was one of the soldiers arrested in 1647 for promoting the first *Agreement of the People* in the "New Model", and in December of the same year he was cashiered from the Army. He and Winstanley were acquainted with one another by the autumn of 1648.

As was usual in the polemics of the day, Winstanley clothed his ideas in Biblical phrase and language, and what Petegorsky calls "a spiritual interpretation of history" (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, p. 126) runs through his earlier tracts.* The history of the human race (he contends) is a record of God's

*For an excellent summary of the early writings of Winstanley see *Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War* (Chap. 3-5), by David W. Petegorsky.

attempt to kill the spirit of selfishness in men by revealing Himself to them through Jesus Christ. Man is saved from the Beast within him through the power of Christ. The first Adam is

the wisdom and the power of the flesh in every man, who indeed is the Beast . . . covetousness . . . pride and envy, lifting up himself above others, and seeking revenge upon all that crosses his selfish honours. And hypocrisy, subtlety, lying imagination, self-love. . . . This is the first Adam, lying, ruling and dwelling within mankind. (*The New Law of Righteousness*, January 1649*.)

But the divine revelation which enables Man to master this first Adam will come not primarily to men "of study, learning and actings", but rather to the "despised, the unlearned, the poor, the nothings of this world", and these shall serve as living witnesses of the salvation which God intends for all mankind. These Saints will be reviled and persecuted; but ultimately all mankind shall be redeemed and "Jesus Christ . . . will dwell in the whole creation, that is, in every man and woman without exception". (*The Mysterie of God Concerning the whole Creation, Mankinde* (April-May 1648)).

History, for Winstanley, is

the story of a continuous conflict between opposing forces. The arena of that struggle is primarily the hearts and souls of men; but the conflict finds reflection and objectification in the institutions and laws men create as instruments for its prosecution. Salvation and freedom for mankind will not come through some sudden miracle, but from the progressive revelation of Christ to every individual, through the triumph of love over selfishness and lust in every human being. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, p. 130.)

Winstanley conceives of God not as a majestic Being dwelling aloof from men in a Heaven beyond this world, but as a spirit that dwells in all mankind. Thus he advises his readers not to

look for a God now as formerly you did to be a place of glory beyond the Sun, Moon and Stars nor imagine a divine being you know not where but see him ruling within you . . . He that looks for a God without himself . . . is led away and deceived by the imaginations of his own heart. (*The Saint's Paradise or the Fathers Teaching the only Satisfaction to Waiting Souls*. June-September, 1648.)

A man becomes conscious of the presence of God within himself when he has conquered selfishness and greed, and no longer feels that he "cannot live without money, lands, help of men and creatures". (*The Saint's Paradise*.)

*Most of the quotations from Winstanley's writings are taken from *Gerrard Winstanley, Selections from his works*, Edited by Leonard Hamilton.

Sometimes Winstanley identifies God with Reason, contending that "though men esteem this word Reason to be too mean a name to set forth the Father by, yet it is the highest name that can be given him". (*The Saint's Paradise*). "It is reason that made all things and it is Reason that governs the whole Creation". (*The Saint's Paradise*). It is Reason, too, that makes a man deal justly with his fellows.

Wouldest thou have another to come and take away thy Goods, thy liberties, thy life? No, saith the Flesh, that I would not. Then, saith Reason, Do as you wouldest be done unto . . . (*The Saint's Paradise*.)

As time goes on the mystical element in Winstanley's writings decreases, and more and more he sees the struggle between good and evil not merely as a clash of spiritual forces within the individual man, but also as one between economic classes, with the wealthy striving to retain their wealth and privileges, and the poor seeking for social justice and equality. That he did not regard his social theories as a contradiction of his religious ideas, but rather as a logical development from them, is shown by the fact that he published a collected edition of his theological works early in 1650 at the very time he was giving effect to his social theories by carrying through the St. George's Hill experiment in practical communism.

WINSTANLEY'S SOCIAL THEORIES

Petegorsky suggests that

an influence of decisive importance in Winstanley's rapid development from his rational theology of the autumn of 1648 to his practical communism of the spring of 1649 was the activity of a group of advanced country Levellers in Buckinghamshire. Winstanley living near the borders of that county, may have come into personal contact with some members of that group, but at any rate the influence of their first short tract, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* of December, 1648, is unmistakably reflected in his remarkable work *The New Law of Righteousness*, of the following month . . . (Winstanley) was able . . . to expand the suggestions of *Light Shining, etc.*, into a comprehensive social philosophy that so completely transferred his interests from man's spiritual difficulties to his social and economic problems. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, pp. 138-142.)

The New Law of Righteousness Budding forth, in restoring the whole Creation from the bondage of the Curse Or A Glimpse of the new Heaven, and a New Earth wherein dwells Righteousness Giving an Alarm to silence all that preach or speak from hearsay or imagination (to give it

its full title) was published in January 1649, and is a blend of the mystical and the practical. Winstanley is still concerned with the spiritual struggle within Man, and his argument is still fundamentally a religious one, but he now definitely recognises that private property is the source of all social misery and strife. "Self-proprietie (he says) . . . is the curse and burden the creation groans under" (*The New Law of Righteousness*). And again, it is

this particular propriety of mine and thine (that) hath brought in all misery upon people. For, first it hath occasioned people to steal from one another. Secondly it hath made laws to hang those that did steal. It tempts people to do an evil action and then kills them for doing of it. (*The New Law of Righteousness*.)

Winstanley's analysis is a remarkable one for the times in which he lived, and Petegorsky rightly says that

in his argument for a system of common ownership he has already passed far beyond all other thinkers of the period. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, p. 138.)

Man at his creation (he contends) was a perfect being; but selfishness arose within him, and became a desire for the exclusive possession and enjoyment of material things, and thus private property was born. As the earth became the private property of the few the rest of mankind were enslaved and forced to labour for them, although "the King of Righteousness did not make some men to be tyrants, and others to be slaves", but rather "The earth was made by the Lord to be a common 'treasury for all, not a particular treasury for some". (*The New Law of Righteousness*).

Winstanley sees that all tyranny arises out of this private ownership of the earth,

for let men say what they will, so long as such are rulers as call the land theirs, upholding this particular property of mine and thine, the common people shall never have their liberty, nor the land ever freed from troubles, oppressions and complainings. (*The New Law of Righteousness*.)

Men would never be free and happy, he believed, until the means of life were held in common.

When the earth becomes a common treasury as it was in the beginning, and the King of Righteousness come to rule in everyone's heart, then He kills the first Adam; for covetousness thereby is killed. A man shall have meat and drink and clothes by his labour in freedom, and what can be desired more in earth? Pride and envy likewise is killed thereby, for every one shall look upon each other as equal in the Creation; every man indeed being

a perfect creation of himself. And so this second Adam, Christ the restorer, stops or dams up the runnings of those stinking waters of self-interest, and causes the waters of life and liberty to run plentifully in and through the Creation, making the earth one storehouse, and every man and woman to live in the law of righteousness and peace as members of one household. (*The New Law of Righteousness.*)

God willed the common people ("the lowest and most despised sort of people, that are counted the dust of the earth, mankind that are trod under-foot") to work upon the common lands "without either giving or taking hire, looking upon the land as freely mine as anothers". But social change of this sort (Win-
stanley predicts) will be vigorously opposed by

covetous, proud, lazy, pampered flesh that would have the poor still to work for that devil (particular interest) to maintain his greatness that he may live at ease. (*The New Law of Righteousness.*)

He sees, too, that State and Church both exist primarily to defend the existing property relationships; and (when allowance is made for archaisms and the occasional use of theological modes of expression) there is something astonishingly modern in his analysis of the social relationships which arise on the economic foundation of private property in land and capital. Having seized the land by force, the landlords (he argues) created a system of law and government to protect their privileges; and to help in the enslavement of the people they also established a visible church which had no divine sanction. Religion is used to keep the common people content with their slavery; for "your false teachers" put this notion of an "outward heaven" into "your heads to please you while they pick your purses". (*The New Law of Righteousness*). And so he has scant patience with those who

seek for the new Jerusalem, the City of Zion, or heaven, to be above the skies, in a local place, wherein there is all glory, and . . . this not to be seen neither by the eyes of the body till the body be dead. (*The New Law of Righteousness.*)

"A strange conceit", he called it, and declared that this

outward heaven . . . is a fancy which your false teachers put into your heads to please you with, while they pick your purses, and betray your Christ into the hands of flesh, and hold Jacob under to be a servant still to Lord Esau. (*The New Law of Righteousness*).

For him (as for Thomas Münzer) the Kingdom of Heaven was to be here, on earth.

If you look for heaven, or for manifestation of the Father's love in you in any place, but within yourselves, you are deceived . . . if you look for any other hell or for sorrows in any other place, than what shall be made manifest within the bottomless pit, your very fleshly self, you are deceived, and you shall find that when this bottomless pit is opened to your view, it will be a torment sufficient. For from hence doth the curse spread, and all that misery you are or may be capable of, it is but the breakings forth of that stinking dunghill, that is seated within you, and is in that power of darkness that rules within the Creation, your body. (*The New Law of Righteousness*).

Winstanley develops the same ideas a few months later in *The True Levellers Standard Advanced or the State of Community opened and presented to the Sons of Men* (April, 1649). This pamphlet is a defence of the Diggers' attempts to set up a Communist colony at Cobham, and shows

the cause why the common people of England have begun, and gives consent to dig up, manure and sow corn upon George Hill, in Surrey; by those that have subscribed, and thousands more that gives consent.

It opens with a sentence which Bernstein suggests "savours of the 18th century rationalists" (*Cromwell and Communism*).

In the beginning of time the great creator Reason made the earth to be a common treasury . . . not one word was spoken in the beginning that one branch of mankind should rule over another.

Winstanley proceeds to charge the government with having failed to keep its promises to make "this people a free people".

Thou hast made many promises and protestations to make the land a free nation; and yet at this very day the same people to whom thou hast made such protestations of liberty are oppressed by thy courts, assizes, sessions, by thy justices and clerks of the peace, so called, bailiffs, committees, are imprisoned and forced to spend that bread that should save their lives from famine. (*The True Levellers Standard Advanced*).

The overthrow of the King has not brought freedom to the common people.

Take notice (he writes) that England is not a free people, till the poor that have no land have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons, and so live as comfortably as the landlords that live in their enclosures . . . not only this common or heath should be taken in and manured by the people, but all the commons and waste ground in England, and in the whole world, shall be taken in by the people in righteousness, not owning any property; but taking the earth to be a common treasury, as it was first made for all. (*The True Levellers Standard Advanced*).

He ends his plea for social justice by declaring that

if any of you that are the great ones of the earth, that have been bred tenderly and cannot work, do bring in your stock into the common treasury, as an offering to the work of righteousness, we will work for you, and you shall receive as we receive.

(*The True Levellers Standard Advanced.*)

Winstanley does not propose to seek justice "by force of arms".

We abhor it; for that is the work of the Midianites to kill one another; but by obeying the Lord of Hosts, who hath revealed Himself in us and to us, by labouring the earth in righteousness together, we eat our bread with the sweat of our brows, neither giving hire nor taking hire, but working together and eating together, as one man, or as one house of Israel restored from bondage. And so by the power of reason, the law of righteousness in us, we endeavour to lift up the Creation from that bondage of civil property which it groans under. (*The True Levellers Standard Advanced.*)

And again:

He that delivered Israel from Pharoah of old, is the same power still, in whom we trust, and whom we serve. For this conquest over thee shall be got, not by the sword of weapon, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. (*The True Levellers Standard Advanced.*)*

It is interesting to note that in spite of the pacifism which Winstanley preached and the Diggers practised in the face of considerable provocation, their enemies charged them with having seized a house and "put four guns into it", and declared that they were "Cavaliers" who "wait for an opportunity to bring in the prince" (Charles II). In the Calendar of State Papers there is a copy of a letter from Winstanley and John Palmer, on behalf of their associates, to the Council of State of the Commonwealth, in which they protest against these grotesque charges, and affirm that "we are peaceable men (who) do not resist our enemies, but pray God to quiet our hearts, and we desire to conquer by love".

Gross charges of immorality were also made against the Diggers (similar to those that were later to be levelled against Socialists), and they were not only accused of robbing others, but of holding women in common. Winstanley warmly repudiated this latter charge.

*The same opinion is expressed in *A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army* (1650), where he declares that "Victory that is gotten by the sword is a victory that slaves get one over another . . . But victory obtained by love, is a victory for a King."

However, by 1651, when Winstanley produced his blueprint for a model community (*The Law of Freedom in a Platform, or True Magistracy Restored*), he gave up his extreme pacifist views, and made provision in his Utopia for the use of violence both by an army and a police force.

For my part (he wrote) I declare against it. I own this to be a truth, that the earth ought to be common treasury to all; but as for women, let every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband, and I know none of the Diggers that act in such an irrational excess of female community. If they should, I profess to have nothing to do with such people, but leave them to their own master, who will pay them with torment of mind and diseases in their bodies. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army*, January 1650.)

But the dominant theme that runs through all Winstanley's later writings is that the land has been stolen from the people, and that with the victory over the King the land ought to return to the people,

or else what benefit shall the common people have (that have suffered most in these wars) by the victory that is got over the king? (*A Letter to the Lord Fairfax and his Council of War with Divers Questions to the Lawyers and Ministers.*) (June, 1649.)

And again, everyone without exception . . . "ought to have the liberty to enjoy the earth for his livelihood, and to settle his dwelling in part of the commons of England, without buying or renting land of any, else there is no true freedom," for "if the common people have no more freedom in England but only to live among their elder brothers (i.e. the landowners), and work for them for hire, what freedom then have they in England, more than we have in Turkey or France?" (*A Letter to Lord Fairfax.*)

There is something perennially modern, too, in Winstanley's complaint that

there are but few that act for freedom, and the actors for freedom are oppressed by the talkers and verbal professors of freedom. (*A Watchword to the City of London and the Army*, September, 1649.)

Winstanley's writings have a simple, forthright vigour, and he has a gift for coining descriptive phrases that stick in the reader's memory. For example, his contemptuous rejection of "the traditional, parrot-like speaking from the Universities and Colleges" (*A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England*, May, 1649); or his biting denunciation of "caterpillar lawyers" and the law which is

a very good name to cover his knavery; for he is a mighty beast with great teeth, and is a mighty devourer of men. He eats up all that comes within his power. . . . The law is the fox, poor men are the geese; he pulls off their feathers, and feeds upon them.

Another memorable phrase is that lawyers

love money as dearly as a poor man's dog do his breakfast in a cold morning,

and they are

such neat workmen, that they can turn a cause which way those

that have the biggest purse will have them. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

O you Parliament-men of England (he cries), cast those whorish laws out of doors, that are so common, that pretend love to everyone, and is faithful to none. For truly, he that goes to law, as the proverb is, shall die a beggar. So that old whores, and old laws, picks men's pockets and undoes them . . . burn all your law books in Cheapside, and set up your government upon your own foundations. Do not put new wine into old bottles; but as your government must be new, so let the laws be new, or else you will run farther into the mud, where you stick already, as though you were fast in an Irish bog. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

Winstanley was equally forthright in his denunciation of the clergy who "will serve on any side, like our ancient laws, that will serve any master". (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and the Army*). For

If the clergy can get tithes or money, they will turn as the ruling power turns, any way: to Popery, to Protestantism, for a king, against a king, for the monarchy, for state government. They cry who bids most wages, they will be on the strongest side, for an earthly maintenance. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

Nor will the ministers

take 12d. a day as other labourers have, but they will compel £100 or more to be paid to them yearly. Secondly they lay claim to heaven after they are dead, and yet they require their heaven in this world too, and grumble mightily against the people that will not give them large temporal maintenance. (*An Appeal to All Englishmen to Judge between Bondage and Freedom.* March 1650.)

But

true religion and undefiled is this, to make restitution of the earth, which hath been taken and held from the common people by the power of conquests formerly, and so set the oppressed free. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

THE DIGGERS OF COBHAM*

In *The New Law of Righteousness* (January 1649) Winstanley states that divine revelation came to him whilst he was in a trance. Texts darted at him from the sky.

Likewise I heard these words "Work together, Eat bread together, declare all this abroad." Likewise I heard these words:

*In its report of an incident at St. George's Hill on April 23rd, *The Kingdom's Faithfull and Impartiall Scout* refers to the "Diggers". This appears to be the first occasion on which the term was applied to them. Generally they referred to themselves as "True Levellers".

"Whosoever it is that labours in the earth for any person or persons that lifts up themselves as Lords and Rulers over others and that doth not look upon themselves equal to others in the creation, the hand of the Lord shall be upon the labourer. I the Lord have spoke it and I will do it. Declare this all abroad."

He goes on to explain that

I have now obeyed the command of the Spirit that bid me declare all this abroad, I have delivered it and I will deliver it by word of mouth, I have now declared it by my pen. And when the Lord doth shew unto me the place and manner how he will have us that are called common people to manure and work upon the common lands, I will then go forth and declare it in my actions. (*The New Law of Righteousness.*)

Soon afterwards, early in April, 1649, Winstanley kept his promise to give practical effect to his communist theories. It was a time of acute social tension. The Levellers' revolt in the Army was coming to a head, and the whole country was in the throes of a political and economic crisis, with widespread unemployment and social discontent. In Winstanley's vivid phrase the old world was "running up like parchment in the fire". (*The True Levellers Standard Advanced or the State of Community opened and presented to the Sons of Men*, April, 1649).

With some twenty or thirty poor men Winstanley and William Everard* came to St. George's Hill, near Cobham, in Surrey, and began to dig some waste land, and sow it with corn, parsnips, carrots and beans. They explained to the local people that as yet they were few, but that in a little while their numbers would be four or five thousand; and they declared that it was

an undeniable equity that the common people ought to dig, plow, plant and dwell upon the Commons without hiring them or paying rent to any.

The local gentry took alarm, and Mr. Drake, lord of the manor of St. George's Hill (and a Member of Parliament), and Parson Platt, lord of the manor of Cobham, appealed to the Council of State for military assistance.

The Council of State sent two troop of horse to Cobham, and on April 20th Everard and Winstanley were brought before General Fairfax, when they refused to remove their hats since "he was but their fellow creature".† Everard defended their actions

*William Everard was regarded as the leader of the Digger movement until he left it in May, 1649, and his name headed the list of signatories to the first Digger manifesto *The True Levellers Standard Advanced*.

†John Lilburne had made the same gesture at his trial before the Star Chamber, in 1637. Later this symbolic assertion of human equality was adopted by the Quakers.

by declaring that ever since the coming of William the Conqueror the "people of God had lived under tyranny and oppression worse than that of our forefathers under the Egyptians". Lately (he said) he had seen a vision which bade him "Arise and dig and plough the Earth, and receive the fruit thereof"; and all that he and his fellows sought to do was to restore the "ancient Community of enjoying the fruits of the Earth", and to distribute the benefits thereof to the poor and needy, and to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. He went on to explain that they did not intend to break down fences, or to meddle with private property, but only to till the common land and "make it fruitful for the use of men", for they did not see why they should die while there was an abundance of common land lying idle. They would recruit the "poor, workless and oppressed into their ranks", and bring them from a "shiftless vagabondage into good citizenship". Finally (he said) the time would come when the present freeholders, the perpetrators of Norman tyranny, would pull down their fences, give up their landed property, and willingly join the community, thus ending all tyranny and slavery and establishing God's kingdom on earth.

Everard made it clear that they would not defend themselves by arms, but would "submit unto authority, and wait till the promised opportunity be offered", which they believed to be at hand.

With their notice by the Council of State and the appearance of their leaders before Fairfax, the Diggers enjoyed the spotlight of national attention for a brief period. Most of the news-sheets of the last weeks of April note their activities.... Some... contented themselves with brief and factual accounts of the information which had reached the Council and the interview with Fairfax. Others, reporting the affair, dismissed it as the work of a few madmen; Everard, particularly, is described by most papers as "a mad prophet." (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, pp. 163-4).

According to one account "they are a distracted crack-brained people"; but *Mercurius Britannicus* accuses the Royalists of having instigated the Digger venture in order to increase the general confusion and unrest so that the Royalists might have a chance to seize power; and *Mercurius Pragmaticus* gloomily remarks that

what the fanatical insurrection may grow into cannot be conceived for Mahomet had as small and despicable a beginning whose damnable infections have spread themselves many hundreds of years since over the face of half the universe.

Meanwhile the local gentry at Cobham organized a boycott of the Diggers "so that they could neither buy nor sell", and early in June several soldiers, under a Captain Stravie, came to St. George's Hill, and beat up a man and boy, seriously injuring the latter, and also burned a house. A few days later several men attacked four Diggers on the common. The Diggers, in accordance with their principle of refusing to use violence, offered no resistance, and were so brutally beaten one was not expected to live. A cart in which they were hauling wood to rebuild their house was smashed and the horse seriously injured.

Hooliganism failing to get rid of the Diggers, the law was invoked, and early in July Winstanley and fifteen of his companions were arrested on a charge of trespass, and brought to the manor court at Kingston. The Diggers refused to employ legal assistance, but were not allowed to plead their own case; and a jury of rich freeholders imposed fines which were deliberately made so heavy (£10 a man, plus twenty-one shillings and a penny costs), that they could not pay, whereupon their property was distrained. "Will Star and Ned Sutton, both freeholders, and others the snapsack boys and ammunition drabs" drove away four cows which Winstanley had either hired or borrowed, and beat them with their clubs, that the cows' heads and sides did swell, which grieved tender hearts to see. And yet those cows never were upon George Hill*, nor never digged upon that ground, and yet the poor beasts must suffer because they gave milk to feed me. (*A Watchword to the City of London and the Army*. Winstanley, September, 1649.)

The four cows were rescued "out of those devils' hands" by sympathisers; but other cows (Winstanley says) were killed to feed the "snapsack boys and the ammunition drabs" that helped to drive them away, "that they might be encouraged by a belly full of stolen goods to stick the closer to the business another time".

On August 24th, 1649, a meeting was held at the "White Lion" at Cobham, when "much sack and tobacco was consumed", and a mob was organised to raid the colony and dig up the seeds.

Alas! you poor blind earth moles (Winstanley wrote of them), you strive to take away my livelihood, and the liberty of this poor weak frame my body of flesh, which is my house I dwell in for a time; but I strive to cast down your kingdom of darkness, and to open hell gates, and to break the devil's bonds asunder, wherewith you are tied, that you my enemies may live in peace, and that is all the harm I would have you to have. (*A Watchword to the City of London and the Army*.)

*St. George's Hill. Like the Quakers, the Diggers omitted the word "Saint".

Seven of Winstanley's cows and a bull were driven off during the night, "some of the cows being a neighbour's that had hired the pasture." However, "these cows (Winstanley relates) are brought home again, and the heart of my enemies is put into the pound of vexation because the cows are set free".

The persecution of the Diggers continued: not only were their cows driven off, but hogs and cattle were "let into the standing barley and other corn".

And when they had done this mischief, the bailiffs and other Norman snapsack boys went hollowing and shouting, as if they were dancing at a Whitsun Ale, so glad they are to do mischief to the Diggers, that they might hinder the work of freedom.

Was it for this, Winstanley asks, that the King was overthrown.

You zealous preachers and professors of the City of London, and you great officers and soldiery of the army, where are all your victories over the Cavaliers, that you made such a blaze in the land, in giving God thanks for, and which you begged in your fasting days and morning exercises? Are they all sunk into the Norman power again and must the old prerogative laws stand? What freedom then did you give thanks for? Surely that you had killed him that rode upon you, that you may get up into his saddle to ride upon others. Oh, thou City, thou hypocritical City! Thou blindfold, drowsy England, that sleeps and snorts in the bed of covetousness, awake, awake! The enemy is upon thy back, he is ready to scale the walls and enter possession, and wilt thou not look out? (*A Watchword to the City of London and the Army.*)

And he cries that

all the rabble of the nations, lords, knights, gentlemen, lawyers, bailiffs, priests and all the Norman snapsack boys and ammunition women to the old Norman camp, do all combine together in the art of unrighteous fury, to drive the poor Diggers off from their work that the name of community and freedom, which is Christ, may not be known in earth.

In the winter the troops were called in again, but some of them "were very moderate and rational men" Winstanley says, and one of them

was very civil, and walked lovingly with the Diggers round their corn which they had planted, and commended the work, and would do no harm . . . and when he went his way he gave the Diggers twelve pence to drink. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army, Gerrard Winstanley.*)

However, the soldiers stood by while the parson

caused a poor old man's house upon the common to be pulled down in the evening of a cold day, and turned the old man and his wife and daughter to lie in the open field, because he was a Digger. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

But Winstanley says of "the poor tenants that pulled down the house" that they did it "for fear they should be turned out of service of their livings", and he asks "Can the Turkish Bashaws hold their slaves in more bondage than these Gospel-professing lords of manors do their poor tenants?"

And when the poor enforced slaves had pulled down the house, then their lords gave them ten shillings to drink, and there they smiled one upon another, being fearful, like a dog that is kept in awe, when his master gives him a bone and stands over him with a whip. He will eat, and look up, and twinch his tail. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

But Winstanley was convinced that "in their hearts they are Diggers".

As for the Diggers themselves they "were mighty cheerful, and their spirits resolve to wait upon God, to see what He will do". And they took

the spoiling of their goods cheerfully, counting it a great happiness to be persecuted for righteousness' sake by the priests and professors, that are the successors of Judas, and the bitter-spirited Pharisees that put the Man Christ Jesus to death. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

In this pamphlet Winstanley sets out

A bill of account of the most remarkable sufferings that the Diggers have met with from the great red Dragon's power since April 1, 1649, which was the first day that they began to dig and to take possession of the commons for the poor on George Hill in Surrey. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

Among other persecutions he relates how

divers of the Diggers were beaten . . . by William Star and John Taylor and by men in women's apparel, and so sore wounded that some of them were fetched home in a cart. (*A New Year's Gift for the Parliament and Army.*)

Elsewhere (*An Humble Request to All the Ministers of both Universities and to all Lawyers of every Inns-a-Court*, April, 1650), Winstanley declares that Parson Platt's men kicked and struck a woman "so that she miscarried of her child, and by the blows and abuses they gave her she kept her bed a week".

In the end this constant savage persecution proved too much even for the courage and endurance of the Diggers, and before Easter, 1650, the Cobham colony had ceased to exist. Prior to that, however, the Diggers had sent missionaries to several counties to urge the poor to follow the St. George's Hill example, and also to collect funds for their own little community. They visited more than thirty towns and villages in Buckinghamshire,

Surrey, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Berkshire, Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire. These delegates carried a letter from Winstanley, which was also signed by 25 other Diggers, declaring their intention to persist in their plans despite all opposition, but adding that their crops having been destroyed, dire necessity might force them to give up their venture unless help was forthcoming.

This mission must have met with some success, for in March, 1650, the "poor inhabitants" of Wellingborough in Northamptonshire had begun to dig upon the "common and waste-ground called Bareshank". However, they were speedily suppressed, and the Council of State wrote to Mr. Pentlow, the justice of the peace for Northampton, congratulating him on the prompt measures he had taken against the "Levellers in those parts". Another colony was established at Coxhall, in Kent; and it appears that similar attempts were made in Gloucestershire, for we hear of "rude multitudes levelling the enclosures". But all these communities failed, and the movement died out.

WINSTANLEY'S UTOPIA

With the collapse of the Cobham experiment Winstanley appears to have devoted himself to the task of trying to win converts to his communist ideas by reason and persuasion rather than by example. In February, 1652, there appeared the fullest and most closely reasoned exposition of his ideas that he ever published, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform, or True Magistracy Restored*. In this he outlines in considerable detail his conception of an ideal community. The work is humbly presented to Oliver Cromwell, with the plea that

it may be here are some things inserted which you may not like, yet other things you may like. Therefore I pray you read it, and be as the industrious bee, suck out the honey and cast away the weeds.

He declares that Cromwell has "the power of the land in your hand", and must

either set the land free to the oppressed commoners, who assisted you, and paid the Army their wages; and then you will fulfil the Scriptures and you own engagements, and so take possession of your deserved honour. Or secondly, you must only remove the Conqueror's power out of the King's hand into other men's, maintaining the old laws still; and then your wisdom and honour is blasted for ever; and you will either lose yourself, or lay the foundation of greater slavery to posterity than you ever knew.

His appeal, of course, was in vain: Cromwell had not the slightest sympathy with Winstanley's levelling, communist theories. He represented the triumphant bourgeoisie of his day, and could but choose one policy; the consolidation of their power. The fight against priestcraft and the divine right of kings (in which the poorer peasantry and the poor artisans of the towns had played a not inconsiderable part) did not mean liberty for the common people, but the enthronement of the divine right of property. After the English Revolution, British capitalism went its triumphant way, building a world empire, turning the English peasant into a pauper, and accumulating (by commerce, the slave trade, the loot of India, and the theft of the common lands) the capital that made possible the Industrial Revolution which began in the second half of the eighteenth century and which ushered in the most dreadful age of exploitation that the English worker has ever known. Winstanley prophesied with more truth than he knew when he declared that Cromwell must either "set the land free to the oppressed commoners" or "lay the foundation of a greater slavery to posterity than you ever knew."

In a preamble to his proposals Winstanley enumerates the popular grievances of the times:

(1) Lack of religious toleration. The "burdens of the clergy remain still upon us," he says, and

if any man declares his judgment in the things of God, contrary to the clergy's report or the mind of some high officers, they are cashiered, imprisoned, crushed, and undone, and made sinners for a word, as they were in the popes' and bishops' days.

(2) In many parishes the "old formal ignorant episcopal priests" remain, many of whom

"are bitter enemies to the Commonwealth's freedom, and friends to monarchy . . . and are continually buzzing their subtle principles into the minds of the people," thereby "causing a disaffection of spirit."

(3) The burden of tithes still remains.

(4) The administration of justice is still arbitrary.

In many courts and cases of law, the will of a judge and lawyer rules above the letter of the law.

(5) The laws remain the same as in the King's day;

only the name is altered; as if the commoners of England had paid their taxes, free-quarter, and shed their blood, not to reform, but to baptize the law into a new name, from kingly law, to state law.

(6) The old feudal dues and obligations still oppress the common people, the lords of the manors "requiring fines and heriots" and driving the people off the common land unless they will pay rent "as much as they did, and more, when the King was in power". Moreover, in parishes where common land remains the rich Norman freeholders, or the new (more covetous) gentry overstock the commons with sheep and cattle; so that inferior tenants and poor labourers can hardly keep a cow, but half starve her.

In many parishes, too, there is injustice in the assessment of taxes due to the influence of "two or three of the great ones", whilst the

country people cannot sell any corn or other fruits of the earth in a market town, but they must pay toll,

and are oppressed by high duties and market dues.

This statement of popular grievances is followed by an attack upon the titles to landed property. Winstanley argues that the land belongs to the landowner "either by Creation right, or by right of conquest". If the owner bases his claim on "Creation right" then the land "is mine as well as his; for the Spirit of the whole Creation, who made us both, is no respecter of persons"; and if he claims the earth by right of conquest "the kings are beaten and cast out, and that title is undone". Since the common people helped win a victory over the King they have an equal right to a share in the earth.

Winstanley then goes on to develop his communist theories, and explains that in his "True Commonwealth" there will be no buying and selling, for

when mankind began to buy and sell, then he did fall from his innocency; for then they began to oppress and cozen one another of their Creation birthright.

He anticipates the modern Marxist theory of the economic origin of war when he declares that

this buying and selling did bring in, and still doth bring in discontents and wars. . . . And the nations will never beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and leave off warring, until this cheating device of buying and selling be cast out among the rubbish of kingly power.

He anticipates modern Socialist criticism, too, when he argues that great wealth is not the result of the thrift and industry of the owner but is the result of the exploitation of the workers.

If a man have no help from his neighbours he shall never gather an estate of hundreds of thousands a year. If other men help him to work, then are those riches his neighbour's as well as his own.

And again "all rich men live at ease, feeding and clothing themselves by the labours of other men."

Winstanley is a throughgoing Leveller, for he will have no titles or honours in his ideal Commonwealth, save those which are the mark of some great service to society.

He who finds out any secret in nature shall have a title of honour given him . . . But no man shall have any title of honour till he win it by industry, or come to it by age or office-bearing.

And the "highest nobility" is "to be a faithful Commonwealth man in a Parliament house".

Nor will there be any need of lawyers in his Utopia, "for there is to be no buying and selling".

Winstanley stresses that while in his ideal state the earth and storehouses are to be common property, "every family shall live apart as they do now"; nor shall any one be compelled to enter this Commonwealth against his will. All that he asks is

that the Commonwealth's land, which is the ancient commons and waste lands, and the lands newly got in, by the Army's victories, out of the oppressor's hands, as parks, forests, chases and the like, may be set free to all that have lent assistance either of person or purse to obtain it, and to all that are willing to come in . . . and be obedient to the laws of the new Commonwealth.

The long preamble is followed by Chapter I, in which Winstanley discusses the meaning of freedom. Once again there is something astonishingly modern about his views. Freedom does not consist (he argues) in the removal of restrictions on trade, or in "freedom to have community with all women", or in religious freedom. "True freedom lies where a man receives his nourishment and preservation, and that is in the use of the earth".

Surely then, oppressing lords of manors, exacting landlords, and tithe-takers, may as well say their brethren shall not breathe in the air nor enjoy warmth in their bodies, not have the moist waters to fall upon them in showers, unless they will pay rent for it; as to say, their brethren shall not work upon the earth, nor eat the fruits thereof, unless they will hire that liberty of them.

Having thus insisted that men cannot be truly free without economic freedom, Winstanley goes on in Chapter 2 to discuss the government of the country. He distinguishes between what he calls "a kingly government, and a Commonwealth govern-

ment". The former (he says) "governs the earth by that cheating art of buying and selling", whereby every man's hand is against his fellows. This government can only rest on force, for "if it had not a club law to support it there would be no order in it". Moreover, this kingly government produces war, for it "beats pruning hooks and ploughs into spears, guns, swords and instruments of war", that the wealthy man may

live idle and at ease by his brother's labours. Indeed this government may well be called the government of highwaymen, who hath stolen the earth from the younger brethren (i.e. common people) by force, and holds it from them by force. . . . This kingly power is the old heaven and the old earth that must pass away.

On the other hand "Commonwealth's government governs the earth without buying and selling", and thereby restores "ancient peace and freedom".

In Chapter 3 Winstanley explains that in his ideal Commonwealth all officers would be chosen annually, for

nature tells us that if water stands long it corrupts; whereas running water keeps sweet and is fit for common use.

Have we not (he asks) experience in these days, that some officers of the Commonwealth are grown so mossy for want of removing, that they will hardly speak to an old acquaintance, if he be an inferior man, though they were very familiar before these wars began ? "

Winstanley's Utopia is thoroughly democratic, with manhood suffrage for all over twenty, although

uncivil livers, as drunkards, quarrellers, fearful ignorant men, who dare not speak truth lest they anger other men; likewise all who are wholly given to pleasure and sport, or men who are full of talk, are "not fit to be chosen officers in a Commonwealth."

Yet even these "uncivil livers" may "have a voice in the choosing". Those, however, who fought for the king or lent him money are neither to be eligible for office nor to have the franchise.

Above all (says Winstanley) men of courage are needed for public office.

Men who are not afraid to speak the truth; for this is the shame of many in England at this day: they are drowned in the dunghill mud of slavish fear of men; these are covetous men, not fearing God, and their portion is to be cast without the city of peace among the dogs.

Winstanley also believes that officers should be above forty years of age,* for they are most likely to be experienced men; and all these are likely to be men of courage, dealing truly and hating covetousness.

If poor men are elected to public office they are to have a yearly maintenance from the common stock until such time as a Commonwealth's freedom is established, for then there will be no need of such allowance.

In Chapter 5 Winstanley enumerates the officers who will be necessary in his ideal Commonwealth. In each town or parish "peace officers" are to be chosen to form a council to order the affairs of the parish, and to administer justice.

Overseers are also to be chosen yearly for every town and parish, to preserve peace, in case of any quarrels that may fall out between man and man. For though the earth with her fruits be a common treasury, and is to be planted and reaped by common assistance of every family, yet every house and all the furniture for ornament therein is a property of the indwellers; and when any family hath fetched in from the storehouses or shops either clothes, food, or any ornament necessary for their use, it is all a property of that family. And if any other family or man come to disturb them, and endeavour to take away furniture, which is the ornament of his neighbour's house, or to burn, break, or spoil wilfully any part of his neighbour's house, or endeavour to take away either food or clothing which his neighbour hath provided for his use, by reason whereof quarrels and provoking words arise; this office of overseers is to prevent disturbances, and is an assistance to the peacemaker.

Other overseers are to be appointed whose duty it is to see that young people be put to masters, to be instructed in some labour, trade, science, or to be waiters (i.e. shop assistants) in storehouses, that none may be idly brought up.

Overseers are also to be chosen for every trade . . . this overseer to go from house to house to view the works of the people of every house belonging to his trade and circuit, and to give directions as he sees cause. . . . And . . . there are to be overseers . . . in the country parishes, to see the earth planted,

It was inevitable in the circumstances of the times in which Winstanley lived that he should conceive of his Utopia as founded upon small-scale production. Thus most of the production

*Winstanley was forty-two when he wrote *The Law of Freedom*. He further justifies this choosing of officers from those who are over forty by arguing that "by this time man hath learned experience to govern himself and others. For when young wits are set to govern they wax wanton". (*The Law of Freedom*, Chap. 5).

is to be carried on in the people's homes, although the community is to maintain public workshops wherein boys who do not wish to follow their father's trade, may be trained in some other craft.

Every tradesman shall fetch materials, as leather, wool, flax, corn and the like, from the public storehouses to work upon them without buying and selling ; and when particular works are made, as cloth, shoes, hats and the like, the tradesmen shall bring these particular works to particular shops without buying and selling. And every family, as they want such things as they cannot make, they shall go to these shops and fetch without money.

Overseers are to be appointed to see that the various tradesmen bring their work to the storehouses and shops in this way.

Besides these overseers, "all ancient men, above sixty years of age " are to be general overseers or elders,

And wheresoever they go, and see things amiss in an officer or tradesman, they shall call any officer or others to account for their neglect of duty.

In addition to these overseers, the community is to choose a chief soldier (i.e. chief constable) with assistants under him, to execute justice, arrest offenders against the law, and to maintain law and order: a taskmaster, who is to see that those who are sentenced to lose their freedom shall do their appointed work: and an executioner to whip, behead, hang or shoot offenders " according to the sentence of the law".

There are to be annual Parliaments; and Parliament's first concern "is to . . . give out orders for the free planting and reaping of the Commonwealth's land", which will consist of all crown and church lands "recovered out of the hands of the Pope's power by the blood of the commoners of England", together with the commons and wastes which have been seized by the lords of the manors. Parliament is also " to abolish all old oppressive laws, and to enact new laws for the ease and freedom of the people"; and it is to raise an army to wage war abroad if occasion demand, or to suppress insurrection at home. (It can be seen that Winstanley has modified his earlier pacifist ideas).

Winstanley sets great store by science and education. On the weekly day of rest the chosen minister for the year is to read reports of "the affairs of the whole land, as it is brought in by the postmaster"; lectures are to be given "in all arts and sciences . . . as in physics, surgery, astrology, astronomy, navigation, husbandry, and such like" or upon "the nature of mankind, of his

darkness and of his light, of his weakness and of his strength, of his love and of his envy, of his sorrows and of his joy, of his inward and outward bondages, and of his inward and outward freedom". Moreover, these lectures are to

be made sometimes in other languages and sometimes in our mother tongue ; that so men of our English Commonwealth may attain to all knowledges, arts and languages.

Winstanley offers a vigorous defence of his educational proposals against those who urge that they are materialistic.

Aye but, saith the zealous but ignorant professors, this is a low and carnal ministry indeed, this leads men to know nothing but the knowledge of the earth and the secrets of nature, but we are to look after spiritual and heavenly things. I answer : To know the secrets of nature is to know the works of God. And to know the works of God within the Creation is to know God himself, for God dwells in every visible work or body. . . . For to reach God beyond the Creation, or to know what He will be to a man after a man is dead, if any otherwise than to scatter him into his essences of fire, water, earth and air of which he is compounded, is a knowledge beyond the line or capacity of man to attain to while he lives in his compounded body. And if a man should go to imagine what God is beyond the Creation, or what He will be in spiritual demonstration after a man is dead, he doth, as the proverb saith, build castles in the air, or tell us of a world beyond the moon and beyond the sun merely to blind the reason of man.

The postmasters (referred to above) are to bring or send monthly reports from their respective parishes to the chief city "of what accidents or passages fall out". The benefit of this news service is

that if any part of the land be visited with plague, famine, invasion, or insurrection, or any casualties, the other parts of the land may have speedy knowledge and send relief. . . . Or if through industry or ripeness of understanding (they) have found out any secret in nature, or new invention in any art or trade or in the tillage of the earth, or such like, whereby the Commonwealth may more flourish in peace and plenty . . . when other parts of the land hears of it, many thereby will be encouraged to . . . do the like.

In Chapter 5, Winstanley still further expounds his theories of education. Children, in his ideal community, are to be educated together in public schools, and every pupil is to receive scientific and trade instruction. There is to be no purely academic section "who set themselves up above their brothers". Children are to be

trained up in trades and some bodily employment, as well as in learning languages, or the histories of former ages. And as boys are trained up in learning and in trades, so all maids shall be trained

up in reading, sewing, knitting, spinning of linen and woollen, in music, and all other easy neat works, either for to furnish storehouses with linen and woollen cloth, or for the ornament of particular houses with needlework.

Work is to be compulsory in the Commonwealth up to the age of forty, after which men "shall be freed from all labour and work unless they will themselves".

Winstanley is insistent that "there shall be no buying and selling in a free Commonwealth, neither shall anyone hire his brother to work for him", and he proposes drastic laws to enforce these rules. Thus,

If any man entice another to buy and sell, and he who is enticed doth not yield, but makes it known to the overseer, the enticer shall lose his freedom for twelve months.

But

if any do buy and sell the earth or fruits thereof, unless it be to or with strangers of another nation, according to the law of navigation, they shall be both put to death as traitors of the peace of the Commonwealth.

And

he or she who calls the earth his, and not his brothers, shall be sat upon a stool, with those words written on his forehead, before all the congregation; and afterwards be made a servant for twelve months under the taskmaster.

Whilst

he that gives and he that takes hire for work shall both lose their freedom and become servants for twelve months under the taskmaster.

Gold is to be used for foreign trade, and

there shall be no other use of it in the Commonwealth than to make dishes and other necessities for the ornament of houses, as now there is use made of brass, pewter and iron.

Those who commit offences against the legal code and "become servants" are to

be under the government of a taskmaster, who shall appoint them to be porters or labourers, to do any work that any freeman want to be done.

Once again Winstanley's hatred of lawyers is evinced, for the death penalty is to be inflicted upon those who "administer law for money or reward". The laws are to be read by the minister to the people four times a year, "that everyone may know whereunto they are to yield obedience. Then none may die for want of knowledge".

Men and women are to be free to marry whom they love, "and for portion, the common storehouses are every man's and maid's portion, as free to one as to another". Marriage is to be a civil ceremony, without the need of a priest.

When any man or woman are consented to live together in marriage, they shall acquaint all the overseers in their circuit therewith, and some other neighbours. And being all met together, the man shall declare by his own mouth before them all that he takes that woman to be his wife, and the woman shall say the same and desire the overseers to be witnesses.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WINSTANLEY

As we have seen, communist theories were far older than Winstanley, but while the

communism of the medieval movements . . . is generally a vague and mystical affair, and does not derive from a reasoned examination of social and historical forces, with Winstanley . . . the demand for common ownership was rooted . . . in a comprehensive social philosophy that became the basis of a political programme. It emerged as the result of a reasoned analysis of the role of private property in history and of the results of social division. Unlike the medieval varieties, it proposes communism not only in distribution, but in production as well. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, pp. 150-151.)

Winstanley in his power of economic analysis and his understanding of class forces is halfway to scientific socialism. And in the influence which his writing later exerted on John Bellers, and through him upon Robert Owen, he is linked with the modern Socialist and Co-operative movements.

CHAPTER 10

THE QUAKERS

Oh! Foolish People . . . are not these the choicest of thy Worthies . . . now in power? Hath it not been the top of thy desires and labors to see it in their hands, and are not they now become weak as other men, and the land still in travail but nothing brought forth but wind?

James Naylor.

THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT

After the collapse of the Digger movement some of the Diggers appear to have joined the Quakers. Bernstein (*Cromwell and Communism*) and Dr. G. P. Gooch (*English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century*) have both asserted that Winstanley himself became a Quaker, and most historians have followed their example; largely basing their assertion on Winstanley's pamphlet *The Saints' Paradise; or the Fathers Teaching the only Satisfaction to Waiting Souls*, which contains ideas that bear a striking resemblance to those of the Friends. However, Petegorsky (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*) adduces evidence which throws considerable doubt on the belief that Winstanley ended his life as a Quaker.

The similarity of the argument of the tract to Quaker concepts (he says) must be considered rather the result of the general environment of the period than of any direct contact between Winstanley and George Fox and his followers—for which there is no evidence whatever. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, Appendix I.)

Quakerism can trace its spiritual descent from the Anabaptists. Like them the Quakers relied less upon tradition and the Bible, and more upon the "inner light" for the revelation of God's will, and the very name by which they called themselves, the "Children of Light", forms a connecting link between them and many of the German Anabaptists.

The name which they eventually took, the Society of Friends, is derived from 3 *John*, i. 14: "Our friends salute thee; Greet the friends by name".

The more popular name of Quakers has been explained in a number of ways. According to one account it was derived from

the fact that members of the sect at their prayer meetings frequently fell into religious ecstasies, with trembling and convulsions; but the more generally accepted explanation is that when George Fox, the founder of the movement, was arraigned before Justice Bennet of Derby on a charge of brawling, he admonished the judge and the assembled company to "quake at the name of the Lord".

The period was one in which all religious dogmas were being questioned, and the various Christian sects were busy denouncing one another.

These disputes were carried on in the streets and open places, the public joining in, as in the case of modern political meetings. The result was that scepticism spread among the people, many of whom turned their backs on religion altogether. Judging from the reports of Quaker missionaries, there were in England at that time a considerable number of people who denied the truth of the Biblical story of the creation. . . . Others attached themselves to obscure sects, brooding on the mysteries of creation (the so-called "seekers"), or waiting for a sign from heaven which was to solve their doubts (the so-called "waiters"). (*Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein, p. 227.)

One of these "seekers" was George Fox, the son of a Leicestershire silk weaver. Born in 1624, and bred during the period of Puritan persecutions, he developed a strong religious bent at a very early age. When he was nineteen he began to go from place to place, preaching and disputing upon religious questions. None of the existing churches satisfied him: he found them all too worldly, and none of them seemed to correspond to primitive Christianity.

Eventually he reached a state of mind which Bernstein calls "a compound of rationalism and mysticism, of democracy and political abstention". (*Cromwell and Communism*, pp. 227-8.) All the misery and sacrifices of the Civil War seemed to him to have been without profitable result. Men who had been looked upon as liberators had themselves become oppressors once they were raised to power. The conclusion seemed to be that evil lay not in social or political systems but rather in man himself, in the frailty of human nature.

Because of their doctrine of the "inward light", of the possibility of God communicating His will by direct revelation to the individual, the Quakers denied the need for a professional clergy paid by the State; and because of this they consistently refused to pay tithes. Every one, they maintained, should say what the

inner voice prompts him to say: and we read in Fox's *Journal* that the priests "trade" or "sell" their gospel, that the bells of their "steeple-houses" resemble market-bells, which call the people together that the priest may "spread out his wares for sale". There were frequent instances in which Quakers entered a church during a service and interrupted the preacher, crying: "Come down, thou false prophet, thou impostor, thou blind leader of the blind, thou hireling!" Sometimes they preached their own doctrine after the regular church service was finished, and not infrequently they were stoned or beaten up by a hostile crowd, and left lying unconscious on the ground, unless some charitable soul took pity on them. They suffered a legal persecution that was hardly less violent, many of them being fined, imprisoned, or whipped, and they provided more martyrs of this sort than all the other sects of their time put together.

In a memorial addressed to Parliament in 1657, it is shown that between the years 1651 and 1656, no less than 1,900 Quakers were sent to prison, and that 21 died in prison. It has been further estimated that between 1661 and 1697, 13,562 Quakers were imprisoned, and that 338 died in prison or from the effects of ill-treatment, and that 198 were transported.

The Quakers accepted the full implications of the Sermon on the Mount, and repudiated war and forcible resistance to evil.

Men who had helped to fight Cromwell's battles bore quietly the worst brutalities from excited ruffians, and risked death rather than defend themselves. (*Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein, pp. 233-34.)

Furthermore, the Quakers would suffer any penalties rather than take an oath, and it was their rule to address every one as "thou", because they considered it tantamount to a lie to address an individual as though he represented a plural number; nor would they doff their hats to anyone, because equal respect was due to all men, high or low, rich or poor.

THE MYSTICS

Up to the proclamation of the Commonwealth in 1649 George Fox had been like the "voice of one crying in the wilderness"; but after 1650 he made converts in increasing numbers in all parts of the country.

The aftermath of revolution is usually a period of disappointment and disillusionment on the part of many of those who once set their hopes upon it, and the English Revolution was no exception to this rule. Though the Leveller movement had been crushed there was widespread discontent with the course of events under Cromwell's dictatorship.

Army agitation, Leveller propaganda, Digger activity, the impact of events had imparted to the people an acute awareness of their class interests. After 1649 and 1650 that social consciousness could no longer be given direct political expression. Instead, it found its voice in the tremendous revival of mystical enthusiasm and millenary fervour that dates from those years. If the price of political agitation was persecution and imprisonment, it was much more convenient to shift the initiative for social change to the Lord who could risk with impunity the wrath of dictators. And if the practical efforts of mortals had failed to achieve the desired results, surely God, in His time, would bring the eagerly awaited millennium.

Radical activity, then, was channelised into religious fervour ; and the growth of the Quakers, the Fifth Monarchists, the Ranters and hundreds of other varieties that defy classification testifies to its intensity. . . . The Levellers and the Diggers had given to the common people the vision of a better world ; and that vision had been sketched in full and attractive detail. They had sought to persuade their fellows that it was a world that was not set in a distant heaven, but that could be achieved immediately on earth. They had imparted to the people the recognition that the privileges of the wealthy were fashioned of the blood and sweat of the poor. And they had constantly emphasized that the people could expect no relief through the charity or humanitarianism of their oppressors and that the delay of the social reforms that had been promised was the result not so much of the political incapacity of their rulers as of deliberate and conscious purpose. A profound understanding of those perceptions is present, in one form or another, in all the mystical sects in the several years after 1650. As the sects moved farther away from their origins, those social perceptions were modified and finally distorted beyond recognition by the extreme religious fanaticism and abstract spiritual symbolism in which they were expressed. That this class consciousness, however, was a dominant factor in shaping the early development of those mystical movements is, I believe, indisputable.

The forms in which that consciousness was expressed, let me repeat, were infinitely varied and fantastic. To the Fifth Monarchists, the millennium, which they interpreted with a rigid faithfulness to the Scriptural description, would be ushered in by the Saints, most likely by force, when God would indicate the propitious moment. The Quakers believed that the new era in human history would be inaugurated only when all men recog-

nized the Inner Light within them, when the power of love had triumphed in mankind. The Ranters,* the wildest and most eccentric of all sects, were so convinced of the omnipresence and imminent revelation of God that they felt that every impulse, every urge, every sign of activity or motion, was a manifestation of His Being. Two things, however, are of vital significance in all of this seeming confusion—the nature of the millennium all sects envisaged and the dogmatic affirmation that only the poor, the downtrodden, the despised, could be chosen as the Saints, as the first Children of Light, as those in whom God would first manifest himself—in other words, that the poor would be the instruments through which the millennium would be established on earth. (*Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, pp. 235-6.)

One hears the echoes of the class struggle in the fulminations of the sectaries against the rich and privileged.

"Go ye workers of iniquity into everlasting punishment," Fox threatened the rich. "Howl and weep, misery is coming upon you, enemies of God, adversaries of righteousness. (*Newes Coming Out of the Northe Sounding Towards the South or a Blast Out of the North Up into the South*. 1656).

Hubberthorn thundered against

all who live in pride and idlenesse and fulnesse of bread by whom the creation is devoured and many made poor by your meanes and you (who) live upon the labours of the poor and lay heaive burthens upon them, grievous to be borne. (*The Immediate Call*, 1654.)

And George Foster declared that God had announced to him that He will

come to destroy all things besides myself and will suddenly take from man his goods and pictures of gold and silver and will make them for fear of me give them away, for I come to take vengeance on those that have afflicted the poor. (*The Pouring Fōrth of the Seventh and Last Vial upon all Flesh and Fleshliness which will be a Terror to the Men that have Great Possessions*—1650.)

QUAKERISM AND COMMUNISM

Some of the disaffected soldiers who obtained their discharge or were dismissed from the Army joined the Quakers, and during the first years of the Commonwealth Fox was overshadowed by men who were better-known than himself, and who led the revolutionary religious opposition to Cromwell. They "marched

*The Ranters made the common ownership of all goods one of their cardinal tenets. "They taught (according to one of their former members) that it was quite contrary to the end of the Creation to appropriate anything to any man or woman but that there ought to be community of all things". (*The Ranters Last Sermon*, by J. M. a deluded brother lately escaped out of their snare (1654).

through the streets of London, denouncing with uplifted voice Cromwell's Government, and predicting its downfall"; and when representatives of the Army (in April 1659) presented a petition to Parliament in favour of the "good old cause" of liberty and of the republic, Quakers supported it by a memorial which added further demands to the petition. It was not until after the Restoration that Fox's doctrine of abstention from politics was generally adopted by the Quakers.

The writings of Fox and the better-known advocates of early Quakerism reveal no peculiar social or economic trends; but some sections, at least, of the sect tried to spread communist ideas; and in 1653 an influx of Fifth Monarchy men

brought revolutionary ideas into the extremist section of the new society. (*The Protestant Churches*, Leslie F. Church, p. 111.)

The Reverend Thomas Hancock in an article entitled "Early Quaker Politics" (published in the *Weekly Times & Echo*, for Feb. 1896) states that there exist a number of Quaker pamphlets which "show a distinctly socialistic tone of thinking"; and there is considerable evidence that Quakers declaimed in their meetings against private property. At a very early period they sent out apostles of the new faith to the Continent and to America; and Pringsheim relates that in 1657 some Quakers caused great excitement in Zeeland and Rotterdam by preaching that all goods ought to be held in common. He quotes a bourgeois paper, the *Hollandse Mercurius*, of 1657, where the Communist teaching of the Quakers is ascribed to the fact that they are "mostly thieves and paupers".

JAMES NAYLOR THE KING OF ISRAEL

Among the Quakers who were prominent in opposition to Cromwell was an ex-quartermaster of the Army, James Naylor. The son of a well-to-do farmer near Wakefield, he joined the Parliamentary Army in 1642, when he was about twenty-four years of age. While serving in the Army he went over to the Independents, and gave religious addresses which had the power to move men strongly. An officer who heard him preach after the bloody battle of Dunbar wrote that "he had been inspired with greater fear by Naylor's sermon than he had felt in the battle".

Soon after Dunbar Naylor obtained his discharge on account of illness, and returned home to his farm. In 1651 he heard George Fox preach, and speedily embraced his ideas; and in the

spring of 1652, while following the plough, he suddenly felt within himself the call to become an itinerant missionary of the new doctrine. He at once set off on his travels, during the course of which he met Fox in London.

In the autumn of the year Naylor was arrested at Orton, in Westmorland, for preaching a "blasphemous" sermon, in the course of which he had declared that the body of Christ after the resurrection was "not carnal but spiritual"; and, refusing to recant, he was kept in prison for nearly six months. Whilst he was in gaol a Quakeress, Margaret Fell, sent him £5 for his maintenance, but Naylor accepted only the twentieth part of it, for, like many Quakers, he followed an ascetic life.

Some idea of his teachings at this time may be gathered from a pamphlet which he published the same year (1652). It bears the title: "*A Lamentacion (By one of England's Prophets) Over the Ruines of this Oppressed Nacion, To be deeply layd to heart by Parliament and Army, and all sorts of People, lest they be swept away with the Broom of Destruction, in the Day of the Lord's fierce wrath and Indignation, which is near at hand. Written by the Movings of the Lord in James Naylor*".

Naylor's political disillusionment is revealed in the opening passage:

Oh England! how is thy expectation failed now after all thy travails! The people to whom Oppression and Unrighteousness hath been a Burden, have long waited for Deliverance, from one year to another, but none comes, from one sort of men to another . . . For as power hath come into the hands of men, it hath been turned into violence, and the will of men is brought forth instead of Equity . . . He that turns from iniquity is made a prey to the wicked and none lays it to heart through the nation, for all hearts are full of oppression, and all hands are full of violence, their houses are filled with oppression, their streets and markets abound with it, their Courts which should afford remedy against it are wholly made up of iniquity and injustice. . . . Oh! Foolish People . . . are not these the choicest of thy Worthies, who are now in power? Hath it not been the top of thy desires and labors to see it in their hands, and are not they now become weak as other men, and the Land still in travail but nothing brought forth but wind?

He declares that no reliance can be placed in men, nor is anything to be hoped for from a change of government: improvement can come only from the cultivation of the right spirit.

Upon his release from prison Naylor resumed his mission, and early in the year 1655 he came to London, where a fairly strong Quaker community existed. His fervent preaching soon

made him a popular speaker, and he became famous even outside Quaker circles. He came into contact with prominent opponents of Cromwell such as Bradshaw and Sir Henry Vane, and even members of Cromwell's "Court" attended his meetings. Something like a Naylor cult grew up, "especially among the female members of the Quaker community". (*Cromwell and Communism*, p. 239, Eduard Bernstein). At first Naylor resisted this adulatory tendency; but in the end it seems to have been too much for him.

In the summer of 1656 he set out for Launceston to visit Fox in prison in order that they might discuss the differences which had arisen in London, and which probably had reference to the attitude to be adopted towards contemporary politics. Several of his admirers accompanied him, and "his journey tended to assume a Messianic aspect". (*Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein, p. 239).

The Quaker gospel, with its mystical idea of the inner light, did not preclude this. The inner light, the divine illumination, varied in the strength of its manifestations. Why should not James Naylor with his enthralling eloquence be called to perform a special work? Why should not the Spirit manifest itself in him with the same power as in the Son of Mary? (*Cromwell and Communism*, Eduard Bernstein, p. 239).

In the west of England, in the centres of the cloth industry, Quakerism had made rapid strides, and as early as 1654, it is reported that Quaker meetings in Bristol were always attended by from three to four thousand people. In a town of little over 30,000 they had, in 1658, over 700 members, most of whom were mechanics, though they also had many adherents among the soldiers of the garrison.

When Naylor passed through Bristol on his way to Launceston demonstrations took place, and even some disturbances, and on his arrival in Exeter he was arrested as an agitator and a disturber of the peace. This, however, only increased his popularity, and more and more his admirers tended to treat him as a Messiah. This was particularly true of the women. He was referred to as the "only son of God", and one, Stranger, wrote: "Thy name shall no longer be James but Jesus." Another Quaker, Thomas Simmonds, called him "Thou Lamb of God". His devotees visited him in prison, where the women (we are told) fell down before him and kissed his feet: and a certain Dorcas Ebury even went to the length of proclaiming that Naylor had brought her back to life after she had been dead for two days.

Towards the end of October, Naylor was released from prison, and began his return journey, mounted on horseback, and accompanied by followers on foot and on horse. At Glastonbury and Wells people spread their garments on the road before him; and when he reached Bristol his entry into that city became an imitation of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem, with Naylor's companions singing such hymns as "Hosannah in the Highest", and "Holy, Holy, Holy".

The rain poured down in torrents as the strange cavalcade entered Bristol, and the roads were like quagmires. The weather may have dampened the ardour of Naylor's supporters: at any rate, though considerable crowds assembled to meet him, he was arrested without any trouble. Nevertheless, the local authorities were loath to bring him to trial in Bristol, and after a first hearing, he and six of his companions were sent to London on November 10th.

After a Committee of 55 members of Parliament had made an inquiry into his case, Naylor was tried at the bar of the House; and though he declared that the homage done to him was not meant to apply to his mortal self but to God speaking through him, he was found guilty on December 8th of "abominable blasphemy". For seven days the House of Commons debated whether sentence of death should be imposed upon him; and finally, on December 16th, it was decided by 96 votes to 82 that Naylor should stand in the pillory for two hours, then be whipped through the streets of London by the hangman, after which he was to be pilloried again, his tongue perforated with a hot iron and the letter B (for blasphemer) to be branded on his forehead. Thereafter he was to be taken to Bristol and conducted through the city seated backwards on a horse, and whipped again. This savage punishment having been inflicted upon him, he was to be kept in solitary confinement during the pleasure of Parliament.

Naylor endured this ferocious punishment with stoicism; but the first whipping was so severe the execution of the rest of the sentence had to be postponed. Meanwhile petitions in his favour poured in upon Parliament, some from people of considerable influence such as Colonel Scrope. Cromwell himself was prompted to ask Parliament the grounds for their verdict, and his question led to another debate in the House. This debate was still in progress when a further part of the sentence was inflicted upon Naylor, his tongue being perforated and the letter B branded on his forehead. Whilst this mutilation was taking place

his followers stood around the scaffold in great numbers, and one of them, Robert Rich, a merchant, tried to hold a placard over his head bearing the words *This is the King of the Jews*. It was, however, torn up by the hangman's assistants. After the branding was complete his adherents kissed his hands and feet; and later, during his shameful ride through Bristol, Robert Rich and other Quakers rode in front of him singing hymns.

At this distance of time it is not easy to guess what was in the minds of Naylor's supporters. Certainly religious ecstasy and chiliastic dreams played a big part in producing the extraordinary demonstrations just described: but it was probably more than religious frenzy which made the movement so dangerous that the House of Commons was prepared to spend weeks discussing it. The general discontent and disillusionment of the times was sharpened by the growing despotism of Cromwell, who had just appointed his Major-Generals to administer the country. Possibly the demonstrations in Bristol when Naylor made his spectacular entry, were to be the prelude to a revolt. Certainly it is improbable that Parliament would have spent months investigating the affair unless they had supposed that some movement hostile to the existing regime was being fostered under the cover of religion; and in this connection it is significant that Naylor was expressly deprived of pen and paper during his imprisonment.

Some historians have dismissed Naylor as a madman, but his writings and letters show no trace of mental derangement, and even after his discharge from solitary confinement (which was hardly calculated to cure mental disorder) he remained a powerful and logical debater.

Naylor was released from prison in 1659, and died the following year; but though the extreme wing of Quakerism thus lost its most powerful representative, it continued to exist for a considerable time after his death, and this despite the fact that the government took stern measures to suppress the sect, as is evidenced by the fact that from 1656 to 1658 3,000 Quakers were imprisoned. It was not until after the Restoration that Quakerism became non-political.

Moreover, in spite of continued persecution under Charles II the Quakers continued to increase, and at the time of the Great Plague (1665) it is said that in London alone there were 10,000 of them, "chiefly recruited from the lower classes", and their numbers mounted steadily until about the year 1680.

But from the moment when they enjoyed official recognition as a religious community, their numbers began to fall. . . . Among all the more important religious communities of the epoch of the Revolution, none has so bravely borne persecutions as the Quakers. While Baptists and Independents temporised, the Quakers practised passive resistance in such a manner as to have, we may well say, tired and worn out their persecutors. But to none of those Churches of the Revolution has the toleration obtained, and the equality of rights subsequently gained, proved so fatal as to the Quakers. (*Cromwell and Communism*, p. 245).

JOHN BELLERS

A more sober attempt at social reform is associated with the name of another Quaker, John Bellers (1654-1725), "a phenomenal figure in the history of political economy", as Marx calls him. (*Capital*, Vol. I, Everyman edition, p. 257).

Bellers was born of well-to-do Quaker parents, and numbered among his friends William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania. In 1695 he wrote an essay entitled "*Proposals for Raising a Colledge of Industry of all usefull Trades and Husbandry with Profit for the Rich, a plentiful living for the Poor and a good education for Youth, which will be advantage to the government by the Increase of the People and their riches. Motto: Industry brings Plenty.—The Sluggard shall be cloathed with Rags. He that will not work shall not eat*".

Bellers dedicated the first edition of this work to his co-religionists, the "Children of Light named in scorn Quakers", declaring that

The consideration of your great Industry . . . Hath induced me to Dedicate these following Proposals to your serious Consideration, whilst I think you a very regular Body, willing and capable of such an Undertaking.

Briefly, what Bellers proposed, was a communal colony or association, wherein labour and not money was to be the standard by which necessities would be valued. By labour he plainly means labour-time. As early as 1662 Sir William Petty had ascribed the value of commodities to the labour embodied in them; but Bellers was the first to suggest putting this idea into practice, and thus he

anticipated Robert Owen and John Gray who in the years from 1820-1850 advocated labour-time notes as a means of exchange instead of money tokens. (*A History of British Socialism*, M. Beer, p. 174).

There was nothing vague or visionary about Bellers' scheme; it was thoroughly sober and worked out in practical detail.

He estimated that for a colony of 300 persons, combining manufacture and agriculture, a capital of £15,000 would be required, and he proposed to raise this sum by loans from interested people—mainly from Quakers in the first instance. Every contribution of £50 was to entitle the patron to one vote on the Administrative Council; but no one was to have more than five votes no matter how much he invested. The profit was to be credited each year to the shareholders according to their investments, and might be drawn out or added to the principal; but no kind of stock-jobbing was to be allowed with the shares, because this “will ruin any good thing”. Moreover, no surplus was to be distributed in the shape of profits until all the material and cultural needs of the workers in the College had been amply provided for in every respect.

Bellers realized that a considerable sum of money would be needed to start the College, and he argued that “a thousand Pound is easier raised where there is Profit, than one hundred Pound only upon Charity”. He also remarked, with a kind of innocent slyness, that “the Rich have no other way of living but by the Labour of others; as the Landlord by the Labour of his Tenants, and the Merchants and Tradesmen by the Labour of the Mechanics”, and used that as a justification for paying interest on the money raised for his project.

Bellers explained that he preferred to call his colony a College rather than a Workhouse, which savours too much of the “Bridewell”; and also because all kinds of useful instruction would be imparted to the members. Working conditions were to be as good as those enjoyed by the best situated apprentices in London, and the normal working day was to be observed, except that as the workers

grow in years in the college, they may be allowed to abate an Hour in a Day of their Work, and when they come to Sixty years old (if Merit prefer them not sooner) they may be made Overseers; which for ease and pleasant life, will equal what the Hoards of a private purse can give.

Managers and overseers or officials were to be paid (like the workers) in kind and not in cash; and all meals were to be taken together.

Although he described a community of 300 persons in order to illustrate how his scheme would work, Bellers pointed out that the college might be considerably larger, and might number 3,000 members, especially in districts where staple manufactures were

carried on. Even seafaring men might be members of it: in short, it should be "an epitome of the world".

He argued very cogently that such a community would effect a big saving by dispensing with shops, and cutting out middlemen and other useless trades, and by savings on lawyers' fees and bad debts. Moreover, there would be a further saving in communal cooking and heating, and in the cost of provisions bought in bulk, and many women would be set free from domestic duties to become productive workers. Nor would there be wastage of labour power due to unemployment. Finally, (and here again he anticipates Marx, cp. *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 25), the College would benefit by the proper combination of industry and agriculture: the fields would be better cultivated, more cattle would be kept, and more manure would be available for the fields.

Bellers set a high value on labour which is

as proper for the body's health as eating is for its living; for what gains a man saves by Ease, he will find in Disease. . . . Labour adds Oyl to the Lamp of Life when thinking Inflames it.

At the same time, however, he attached great importance to education; and here again there is something astonishingly modern about his views. Thus, in his model community, children were to learn by practice and experience rather than by rote, and work and learning were to go hand in hand, "an Idle learning being little better than the learning of Idleness".

Bellers recognised that he had to begin the practice of his ideas with the young. "Old people", he says in the Introduction to his *Proposals*,

are like earthen vessels, not so easily to be new moulded, yet children are more like clay out of the Pit, and easy to take any form they are put into.

Hence if the poor should perchance at first "prove brittle", the patrons who had found the money for the College should not lose patience. "Seven or fourteen years may bring up young ones that Life will be more natural to". And so he proposed to make a start with some trustworthy workers who would set a good example to others: the rest, at first, would consist largely of apprentices.

Bellers made his proposals sound very practical: there was nothing of the dreamy spinner of impossible utopias about him. Nevertheless, it does not appear that he got the support which he had hoped to get from the "Children of Light." Possibly this was due less to lack of sympathy than to lack of

means. However, whatever the explanation, the second edition of his pamphlet, issued in 1696, was not dedicated to the Quakers, but to the Lords and Commons of Parliament and to the thoughtful and those concerned for the public weal. Parliament is requested to examine his proposals and to carry them out for the benefit of the nation: the "thoughtful" are requested to deposit subscriptions and contributions for the projected enterprise with two London citizens mentioned by name, one a merchant, the other a lawyer.

A year later (1697) at the conclusion of another pamphlet issued by Bellers, *An Epistle to Friends Concerning the Education of Children*, there is an appeal to the Friends signed by about 45 Quakers, in favour of giving the College of Industry a trial.

ROBERT OWEN AND BELLERS

John Bellers' College of Industry inevitably provokes comparison with Robert Owen's Villages of Unity and Co-operation: but although the two proposals have many features in common, Owen appears to have developed his idea quite independently of Bellers. He records in his autobiography that a copy of the second edition of the *Proposals* was accidentally found, about 1817, by Francis Place when the latter was sorting out some useless books from his library. Place wrote to Owen saying: "I have made a great discovery—of a work advocating your social views a century and a half ago".

Owen told Place he would have a thousand copies printed for distribution, and would acknowledge that the author deserved the credit of being the parent of the idea of co-operative communities,

although mine had been forced upon me by the practice of observing facts, reflecting upon them, and trying how far they were useful for the every-day business of life.

Owen kept his word, and thus Bellers' pamphlet was rescued from the obscurity in which it had been buried for more than a hundred years.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIANITY AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

A stranger would think our churches were built, as indeed they are, only for the rich. Under such an arrangement where are the lower classes to . . . learn the doctrines of that truly excellent religion which exhorts to content and to submission to the higher powers?

An Inquiry into the State of Mind amongst the Lower Classes.

Arthur Young (1798).

What the millions should generally know is this: that no rich man believes in religion of any sort except as a political engine to keep the useful classes in subjection to the rich.

Bronterre O'Brien, in the *Poor Man's Guardian*,
December 12, 1835.

RELIGION AND SOCIAL UNREST

In no age perhaps was the use of Christianity as an antidote to social unrest more blatant than during the Industrial Revolution which began in this country in the second half of the 18th century. No slave or servile class was ever more brutally exploited than the industrial proletariat whom this "Revolution" called into being. Men and women worked for sixteen or seventeen hours a day, and children of five were employed underground in the mines as trappers, where they might sit in darkness for twelve hours at a stretch, unless a good-natured collier gave them a bit of candle. "Sometimes I sing when I've light, but not in the dark: I dare not sing then", one of these pitiful little victims told the Children's Employment Commission which issued its Report in 1842. Parish authorities got rid of little pauper children by selling them to millowners who (in at least one authenticated case) agreed to take one idiot child with every twenty normal children. It was an age which saw the creation of vast, sprawling slum cities, which, in the memorable phrase of J. L. and Barbara Hammond, "were not so much towns as barracks: not the refuge of a civilization but the barracks of an industry". (*The Town Labourer, 1760-1832.*)

Some measure of the savage exploitation of the working class is to be found in the fact that, in the course of four years, Robert Owen showed a profit of £160,000 on the New Lanark Mills, besides paying 5 per cent. on the capital employed, and raising the selling value of the factory 50 per cent. And Owen, be it remembered, was a model employer, for whom his business contemporaries predicted speedy bankruptcy when he reduced the hours of labour from seventeen to ten a day, and refused to employ children under ten years of age. Never were such profits wrung from the blood and sweat and tears of the common people: never was there such misery and degradation for the workers.

They were a helot class, denied all political power, for an oligarchy of landed gentry had a monopoly of Parliamentary and Local Government, until the Reform Act of 1832 was wrung from them under threat of a violent revolution. The workers played an important part in the agitation for political reform; but they were tricked by their middle class allies when the Reform Bill was won; and it was not until 1867 that the town worker got the vote, and not until 1884 that the village labourer was enfranchized.

Meanwhile the Combination Acts forbade the formation of trade unions; and even with their repeal, in 1825, ways and means could often be found to make trade union organisation impossible. There is the famous case of the Six Dorset Labourers (the Tolpuddle Martyrs) who, in 1834, were transported for seven years for combining to raise their wages (which were 7/- a week).

The ruling class were constantly haunted by a dread that these wretched slaves might revolt; and the modern mind is a little startled at times by the astonishing candour with which religion was urged as an opiate for social unrest.

One philanthropic organisation, passably progressive as the nineteenth century goes, had the honest candour to claim a deep interest in the morals of the poor on the grounds that 'as in every country they are numerous and a threat to our personal security, we are obliged on innumerable occasions to trust them with our property and, what is more, the minds of our children may be influenced by the good or bad qualities of the servants in whose care they spend so much of their time. The higher ranks are thus deeply interested in providing a moral and religious education for the whole of the poor. As these are enabled to rise in the scale of civilization they will feel more repugnance to the degradation of parish relief and the enormous sums extracted from the industrious part of the community will be saved.'

(Quoted from *Adult Education Committee Final Report*, 1900, by Ernest Green, M.A., J.P., in *Education for a New Society*, p. 5.)

Arthur Young even went to the length of suggesting the building of a great number of churches in the form of theatres, with benches and thick mats for the poor, and galleries and boxes for the well-to-do, so that the "lower classes" might be given a chance to learn "the doctrines of that truly excellent religion which exhorts to content and to submission to the higher powers". (*An Inquiry into the State of Mind amongst the Lower Classes*, 1798).

Twenty years later, one Englishman out of seven being at that time a pauper, Parliament voted a million of public money for the construction of churches to preach submission to the higher powers. (*The Town Labourer*, 1760-1832, J. L. & Barbara Hammond, p. 235.)

Even as late as 1843, on the eve of the collapse of the Chartist movement, the Earl of Shaftesbury moved in the House

the need for instant and serious consideration of the best means of promoting the blessings of a moral and religious education among the working classes. (*Education for a New Society*, Ernest Green, M.A., J.P., pp. 14-15.)

Hannah More ("that prime old primate in petticoats", as Cobbett calls her), exemplifies the philanthropic mind of the period. With her sister Martha she undertook the moral reclamation of the poverty-scourged workers in the Mendip villages. They started Sunday-schools and Women's Benefit Clubs in several villages.

These they managed despotically, and they used to pay periodical visits to see that their teachers and pupils had not lapsed from virtue and Bible reading, and to address the villages in a series of charges. (*The Town Labourer*, 1760-1832, J. L. & Barbara Hammond, p. 226.)

The condition of these villages was such that one of them was popularly known as Botany Bay or Little Hell. In one place Hannah More mentions that the wages are a shilling a day; in another two hundred people are crammed into nineteen hovels. . . . The sisters More were benevolent women who put themselves to great trouble and discomfort out of pity for these villages, and yet from the beginning to the end of the *Mendip Annals* (in which they describe their "Charitable Labours") there is not a single reflection on the persons or system responsible for these conditions. It never seems to have crossed the minds of these philanthropists that it was desirable that men and women should have decent wages, or decent homes, or that there was something wrong with the arrangements of a society that left the mass of people in this plight. (*The Town Labourer*, pp. 226-227).

Their prudish comment upon the 200 glassworkers who were huddled in the nineteen hovels is: "Both sexes and all ages

herding together: voluptuous beyond belief"; and they are shocked that "the work of a glasshouse is an irregular thing . . . not only infringing upon a man's rest, but constantly intruding upon the privileges of the Sabbath". They seem equally shocked that "the wages are high, the eating and drinking luxurious—the body scarcely covered, but fed with dainties of a shameful description".

Thus the guilty in this scheme of civilization are not the persons who neglect to provide the decencies of life and housing and education for the men and women by whose labour they become rich, but the voluptuous glassworkers who feed their bodies on shameful dainties. . . . The employers and gentry are sometimes blamed, it is true, in these pages, but they are only blamed for their want of sympathy with the efforts of the More sisters to teach religion. They are nowhere blamed for ill-treating their dependents, or told that they have any duties to them except the duty of encouraging them to listen to Hannah More on the importance of obedience, and on the claims to their regard and gratitude of a Providence that had lavished such attention upon them. (*The Town Labourer*, p. 227.)

There was an occasion when a Blagdon woman was condemned to death for attempting to begin a riot and stealing some butter from a man who demanded an unreasonable price for it. As the Hammonds caustically remark:

It would seem to most people that much as the village might need a Sunday-school, the judges who were responsible for this piece of barbarity needed one a great deal more, but the philanthropic sisters, both of whom refer to the case, have no complaint to make of the sentence. The More sisters took the parish in hand, with the gratifying result that they were able to report a few months later that many of the pupils 'understood tolerably well the first twenty chapters of Genesis.' (*The Town Labourer*, p. 228.)

On another occasion, during a famine, when wheat was at 134 shillings a quarter and labourers were living on a shilling a day, Hannah More offers the wretched victims of slow starvation the consolation that

in suffering by the scarcity you have but shared in the common lot, with the pleasure of knowing the advantage you have had over many villages in your having suffered no scarcity of religious instruction.

And again, addressing the women of Shipham in 1801 on the same topic:

Let me remind you that probably that very scarcity had been permitted by an all-wise and gracious Providence to unite all ranks of people together, to show the poor how immediately they are dependent upon the rich, and to show both rich and poor that

they are all dependent on Himself. It has also enabled you to see more clearly the advantages you derive from the government and constitution of this country—to observe the benefits flowing from the distinction of rank and fortune, which has enabled the high so liberally to assist the low : for I leave you to judge what would have been the state of the poor of this country in this long distressing scarcity had it not been for your superiors. . . . We trust the poor in general, especially those that are well instructed, have received what has been done for them as a matter of favour, not of right—if so, the same kindness will, I doubt not, always be extended to them whenever it shall please God so to afflict the land.

Wilberforce played a big part in winning personal freedom for black slaves, but his writings and speeches show

that the tendency to regard Christianity in politics as only one of the sanctions of the existing order was no accident, but an essential part of its spirit. He was . . . largely responsible for the degradation of industrial life due to the savage measures taken by the upper classes to prevent working men from protecting their standard of living by defensive organisation. If any one event can be singled out as having led more than any other to that degradation, it is the enactment of the Combination Laws of 1799 and 1800 in which Wilberforce took a leading part. It is particularly interesting, therefore, to turn to the pages of his *Practical View of the System of Christianity*, a work that attained an immense popularity, in which he has something to say on the relation of religion to the economic circumstances of society. There he explains that Christianity makes the inequalities of the social scale less galling to the lower orders, that it teaches them to be diligent, humble, patient, that it reminds them "that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences ; that the present state of things is very short; that the objects about which worldly men conflict so eagerly are not worth the contest; that the peace of mind, which Religion offers indiscriminately to all ranks, affords more true satisfaction than all the expensive pleasures which are beyond the poor man's reach; that in this view the poor have the advantage; that, if their superiors enjoy more abundant comforts, they are also exposed to many temptations from which the inferior classes are happily exempted; that, ' having food and raiment, they should be therewith content,' since their situation in life, with all its evils, is better than they have deserved at the hand of God; finally, that all human distinctions will soon be done away, and the true followers of Christ will all, as children of the same Father, be alike admitted to the possession of the same heavenly inheritance." (*The Town Labourer*, pp. 231-232.)

Palay, in his *Reasons for Contentment addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public* (1793), made a similar claim for religion that it "smooths all inequalities because it unfolds a prospect

which makes all earthly distinctions nothing". Indeed, he even seems to have persuaded himself that there was scarcely any respect in which the poor were not more fortunate than the rich, "Some of the necessities which poverty . . . imposes" he says, "are not hardships but pleasures. Frugality itself is a pleasure".

A yet more serious advantage (he says) which persons in inferior stations possess, is the ease with which they provide for their children. All the provision which a poor man's child requires is contained in two words, 'industry and innocence.' With these qualities, though without a shilling to set him forwards, he goes into the world prepared to become a useful, virtuous, and happy man.

This theme, that the poor are just as well off as the rich in Christian England under the British Constitution, was developed with even greater gusto by Hannah More in a series of political tracts that had an immense vogue.

She published a great number of dialogues and jingles to illustrate the theme that the most modest attempt to reform or relax the ferocious laws that held society together would inflict great suffering upon the poor. (*The Town Labourer*, p. 234.)

But if it was the policy of the Church of England to "indulge the rich and keep down the poor", this was not true of the Evangelicals, whose "greatest ornament was Lord Shaftesbury, famous for his leadership of the Ten Hours Movement". Mr. S. Maccoby remarks very truly in his *English Radicalism, 1832-1852* that "it was a peculiarity of the Ten Hour Movement, that though manned by plebeian Radicals . . . it was led by religious philanthropists from the opposite political camp." (*English Radicalism 1832-1852*, S. Maccoby, Ph.D., p. 34).

Lord Ashley (as he was then) was no democrat, but a Tory. In his opinion Socialism and Chartism were "the two great demons in morals and politics", and he confessed that "from the first hour of my movement to the last I had ever before me and never lost sight of it, the issue of a restoration of a good understanding between employer and employed". In 1833, when he undertook the leadership of the Ten Hours Bill movement, he made it clear to the workers

that all should be carried on in a most conciliatory manner, that there should be a careful abstinence from all approach to questions of wages and capital; that the labours of children and young persons should alone be touched; that there should be no strikes, no intimidation and no strong language against their employers either within or without the walls of Parliament. (*Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, Edwin Hodder, pp. 155-156.)

It would be grossly unfair to him to suggest that he was a conscious humbug who advocated social reform to avoid social revolution; nevertheless, he records in his diary that

I may rejoice and heartily thank God that the operatives of Lancashire and Yorkshire, suffering as they are, remain perfectly tranquil. Such, under God, is the fruit of many years of sympathy and generous legislation.

Rothstein may be exaggerating when he suggests that in 1848 the factory movement "may be said to have saved the country from a revolution which seemed likely to break out at any moment" (*From Chartism to Labourism*, Th. Rothstein, p. 78); but the movement which Lord Ashley led certainly offered vent for the angry temper of the working class of that period, and gave them enough hope to continue to struggle for an improvement in their lot by peaceful and constitutional methods; moreover, the Ten Hours Act of 1847 (and, for that matter, the repeal of the Corn Laws and the easing of the infamous Poor Law) "were secured under the pressure of torchlight meetings, the riots, insurrectionary plots and strikes of Chartism". (*The Common People 1746-1938*, G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, p. 309). Without the explosive pressure of mass working class discontent it is doubtful whether Ashley's philanthropic concern for the workers would have extorted any serious concessions from the ruling class.

THE METHODISTS

Methodism played an even more important part in the new industrial civilization than the philanthropic activities of the Church of England. On a population

partly neglected, partly dragooned by the Church, there descended a religion that happened to supply almost everything that it wanted. The Church offered no function to the poor man: his place was on a rude bench or a mat, listening to sermons on the importance of the subordination of the lower classes to the grand family worshipping amid the spacious cushions of the squire's pew. The Chapel invited him to take a hand in the management of the affairs of his religious society: perhaps to help in choosing a minister, to feel that he had a share in its life, responsibility for its risks and undertakings, pride in its successes and reputation. As a mere exercise in self-government and social life, the Chapel occupied a central place in the affections and the thoughts of people who had very little to do with the government of anything else. . . . The men and women who were drawn into the brisk, alert, and

ardent life of the new religion found plenty to occupy their minds and to stimulate faculties and interests that were otherwise left neglected. (*The Town Labourer*, J. L. & Barbara Hammond, pp. 270-271.)

No wonder, then, that

it was in the new industrial districts that the Evangelical revival had the most rapid and lasting influence in building up a religious life outside the Established Church. (*The Town Labourer*, J. L. & Barbara Hammond, p. 268).

In Yorkshire one person out of 23 was a Methodist, in Lancashire one out of 51, whereas in Surrey the proportion was one in 249 and in Sussex one in 211. (Table published in the *Annual Register* for 1824). The millions of pounds of public money voted by Parliament for the building of churches in 1818 (see p. 155) were justified on the grounds that it was unwise to leave the new industrial districts to the Methodists.

Methodism brought colour and excitement to a people living drab, dull lives.

The old Jewish civilization became actual and vivid to men and women who listened to the rhetoric of the new type of preacher. The Sunday-schools, that spread rapidly over the north of England and the industrial districts, were primarily institutions for interpreting this civilization to children brought up in the factories and mines. . . . A Revival fed the imagination of the new population on the exciting history of a fierce and warlike race living under conditions very unlike those of Manchester or Leeds, leaving a literature rich in metaphor and image, which awakened amid the bare and colourless life of the new civilization dreams and reveries and visions full of awe and splendour. It is significant that this religion spread most quickly, and in its extreme form, among the workers living in the deepest gloom, for the miners were particularly given to Methodism. Perhaps the very dangers of their employment prompted them to seek this special and miraculous sense of protection, just as the belief in the miraculous salvation of religion is particularly strong among the deep-sea fishermen of Brittany. This religion did for the working class what Greek and Roman literature did for the ruling class: drawing aside the curtain from a remote and interesting world, seeming thus to make their own world more intelligible. . . . For the miner or weaver the Chapel with its summons to the emotions, its music and singing, took the place that theatres, picture galleries, operas, occupied in the lives of others. (*The Town Labourer*, pp. 272-3.)

Many magistrates wrote to the Home Office complaining that Methodism helped to make the working class discontented and strengthened the forces of working class organisation.

Other magistrates, particularly parsons, thought the Government ought to watch them. Indeed,

the term Methodist served as well as the very different term Jacobin for a description of the disreputable. . . . Those who read more closely will observe that whenever any particular person is mentioned as seditious, he generally turns out to be a Baptist or Presbyterian. The Dissenters had always been more or less radical, and a parson magistrate had a quick sense for sedition in those quarters. (*The Town Labourer*, pp. 277-78).

In fact, however,

the official attitude of the Methodist leaders seems to have been quite clearly conservative in the years of crisis, 1817 and 1819. (*The Town Labourer*, pp. 279-280.)

An example of their moderation and anxiety not to run foul of the civil authorities is to be found in an Address adopted at a Conference of Methodist Ministers at Bristol, and sent to the Home Office in August 1819 by one of the secretaries of the Wesleyan Missionary Society. The text is as follows:

We deeply sympathise with those of you, dear Brethren, who, from the pressure of the times, and the suspension of an active commerce, are, in common with thousands of your countrymen, involved in various and deep afflictions. We offer up our prayers to God for you in this dark season of your distress, "that you may not be tempted above what you are able to bear"; and that he who "comforteth the distressed", may comfort you. "Cast all your care on God, for he careth for you": and fail not to remember, and to comfort one another with these words, "that in heaven, you have a better and enduring substance". In the present changeful scene of things, one event happeneth to the righteous and the wicked; but you are nevertheless still under the care and the eye of your Father in heaven. Such afflictive events he will sanctify to those who trust in him:—his promises cannot fail because he changeth not. "*He knoweth the way you take, and when he hath tried you, he will bring you forth as gold*". Never fail, dear brethren, to commit your cause to him, who has a thousand ways to "deliver the godly out of temptation", or to render their temptations the over-ruled instruments of putting them in possession of a good which shall remain their portion and their joy, when their spirits shall be for ever beyond the reach of the joys or sorrows of this present state. "*In patience possess ye your souls*". And remember him who hath said, "*I will never leave you, nor forsake you*".

As many of you to whom this measure of national suffering has been appointed reside in places where attempts are making by "unreasonable and wicked men", to render the privations of the poor the instruments of their own designs against the peace and the government of our beloved country, we are affectionately anxious to guard all of you against being led astray from your

civil and religious duties by their dangerous artifices. Remember you are Christians, and are called by your profession to exemplify the power and influence of religion by your patience in suffering, and by "*living peaceably with all men*". Remember that you belong to a Religious Society which has, from the beginning, explicitly recognised as high and essential parts of Christian duty, to "*Fear God and honour the King; to submit to magistrates for conscience' sake, and not to speak evil of dignities*". You are surrounded with persons to whom these duties are the objects of contempt and ridicule: show your regard for them because they are the doctrines of your Saviour. Abhor those publications in which they are assailed, along with every other doctrine of your holy religion; and judge of the spirit and objects of those who would deceive you into political parties and associations, by the vices of their lives, and the infidel malignity of their words and writings. "*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?*" (Quoted in *The Town Labourer*, pp. 280-1.)

The official attitude of the Methodists is well exemplified in this manifesto: namely, that the meek and righteous would be compensated for their sufferings in this world in an after-life, and that to attempt to change existing inequalities was "infidel and irreligious". No wonder that Cobbett called them in his forthright way the "nasty, canting, lousy Methodists". In the *Political Register* for June 12th, 1813, he says "There are, I know, persons, who look upon the Methodists . . . as *friends of freedom*. It is impossible they should be. They are either fools or tricksters". A few years later (in 1824) he called them "the bitterest foes of freedom in England", and accused them of having "served as spies and blood-money men" amongst the people of the north.

Cobbett may have been over harsh; nevertheless, it is true to say, that on the whole Methodism was unfavourable to the growth of the Trade Union movement or a spirit of revolt among the workers. The Hammonds in their acute and intensely interesting study of the effects of Methodism on the new industrial working class, very truly remark that

The Methodist movement was a call not for citizens, but for saints: not for the vigorous, still less the violent redress of injustice, but for the ecstatic vision: the perfect peace of expectation. The brutal inequalities of life, the wrongs inflicted on man by man, the hardships of poverty and suffering, these vexations of a passing world were merely trials of faith for the true Christian, who could escape from them and sustain his soul with dreams of a noble and confidential companionship in this world and of radiant happiness hereafter. The reforms that he wanted had nothing to do with Parliament or Corn Laws or Combination Laws. (*The Town Labourer*, p. 282.)

And again:

In so far as this religion touched on the affairs of this world, it tended to reflect the conservative spirit of its first missionary. The spirit of its teaching was just the opposite to the spirit of the Trade Union movement of the time. It taught patience where the Trade Unions taught impatience. The Trade Union movement taught that men and women should use their powers to destroy the supremacy of wealth in a world made by men; the Methodist that they should learn resignation amid the painful chaos of a world so made, for good reasons of His own, by God. The trade unionist taught that men were not so helpless as they seemed, for combination could give them some control over the conditions of their lives. The Methodist taught that men were not so helpless as they seemed, for religion could make them independent of the conditions of their lives. Further, the Trade Union movement made loyalty to a class a virtue, teaching men and women to think of themselves as the citizens of a community struggling to be free. The Methodist movement had just the opposite effect. It preached an intense spiritual individualism. It taught men and women to think of themselves, not as members of a society with common interests, common hopes, common wrongs, but as individual and separate souls, certain to suffer eternal damnation unless they could attain by a sudden spring of the heart a victorious sense of pardon and escape from sin. . . . The Methodist movement . . . softened the sense of class and it soothed the grievances of the poor, for it created new affinities and sympathies, and brought reconciling dreams into their lives of hardship. It set up a rival to the ideal of civic freedom. It diverted energy from the class struggle at a time when wise energy was scarce, and money when money was still scarcer. (*The Town Labourer*, pp. 283-285.)

The same point of view is expressed by G. D. H. Cole in *A Century of Co-operation*, when he points out that the new type of employer

and his workpeople attended the same places of worship, and after the church had driven them forth against Wesley's will came to be united in their hostility to the claims of the Establishment". This "served to mitigate for many the class antagonisms which were inherent in the economic confrontation of the two classes of millowner and factory hand. The workmen who could not stomach this community were driven forth from the main dissenting connexions as well as from Mother Church. They found refuge in little chapels of their own under preachers who had also been driven forth, or they were impelled into complete revolt. But a complete severance from religion was tolerable to but few except in the biggest towns. It meant too much isolation, and too much deprivation of consolations which were sorely needed. Any religion that held men in communion with

their fellows seemed to be better than none; and only the few who could make a religion of Chartism—which had its own churches—or Co-operation—which had its “rational religion” and its Social Halls—could bear to break wholly away from the more theological brands of worship. The times were terrible for the poor—terrible for their drabness as well as for the physical privations which they required. Religion administered some comfort, and consequently the chapels were well filled. This was one great factor in breaking the spirit of working-class revolt and impelling the leaders of the workers into more sober courses of economic and political thought. Politically it led them towards union with the Liberal manufacturers who were the mainstay of the dissenting congregations. Economically it led them from revolutionary Trade Unionism and Chartism to the ‘New Model’ Trade Unionism of the ‘fifties’ and to the new forms of Co-operation which were developed under the inspiration of the Rochdale Pioneers.” (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, pp. 55-56.)

Yet, in spite of itself, Methodism helped the working class struggle of the period.

Methodism was in a very real sense a school, and when men and women go to school they may learn more lessons than those taught on the blackboard. Moreover the early Methodists had the credit of introducing the teaching of writing in the Sunday-schools. . . . The teaching of writing was an enormous boon to the working class. And there were other important arts that might be acquired in this school. The upper class could learn to speak at Eton: the working class in the little Bethel. The Methodist Sunday-schools would attract men and women with the gifts of oratory, leadership, organisation: they gave scope, experience, and training. . . . The teaching of Methodism was unfavourable to working-class movements; its leaders were hostile and its ideals perhaps increasingly hostile; but by the life and energy and awakening that it brought to this oppressed society it must, in spite of itself, have made many men better citizens, and some even better rebels. (*The Town Labourer*, pp. 286-287.)

NONCONFORMITY AND REVOLT

Certainly many significant leaders of working class revolt were Methodists. Several of the Rochdale Pioneers were prominently connected with local religious Nonconformity. G. D. H. Cole says of Rochdale at this period:

I doubt if any other town of its size was equally prolific in religious controversies and foundations. New churches and chapels were continually being built, and among the dissenting congregations there were constant shifts, secessions, and foundations of new sects. The Unitarians were first in the field, their meeting going back to the exclusion of Robert

Bath in 1688. The Wesleyans came next, founding their first Society in 1760, and building their first chapel in Toad Lane (where now stands the central store of the Pioneers) ten years later. The Baptists followed with their first meeting house in 1773; and the earliest Sunday Schools were begun in 1782. In 1806, as we have seen, came the Cookites, or Methodist Unitarians, as the sequel to Joseph Cooke's exclusion from the Methodist Connexion. The Friends built their meeting house in 1808, the Particular Baptists their Hope Chapel in 1810, the followers of the Countess of Huntingdon their St. Stephen's Church in 1811, and the Methodist New Connexion, which had started services in 1814, its own chapel in 1822. The Roman Catholics built themselves St. John's Church by public subscription in 1829; and the Established Church built new places of worship in 1820 (St. James's) and 1835 (St. Clement's)—the latter out of the "Million Grant" voted by Parliament for the erection of new churches in the growing industrial towns. These are only a few out of many new places of worship built in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The dissenters especially were continually outgrowing their spiritual homes, and were aided by the benefactions of devout manufacturers to erect new ones—usually of surpassing ugliness. Rochdale was the home of all the sects; and among them was the little sect of the Owenite Socialists, with their "rational religion" based on a rejection of all theological dogmas, from whom the original inspiration, though by no means all the original membership, of the Equitable Pioneers was drawn. (*A Century of Co-operation*, by G. D. H. Cole, pp. 54-55.)

One of the best known of the "Pioneers" was James Wilkinson, the shoe-maker preacher known in Rochdale as the Reverend James Wilkinson. He was a "Cookite", "a brand of Methodist Unitarianism indigenous to Rochdale". (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 72). The "Cookites" were the followers of Joseph Cooke, originally a Wesleyan Methodist minister who was expelled by the Methodist Conference in 1806 on account of his unorthodox opinions. Cooke's followers built a new chapel—Providence Chapel in the High Street—for him, and he continued to preach there until his death in 1811. Later there was a secession under the leadership of James Wilkinson, John Ashworth, and James Taylor,* and by 1818 the secessionists had built themselves a new chapel in Clover Street the congregation of which "contributed a substantial membership both to the Chartist body and to the Society of Equitable Pioneers" (*A Century of*

*James Taylor had gone as a delegate from Rochdale to the Chartist Convention of 1839 and to the National Conference of 1840. He was also the Rochdale delegate to the Manchester Conference of 1840, at which was formed the National Charter Association. In 1842 he was arrested and tried at Lancaster for his part in the great strike movement of that year. He was acquitted.

Co-operation, p. 49). John Garside, another of the pioneers, was also well-known as a local preacher; and two others, John Kershaw and John Scowcroft, were Swedenborgians also associated with the Unitarians.

I cannot find that the others had any religious affiliations (says Cole). It was only at a later stage that recruits came in from the Established Church, the Wesleyan Methodists, and other well-established bodies. (*A Century of Co-operation*, p. 72.)

On the other hand, George Jacob Holyoake, in his *History of the Rochdale Pioneers*, declares that at least half of the original Pioneers were associated with the Clover Street Chapel.

There is, of course, considerable doubt as to who should be included among the famous twenty-eight Pioneers (if there *were* twenty-eight of them*), but in spite of controversy it is beyond doubt that a number of the famous Twenty-eight were actively connected with the religious life of Rochdale.†

Among the wretchedly paid and oppressed village labourers of the period religious Nonconformity was also found to go often hand-in-hand with political nonconformity. George Loveless, the leader of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, was a local preacher of the Wesleyan Methodists. Nonconformity was particularly important in the country districts, where

the country parson had none of the characteristics of the village priest of the Middle Ages. He was, indeed, in his social status above even the leaseholding farmers, and, as a rule, squires and parsons ranked together, meeting on terms of social equality. The poorer parsons, and there were many very poor benefices, were tied to their homes, and here they devoted their spare time to some attractive hobby such as archaeology or natural history. But the men with private property or richer benefices took an active part in country life. They attended the social functions of the gentry, often shot and sometimes hunted with them, and took part in other forms of sport. Some sat on the Boards of Guardians, many were magistrates. Such men belonged to the governing class, and many indeed held what was called the "family living". Sometimes the parson was himself the squire,

*For a very thorough study of this problem see the Appendix to Mr. Cole's *A Century of Co-operation*.

†It was probably due to the multiplicity of strongly-held religious views that the Co-operative Movement declared itself neutral in religious matters. As early as 1832 when the Third Co-operative Congress was held, in London, a resolution was carried declaring that "Whereas, the co-operative world contains persons of all religious sects, and of all political parties, it is unanimously resolved, that Co-operators, *as such*, are not identified with any religious, irreligious, or political tenets whatever; neither those of Mr. Owen, nor of any other individual". See Holyoake's *History of the Rochdale Pioneers*, p. 20.

and so earned the nickname of "squarson". The typical country parson of the 19th century was above all things a "gentleman". In religious matters he kept clear of the controversies of the time, avoiding fervour and adopting the moderate view, whilst in political life he supported, as a rule, the squire's party. Thus inspired, he took a friendly interest in the farmers, their wives and families, and in a kindly if somewhat patronizing spirit did something by the administration of doles to alleviate the miserable condition of the impoverished labourers. But when the labourers showed independence and made a struggle for better conditions, the parsons rarely actively supported them.

The influence of the Nonconformists was of a distinctly different character. The chapels of the more important sects, the Congregationalists, the Baptists and Methodists, were as a rule in the country towns or the big villages, and had the support of a section of the shopkeepers, a few of the more broad-minded farmers, and some of the village artisans and more intelligent labourers. Amongst these people the minister moved, definitely cut off by his religious views from the houses of the gentry, the clergy and the orthodox farmers. Such of the labourers as took an independent line in religion tended, if the opportunity offered, to attach themselves to the Primitive Methodists—the Ranters as they were often called. This offshoot of Methodism, founded early in the 19th century, was, from its beginning, a movement led by rough, uneducated men, who made their appeal to the poor. Its preachers, like the medieval friars, were to be found tramping through the country districts preaching, in face of much persecution, a gospel of simple Christianity. Many labourers became "Primitives", and their little chapels, built in the last century, are still common in some counties, especially in the East of England, where they had a strong following. The "Primitives" have always shown sympathy with the labouring population. In 1830 they took an active part in the risings of that time, and in common with other Nonconformists did much to help the Trade Union movement in the seventies. Many of the Leaders of the latter movement had, indeed, obtained their power of speaking through the practice they had obtained as local preachers. (*A Short History of English Rural Life*, Montague Fordham, M.A., pp. 153-154.)

That was true of Joseph Arch the Warwickshire farm labourer who, in February 1872, formed the National Agricultural Labourers' Union. A moving speaker, he had got his early training in that art as a Primitive Methodist preacher. "Through the eloquence, the revivalist fervour, and the untiring energy of Joseph Arch*, the movement spread like wildfire among the

*Joseph Arch writes feelingly of the autocratic rule of the parson in his native Warwickshire village, when he was a boy. See his autobiography, *Joseph Arch: The Story of his Life*.

rural labourers of the central and eastern counties" (*The History of Trade Unionism*, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, pp. 331-332), and at its peak had 80,000 (some estimates put it as high as 100,000) members. The union conducted a campaign throughout the country, demanding a wage of 16s. a week for labourers, and actually secured a general rise of about 4s. a week.

This revolt of men whom their masters had been used to think of almost as serfs filled the employers with surprise and fury "as if the dumb had spoken and the the crippled walked" (*The Common People*, G. D. H. Cole & Raymond Postgate, p. 389), and the farmers ruthlessly victimized any man who joined the Union.

It is needless to say that they received the cordial support of the rural magistracy. In aid of a lock-out near Chipping Norton, two justices, who happened both to be clergymen, sent 16 labourers' wives, some with infants at the breast, to prison with hard labour, for 'intimidating' non-Union men. (*The History of Trade Unionism*, pp. 331-332.)

The Church was openly partisan, and

the spirit in which the rural clergy viewed this social upheaval is not unfairly typified by the utterance of a learned bishop. On September 2, 1872, Dr. Ellicott, the Bishop of Gloucester, speaking at a meeting of the Gloucester Agricultural Society, significantly suggested the village horsepond as a fit destination for the 'agitators' or delegates sent by the Union to open new branches. (*The History of Trade Unionism*, p. 332.)

The Anti-Poor-Law movement of the eighteen-thirties (which was later absorbed into the Chartist movement), provides further instances of working class leaders whose hatred of social injustice flowed from their religious beliefs.

The leaders of the movement drew their inspiration from the Bible, from a belief that the Act (of 1834) was a violation of Christian principles . . . This tendency to hark back to the Bible and to Christianity as a basis of political and social practice is the most interesting phase of the whole Chartist movement. (*The Chartist Movement*, Mark Hovell, M.A., p. 85.)

The infamous Poor Law of 1834 was based on the principle that out-relief should never be given to able-bodied males, and that when the wretched victims of capitalism were admitted to the new workhouses—Bastilles, as they were soon named—existence should be more unpleasant than the worst possible way of earning a living outside. Paupers were to be kept in "a contrite frame of mind by means of a low diet, a severe discipline, and a rigid segregation of the sexes which separated man and wife" on

the sound Malthusian principle that surplus workers should not be allowed to breed.

The most prominent leaders of the agitation against this shameful measure were Richard Oastler and Joseph Rayner Stephens.* Oastler was a member of the Established Church, although his father had been a Methodist and a personal friend of John Wesley. Stephens was the son of a Wesleyan minister, and entered the Wesleyan ministry himself, in 1825, to be expelled when he became an active Chartist.

It may be safely said that Stephens went a long way towards making the factory and poor law movement into a kind of religious revival... With Stephens and Oastler alike the Bible was the source of all political and religious teaching. Says Oastler: "I take the Bible, the simple Bible with me, without either note or comment, and in spite of all that men or devils may devise against me, I will have the Bill." . . . Stephens' special gift was denunciation. He conceived himself as a successor of Bishop Latimer or of those Old Testament prophets, summoned by the Almighty to chastise the Jeroboams and Ahabs of their time, prophets "who told kings what they were to do and the people likewise, who told senates and legislatures what kind of laws they were to make and what laws they should not make." He imagined himself at war with Satan, whose reality and vitality, already an established dogma of the Wesleyan community, was vouched for by the existence of such persons as Malthus and the Poor Law Commissioners. These he compared to Pharaoh who ordered a massacre of innocents, but unfavourably, as Pharaoh was frank about the matter whilst the Commissioners were hypocritical. (*The Chartist Movement*, Hovell, p. 89.)

At a meeting at Newcastle-on-Tyne, called in 1838 to demand the repeal of the Poor Law Amendment Act, he declared that

"If this damnable law, which violated all the laws of God, was continued, and all means of peaceably putting an end to it had been made in vain, then, in the words of their banner, "For children and wife we'll war to the knife". If the people who produce all wealth could not be allowed, according to God's Word, to have the kindly fruits of the earth which they had, in obedience to God's Word, raised by the sweat of their brow, then war to the knife with their enemies, who were the enemies of God. If the musket and the pistol, the sword, and the pike were of no

*Oastler and Stephens also took a prominent part in the struggle for the Ten Hours Bill. Lord Shaftesbury is usually given the chief credit for the Ten Hours Act of 1847, but Oastler's forceful propaganda and years of agitation by a host of humble working men whose names are unknown to us, made that piece of social legislation possible. The Bradford workers knew that and placed on record their "heartfelt gratitude to that noble of Nature Richard Oastler, Esq., the originator of, and persevering advocate of, the greatest boon to the factory working population of this country". (Bradford, June 16, 1847).

avail, let the women take the scissors, the child the pin or needle. If all failed, then the firebrand—aye, the firebrand, I repeat. The palace shall be in flames. I pause, my friends. If the cottage is not permitted to be the abode of man and wife, and if the smiling infant is to be dragged from a father's arms and a mother's bosom, it is because these hell-hounds of commissioners have set up the command of their master the devil, against our God.

And again, at Glasgow, in January 1838:

If they will not reform this, aye uproot it all, they shall have the revolution they so much dread. We shall destroy their abodes of guilt, which they have reared to violate all law and God's book. If they will not learn to act as law prescribes and God ordains, so that every man shall by his labour find comfortable food and clothing—not for himself only, but for his wife and babes—then we swear by the love of our brothers—by our God who made us all for happiness—by the earth He gave us for our support—by the Heaven He designs for those who love each other here, and by the hell which is the portion of those who, violating His book, have consigned their fellowmen . . . to hunger, nakedness, and death; we have sworn by our God, by heaven, earth, and hell, that from the East, the West, the North and the South, we shall wrap in one awful sheet of devouring flame, which no arm can resist, the manufactories of the cotton tyrants, and the places of those who raised them by rapine and murder.

MESSIANIC RELIGION

In some instances religion took on forms that recall the chiliastic dreams of the Middle Ages. Many of the sects tended to forget "the new Manchester in the New Jerusalem", and

the early history of the Primitive Methodist connection reads like the history of the early Christians in its isolation from the world and its expectation of an imminent day of judgment. (*The Town Labourer, 1760-1832*, J. L. & Barbara Hammond, p. 283).

It was a time of millennial hopes, and Robert Owen convinced himself that within a brief space, possibly no more than five years, the Trade Unions would transfer society into a Socialist community by taking over industry and running it co-operatively.* In November 1833 he addressed the Annual Meeting of the Operative Builders' Union—the Builders' Parliament, as it was called—which had been formed in the previous year, and which united all the building crafts into one body, with a probable

*This period witnessed the formation of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland, and its mushroom growth in the twelve months October 1833 to October 1834 to half-a-million members, and its equally rapid disintegration. Owen played a great part in the formation and fortunes of the Grand National.

membership at one time of some 60,000. Owen persuaded it to form itself into a Builders' Guild for the co-operative erection of buildings, and in a public lecture which he delivered soon afterwards, he announced the form which the new society was to take, by saying: "I now give you a short outline of the great changes which are in contemplation, and which shall come suddenly upon society like a thief in the night".

Commenting upon these excited years, G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate remark that

Psychologically, the great majority of the British working class was in those years, and for fifteen more years to come, diseased: as it had indeed always been in a greater or lesser degree since the eighteenth-century equilibrium had been broken up. Unable to find any rational methods of escape, it turned to irrational. It demanded a sure promise of happiness—of food, of rest from overwork, clothing and what delights it could imagine—within its own lifetime. It found this in prophetic religions; one of the legitimate ways of regarding Owenism is to class it among the Messianic religions which arose in the early nineteenth century. (*The Common People, 1746-1938*, G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, pp. 264-5).

Owen himself was often called the "revered father". James Morrison,* whom Postgate calls "one of the most level-headed leaders of this time", wrote to him:

I hope you will not hesitate to tell me of my errors, my prejudices and my natural discrepancies. Your doctrines have made me a *better* and a *happier* being. Before I knew the great truths which you have developed I was a rough and irritable stickler for vulgar Liberty—since my personal intercourse with *you* I have become better—but I do not feel satisfied. I have not that *charity* which beareth all things—which endureth long and is patient of suffering. Need I tell you I have been trained to be *hasty*, *impassioned* and prone to sudden bursts of feeling. You must have perceived my prejudices, my ambition, my weaknesses. Be, then, my Physician—I put my case in your hands. Give me your counsel—your practice inspires my perfect confidence. . . . I shall look upon you as a Father and try to become a faithful Son. May circumstances be auspicious to my Baptism and make me worthy to be

yours truly,
JAMES MORRISON.

(Quoted by Raymond Postgate in his *The Builders' History*, pp. 83-84.)

As for Owen

his mind was already, indeed, partially withdrawn from the

*Morrison, a bricklayer, was the editor of the semi-official journal of the Builder's Union, the *PIONEER*, which later transferred its allegiance and became the official organ of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain & Ireland.

outside world. He had begun to live among the fantasies in which he ended his life. He had, for example, previously announced that the millennium had commenced on May 1, 1833. What he meant by this, what it meant to him or to his followers it is impossible to conceive. (*The Common People*, p. 263.)

Presently he fell out with his two chief assistants, James Morrison, and J. F. Smith, a lecturer and "a sort of clergyman" who was editor of Owen's own journal *The Crisis*.

These two men, far more clear-headed than those who surrounded them, had for several issues been preaching what today would be called the strategy and tactics of the class-struggle. They urged reform of the Union structure, abstention from trivial conflicts, consolidation and conservation of energy for one well-considered attack—"a long strike, a strong strike, and a strike all together"—and generally an informed and directed hostility to the employers. Smith's economic analyses (signed "Senex") are astonishingly modern and intelligent: reading them torn from their context, few critics would believe that they antedated Marx. But though this advice corresponded to economic reality, it increasingly vexed Robert Owen. . . . All the objective facts were on their side, but Owen's disapproval was enough to close down *THE CRISIS*, which Smith edited, and expel Morrison's *PIONEER* from its position in favour of a new official journal of the Consolidated. . . . All arguments must have been in favour of the propaganda of Smith and Morrison. Yet the disapproval of Owen was enough to extinguish them. This was, as has already been suggested, directly because of the apocalyptic nature of his speeches. He announced with absolute conviction that the millennium was about to arrive—with a minimum of exertion by his listeners—or even that it had arrived. Because of their economic conditions . . . the working class of Great Britain was prepared to accept this affirmation. (*The Common People*, pp. 262-264.)

The causes which gave to Owenism its messianic qualities, bred even more monstrous forms of religion, all of which depended for their popular appeal upon "the promise of a heaven which could be secured by merely believing the prescribed set of propositions, and which would shortly appear on this earth." (*The Common People*, p. 226).

As late as 1851 the Mormons had 222 churches with 30,000 sittings. George Turner, one of the most successful prophets, not only promised immediate rewards to his followers, but actually announced the date on which the Lord would take over the government of the world and reward the faithful. The date was 1877, the Cabinet was named, its salaries fixed, and one of the advantages of the new regime was to be that the power of men and women to enjoy each other was to be increased "and that an hundredfold". The date passed uneventfully, but the new Church

was undismayed. John Ward succeeded to Turner, and the Church extended as far as Australia, where its practices became demonstrably pathological. Joanna Southcott, still unforbidden, and perhaps the most important, announced that she was pregnant with Shiloh, the new Messiah. She died of dropsy, but her followers were unaffected by such external facts: they continued numerous and certain of the imminent coming of the Kingdom of Heaven up till 1885, when the last prophet J. J. Jezreel died. (*The Common People*, pp. 265-266.)*

*The founder of the Jezreelites (as they were popularly called) was one James White, a soldier, who gave the society the title of the "New and Latter House of Israel", and to himself the alliterative name of James Jerishom Jezreel. He commenced his mission in October 1875, and addressed himself chiefly to members of the old Christian Israelite Church at Gillingham and elsewhere. He claimed to be divinely inspired, and in due course produced a "Flying Roll", the idea having been suggested to him by *Zechariah*, v. 1 ("Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll"). "The work, if such an exalted term can be applied to it, is a wretched jumble of texts and prophecies, and consists largely of a re-hash of the writings of the late John Wroe, the leader of the Christian Israelite Church". (*The Jezreelites and their Famous Tower*, reprinted from *Chats About Gillingham*, by permission of the author, Mr. C. S. Leeds, p. 1.)

The sect made considerable progress, and many members of the old Israelite Church accepted Jezreel as "God's last messenger to man", in what was mysteriously termed "the third and last watch". "The tenets were not new to old members of the Christian Israelite Church, many of whom 'gathered' at Gillingham from various parts of England and Scotland and the United States of America, and, what is more, gave proof of their faith in Jezreel and his teachings by selling all their goods and casting the proceeds into the 'treasury'. The sect, it was understood, was to be run on family lines, and all things were to be 'in common' ". (*The Jezreelites and their Famous Tower*, p. 2).

The sect began the erection of a "four-square" building, and over £30,000 was spent on this "temple" before work was suspended for lack of funds. The Jezreelites' Tower still stands on Chatham Hill.

CHAPTER 12

THE CHRISTIAN SOCIALISTS (1848-1854)

We have used the Bible as if it were a mere special constable's handbook, an opium dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they are being overloaded.

Charles Kingsley.

THE YEAR OF REVOLUTIONS

In February, 1848 the French king was driven from his throne by the people of Paris, and a republic was proclaimed. The effect of the February revolution was as if the key-stone of an arch had been withdrawn: the whole political structure of Europe began to collapse. In one country after another the ruling dynasty was tumbled over by popular insurrections. The Elector of Hesse and other German princelings were compelled to grant a constitution to their people, and on March 13th the populace of Vienna rose in revolt, and Metternich fled to England. Before the end of the month the Austrian emperor had been forced to grant constitutions to the kingdoms of Hungary and Bohemia, incorporating long-desired reforms. In Italy, the Milanese, in five days of fighting, drove out the Austrian garrison, and the Venetians followed this example, and Venetia and Lombardy declared their independence of Austria. The greater part of Italy flared in revolt: constitutions were granted to Naples, Rome, Tuscany and Piedmont by their rulers. Florence declared herself a republic, and the Pope fled from Rome and put himself under the protection of the King of Naples. In February, 1849, a constitutional assembly declared the temporal power of the Pope abolished, and proclaimed a Roman republic. Even the King of Prussia was forced to promise a constitution, and to stand bareheaded whilst the funeral of the revolutionary dead passed before his balcony; and a national assembly was convoked at Frankfurt to draft a constitution for a united Germany.

The whole of Europe seemed threatened by a revolutionary tidal wave; and in this country there was a revival of the Chartist movement.

The successive Continental revolutions, the news of which strangely unsettled even the most prosaic of the middle class, had a much

deeper effect on working men still suffering extensively from the industrial results of the financial shocks of 1847. On March 2nd, an enthusiastic London meeting of the Chartists sent a congratulatory deputation to the Republican Government at Paris, and very soon Stepney Green, Bethnal Green, and Clerkenwell Green, the principal meeting-places of the working-class politicians of the Metropolis, were the scenes of "immense gatherings." That the provincial towns were also overcome by the same excitement became evident from the events of the week beginning on Monday, March 6th. Glasgow especially was for a time in the hands of a mob pillaging provision shops and shouting "Bread or Revolution" and "Vive la République". But it was London's West End which saw the most remarkable Chartist manifestations. For three successive days there were Chartist hostilities with the police in connection with the ban placed upon meetings in Trafalgar Square, and on one occasion a movement was attempted upon Buckingham Palace.

After this explosive intimation of its revival Chartism engaged in several weeks of mass meetings, sometimes in halls, sometimes on town greens, and sometimes on the waste ground outside or between populous places. Chartists were once more listening to inflammatory oratory, signing yet another National Petition, and electing yet another Convention. (*English Radicalism, 1832-52*, S. Maccoby, Ph.D. pp. 279-280.)

THE END OF CHARTISM

The revolutionary Chartist hopes of 1839, and the threats of armed insurrection which had accompanied them had faded out in the ill-fated Monmouthshire rising of November 3-4, when John Frost and some 4,000 colliers and iron-workers tried to free Henry Vincent from gaol and fought a pitched battle in the streets of Newport with the military. The Chartist losses in that battle have been estimated at various figures between 11 and 53. One result of the disturbances of that period was that most of the outstanding Chartist leaders were gaoled, and the movement was left for a time leaderless and dispirited.

But Chartism revived. Various schemes for Chartist education and propaganda were put forward, and in July, 1840, the National Charter Association was founded, and the attempt was made to create a nation-wide party, organised in towns and wards, with a weekly membership subscription of a penny.

The National Charter Association was the first serious attempt at the creation of a mass working class political party in this country, and the organisers faced colossal difficulties, including the fact that the Corresponding Act of 1817 made it illegal to found a national organisation with branch societies. The N.C.A.

was a notable achievement therefore, even if it is true that "it was only the exceptional Chartist who religiously renewed his twopenny membership card every quarter and paid his weekly subscription besides". (*English Radicalism 1832-52*, p. 214).

At first the Association enrolled members slowly, and by the end of 1841 had 13,000 members in 282 localities. By the summer of 1842, when it appears to have reached its maximum strength, the Association claimed a membership of 48,000 organised in 400 localities.

That year saw the second Chartist Petition, which was signed by 3,317,702 persons and was over six miles long. It excited the wildest hopes among the Chartists, not least in the mind of Feargus O'Connor.

August saw a strike in Ashton-under-Lyne which was turned into a strike for the Charter. It spread over Lancashire, Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire, the Potteries and Warwickshire into Wales, and the Scottish miners also came out. It is reported that when Campbell, the secretary of the Association, saw the smokeless chimneys of Manchester from the train he declared, "Something must come out of this, and something serious".

But, at the best, most of the Chartist leaders were very vague as to what their next move should be, and at worst frankly alarmed at the storm which they had helped to provoke. On August 27th, at the very time when trades as far north as Aberdeen were considering joining in the strike, O'Connor denounced it in the *Northern Star* as an Anti-Corn-Law League plot. The strike was already beginning to weaken at the centre, and O'Connor's weak denunciation helped to wreck it completely, and to inflict a defeat upon Chartism from which it never fully recovered. With the collapse of the great strike the ruling class took their revenge for the fright which they had suffered by arresting 1,500 of the strikers, and transporting 79 of them to Australia.

The two high tides of Chartism in 1839 and 1842 were largely the result of trade depression which inflicted intolerable suffering upon the working class of the industrial north. 1847 and 1848 were also years of bad trade and heavy unemployment, and these economic factors making for mass discontent were aggravated by the dramatic events on the Continent. Once again fantastic hopes were raised, and O'Connor drafted a constitution for a British republic, with himself as President. A new Petition was drafted, another National Assembly convened, and a mass meeting called for April 10th, 1848 to present the petition.

This meeting was arranged to take place on Kennington Common, whence it was to march to Parliament; and the ruling class (already shaken by the events in Europe) had horrific fears of an English revolution. 150,000 or more special constables were sworn in, and the Duke of Wellington massed an army in London, and "made preparations as though for Waterloo".

Kennington Common was packed on April 10th, the attendance being stated at various figures between 25,000 and 250,000, these estimates being coloured, no doubt, by the author's political opinions. One thing is certain: there was no revolutionary upheaval. O'Connor's threats proved to be wind as usual, and when the procession to the House of Commons was banned he implored the people not to be provoked. The great meeting from which so much had been hoped (and feared) fizzled out tamely, the Petition being conveyed to Parliament in three cabs. Later, when the signatures were counted, the fiasco was complete, for the numbers were announced as slightly less than 2,000,000 instead of the 5,700,000 which the Chartists had claimed, and many of these were obviously fictitious and somewhat risible.

THE CHRISTIAN SOCIALISTS

Chartism never recovered from the fiasco of April 10th, and thereafter dwindled both in the numbers of its adherents and in its power to sway the masses.

Some such startling defeat of the Chartists was inevitable, even if the leadership had been wiser. The enemy, the capitalistic class, which the Chartists were attacking, was enormously stronger than they believed. It was nothing like the feeble landowners who had surrounded George IV. So far from being in decay, it had during this period and the immediately subsequent years, begun to use fully its economic powers of expansion for the first time, and provided itself with legal instruments which enabled its progress to astonish the world. (*The Common People 1746-1938*, by G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, p. 285.)

However, the events that culminated in the Kennington meeting had frightened the capitalist class, and along with the customary savage persecution of the working class rebels, there was a growing realization that some amelioration of working-class conditions were desirable. It is at this stage that the small group of middle class reformers (mostly parsons and barristers) known as the Christian Socialists appear on the scene.

On the morning of the Kennington Common demonstration Charles Kingsley, a young country parson, came up to London,

and went to see the Reverend Frederick Denison Maurice, then a professor at King's College, London, and leader of the "Broad Church" party in the Church of England. Maurice gave him a letter of introduction to a young barrister named Ludlow, and that afternoon the two of them set off for Kennington, and had got as far as Waterloo Bridge when they met the remnants of the great mass meeting trudging homewards through the rain. The same evening Kingsley and Ludlow discussed the exciting events of the day with Maurice, and conferred on the best means to "save the country from disturbances, and the people from harmful utopias".

The next day Kingsley wrote that "Maurice is in great excitement. . . . We are getting out placards for the walls, to speak a word for God. . . . I am helping in a glorious work". The same evening he adds: "I was up till four this morning, writing posting placards under Maurice's auspices".

The following day posters appeared on the London hoardings signed "A Working Parson" (Kingsley's nom-de-plume), which assured the workers that "almost all men who have heads and hearts" know their wrongs and the patience they have shown. They implored the workers not to "mean licence when you cry liberty", since "the Almighty God, and Jesus Christ, the poor Man who died for poor men, will bring freedom for you, though all the Mammonites on earth were against you". The workers are asked, will the Charter free them from "slavery to gin and beer?"; and the homily concludes: "There will be no true freedom without virtue, no true science without religion, no true industry without the fear of God and love to your fellow-citizens. Workers of England, be wise, and then you *must* be free, for you will be *fit* to be free".

Other posters appeared in due course, all of them critical of Chartism, and urging the need for individual regeneration if social amelioration was to be achieved.

I am a radical reformer (runs a typical passage). I am not one of those who laugh at your petition of April 10th; I have no patience with those who do. . . . But my quarrel with the Charter is that it does not go far enough in reform. I want to see you free, but I don't see how what you ask will give you what you want. I think you have fallen into just the same mistake as the rich of whom you complain—the very mistake which has been our curse and our nightmare—I mean the mistake of fancying that legislative reform is social reform, or that men's hearts can be changed by Acts of Parliament. If anyone will tell me of a country where a

charter made rogues honest or the idle industrious, I shall alter my opinion of the Charter, but not till then. . . . Be fit to be free and God himself will set you free.

This linking of Christianity with a demand for social reform had little in common with the earlier revolutionary movements of which I have written, in which the demand for social justice was based upon Biblical sanction. The Christian Socialists were no revolutionaries: their approach to the working class was one of condescending (though quite honest) benevolence. They came to them as middle-class philanthropists* who were quite genuinely shocked by the wretched conditions under which masses of poor people lived and worked; but whilst they were anxious to improve working class conditions they deplored the class struggle, and deprecated any manifestation of working class militancy. Maurice expressed their basic idea in these words:

The question is, how to eliminate Owenism and Chartism? Repression has proved powerless; but the Queen, in a conversation with Lord Melbourne, has indicated the proper way, to wit, education. But what sort of education will be capable of doing away with Chartism? The one that will point out to him (to the worker) his unjust claims and will satisfy his just demands. (*The Life of F. D. Maurice*, by G. F. Maurice, Vol. ii, p. 269.)

And though their first series of tracts made a special appeal to Chartists, they sought "to convince them of the folly and wrong of open violence", and gloried "in the success of the householder constables". (*Charles Kingsley and Christian Socialism*, by Colwyn F. Vulliamy, p. 10).

They were largely ignorant of the Trade Union and Co-operative movements, and Max Beer has described them, not unfairly, as "leaders and officers, but without any army behind them". (*History of British Socialism*, Vol. ii, p. 184). Not only did they regard Owenite and Chartist ideas as dangerous, but Maurice

*Of the best known members of the group Maurice and Kingsley were clergymen; Ludlow, Funnivall, Brickdale, and Thomas Hughes (better known, perhaps, as the author of *Tom Brown's School-days*), were barristers; Walsh was a doctor; Campbell and Penrose were architects; and Mansfield a trained scientist. Several of them were queer almost to the point of being cranks. "There was Mansfield with his cotton-cloth shoes, and Campbell with his 'fonetic nuts', and Funnivall, vegetarian and non-smoker and teetotaler, with a spelling all his own . . . and even the leaders were a couple of parsons and a strange fellow who had spent half his life in France. They were admittedly on their own showing a queer collection . . . And to them had come Tom Hughes, the "blue", with the healthy mind and the healthy body, whom no one could accuse of madness or vice, who was the ideal hero of the British public and the sporting press. . . . Here was something to give their critics pause . . . they could not be so bad after all if a man like that was among them". (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, by Charles E. Raven, M.A., pp. 130-131).

(whom Ludlow has described as "towering spiritually by head and shoulders over the rest" (*Economic Review*, Oct. 1893)), was "no democrat and condemned the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people as atheistic and subversive". (*History of British Socialism*, M. Beer, Vol. ii, p. 182.) Quite naturally he had offered his services as a special constable on April 10th, 1848, but had been excused on account of his clerical rank. For him

the church was a visible society ordained by Christ for bringing about the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom was at all times more truly real, more genuine, than the "kingdoms of this age" because it existed in the Divine mind. (*The Common People 1746-1938*, G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, p. 315).

The events of 1848 seemed to him a direct manifestation of Divine power. "Do you really think", he wrote,

that the invasion of Palestine by Sennacherib was a greater event than the overthrowing of nearly all the greatest powers, civil and ecclesiastical, in Christendom?

His conception of Socialism was inextricably mingled with a religious mysticism.

We want the Church (he said) fully to understand her own foundation, fully to work out the communism which is implied in her existence. Church reformation, therefore, in its highest sense, involves *theologically* the reassertion of these truths in their fullness, apart from their Calvinistical and Tractarian limitations and dilutions; *socially* the assertion on the grounds of these truths of an actually living community under Christ, in which no man has a right to call anything that he has his own, but in which there is spiritual fellowship and practical co-operation. (*Life of F. D. Maurice*, J. Maurice, p. 10.)

Ludlow, of whom General Sir Frederick, then Colonel, Maurice later wrote (December 21st, 1889), that "John Malcolm Ludlow was the founder of the movement; and he brought in my father by the force of his strong will",* declared that he (Maurice)

never understood the meaning of democracy . . . and Maurice himself in the most elaborate of his letters on this topic admits that he does not believe democracy to be possible except upon a basis of slavery. Athens had been a slave-state. Modern experiments, in France and America, had only led to chaos and military despotism, or to corruption and negro-servitude. With these examples before him his view is that there must always be some visible embodiment of the principle of authority, and that this is to be obtained better by monarchy and aristocracy, wherein certain persons are elevated above the normal

*Quoted by Charles Raven in *Christian Socialism, 1848-1854*, p. 55.

level, than by democracy and slavery, wherein the same differentiation is reached by depressing one class below the others. . . . 'I must have Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Socialism, or rather Humanity, recognised as necessary elements or conditions of an organic Christian society,' he writes. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, Charles E. Raven, p. 91).

Ludlow† himself

was equally exalted, but more practical, his insistence on working-class self-government and the practical details of workshop management seemed to Maurice unwise and more than a little worldly. (*The Common People 1746-1938* by G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, pp. 315-316.)

Like Maurice, Ludlow also wondered on April 10th "whether he should not enlist to defend the city against an orgy of bloodshed". (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 106).

Charles Kingsley was at one with Maurice in setting a high value on aristocracy; to him the House of Lords "represented all that was noble and permanent in the national character". (*Charles Kingsley and Christian Socialism*, Colwyn F. Vulliamy).

In his "First Letter" as Parson Lot, he wrote:

God will only reform society on condition of our reforming every man his own self—while the devil is quite ready to help us to mend the laws and the parliament, earth and heaven, without ever starting such an impertinent and "personal" request.

Mr. Vulliamy in his little pamphlet *Charles Kingsley and Christian Socialism* (pp. 10-11) recounts a significant incident which occurred at the Cranbourne Coffee Tavern where Maurice addressed Chartist leaders and other working men.

On one occasion (he writes) the National Anthem was hissed. Hughes, like an evangelical Desmoulins, sprang on a chair, vowed that any man who insulted the Queen would have an account to settle with him personally (he was a proficient pugilist), ordered the pianist to play on loudly, and himself led the singing of the Anthem, which was continued so vociferously that interruption was either quelled or was drowned by mere tumult.

Nor is it without significance that three copies of Kingsley's most famous pamphlet, *Cheap Clothes and Nasty*, are reported on one occasion as "lying on the Guards' Club table!" (Letter to Mrs. Kingsley, June 1850, cf. *Life of Kingsley*, i. p. 236. Quoted in Charles Raven's, *Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 195.)

†Furnivall, one of the earliest recruits, also described Ludlow as "the true mainspring of our Christian Socialist movement" (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 55).

THE BEGINNING OF THE MOVEMENT

On April 12th, 1848, Maurice, Ludlow and Kingsley met again and decided to start a penny weekly, which they called *Politics for the People*. Seventeen numbers were issued, and then lack of funds forced them to suspend publication. Ludlow, who wrote over the signature of "John Townsend", or, more generally, "J.T.", was responsible for about a third of the total matter published in the paper. Maurice, whose work was either unsigned or signed "A Clergyman", wrote an introductory article on "Fraternity", and also contributed several dialogues, a story, and a number of other articles; whilst Charles Kingsley sent several contributions, including the three famous "Letters of Parson Lot", and some short poems. William Lovett (who had founded the London Working Men's Association in 1836, and had drafted the famous Charter in 1838) sent an address which Maurice reviewed. "One or two working men sent letters, but their number was disappointingly small". (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. III).

The objects of the paper were explained in the first issue. Politics (it was said) have been separated from Christianity; religious men have supposed that their only business was with the world to come; political men have declared that the present world is governed on entirely different principles. . . . But Politics for the people cannot be separated from Religion. They must start from atheism or from the acknowledgment that a Living and Righteous God is ruling in human society not less than in the natural world. . . . The world is governed by God; this is the rich man's warning; this is the poor man's comfort; this is the real hope in the consideration of all questions, let them be as hard of solution as they may; this is the pledge that Liberty, Fraternity, Unity, under some conditions or other, are intended for every people under heaven.

Politics for the People put Ludlow in touch with a number of working class leaders. Among them was Walter Cooper (brother of Thomas Cooper the well-known Chartist poet). Cooper, who was working at that time as a tailor in Fetter Lane, was a prominent Chartist and a capable speaker. He was impressed by *Politics for the People*, and agreed to help Ludlow to get together a meeting at which members of the Christian Socialist group might discuss social problems with working men. The "Cranbourne Coffee Tavern" was chosen as a meeting place, and the first meeting was held there on April 23rd, 1849. Thereafter weekly meetings were held at which lectures or addresses were delivered, or debates took place.

The first of these meetings "began in a somewhat frigid fashion", and

the general embarrassment was not diminished by the first speakers, who were men with grievances that they were glad to air. They said many hard things of their social superiors, and made the group feel distinctly uncomfortable. The clergymen came in, as usual, for a good deal of plain speech. Then up rose Charles Kingsley; and with the stammer which marked his utterance until he lost himself in his subject blurted out "I am a Church of England clergyman", and then, after a pause, and with folded arms, "And I am a Chartist". After which he spoke with some frankness, and the meeting became friendly". (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 139.)

It was at the "Cranbourne" meetings that the Christian Socialists made contact with the Owenite Socialist, Lloyd Jones, who was in touch with all the surviving Owenite and Co-operative groups. Despite his religious scepticism, Lloyd Jones threw himself wholeheartedly into the plans of the Christian Socialists.

Other recruits were the watch finishers, Joseph Millbank and Thomas Shorter, both of whom were Chartists, and who subsequently succeeded Charles Sully as joint secretaries of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations. Sully, who also came to the "Cranbourne" meetings, was a bookbinder from Paris, and had an extensive knowledge of the French movement for Co-operative Production. He

had taken a full share in the revolutionary outbreaks of the two past years. Becoming convinced of the futility of physical force as an instrument of reform, he left France and came to London with a strong recommendation from a friend of Ludlow's. The group were delighted to have found one who knew the French Associations at first hand, and who was honest, energetic, competent, and experienced. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 184.)

Another French recruit was A. L. Jules Le Chevalier, who in May, 1850, adopted the name St. André. He professed to be a follower of St. Simon, and was expelled from France in June, 1849. He met Ludlow and other members of the group in November, and his

plausible address, wide knowledge, and ready enthusiasm gave him at once a prominent position in their counsels. At the beginning possibly he was sincere . . . but after a time their suspicions were aroused . . . and in March 1852, he severed his connection with the Society. . . . Maurice, the most charitable of men, refers to him, years afterwards and not unjustly, in a letter to Ludlow as a "clever sharper". After the fall of the French Empire and the

exposure of Napoleon's intrigues "Le Chevalier" was discovered to have served for some years as a paid secret agent! (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, pp. 143-144.)

It was at these "Cranbourne" meetings that Ludlow found support for his plans to start self-governing workshops on the model of those established in France. Ludlow had been brought up in France, and he "was at once intimately acquainted with French Socialist and Co-operative ideas and almost entirely ignorant of their British equivalent". (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 97). He had inspected several of the Paris workshops where the French workers were carrying out the ideas of Buchez and Louis Blanc by forming self-governing Producers' Associations, and he had

collected a large bundle of papers containing their constitutions, conditions of membership, and regulations, and a full account of the results of his research was published in 1850 as the fourth in the series of *Tracts on Christian Socialism*. This really magnificent work, he wrote, seemed to meet the very mischiefs we are anxious to deal with. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 143.)

PRODUCERS' CO-OPERATION IN GREAT BRITAIN

It is a curious fact (says G. D. H. Cole) that the Christian Socialists, when they first launched out on their attempt to foster Producers' Co-operative Societies of working men, seem to have known practically nothing about all the previous attempts that had been made in Great Britain to achieve this very thing. They soon learnt about these earlier movements and discovered that they were still in being; but at the outset they derived their inspiration to form such Societies entirely from France. (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 97.)

If the Christian Socialists had not been so aloof from the working class movement of their day they would have known that the movement for Co-operative Production in Great Britain had experienced a revival in the second half of the 'forties after the failure of the Owenite colony at Queenwood (1846). Even before this failure the Trade Unions had taken a renewed interest in schemes for Co-operative Production which had been prevalent in the days of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of 1834. In 1845, just before a trade depression set in, a Trade Union Conference (the first national conference of this kind since the collapse of the Grand National in 1834) assembled in London, and formed a National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour. This was intended to help to co-ordinate

working class action in trade disputes and to represent the general claims of the working class before Parliament and the public.

The National Association of United Trades did not set out with the millennial ideas of the Grand National, and it declared its willingness to negotiate with the employers and its desire to avoid having recourse to strike action by the setting up of mutually agreed "Boards of Trade", or conciliation courts. At the same time, however, it prepared for possible strikes and lock-outs by setting up another body, the National United Trades Association for the Employment of Labour, which revived the Union Shop and Co-operative Production projects of the eighteenth-thirties. The proposal was to raise a £50,000 Employment Fund to be "devoted to the formation of self-supporting industrial colonies", which could employ members during industrial disputes.

At the next yearly conference it was announced that the National United Trades Association for the Employment of Labour had 123 men at work under its auspices, mainly in boot-making and other hand trades which required very little capital. But hardly had the new movement taken shape when the economic depression of 1846-47 began; and in 1848 the two Associations were merged into a single body.

As the funds of the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour became exhausted many societies which had joined it fell away; but the Association survived for several more years. Then, in 1849, it became involved in a strike of the Wolverhampton tinplate workers. The employers met this strike by a prosecution of both strikers and leaders for incitement to breach of contract and for other offences. The trials dragged on until 1851; and this protracted legal struggle greatly weakened the Association. After that it steadily declined, and gave up the attempt to develop Co-operative Production. It finally disappeared in 1867.

About the same time as the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour was being formed, a group of old Owenites formed the Leeds Redemption Society, in 1846.

The aim of the Redemptionists was to persuade workmen to subscribe a penny a week to a fund which was to be used for the "Redemption of Labour" by setting the members to work both on the land and in self-governing workshops. . . . In the following year the Redemptionists took a leading part in the establishment of the Leeds Co-operative Corn Mill, out of which sprang the Leeds Co-operative Society. They also had presented to them an

estate at Garnlwyd, in Carmarthenshire, on condition that it should be returned to the donor if they failed to put it to Co-operative use. On this estate a small number of the Redemptionists settled down in 1848 and proceeded to erect workshops as well as till the land, supplying their products to the Co-operative Societies at Leeds and elsewhere. . . . The venture . . . lasted until 1854, when the estate was given up and handed back to the donor, and the Leeds Redemption Society ended in the following year. . . . The Bury Redemptionists started in 1850 a Co-operative Store which ran for four years, and in 1851 they helped the local bootmakers to win a strike by establishing Co-operative Production. The movement also spread to Liverpool, where in 1851 there was a project afoot for the newly founded Amalgamated Society of Engineers to buy the Windsor Foundry, which had just failed, and restart it as a Co-operative Workshop. . . . [It] came to nothing, because before it could be completed all the funds of the A.S.F. were swallowed up in the great engineers' lock-out of 1852. (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 101.)

Thus the Redemption Society movement was in full swing in the north of England at the very time when the Christian Socialists were becoming interested in Co-operative Production; but they seem to have known nothing about it.

THE TAILORS' ASSOCIATION

During the summer of 1849 Henry Mayhew published his *London Labour and the London Poor*, and his dreadful revelations about slum conditions and the sweating systems (revelations which were based on first-hand investigation) made a tremendous impression upon the reading public. As if to underline his indictment there was an outbreak of cholera during August and September.

The Christian Socialists

plunged into practical relief-work. Mansfield with his scientific training went down to investigate sanitary conditions in the plague-areas. Walsh lost the support of his wealthy patients by accepting a post as inspector in Bermondsey. Kingsley came up from Eversley to join the crusade, and from his experiences on Jacob's Island got the material for one of his most lurid chapters in *Alton Locke*. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 145.)

He was also impelled to write his first and most famous pamphlet, *Cheap Clothes and Nasty*, in which he exposed the London sweatshops. It was published in January, 1850. Finally, he set about writing *Alton Locke*.

Mansfield conceived a scheme for a Health League, "for uniting all classes of society in the promotion of the Public

Health, and the removal of all causes of disease which unnecessarily abridge men's right to live", but nothing came of it. Instead the group devoted themselves to setting up a Tailors' Association. Maurice entered heartily into the venture; and wrote a typical letter to Kingsley on the subject, declaring that

Competition is put forth as the law of the universe. That is a lie. The time is come for us to declare that it is a lie by word and deed. I see no way but associating for work instead of for strikes. I do not say, or think we feel, that the relation of employer and employed is not a true relation. I do not determine that wages may not be a righteous mode of expressing that relation. But at present it is clear that that relation is destroyed, that the payment of wages is nothing but a deception. We may restore the whole state of things: we may bring in a new one. God will decide that. His voice has gone forth clearly bidding us come forward to fight against the present state of things; to call men to repentance first of all, but then also, as it seems to me, to give them an opportunity of showing their repentance and bringing forth fruits worthy of it. This is my notion of a Tailors' Association. (Quoted by Charles Raven, *Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, pp. 149-150.)

On January 8th, 1850, a meeting of the promoters of the scheme with several working men and one or two master-tailors—about twenty persons in all—was held in Maurice's house, and adopted a constitution based upon those of the Paris associations. Walter Cooper was appointed manager at a salary of £2 a week, and shortly afterwards a shop and workrooms were found at 34 Castle Street, and a three-years lease was signed on January 18th.

Meanwhile a public meeting of journeymen tailors was held at the Mechanics Institute, Chancery Lane, and a motion was carried declaring that

individual selfishness as embodied in the competitive system, lies at the root of the evils under which English industry now suffers: the remedy for the evils of competition lies in the brotherly and Christian principle of Co-operation—that is, of joint work, with shared or common profits: this principle might be widely and readily applied in the formation of Tailors' Working Associations.

Twelve men undertook to join, and work began on February 11th. Within two months the number of men employed had risen to a couple of dozen. An account of this Association was written by Hughes, and was published in the spring as the second of the *Tracts on Christian Socialism*. Maurice in a letter to Daniel Macmillan, dated February 7th, refers to the venture, and makes the typical confession that "our great desire is to Christianize Socialism".

The Association prospered at first. Trade was brisk, and Cooper, when giving evidence before the Slaney Commission in May, 1850, declared that during the first three months of their existence the number of Associates rose from 12 to 34, that they had done business to the tune of £250, and had made a profit of £77.

Besides their wealthier customers, whose clothes were made to measure, they had found a large demand from their fellow artisans for ready-made goods, and it was hoped that by turning attention to these in the slack seasons they could keep their members fully employed all the year round. Wages were being paid at an average rate of 24s. a week, the skilled workmen getting as much as 33s.—rates which compared favourably with those paid elsewhere in the best houses in the trade. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 195.)

LITERARY ACTIVITIES

On February 19th Maurice published a tract entitled *Dialogue between Somebody (a person of respectability) and Nobody (the writer)*, in which the general ideas of Christian Socialism were expounded. Within the next nine months six more *Tracts on Christian Socialism* followed. (2) *A History of the Working Tailors' Association*, by Hughes; (3) *What Christian Socialism has to do with the question at present agitating the Church*, by Maurice; (4) *The Working Associations of Paris*, by Ludlow; (5) *The Society for Promoting Working-men's Associations*, by Ludlow and Sully; (6) *Prevailing idolatries or hints for political economists*, by Ludlow; (7) *Dialogue between A. and B., two clergymen, on the doctrine of circumstances*, by Maurice; After a year's interval yet another *Tract* was added to the series, *A Clergyman's answer to the question "on what grounds can you associate with men generally,"* by Maurice. Ludlow writing of the *Tracts* in January 1851, says:

The *Tracts* have been circulated to the extent of thousands, and have been favourably noticed in the most unforeseen quarters by men perhaps whose candour the authors were presumptuous enough to distrust. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 157.)

On November 2nd, 1850, there appeared the first number of *The Christian Socialist*, a *Journal of Association*, conducted by several of the Promoters of the London Working Men's Associations. It was priced at a penny, and Ludlow undertook the editorial work. The object of the paper was stated to be "to diffuse the principles of co-operation as the practical application of Christianity to the purposes of trade and industry". In each weekly issue a

Gazette was inserted, containing a record of the various Associations, both in London and the provinces, and abroad.

The paper reached a circulation of 1,500 copies almost immediately, and this was doubled within a year. However, it required a circulation of at least 5,000 to pay its way, and it had eventually to be discontinued after the promoters had lost about £400 on the venture.

Meanwhile, a fresh series of *Tracts by Christian Socialists* was issued. The first was by Maurice, and was published in May 1851. It was intended to be Number One in a *Series of English History by a Clergyman*, but the series was not, in fact, continued. The next tract was Kingsley's *Cheap Clothes and Nasty*, reprinted as a second edition, and priced at 2d. instead of the original 4d. The third and fourth contained another reprint,—Ludlow's article on *Labour and the Poor*, which had originally appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, and was now revised and issued in two parts. There the series ended, though another series of *Tracts for Priests and People* was launched in January 1854. This series was confined almost entirely to religion and theology.

In addition to these tracts the Christian Socialists were responsible for publishing a large number of other pamphlets. Most of these contained reports of lectures, or the sermons and addresses of Maurice and Kingsley. The last of them appears to have been issued in 1853, under the title of *Strikes Suspended by Self-employment*.

Finally, mention should be made of Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, which appeared in August 1850, and ran into three editions in little over a year.

THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING WORKING MEN'S ASSOCIATIONS

It was in June, 1850, that the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations was established, and the Christian Socialists set to work to advocate "with an almost apostolic fervour the formation of associations of producers, in which groups of working men were to become their own employers". (*The History of Trade Unionism*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, p. 225). Sully prepared the first draft constitution for the Society, and after this had been drastically revised by Ludlow, and amended by the other Promoters it was issued as a tract in June.

The Society was to work through two bodies, the Council of Promoters (consisting of the Christian Socialists who advanced

the initial capital, with Maurice as President) and the Central Board, consisting of the managers of all the Associations together with a rank-and-file representative from each of them, and a secretary appointed and paid by the Council. The duties of the Central Board were to regulate the relations of the various Associations one with another and with the public, subject to the consent of the Council, and to co-operate with the Council in the formation of new Associations. In the beginning the meetings of the Council and the Central Board were held separately; but in April, 1852, they began to meet jointly.

The Associations themselves were controlled each by its own Council of Administration, which consisted of the manager, a chairman, treasurer, and secretary, and a specified number of Associates. This Council had the right to be consulted by the manager in the conduct of the business; and it could also fix prices for the goods produced by the Association, subject to the control of the Central Board. However, executive authority remained in the manager's hands: he alone took orders, gave out the work, directed the preparation of the material, and sold and received payment for the goods produced. The chairman, however, was recognised as head of the workshop, and had the right to enforce fines for breaches of duty there. It was intended that the appointment of the manager should eventually be in the hands of the Associates (who would thus become self-governing); but at the start it was provided that so long as money was owing to the Promoters they should retain the right to veto any manager whom the Associates might appoint, and should also define his powers and duties. The capital advanced by the Promoters was to be gradually repaid out of the profits of the Associations.

New Associates were required to serve a probationary period, during which time they were to be paid at the same rates as full members, and were to receive in addition a fixed sum in lieu of a share in the profits; but they were to take no part in the control of the Association.

The most elaborate part of the Constitution was that which dealt with the division of profits. The principle of an equal wage for all was rejected, and it was agreed that an allowance be paid to each Associate, "which shall be a fair day's remuneration for a fair day's work whether by time or piece according to the custom of the trade", and that this allowance should be in proportion to the skill and energy of the individual concerned. The net profit or surplus (after deducting expenses, setting aside

a proportion for repaying loans or for paying interest on them, and reserving a portion to increase the capital and extend the business) was to be divided every six months between all the Associates "in proportion to the time they have severally worked".

There was to be no Sunday work, and the working day was not to exceed ten hours, excluding meal-time, unless with the consent of the Board and the Council. No Association was to be used for political agitation (although individual members were free to hold what views they liked); and all disputes between members, or between members and the manager were to be settled by arbitrators chosen by each party. Disputes between Associations were to be settled by the Central Board, subject to the right of appeal to the Council.

The Society promoted (or helped to promote) Working Associations in a number of trades. The early Associations were formed by accepting any one who cared to join, up to the number who could be given work, and disputes soon arose between the managers and the workers. Even the original Association, the Castle Street Working Tailors, made scarcely any inquiry into the record and character of intending Associates.

We called together large bodies of tailors, and told them what we intended to do, and then accepted the first that put down their names. (*First Report of the Society, issued in 1852, p. 6.*)

To make matters worse in the case of the Castle Street Tailors, Walter Cooper, the paid secretary, preferred public speaking to the mundane job of managing the shop, and when he went off on a lecturing tour in September, and the Tailors' Council of Administration took over his work, they found his accounts were in a hopeless confusion. No definite charge of dishonesty was made; but the Council wrote to him on September 12th, urging him to return, and commenting upon his book-keeping in a way which he resented as insulting. He returned, and a long wrangle ensued, during the course of which Cooper tried to dismiss the Council, and found that the whole body of Associates supported them. Eventually the Promoters intervened, a full enquiry was held, and the Association was virtually dissolved, and when it was re-constituted eleven of the original members were refused admission.

After that the Tailors' Association was relatively successful; and on March 7th, 1851, Cooper reported that they were in a position to pay off the whole loan of £300, and still have another £300 in hand. "They were . . . apparently free from the discords

and suspicions which had produced the crisis six months before. . . . Their prices were well able to stand comparison with those of other firms". (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 198).

In April 1852 a branch, specially intended to cater for the needs of the lower and middle classes, and consisting of Associates drawn from tailors who had been reduced to slop-work, was opened at 68 Westminster Bridge Road, and was known as the Borough Branch of the Working Tailors' Association. By this time the Castle Street Group had 19 members.

Of the eight original Associations three were of Boot and Shoemakers, "a business which seemed to lend itself admirably to the methods of the Christian Socialists", (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 200), but of all the Associations none proved more disappointing than these.

Two of the three were set up in April, 1860. One, the Ladies' and Gentlemen's Working Boot and Shoemakers Association, was established in part of a large house and shop at 11B Tottenham Court Road, and began work with a loan of £165; but the cost of these premises (about £160 per annum) proved a too heavy burden, and within a couple of months the Association had to be re-constituted. In this way they lost the summer trade in light shoes, and in September, when the demand was for heavier footwear, the Association found itself with a "large and useless stock of light shoes on hand and neither money nor materials". (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 201). The Promoters advanced a further loan of £65, and prospects seemed brighter. But fresh dissensions broke out; the manager found it impossible to keep the confidence of the Associates; and it became hopeless to try to carry on. One of the causes of failure appears to have been the fact that none of the members were high-class workmen.

Meanwhile, the "Gentlemen's Working Boot and Shoe and Strong Shoemakers Association" had been set up in business at 151 High Holborn; but they also were soon beset by difficulties. As with the Ladies' Shoemakers, they had trouble with their managers, and

the best craftsmen would not consent to join an Association which made it a condition of membership that work should be done on the premises. Cobblers have always had a bad reputation for sociability, and it is possible that the rule of the Society, forbidding speculative arguments in the shops, may have pressed hardly upon them. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 202).

Eventually, in July the Holborn premises were closed down and

the two Associations were combined. The men who had been responsible for the disagreements were got rid of; but matters showed little improvement. Early in the following spring there was fresh squabbling between the manager and the members; and the Council of Promoters decided that the Associates should forfeit all rights of self-government during a probationary period. They appointed a new manager to act under their instructions. After this things went a little better (though the Association did not return to full self-government), and by July, 1852 it had 24 members and eight women binders at work.

The third Cobblers' Association, which was founded in June 1850, was even less successful than the two we have just considered. There were innumerable quarrels between the members and the first two managers; and matters came to a head when the Associates selected for their third manager "a man who could neither read nor write, and drew upon themselves a strong protest from the Central Board". (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 203). The Association was finally dissolved in December.

It was in the building trade that the Christian Socialists met with the greatest success, although they

had often to complain that the Builders were adopting the outlook and policy of a joint-stock company owing to their expressed desire to admit to Associateship persons not engaged in the trade, provided they contributed to the funds. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 206.)

The Working Builders' Association was started in May 1850. In December they were able to take premises at 4 All Saints Place, Caledonian Road, and they not only paid off the money loaned them by the Promoters, but showed a balance on the credit side. However, the usual trouble about managerial authority cropped up, and in February 1851 the Associates quarrelled violently and dissolved the Association. Five of them applied for re-admission into the Society, and made a fresh start as the North London Working Builders' Association. This time they were more successful, and by the end of 1851 they were employing from 20 to 25 Associates.

On July 4th, 1850, a second Builders' Association (the Pimlico Builders) was founded as the outcome of a strike, and commenced work the following October. On April 16th, 1851

they were able to celebrate the building of their first entire house, and the owner of it, himself a working man, expressed himself as delighted with the quality of their work. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 207.)

By July 1852 they had 46 members, had built some 20 houses and owned property to the value of £4,700, in addition to more than £1,000 worth of stock.

Of the remaining two original Associations, one was the Working Printers' Association, which consisted of four friends who were provided with a printing press by the Society, and with quarters in a house, 4A Johnson's Court, Gough Square, at a cost of about £44. They never did much business outside printing the Society's periodicals, tracts, pamphlets and catalogues, but they managed to pay their way, and increase their numbers to six, and on occasion to employ 12 to 14 workmen.

Finally, there was the Working Bakers' Association, founded in April, 1850, with 10 members, and a manager, James Clarkson, who supplied the initial capital. In June a disagreement occurred, Clarkson resigned, and thereafter the Association consisted of three members, and did practically no business beyond what the Promoters were able to put in its way. "Eventually they were absorbed into the service of the Co-operative stores, as the London Co-operative Bakery". (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, p. 209-210.)

One other venture is worth notice. On February 18th, 1850, the North London Needlewoman's Association was founded. It was not affiliated to the Society, but was managed by a separate committee of eight ladies, of whom Mrs. Maurice was the secretary. It rented 31 Red Lion Square (the Maurices making themselves responsible for the rent) and £500 was collected for the purchase of furniture and materials. Besides workrooms and a shop, there were lodging-rooms, where single women could live at a cost of 1s. 6d. a week. Twenty women workers from the London sweat-shops worked in this establishment, under a superintendent, who was paid a fixed salary, and acted directly under the Managing Committee. It was arranged that part of any profits should go to repay the loan and interest on it, and the remainder should be divided among the needlewomen quarterly. This Association, of course, was little more than a charitable organisation. It survived until the autumn of 1853, when it was wound up. The house in Red Lion Square was afterwards used for a time by the Working Men's College.

Some twelve months after the foundation of the original eight Associations two more were set going. One was the Working Pianoforte Makers' Association (February 1851), which eventually opened premises at 5 Charles Street, Drury Lane, in the October. These premises and the plant and goodwill had been bought

from the men's employer by Neale. There were for some time 14 Associates and 3 non-Associates, and they had a market for four or five pianos a week. The other Association was the City Working Tailors', of 23 Cullum Street, Fenchurch Street. Their first effort failed, but they started again, in May, 1852, with six Associates, Neale advancing them money for their initial expenses. By 1853 the group had failed altogether as a Working Association, and was trading as Bowen, Brown & Co. It finally disappeared completely in 1857.

The last Association to be founded under the direct auspices of the Christian Socialists was the Working Smiths'. A start was made in July, 1852, in premises in Pimlico, and though the Association was never very large it lasted for some years.

Two more charitable organisations were also set on foot: the East London Needlewomen's Home and Workshop, started in the autumn of 1851, at 51 Wellclose Square, Whitechapel, and the Ladies Guild, started at 4 Russell Place, Fitzroy Square, early in 1852. The first was similar to the Needlewomen of Red Lion Square, and was intended to help the poorest of all the sweated women workers. Lord Shaftesbury and several other prominent philanthropists agreed to serve on the Committee, together with some of the Promoters; but "the big folk, with the exception of one City Missionary, took no trouble whatever in the matter", (*Life of Maurice*, ii, p. 65), and the "Home" did not long survive. The Ladies Guild was intended to assist "distressed gentlewomen" and the Guild was presented with the patent rights of a new method of painting on glass. Much time was spent in teaching this to the members, and by July it was reported that 27 were at work. The Guild appears to have survived until 1856.

Two Associations which got going in the provinces associated themselves with the Society, though they were not directly sponsored by it. The first was the Southampton Tailors' Association, which was first mooted in April, 1850. It was formed by a group of journeymen, who raised the necessary capital by means of 5s. shares, and reported their intentions to the Society of Promoters in November. They were recognised as an Association connected with the Society in June, 1851, and a circular, which they sent out in April 1852, speaks confidently of their "most unequivocal success". The second provincial Association which associated itself with the Society applied for recognition in September 1851. This was the Hatters of Salford. They had hoped for help from their Trade Union, and when this was

refused they subscribed equally to a fund for the purchase of tools and materials, and managed to collect £40. Arrangements were made with Co-operative stores in Glasgow, Bradford, Halifax and London to sell their goods on a commission basis (of 10 per cent.). Eventually they joined forces with the Manchester Working Tailors' Association, and the two set up a shop at 83 Bridge Street. This Association was one of the longest-lived: in 1864 there was a very favourable account of it printed in the *Westminster Review*. It carried on until 1873, and only ceased after the tailors had been compelled to disband for want of sales.

All over the country similar experiments were undertaken. "We are only a very small stream of the great flood", says the *First Report of the Promoters' Society*. In the pages of the *Christian Socialist* and the *Journal of Association**

we find a continuous stream of enquiries, proposals, reports and discussions coming in from sympathisers and imitators everywhere. The Silk-weavers of Bethnal Green, the Plush-weavers of Salford, the Saw-makers of Sheffield, the Stone-masons of Sunderland—these are some of the Associations which, though not formally connected with the Society, yet worked in close contact with it. And in several towns organisations parallel in scope to the Society of Promoters had been set up, such as the General Labour Redemption Society of Bury, whose first object, as set out in its constitution, was to unite labourers "by forming associations". This was founded on September 16th, 1850, by the "Central Committee of the Iron Trades of Bury," made the *Christian Socialist* its official organ in November, and on New Year's Day mustered nearly eight hundred members to meet Maurice, Hughes and Neale when they visited the north. Somewhat similar was the Halifax Working Men's Co-operative Society, founded in January, 1851, which sent its reports and balance-sheets regularly to the *Christian Socialist*, and at its first anniversary meeting made a deputation from the Council of Promoters the guests of the evening. As for Tailors' Associations they grew like mushrooms under the spell of Cooper's eloquence: in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool and Newcastle-on-Tyne, Associations were formed . . . and others were mooted, and sometimes even started at Doncaster, Norwich, Sunderland, Aberdeen and Dublin. (*Christian Socialism 1848-1854*, pp. 222-223.)

CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM AND THE TRADE UNIONS

The formation of the first Working Tailors' Association was responsible for bringing into the Christian Socialist movement

*In January, 1852, *The Christian Socialist* was replaced as the organ of the Co-operators by *The Journal of Association*—a change indicative of the passing of control from the "promoters" to the Societies which they had set on foot.

a man of whom George Jacob Holyoake has said, "His monument in the Co-operative Movement". This was Edward Vansittart Neale. Having seen an advertisement of the Association he visited Castle Street, and got into touch with the Society of Promoters, who speedily invited him to join their council.

Neale was a barrister with chambers in Lincoln's Inn. Unlike the other Christian Socialists he was a really wealthy man, with a house in Mayfair and a "place" in Warwickshire, and now

at last, they had a well-filled purse placed at their disposal with a lavish and unsparing enthusiasm. It would have been quite beyond the power of the others to do more than start the Tailors and such Associations as required hardly any plant or costly materials. The campaign in the provinces would have been impossible. . . . The movement could never have been more tentative and local; and the losses of the first few weeks would have put an end to the whole adventure. But Neale . . . made it evident that he was prepared to sacrifice everything for the cause. At his instigation and with his support schemes of far-reaching importance became practicable. . . . Even Hughes, his closest comrade in the movement, never knew the extent of his losses, but only that they involved the sale of his house in Hill Street and of an estate in Warwickshire, and constrained him for many years to live with strict economy and to accept a salary for his work.*

(*Christian Socialism 1848-54*, p. 229.)

After Neale joined the Council attempts were made to interest the trade unions in the plans of the Christian Socialists. In the autumn of 1850 Lloyd Jones and Walter Cooper were sent out to undertake propaganda work in the Midlands and in Lancashire. They also signed a circular letter which was sent to all the London Trade Societies urging them to support plans for Co-operative Production on the model of the Working Associations which the Society of Promoters had established, and asking them to grant an interview. "We are anxious", they said,

to explain to you, as men holding official positions in your trade, the nature of the operations in which we are engaged.

Two interviews were granted, both with societies of Cabinet-makers, beyond which there seems to have been no response to the circular.

Thus far the Working Associations formed directly under the auspices of the Christian Socialists had been set up for the most part in badly organised trades, and the Trade Unions had had little to do with them. It was not until after the merging of a

*Greening estimates Neale's losses at £60,000.

number of small societies of engineers and ironworkers to form the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Machinists, Smiths, Millwrights and Patternmakers, in January, 1851, that any impression was made by the Christian Socialists on an important trade union.

The Amalgamated Society of Engineers created a new type of Trade Union organisation, which was speedily copied by the Carpenters and others.

From 1852 to 1889 the elaborate constitution of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers served as the model for all new national trade societies, whilst old organisations found themselves gradually incorporating its leading features. (*The History of Trade Unionism*, by Sidney & Beatrice Webb, p. 217.)

These "New Model" Unions were quite unlike the small, local craft societies of earlier days, or the cumbrous "all-in" Unions which had been attempted in the early decades of the 19th century. They catered in the main for the "aristocracy of labour", the highly skilled craftsmen, and they had high subscription rates which made them still more exclusive. Unlike the loosely-organised General Unions such as the "General Union of Trades (or Philanthropic Hercules) of 1818, or the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland, of 1833-34, the new amalgamated societies no longer entertained revolutionary or chiliastic dreams of overturning capitalism and building a new social order. Instead they were increasingly concerned with providing friendly society benefits for their members (out-of-work pay, funeral benefits, disablement benefits, travelling allowances, even old age pensions to superannuated members), and they combined "the functions of a trade protection society with those of a permanent insurance society". (*The History of Trade Unionism*, Sidney & Beatrice Webb, p. 218). They also became more and more adverse to risking their funds in strike action, and the Stonemasons' Central Committee, for instance, repeatedly caution their members "against the dangerous practice of striking. . . Keep from it", they urge, "as you would from a ferocious animal that you know would destroy you". (*History of Trade Unionism*, p. 199). The Portsmouth Lodge of this society even went to the length of suggesting that not only should strikes cease, but that the very word "strike" should be abolished.

The minutes and circulars of the larger Unions abound in impressive warnings against aggressive action. (*History of Trade Unionism*, p. 198.)

"How often have disputes been averted by a few timely words with the employers!" say the Ironmoulders (*Address of Delegate Meeting*, September 26, 1846): whilst in 1854 the Flint Glass Makers, on the proposition of their Central Committee, abolished the allowance of "strike money" by a vote of the whole of the members.

Many unions sought to make their labour scarce, and thus (they hoped) to raise the rate of wages, by establishing an emigration fund for their members. Thus the Flint Glass Makers declare in 1857 (*Address of Executive*) that "It is simply a question of supply and demand, and we all know that if we supply a greater quantity of an article than what is actually demanded that the cheapening of that article, whether it be labour or any other commodity is a natural result". "In this application of the doctrine of Supply and Demand the Flint Glass Makers were joined by Compositors, Bookbinders, Ironmoulders, Potters, and . . . the Engineers. For the next ten years an Emigration Fund becomes a constant feature of many of the large societies". (*The History of Trade Unionism*, p. 201).

The avoidance of aggressive strike action, and the search for other means of improving the conditions of their members had been characteristic of many Trade Unions before the Amalgamated Society of Engineers was formed, and all that the Engineers' leaders did was to continue this policy with greater vigour and ability. It was in keeping with their preference for a "constructive" policy that they should send their General Secretary, William Allan, and William Newton (the two men who had been mainly responsible for the creation of the A.S.E.) to discuss with the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations the possibility of devoting some of their funds to the development of Associations in the engineering trades. Up till then the only Associations which the Christian Socialists had succeeded in forming had been in the "ill-organised trades where the work was done under domestic conditions" (*Christian Socialism 1848-54*, p. 235), and, not unnaturally, the Promoters were delighted with this new and promising development. They suggested that the Windsor Ironworks, a foundry in Liverpool which had recently failed and was now for sale, should be bought and run as a self-governing Association.

Accordingly six trustees were appointed, including Hughes, Ludlow and Neale, and a prospectus was issued with a covering letter from the Executive Council of the A.S.E. inviting the public (and especially members of the Iron Trades and of the Co-

operative movement) to subscribe to the £50,000 (which it was estimated was needed) by taking up £1 shares to be paid for in monthly instalments. On January 6th the membership of the Union endorsed by an overwhelming majority in a ballot vote the proposal of their Executive to invest £10,000 in the venture, and definite plans were prepared for starting such an Association. It was decided that the workmen employed in the concern were to be members of the A.S.E., and that wages were to be paid at the standard rates fixed by the A.S.E. Profits were to be devoted to the payment of interest on capital at 5 per cent., to providing an unemployment fund, to improving the condition of the Associates and other workers employed, and to extending the business or forming similar establishments: in other words, no part of the profits was to be divisible except in the shape of unemployment benefit and collective benefits.

Unfortunately for these ambitious plans the great engineering lockout began in 1852, when the London and Lancashire employers set out deliberately to smash the new amalgamated society. The Engineers had been seeking an end to piecework and to systematic overtime, and the employers had threatened a general lockout of the industry if a strike took place at any one establishment. On January 1st, 1852, the members of the A.S.E. refused to work overtime, and on the 10th of that month the masters kept their threat to close every important engineering works in London and Lancashire.

A three-months struggle followed, in which the Christian Socialists helped by letters to the press, pamphlets, and lectures, and also by liberal donations. (According to the Webbs Lord Goderich, afterwards the Marquis of Ripon, gave the Engineers' Executive £500, and Charles Raven puts his total help at double that figure). Meanwhile the employers insisted not only on the unconditional withdrawal of the men's demands—only 16 out of the 11,800 members of the A.S.E. had declared against the abolition of overtime and piecework when a vote had been taken in the preceding August—but also presented the men with the hated "document", i.e. demanded that they should give a written promise to leave the Union.

The A.S.E. had a fund of £25,000 when the struggle began, and other trade societies donated another £5,000, whilst the general public subscribed £4,000 to their strike funds. Nevertheless these financial resources became exhausted, and in April the men were forced to resume work on the employers' terms. Almost

all the masters insisted upon their men signing the "document", but as they did this under duress the men had no compunction about remaining members of the Union, and the A.S.E. remained substantially intact. But their funds were now exhausted, and they had no longer the means for financing a venture in Co-operative Production on the scale suggested by the Christian Socialists.

However, two less ambitious schemes were financed by Neale and his cousin, A. A. Vansittart, who was also a man of considerable means. In January John Musto (brother of Joseph Musto, President of the A.S.E.), persuaded his fellow employees to form the Southwark Working Engineers' Association, and Vansittart secured a factory for them in Cambridge Road, Mile End. The constitution which they adopted was modelled on that which had been drafted for the Windsor Ironworks. The A.S.E. was represented at the first meeting of the shareholders (March 6th) by Newton and Joseph Musto, who expressed warm approval of the venture.

About the same time Neale bought a small factory, the Atlas Works, in Emerson Street, near Southwark Bridge, and started another Association, also modelled on the plan for the Windsor Ironworks. The venture was launched on March 25th, and once more the A.S.E. blessed the undertaking.

As late as April 29th the A.S.E. were still willing to support Neale's venture, and on that date there appeared in *The Times* an address from their Executive Council to their members and to the trades in general, reporting five resolutions which they had adopted on April 22nd. The last of these is worth quoting in full:

That in the opinion of this meeting hostile resistance of labour against Capital is not calculated to enhance the condition of the labourer. We therefore advise that all our future operations should be directed in promoting the system of self-employment in associative workshops, as the best means of effectually regulating the conditions of labour, and that this resolution be submitted to our next delegate meeting.

Appended to this resolution was a letter signed by William Allan, the General Secretary, on behalf of the Executive Council, and dated April 26th. This was even more enthusiastic in its advocacy of Co-operative Production.

How shall we set about the work of preparation for a coming time? (it asked). There is but one way—we must co-operate for production. The events of the last few months have directed the attention of working men to co-operation, and inclined them to

it more decidedly than years of prosperous industry could have done. Perhaps a greater good is to come out of present evil than could have been in any other way brought about. We have learned that it is not sufficient to accumulate funds, that it is necessary also to use them reproductively, and if this lesson does not fail in its effects a few years will see the land studded with workshops belonging to the workers—workshops where the profits shall cheer and not oppress labour, where tyranny cannot post an abominable declaration on the gates; where the opportunity of working is secured without the sacrifice of all that makes work dignified and honourable. Then, indeed, the artisan may successfully assert his claim to be treated as a man with thoughts and feelings instead of a machine. And if the employers, seeking to wrong him, close the gates of the factories, he will not then stand in forced idleness, consuming the accumulations of the past years, but with double energy he will turn to the factory, and there do the work of the country, without the unneeded help of others. . . . Assisted as we have been by the advice of men who take a deep interest in the promotion of Working Men's Associations, and have counselled the abandonment of all attempts to deal with the capitalists in a spirit of hostility—and given it as their opinion that nothing but creating a new relationship between capital and labour can effectually elevate the condition of the toilers of society, we must progress in these principles, and we hope that our next delegate meeting will lay down the basis of our future permanent prosperity. Immediately on receipt of this circular each secretary is instructed to convene a meeting of the members of his branch, so that its contents may be made generally known to the members.*

But the brutal fact was that the Amalgamated Engineers had no funds with which to back these brave words, and the Engineering Associations had to depend on what Neale and Vansittart advanced. Disaster soon overtook them. The Mile End Ironworks lost heavily through taking on a large contract at too low a price,⁴ and had to close down in 1854. The Atlas Works lasted a year or two longer before they were wrecked by quarrels among the Associates. Some small ventures also disappeared.

By 1855 the A.S.E. was becoming hostile to the idea of Co-operative Production, for experience had convinced them that when workmen became managers or secretaries of these undertakings they usually ceased to be energetic members of their Unions.

We have found, say the Engineers' Executive in their Annual Report of 1855, that when a few of our own members have

*The Christian Socialists were further encouraged by a declaration on June and, by the National Association of United Trades that "the time has come for the entire abandonment of strikes and turn-outs as a means of protecting labour", and that "the only thing left is to organise and carry out a self-supporting co-operative re-productive system of employment."

commenced business hitherto they have abandoned the society, and conducted the workshops even worse than other employers. (*The History of Trade Unionism*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, p. 226.)

THE CHRISTIAN SOCIALISTS AND CONSUMERS'

CO-OPERATION

The experiments which the Christian Socialists conducted in Co-operative Production had no permanent results and are of comparatively little importance to the development of the British working class movement. As we have seen, there was nothing original in their notion of self-governing workshops, and many such ventures were undertaken in this country by working men who were entirely uninfluenced by anything that Ludlow and his friends thought or did. Their real claim to be gratefully remembered by the working class is the help they gave to Consumers' Co-operation. There is a certain irony in that, for the majority of the Christian Socialists did not rate Consumers' Co-operation nearly so highly as Producers' Co-operation.

For the Christian Socialists proper, Producers' Co-operation, on a basis of high moral principles, was the objective; and Consumers' Co-operation was valued only to the extent that it helped to provide an outlet for goods made by Producers' Societies. For the Co-operators of the North, even if they strongly favoured Producers' Co-operation, as many of them did, Consumers' Co-operation came first. Neale and Lloyd Jones stood midway between the two points of view, trying to combine them into a single unified movement. (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 132.)

Neale had been greatly influenced by Lloyd Jones and the Chevalier St. André, "neither of whom was principally interested in the religious aims of the Christian Socialist group or in the tiny Working Men's Associations which the group were so painfully nursing" (*A Century of Co-operation*, p. 130). In June, 1850, St. André proposed a plan for a Co-operative Agency which could act as a general centre for Co-operative trade and as a federal organ of the whole movement. Neale was impressed by this suggestion, and drew up a scheme of his own, which included the proposal for a "General Union" of Co-operative societies, which would link the individual societies together so that the more successful could help the less successful out of a common fund. He also proposed that this "General Union" should have as an auxiliary a General Co-operative Agency along the lines which St. André had suggested.

As a first step towards realizing these ideas, Neale put up the capital, in October 1850, for opening the London Co-operative Stores, at 76 Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square (the old headquarters of the Owenite Equitable Labour Exchange). This store (says G. D. H. Cole) "seems to have provided for dividend on purchases in a rudimentary form". (*A Century of Co-operation*, p. 130). Lloyd Jones was appointed manager, and St. André supervisor, and a prospectus was issued stating that the object of the Stores was to "enable members of the Associations and other persons who might desire it, to obtain articles of daily use free from adulteration, of the best quality and at the lowest charge, after defraying the necessary expense of management, distribution, and providing for a reserve fund". After these administrative expenses had been met, all subscribers of not less than five shillings were to receive back the profits upon their purchases. Members of Working Associations were offered special terms even if they did not become subscribers.

Neale's proposals for a "General Union" to unite all the Working Associations and the Co-operative Stores into one body was discussed at a special conference of the Promoters' Society, and the scheme was referred to the Central Board. There it seems to have been dropped, for although the Board resolved to form themselves into a General Industrial Association (thereby securing legal status) there is no record of any action being taken to implement this decision.

Meanwhile Lloyd Jones left for the north, and succeeded in getting a conference of Co-operative Societies to meet in Manchester over Christmas. The main business of this conference was a discussion of the proposed Industrial and Provident Societies' Act; but Lloyd Jones used the opportunity which the gathering of co-operators afforded to establish a Northern Store in Manchester on similar lines to those of the London Co-operative Stores. In April, 1851, he persuaded another Co-operative Conference, in Bury, to carry a resolution in favour of the establishment of a "Central Trading Department", and to appoint a committee to report on the matter to a further conference.

The following month (May, 1851) Neale converted his London Co-operative Stores into a Central Co-operative Agency, which he hoped to make a Co-operative Wholesale agency for the whole Co-operative movement of the country, at the same time supplying the Working Associations with a market for their products.

Then in June a representative Co-operative Conference (which included the important Yorkshire and Lancashire societies) met in Manchester, and received the Report of the committee which had been appointed at the Bury Conference. This Report stressed the need for measures to combat the sale of adulterated food and to give the local Co-operative Societies the advantages of bulk purchases in the wholesale markets; and it proposed to raise a capital of £3,000 in £5 shares, these to be taken up in the first instance by Co-operative Societies, and thereafter to whatever extent might be necessary by individual sympathisers. Interest at 5 per cent. was to be paid on this capital, and the remaining profits to be divided into four equal parts. One was to go to a reserve fund, until this fund equalled the paid-up capital; one was to be used in promoting Working Men's Co-operative Associations; and the remaining two quarters were to be used for the payment of dividends to Co-operative Societies in proportion to their purchases. The

scheme is in most respects practically identical with the plan adopted by Neale for his Central Co-operative Agency. There are, however, two differences, and one of them is highly significant. Neale's plan did not specifically give Societies the priority over individuals in subscribing the capital required; nor did it provide for dividend on purchases, allocating the "two-fourths" instead to payment of a bonus on wages to the employees of the Agency. (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 131.)

This rival plan did not deter Neale from persevering with his own scheme, and a circular was sent to the Trades Societies of the kingdom asking for their support of the Central Co-operative Agency. A Committee was appointed to follow up this appeal, and an address was printed in the *Christian Socialist* for November 15th, 1851, which proposed (among other things) that a Model Association be formed in each trade to employ members of the Trade Society who might be unemployed. It also suggested that Co-operative Stores should be organised to supply articles of domestic consumption and raw materials for the Productive Associations, and to provide them with a market for the goods which they produced. The Central Co-operative Agency should assist (it suggested) by supplying goods and raw materials at wholesale prices, and in warehousing, displaying and selling the manufactured products of the Working Associations.

The Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations was not consulted about the Address, and Ludlow, when he returned from a tour in the north, criticised it as an appeal to the com-

mercial instincts and as being false to the moral principles of Christian Socialism, and a breach threatened between himself and Neale. More and more there was a divergence of views between the two men.

Ludlow was an enthusiast for Co-operative Production; but, with Maurice and Kingsley, he stressed the need for individual moral and religious conversion as an indispensable basis for the success of the Co-operative principle, and he had become convinced by the growing pains of the Working Associations that he and his fellow-promoters had made a mistake in not selecting carefully enough, on moral and Christian principles, those who were allowed to become working associates. The promoters therefore wished to go slow, and to limit their practical efforts to tried supporters who could be relied upon to act in the spirit of Christian Socialism. . . . Neale . . . though a churchman, did not share Ludlow's view. He wanted to join hands, on a secular basis, with Trade Unions and Co-operative Stores in order to create a nation-wide movement of Producers and Consumers; and the Central Co-operative Agency, backed by his money, rested on this wider basis, and was in no way subject to the Christian Socialist 'Council of Promoters'. (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 110).

One result of this clash of opinion was that the offices of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations were removed from the rooms which it had occupied at Charlotte Street. On February 5th, 1852, Penrose, a member of the Council, prepared plans for the construction of a hall to seat 300 people, together with offices for the Society under the workshops of the Tailors' Association, at 34 Castle Street. The work was entrusted to the North London Working Builders.

Meanwhile two branch stores had been founded by the London Co-operative Stores. One, which opened at 18 Newnham Street, Edgware Road, in April 1851, had to be wound up after a year owing to internal quarrels; the other, opened at 13 Swan Street, Manchester, as a result of the conference of December, 1850 (see page 204), was more successful, and served the Central Co-operative Agency as a northern agent for wholesale business.

Before long, however, Neale's Agency had to face the competition of a rival "Wholesale", for St. André, whom G. D. H. Cole describes as "a genial scoundrel of considerable force and personality" (*A Century of Co-operation*, p. 103), left the Central Co-operative Agency, and set up, in December 1852, the Universal Supply and Demand Establishment (shortened to the Universal Provider), at 159 Fenchurch Street. It got some Co-operative

support, the Rochdale Pioneers dealing with it as well as with Neale's Agency; nevertheless it failed and was dissolved on April 27th, 1855.

For a while the Central Co-operative Agency seemed to thrive, and in the spring of 1855 it removed to "a fine block of buildings, comprising showrooms, factory and warehouse" at 356 Oxford Street, its old Charlotte Street premises having become too small for it.

Another of Neale's activities about this time was the founding, in January, 1852, of a Co-operative League for the discussion of Co-operative problems; whilst in June of the same year he brought forward proposals for a Co-operative Investment Society, which could receive deposits from individuals or from Trade and Benefit Societies, and make advances, after the manner of a Building Society, to bodies of working men who needed capital for Co-operative ventures. Neale got the support of the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour for his scheme, but nothing ever came of it.

Meanwhile, the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations having by this time completed its Castle Street headquarters, a series of debates and lectures took place there, at which many prominent people spoke, among them Bronterre O'Brien, perhaps the ablest theoretician that the Chartist Movement produced.

These meetings paved the way for summoning a general conference of Co-operators. Since the abandonment of the Owenite Congresses no serious attempt had been made to get together a representative body to which the whole Co-operative movement could look for guidance. Now the Society of Promoters called a national conference to consider the new Industrial and Provident Societies Act, which had become law on June 30th, 1852. The conference met in the Castle Street Hall, on July 26th and 27th, and delegates were invited from all known Co-operative organisations. Twenty-eight organisations were represented by 25 delegates, those unable to send a delegate being allowed a proxy. Hughes gave an account of the scope and value of the new Act, and a Committee was appointed to arrange a similar conference in Manchester, the following year.

However, the chief value of this conference was that it asked the Council of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations to prepare a memorandum explaining the advantages which Co-operative Societies could secure by registering under

the new Act. In September such a memorandum was circularised, together with a set of *Model Rules for Industrial Societies*, as necessitated by the Act. These Model Rules were approved by the Registrar, J. Tidd Pratt, on September 16th, and were of very considerable help to Co-operative Societies.

THE INDUSTRIAL AND PROVIDENT SOCIETIES ACT

The great service which the Christian Socialists did for the Co-operative Movement was to secure the passing of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852. Mr. G. D. H. Cole has produced an excellent summary of the legal position of the Co-operative Societies before the passing of this Act (*A Century of Co-operation*) and this section owes much to his account.

Co-operation (he points out) never suffered under legal disabilities as severe as those which beset the Trade Unions. No one was ever put in prison for belonging to a Co-operative Society, and no one ever suggested that it was unlawful to form such a body, or for it to engage in trade or production. The difficulty was not that Co-operative Societies were under the ban of the courts, but rather that no special provision had been made for them, so that they were unable to enlist the positive protection of the law when it was needed either to secure them against fraudulent or negligent officials or to enable them to carry on trade in such a way as to enter into firm contracts, to sue or be sued as collective bodies, or to enjoy any reasonable security for their funds. . . . The Co-operative Societies of the Owenite period mostly did without any sort of legal status, though a few which sprang directly out of Friendly Societies may have been registered under the Friendly Societies Acts. These Acts, however, were not designed to cover trading enterprises, and before 1834 the recognition accorded by the state even to Friendly Societies was very narrowly limited. They had been first recognized under George Rose's Act of 1793, which was designed to foster Friendly Societies under the patronage of members of the upper classes rather than as bodies created by the workers for mutual self-help. . . . Thus things remained until 1834, when an amending Act widened the scope allowed Societies by extending legal recognition to Friendly Societies formed "for any purpose not contrary to law". Trading Societies were thus for the first time made eligible to apply; but there was still no special provision for them. The Act of 1846 went considerably further, including what came to be known as the "frugal investment" clause, which authorised the establishment of Societies "for the frugal investment of the savings of the members, for better enabling them to purchase food, clothes, or other necessities, or the tools or implements of their trade or calling, or to provide for the education of their children or kindred". (*A Century of Co-operation*, pp. 114-118.)

The Act of 1846 established the Friendly Societies Registry, and gave full powers of enrolment to the Registrar, and it was no longer necessary for societies to submit their rules at enrolment to Quarter Sessions (as it had been, for instance, when the Rochdale Pioneers founded their society in 1844).

However, "the Act of 1846 remained seriously defective from the standpoint of the Co-operative Movement. Trading Societies were dealt with only in the "frugal investment" clause, and under this the Societies were empowered to trade only with their own members. . . . The position of Producers' Co-operatives which had to seek markets outside their membership was left very uncertain. Moreover, the Societies . . . could hold personal property only through trustees, and landed property not at all: they were restricted to investing any accumulated funds through the National Debt Commissioners, and there was no power for Societies to federate or join together in any way. (*A Century of Co-operation*, pp. 117-118).

This, then, was the position when the Christian Socialists took up the question, and began to seek a modification of the law. As a first step Hughes approached a Member of Parliament by the name of Robert Aglionby Slaney, "a gentleman upon whose name as the promoter of Slaney's Act Christian Socialism has conferred an undeserved immortality". (*Christian Socialism 1848-54*, p. 289). Slaney was completely ignorant of the subject which he undertook to champion in the House, but the Christian Socialists "coached him carefully", and in the spring of 1850 he moved for the appointment of a Select Committee of the House to report upon "Investments for the Savings of the Middle and Working Classes".

Ludlow, Neale, Hughes and Lloyd Jones, and several working men, including Cooper, gave evidence before this Committee; and the Christian Socialists also induced H. Bellenden Ker (Counsel to the Board of Trade and an acknowledged authority on Company Law) to appear. "On the whole his testimony was disappointing" (*Christian Socialism 1848-54*, p. 292); but John Stuart Mill, who was also persuaded to give evidence, "filled the Christian Socialists with delight" (*Christian Socialism 1848-54*, p. 295) by his approval both of Co-operative stores and of Associations for Co-operative Production.

There was a further Committee the following year; and eventually in 1852 the Industrial and Provident Societies' Act*

*It is an interesting point that it was a Conservative Government which put this Act on the Statute Book, after a Liberal Government had refused facilities, apparently because it had been alarmed during the Engineers' lock-out of 1852 by the attempt which the men had made to defeat their employers by embarking on Co-operative production.

received the royal assent on June 30th, and the "Co-operative Movement was at last given an assured, though not yet a fully satisfactory, legal status" (*A Century of Co-operation*, p. 110).

The new Act carried with it very real advantages. Under it the Co-operative Societies, while retaining all their privileges under the Friendly Societies Acts, were given for the first time an Act of Parliament specifically designed to meet the needs of both Producers' and Consumers Co-operation. They were set free from the provisions of the Act of 1844 compelling partnerships of more than 25 persons to register as joint stock companies in order to secure trading protection. . . . Under Company Law as it then stood it was an essential requirement that companies should allow free transfer of their shares. This rule, applied to Co-operative Societies, would have meant that control might have passed right out of the hands of those trading at the Stores—or in the case of Producers' Societies out of the hands of the employees or of other shareholders concerned to keep them working on truly Co-operative lines. Indeed this loss of control did actually occur in the case of the bodies (the "Working-class Limiteds") which became registered as joint stock companies. . . . The Act of 1852 restricted the transference of shares (called in the Act "subscriptions") in Industrial and Provident Societies so as to require holders who wished to dispose of their "subscriptions" either to sell them back to the Society or at any rate to secure the consent of the Board of Management to the transfer to a particular person. Industrial and Provident Societies were further differentiated from joint stock companies in that no one could hold more than £100 in the subscribed capital . . . but the Societies were free . . . to accept loans from their members up to an amount equal to four times the subscribed capital. . . . The Societies were, moreover, freed from the restrictions imposed on Friendly Societies in respect of the investment of their funds, and were thus enabled to invest their resources freely in the development of their operations. (*A Century of Co-operation*, pp. 118-119.)

But despite the vastly improved status which the Co-operatives enjoyed as a result of the 1852 Act they did not get all that they wanted.

The privilege of limited liability was still refused, and this remained as a serious deterrent to working-class investment, though the difficulty could be to some extent got round . . . by the device of vesting property absolutely in the hands of trustees. This was the method adopted by the Christian Socialists for their Working Associations. . . . Moreover the Act of 1852 contained no provision for joint or federal action by Co-operative Societies, and it was therefore impossible for Neale to organise his Central Co-operative Agency on a federal basis. He had to resort to the old device of trustees to hold the property and to constitute a joint stock company—Jones, Woodin, and Co.—to carry on the actual tra-

ding operations, and he could not give the Societies which agreed to deal with the Agency any effective control over its affairs. This was undoubtedly one reason for its failure. (*A Century of Co-operation*, pp. 119-120.)

THE END OF THE CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

In the year 1853 the Co-operative Societies held a National Conference at Manchester. At this conference the Northern Consumers' Societies (which had been formed on the Rochdale model) played the leading role, and the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations transformed itself into the Society for Promoting Industrial and Provident Societies under the new Act. The next year (1854) when the Co-operative Conference met at Leeds, the Christian Socialists definitely dropped out as an organised body. They wound up their Society, leaving the Co-operative Conference (which it was intended to make an annual affair) to take over its functions, and Neale to bear the remaining responsibility through the Central Co-operative Agency.

By this time many of the Working Associations had failed. As already related the Mile End Ironworks had been wound up in 1854 (see page 202); and the Atlas Works only lasted a year or two longer. The Amalgamated Shoemakers' Association had also been deprived of self-government, and was still in difficulties; and in the end the manager, Thomas Christmas, took over the business and conducted it as a private firm.

The Printers, too, became a private firm; and the Pimlico Builders incurred serious losses and had to be wound up in 1853. The North London Builders survived until 1860, when it became a private business. Even the Castle Street Tailors (which had been the pioneer, and the model for all the Associations) came to grief in 1860, when it was discovered that Walter Cooper had been misapplying the profits and falsifying the books.

Nor was the Central Co-operative Agency any more long-lived than the Working Associations. The Manchester branch which had been established by Lloyd Jones in 1850 had faded out by 1852 or 1853, and in 1857 even Neale was forced to accept the fact of failure. The Central Co-operative Agency ceased to exist as a Co-operative concern, and what was left of it was carried on as an ordinary company under James Woodin, its former business manager. One reason for its failure was that London was too far off to act as a Wholesale Society for the Yorkshire and

Lancashire stores, whilst Consumers' Co-operation in the metropolis was still too embryonic to keep a Wholesale going.*

After the Christian Socialists wound up their Society, they devoted much of their time to the cause of popular education, and founded the Working Men's College (1853-54). This was originally housed in the premises vacated by the defunct Needlewomen's Association at 31 Red Lion Square. Later the College was transferred to Crowndale Road, Camden Town.

Maurice became principal of the Working Men's College and lectured on literature and theology; whilst Ludlow gave lectures on law, and Furnivall taught English Grammar. There were also courses in Public Health, Geometry, Algebra, Arithmetic and Geography. Later French, Latin, German and Greek were added to the syllabus; and Hughes conducted sparring classes, whilst Ruskin offered to take a drawing class, and actually taught in the College until 1860.

Some of the Christian Socialists, however, retained a lifelong interest in Co-operation, notably Neale, who became secretary to the Co-operative Union and retained that position during "its formative years" (*A Century of Co-operation*, p. 113), and Ludlow, who was appointed Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies in 1875, an office which he held until 1891. Thomas Hughes also remained interested in the movement, and in the 'sixties and 'seventies he ventured and lost money in Co-operative productive concerns formed on a profit-sharing basis. He continued, also, to be a good friend to trade unionism, and in 1867, when the Unions suddenly found themselves "deprived of the legal status which they imagined they had acquired, and saw themselves once more destitute of any legal protection for their accumulated funds" (*The History of Trade Unionism*, Sidney & Beatrice Webb, p. 262) Thomas Hughes was almost their only spokesman in Parliament.

The Boilermakers' Society had proceeded against the treasurer of their Bradford branch for wrongfully withholding the sum of £24; but the magistrates, to the general surprise of all concerned, held that the Society could not proceed under the Friendly Societies Act, since Trade Unions were outside its scope.

*It was left to the Consumers' Societies of the north to develop a Co-operative Wholesale. For a while the Rochdale Pioneers' Equitable Society acted in that capacity, and "from the establishment of the Rochdale Pioneers' wholesale department in 1850 to the creation of the North of England Wholesale Society in 1863 there is a quite continuous record of development", (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 133) though the story "is at certain points difficult to piece together aright".

The Court of Queen's Bench upheld this decision, giving the additional reason that the objects of the Union if not actually criminal (since the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1825) were yet so far in restraint of trade as to render the Society an illegal association.

Trade Unionism was now at bay. . . . It was easy to foresee that the employers and their allies would make a determined attempt to . . . suppress Trade Unionism by the criminal law. On the other hand, the hard-earned accumulations of the larger societies, by this time amounting to an aggregate of over a quarter of a million sterling, were at the mercy of their whole army of branch secretaries and treasurers, any one of whom might embezzle the funds with impunity. (*The History of Trade Unionism*, Sidney & Beatrice Webb, pp. 262-263.)

The first action of the Junta (as the Webbs have named the little group of Trade Union leaders who at that time dominated the new amalgamated societies, and through them the London Trades Council)

was to call to their councils those middle-class allies upon whose assistance and advice they had learned to rely. (*The History of Trade Unionism*, p. 263.)

Thomas Hughes and Frederic Harrison helped them to present their case to the Royal Commission which had been appointed in 1867 to inquire into what were known as the "Sheffield outrages" (where blacklegs had been terrorized by the explosions of cans of gunpowder in the troughs of their grinding wheels or by having cans of gunpowder thrown down their chimneys. In some cases these explosions had caused serious injuries). As a result of their skilful handling of the Unions' case "the official report of the Commission, from which the enemies of Trade Unionism had hoped so much, contained no recommendation which would have made the position of any single Union worse than it was before". (*The History of Trade Unionism*, p. 269).

Harrison and Hughes had not restricted themselves to casting out all dangerous proposals from the majority report. Their minority report, which was signed also by the Earl of Lichfield . . . advocated the removal of all special legislation relating to labour contracts, on the principle, first, that no act should be illegal if committed by a workman unless it was equally illegal if committed by any other person; and secondly, that no act by a combination of workmen should be regarded as criminal if it would not have been criminal in a single person. (*The History of Trade Unionism*, p. 270.)

After a long campaign the Conspiracy and Protection of Property and the Employers and Workmen Acts of 1875 gave the Trade Unions most of what they demanded.

Henceforth master and servant became, as employer and employee, two equal parties to a civil contract. Imprisonment for breach of engagement was abolished. The legalisation of Trade Unions was completed by the legal recognition of their methods. Peaceful picketing was expressly permitted. The old words "coerce" and "molest" which had, in the hands of prejudiced magistrates, proved such instruments of oppression, were omitted from the new law, and violence and intimidation were dealt with as part of the general criminal law. No act committed by a group of workmen was henceforth to be punishable unless the same act by an individual was itself a criminal offence. Collective bargaining, in short, with all its necessary accompaniments, was, after fifty years of legislative struggle, finally recognised by the law of the land. (*The History of Trade Unionism*, p. 291.)

THE FUNCTION OF CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM

"The corruption of Chartism", wrote Th. Rothstein, "was the special task entrusted to a group of people—mostly clergymen—who were the founders of Christian Socialism". (*From Chartism to Labourism*, p. 354). Such a verdict is to attribute an improbable degree of conscious malevolence and cunning to the capitalist class of that period. It is also grossly unfair to the Christian Socialists, for, whilst it is true that they were pained by working class militancy, and sought (in the words of Kingsley's biographer) "to promote a more brotherly spirit between rich and poor", they were quite sincere in their desire to help the working class. G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate offer a more balanced judgment when they declare that

together with Radical dissenting ministers they (the Christian Socialists) were responsible for preventing that hostility between the organised working class and organised religion which became universal on the Continent. There was, henceforward, always a small percentage of persons with a genuine sympathy with Socialism and the misery of the working class, whose influence prevented the Church and the Chapels being counted wholly as enemies: similarly a strain of religiosity and pietism ran powerfully in the Labour movement and was later to be an effective obstacle to the spread of Marxian philosophy. (*The Common People 1746-1938*, by G. D. H. Cole & Raymond Postgate, p. 316.)

Moreover, it is undeniable that the Christian Socialists put the working class deeply in their debt by the invaluable help which

they rendered in the struggle to win a legal status for the Co-operative and Trade Union movements.* The Rochdale Pioneers recognised that when they in 1855 publicly declared that

They were convinced that the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations had, during the period of its active existence, conferred great benefits on the Co-operative cause by gathering all sorts of valuable information, and spreading it throughout the country amongst the various Co-operative bodies; by urging on the attention of Parliament, through members favourable to the cause, the legal hindrances to the movement; and by helping to procure such alterations to the laws relating to Friendly Societies as to give freer action and greater security to the men who have embarked in the Co-operative undertaking. Not only have they done these things, but they have likewise drawn up model laws suitable for either distributive or productive associations, so as to facilitate the safe enrolment of all Co-operative bodies, and to secure the highest degree of legal accuracy with the smallest possible cost; in addition to which, they have at all times given legal advice freely to such of the Societies as stood in need of it—a matter, it must be acknowledged, of great value to bodies of working men.

The Rochdale Equitable Pioneers feel deeply the value of the services rendered to Co-operation by the Council of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations; and, as the fullest and most acceptable acknowledgment, they considered that the best thing they could do would be to attempt to continue the work which the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations had begun, and perfect, if possible, the design which they were unable to complete. (Quoted by George Jacob Holyoake in *The History of the Rochdale Pioneers*, p. 52.)

From their own point of view the Christian Socialists failed, for they were much more concerned with their utopian plans for self-governing workshops than with fostering Consumers' Co-operation: indeed, many of them were critical of the Consumers' Co-operative movement for being mercenary and lacking in high Christian idealism.

There were many reasons why their Working Associations failed: indeed, they were bound to fail, even as Owen's equally utopian "Villages of Unity and Co-operation" were doomed to failure. The fundamental reason for their lack of success was that the Working Associations ran counter to the whole economic

*"The Christian Socialists performed a vitally important service to the whole Co-operative Movement by helping to place on the Statute Book the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852—the law which first gave Co-operative Societies a recognised legal status and a reasonably satisfactory measure of protection for their funds". *A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 97.

trends of their day: tiny colonies of Co-operative producers could not function within the structure of a capitalist society. Especially a capitalist society which was still economically progressive, and had before it a century of development, during which it was to develop enormously the productive forces of society, and thus create the technical basis not for little, isolated self-governing communist utopias, but a world-wide Socialist order.

But even apart from this basic contradiction between their ideals and the economic realities of their day, there were many detailed reasons why the Working Men's Associations came so speedily to grief.

The Christian Socialists aspired to convert the working classes to an impossibly high moral code, and to a theological approach to industrial problems which most working men were quite unprepared to accept. Moreover, they made the mistake of supposing that real Co-operative Societies could be created from above with capital supplied by wealthy idealists, and that the workers would submit to a position of tutelage under the middle-class promoters until this capital had been repaid. Trouble between managers responsible to the promoters and working associates wanting self-government was unavoidable, and there were in addition disputes about the principles on which the Associations were working. The promoters adopted the principle of paying the standard wages of each trade and limiting the working hours to ten, including meal times, and of apportioning the surplus after payment of wages and interest on capital one-third to a reserve fund, one-third to repayment of capital, and the remaining third to a bonus on wages. There were disputes about the basis of this bonus. Was it to be equal for all associates, or proportionate to hours worked, or proportionate to wages paid? The promoters favoured the second alternative; but some of the Associations preferred the third, while minorities in them favoured the first. There was, furthermore, the question whether each Working Association was to be regarded as a financially independent body. The promoters insisted that prices charged must be controlled by the Central Board representing all the Associations, with an appeal to themselves as long as capital was owed them. This was accepted, but the Associations would have none of the proposal of Neale and some others that they should be treated as parts of a "General Union", with pooling of profits and reserve funds over the whole body. When they made profits they wanted to keep them: when others made losses they were not prepared to shoulder the burden. In practice each Association remained a separate financial entity, and they failed, not all together, but one by one. (*A Century of Co-operation*, pp. 112-113).

CHAPTER 13

THE RISE OF THE MODERN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT IN GREAT BRITAIN

There are derelict churches in the Strand . . . and there are slums hard by. There are thieves in the Strand, and prowling vagrants, and gaunt hawkers, and touts, and gamblers, and loitering failures, with tragic eyes and wilted garments; and prostitutes plying for hire. . . . As London is, so is England. This is a Christian country. What would Christ think of Park Lane and the slums, and the hooligans? What would He think of the Stock Exchange, and the Music Hall, and the racecourse? What would He think of our national ideals? What would He think of the House of Peers, and the Bench of Bishops, and the Yellow Press?

God and My Neighbour, Preface, by Robert Blatchford.

THE GUILD OF ST. MATTHEW

The modern Socialist movement in this country dates from the widespread social discontent and the great industrial struggles of the eighteen-eighties: but it is significant that the first attempt to create a Socialist organisation came not from working men but from a group of Anglican clergymen, headed by Stewart Headlam, a young London curate. In 1877 Headlam founded the Guild of St. Matthew which expounded a Socialist interpretation of Christianity, and played a not inconsiderable part in the spread of Socialist ideas. Stewart Headlam later became a prominent member of the Fabian Society, and served on the London School Board.

Several years after the formation of the Guild of St. Matthew the propagandist activities of the Stratford Radical Club resulted in the foundation (in 1881) of the Labour Emancipation League, which was essentially a working class body, and "the real pioneer of proletarian Socialism in the 'eighties'." (*British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914*, G. D. H. Cole, p. 85.) The Labour Emancipation League arose out of a series of open-air meetings held in 1881 on the Mile End Waste, and had as its object "the establishment of a free social condition of society, based on the principle of political equality, with equal social rights for all." The same year

(1881) saw the formation of the Democratic Federation. The Federation was a Radical rather than a Socialist body, and it was not until 1883 that it adopted a Socialist policy, and issued it as a pamphlet *Socialism Made Plain*. The following year (1884) it changed its name to the Social Democratic Federation. The Fabian Society was founded in 1883 by a little group of intellectuals; and in 1893 the Independent Labour Party was formed. Thus the Guild of St. Matthew was in existence before the foundation of any of the Socialist societies which helped create the modern Labour Party.

The Guild published a monthly newspaper, *The Church Reformer*, which Sidney Webb described as being "a frankly Socialist medium of great ability", (*Socialism in England*, p. 64) and it recruited several hundred lay and clerical members. The Guild's social philosophy can be gauged from a memorial which it presented to the Pan-Anglican Conference of Bishops in 1888.

Our present social system—if the words 'social system' can be used of that which is largely the outcome of anarchic competition—is cruel and dishonest, and needs drastic reform and radical reorganisation. The startling contrast between the hovels of the poor and the houses of the rich within the same city, between the pitiful wage of the labourer and the vast income of the idler, between the poverty of the tenant and the luxury of the landlord, especially in our large towns, has been put before English society with startling vividness*. A wave of Socialist thought has swept over England. The older party divisions are becoming less and less distinct. Socialism seems destined to produce in the near future a perfectly new moral 'line of cleavage' in English Society. "Herein, we respectfully submit to your Grace, are great moral questions with which it is the plain duty of the Church to deal. It has long been conceded by many Churchmen that the housing and feeding of 'Christ's poor' are pre-eminently matters with which the followers of Him who fed the hungry and healed the sick should concern themselves. Under the 'Housing' question lies the Land question, as surely as the house stands on the land. Mr. George denounces our present land system as one that robs the many for the benefit of the few. His opponents retort with a charge of 'plunder', and describe the movement for restoring to the people the value which they give to the land as one of 'robbery plus cant'. Shall the Church of Christ be dumb when men turn to her for guidance in this matter? Her priests, in the name of God, from the altars of His Church, proclaim, 'Thou shalt not steal'. What is it to steal? Again, the Socialist objects to the competitive commercial system under which we live that it 'robs the poor

*A reference to the revelations of a recent Royal Commission on the Housing of the Poor.

because he is poor'; that it enables and encourages the capitalist to 'build his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by wrong', inasmuch as it gives him the power, by taking advantage of the competition for a mere livelihood, to 'use (a large part of) his neighbour's service without wages, and give him nought for his work'. The differences between political party programmes sink into insignificance beside the moral question here involved. Churchmen are beginning to ask, 'Is it true that the landlord and capitalist are able, independently of any work done by themselves, to appropriate a large share of the results of the labour of their unprivileged brethren? If it be true that this is so, is it just?' " (Quoted by Sidney Webb in *Socialism in England*, pp. 66-67).

The Memorial enumerates two Christian principles:

First, *Every man should work*. There should be no idle class; no class of those who consume but do not produce, no privileged body allowed to live upon the produce of others' labour without rendering a due equivalent.

Secondly, *The produce of labour must be distributed on a much more equitable system than at present*. The landlord and the capitalist, say the Socialists, secure far too great a share of the wealth created by labour. They take the first and often the largest share with an acknowledged tendency to increase their takings till no more than a bare subsistence is left to the labourer. The Socialist claim may not be orthodox economy from the stand-point of *laissez faire*, but it sounds strangely like an echo of St. Paul's dictum, 'The husbandman that laboureth must be the first to partake of the fruits.' 'He that plougheth ought to plough in hope, and he that thresheth thresh in hope of partaking'. And yet it has needed almost a revolution within the last generation to bring 'hope' within the life of the English husbandman.' (*Socialism in England*, pp. 67-68).

The final conclusion of the memorialists is that "with the main contentions of the Socialist, the Christian is not only able but bound to agree".

THE CLARION

Perhaps Robert Blatchford* and *The Clarion* did more to stimulate interest in Socialism in those early days than any of the organisations we have just named. Certainly the British Socialist Movement has produced no more effective and influential weekly paper than *The Clarion* even though (in the expressive phrase of Mr. Cole) it "stank in the nostrils of the 'unco guid' as a

* Blatchford's famous pamphlet *Merry England* had an enormous influence in spreading Socialist ideas. It was published originally at a shilling, and 20,000 copies were soon sold. Pete Curran suggested a penny edition, and in less than a year the sales rose to over a million, in addition to which many pirated editions were sold in the U.S.A.

wicked, roystering, atheistical, impudent, blasphemous, god-forsaken horror of a paper".

But Blatchford's atheism was no more negation of God and religion: rather it was provoked by the belief that religion tends to distract men from the real task of busying themselves with the job of making this world a fit place for all men to live in.

In such a world as this, friend Christian (he wrote), a man has no business reading the Bible, singing hymns, and attending divine worship. He has not *time*. All the strength and pluck and wit he possesses are needed in the work of real religion, of real salvation. The rest is all "dreams out of the ivory gate, and visions before midnight". (*God and My Neighbour*, p. 194.)

And again, in another typical passage :

I know nothing about Gods and heavens. But I know a good deal about Manchester and London, and about men and women; and if I did not feel the shames and wrongs of the world more keenly, and if I did not try more earnestly and strenuously to rescue my fellow-creatures from ignorance, and sorrow, and injustice, than most Christians did, I should blush to look death in the face or call myself a man.

I choose my words deliberately again when I say that to me the most besotted and degraded outcast tramp or harlot matters more than all the Gods and angels that humanity ever conjured up out of its imagination. (*God and My Neighbour*, p. 191.)

Blatchford was (to use his own description) a Humanist: that word aptly summed up his whole social philosophy, which was a protest against injustice and needless suffering.

Truly we should love all men (he wrote). Let us, then, begin by loving the weakest and the worst, for they have so little love and counsel, while the rich and the good have so much. (*Britain for the British*, p. 43.)

In the main a humanist* rather than a Marxist approach to Socialism was typical of the working class movement in Great Britain in the nineties of the last century.

In the "eighties" (writes G. D. H. Cole) the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League had sought to capture the masses by converting them to Socialism as a doctrine of class-war. Blatchford and also, to a great extent, Hardie appealed to them rather in the name of human fellowship and decent feeling. In Great Britain the "nineties" were above all else the age of an ethical Socialism full of warm feelings of sympathy for the poor, and somewhat scornful of doctrines that could not be cast into the

*"I am an Agnostic, or Rationalist, and I am a Determinist, and I am a Socialist. But if I were asked to describe myself in a single word, I should call myself a Humanist." (*God and My Neighbour*, p. 189).

form of moral imperatives. "Scientific" Socialism did not appeal to Blatchford or to Hardie. They wanted to make converts on the basis of human brotherhood rather than of the class-war—even though they recognized the class-war as a fact.*

Undoubtedly, this appeal was at that time the most likely to bring over large sections of the British workers from their traditional allegiance to Gladstonian Liberalism. As followers of the great Mr. Gladstone, they had been nourished on moral inspirations and high-sounding phrases; and they were gradually finding out that these phrases meant nothing in terms of their everyday material needs. They were ready to be weaned from a Liberalism that had discarded Chamberlain's social Radicalism together with its author; they were not ready to do without the feeling of virtue with which Gladstone had held them comforted for the lack of more substantial advantages. They were in many cases still closely attached to one or another Nonconformist congregation; and even when they became sceptical of the dogmas of the Churches they were apt to feel cold and uncomfortable unless they could find some spiritual substitute. (*British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914*, pp. 134-5.)

The same spiritual cravings accounted for the success of John Trevor's Labour Church movement, which became organised in the Union of Labour Churches, in 1893.

KEIR HARDIE

Keir Hardie, like so many other early members of the Independent Labour Party, received his training as a public speaker in the church and in the Temperance and Brotherhood movements. Writing of his early days in Ayrshire, William Stewart says that

he became Grand Worthy chief of the local Good Templars' Lodge. He took his share of the church work and filled the pulpit on occasions . . . and frequently his voice was to be heard at the street corners in Cumnock and in some of the neighbouring villages preaching the Gospel of Christ as he understood it. (*J. Keir Hardie*, William Stewart, p. 20.)

Later, it was natural for him to turn

most of his economic arguments into moral discourses in which the capitalist class was cast for the part of Satan. This was not affectation, or calculated for effect: it came natural to him. And that it did so was highly opportune at a time when the advocates of Socialism and Labour representation were trying to win over a

*Blatchford gave practical recognition to the fact of the class struggle when he advised his working class readers that "if you wish the interests of the working class to be attended to, you will . . . form a working-class party". (*Britain for the British*, p. 148.) Hardie of course, took the same line as a practical politician, and played a notable part in persuading the British Trade Unions to create their own independent political party.

working class still largely tied to Nonconformity, and held fast to Liberalism by the close alliance between the Chapel and the Liberal electoral machine. The "Lib-Labs" were mostly lay preachers as well as Trade Union officials; and the task of winning over their followers needed a man such as Hardie who could speak a language they could readily understand. . . . Hardie, despite his public reputation for wildness, did not sound at all wild to a gathering of miners or iron-workers or factory operatives who had been brought up on the Bible, and were much readier to accept Socialism when it came to them clothed in the garments of morality than when it was presented in economic terms or by means of slogans of class-war. (*British Working Class Politics, 1832-1914*, pp. 119-120.)

And thus it was natural that the "New Unionists", when they began to turn their attention to politics, looked to Keir Hardie rather than to Mann, or Burns, or Tillett for leadership.

CHAPEL INFLUENCES

But if many of the early propagandists of Socialism in this country found inspiration and guidance in the Christian teachings of their youth, religious Nonconformity also exercised a baneful influence on the political education of the working class, and helped delay the formation of an independent political party of their own long after economic conditions were ripe for such a development. This was true of both those mass working class movements, the Co-operatives and the Trade Unions.

Close links between Store and chapel . . . existed in many parts of the North, and tended to keep leading Co-operators on the Liberal side as long as Liberalism and Nonconformity walked hand in hand. (*A Century of Co-operation*, G. D. H. Cole. p. 312.)

Within the Trade Union movement the same thing happened. Many of the Lib-Labs who used their influence within the Trades Union Congress and the Trade Unions to oppose the formation of an independent Labour Party were "pious

*The following excerpt from an article in *The Miner*, written when Hardie was in the thirties, is a good example of how he identified Socialism and Christianity. "The world today is sick and weary at heart. Even our clergy are for the most part dumb dogs who dare not bark. So it was in the days of Christ. They who proclaimed a God-given gospel to the world were the poor and the comparatively unlettered. We need today a return to the principles of that Gospel which, by proclaiming all men sons of God and brethren one with another, makes it impossible for one, Shylock-like, to insist on his rights at the expense of another". (Quoted by William Stewart in *J. Keir Hardie*, pp. 32-33.) In a penny pamphlet, *The I.L.P.—All About it*, Hardie wrote that "To some, Socialism comes in the form of an intellectual conviction, to others it can be stated in the terms of a proposition in political economy; to ninety-nine per cent of the members of the I.L.P. Socialism comes with all the emotional power of a great religious truth."

Methodists and local preachers", to use the phrase which Elie Halévy (*A History of the English People, 1895-1905*, Book ii., p. 134) applies to Burt and Fenwick, representative Trade Union leaders of the period. Thomas Burt was the leader of the North-umberland miners, and won Morpeth in the General Election of 1874: he shares with Alexander Macdonald (who won a Stafford seat in the same election) the honour of being what the Webbs call the first "Labour members" of the House of Commons. (*History of Trade Unionism*, p. 290.) Charles Fenwick succeeded Henry Broadhurst as Secretary to the Trades Union Congress. Both Burt and Fenwick were Lib-Labs.

This Nonconformist strain in the British working class movement has continued down to the present day. The late Arthur Henderson (who more than any other man was the architect of the Labour Party's electoral machine) was a Dissenter, a teetotaler, and a leading figure in the Brotherhood Movement; and in our own day the Right Hon. A. V. Alexander is proud of the fact that he is a Baptist preacher*.

THE GENERAL STRIKE

There has never been in the British working class movement anything comparable with the anti-clericalism which has been characteristic of a good deal of European Socialism. That significant fact was curiously illustrated in the General Strike of 1926—when this country came nearer to violent revolution than at any time within the memory of living man.

Foreign Socialists were unable to understand the part played by religion in the strike. Some of the strongest fighting centres proved to be also the most religious. Poplar (*Lansbury's Bulletin*) on the 8th wrote, "To-morrow is Sunday. You will come to our meetings at night, but I would like you to attend the Church Services nearest your home. . . . It is Christ's gospel of passive resistance which you are practising to-day". Preston carried, from Canon Donaldson of Westminster, a message which might have shamed the "negotiators":—

"I earnestly beg that the workers will stand firm. If they stand firm, they will win; but if they begin to doubt and quaver and to blackleg—all will be lost for a generation."

In Wigan, where the railwaymen carried the burden of the

*Mr. Joseph Bradshaw, J.P., in his presidential address to the Co-operative Congress in 1946, said that "after 2,000 years, they must still go back to the Sermon on the Mount for the only reliable basis on which to build their new democratic world. Whatever their achievements in science, industry or culture, it was only when we learned to acknowledge the Divine truth of that message that they would attain universal happiness and peace". *The Co-operative News*, 15.6.1946.

strike on their backs, the editor appointed by them, on being chosen "knelt by my chair, acknowledged our weakness and asked for Divine guidance", and on Sunday he produced the curious bulletin reproduced here,* inexplicable in any other country. All St. Albans railway strikers formed into a procession on one day and marched to the Abbey for a special service. And it was the same railwaymen who on the 13th refused to go back and wired to the General Council, cursing it and telling it to reimpose the strike. Shrewsbury's official time-table one day began:—

9-45 a.m. Intercession service at . . . Chapel.

10-45 a.m. Strike Committee meets. All strikers may attend and listen.

12.0 Noon. Service at St. Mary's.

(*A Workers' History of the Great Strike*, by R. W. Postgate, Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., and J. F. Horrabin, pp. 41-43.)

Socialists may approve or disapprove of the religious strain which runs through the British working class movement: but its influence, even today, cannot be denied, even though it may be true that the majority of workers are now largely indifferent to all forms of organised Christianity.

*WIGAN JOINT STRIKE COMMITTEE. LEGS OF MAN
ASSEMBLY ROOMS.

No. 2. Sixth day of strike. Sunday, May 9th, 1926.

MY DEAR PUBLIC,

Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it Holy.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with
All thy heart, soul, mind and strength and
Thy neighbour as thyself.

Daily bulletin.
News from all points.
Situation magnificent.
Everywhere solid.

Public meetings well supported by eminent men of all shades of thought and from all stations of life.

Facsimile of the Wigan Strike Bulletin, Sunday, May 9th. (Reproduced in *A Workers' History of the Great Strike*, p. 42).

CHAPTER 14

FASCISM, BOLSHEVISM AND SOCIALISM

The aim of Socialists should be the founding of a religion, towards which end compromise is no use.

William Morris.

MODERN INDUSTRY AND RELIGION

Modern industrial society, with large-scale commodity production based on giant factories and power-driven machinery, the whole depending upon a vast and growing accumulation of scientific knowledge, engenders a temper altogether alien to traditional religion. In a less complex civilization, in which the great majority of men were engaged in agriculture, and were largely at the mercy of all the vagaries of nature, the notion of a personal God (or gods) who arbitrarily intervened in human affairs, was natural enough. In the illuminated missals of the Middle Ages one finds the figure of Christ with vines growing out of his wounds, whilst bishops and abbesses devour the grapes which are growing on these vines. Such a conception of God could have occurred only in a backward agrarian society possessed of little of our modern knowledge of the universe. To such a community grossly anthropomorphic conceptions of the Deity did not seem absurd or irreverent. Herbert Spencer, in his *Study of Sociology*, gives an amusing example of the anthropomorphic conceptions which were common at that period.

God, having one day gone out with the saints and the apostles for a walk, left Peter at the door of heaven with strict orders to admit no one. Soon after a tailor came and pleaded to be let in. But Peter said that God had forbidden any one to be admitted; besides, the tailor was a bad character, and 'cabbaged' the cloth he used. The tailor said the pieces he had taken were small, and had fallen into his basket; and he was willing to make himself useful—he would carry the babies, and wash or mend the clothes. Peter at last let him in, but made him sit down in a corner, behind the door. Taking advantage of Peter's going outside for a minute or two, the tailor left his seat and looked about him. He soon came to a place where there were many stools, and a chair of massive gold and a golden footstool, which were God's. Climbing up on the chair, he could see all that was happening on earth; and he saw an old woman, who was washing clothes in a stream, making away with some of the linen. In his anger, he took up the footstool and

threw it at her. As he could not get it back, he thought it best to return to his place behind the door, where he sat down, putting on an air of innocence. God now re-entered, without observing the tailor. Finding his footstool gone, he asked Peter what had become of it—had he let anyone in? The apostle at first evaded the question, but confessed that he had let in one—only, however, a poor limping tailor. The tailor was then called, and asked what he had done with the footstool. When he had told, God said to him: "O you knave, if I judged like you, how long do you think you could have escaped? For long ago I should not have had a chair or even a poker left in the place, but should have hurled every thing at the sinners." (*The Study of Sociology*, pp. 137-138.)

Such gross anthropomorphism is unthinkable to the modern industrial worker whose labour

in the great industries has removed him . . . from the influences of the environment of nature which in the peasant keep up the belief in ghosts, in sorceries, in witchcraft and other superstitious ideas. . . . Drought, excessive rains, hail, cyclones, etc. never make him think of their action on nature and her harvests. His urban life shelters him from the anxieties and the troublesome cares which assail the mind of the farmer. Nature has no hold on his imagination.

The labour of the mechanical factory puts the wage-worker in touch with terrible natural forces unknown to the peasant, but instead of being mastered by them, he controls them. The gigantic mechanism of iron and steel which fills the factories, which makes him move like an automaton, which sometimes clutches him, mutilates him, bruises him, does not engender in him a superstitious terror as the thunder does in the peasant, but leaves him unmoved, for he knows that the limbs of the mechanical monster were fashioned and mounted by his comrades, and that he has but to push a lever to set it in motion or stop it. The machine, in spite of its miraculous power and productiveness, has no mystery for him. The labourer in the electric works, who has but to turn a crank on a dial to send miles of motive power to tramways or light to the lamps of a city, has but to say, like the God of Genesis, "Let there be light," and there is light. Never sorcery more fantastic was imagined, yet for him this sorcery is a simple and natural thing. He would be greatly surprised if one were to come and tell him that a certain God might if he chose stop the machines and extinguish the lights when the electricity had been turned on; he would reply that this anarchistic God would be simply a misplaced gearing or a broken wire, and that it would be easy for him to seek and find this disturbing God. The practice of the modern workshop teaches the wage-worker scientific determinism, without his needing to pass through the theoretical study of the sciences. (*Social and Philosophical Studies*, Paul Lafargue, pp. 49-50.)

As long ago as 1909 C. F. G. Masterman wrote that

the world of today . . . is not becoming atheist. It is ceasing to

believe, without being conscious of the process, until it suddenly wakes up to the fact that the process is complete. (*The Condition of England*, p. 223.)

Suburban London (he asserted) is losing its old religions. It still builds churches and chapels of a twentieth-century Gothic architecture: St. Aloysius, reputed to be dangerously "High" because its curates wear coloured scarves; the Baptist Chapel, where the minister maintains the old doctrines of hell and heaven, and wrestles with the sinner for his immortal soul; the Congregational Church, where the minister is abreast with modern culture, and proclaims a less exacting gospel, and faintly trusts the larger hope. But the whole apparatus of worship seems archaic and unreal. . . . The old lights have fallen from the sky, existence has become too complex and crowded for the influences of wider spaces reaching to a far horizon. (*The Condition of England*, p. 69).

And yet again:

The Churches are extraordinarily active, endeavouring in this way and in that to influence the lives of the people. Their humanitarian and social efforts are widely appreciated. Their definite dogmatic teachings seem to count for little at all. They labour on steadily amid a huge indifference. The very material of their appeal is vanishing. Fear which is the beginning of wisdom no longer terrifies a society which sees orderly arrangements everywhere accepting the secure as the normal. It cannot believe that, even if any future world exists at all—of which existence it is becoming increasingly doubtful—that future world will not in essence re-establish the decencies and commonplaces of the modern city state. There is less material therefore to-day for the appeal—to the general—of the revivalist preacher, with which Wesley and Whitefield changed the face of eighteenth-century England. The fleeing from the city of Destruction, the crying out against the "burden" of sin, the vision of the flames of hell flaring close to the Celestial City, represents an apparatus of experience that is alien to the present. "Religion", was Dolling's testimony from Poplar, "has, so to speak, gone to pieces. There is no opposition. We do not care enough to oppose. God is not in any of our thoughts: we do not even fear Him. We face death with perfect composure, for we have nothing to give up, and nothing to look forward to. Heaven has no attraction, because we should be out of place there. And hell has no terrors". (*The Condition of England*, pp. 220-221.)

Masterman in his profoundly despondent book further gave it as his opinion that

there can be no doubt that apart from any question of future revival, present belief in religion, as a conception of life dependent upon supernatural sanctions or as a revelation of a purpose and meaning beyond the actual business of the day, is slowly but steadily fading from the modern city race. Tolerance, kindliness, sympathy,

civilization continually improve. Affirmation of any responsibility beyond that to self and to humanity, continually declines. Life therefore gradually ceases to be influenced or coloured by any atmosphere of "other-worldliness". Present disabilities find no compensation in the hope of a future redress, which makes the present endurable. (*The Condition of England*, pp. 219-220.)

Élie Halévy reaches the same conclusion about the (seemingly) secure world in the years just before the First World War.

The characteristic feature of the age (he wrote) was not the irreligion (the term would be too strong) but the religious indifference of the masses. (*A History of the English People, Epilogue Vol. i., 1895-1905, Book III*, Pelican Books Edition, pp. 133-134. Elie Halévy.)

Referring to the inquiry into the condition of the chief religious denominations in London which Cadbury conducted from May, 1902 to June, 1903, he says:

If the Nonconformists could find consolation in the fact that the decline of their sects had been perhaps less marked than the decline of the Anglican Church, the results of the inquiry were none the less disquieting to a sincere Christian. While the population of the area to which the inquiry related had increased by half a million in about 15 years, the number of practising Christians not only failed to show a corresponding increase but had actually fallen by 150,000; and . . . it was found that of every hundred inhabitants of London only 16 were practising Christians. (*A History of the English People, Epilogue Vol. i., 1895-1905, Book III*, Pelican Books Edition, p. 133.)

NAZISM AND COMMUNISM

Today it is more than ever true that the great mass of people in this country are indifferent to traditional religion; that at the most they pay an occasional conventional respect to it, such as using the services of the Church for marriages and burials.

But it is not only belief in organised Christianity which has declined. Socialism, too, has lost much of the fervour and idealism of its pioneer days. Men and women who espoused the unpopular cause in the closing decades of the last century were often sustained by a profound sense of serving a great human movement which moved to inevitable and not far distant triumph. Whether they came to Socialism emotionally, or whether they prided themselves on being materialists, and expounded "Scientific Socialism" (often with as sharp a nose for heresy as any Father of the Early Church) they saw in it much more than political manoeuvring or even economic planning for a world of material plenty and security. It is not too much to say that many

of them found in Socialism the same emotional satisfaction that men found in religion in earlier ages. Not infrequently they sacrificed their own interests to the movement; and they were sustained in face of ridicule and persecution by the knowledge that they served something bigger than themselves, something that gave a meaning and a dignity to their own brief and trivial lives. And (particularly in the case of the devout Marxist) their faith gave them the same certain promise of ultimate victory over the forces of evil, even though the Kingdom of God was not in some future state of blessedness, but was the classless society which was shortly to come into being, and a personal Deity was replaced by impersonal economic forces. The seventeenth-century Calvinists had known that the Gates of Hell should not prevail against the Chosen of the Lord (which usually meant against the rising middle class): the Marxist was apt to turn the Materialistic Conception of History into something curiously like a theological dogma, and to feel the same comforting assurance that the Proletariat was inevitably destined to be the grave-digger of Capitalism, and to usher in the millennium of Communism.

It was inevitable, no doubt, that Socialism should shed this chiliastic idealism as it grew from a small unpopular sect into a mass movement that played an increasing part in the administration of the capitalist state. It ceased, of necessity, to recruit mainly the exceptional man and woman: its appeal was more and more to everyday people. And everyday people are not in the habit of living with visions of the New Jerusalem, whether such visions be of this world or of the next.

Yet it remains true that the normal man is never happy unless he can give his loyalty to something bigger than himself; to an ideology which simultaneously provides him with an explanation of the world in which he finds himself, and calls upon him to serve the common good of some social group with which he is associated. In short, the average man is religious: he is not the self-seeking, rational being imagined by the cruder forms of Victorian rationalism. And so, of course, the decline of the old faiths, and the weakening of the hold of the Christian churches over men's imaginations and loyalties has not produced the rational world which the Victorian Secularist so confidently predicted. Masses of men no longer have any belief in Christian mythology (or in Christian ethics, for that matter); but they have given blind, unreasoning allegiance to Nazism or to the dogmas of the Communist International. For both Nazism in

Germany and Communism in Russia have had many of the characteristics of an organised church. Both demanded that the neophyte accept once for all certain fundamental dogmas that must never be questioned on pain of damnation. Both required their followers to lose their identity in the Party (the Church), and to accept with cheerful, blind devotion the infallibility of the Party leadership, no matter how that leadership might twist and turn, and contradict its own *ex cathedra* assertions of yesterday. Both practised the Jesuitical policy that the end justifies the means, even though the means be systematic lying, persecution of former members, and mass murder. Both have shown themselves as militant and intolerant as Islam in the heyday of its career as a conquering faith, or the Society of Jesus at the time of the Spanish conquests in the New World. And both (despite much in their doctrine which is manifestly irrational) have succeeded in winning the fanatical loyalty of great numbers of men and women—and particularly of young men and women.

The means (says Professor Laski) by which Fascist leadership in Germany and Italy, especially in the former country, has sought to obtain its psychological hold upon the masses . . . is built upon the religious impulse—worship of, and utter surrender to, the leader is made into a cult comparable in its outward expression of intensity only to the fanaticism of the historic religions. Hitler, for instance, is the especially chosen of God; he is infallible; he is omniscient; he is the father of his people. He is not bound by the laws of men; special insights are communicated to him. . . . He becomes a semi-sacred person, not to be judged by ordinary standards. He is half-ruler, half-priest, deified in his own lifetime, spoken of in terms of an adoring adulation it is sacrilege to doubt. It is not, I think, blasphemous to suggest that it has been the deliberate effort of the Nazi party to make of Hitler in a real sense a god to the people. (*Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Harold J. Laski, p. 119.)

In Russia (writes Borkenau) the Bolshevik party had really been, to a great extent, what Lenin wanted it to be: a select community, a sort of religious order of professional revolutionaries, crusaders of a materialistic faith. (*The Communist International*, F. Borkenau, p. 419.)

And again, referring to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*,

That which makes the work so important is Lenin's complete unawareness of the fact that he himself, with his absolute belief in materialism, is just as religious as those 'fideists', in other words those Christians, whom he fights, and much nearer, in psychology and method, to an Eastern ascetic than to the thorough religious indifference of a Poincaré or a Mach; he does not even

suspect the paradox and defends materialism with the fury of an inquisitor. (*The Communist International*, p. 49.)

And

Naive religious beliefs are a strong and constructive force in history . . . This religious belief, this implicit acceptance of Marxism, not as a method of research but as a creed, responded to an urgent practical necessity. Without it, Lenin might have been a better student of social problems; but without this firm conviction he could not have been the man with an iron will and a single purpose, 'the revolution'. Again, in this narrow dedication of everything to one single aim, the true religious fanaticism of an early civilization reveals itself a mentality which, if realized in its true character, can only provoke among men of the West the wonder which the early Christians provoked among the Greeks. It is no less a tremendous practical force for all its intellectual limitations. (*The Communist International*, pp. 50-51.)

Since Lenin's death the tendency for Bolshevism to grow into a new religion has been in no wise checked, but rather the contrary.

The cult of Stalin, indeed, has become a veritable religion, with the Politbureau as a college of Cardinals, and the secret police acting as inquisitors for a Bolshevik Pope. Deviation from orthodoxy is, as in a militant religion, punished by imprisonment or death. (*Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 69.)

and

the Puritan's citations of Scripture are the precise equivalent of the Bolshevik's citations of Marx. (*Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 73.)

Moreover,

the average Russian citizen . . . has been educated both by experience and propaganda, to think of the Soviet Union as the land of the socialist revolution, beset by enemies, internal and external, on all sides. He believes in its achievement and its prospects as firmly as the early Christians believed in the certainty of the Second Coming. (*Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 70.)

A NEW HUMANISM

If Socialism is to generate the dynamic to create a new and worthwhile civilization it has got to be able to inspire an equally profound, but more rational devotion among its adherents. It will not do that by a cautious insistence upon being "practical"; nor will it do it by the lavish use of Marxist jargon, or by seeking to appeal to men's minds alone. Of course, the Socialist movement needs its blue-prints of the new society which it seeks to build. Equally it needs a scientific theory and analysis for an

understanding of what is happening in the world of economics and politics. But men are not moved to action by masses of detailed plans for social reform, or by the sweet reasonableness of Fabianism: nor are they activated by scientific reasoning about the laws of social development. They are impelled, in the main, to strive against social injustice, and to sacrifice their personal interests (maybe their lives) in a struggle for a better world not by reason but by deep social emotions.

If Socialism is to win and hold power to make a new social order that shall be something better than a totalitarian state able to give material security only at the price of personal freedom and the degradation of human individuality, it must recapture something of the passion and enthusiasm of its pioneers, who saw a noble vision of the world that shall be ; a world from which poverty, crime, and war have been banished ; a world in which free men and women can love truth, and justice, and beauty. It needs to re-discover the dynamic energy with which William Morris hated all the ugliness, and meanness, and dull stupidity of our machine civilization: but it must denounce not only shoddy, mass-produced clothes and furniture, and houses and amusements, but also mass-produced, shabby little ideals, and all the pitiful waste of individuality and all the frustration which is part of our modern world.

Above all Socialism must recapture the sense which many of the pioneers had of serving a great impersonal end which gives a meaning and a dignity to our own brief, petty lives ; a sense of being part of a great fellowship of men who have striven, in many ages, and in all lands, to make the Brotherhood of Man a living reality, and not a cant phrase on the lips of insipid priests or slick politicians.

For fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death: and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship's sake that ye do them, and the life that is in it, that shall live on and on for ever, and each one of you part of it, while many a man's life upon the earth from the earth shall wane.

THE END

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