

By
F. W. JOWETT



*What
made
me*



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A SOCIALIST

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL FOREWORD

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FOREWORD

F. W. JOWETT, First Commissioner of Works in the Labour Cabinet of 1924, and Member of Parliament for Bradford (West) from 1906 to 1918, and for Bradford (East) from 1922 to 1924, herein tells what made him a Socialist. As a simple statement of faith and the causes which led up to its adoption, it is a document of unique importance and undoubted interest, not only to that large circle who have been co-workers with the writer, but to the younger generation now coming forward to achieve the ideal which the earlier pioneers set before themselves as an hardly realisable possibility.

It is, however, incomplete in that it does not tell us about the man himself nor of his work for Socialism and the Labour Movement. A few words of introduction may therefore be permitted.

Born in 1864, F. W. Jowett commenced work in a Bradford weaving shed as a half-timer when he was eight years of age, and for a number of years he followed his trade, mastering it until he held the position of manufacturer's assistant. Whilst studying and working he was at the same time thinking of his fellows, so that when the call came to leave industry for service he was ready to respond.

In 1887 he was stating the case in the local press for Labour representation and the need for a separate group distinct from Liberals and Tories in Parliament. He was active in support of the workpeople concerned in the great strike at the Manningham Mills, when over 4,000 workers were affected (December 1890 to April 1891), and consequent upon interference with the rights of public meeting, the Riot Act had to be read in Bradford Town Hall Square. Following upon the strike came the formation of the Bradford Labour Union, in which Mr. Jowett became an active worker, and in 1893 he was a delegate to the conference at which the I.L.P. was established as a national organisation.

He was elected as a Labour representative to the Bradford Town Council in 1892, and immediately made his presence

felt in efforts to stimulate municipal enterprise and social service. In 1895, when unemployment and privation was very severe in the city, he condemned at a public meeting the action of the Council for refusing to admit in an official report the existence of distress arising from unemployment. This speech evoked such bitter hostility among the other members of the Council that at its next meeting he was refused a hearing in his own defence and solemnly censured by resolution. The following year, as if to make amends, the same Council elected him as Alderman, and in 1898 he became Chairman of the Health Committee. He was able to secure the abolition of the contractor and the introduction of municipal management in connection with the removal of refuse. Under his inspiration also was carried through an extensive scheme of slum clearance and house building.

For fifteen years in all, until his Parliamentary duties prevented, he was a member of the Bradford Council, and during the whole time he worked with unremitting activity. On its Education Committee he has the credit of being responsible for the inauguration of the Movement for feeding necessitous school children.

It is now 21 years (November 1904) since a sub-committee of which Mr. Jowett was a member, reported to the Town Council that 329 children had gone to school breakfastless and it had resolved (1) to undertake to provide food for the children who go to school without sufficient food, (2) to make an application to the City Council for a grant to enable the Education Committee to provide food. These resolutions were accepted by the Council, but at the next meeting which lasted from 3 p.m. on one day to 2.35 a.m. the next, it was rescinded despite the fiercest opposition of the then Labour group.

Two years afterwards Mr. Jowett was elected to Parliament, and there his maiden speech was on the School, Provision of Meals Bill, which afterwards became law, and the fight for feeding school children in case of necessity was won and no longer left to haphazard charity.

On page 11 Mr. Jowett refers to an early meeting at which he spoke; it may not be out of place, therefore, to quote an

account of this meeting as recorded by Mrs. Bruce Glasier, who was present.

"A pale-faced, dark-haired, slight young man was on his feet asking quietly if he would be allowed to move an amendment, declaring that this meeting regarded the Labour candidate as in every way equally worthy with Mr. Illingworth of the support of all true followers of Jesus Christ, the carpenter's son." The request was rudely refused, and a wild half-hour followed. Never have I seen a platform of men look so abjectly wretched; many of the ministers buried their faces in their hands as the uproar continued.

"Suddenly there was a move; a great river of motion was visible in the crowded audience. Borne in its front was Fred Jowett; through the people's midst he was carried on, and onward till he was literally flung up upon the platform. Paler than ever, his hair hanging damply on his forehead, he lifted his hand, and the turbulent audience grew suddenly quiet.

"It was no oratorical flight that followed. In a clear, but low-pitched voice Fred Jowett arraigned the chairman and, through him, the whole of capitalist Bradford for its selfish opposition to the interests of the workers. Facts—hard, unyielding facts, that proved the absolute necessity of legislation that would secure the workers even the poor wages they had actually earned; facts that showed it was the worship of Mammon and not of God which governed the political conscience of the Liberal M.P.s whom the Nonconformist ministers were delighted to honour."

The knowledge shown and the power evinced by his first speech in the House of Commons has been maintained throughout his Parliamentary career. He has not been one of the frequent speakers, but when he has intervened in debate it has always been with effect. His interest in municipal administration has been shown not only by his practical work but by his little book "The Socialist and the City," and long service as a member of the Local Legis-

lation Committee of the House of Commons. He was also, for a time, Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

A persistent advocate of international peace, prior to the great war Mr. Jowett sought for information by means of questions to Ministers, regarding the commitments of this country, and was one of the small group in Parliament which spoke and worked as opportunity offered, for peace and a reasoned settlement.

He has consistently urged that Members of Parliament should cast their votes on the merits of the question before them regardless of Cabinet or Party interests, and is the acknowledged exponent of the case for the democratisation of Parliament. His views are explained in detail in the report submitted to the Annual Conference of the I.L.P. held at Gloucester, 1925 (published separately at 6d.), but briefly it may be said that he urges the institution of a committee system with a Cabinet Minister as chairman of the committee concerned with his Department, and the members of which are entitled to question officials and secure any necessary information relating to the committee, the material proceedings of such committees to be reviewed by the full House of Commons, and the voting records of the committees to be available for publication. Such procedure, he maintains, would afford complete and more effective Parliamentary survey of departmental administration and legislation arising therefrom, and the departments would have better contact with the legislature. It would also give to members the opportunity and the right to take an active and more informed part in the administrative as well as in the legislative work of Parliament.

Mr. Jowett is a member of the National Council of the I.L.P. and has been its Chairman for the full period of three years. He has been Chairman of the Labour Party (1921-22) and a member of its Executive since 1916, but his other public activities throughout his life have been many. He is presently utilising his freedom from Parliamentary duties (he only failed to secure re-election in October 1924 by 66 votes) to carry the Socialist message of the I.L.P. far and wide through Great Britain.

What Made Me A Socialist

By F. W. JOWETT.

I HAVE been asked how I became a Socialist, and to let my reply be published as a pamphlet. Now that I am about to fulfil my promise, I confess that I am doubtful whether I ought to have made it. It is natural to feel a little awkward even in speaking of one's personal experiences. To sit down to write of them for others to read in cold print gives one the appearance of conceit. Does it really matter what made me a Socialist? I don't know. I can only say that friends whose opinion I respect say that it does, and then leave whoever reads my story to judge for themselves.

There is a difficulty, however, about the beginning of this kind of story. At least there is in my case. It may be that there are Socialists whose conversion came by way of sudden revelation, as men sometimes are converted to religion, when they are shocked into changing their manner of life by an inspired word or an unlooked-for experience which terrifies or exalts them. But not many Socialists are made so suddenly. With most people, the change into conscious belief in Socialism is not clearly marked by any particular event. The exceptions are mainly rich people, whose idea of social relations has been so false that they have believed the working-class dependent on them and not they on the working-class. Such must be born again into an entirely new mind before they can be Socialists, and sometimes the conversion comes suddenly like the conviction of sin to the converted sinner.

The working-class man needs no re-birth into the Socialist mind. He drifts naturally into common action with his fellow-workers, and this in itself, makes him class conscious and gives him the Socialist outlook. All that is necessary is knowledge to give expression to his experience in

accordance with the requirements of his day and generation. So it was with me.

The week following my eighth birthday was my first week as a wage-earner in a textile factory. I was one of the least of the children lined up to pass the doctor, whose duty it was to certify fitness for work in the mill. The most the doctor did to satisfy himself that the age declared was correct was to look at our teeth. A copy of the registration of birth was not demanded, nor expected. The working hours for half-timers then were 6 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., with half-an-hour off for breakfast one week, and from 1.15 p.m. to 5.45 p.m. the next week. The remaining half days, except on Saturday, were spent in school. These hours applied from Mondays to Fridays inclusive. On Saturdays, half-timers worked from 6 a.m. to 8.30 a.m. one week, and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. the next week. At the age of thirteen the half-timer became a full-timer.

Tired children sleep soundly, and I was no exception. And in winter time, when the wind bites and the streets are dark, even grown-up people are reluctant to rise so early. But my mother made things easy for us. She knew. Always there was the bright blazing fire ready to warm us, and hot tea to drink before leaving for work.

My mother had been a half-timer herself, and to her probably more than to anyone else, I owe my love of common folk. She was one of the little orphans brought into the West Riding when cheap child labour was making fortunes for mill-owners in the days of their first El Dorado. On my father's side I was rooted in the West Riding, but my mother came from Devonshire when she was not more than seven years of age. Like many other children in those days, she had been deposited for exploitation, fatherless and motherless, alone among strange people and regardless of consequences. Occasionally she would reveal incidents of her early life in my hearing, and they sank deeply into my mind, although she was quite unaware of the fact. It seemed natural that she should tell also of Chartist meetings, although she was so young at the time and so little that for safety against the crowd she crept under the wagon from

which the speeches were delivered. Early impressions of this sort must surely have made me a potential democrat in my very early years, and a class conscious one, too.

The precarious position of working folk under the present system of capitalism was thoroughly pressed home to my understanding between the years of fourteen and eighteen. A wave of trade depression began to spread itself about the year 1878. The position of the firm at which my father and the other three wage-earners of the family worked, became insecure. My father held a position of some responsibility, but the pay was small. He was trusted and respected, and this to him counted as much as the money he received. For nearly three years the uncertainty continued, and then the firm dissolved. Fortunately the dissolution was followed by reconstruction on the part of one of the partners under improved trade conditions.

In these years I was not only feeling deeply the uncertainty of the workers' livelihood, but I was realising how cheaply labour of the highest skill was bought. Weaving, with which I was associated, is a most skilful operation. The best weavers are generally the daughters of weavers. Keen eyesight, quickly moving fingers, light touch and habits of neatness in their work are required. To find one broken thread in a mass of tightly stretched threads, sometimes all black, and to replace it through its empty eyelet (of which there may be sixty or seventy to every inch) without breaking or fraying more threads, is a delicate operation. And much of a weavers' work is of this difficult kind.

The average wage earned at mills in full work, where wages were relatively high, would not be more than twelve shillings per week. A few weavers of exceptional skill would earn fourteen or fifteen shillings. The slow and inexpert ones would earn ten or eleven shillings. Many of the weavers were married women with children, and were of child-bearing age. They worked up to within a week or a fortnight of confinement, and re-appeared generally a month after confinement. Working at a tense occupation all day, cleaning at home in the evenings until bedtime, washing

and baking Saturdays and Sundays, they were indeed wage slaves.

Seeing the working folk giving so much for so little, and that little so uncertain, made me wonder why they submitted so quietly. The answer was that they were not conscious of their strength—they were not even conscious of the wrong being done to them. They felt life was hard but blamed nobody in particular.

Some employers had a bad name because their weavers earned less than others, but, beyond an endeavour on the part of the low-paid ones to get work where the pay was higher, little was attempted. There was no trade union at that time—at least, I never heard of one until some years later, and only in recent years has it been relatively strong. Only the Factory Acts, limiting the hours of labour for women, young persons and children, gave any protection to the textile worker.

Of all the wrongs of the workers that made a lasting impression on me, the meanest of all was the method of wage reduction practised upon the weavers, whose skilful occupation I have described. They were paid by the piece.* When the weaver begins on a new warp, she receives with it a ticket giving particulars of her work at the wage per piece. One of the objects of the weaver's ticket should be to prevent concealment of wage reductions. But employers throughout the West Riding dodged this object by adopting a secret code of letters to represent figures. Under cover of this subterfuge I have seen the length of pieces increased by a couple of yards at a time from fifty-eight to seventy, without any adjustment of wages. This practice was not ended until it was made a legal obligation on the part of employers to use plain figures for all particulars on which the wages were paid.

To give expression to the workers' wrongs, to make them speak, to promote class consciousness, is the duty of the

* The warp on the beam is marked in measured lengths, and when each length has been completed—crossed by the weft in the shuttle and made into cloth—the woven cloth is cut off, folded, and called a "piece." Probably this may be the origin of the term "piece-work."

man of Socialist mind and purpose. An opportunity came to fulfil this duty, when, a neighbouring Member of Parliament, an employer, who had meanly tried to torpedo this obligation in the House, took the chair at a public meeting in Bradford. The meeting was called to mobilise the Nonconformist vote in opposition to Ben Tillett for the Parliamentary Election of 1892, and the Socialists present put me in charge of an amendment to the platform resolution. When the Chairman endeavoured to prevent me from speaking, I was almost carried on to the platform against the resistance of opponents. I had the pleasure of putting the M.P. in the dock, as he sat dumbfounded in his chair. Both sides were acutely class conscious that night!

I have often tried to remember what age I was when I read the first book that brought me on the way to the Socialist faith. It is not easy to recall. My progress to Socialism began long before I knew where I was going. At about fourteen I read Carlyle's "Past and Present." I am sure this book did quite a lot to prepare my mind to receive the idea of a new social order by destroying my sub-conscious acceptance of the present system. But its effect on me was entirely destructive. Carlyle's gospel of hero-worship, his laudation of the idea of government by wise, strong men, did not appeal to me at all.

Previously, when I have indulged in recollections of my progress towards Socialism, it has not occurred to me to ask myself why it was that only the destructive part of Carlyle's teaching appealed to me. There must have been something in me that could not respond to his powerful and eloquent glorification of the super-men—including the captains of industry who would organise production not for profit but for use,—for in all things else he made a deep impression on my young mind. What could it be? What other experience had woven itself into me? The more I read of Carlyle's heroes, the less attraction they had. I did not like his Luther, his Frederick the Great, nor his Cromwell. In some way, at some time, I must have imbibed a repugnance to personal domination which rests on force. I had in me the feeling that the common people should not be driven,

and the more Carlyle crowned and canonised a ruling class, the more I felt I was on the side of the common people. I was at heart a democrat. I was class conscious.

In accounting for this aversion of my early youth to Carlyle's heroes, the impression left by my mother's stories of the Chartists and her early associations are important to me. But I think also a book had something to do with it. It was one of the first books I ever read—excepting, of course, the story books which all children read,—and although at the present time the episode is but a faint and indistinct memory, it surely has been with me and in me ever since. The book to which I refer recorded the life of Dr. Livingstone, who won his way into the heart of Africa without force, who conquered savages by serving them, ruled them by doing good and commanding their respect. I cannot help thinking, as I recall the reading of that book, that my Socialist mind was being prepared even so long ago, for there is no place in Socialism for the dominant persons who cleave their way to power by force, whether it is hearts or heads they break as they go.

Some years after I made the acquaintance of Thomas Carlyle's writings, I was induced by a lover of Ruskin's writings to read "Unto this Last," the book to which Ruskin attached more importance than to any of his works. I was then eighteen. This took me a stage further. Ruskin's onslaught on the present system is no less deadly than Carlyle's, but otherwise the two writers differ greatly. Government by the wise and strong—industrialism transformed by philanthropic captains of industry,—was Carlyle's way to the new social order. Ruskin, on the other hand, was less hopeful of super-men bringing in the new social order. He realised that poverty, unemployment and ignorance are a national responsibility. He boldly declared for State intervention. He advocated State education, State factories and stores, State training for the unemployed, and State pensions and homes for the old and destitute.

"Unto this Last," containing the above proposals* was published in 1862. If the proposals had appeared in a

*See extract page 15.

Socialist programme, they would then have seemed revolutionary. Twenty years after the book was published, it made me a Socialist in all but the name, and when, shortly afterwards, I came across pamphlets by William Morris and Edward Carpenter, I knew what I was without any doubt.

The pamphlets that first gave name and shape to my beliefs were "England's Ideal," by Edward Carpenter, and "Useful Work against Useless Toil," by William Morris. I began to buy *The Commonwealth*, a weekly paper edited by William Morris. It was in this paper I read Morris' "Dream of John Ball," and, to the best of my recollection, his "News from Nowhere" also.

The discovery that it was this Socialist faith I had long been wanting had a marked effect on me. I had to tell of it. There was a workmate of mine, at that time, who couldn't read. He was, nevertheless, very much alive and interested in political questions. He worked in a part of the factory in which there was no machinery, and at a job which for hours kept his fingers busy twisting threads together in oft-repeated motion. All the time he could think and talk of other things than his work. I carried my Socialist pamphlets about with me and read them to him in spare intervals, a few pages at a time; the same with the *Commonwealth* and other literature. He became as keen as I was myself, and the process of reading and explaining deepened my own convictions. We talked at meal times to the other men.

Some time afterwards, Robert Blatchford began a series of articles on the Manchester slums. These were excellent propaganda. He began to write about Socialism, and followed with "Merrie England." In the meantime, I had begun to attend meetings addressed by Socialists. Morris himself was one of the men I heard. It was my first Socialist meeting. I remember he looked like a jolly sailor in his blue suit with reefer jacket, and he read his speech from manuscript. I also heard Carpenter and Kropotkin about the same time.

These meetings were occasions for drawing together the two small groups of Socialists in Leeds and Bradford, where branches of the Socialist League had been formed. There were less than a dozen members in the Bradford branch, and I became one of them. Although weak in numbers, we were strong in the faith.

Sometimes in summer time, the joint forces of Leeds and Bradford Socialism tramped together to spread the gospel by printed and spoken word in neighbouring villages. And at eventide, on the way home, as we walked in country lane or on river bank, we sang:—

*"What is this, the sound and rumour? What is this that all men bear,
Like the wind in hollow valleys when the storm is drawing near,
Like the rolling on of ocean in the eventide of fear?
'Tis the people marching on."*

And we believed they were.

EXTRACT

from the Preface of
"UNTO THIS LAST," by John Ruskin.
10th May, 1862.

. . . lest the reader should be alarmed by the hints thrown out during the following investigation of first principles, as if they were leading him into unexpectedly dangerous ground, I will, for his better assurance, state at once the worst of the political creed at which I wish him to arrive.

1. First,—that there should be training schools for youth established, at Government cost,* and under Government discipline, over the whole country; that every child born in the country should, at the parents' wish, be permitted (and, in certain cases, be under penalty required) to pass through them; and that, in these schools, the child should (with other minor pieces of knowledge hereafter to be considered) imperatively be taught, with the best skill of teaching that the country could produce, the following three things:—

- (a) the laws of health, and the exercises enjoined by them;
- (b) habits of gentleness and justice; and
- (c) the calling by which he is to live.

2. Secondly,—that, in connection with these training schools, there should be established, also entirely under Government regulation, manufactories and workshops, for the production and sale of every useful art. And that, interfering no whit with private enterprise, nor setting any restraints or tax on private trade, but leaving both to do their best, and beat the Government if they could,—there should, at these Government manufactories and shops, be authoritatively good and exemplary work done, and pure and true substance sold; so that a man could be sure, if he chose to pay the Government price, that he got for his

*It will be probably inquired by near-sighted persons, out of what funds such schools could be supported. The expedient modes of direct provision for them I will examine hereafter; indirectly, they would be far more than self-supporting. The economy in crime alone (quite one of the most costly articles of luxury in the modern European market), which such schools would induce, would suffice to support them ten times over. Their economy of labour would be pure gain, and that too large to be presently calculable.

money bread that was bread, ale that was ale, and work that was work.

3. Thirdly,—that any man, or woman, or boy, or girl, out of employment should be at once received at the nearest Government school, and set to such work as it appeared, on trial, they were fit for, at a fixed rate of wages determinable every year :—that, being found incapable of work through sickness, should be tended ; but that being found objecting to the work, they should be set, under compulsion of the strictest nature, to the more painful and degrading forms of necessary toil, especially to that in mines and other places of danger (such danger being, however, diminished to the utmost by careful regulation and discipline) and the due wages of such work be retained—cost of compulsion first abstracted—to be at the workman's command, so soon as he has come to sounder mind respecting the laws of employment.

4. Lastly,—that for the old and destitute, comfort and home should be provided ; which provision, when misfortune had been by the working of such a system sifted from guilt, would be honourable instead of disgraceful to the receiver. For (I repeat this passage out of my "Political Economy of Art," to which the reader is referred for farther detail) "a labourer serves his country with his spade, just as a man in the middle ranks of life serves it with sword, pen, or lancet. If the service be less, and, therefore the wages during health less, then the reward when health is broken may be less, but not less honourable ; and it ought to be quite as natural and straightforward a matter for a labourer to take his pension from his parish, because he has deserved well of his parish, as for a man in higher rank to take his pension from his country, because he has deserved well of his country."

To which statement, I will only add, for conclusion, respecting the discipline and pay of life and death, that, for both high and low, Livy's last words touching Valerius Publicola "*de publico est elatus*," ought not to be a dishonourable close of epitaph.

"UNTO THIS LAST," by John Ruskin, can be obtained, in various editions, at 1/6, 2/-, 2/6 and upwards, from the I.L.P. Labour Literature Department, 14 Great George St., London, S.W.1. Write for the LABOUR BOOKSHELF, post free.