

Chapter V

FREETHOUGHT AND REPUBLICANISM. IN SEARCH OF A FAITH. INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL VAGRANCY

EMANCIPATION from the orthodox popular theology came, as so many changes in one's spiritual Odyssey often do, by wholly unexpected and chance encounters. As a boy, when visiting my grandmother on Saturdays, after cleaning knives and forks and other domestic duties at home in Bethnal Green, it had been my duty to bring with me a copy of the *British Workman*, an illustrated weekly sheet of a religious type. One Saturday, this periodical dealt prominently with the death-bed of the notorious Tom Paine, and I thus learned of the existence of so-called infidels and sceptics, their abject terror of a future state on their death-beds, and their conversion.

It chanced later, in my youth, that I was attracted by, and attended, some lectures

given under the auspices of the Christian Evidence Society in Shoreditch, at which discussion was allowed. Unfortunately, the not very able lecturers sent down by the Society, chose to place themselves on a platform in defence of the literally inspired truth of the Bible which gave every advantage to Charles Bradlaugh's lambs trained under the most powerful debater of the day. The smart young iconoclasts of the Free Thought Propagandist Society made havoc of their arguments. The result of my attendance at these lectures and discussions produced the opposite effect from that which I had promised myself, and awakened curiosity led me one Sunday to the Temple of Free Thought, the Hall of Science in Old Street, where after the almost trembling audition of the first lecture I became interested in the formidable oratory of Bradlaugh, its High Priest, and his organ, the *National Reformer*.

The first appearance, in 1875, on the platform of Mrs. Annie Besant—a "real lady," as the mainly working-class audience decided, whose cultured style formed a marked contrast with Bradlaugh's sledge-hammer oratory—made a great impression.

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Secularism and Republicanism were to be the salvation of the working classes, and of the people of England generally, according to the devotees of the Hall of Science. Members of the propaganda succeeded in publishing a weekly journal, the *Republican*, which had a brief existence. With the aid of George Standring's father's printing establishment (after hours) we wrote, printed—I first saw myself in print in the *Republican*—and distributed the paper ourselves. It was the top of the wave of Republicanism which, in the 'seventies, ran through advanced politics; when "the cobbler," George Odger, organized a republican party, with a tricolour flag, and designated John Bright as the head of a new constitution of the state; when Sir Charles Dilke attacked the monarchy; when Joseph Chamberlain talked of ransom, and Charles Bradlaugh ingenuously regarded himself as marked out for the first president of the coming English Republic. Much criticism was levelled at the misnomer "*Hall of Science*" for the Temple of Secularism where the only science taught and practised was the terpsichorean. A number of lectures, chiefly on the natural sciences, were then organized by

qualified sympathizers and propagandists in the Free Thought movement, such as Dr. Aveling and Mrs. Besant, the latter having qualified herself as a lecturer under the Science and Art Department of South Kensington. She was refused admission to the gardens of the Royal Botanical Society and excluded from the class of Practical Botany at University College owing to prejudice against her opinions.

Experience in facing an audience I gained in early days at a debating society, an offshoot from the old Poultry Chapel, known as the Milton Conversational Class. This met in Milton Street, which formerly was the notorious Grub Street. In Stow's time it was inhabited by bowyers and fletchers, but in the days of Pope, Johnson, and Goldsmith, was the haunt of shabby, down-at-heel projectors of *poisoned* arrows, seditious and libellous pamphleteers, poetasters, and playwrights, the dregs of the literary profession well known to students of eighteenth-century literature. In Stow's time one of the chief streets in the Ward of Cripple-gate, in the seventeen-hundreds it was a street of dilapidated, tumble-down houses, courts, and alleys, where, in a tavern, the "Pegasus,"

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one of the earlier literary clubs, met and published reports of its meetings.

The change of name was due to an appeal by speculative builders and local inhabitants who in 1829 petitioned the City of London Commissioners of Sewers that the depreciatory association with Grub Street might be alienated and the birthplace and tomb of the poet Milton in the vicinity be commemorated by altering the name to Milton Street. Their petition was granted in 1830, and from that date Grub Street disappears from the nomenclature of City ways. In the early days our debating society, urged by the desire to breathe a freer intellectual atmosphere than that of a Nonconformist chapel, made an exodus to Milton Street, and set up its rostrum in the old surviving *City Pantheon*. Early in 1877, I read a paper¹ on the Opening of Museums and Picture Galleries on Sunday Afternoons—an innovation strenuously combated by orthodox folk as destructive of the sanctity and somnolence of the English sabbath.

It was a time of a casting on the waters of the bread of science; the crumbling of old

¹ At the new place of meeting, the Wilton Temperance Hall in London Wall.

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beliefs and worn-out creeds, "dwindling day by day beneath the deicide eyes of science"; the period described by Baron von Hügel as the agnostic tempest that roared between 1855 and 1875; when the Rev. Charles Voysey was deprived of his benefice for the expression of some mild modernism; when Morley wrote God with a small "g," and the Positivists deleted the second verse of Blake's *Divine Image* from their hymn book, since "God our Father dear" appeared in it; when the trustees of the Episcopal Fund tried to stop the payment due to Dr. Colenso, the saintly Bishop of Natal, because of certain criticisms of Old Testament chronology and mathematics. I well remember the half-suppressed murmur of indignation that passed through the congregation when the rector, the Rev. Stopford Brooke, announced that the Bishop of London had inhibited Dr. Colenso from preaching the sermon he had been announced to give in his church at morning service.

Needless to say, the crude secularism of the Hall of Science soon failed to satisfy one's spiritual needs, and much errancy ensued in the search for a resting-place. For a while the Comtists attracted some few of us, and

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on Sunday evenings I added to the meagre congregation at the Services of Humanity under Dr. Congreve at the little Positivist chapel in Chapel Street, Red Lion Square. George Augustus Sala once described his impressions of a Service of Humanity there for the *Daily Telegraph*: "He entered, and found three persons and no God."

After much study of the Comtist catechism—I still possess the copy of the *Catechisme Positiviste par Auguste Comte*, in 388 pp., published in 1852 in the form of eleven systematic interviews between a woman and a Priest of Humanity—acceptance became shaken and, since we failed to echo the woman's invariable *Oui, mon Père!* to the priest's exposition, we sought and obtained an interview with High Priest Congreve. Having expressed our difficulties, especially with regard to the Corinthian subjection of women under the Positivist creed, to our amazement, Dr. Congreve brushed aside all questioning of Comtist dogma. Comte had settled the creed. *Roma locuta est.*

Well, really, we thought, if one is to subject one's reason to "infallible" authority, it were far more dignified to submit to the venerable High Priest and the millennial Hierarchy that

sit on the seven hills at Rome. Secession, however, to the dissentient school of Positivist doctrine under Frederic Harrison and Professor Beesly in Fetter Lane provided for a time healthier spiritual pabulum. After many wanderings and wrestlings, including, under Newman's powerful and seductive eloquence and the beautiful symbolism of the Catholic ritual, a far journey (on the way) towards the rock of St. Peter at Rome, I came to rest at South Place Chapel Religious Society under Dr. Moncure Conway, a protagonist of evolution, and of the new era in philosophy and science. It is difficult to convey to the present age the enthusiasm of the young of the 'sixties and 'seventies of the last century for the new gospel heralded by the names of Darwin and Herbert Spencer—a feeling akin to that of religious emotion—a feeling expressed in lyric form by Thomas Hardy:

In the 'seventies I was bearing in my breast,
Penned tight,
Certain starry thoughts that threw a magic light
On the workhours and the soundless hours of rest,
In the 'seventies, aye! I bore them in my breast
Penned tight.

We felt that we were working for a "something

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not ourselves that made for" right thinking, a *Vita Nuova* for humanity.

The prophets of Darwinism, of evolution—Tyndall, Huxley, Clifford—with rare eloquence, devotion, and self-abnegation, were fighting for the recognition of their gospel of modern science. It was the time of Tyndall's famous Belfast address in 1874 and memories were green of that other historic meeting of the British Association at Oxford when Bishop Wilberforce (Soapy Sam) came down with his faithful, avowedly to "smash Darwin," and was flattened out by Huxley. We, young disciples of the new evangel, regularly attended their lucid, compelling expositions at the eight o'clock Saturday evening lectures at the Society of Arts and at the Sunday afternoon lectures at St. George's Hall, walking the three miles each way to sit at their feet. Never to have heard Huxley, that master of popular exposition, lecture on a scientific subject is to have no adequate conception of what lecturing is.

It fell out one Sunday afternoon that an address was to be given by Father Ignatius at St. George's Hall. Curiosity drew us thither. The eloquent preacher began his

address by asking the audience to stand up and recite the Apostles' Creed as a propitiatory offering for the previous Sunday's blasphemy—a kind of spiritual disinfectant. We, sturdy devotees of the gospel of evolution, remained seated during the recital in protest against the offence to our prophet. We took things seriously in those days. Later, during the Boer War, following the example of Herbert Spencer, who wore no gold or jewels on the person, I and other friends gave such gold and jewelled personal belongings as we possessed to the Indian Famine Fund. I still wear the silver chain and watch I substituted for the gold guard and watch I then wore. The only permissible exception was the nib of a fountain pen.

The last stage of my spiritual vagrancy came to an end in 1887, when, after the retirement of Dr. Conway and the election as Minister of South Place Chapel of Dr. Stanton Coit (formerly a member of the Ethical Culture Circle of New York¹), our *Religious* Society was transformed to the South Place *Ethical* Society, a society which still

¹ Dr. Conway also came to South Place from the States, having opened his public ministry in 1851 as a Methodist preacher in Virginia.

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carries on its services in its new temple, Conway Hall, in Red Lion Square. The society's object is defined to be "the cultivation of a rational religious sentiment, the study of ethical principles, and the promotion of human welfare in harmony with advancing knowledge."

In 1894 an East London Ethical Society, with Dr. Coit's help, set up its platform in Old Ford, where, during the late 'nineties, I lectured in association with certain other sympathizers with the Ethical movement, whose names have since come prominently before the public—Ramsay MacDonald and George Lansbury. Here was established the first Ethical Sunday School under its devoted director and teacher, F. J. Gould, the fervent apostle in many lands of the education of children on rational and ethical principles. Among the sixty children who attended the school were Tom Mann's four girls, and the four or five children of George Lansbury.

Chapter VI

HOW TO ACQUIRE ORAL PRACTICE IN FOREIGN
TONGUES. THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
MOVEMENT AND THE CREATION OF TOYNBEE
HALL IN WHITECHAPEL. MUSIC AND THE
DRAMA IN EAST LONDON

"OKEY," said Bernard Shaw to me when in 1891 we were travelling in Italy, "how do you account for your virtuosity in modern languages?" I could not tell then, nor indeed can I tell now, except that the secret was hard work and the utilization of spare odd half-hours. I cannot say I burned the midnight oil to any extent. Working hours were too long. In Victorian days, before the foundation of the Schools of Modern Languages at Oxford and Cambridge, knowledge of the leading European languages, especially fluency in oral use, was rare. And small wonder, for the difficulty lies not so much in speaking the language well or ill as in understanding what the other fellow says. This story is told of an



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (About 1890)
(From a photograph in the possession of Miss Bertha Newcombe)

Oral Practice in Foreign Tongues

examination in French at one of our public schools in early Victorian days. The examiner for the first time happened to be a native. After a few sentences had been dictated the shocked headmaster hurriedly stayed the examiner—the boys were being unfairly tried. “We always pronounce it like English. They won’t understand,” he protested.

Owing to the long hours a basket-maker worked, few opportunities occurred to attend evening classes. So many of the classes began at eight o’clock and to attend at that hour meant the sacrifice of an hour’s wages, since all work was piece-work. The acquisition of tongues I mainly effected by the use of an Ollendorf and a key, and by reaching the cellar where I worked half an hour earlier, staying half an hour later than the other men, and utilizing part of the dinner interval. Oral teaching I gained by exchanging lessons with native refugees and others; by attendance at the Sunday services at the French Protestant Church in St. Martin’s-le-Grand, at the German Church in Leman Street, White-chapel, and the Italian *Chiesa Evangelica* in Soho—this last-mentioned gave excellent practice, for the service in addition to the address,

consisted in congregational reading of the Bible, each one present reading in turn. Oral practice in Spanish I gained from intercourse with a Spanish Missioner to the sailors of that nationality in Dockland.

After the suppression of the Commune of Paris and the massacre at Père-la-Chaise crowds of refugees congregated in Soho, not a few men of high attainments, Clemenceau among them, some of whom gave Sunday evening lectures in French on scientific subjects at a public-house there. Certain others joined our Secularist club in St. Luke's. One strapping young militant *communard* I recall, who bore on his face the scar of a sabre-cut from fighting at the barricades against the Versailles troops in Paris, whose explanation of failure was *Nous n'avons pas tué assez de prêtres!*¹ I am not sure the words were to be taken in their naked literalness. A half-humorous, half-malicious pleasure in the misfortunes or discomfitures of the priest is a prevalent strain in the mentality of the common people of France. At the great Easter fair of the *Pain d'Épice* outside Paris one of the most popular shows is, or rather was, for I suspect the cinema

¹ We didn't kill enough priests.

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has superseded the like, a *Vue d' Enfer pour trois sous* (a sight of Hell for three half-pence). On the stage was represented a lurid scene of the flaming pit of hell with Satan, a fearsome being, seated in judgment on a throne at its mouth. Typical sinners were haled before him by attendant devils: the milk-woman who was so good a Christian that she baptized her milk The drunkard, and as he is hurled down a fiercer flame bursts forth: *Voilà l'esprit qui brûle* (That's the spirit burning), comments the audience. Last of all the *clou* of the whole show; a priest is dragged forth beneath whose *soutane* a woman is concealed. His sins are recited. The devils fling him down into the pit, whereupon the Satanic judge remarks to the intense satisfaction of the audience: *Et si c'était le dernier quel bon débarrasement!* (And if it were the last what a good riddance!)

Excellent practice in German was accessible at a German Socialist club meeting in Soho. One dramatic evening remains in my memory when a member, accused of being a spy in the pay of the German police, defended himself with fine force and rare eloquence. A revolutionary Socialist journal, *Die Freiheit*,

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printed in red ink and edited by a well-known firebrand, Johann Most, was sold at the meetings.

My chief indebtedness for higher education was due to the happy localization of the evening lectures, organized by the University Extension Society in the early 'seventies near my work in Whitechapel, at the lecture theatre of the London Hospital, and later, at Toynbee Hall after its foundation in memory of Arnold Toynbee by Cambridge and Oxford men (I like to remember that Cambridge gave the initiative to the University Extension Movement). There I sat under the eminent Oxford historian, Professor Samuel Rawson Gardiner, whose broad and impartial treatment of history, genial manner, range of view, and ease and clarity of diction, were a rich intellectual endowment to us Toynbee students.

It is my privilege to have known Arnold Toynbee and to have been present at his last lecture in Newman Street, London, when stricken by ill-health and shamefully heckled and mocked by a few violent Socialists in the audience, due probably to a strain of sentiment in the address which they regarded as patronizing, this self-devoted martyr to social work in

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East London and other industrial centres sank into exhaustion. He never recovered from the breakdown and died in 1883 of inflammation of the brain. Arnold Toynbee was the most beautiful character I have ever known. If Oxford had produced none other than Arnold Toynbee and Bolton King it would have justified itself in the eyes of democracy.

To Dr. Gardiner I owe whatever success I may have achieved in writing or lecturing on History. As an instance of the modesty ever associated with true greatness an incident may be worth mentioning which occurred during Dr. Gardiner's lectures at Toynbee Hall. Dealing with Modern French History, the lecturer repeated the unfounded charge so often levelled at Louis Blanc—his responsibility for the creation and inevitable failure of the *Ateliers Nationaux* in 1848. My reading and contact with French refugees had given a special interest to the revolutionary period, and I made bold to write to the professor, respectfully calling his attention to the error. A courteous reply followed, asking for my authority. I marked the relevant passages and sent the books on. At the next lecture the professor began by rehabilitating Louis

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Blanc and generously acknowledging the service a student had rendered. The act made a lasting impression on me and my fellow-students.

Inspiring, too, were Churton Collins's lectures on English Literature and Dr. Pye Smith's on Physiology, illustrated by the skeleton of a German soldier who fell in the war of 1870 which was trundled out during one lecture at the London Hospital. To the teachers and lecturers at the College for Men and Women and the Working Men's College in Bloomsbury and to the eminent scientists and scholars who generously gave their services on Saturday evenings there, I owe a great debt of gratitude, more especially for breadth in general culture.

Interest in the fine arts was evoked by the fortuitous location of the Wallace collection of pictures in the Bethnal Green Museum and the evening opening of its doors. So moving was the impression made on me by this first contact with the work of the Italian School of painting that during the working day I sometimes stole odd hours to feast my eyes on the pictures, for the contemplation of great art is, like reading great literature, an emotional experience.

Creation of Toynbee Hall

The arts of music and the drama were not without honour in East London. For devotees of classic English tragedy seasons of Shakespearean plays were given at the Pavilion Theatre in the Whitechapel Road by the J. B. Howe Company and by Mr. and Mrs. Bandman at the Standard Theatre in Shoreditch. The East Londoner preferred his tragedy full-bodied. The performers might have deserved the reproaches of Hamlet to the players in the Castle; but the Garrick tradition still survived and travelling companies in the 'seventies were at least careful of their elocution. One odd incident I recall. During the hushed silence which always attended the delivery of Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be," Howe, annoyed by some chattering scene-shifters in the wings, turned aside and muttered in a stage whisper, audible to us in the front row of the pit (entrance sixpence), "Hold your bloody row, can't you?" and calmly proceeded—"To die, to sleep," etc.

A long-forgotten drama, *Ingomar*, was frequently staged at the Pavilion Theatre and the Standard Theatre in Shoreditch, for the tragic, rather than the comic muse, appealed

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to an East End audience. Classic English Comedy one heard from the sixpenny gallery of the Strand and the shilling gallery of the Haymarket Theatres: *The School for Scandal*, *The Rivals*, *The Liar*, the leading character of the last-named played by the inimitable Charles Mathews¹ whose joints stiffened by age made kneeling and rising a difficult performance. The transpontine type of drama had its home in Whitechapel at the Effingham Theatre opposite the Pavilion, and a popular music hall, the Cambridge, near Quaker Street provided the unlovely proletariat with indecorous entertainment. A popular star artist was George Leybourne who captured the East End with his song, *Champagne Charlie is my name*.

Seasonable turns of opera in English were given at the Pavilion Theatre by the J. M. Turner company: *Faust*, *The Bohemian Girl*, *Martha*, *Maritana*—thrilling experiences; one seemed to be treading on air as one made one's way home. To the chamber music provided by the People's Concert Society—the East

¹ Charles Mathews was the most remarkable actor of his day. The beauty, rapidity, clearness, and perfection of his elocution were amazing. He could deliver more clear-cut words in a given time than any other speaker I remember.

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End equivalent of the Monday "Pops"—we East Londoners owed a broadened musical taste. Interest in Wagnerian opera was awakened in me at a lecture given by Mr. Labouchere¹ at a Workmen's club in the Bethnal Green Road on the great German master's music which led to the expenditure of sundry half-crowns for admission to the galleries of Covent Garden and Her Majesty's Theatres and, later in life, to pilgrimages to Bayreuth.

The founders of Toynbee Hall² knew a far different Commercial Street from the clean, well-policed thoroughfare we now know. In my young days, still known as the "new street," it had cut its way through a mass of sordid slums of which sections remained on either side, the haunts of thieves and prostitutes, rarely entered, and always at his risk,

¹ Bradlaugh's colleague as Member of Parliament for Northampton. Proprietor and editor of *Truth* and publisher of the *Coming K*, a brilliant and daring skit in the form of a travesty of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, on Edward, Prince of Wales (Edward VII), notorious for his breaches of the Victorian proprieties, and who, as Sir Sydney Lee neatly expresses it, "suffered somewhat in moral robustness." The *Coming K* appeared as the *Truth* Annual at the end of 1870. The Mordaunt divorce case proceedings were opened early in that same year. It was a difficult period for monarchical prestige. Much scandalous gossip was rife among the men in the workshop, best left unremembered.

² See *Canon Barnett, his Life, Work, and Friends*, by his Wife, 1918.

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by any well-dressed person. The equality of bestial depravity with the male which members of the female persuasion could descend to, sight and hearing of the passer-by were only too painfully cognizant of: women, swearing, fighting, clawing, *ritu ferarum*, with lacerated, bloody faces and breasts—a modern enactment of the rowdy medieval convent scene depicted in *Piers Plowman* where the women slang each other “. . . Til aither cleped othere ‘hore’ and of with the clothes, Til bothe here hendes (heads) were bar and blody here chekes.”¹

The first act of welcome Canon Barnett met with from one of his future parishioners on entering Commercial Street to take possession of St. Jude’s vicarage was to be knocked down and have his watch stolen. Later, a like greeting met the late J. M. Dent, the well-known publisher and founder of the Everyman’s Library, who was tripped up and suffered a similar loss. A brougham draws up at the entrance of the settlement. Lord — alights and enters. A passing thief calmly puts his hand over the back of the carriage, appropriates a valuable rug and walks away under

¹ Prof. W. A. Skeat’s edition, 1886, vol. i, p. 143.

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the coachman's eyes, who dares not leave his seat. Such was Commercial Street in earlier days. Two ruffians, however, learned to respect the "toffs" at Toynbee Hall, for, to their amazement on attacking a young Oxford resident skilled in the art of self-defence they were severely punished and laid flat.

During the excitement caused by the Jack-the-Ripper murders¹ two young Neapolitan lawyers, on a visit to London, were commended to me. On asking how I could serve them, with one voice came the request, could I lead them to a scene of a *Giacomo-lo-Squarciatore* murder? I had but a few yards to take them from Toynbee Hall, where we met, to Wentworth Street, then locally known as the "Ripper Street." One hardly expected a Neapolitan lawyer to betray trepidation at a scene reminiscent of blood, but I distinctly felt a flutter of nerves as they pressed against me in the dark night on nearing the squalid scene where one of the crimes took place. A suggestion to extend the experience to Mitre Court, a few hundred yards farther on, scene of a second horror, was rejected.

¹ Five horrible mutilations of women were perpetrated in East London between August and November 1888.

Chapter VII

SOCIALISM. AUTHORSHIP

My first contact with the Socialist movement dates back to the late 'seventies or early 'eighties, to the English section of the German Socialist club in Soho, a small section—we were seven. Our secretary, Kitz, was a zealous propagandist in the cause, later taken up and given employment by William Morris. The great prophet and leader, however, of English Socialism in those days was Henry Mayers Hyndman, founder of the Social Democratic Federation, a university and society man, a mining company director, and a widely travelled man of the world. He possessed the saving grace of a love of music, was an excellent flautist,¹ and was well read in economic and political science, a leader of exuberant, optimistic faith in the new social gospel such as to cherish the hope of winning

¹ When I first called on Mr. Hyndman and was ushered into his drawing-room the great tribune was fluting "O for the Wings of a Dove."

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the support of Lord Beaconsfield and the new Tory Democratic Party for actualizing in legislation his socialistic ideals.

Hyndman has been described as "perhaps England's greatest orator." He was a man of generous impulses and one of the most typical and memorable of modern Englishmen, certainly the most powerful and eloquent popular speaker I have ever heard, though carrying less sheer weight of will-power and force of domination over the masses in an open-air meeting than Bradlaugh. He, Bradlaugh, was "a hero, a giant, a terrific personality," says Mr. Bernard Shaw, "who dwarfed everything around him." In fact, he was *the only* controversialist whom Mr. Shaw confesses to have been afraid of in debate.¹ Oddly enough, in later days, the Hyndmans became my excellent neighbours here in Brasted (Kent) where I now write.

It is not my purpose to deal with the history of the Socialist movement. Three brothers, it is said, may sleep in one and the same bed;

¹ Like most big-minded men Bradlaugh attracted many devoted friends. By the Annual Dinner of the Bradlaugh Fellowship held at the Holborn Restaurant his memory was kept green until 1916, when the war interrupted the celebrations, and they were never renewed. Both Hyndman and Shaw had presided at meetings of the Fellowship.

but each will dream a different dream. Soon the fissiparous nature of Socialistic thought declared itself, and the movement proliferated into three main schools of propaganda: Hyndman's Democratic Federation, the Socialist League under William Morris, and the Fabian Society under the Webbs and Bernard Shaw. There is small need at the present moment to emphasize the influence of the last-named body on social legislation in this country when certain of its members now sit in the seats of the mighty in the Lords and Commons.

It is a far cry to "Bloody Sunday,"¹ in November 1887, when one thousand six hundred police, and a battalion of Foot Guards with fixed bayonets, held Trafalgar Square against a demonstration of the unemployed organized by the Socialists; when John Burns, at the head of two hundred stalwarts, charged a line of police (which perhaps explains his apotheosis as the archangel in Sir William Richmond's mosaic in St. Paul's Cathedral); when Mrs. Besant's wagonette tried to break a charge of police horse; when Hyndman escaped through the Grand Hotel at Charing Cross;

¹ Nearly one hundred and fifty demonstrators were treated at the hospital, chiefly for injuries caused by the truncheons of the police and being trampled under the hoofs of their horses.

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when Morris's contingent was turned back by the police and never reached the Square. It was a narrow escape from what might have been an ugly business. The soldiers were kept well in hand and were reduced to give vent to their irritation at being called out to a hated Sunday duty by spitting on the demonstrators as they passed by them—a foul and filthy substitute for the bayonet and the rifle. It was a revolting insult, bitterly resented by those of us Secularists who attended, as many did, not as Socialists, but as a protest against the attack on the right of public meeting in the Square.

There are two world-shaking books I never take in my hand without a certain feeling of awe—the *Contrat Social* of Rousseau and *Das Kapital* of Marx.¹ The Marxian revolutionary social teaching was slow in penetrating this country, but, during the 'seventies and 'eighties of last century, indications were obvious both on the platform and in the audience of the Hall of Science that the Marxian bible, or rather the earlier communist manifesto (1848) of Marx and Engels—the first volume of *Das*

¹ An English translation of this work has been (1930) published by Messrs. Dent in their Everyman's Library.

Kapital did not appear till 1867—had begun to leaven English democratic thought. It quickly made a more potent appeal than mere republicanism and negative freethought to the working and labouring classes of East London.

It was in 1883 that Mrs. Besant became a convert after hearing a lecture by Louise Michel, a communist exile. Louise had a remarkable gift of moving eloquence—I well remember the emotional effect of her peculiar appealing voice (I can hear it still), the recurrent "*Tenez! Tenez!*" with which she held her hearers in the many lectures I attended. In 1885 Mrs. Besant became a member of the Fabian Society, and a powerful recruit to the Socialist movement.

Another convert to Socialism was Dr. Aveling, one of the few among my acquaintances who had read and understood *Das Kapital*, as his admirable course of lectures at South Place Chapel proved. Aveling was a man of prodigious intellectuality who, it was said, could have earned a thousand pounds a year at coaching.¹ Unhappily, owing to the devastating effect of alcohol on the moral

¹ In 1879 Dr. Aveling had been dismissed from the Chair of Comparative Anatomy at the London University for having joined the National Secular Society.

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character, Aveling's responsibility for the tragic end of Marx's gifted daughter Eleanor became only too evident. During the latter part of their informal union they were living together in a south-eastern suburb of London, near where I then lodged. It was a sad experience of moral wreckage.

At length, in the vicissitudes of life and death, at thirty years of age, a master basket-maker, I was able more freely to dispose of my time for literary work and foreign travel by concentrating the business in much the same fashion as Mr. Disraeli "concentrated" the Turkish Empire in 1878. Having thus secured relative freedom in the afternoons I was able to spend them at the Reading Room¹ of the British Museum and the London Institution library in Finsbury Circus. Occasional weeks or fortnights were won for foreign travel. Still later, in 1903, and after the foundation of the Toynbee Travellers' Club, with much hesitancy and searching of heart and mind, I was persuaded by Mr. J. M. Dent to accept a commission to write the *Story of Venice*, whose success, largely due to the

¹ I still hold the precious green life ticket of admission to the Reading Room granted to me on July 23, 1884.

admirable illustrations in colour by Mr. O. F. M. Ward, and in line by Miss Nellie Ericson, led to the writing of other similar works—*Paris, The Venetian Palaces*, and volumes in the Medieval Towns series—*Venice, Paris, Avignon*; an Introductory Essay on the life, and a translation of the *Fioretti*, of St. Francis, I also contributed to the Everyman series. As illustrative of the penetrative force and wide range of the Franciscan appeal, I may be permitted to quote the following letter from a Japanese author:

Feb. 28th, 1922.

DEAR MR. THOMAS OKEY,

It is a great honour for me to write this letter to you. I beg your pardon for my presumption.

For several years I have been studying Saint Francis with profound reverence and admiration. There are in Japan some works describing the Saint left by Paul Sabatier and Johannes Jorgensen. Lately I have likewise published *The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi*.

I have a great desire to translate your *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* into Japanese in order to introduce the Saint's anecdotes widely to our people. Please give me your permission.

I pray that God's blessing may abide with you forever:

Cordially yours.

Y. MIYAZAKI.¹

¹ Unhappily, Mr. Miyazaki writes to me, the whole edition of his translation was swallowed up in the disastrous Tokio earthquake and his publisher ruined.



THOMAS OKEY WITH A FRANCISCAN FRIAR

Authorship

Far the most important of my literary labours I owe to Mr. Dent's daring design to publish in the Temple Classics, translations (with the texts) of the whole of Dante's works in Italian under the editorship of the Rev. Philip Wicksteed and Dr. Oelsner, in which I was commissioned to translate the *Purgatorio*, the *Vita Nuova* and the *Canzoniere* (except the *Canzoni*, which were translated by Mr. Wicksteed, who also was responsible for the translation of the *Paradiso*, the *Convivio*, and the Latin works).¹ Our common labours, begun in 1899, were successfully completed in 1906, by the volume containing the *Vita Nuova* and the *Canzoniere*—the last volume of the only complete edition of Dante's works in any modern language. The *Inferno* volume, first published in 1900, has now been reprinted sixteen times, the other volumes of the *Divina Commedia* almost as many. The whole work is now to be republished in a new edition.

¹ For the *Inferno* Dr. John Carlyle's famous version was adopted with some few revisions.