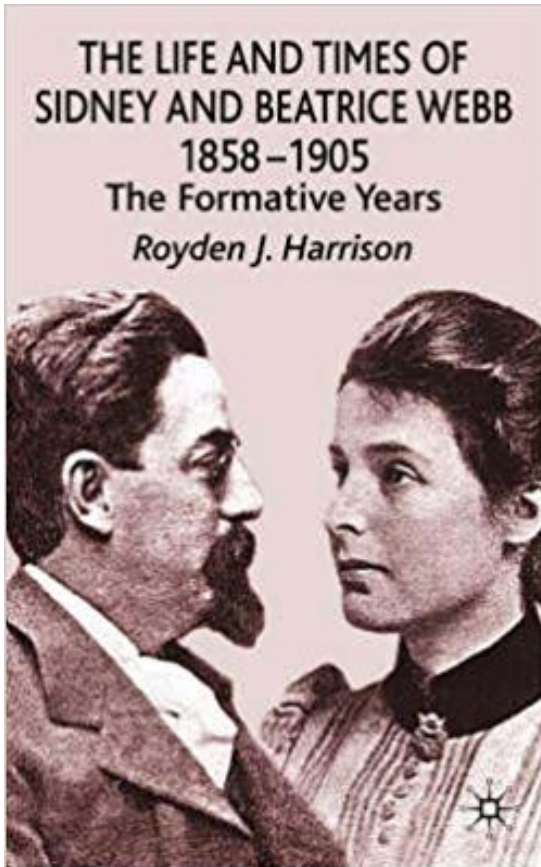


The Life and Times of Sidney and Beatrice Webb

1858–1905: The Formative Years

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palgrave

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List of Abbreviations

BP	Beatrice Potter
BW	Beatrice Webb
CWN	Charles Webb Notes
D	The Diary of Beatrice Webb 1873–1932
GBS	George Bernard Shaw
GW	Graham Wallas
<i>ID</i>	<i>Industrial Democracy</i>
L	The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb
<i>MA</i>	<i>My Apprenticeship</i>
<i>OP</i>	<i>Our Partnership</i>
PAS	Passfield Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science
RCL	Royal Commission on Labour
SW	Sidney Webb
TU	<i>The History of Trade Unionism</i>

Introduction

At the end of their lives the Webbs established a body to be known as the Passfield Trustees. Its task was to benefit the institutions which they had a hand in creating: the Fabian Society, the London School of Economics, the Labour Party, the *New Statesman*, the *Political Quarterly*, *Tribune* and so forth. In distributing the proceeds of the Webbs' estate the trustees rightly felt that it was the LSE with which Sidney and Beatrice had the longest and most continuous identification. The chairman of the trust was Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders, the noted demographic sociologist, who was also the director of the school. William Robson, Professor of Public Administration in the LSE, was also an active trustee. It was to the school and those who worked in it that most of the resources went. The school presence was not equally apparent in all the trustees. For example, Margaret Cole was there as being along with her husband, G.D.H. Cole, a life-long adversary and friend of the Webbs. John Parker MP evidently stood primarily, but not exclusively, for the Labour Party connection. These trustees were required by the last instruction to appoint a biographer.

Beatrice in her journal – a better title for her diary – states that she spent much time in contemplating the character of the ‘unemployed intellectual’ who would be given that task. When in the mid-sixties I was invited to come and meet the trustees in the House of Commons I had some doubts about whether the noun applied to me. I was certain the adjective did not.

Bertrand Russell declared that nobody had ever dared to call him an ‘intellectual’. He understood by that term someone who pretended to have more intellect than he really had. ‘Unemployed’ I was not. I had just returned from a very busy semester in Madison, Wisconsin, where I had been teaching modern British and European history and was trying to readjust to my duties as a teacher of Industrial Studies in Sheffield. I was now academic adviser for the day-release programmes for coal miners and steelworkers. The Director of the Extramural Department was among those pressing me to put myself forward for a new ‘chair’ in politics in the university. I was greatly relieved when this appointment went to Bernard Crick. I was greatly flattered when Crick asked me to join his department. No sooner had I accepted than I was confronted with a challenge from my old friend and comrade Edward Thompson to come and partner him in the direction of the Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick. I declined, but a few weeks later the university was convulsed by a crisis: Edward resigned as director of the centre; the

vice-chancellor invited me to come to Warwick to consider the succession. I agreed to do so provided I was to be made a professor or accorded equivalent powers within the Warwick University constitution. I also insisted that before I met the Warwick appointments board I should discuss with the librarian the creation of an archive of primary sources in British labour and social history. This was the beginning of what is now the Modern Records Centre, which houses the records of the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry and numerous trade unions and companies. However, my first task at Warwick was to supervise the existing student population, which was largely employed in writing theses on crime and criminals in the eighteenth century, a subject area which was certainly not mine. Thompson told me that he considered my appointment would be good for Warwick, but probably not for me. I doubt whether he was right on either count.

All these developments put back progress on the Webbs, as did my inability to resist temptations to visit Japan and Australasia. Every night the shades of Sidney and Beatrice visited me with curious and reproachful stares and interrogated me as to why I was taking so long. 'Can you write a biography?' enquired Margaret Cole. I did not know the answer. I was trying to find out, encouraged by the evident assurance of the other Passfield Trustees. They were not only helpful collectively but, like Margaret Cole, Sir Alexander, Professor Robson and especially John Parker MP gave me their recollections of the Webbs. They also encouraged me to interview others who had known them: Lord Attlee, Lady Simon of Wythenshawe, Leonard Woolf, Kingsley Martin and the most helpful of all, Bertrand Russell. (It was on my own initiative that I went to Moscow to talk to Ivan Maisky, the sometime Soviet Ambassador to the United Kingdom.) In particular I am indebted to Margaret Cole for reminding me that while it may be desirable to wait until one has read all the existing literature concerning the relationship between the Webbs and the person to be interviewed, such persons will not be around for ever. So it was when I was just beginning that I set off for Wales to see Russell and to Moscow to see Maisky.

I was made hesitant in my response to Margaret Cole's key question because I already sensed the social historian's problem: how can you see the tree for the wood? I was determined to manage a life and times: one that had, almost as much, to be a times as a life. The trustees were inclined to press me down to one volume and a couple of years. To the best of my recollection we fully agreed that the Webbs were not to be separated. We left undisturbed other potentially controversial matters.

I had not been at work for more than a few weeks before they rose to the surface. I was at work in the library of the LSE when I discovered that I was not alone in writing a Webb biography. Mrs Kitty Mugeridge

was already benefiting from the infinite helpfulness and learning of the librarian and his staff. Neither then nor upon subsequent occasions did I want to deny access to the Webb material. Yet I had worries about the Muggeridge connection. What, I wondered, was one to make of Malcolm Muggeridge's letters to his 'Aunt Bo', in which he tried to discuss with her the incidence of masturbation in Welwyn Garden City or his contention that the Soviet Union was a terrible place? Perhaps there was a reasonable contention here, but what of the remark that it was only fit for 'hunchbacks, perverts and Jews'? Mr Muggeridge was the only eminent person who declined to grant me an interview. He explained, what by chance I already knew, that his wife was writing a life. I found this 'a bit rich' and said so to the trustees. Why had they not told me about the Muggeridge activities? Professor Robson replied that I had never asked about them. Did I think they could deny access to a niece? (I had hoped that I would be spared the connection of a second cousin once removed.)

Robson went on to ask me to record any references to himself which I came across in the papers. This was a request that could not be met. Was I to tell him that Sidney regarded him as the most boring person on earth? He did not bore Beatrice, since she enjoyed asking herself why he was such a bore!

Then I discovered that I had very nearly had a most distinguished predecessor. In 1947 the Passfield Trustees had asked R.H. Tawney to write a biography of Sidney. By 1949 the work was under way and Tawney had found a research assistant in the shape of Henry Pelling. It was only then that he discovered that one of the Trustees, Margaret Cole, had embarked upon her own biographical endeavour without troubling to inform him about it. Incredibly she had chosen for her title one which Tawney had used himself in his memorial lecture of 1945: *The Webbs and Their Work*. Tawney felt that this episode made his work impossible. I found it made my own difficult.

Next I found what I took to be a still more damaging challenge. Professor Norman MacKenzie asked to stay in my house in Sheffield to discuss his editorial work on the diary of Beatrice Webb and the letters between Sidney and Beatrice. His wife Jeanne was assisting him. She went beyond the editorial role when she wrote *A Victorian Courtship: The Story of Beatrice Potter and Sidney Webb*, 1979. This offering was unhelpful. When the second invader on the field of the 'authorised biographer' appeared, Professor Robson was no longer with us. My previous question could not be put again!

Amidst these numerous challenges I felt the Webbs to be less pressing than others might have done. I think Sidney would have had some sympathy with my attitude. I doubt whether Beatrice would have been quite so emancipated.

Yet despite all the difficulties I still feel a deep sense of gratitude to the Passfield Trustees for commissioning me. Since Margaret Cole was the only one I knew, albeit slightly, I suspected that she was my main supporter. (As an 'advanced student' at Oxford I had worked under the supervision of her late husband, G.D.H. Cole.) I felt – and still feel – deeply indebted to the Universities of Sheffield and Warwick, which both granted me leave of absence with generous financial support. In addition I owe a debt to the Social Science Research Council and to the Leverhulme Foundation for enabling me to employ two research assistants. Jean McCrindle helped me – under very difficult circumstances – with the start of the project. Dr David Martin provided me with invaluable material for Webb at the Colonial Office and has been helpful in other ways. Most of my other debts must be acknowledged at a later date and elsewhere. However my old friend and colleague John Halstead must be recognised for mobilising a secretarial pool consisting of Maria Baldam, Audrey Elcock, Julie Goode, Aileen Jones, Justine Perkins and Barbara Zeun. He also provided a demanding editorial eye by which I was occasionally corrected and sometimes encouraged. I am grateful to him too for dealing with matters during my period of hospitalisation.

ROYDEN J. HARRISON

Part I
The Man with
No Inside:
Sidney Webb 1859–90

And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew.

Oliver Goldsmith

Let me say at once that I have no intention of writing an autobiography. I am, I believe, 'not that sort'. Indeed, I have very little knowledge of what has happened to me internally. I am, I suppose, what is nowadays called an extrovert. Things impinge on me and I react to the impact, occasionally, with ideas and suggestions that prove interesting ... I can supply nothing but a series of disconnected accounts of impacts and reactions.

'Reminiscences', *St Martin's Review*, October 1926

Sidney Webb is a door that will never be unlocked.

A.J.P. Taylor

1

The Shaping of a Professional Man 1859–85

1859—Webb's birth and family, early education and schools in Switzerland and Germany—Enters the civil service—Further education and examination successes—First-division clerk at the Colonial Office—Meets Sydney Olivier—Cambridge and the Whewell Scholarship—Antipathy to the classical, literary, aristocratic tradition—Life in the Zetetical Society—Sidney's first paper (1881) and pessimism—Disposition towards positivism—Webb's personality and attraction—Sidney and George Bernard Shaw—Influence of Olivier and Wallas—Activity in the 'Lambeth Parliament'—The engagement with Henry George and Karl Marx—Webb, Marshall and the 'rent of ability' leading to the doctrine of Renunciation.

Sidney was born in the heart of London on 13 July 1859. 1859 was a momentous year. In publishing it saw the first appearances of Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* and of Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. (Marx wrote in German and published in Germany, but he lived in London, within easy walking distance of the Webb household. It was at the Highgate Cemetery that Engels announced that Marx had done for human history what Darwin had done for nature.) Webb and Engels were to establish a respectful hostility at the Democratic Club. More important and interesting for the life of Sidney was the appearance in 1859 of J.S. Mill's *Essay on Liberty*, probably the most influential of all Mill's books and yet the one least congenial to the Webb spirit. Certainly it compared unfavourably with the contempt for mere money-making contained in the latter editions of the *Political Economy*, never mind the posthumously published essays on *Socialism* (1879). Sidney's father is supposed to have been actively identified with Mill's candidature when he stood for Parliament, but no hard evidence for this has been found. Of more immediate and obvious importance was the fact that 1859 saw the coincidence of Mill's *On Liberty* and Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*. Both books

have been seen as unqualified celebrations of individual liberty, meaning the absence of restraint or doing what one desired. This is possible, but only upon a careless reading. 1859 saw significant advances in collective self-help: the theory and practice of positive freedom among workmen. A fresh ambition and fresh self-confidence among the 'pompous trades and proud mechanics'. It was during the prolonged strike and lockout in the London building trades that began in 1859 that the London Trades Council was established and the principles of the 'New Model' unionism that first conquered in engineering, extended to carpenters and joiners, bricklayers, and less successfully, among painters and plasterers.

These proletarian developments roughly coincided with the rise of professionalism among the middle classes. Even lawyers and doctors, parsons and army officers, the archetypal professional gentlemen, began to come under challenge from professional associations that devised standards and enforced them. In the crucial instance of the civil service, the Northcote-Trevelyan Report of 1853 took many years to implement the system of employment by open competitive examination as against the privilege of nomination. It was in 1859 that it was enacted, with limited exceptions, that no one should for the purposes of superannuation be deemed to have served in the civil service unless he had a certificate from the Civil Service Commissioners who were first established in 1855.

As to party politics, 1859 belonged in the small minority of years that the Tories were in office between 1844 and 1874. When Reform was a question out of doors it was too alarming to be a matter for the House. When it was a parliamentary preoccupation it was too minimal or trivial or boring to engage the attention of 'the masses'. It was not until Sidney was about eight or nine years old that an extension of the franchise concerned men both outside and inside parliament so that democracy became what Bentham would have termed agenda. As for the government of London, it remained in many respects in the Dark Ages. In 1859 it was a long way behind other great urban centres in the matter of democratic reform.

Sidney Webb's mother was born, Elizabeth Mary Stacey, in East Anglia in 1825. Her father was a sea captain from Wivenhoe, near Colchester, employed in the coastal trade. The other members of her family were farmers or small property-owners living in Essex and Suffolk. Her father Benjamin and her mother died while she was still a child, and one or other of her aunts brought her up. In 1848 a brother-in-law lent her a few hundred pounds, and by 1851 she had established herself as a hairdresser and a keeper of a shop selling ladies' toilet requisites at 45 Cranbourn(e) Street, Leicester Square.¹

Across the way at number 46 Cranbourn Street there lived the family of a finisher named William Webb.² One may conjecture that it was through these neighbours that Elizabeth came to meet Charles Webb of Catherine

Street, Pimlico, whom she married at St George's Parish Church, Hanover Square, on 14 May 1854.³ He was four years younger than she was, but he came from much the same milieu. It was the world of small property-owners in sleepy towns and villages of southern England, affected by the industrial revolution through its impact upon the market, rather than by its presence as a way of life. Charles Webb's father, James, kept the Duke's Head public house in Peckham, and accumulated a fortune of several thousand pounds. However, his family was large, and most of the other members of it were in decidedly modest circumstances. His brother Thomas was a general servant or agricultural labourer. His eldest son William became a master tailor in the village. There were many relatives and dependants.⁴ When Charles Webb married Elizabeth he described himself as a 'hairdresser' and he was so described on Sidney Webb's birth certificate. On Sidney's own copy of the certificate, the word 'hairdresser' was erased, and replaced by 'accountant'. One assumes that this reflected a concern with accuracy rather than gentility. Charles Webb was no doubt an accountant, but he appears to have pursued that occupation intermittently and on a freelance basis. The hairdresser's shop provided the largest and steadiest part of the family income, and as head of the household Charles assumed the formal control of it, at least for a time. However, his real interests were in public service rather than business. He was a sergeant in the Queen's Westminster Rifle Volunteers, and a crack shot. He was also a vestryman – which explains why he was sometimes described as a rate-collector – and a Poor Law Guardian.⁵ He was reported to be a keen Radical and to have been a member of John Stuart Mill's committee when the 'Saint of Rationalism' contested the Westminster election of 1865.⁶ However, his name did not appear on the published list.⁷

Such evidence as there is concerning Elizabeth and Charles Webb suggests that she was a resourceful and industrious woman, and that he was an intelligent and public-spirited man. On the face of it, their marriage was a success. In 1946 Bernard Shaw remarked to Sidney: 'You had wonderful parents: I have never met a more gentle, conscientious, thoroughly likeable pair in my life. It was largely due to them that I can also say that I never met a man who combined your extraordinary ability with your unique simplicity and integrity of character.'⁸

Sidney, who was born at Cranbourn Street on 13 July 1859, confirmed that his was a 'happy family'.⁹ His eldest brother Charles and his younger sister Ada came to live, in their own very different ways, lives as contented and fulfilled as his own. Yet happy though they were, Sidney came to feel that one great influence was missing. He envied Ruskin who could recall as the chief blessing of his boyhood that it had taught him peace. Peace was not to be had in Cranbourn Street. The Webbs were always 'in the thick of the fight'.¹⁰ They were not poor. In 1861 they appear to

have employed three shop assistants as well as one resident servant in the house.¹¹ The rateable value of the shop and the house together came to £188.¹² Allowing for Charles Webb's contribution to the household, the family income must have been fully £500 a year. Yet they were not beyond the reach of poverty. An illness or a commercial depression might make serious inroads on their slender resources. Elizabeth and Charles both came from families of the 'middling sort', in which 'rising' and 'falling' in the social scale was a familiar experience. Their neighbours in Cranbourn Street – small merchants, dressmakers, drapers, window-blind makers, and importers of French stays – lived precariously in the unsettled regions of the lower middle class. And close by, in the teeming streets, in the maze of courts and alleyways, dwelt a small part of that great and as yet unmeasured mass, the London poor. As a young man in his twenties, Sidney declared that there was something worse than poverty, and that was the fear of it.¹³

Like most of us, Sidney received his earliest education at his mother's knee, and like most of us, he could remember nothing at all about it. He fancied that he taught himself to read 'very largely from the books and notices in the shop windows'.¹⁴ His mother took him to a succession of churches and chapels 'in search of an eloquent preacher free from sacerdotalism', but he never went to Sunday school.¹⁵ She also took him, as a very little boy, to see the Lord Mayor's Show from the steps of St Martin's Church, telling him that if he was a good boy he might himself be Lord Mayor of London. His father, as a strong Radical, doubtless had a more exact knowledge of the qualifications required for that particular office. Besides, Sidney was not always a good boy. If he managed to wander endlessly through miles of streets without ever being robbed or molested, he sometimes fell foul of authority. Once when he and his brother, elegantly and respectably attired in kilts, were playing round the Duke of York's Column, they were chased by a policeman. To the end of his days Charles Webb recalled how Sidney 'tore off his Scotch cap and flew down to steps to the Park'. Charles might enjoy recalling such escapades, but for Sidney they were no less disagreeable in recollection than they had been at the time. At the age of twenty-two he found:

I can recall most easily instances of trivial blunders or sins committed, which caused me intense mental discomfort at the time, such as shame, remorse, etc., though occurring at least fourteen years ago: and this with a vividness and consequent repetition of the pain, which makes it a very unpleasant psychological experiment.¹⁶

London seemed to Sidney to have been his first and greatest school. In the streets he became 'precociously familiar' with many aspects of life.

He recalled that

It used to take me a full hour to get the whole length of Fleet Street, so absorbing were the pages of periodicals there exposed to view. I found more instruction in the reputedly arid pages of Kelly's London Directory, then already a ponderous tome, than in any other single volume to which my childhood had access.¹⁷

This great, free and informal process of self-education was supplemented by attendance at a reputable private school just round the corner from Sidney's home, in St Martin's Lane.¹⁸ The headmaster bore the ominous name of Mr Pincher, but although Sidney came to consider that fear of punishment had been one great factor in his moral development,¹⁹ it is doubtful whether he was often the subject of Mr Pincher's severities. He was far too intelligent, industrious and sensitive a child to have allowed it. Sidney detested punishment considered as retribution and doubted whether it had ever had much use in improving the character of those upon whom it was inflicted, but he did hold that 'a good whipping of the first culprit has deterred many a whole school from following his example.'²⁰

When Sidney went to school he went to learn. In 1871 his parents, acting on the advice of a friendly customer, sent their sons to a school at Herveville on the Lake of Rienne, near Neuchâtel in Switzerland. This was a delightful place, with its own vineyard sweeping down to the lakeside. At vintage time the boys picked the grapes and were allowed to eat all that they wished. Sidney fared as well as the rest, but he also worked so diligently that within three months he could hold his own in French dictation against the French-speaking Swiss boys. About 1873 the boys left Switzerland to complete their education in Germany, where they were placed in the care of a Lutheran pastor in Mecklenburg-Schwerin. The story that Sidney was shipwrecked on the voyage from England to Germany has no foundation in fact. If he got wet, it was through playing about in the boats in Wismar harbour.²¹

It is possible that in the early seventies certain differences arose between Sidney's parents, and this partly explained their decision to send the boys abroad. In his old age Sidney received a letter from Canada by someone who claimed to be his sister. He responded that he could not remember her. He does not appear to have told Beatrice about this. No invitation was sent to this person to come to the great family party, which was arranged about this time. The sister – or half-sister – was barely literate, but she employed a lawyer to follow up her claim. Sidney did inform his brother, who congratulated him upon his management of the matter despite the fact that he was, as he wrote, not in the habit of 'handing out bouquets'. This suggests a strong possibility that Charles Webb senior

fathered a child – possibly by the living-in servant. This unwelcome birth would have been more likely to occasion the foreign schooling of Sidney and his brother than the advice of a friendly customer. However that may be, their hope that a mastery of French and German would help them to find secure employment proved to be fully justified. If as a twelve-year-old Sidney objected to being dispatched to the Continent and held that London was the only place on earth to live,²² he and his brother immediately on their return found useful and progressive employment. While Charles went into Marshall & Snelgrove, the department store, the sixteen-year-old Sidney, ten days after his arrival back in England in 1875, was a clerk in a colonial broker's. He did so well there that his fortune seemed assured. The broker was so impressed with his recruit that he offered him a partnership when he was twenty-one if only he would stay with him.²³ With her sons safely established in business, Elizabeth Webb sold her shop and moved to 27 Keppel Street, where she and her husband spent the rest of their lives in modest comfort together with their daughter Ada (who was as brilliant an examinee as Sidney himself)²⁴ and their dog Prince. Charles Webb junior married in 1883, and neither he nor Sidney were 'home birds', but Sidney introduced his parents to Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas and the other friends he made during the next ten years.

Despite the tempting offers of his new employer, Sidney Webb had – unlike his brother – no ambition for a successful business career. If he had his mother's industry, resourcefulness and unusually powerful memory, he seems to have resembled his father in culture and outlook. He even followed him so far as to become, for a time, a volunteer. More to the point, he subscribed to paternal influence so far as the merits of John Stuart Mill were concerned. Mill was not only the great teacher to be respected, but also the model to be followed. As he had chosen a career in the East India Company, as a means to security and leisure for continued learning, so Webb elected to enter the Civil Service, eventually reaching the Colonial Office.²⁵ The end of his formal schooling marked the beginning of a ten-year period of intensive further education, associated with entry into the public service and continuous promotion within it. Sidney was a voracious reader, whose reading was distinguished by its phenomenal range and speed. He became a member of the London Library and a reader at the British Museum and devoured books at a rate that left his friends – and his examiners – humbled and aghast. The introduction of an examination system, rigorous and systematic, was one of the most characteristic features of English life in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. It was essential to that rise of the professional man, as distinct from the professional gentleman, which was one of the important characteristics of English social development at this time.²⁶ The older professions, such as medicine, developed in the 1850s associations with an established 'ethic',

and acquired, with the help of legislation, control over entry. But the newer ones, such as engineering, architecture, dentistry and schoolteaching, sought to create and perfect examination systems, providing objective criteria of a man's fitness to practise. High connections, or experience of the public schools, or of Oxford and Cambridge still counted for much but – to the alarm of the old landed oligarchy – they were ceasing to be necessary or sufficient conditions of entry into the new and growing categories of professional employment. To succeed, one needed to be a good examinee, and in the history of mankind there can have been few examinees that could compare in point of excellence with Sidney Webb. The challenge of an examination brought him to exactly the right pitch of competitive excitement. His memory furnished him with everything he needed. His sure sense of relevance and his lucid style allowed him to express himself with clarity and economy. He swept all before him.

At the end of 1876 Sidney took a first-class certificate in German from the City of London College. This institution was one of several established around 1848, with the object of providing some useful employment for the intelligent artisan and as a counter-attraction to Chartist meetings on the Kennington Common. In point of fact few working men went to such establishments, and those that did sometimes caused the clerical directorate so much trouble that the police had to be called in to evict them. Most of the students were men of much the same social level as Sidney himself.²⁷ They were clerks who wore collars and ties and had smooth hands. Once he had left the colonial broker's Sidney could settle down to real work. Between November 1878 and December 1880 he received twenty educational awards from the City of London College. He took first-class certificates in arithmetic, book-keeping, English grammar, French and geology. In 1878 he won the Cotton Prize for modern language, as well as the Phenean Essay Prize. Next year he took the Thompson Prize in arithmetic and the Cobden Club Prize in political economy. He also made off with the Medhurst Prize for proficiency, punctuality and regularity. In 1880 he contented himself with the Cutler Law Prize, prizes in commerce and in geology, and the Lubbock Testimonial Scholarship for the highest aggregate number of marks in three of the subjects of examination. Lest this should be taken to mark a falling-off in ambition, it should be explained that he simultaneously enrolled at four institutions of continuing education in London. These were the Society for the Extension of Further Education, the Society for the Extension of University Teaching (where he took a first in geology) and the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce (where he took three certificates and several prizes). Also the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution, where he secured eleven certificates between the end of 1879 and the close of the following year. If he did chance to be placed in

the second division, he generally took the subject again and was placed in the first. 1879 at Birkbeck was particularly good. He was awarded the English Essay Prize and the Mednyansky Essay Prize, the Henken Prize in correspondence and the Ravenscroft Prize for English grammar. In addition to the Birkbeck Prize for mental science, he took prizes for logic and geology, along with the Chester Prize in political economy.²⁸

While at Birkbeck, Sidney led his first public movement for institutional reform. He served as secretary to a committee formed to secure the better representation of the students in the institution. He led 'a large minority' of his fellow students in 'earnest protest' against an alteration of the constitution that made a two-thirds majority necessary before there could be any change of rule. Holding that 'unanimity of opinion can only be outlined by the sacrifice of either invaluable individuality, or of that healthy general interest in the affairs of the institution, which is the best guarantee for its stability', the protesters denounced the new rule. It would stereotype the institution and diminish its capacity for change. Under the pretence of protecting the minority, it established the dominion of a minority. The rule, approved by a simple majority, required a two-thirds majority to rescind it. Anticipating the discoveries of Michels, the protesters argued that

No measure opposed by the Committee will have a chance of being passed: the Committee alone will practically be able to reject any alteration brought forward by the body of members. A committee – through its official position – its organisation – the numerous acquaintances of its members and their esprit de corps – necessarily commands great power in a meeting. This power is now rendered irresistible. The issue had been treated as a question of confidence, and this had prejudiced the decision in a most unwarrantable manner. The change had its origin in a determination to prevent lady subscribers from acquiring the full privilege of members. We contend that such a serious matter as an alteration of rules likely to last for generations should not be brought forward in order to defeat any particular resolution; still less, a resolution supported by so large a minority of student-members, and against which arguments may not be adduced.

The governing committee at Birkbeck was much displeased with Sidney Webb and firmly resolved that his protest should not be entered in their minutes.²⁹

While Webb was troubling and triumphing at Birkbeck, he was simultaneously advancing up the civil service by examination. He had entered the War Office in 1878 as a lower-division clerk. In the following year he went into the Inland Revenue as a Surveyor of Taxes. Finally, in 1881, after an examination in which he offered neither of the favoured subjects of

classics and mathematics and yet secured 'an almost incredible number of marks',³⁰ he went into the Colonial Office as a first division clerk.

Such a clerkship in the Colonial Office was worth a starting salary of £250 a year. The duties were not onerous. The doors did not open for public business before 11 o'clock even if one had to stay on until 7.30 in the evening. The blight of the Office, which came to weary Sidney more and more as the years passed, was procrastination and 'bottling'. The old staff, who formed the first-class upper division clerks, were a product of the patronage system. Some were sleepy and easy-going, others were men with shattered nerves who suffered from a suppressed phobia which made them paper-shy. All suffered from a 'potterers' rot'. The second class of the upper division was made up of university men recruited by competition – like Sydney Olivier – along with a 'younger, more intelligent class of men' – like Sidney Webb. (The near namesakes, who were both for a time in the West Indian department as well as being resident clerks together, soon became firm friends.) Beneath were the subordinate clerks of the lower division: men who entered the service at about seventeen, having had a lower-middle-class education. Finally there were the writers, who spent their time copying out the dispatches.

In the afternoons, exercise was provided in the large First-class Clerks' room of the Eastern Department in the form of cricket, played with a paper ball tightly lashed with string, and a long tin map case for bat.³¹ One could well understand how Sidney, who probably neglected the cricket, found ample time to prepare himself for the Bar. This process normally cost about £130, but Webb made it more than pay for itself by winning £450 in academic prizes.³² After being placed in the first division of classes in the intermediate examinations for the Bachelor of Laws, he 'came a mucker', as he put it, and finished in the third class. The reasons for this comparative failure will be made apparent in the next chapter, but there was an earlier disappointment which must be noticed first, for it must have made Sidney ponder the strange association between social divisions and administrative hierarchy in the Colonial Office.

In 1883 Sidney competed for the Whewell Scholarships in international law awarded by Trinity College, Cambridge. He secured the second scholarship, but was unable to take it up because his Colonial Office duties would not allow him to meet the condition that he must reside in the college. Sidney sought to demonstrate – and he did it very persuasively – that the Master and the Fellows of Trinity had a discretionary power under the Statutes, which would allow them to waive this condition if they chose to do so. The Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Robert Hundert, commended him on the skill with which he made out his case. The Earl of Derby wrote to the Master of Trinity on Webb's behalf. Sidney drafted a letter to Sedgwick in the hope of mustering Millite understanding in his

interests. It was of no avail. Trinity could not be induced to make a concession. Sidney certainly felt that he had been cheated, and that the episode was of larger than personal significance. He filed all the correspondence together under the jocular heading, 'Memories pour servir à l'histoire de notre siècle.'³³ When he gave his first series of public lectures at the Working Men's College, he proudly and defiantly described himself as 'Second Whewell Scholar in International Law'. When Mark Pattison's *Memoirs* were published in 1885, Sidney became engrossed in them. He found in Pattison a kindred spirit.³⁴ Here was a remarkably hard-working and conscientious man, having (so he said) no history but a mental history, who directed all his energy to self-improvement and the forming of his own mind free 'from the bondage of unreason'. At Oxford, Pattison felt ill at ease among contemporaries whose social background and graces he did not share. In his *Memoirs* he recorded how his new ideas on teaching and university administration had brought him up against the archaic college establishment that had sought to deprive him of his fellowship.³⁵ 'It would be interesting', said Sidney,

to know how much has been lost to England by the unfortunate chance which placed both its ancient Universities in malarial marshes, instead of on high ground, swept by bracing sea-breezes and watered by rapidly flowing streams, which at any rate, know their own minds.³⁶

A 'full, true and particular account of the great Whewell Scholarship case' has its place in any explanation of Sidney's complex, but basically antipathetic, attitude towards the classical, literary and aristocratic cultural tradition of Oxford and Cambridge. It was an interesting episode that brought into relief social and cultural divisions which were to be fully confirmed by later experiences. The new race of professional men who struggled to make their way as gentlemen (since everybody thought it was their duty to try to become gentlemen) could only make their way forward through evening institutes and other establishments which had been created for 'practical' purposes. And they were largely imbued with the traditions of scientific, provincial, bourgeois culture. Those who rose through this process were likely to sense that they were at once more professional than their counterparts from the ancient universities, while being less assured in their manners and their tastes.

The belief that the great benefit of an education at Oxford or Cambridge lies in the opportunities it affords for young men to thrash out informally the ultimate problems of meaning and purpose, human and divine is one of those exemplary half-truths. 'The Apostles' or the 'Society of Mumbo-Jumbo' have always been affairs of minorities. If those reared in

the tradition of provincial bourgeois culture had to spend longer in the lecture room and on ‘cram’, they also managed to create their own societies, in which some at least of the same issues were debated. Sidney delivered his first lecture when he was exactly seventeen years old. His audience probably consisted of fellow students at Birkbeck, and his subject was ‘The Existence of Evil’.³⁷ It was evidently well received, for it was followed by another on ‘The Service of God’.³⁸ In these lectures Sidney swiftly dispatched the Almighty – although in a very tolerant, reasonable and sympathetic manner that was wholly becoming to an admirer of the late John Stuart Mill. He noticed that

the infliction of punishment is now regarded as a defect even by our poor human educators. Their business is to govern by developing the sympathies, by moral persuasion, by the influence of high example, and in proportion as they fail in this, and have to resort to harsher proceedings, they give the measure of their incapacity. How much more then must severity be discreditable in an all-powerful Deity? Besides, not one of God’s punishments is educational; all have the character of wanton ferocity. Adam, having sinned once, is punished forever.

He concluded that

the pain and sin here below is not God’s punishment on our sins, not yet a trial of our virtue. If we believe in God, I think it follows that his attributes are infinite power and love. Predestination and original sin are *not* consistent with justice, and therefore *not* with love. These cannot be the causes of sin and evil.

As for the service of God: the problem was that if He was infinitely rational, powerful and loving, ‘What good can the so-called service be to such a One?’ If service meant prayer and prayer mean petition then ‘God is not a weak-minded fool to be changed by every petition addressed to Him.’ Yet Sidney, at seventeen, was of the opinion that religious belief, if sincere, was the most valuable for the conduct of life. He affirmed that ‘any religion is better than no religion’. Prayer might have beneficial effects even if it was of no practical use, and even if a large proportion of those worth respecting had been claimed by secularism. ‘Is there’, he asked, ‘a religion of the heart, even if not of the head?’ If so it must be something more than a merely allegorical statement of Utilitarian principles, with the service of God made all one with the services of man.

Sidney’s unbelief began with a growing sense of the logical and moral inadequacy of Christianity. He stopped accompanying his mother to

church and when on some rare occasion he did so, it made him cross. As 'best man' at his brother's wedding, he found the service

a most lugubrious and disgraceful remnant of superstition. The mild officiating curate gave us the entire animal, concluding with 'two short rules for happiness in the new state', evidently attributed by some Church organ. These were gracious heavens, the whole duty of married man – first to join together in morning prayer, second to attend church. And this is the institution which is in touch with the national life!³⁹

He had already been vexed by considerations of this sort before he began to encounter the problems of reconciling theology with the teachings of the geologists and biologists, or came to regard the clergy as hirelings of peace and order battenning on the 'surplus value' produced by the proletariat.⁴⁰ Yet like most of the emancipated members of his generation he felt the cravings of religious need, and was haunted by the difficulty of finding new sanctions for morality bereft of its traditional theological support.

From a student debating club Sidney moved on in 1879 to the Zetetical Society: the oddly named meeting place of religious-minded agnostics, faddists, and the more intellectual and progressive sort of lower-middle-class enthusiast. The term 'zetetic' was apparently coined in the seventeenth century. In the 1820s there had been zetetical societies which had organised working-class infidels.⁴¹ But this one, established at 9 Conduit Street, Regent Street, was emphatically neither infidel nor working-class. It was concerned with social, political and philosophical subjects, and it had a special philosophical section which met monthly to hear the more technical papers on political economy, as well as metaphysics, logic, ethics and psychology. The Zetetical Society declared that

its primary object is to search for truth in all matters affecting the interests of the human race; hence no topic, theological or otherwise, discussed with decorum, is excluded from its programme: and that the Society may not become identified with any particular opinion or school of thought, no vote is taken except on its business affairs, and its doors are thereby thrown open to all who, whatever their opinion may be, desire to arrive at truth.

The subscription was five shillings per session. The society's committee consisted of young men and women, who tended to get married to each other, had not been to university and who wrote books about managerial problems such as the keeping of factory accounts – or so it would seem from the sparse information that is available. At least 5 of the 13 members of the committee subsequently became Fabians: among these were George

Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb, who met each other for the first time at a Zetetical meeting in 1879.⁴²

Despite its avowal of an impartial and Socratic spirit, the Zetetical had a radically progressive and avant-garde character. Between 1880 and 1882 it was addressed by a number of distinguished and worthy, if now mostly forgotten, radicals. Dr C. R. Drysdale spoke on the Malthusian state remedy for poverty and dear food. He was the president of the Malthusian League, which had been established in 1878. The Bradlaugh–Besant trial, and the outrageous sentence of four months' imprisonment on the devoted and courageous publisher Edward Truelove in 1878–9, 'went far to make legal the general, free discussion of contraceptive knowledge' by provoking a violent popular reaction.⁴³ Dr Charles Drysdale, unlike his brother George, was more concerned with the economic and social implications of contraception than with its medical technique. It may be assumed that he had no difficulty in abiding by the rule respecting 'decorum'. For many years the young Webb was a very decided Malthusian, and he took a particularly deep interest in the mortality of rich and poor, a subject on which Charles Drysdale had just spoken to the Medical Society of London.

Sidney probably already knew James Beal, who spoke on the great reforms and reformers. Beal, auctioneer and land agent, had his offices at 20 Regent Street, close to the rooms of the Zetetical Society. Along with Sidney's father he had allegedly been a member of John Stuart Mill's election committee in 1865. Beal had a splendid reformist record. He had been associated with Place and Hetherington in the campaign against the taxes on knowledge. He had addressed a series of trenchant letters to the Bishop of London on 'certain Popish practices' observed in the churches of St Paul, Wilton Place, and of St Barnabas, Pimlico. With some success he had challenged the legality of ritualism before the Privy Council. Of still greater interest, he was a pioneer in the struggle to reform London. In 1857 he began a long struggle against the London gas companies which culminated in the passing of the Metropolitan Gas Act in 1860. This measure improved the quality of the gas supply, limited its prices, curtailed dividends and effected a net saving to the consumers of £625 000 per annum. He was also an energetic and effective advocate of an improved water supply for the metropolis. In 1876 he broke new and important ground:

Fearing lest an increased education rate should render the cause of scholastic enlightenment unpopular, he set himself to investigate other possible sources of revenue, and an altogether remarkable series of papers on 'The Corporation Guilds and Charities of the City of London', contributed to the *Dispatch* and signed 'Nemesis', was the result.

He exposed endless anomalies and gigantic abuses, and demonstrated that what was wanted was a single municipality for the whole of London. Here was a career perfectly suited to inspire and instruct Sidney. But there was more to it than that

for Beal, with all his fiery zeal, has a wonderful knack of converting foes into friends, if only an opportunity of exerting his personal influence is afforded him. His own mind is so thoroughly made up, that he will speedily make up yours if you are not on your guard.

Here was a character from whom much could be learned.⁴⁴

The association with Mill was maintained in the person of Helen Taylor, who talked to the society on the Irish Land League. Richard Congreve, who had inaugurated organised positivism in England in the year of Sidney's birth, came before the Zetetical in his role as backroom Pope of the new religion of humanity. Congreve had resigned his fellowship at Wadham College, Oxford, in the hope of teaching larger and maturer audiences to find salvation through following the more up-to-date curriculum devised by Comte out of the inheritance of Saint-Simon and the tradition of *L'École polytechnique*. When he talked to the Zetetical Society in October 1881, Congreve had already broken up his own following, partly through insistence on the quaint, sacerdotal side of positivism. But there was much else in Comte that appealed to him immensely, and that continued to influence him with varying degrees of intensity until the end of his life. He followed Comte in rejecting metaphysics, and making philosophy only a science of the sciences, and depository for the most general and important scientific truths. If he shared Mill's contempt for the details of Comte's new religion, he had a broad sympathy with his attempt to bring religious feeling into harmony with the conclusions of scientific enquiry. In particular, he applauded the attempt to establish a positivist polity founded upon the final science – the new historical discipline of sociology. The reconciliation of order and progress; the alliance of the philosopher and the proletariat; the moralisation of the capitalist; the ordered planning of the economy through the concentration of capital, and the direction of the banks – these were among the items in the Comtian repertoire which for a time captivated Webb and left some permanent impression upon him.⁴⁵

The Zetetical Society was by no means solely an affair of distinguished speakers. Many of the members themselves prepared and discussed papers. They ranged far and wide: from the origin of civilisation to Cobbett and vaccination; from vegetarianism to the political emancipation of women; from spelling reform to the future of the working classes; not to mention Shelley, Ireland, utopia, Athens, India, parliamentary oaths

and national insurance as a remedy for pauperism. Sidney read his first paper to the society in 1881 when he was twenty-two years of age. He gave it the impressive but obscure title of the 'Ethics of Existence'.⁴⁶ It was prompted by Mallock's *Is Life Worth Living?*, a work which the young lecturer found to be a 'dull, incomplete and shallow criticism on Utilitarianism and Materialism'. It was also – although Webb hardly confessed it – prompted by J.S. Mill's *Autobiography*.

It may be recalled that when Mill was twenty he was

in a dull state of nerves, such as everybody is occasionally liable to; unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement; one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times becomes insipid or indifferent; the state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are when smitten by their first 'conviction of sin'. In this frame of mind it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realised: that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered: 'No!' At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for.

Mill claimed that Coleridge had exactly described his case:

A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear,
A drowsy, stifled, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet or relief
In word, or sigh, or tear.⁴⁷

This was Webb's mood in 1881; it was, he allowed, as Mill himself did, a state of mind passed through by most reflective men, even if they are not usually confirmed for ever in melancholy. But while Mill could find none but Coleridge to express his feelings, Webb marshalled his supporters from the entire history of world literature, in proof of

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem all the uses of this world.

He began with Johnson:

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope, who expect that age will perform the

promises of youth, and that the deficiency of the present will be supplied by the morrow – attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.

He continued with Tennyson:

I stretch the lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

Most of my hearers [said Sidney] will, I think, know something of this state, so prevalent at the present day. Its leading feature is a deep sense of unsatisfactoriness, of unrest, of discord. This is no new thing. We trace the influence of fits of pessimism in the Psalms and especially in Ecclesiastes, in ancient Greek and Roman literature, and in the middle ages. But as we come down to our day the names become thicker, until there is hardly a poet of the present century whose views are not more or less tinged with melancholy. Take as instances Shelley, Byron, Heine, Lamartine, Leopardi, Tennyson and Browning.

Sidney had no wish to follow Schopenhauer and attempt to build up to a logical conclusion of pessimism by arguing from the facts of the universe and of the nature of man. 'These German metaphysicians seem like so many cobwebs to the average Englishman.' He wanted to describe this state of mind and to account for it in commonsense terms. This he did by making reference to the prevalence of indigestion, 'a potent cause of melancholia: mental overwork; and there is I think one other special physical cause that cannot be dwelt upon.'

It may occur to the reader that this explanation, although admirable in its way, would hardly suffice to explain a growing tendency to pessimism. However, Sidney had anticipated this objection: indigestion arose from want of exercise, light and air. In short, 'from the necessary conditions of the life of great cities'. It was the paradox of progress that, while its march made cities grow, so the oxidation per head decreased. He maintained that there was little that could be done to alter the material conditions of life:

If increasing knowledge makes accidents less frequent, increasing the use of machinery will keep the average equal. If increasing justice shares the earth's return to labour more justly among the labourers, Malthusians know it is quite visionary to suppose a time when severe labour will cease to be necessary for the maintenance of the race.

There was however, one other source of pessimism – acuteness of sensibility, for which some treatment might be prescribed. As sensibility increased, excruciating pains came far to exceed in intensity corresponding pleasures. Since inducing a state of placid sluggishness or dull stupidity was unlikely to be a course which would commend itself to a Zetetical Society, and least of all to Sidney Webb himself, he recommended precisely the plan followed by John Stuart Mill: avoid introspection; discover ‘the efficacy of an absorbing interest in removing grief’. Without mentioning Mill at all, he too subscribed to the view that

happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But ... those only are happy ... who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness: on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit followed not as a means, but itself as an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way. The enjoyments of life (such was now my theory) are sufficient to make it a pleasant thing when they are taken en passant without being a principal object. Once make them so, and they are immediately felt to be insufficient. They will not bear a scrutinising examination. Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so.⁴⁸

The pessimism of 1881 was no mere youthful affectation. Webb was a settled pessimist for at least ten years. Nor was his paper out of keeping with the rest of the Zetetical Society’s programme: a programme that was strikingly representative of the preoccupation of the time, and so evidently formative of the minds of its most distinguished members. Pessimism, positivism and socialism were a progression common to many of the ablest young professional men of the 1880s Great Depression.⁴⁹ Schopenhauer appeared in an English translation early in the decade, and this no doubt encouraged the belief that pessimism was the mode of thought and the essential feeling of all great writers. He also insisted, as Sidney has been shown to do, on a great line of distinction between the man of feeling and thought, and the ordinary unthinking and unfeeling man. But pessimism bore no necessary relation to misanthropy. On the contrary, considered as a thesis to be defended, it may have helped to direct attention to the extent of poverty and social evil. If it was a warning against a utopian dream that took no account of reality, it could, through its recommendation to negate the individual will, prepare men to dedicate themselves to causes and submerge themselves in active association. Positivism, with its maxim *vivre pour autres* and its repudiation of the ‘metaphysical’ language of individual rights in favour of a positive science of morals emphasising social duties, offered the individual submission to

the interests of humanity. It announced itself to be the last and final outcome of modern science, yet it issued in a religion in which the head was to be subordinated to the heart, and knowledge was to be directed by sympathy and compassion. Although positivism was optimistic about the ultimate destiny of mankind, it held out no hope of immediate or painless deliverance; it insisted upon the need to elaborate and develop social science; it offered no run-and-read solutions. Finally, socialism came to suggest that where the positivist was content to educate and to convert, one might properly seek the enforcement of morals and wisely regulate what a purified public opinion proved powerless to control.

The influence of his father and the whole quality of his education disposed Sidney Webb towards positivism – considered, in the first place, not as a specifically Comtist doctrine, but as a whole stream of tendency in modern European thought. He contended that, outside mathematics, we owed little to the ancients. Knowledge had grown more in the last four hundred years than in all preceding periods put together. The end of the eighteenth century had seen the inauguration of what he termed ‘the second Renaissance’. James Mill and Bentham had given us most of the fundamental ideas of psychology, ethics and jurisprudence. Adam Smith and Malthus had literally created political economy, while in philology the same honour belonged to von Humboldt, Grimm and Schlegel. These were the opening men of an epoch of which John Stuart Mill was the last considerable representative. Sidney declared: ‘I yield to no one in my admiration for the two Mills.’ Yet he considered that J.S. Mill had belonged to what was now recognisably a pre-scientific age. He had known little of the natural sciences and less of biology:

In fact his education in this respect belonged to the old-fashioned type. His work in logic and political economy is unshaken because there biology has but little influence, but I contend that his Psychology, his Ethics and above all else his Metaphysics, his theory of things, want correcting by later ideas.

Mill was a destructive. ‘The great generalisations which I contend must change the whole drift of our Philosophy, are especially the conservation of Energy and Evolution.’ It was not John Stuart Mill, but Herbert Spencer, who must be acclaimed the Bacon of the Second Renaissance.⁵⁰

On 22 March 1882 Sidney gave a paper to the Zetetical Society in which he attempted to make good these contentions concerning the new learning of the nineteenth century. He called his talk ‘Heredity as a Factor in Psychology and Ethics’.⁵¹ He began with an assertion that would have had more warrant had it been made in 1892 than in 1882: namely, that the theory of heredity had made great advances in the course of the

nineteenth century. In conformity with a general rule illustrated by Newton in physics and Darwin in biology, 'the advance is not so much in the facts which science inductively demonstrates, as in the theories in which the facts are summed up, and in the new light thrown upon other facts by the deductive application of the theories.' Darwin himself had asserted: 'we may look at the following law ... as fairly well established. ... A tendency in *every* character new and old, to be transmitted by ... generation, though often counteracted by various known and unknown causes.'⁵² According to Sidney, this applied to structure: 'from the species dog, nothing can be produced but dogs', and this with reference to individual peculiarities as well as the general typical form. Racial and national characteristics were inherited. It was 'inevitable' that peculiarities of function were equally transmissible. And here Sidney paused to elaborate the point in a manner that was to become the hallmark of Webb for the next fifty years:

it must suffice to remind you that peculiarities of taste and smell, of hearing, sight and touch are all frequently recognised as inherited, including near-sight, long sight, dull sight, squinting, cataract, amaurosis, day-blindness, daltonism, deafness, dumbness and left-handedness. In fact diseases generally – which are nothing but morbid peculiarities of structure – have nearly all been proved to be derivable from ancestors. Instances are especially well known in the cases of such various disorders as Gout, Insanity, Consumption, Leprosy, Catalepsy, Epilepsy, Apoplexy, Asthma, Elephantiasis, Stone, Cancer, Sebaceous Tumours, Plica Polonica, Ichthyosis, Psoriasis, Dipsomania, Sonambulism, General Nervousness and Suicidal Mania.

The point was that nothing was too trifling or too momentous to be transmitted, including – according to the still conventional wisdom of Lamarck – 'scars and wounds'. But the key contention was the inheritance of psychical as well as physical characteristics. Sidney held that 'we imply this clearly [*sic*] when we talk of the courage of the Plantagenets; the obstinacy of the Bourbons; or the pertinacity of the Hohenzollerns.' It was neglect of this circumstance that put John Stuart Mill behind the level of the age. To grasp this great 'fact' was to place oneself in a position that allowed certain long-standing problems to be solved, or more adequately approached. For example, this applied to the celebrated debate between Mill and the empiricists, on the one hand, and intuitionists like Hamilton on the other, concerning innate ideas. The empiricists were, according to Sidney, incomparably superior to their opponents, and entirely right in contending that all our ideas are derived from experience. What they missed – thanks to their ignorance of biology – was that 'our experience

must be understood to relate not merely to individual experience but also to that of our ancestors. Consequently they were unable to rebut convincingly the contention of the intuitionists that such propositions as $2 + 2 = 4$ could never have acquired such fixity and certainty merely through upbringing and being particularly well-attested inductive generalisations. We do feel an unusual degree of assurance about these propositions. But this feeling, declared Sidney, was to be explained not by the different logical or epistemological status of these propositions, but because the experience of the race 'had fixed and embodied them in the brain cells we inherit'. Similarly, there were long-standing problems arising from Berkeley's theory of vision, which could be resolved thanks to the scientific observation of new-born chicks by Sir Joseph Banks.

What interested Sidney most was the light that he imagined new notions of heredity shed upon the problems that J.S. Mill discussed in his essay *On Liberty*:

Following the lead of Humboldt and John Mill, advanced liberals have generally gone to such an extreme of liberty as has unfortunately caused them to be separated by a great gulf from the practical politicians who have to work the government machine, and upon whom they might have had an important influence for good ... The philosophical radical had found a theory, that self-regarding actions should not be interfered with by the government, and he thereupon called upon the government to hold its hand in such cases as vaccination, education, sanitation and what not, because he chose to assert that these were self-regarding actions. The stupidity of officialdom and sagacity of statesmanship, not understanding why he was wrong, but simply perceiving by that inherited intuition of common-sense, that he was wrong, have held on their course and the philosophical radical has blindly persisted in his vituperation of moderate interference, with the effect of throwing away that beneficial influence upon radical politicians which seems to have been exercised by Bentham and James Mill, the Fathers of the Tribe.

For, if we believe in the universal potency of heredity, it must at once become evident that, in this particular world at least, there is no such thing as purely self-regarding action, and the fundamental axiom and world-moving level of the philosophic radicals becomes a mere scholastic fulmination of no immediate practical application.

However, the conclusion of Webb's argument pointed to Positivism rather than to Socialism: 'Should Government then interfere with each and every act? God forbid that any such conclusion should be drawn.' Bentham – so much wiser than his declared disciples – 'said that the proper sphere of government was to be determined by a laborious and far-reaching

examination of each particular case.' What heredity brought home was the proof of the Positivist notion of inter-generational independence and indebtedness:

We can, alas, no longer hold the comfortable doctrine that God made this world and the sin and the shame and the misery which is in it. Our ancestors made this world and its imperfections, and if we are impressed by the pain of our fellow creatures: if we feel the shame of the plundered toiling lives of the millions of England; if we hear of the unspeakable atrocities which all over the world the strong man is committing on the weak; if we know that the dark places of the earth are *full* of cruelty; let us at all times remember that if our ancestors have made these horrors, it is we who have in our hands the making of the future world ... Our petty lives are a trust for which we are fully responsible, not to God, but at the bar of our conscience: a trust for the exercise of which we have the clearest instructions written in the groans and blood of murdered humanity where, for instance, the skeletons of those who fell on the battlefield of South Africa, and of those who died of starvation in England last year, alike cry out a solemn warning against aggression by the strong on the weak, by the rich on the poor.

Such was Sidney Webb in the days of the Zetetical Society: a youth of astonishing learning; ingenious and bold – if still somewhat jejune – in speculation; by temperament a sensitive, introspective pessimist; by education, a Positivist inclining increasingly to Comtism, and passionately eager to serve suffering mankind. Although it was already evident that he had the makings of an outstanding teacher, he had no great presence and he still needed to write out his speeches in full rather than deliver them from his notes. He was small – no more than 5 feet 4 inches tall – and ill-proportioned, the head being exceedingly large in relation to the body.⁵³ He was short-sighted, and his blue eyes were very bright and prominent below a high and well-shaped forehead.⁵⁴ His hair was dark and thick. He grew an imperial and preferred to be photographed in profile. He spoke rapidly and forcibly and with what – to aristocratic ears – was taken to be a cockney accent.⁵⁵ However, a young woman who studied him closely, and who was to be the first of many writers to report him in fiction, found the evidences of culture in 'voice, manner and diction.' If he was small, he had no 'superfluous flesh'. If his head was large in relation to his body, it was 'a fine and rugged head'. If his background should have sunk him into 'a complete rut of commonplace', he was highly attractive and immensely impressive. And it was as a teacher that he was at his best. Not only had he

an unusual mastery over words, a clearness and simplicity of thought and a fearlessness of expression that drove the sentence out in well-directed

blows, but in the matter of his lecture he himself had an indomitable faith. Deft and ingenious in the logical application of argument he might be, but the main quality was burning conviction and absolute sincerity. To a girl accustomed to the superior didactic manner, the scholarly hesitation, and the careful non-self-committal of a Cambridge lecturer, this fire of sincerity was something astounding. Moreover there was humour and racy originality in the turn of some the lecturer's phrases, pointing to a very deep streak of the quality which should be common to all men, but which has been almost lost to the race in the process of civilisation – and that is of humanness.⁵⁶

Sidney could be attractive to women. Throughout his life they noticed his small, finely shaped hands.⁵⁷

To a tall, young, red-haired Irishman, Webb was not small: he was 'rather below middle height'; he was not merely unusually well read and able: he was already the most knowledgeable and most able man in England. He was not merely an admirer of John Stuart Mill, trying to work his way through problems in the positivist tradition; but a 'disciple ... [who] had grasped the economic certainty that private property in the sources of production plus freedom of contract must produce a plutocracy face to face with a proletariat, and substitute class-war for genuine democracy.'⁵⁸ Probably something of this idealised picture entered into Bernard Shaw's impression of Sidney Webb when he first saw him; but, for the rest, Shaw's attractive account telescopes the developments of a decade or so in the most misleading manner. Sidney came as no *deus ex machina* either to Shaw or to the Fabian Society. In the days of the Zetetical, Sidney showed neither the clearness nor the coolness that Shaw retrospectively attributed to him.

Yet that they met there is incontrovertible, as that their friendship was of high importance for them both and for socialism in England. GBS recalled that: 'Quite the wisest thing I ever did was to force my friendship on him and to keep it; for from that time I was not merely a futile Shaw, but a committee of Webb and Shaw.'⁵⁹ He told Sidney:

Fortunately ... I had a musical mother, and was stuffed with first-class music, National Gallery pictures, and uncensored literature: in short, very highly educated on one side before I was ten. When we met, you knew everything that I didn't know and I knew everything that you didn't know. We had everything to learn from one another and brains enough to do it.⁶⁰

On another occasion he remarked: 'The balancing instinct in Nature is remarkable. Alarmed at her work in 1856, she produced you three years later as my complement. It was one of her few successes.'⁶¹

Sidney was as persuaded as Shaw that they were complementary. It was a union of outrageous paradox with invincible common sense; of egotistical exuberance with selfless dedication: of wit and eloquence with industry and learning; of the platform with the committee. Beginning with the comic, sophisticated innocence of the newly wise, their partnership proved to be effective and durable. The one whose whole life was in display and self-advertisement could enter into an equal relationship with the other: he who came to renounce personal power in favour of a pervasive, self-effacing influence. That they could use each other is clear. That they came to a deeply affectionate mutual regard courses against the probabilities and enlarges hope.

Yet Shaw was mistaken in implying that there was a fair exchange of education between them. It was he, rather than Sidney, who benefited on this account. Webb saw to it that Shaw was 'documented'; Shaw failed, if he ever seriously tried, to widen and deepen Sidney's artistic sensibilities. The young Webb never appears to have attended a concert or discussed music. He never referred to painting beyond remarking that the Sansisto Madonna was the only ancient picture that really touched him. He went to the theatre; he was enthusiastically with William Morris in being *Anti-Scrape*; but he trusted his own judgement of the arts only in relation to literature. He was fond of poetry and he frequently read novels, being as well acquainted with Zola and Freytag as with Dickens and Thackeray. However, his favourite novelist was George Eliot, and it was intense disappointment with the inadequacies of George Eliot that persuaded Shaw that he was capable of becoming a successful writer.⁶² What Sidney valued in *Silas Marner*, *Romola* and *Middlemarch* was the plausible description of bourgeois life, and persuasive insistence on positivist morals. As Sidney reflected: 'The aristocracy is after all a small class, and the world consists chiefly [*sic*] of that vast and undefined middle class to which nearly all George Eliot's characters belong.' The standard complaint that she was too gloomy and pessimistic, and too prone to indulge in explicit scientific analysis of character, was rejected by Webb. For him, the world was really like that, and it was natural to one of her culture and education to take the reader into the dissecting room. Her books were unrivalled as culture for the feelings and as carriers 'of the great lessons of Work, Renunciation and Submission'.⁶³

It was not from Shaw, another cultural outsider and autodidact, but from Sydney Olivier and Graham Wallas that Webb felt that he had most to contend against and most to learn. From about 1882 Olivier and Webb were living together in the Colonial Office as resident clerks, the fate of the British Empire being regularly left in their hands overnight. One evening Wallas called to see Olivier with whom he had struck up a friendship at Oxford. Olivier was out, and he passed the time until his return by

playing chess with Sidney Webb and arguing about the world in general.⁶⁴ Sidney's friendship with these two men was, throughout the 1880s, singularly warm and deep. For a time Olivier had served as a tutor to the children of Henry Crompton, the leading Positivist, and Webb and he were both attracted to Comte. Wallas was a schoolteacher ready to be impressed by the limitations as well as the strengths of the classical and literary tradition of Oxford. He shared Webb's large ambitions for improvement and his generous social sympathies, but discovered that Sidney's education had given him clarity of purpose and efficiency in method and resource that he lacked.⁶⁵ Sidney recalled that

Wallas had enjoyed what was then declared in England, to be the best education that the world could give. I had almost the diametrical opposite ... constantly to be meeting him in intimate converse was, to me, a liberal education beyond price ...⁶⁶

Although Shaw was quickly brought in to complete the quartet, it was Wallas and Olivier who widened his historical understanding, particularly of classical antiquity, and they helped him to instruct himself and his sister Ada in studying Virgil and Horace, Cicero and Lucian.⁶⁷ Olivier and Wallas helped to enlarge Webb's knowledge rather than to modify his values or redirect his attitude. If Sidney was to acquire the elements of a classical education at second hand, his mind – as Wallas complained – was to the end that of an Aristoteleian rather than a Platonist. His attitude to the literary and architectural remains of classical antiquity was obstinately 'philistine'. Thus, upon reading Lucian, he concluded that little of it would be accepted by a publisher nowadays.⁶⁸ A visit to Hadrian's Wall only served to lower his already low opinion of the Romans: as a feat of engineering it did not begin to compare with the London Underground. As Sidney remarked to Wallas:

However important the Greeks, like the Celts, have been to our development, we are not bound to find either their drama or their stone axes as good as ours:

John P
Robinson he
Said they didn't know everything down in
Judee.

There!⁶⁹

In expressing his debt to Wallas for a liberal education, Webb was not confusing it with a classical one. It was one thing to point up the difference between an educated man and one who had merely been trained for his

métier, and another to make the correct and elegant translation from Latin and Greek the unique and distinctive attribute of cultural excellence. If Olivier and Wallas helped Sidney to see the inadequacy and shallowness of arguing for an education in useful knowledge, while leaving the training of the mind to look after itself, he saw with Sidgwick that the correct teaching of useful knowledge might afford as valuable a training in method as any other kind of teaching.⁷⁰ Greek might be indispensable to clergymen and lawyers might be better for being able to read Latin, but the dead languages offered little to medical men or to those who were entering the newer professions. It was impossible for a man of Sidney's learning and education to be intimidated into a sense of inferiority by the claims made for classical education as training of the mind. It was certain that such a man would detect behind this pretension attempts to retain an exclusive character in higher education, just as political, scientific and administrative progress was rendering it more and more futile. It was equally certain that a man with his capacity for learning would not be indifferent to the cultural tradition in which his friends and colleagues had been reared. But as we shall see towards the end of this chapter he discovered within that tradition conclusions which they had never suspected.

Yet in 1882–3 Sidney appears to have been far closer to the established Liberalism or Radicalism than his friends. He was as prepared as they were to seek a wider audience than that afforded by the Zetetical Society, but he had scruples against any organisation that might be thought to have designs on private property. In 1883 and 1884 he was active in the 'Lambeth Parliament'. He served as 'Foreign Secretary' and then as 'Colonial Secretary' in successive Liberal 'administrations'. The government was an advanced Radical one, which abolished oaths, disestablished the Church and amended the Education Act of 1870 so as to provide for 'national, free, secular, compulsory education'. But when a Conservative administration took over and introduced an Artisans' and Labourers' Dwelling Bill, Sidney opposed it:

the leading principle of the Bill was the power it gave to the local authorities to acquire sites and erect artisans' dwellings. If they attempted to hand this over to the imperial department, or worse still to the miserable vestries, the jobbery, incompetence, mismanagement and gross extravagance would be something beyond comparison.⁷¹

Towards Henry George, whose agitation provided one of the most important gates for entry into the infant Socialist movement, Webb defined his attitude in a lecture, which he delivered in a Congregational church at the beginning of 1884. He found *Progress and Poverty* to be a 'wonderful book', although it was the awareness of poverty, not poverty itself, which was

growing. As for rent, George could not abolish that; ‘Difference in land did exist, and rent existed; and that was the difference.’

It was not rent which caused poverty, but the rise in population that increased rent by widening the gap between poor and good soils. The socialists were more consistent than George, but even if you added the nationalisation of capital to that of land, it would not remove poverty. ‘It might do much if the increase of population went on exacting ever more toil to equal grinding poverty. This was an iron law – it was vain to kick against it. Without “prudential limits” to population, all other expedients were as but draining water into a sieve.’ He could ‘see no better system than the un-Christian, competitive, devil-take-the-hindmost system of private property’; but of this he was certain: ‘because we seized the produce of the poor, they died.’ The rich must cease to live in luxury. They should invest their wealth, which would reach the poor and make them better – it would be ‘twice blessed’.⁷² When Shaw invited him to join the Land Reform Union, one of several organisations that flourished under the impact of Henry George’s propaganda for land nationalisation, Sidney declined except under certain conditions:

I am, I think, an enthusiastic land law reformer, and I brought in a mild Bill last session to the Lambeth parliament ... and an integral part of that scheme was a revision of the land tax, though this could not appear in the Bill. But although I am entirely in favour of the restitution of the land to the people – if it could be done – I am at present not a land nationaliser. Even if I were, I should not see in this any wonderful panacea. It would enable us to abolish all indirect taxation, which might be a good thing, but I am not enthusiastic at the prospect of cheap gin. It is certainly not worth a revolution, and even a revolution would not abolish rent, that presumed destroyer of wages. I enclose 2s 6d and should like to be a member of your society, if nationalisation is not an article of faith ... but if the committee should not care about such a cold-blooded member, please return the 2s 6d ...⁷³

Shaw was already falling under the spell of Marx. He encouraged his friends to take part in a ‘Karl Marx Club’ or seminar, which was held in Hampstead under the auspices of Mrs Charlotte Wilson, a lady who wished to entertain very advanced opinions. Sidney’s intended conversion was indefinitely postponed as a result of the absence of Shaw and the presence of the well-known economist, Edgeworth. Sidney described the scene for the benefit of GBS:

We were eleven, and you were the faithless apostle. Mrs Wilson – who appeared to my astonished gaze as a ‘Rosetti’ young woman with dense

hair – read a most elaborate analysis of Chapter I of Marx, in English, over which she must have spent weeks. F.Y. Edgeworth, who was in the chair, then opened the proceedings by expressing his intense contempt for Karl and all his works, and snorted generally on the subject, as Ricardo might have done to an errant economist of the period. The company, most of whom were apparently under the impression that we were assembled for the purpose of reverently drinking in the wisdom of the great seer, were speechless with amazement; and Edgeworth's voice was followed by a silence which was thick enough to have been cut with a knife. In despair he appealed to me. I rushed in, and the rest of the evening was a kind of Scotch reel *a deux*, Edgeworth and I gaily dancing on the unfortunate K.M. trampling him remorselessly under-foot, amid occasional feeble protests and enquiries from Mrs Wilson (who had thrown away her young love upon him ...)

Now this sort of thing is demoralising – I mean to me. Of course you will have already noticed how demoralising it must have been to the others. But unless some utterly unscrupulous socialistic dialectician like yourself turns up there, we shall have discarded *Le Capital* within a month, and be found studying the gospel of Ricardo! Please therefore appear there next meeting, Wednesday 12th. in great force to defend Chapters 2 and 3 on money. I am going to bring Olivier to assist you, if possible; but he alone would not be sufficiently 'brazen' in argument on the subject.⁷⁴

Whether Shaw appeared at the next meeting or not, discarding *Le Capital* took more than a month. Almost a year later Sidney bought Volume II in German. 'I fear a very bad investment. Still it is something to be relieved of the sense of privation. (Without having read the book) I am prepared to assert that it is worth little. Everything is still put off – this time until the third volume.'⁷⁵ While Shaw still hoped to convert Sidney to Marx, Sidney hoped to convert Marx into a means of teaching Shaw some German. They read two pages in two hours, Sidney accompanying each word with a philosophical dissertation.⁷⁶

Notwithstanding these appearances to the contrary, Sidney generally adopted a respectful attitude towards the founder of scientific socialism. For four years between 1883 and 1886 he led a prolonged discussion with his three friends and others on Marx methodology, his theory of value and his concept of socialism. It was not until 1886 when he wrote a paper on 'Rent, Interest & Wages: Being a Criticism of Karl Marx and a Statement of Economic Theory' that he arrived at any settled opinion.⁷⁷ Throughout, Webb recognised that Marx was a man of great learning and acute intelligence. He had set the cat among the pigeons by pointing up the failure of the orthodox economists to give an adequate account of profits or of the

natural laws that regulated the distribution of income among the several classes. Early in 1884 he found that

the chief value of the book of Karl Marx is the very plain account of the exploitation of labour. There is, however, nothing new in the explanation except the point of view, although this, perhaps, makes all the difference ... he utterly and repeatedly smashes, pulverises and destroys the absurd idea that money breeds money, or that capital or machinery produce anything; an idea however that is still widely current ... Marx pursues this subject with great ability, and has some instructive chapters on the rate and progress of exploitation.⁷⁸

In 1886 Sidney was still commending Marx's summary of exploitation as 'a marvel of forcible exposition', while denying that, as a piece of applied economics, it had originality. Marx was inventive only with respect to terminology. Webb maintained that such a term as 'the degree of exploitation' was only a new expression for the rate of wages. At the most Marx's service had been to expose the problems which the orthodox economists had hushed up, but which were capable of being solved by orthodox methods.

It was with respect to Marx's methodology that Sidney's opinions went through their sharpest vicissitudes before he finally shrugged it off. In 1885 he had either forgotten about the 'instructive chapters on the rate and progress of exploitation', or else he had come to regard them as excursions into economic and social history, and standing in no logical relationship to the core of the analysis. In a paper on 'Economic Method',⁷⁹ Marx is described as the father of the 'abstract-intuitive' school, which differed from J.S. Mill and the advocates of the 'concrete-deductive' method in

ignoring all the present facts of society, starting from premises of assumed *primordial and necessary elements in human nature only* ... Karl Marx, as I understand him, would oust from the data of Political Economy all references to the political and social conditions of men, and would admit only human nature in the abstract, as it nowhere actually exists or has existed ... The followers of Marx appeal confidently in their justification to the example of pure mathematics ... To them man is man, and not capitalist employer, serf, slave or peasant proprietor ... As economists they have produced nothing, corrected nothing, discovered nothing, and the only useful method in Political Economy remains the much abused, but still triumphant, Concrete Deductive Method of Ricardo, Mill and Cairns.

By the following year Sidney had discarded this remarkable opinion and come to the conclusion that Marx was also a follower of the concrete-deductive method, although he concealed this from himself and from others.

The first necessity for a due appreciation of Marx's work is a proper understanding of his point of view and method. To acquire such an understanding it is perhaps not too much to say that we should ignore all his professions and explanations on the subject, and pass resolutely over all his definitions. The mental twist – dare we call it affectation? – which constantly led him to enshrine his acute remarks in esoteric and philosophic terminology, or obscure metaphysical arrangement, only darkens counsel, and we quickly discover that he has no special means of discovering truth, but only a Teutonic capacity for over-subtle analysis.⁸⁰

Marx, just like Mill, had to proceed by abstracting certain relationships from the influence of all modifying and counteracting factors, and to assume universal selfishness and perfect competition.

In classifying economic methods Sidney did not always relate the methodology to the distinctive aims and preoccupations of the various schools of economists. So far as he considered aims at all, he thought of them in their normative rather than in their analytic aspect. The 'theological school' in which he placed Ruskin and Henry George deduced certain principles from assumed ontological data, and Marx's labour theory of value was similarly a prop for his ethical conclusions. He did not consider the labour theory in relation to the avowed aim of discovering the laws of capitalist development. He considered it in its relation to the determination of prices in the market. In 1884 he evidently was teaching that 'free competition by removal of legal restraints, causes commodities freely produced ... to exchange for each other in proportion to the labour expended on them'.⁸¹ But he was already recommending his students and friends to read Marshall's *Economics of Industry*,⁸² and by 1886 he had thoroughly convinced himself of the correctness of the Jevons type of marginal analysis. 'The peculiarity of the Marx theory is the determined exclusion of every fragment of scarcity value from the normal case, whereas it may plausibly be argued that the factor of possible scarcity does enter into every conceivable exchange.'⁸³ This left the problem of furnishing some alternative to the Marxist account of the distribution of income and of cyclical crises. By extending the Ricardian theory of rent, and through a special application of the Jevonian marginalist analysis, Sidney began to try and offer a new socialist account of exploitation. This task was by no means completed in 1886. As for the problem of explaining crises of over-production, Sidney and his friends did not seriously attempt this in the eighties, and it was destined to remain as their most fundamental and long-standing omission.

It might plausibly be maintained that in relation to the theory of value, Webb and the Marxists were at cross-purposes, and that the general muddle resulted from a failure on both sides to see the actual role and function

performed by the labour theory of value in Karl Marx's thought. However the young Webb objected not only that it was a mere prop to an ethical conclusion, but also that it was disposed to qualify that conclusion and to reject what were commonly taken to be its political and administrative implications.

The trouble with Marx was that he did not recognise the economic function of the middle classes in general and of the professional middle class in particular. Thus, in 1884, while conceding that the middle class was on trial, and it was open to the reproach that it had neither the skill to produce the wealth it controlled, nor the taste with which to enjoy it, Sidney held that it nevertheless performed indispensable functions. One stratum of it worked by hand and brain in distribution. Another performed the managerial functions of engineering modern business: superintending inferiors and promoting enterprise, invention and efficiency. Another performed the function of saving, so as to increase future capital. Last but not least there were the professional men who supplied us with law and letters, engineering and education, the arts of war and administration. All these strata combined to supply by their example elevating standards of life and comfort. They maintained and developed the sense of beauty and general culture, and helped to diffuse them through society. In 1884 Sidney found that Marx and the socialists totally excluded these indispensable people from the designation of 'workers', and lumped them together with landlords and mere rentiers. Two years later he was still making the same complaint. Marx classes rent, interest and profits in one mass as the fruit of 'exploitation'. Consequently, 'no light is thrown by Marx on the amount of the remuneration of superintendents, managers, foremen and indeed, skilled labourers of any sort.' Marx habitually ignored 'the great difficulty of managing this great force (capital) which is at present performed by a part of the class he would abolish.'⁸⁴ Moreover, since Lassalle, so much has been made of the 'reward of abstinence', that economic socialists are afraid to use this serious, expressive phrase. But it may be suggested that the turning of income into capital, by abstinence and saving, is a necessary social function. That it is one costing to the saver considerable effort and often self-denial and pain; and that its due fulfilment is absolutely essential to the increased production of the future. Even in Marxian economics this painful social duty, the fulfilment of which increases the product, would seem to merit a share of such increased production. Thanks to the law of diminishing marginal utility, Webb could now (1886) assert that there was a 'surplus value of utility strictly analogous to the Marxian surplus value of commodities'. This surplus value merely placed at the disposal of society 'at a price determined, not by cost of production but by relative scarcity, the use of social product indispensable to the world, but under individual control'.⁸⁵

The crucial concept in Webb's economic thought was the notion of the rent of special ability, as the reward of a distinct, scarce and monopolised factor of production. As recipients of one of the three rents, the manager or professional man appeared to be in an analogous position to the landlords with their rents, and the capitalists with their interest. (In consequence the notion of profit acquired an unsettled or equivocal status.) The unravelling of the relations between this class of rent receivers and the other two was a complicated problem to which Sidney gave prolonged attention. Plainly it presented, morally and administratively, special difficulties for the socialist bent on expropriating surplus value. In 1884 he deprecated the proletarian contempt for 'useless' study, which was made possible only by easy circumstances. 'State endowment of research might effect the same end, but one shudders to think of the fate of Comte and Herbert Spencer, Blake and Rosetti, Browning and Matthew Arnold, at the hands of never so enlightened a Home Secretary.'⁸⁶

Webb had shown that the middle class performed indispensable functions. However, along with the other two classes of rent receivers, they secured the lion's share of the national income. They supplied their services at exorbitant cost that bore no proportion to their real value, and could have no warrant by the elementary principles of distributive justice. The middle class enveloped itself in idleness. Political economy was 'the child of the bourgeoisie':

The current political economy of the bourgeoisie is still compounded of shreds of empirical maxims bound up with perverted pieces of M'Culloch and Bastiat: in possession of this powerful *horum organum* he [the bourgeois] still appeals loudly to the Science of Political Economy and he has, alas, been able to use this pasteboard armour with only too successful results.⁸⁷

Apart from restoring and extending the science of political economy, what was to be done? In 1884–5 Webb declared:

I am, I am sorry to say, no believer in State Socialism, the impossibility of which I need not here attempt to demonstrate. I am a strictly orthodox believer in Political Economy as expounded, say, by Marshall. I am not even a believer in land nationalisation in the ordinary sense.⁸⁸

At this time Sidney explicitly rejected the view that socialism could be equated with the further extension of state regulation of industry, and increasing state control of health and housing. If socialism meant anything it meant not the regulation of the monopolist, but his suppression by the state. The practical extension of *laissez-faire* had gone far. Instead of

shedding bitter tears, as the philosophic radicals foretold, we 'clanged our chains in exulting triumph'. But socialism, even land nationalisation, could be accomplished only by revolution.⁸⁹ Besides he considered that it meant immoral confiscation. 'This, however is perhaps due to my bourgeois training, and results doubtless from a warping prejudice in favour of bourgeois dishonesty.'⁹⁰

In the mid-eighties and even perhaps in 1886 only two remedies appeared to offer any hope. The first was that labour should organise itself into a monopoly capable of bargaining effectively with other monopolies. A labour monopoly would lead to an 'armed quadrilateral' of countervailing power;⁹¹ no idyllic vision, but something to be preferred to the present subjection of the labourer. The difficulty was that anyone who knew his Malthus, or who was aware of the unpromising and stationary character of the trade union movement, could entertain little hope of much progress being made in this direction. The second was the moralisation of the capitalist:

This may seem a perfectly visionary ideal, and certainly when we think of the absolute unconsciousness of the British bourgeoisie of the real nature of interest, and still more of the ability wages; when we remember his insatiable appetite for middle class luxuries which he calls 'comfort', we may well despair. Yet much has already been done ... looking at the power of English capital, and the still greater power of English ability; looking again to the stolid stupidity and unreceptivity of the English bourgeois. I would warn them [the Marxists] seriously that they have undertaken a very difficult task: they will find it easier to moralise the monopolist than to expropriate him.⁹²

This thesis which had been advanced before the London Dialectical Society in February 1884 was developed in a paper entitled 'The Way Out' which Sidney read almost exactly a year later.⁹³ He argued that the lot of more than half the people of England was deplorable, and 'it is simply absurd for the more fortunate classes to lay the flattering unction to their souls that the discomfort of the poor is due chiefly, or largely, to vice and improvidence.' The misery of the poor was due to their poverty: their poverty was due to the inequality with which the produce of labour was shared. His solution to this Condition of England question through taxation and collectivism was more Roman than Greek, as he demonstrated in 1888.⁹⁴ Just as the positivist, Professor Beesly, was able to make Roman history a vehicle for commentary on the contemporary human condition,⁹⁵ so Sidney found in Rome material for what he called a 'sociological sermon'. According to Sidney the classicists were apt to exaggerate the influence of Rome. 'We inherited from the World-Empire scarcely a single

institution of social organisation or administration, and not one public office.' As for the torch of learning, about which so much as written, Rome failed to hand on even what it had received from Greece. In consequence,

Teutonic literature was able to rise in its pure originality uncontaminated by the corruption and feeble prettiness of the later Roman writers. We could probably not otherwise have had a *Nibelungenlied* or even the *Canterbury Tales*, these leading straight, as they do, to Shakespeare and Goethe.

Sidney's command of German allowed him to be familiar with the work of Mommsen and the German school. It was on this that he relied in presenting the Rome 'manufactured' in his own generation: the Rome which was, 'to a great extent merely the Broken Spectre of its own personality reflected on the mists of antiquity'. What the personality of Sidney found in the typical Roman was a subordination 'to the preservation of Rome, and this not the Rome composed of himself and his fellows, but a pure abstraction, the State apart from the citizens.' While 'the happiness of Romans was of course the ultimate unconscious aim ... the public spirit of the Roman led him ... over and over again [to declare] for the ultimate interests of the abstract entity'. In Rome, unlike Athens, where 'the supremacy of the individual became more and more recognised', the Romans were remarkable in recognising, as a universal conviction, that their duty 'lay in somehow promoting the permanent national welfare at any cost of individual sacrifice'. While the Athenians believed in themselves, 'the Romans rightly believed in their State'. The stern utilitarianism of the early Roman character, which was unfortunately suborned as 'the poison of the higher individualism' stole 'insidiously in' with an 'Attic philosophy and elegance', recovered itself for a time under an acceptance of the Stoic philosophy. This subject, said Sidney, leads us to the point: 'the necessity in life of fixed rules'. On the question of freedom, 'the perfectly free man is he whose impulses issue into action untrammelled by rules, even rules of thought.' While 'perfect individual development' is 'only rendered possible by the following up of all natural instincts' and the full play of all suggestions of thought, 'the perfectly Socialised' put constraint upon themselves in every direction. 'The Ego stands ever ready as a watchful guardian, remorselessly checking and strangling those monstrous births and strange abortions which all minds bear, but only foolish or bad minds bring to light.' Yet this 'autonomic internal rule of the perfect man' is insufficient for 'imperfect mortals'. The Romans recognised from the beginning the necessity of law by which rule would apply to those who had not yet 'let the ape and tiger die' within them. Roman law, Sidney adjudged to be 'the noblest native product of

the Empire'. The 'scientific completeness' with which it covered the whole field of ancient life was in marked contrast to the scanty jurisprudence of the barbarians, and, indeed, of early Rome itself. While in Athens every case was argued on first principles and decided according to the momentary impulses and temporary ethical views of the popular judges for the time being, the Romans recognised that it is infinitely better to have any fixed rule. This even if its strict observance produced hard cases in exceptional instances. To the Roman, liberty meant the 'freedom to choose your laws and your law-givers' and this was not inconsistent with the most rigid subjection to them when once chosen. Liberty in the sense of freedom *from* law or restraint was to the Roman immoral licentiousness. The benefit that accrued from the Roman acceptance of this view and was embodied in Roman Collectivism as against Greek Individualism was enjoyment for the first time of the benefits of world commerce and the international division of labour. As a general rule, at least down to the Empire, Sidney argues on the authority of Mommsen that 'the income drawn from the provinces was not properly a taxation of the subjects for the benefit of the mother state.' It was, rather, revenue by which the latter defrayed the expenses of the administration. In contrast to the Egyptian and the Carthaginian cases, the Roman Treasury was but the joint military chest of the allied peoples. What Rome teaches in sociology is that 'if the progress of humanity be the ultimate end, and not merely our own personal happiness, we must have regard not only to the development of the individual, but also to that of the Social Organism.' The special lesson of Rome with respect to 'the type' of social organism is

the necessity ... of the universal reign of law in society. Man's perfect state is constant subjection. Freedom is the choice of, not absence, of rule, and at every turn the good citizen finds as the rule of life Goethe's emphatic motto.

'Thou shalt renounce, renounce, renounce'.

It is the master of the house who is bound: the brutish slave is free. The momentary impulse to the permanent will, the present to the future, the individual to the mass, the generation to the race – all is subjection: in the perfect commonwealth man 'never is, but always to be blest'; and, oddly enough, finds his highest joy therein. Our wrong-headed refusal willingly to bow the neck to this yoke is the one unpardonable social sin; the obstinate 'will to live' an individual life which is the survival of the brute in man.

If it was the social question and Karl Marx, not Horace or Ovid, that he and Wallas, Olivier and Shaw were most concerned with when their friendship was formed in 1882–3, by 1888 Roman history, at least, had become a vehicle whereby Sidney could express some basis for a solution.

2

The Prevailing Fabian 1885–90

Sidney joins the Fabian Society—The personal preoccupations of 1885—Fabian Society activity and the critique of anarchism—The Fabian Parliamentary League—Webb and ‘The Mistakes of the Socialists’ —*Facts for Socialists* and the distancing from Positivism—The Basis—The Charing Cross Parliament—Distances Socialism from ethical speculation and Marxism—The *Fabian Essays*, the ‘Historic Basis of Socialism’ and the emergence of the distinctive features of Fabianism—Fabianism as heir to Positivism and Utilitarianism—Fabianism and economics—Webb’s growing reputation as a lecturer and writer and recognition as a political organiser—His introspection towards the end of the decade.

Sidney first spoke to the Fabian Society in March 1885. He was elected a member along with Sydney Olivier in May. By the following year he was on the executive.¹ This does not imply that he exchanged Positivism for socialism between March and May 1885 or even that he must have been a socialist in 1886. The ‘Basis’, which laid down that ‘The Fabian Society consists of socialists,’ was not adopted until 1887. But 1885 was a propitious year for a new departure in British politics in general and in British socialism in particular. It witnessed the beginning of ‘the most dramatic thirteen months in modern English party history’.² To appearance, the two-party system had broken down, and Parnell, challenging English rule in Ireland, had succeeded in establishing Irish rule in England. In reality, the Liberal Party under Gladstone had gone over permanently to Home Rule, and so ensured the continuity of the two-party system while itself ceasing to be capable of furnishing the normal government of the country which was, henceforth, Tory. Joseph Chamberlain and Randolph Churchill were the rising stars of political life, each assailing his respective ‘old gang’ with the help of radical programmes and extra-parliamentary party organisations. The Irish difficulty helped to popularise the theory, if not the practice, of a new social radicalism in England. It did this first by

causing the Tories to bring in measures such as Lord Ashbourne's Act – the first state-assisted scheme of land purchase. It worked to the same effect by encouraging imperialists like Chamberlain and Churchill to hope that they could break out of the vice in which Ireland seemed to hold them fast by such radical projects as the 'unauthorised programme' which announced that socialism was no stigma, but a 'modern tendency pressing for recognition'.³ Whether he was numbered in the Liberal or in the Tory ranks, Chamberlain's doctrine that the rich ought to pay – and must be induced to pay – 'a ransom' for their privileged access to land and capital, continued to receive a wide and increasingly sympathetic hearing. But while established Radicalism swore that it shared the intentions of Jack Cade, it was, under the disorganised conditions of parties, unable to 'deliver the goods'. Socialism was in a similar predicament. As a school of thought it was making – thanks to the support of men of the distinction of William Morris – considerable progress. But as an organised movement it was to discredit itself. H.M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation, which had been founded in 1881 as a broad radical alliance, had become possessed by the most narrow Marxist sectarianism, at once rigid and romantic. By accepting subsidies from the Tory Party in 1885 it had allowed itself to become the object of contempt and derision. William Morris and the Socialist League were being caught up in the coils of anarchism. Between 1884 and 1887 unemployment was running at an exceptionally high rate. In 1886 more than 10 per cent of all British trade unionists were out of work, a figure not to be reached again until after the First World War. But when, in the parks and the streets, the socialists led the unemployed into actions against the police they were, from a military point of view, soundly beaten.

Thus, the political and economic situation could hardly have been more favourable for a restatement of socialism in terms that would make it seem relevant and effective. Unfortunately the Fabian Society was in no condition to make the most of the opportunities. It had indeed succeeded in separating itself from the Society of the New Life, and stopped harking after community-building of the old-fashioned Utopian sort, but it had acquired no decided character of its own. It collected its members from among people of the most varied and unsettled opinions, and was divided evenly on the land question, positivism, Marxism and anarchism. Anarchism had indeed a considerable following among the Fabians of 1885. It was by no means the monopoly of Mrs Charlotte Wilson. The first number of *The Anarchist* included a contribution from Bernard Shaw, who had been a Fabian for a year or so, in which he asserted that

The Collectivists would drive the money-changers from Westminster only to replace them with a central administration of public safety, or what not. Instead of 'Victoria by the Grace of God', they would give us 'the superintendent of such and such an industry, by the authority of

the Democratic Federation,' or whatever body we are to make our master under the new dispensation.⁴

Another future Fabian Essayist, William Clarke, also declared that he accepted the anarchist platform, and started a paper called the *Wage-worker*, in which he apparently differed from his fellow anarchists only in advocating permeation of political machinery in the interests of hastening its destruction.⁵ E.R. Pease, the future secretary of the Fabian Society, donated £1 to the propaganda fund of *The Anarchist*.⁶

To many of these young Fabians it appeared, at least in retrospect, as if Sidney Webb had been sent by Providence to deliver them from these or similar delusions. He certainly never had any patience with anarchism, although he translated two Gedichte in Prison for *The Anarchist*.⁷ He thought it had set itself against the immanent tendency in modern society to increasingly complex organisation. He doubted whether it would be either feasible or desirable to rely on such social pressures as ostracism, to do the work of government: any sane person would prefer to be tried in a court of law rather than by public opinion. He disputed whether a sense of freedom made for happiness, or whether law necessarily reduced freedom: 'Only those laws are restrictions which I feel as such.' He considered that anarchism was a case of atavism rather than any avant-courier of the future golden age.⁸ This was perfectly consistent with his admiration for John Stuart Mill, for the Mill he admired was the author of the *Logic* and the *Political Economy*, not of the *Essay on Liberty*. There were three compelling reasons for rejecting the idea of the freely developing autonomous individual. First, there were no self-regarding actions. This was one of the first and one of the most settled opinions of Sidney Webb. Second, it was the monopolists of the factors of production who pre-empted liberty for themselves at the expense of the majority of mankind:

Loss of liberty and independence, what of these? This is perhaps felt to be the weightiest objection to collectivism, but one that Mill himself thought to weigh but as dust in the balance of advantages offered by Socialism; and this present liberty and independence of the comfortable classes, on what are they based? The King's House at Dahomey is a great square building. The mighty corner piles stand solid in the African sand, and their solidity is secured – so the natives will tell you – by the blood of the slave girls crushed in the holes in which the piles are driven.⁹

Yes, socialism meant the loss of liberty of mill-owners and their like to squander wealth in luxury and to travel where they pleased. Third, it was not through liberty but through work, submission, renunciation in favour of the organisation of the commonweal that men would find, if not happiness, the highest fulfilment. Sidney's slowly but steadily maturing conception of the soul of man under socialism was as distant from Oscar

Wilde's with respect to the soul, as it was to the socialism. Miss Brooke knew her man when, in her novel *Transition*, she made Sidney say: 'We've got to fight the anarchists. If you want to point out to me the genuine enemy of practical socialism, show me an anarchist.' Miss Brooke's anarchists attempt to assassinate Webb, but otherwise his relations with them are faithfully depicted.

If Webb in 1885 was able to free minds from anarchism, he was by no means prepared to introduce them to a new and finished socialism. Far from having thought Mill to his logical conclusion, he had hardly arrived at Mill's own very tentative and qualified acceptance of socialism. Far from having glanced at the first volume of *Capital* and instantly found it wanting, he was in the midst of a prolonged struggle to arrive at some adequate appraisal of that work. Far from dismissing Comte, he was in some essential particulars a positivist. His social ideal was the moralisation of the capitalist, and he did not conceal the fact that he had discovered it in Comte. He was not, however, a young Beesly or a Semerie. Far from being a Positivist of the Left, he never discussed the role of a militant trade union movement in inducing the capitalist to treat his capital as a public trust, nor did he ever refer to the possibility, envisaged by Comte, of a provisional dictatorship of a proletarian governor. 'The labour metaphysic', the 'romantic' view of the proletariat, had no attraction for Webb. This may well have been one of the reasons why he never formally associated himself with organised Positivism in England, although the difference of generation between himself and Beesly, Harrison or Compton probably had something to do with it.

Sidney became the prevailing Fabian, but he was far from this in 1885. He did not appear to be a *deus ex machina* – or perhaps a *machina ex deo* – come to save the society from vague rhetoric and high-minded sentimentalities. No doubt it would be easy to demonstrate that it was historically inevitable that a new professional, practical, calm, cool and collected socialism should appear in 1885, and that such a man as Sidney Webb should arrive and be its prophet. History filled the sky with omens, but it had to wait a little longer – for Webb far from being cool or practical, was far too wretched to be fit for much political work.

When Sidney Webb joined the Fabian Society he was intensely preoccupied with his own misfortunes and inadequacies. Shortly after he had become a Fabian he apologised to Shaw for having taken up so much of his time with his woes:

How like I am to everybody else – a reflection which has come home to me a good deal lately. My consolation is that I was furnishing you with heaps of material, and perhaps even preventing you from making confessions to me. But a better excuse is the very bitter and overwhelming

reality of the matter to me – the extent of which I shall fail to make you realise. I really am very sick – however absurd it may be.¹⁰

He impressed Graham Wallas with the ‘bitter and overwhelming reality of the matter’ during a long walk and talk. However, despite the exercise and the conversation and the beer and the bus and the bed, he had a sleepless night: ‘But this lying in a dreamy state, with will and judgement suspended, consciousness languidly following out its aimless thread, has become not unpleasant to me.’¹¹ Wallas left his cane and Sidney felt ‘debauched’ by it, but carefully preserved it, and returned it along with a novel called *But Yet A Woman*. Sidney was very much attached to this book and wanted Graham to ‘please enjoy and appreciate it’. There was, he insisted, so much of himself in it. This applied to the hero, but still more to the villain. (Both characters appear to a reader at the end of the twentieth century as almost equally preposterous. However, they are drawn in such emphatic lines that one can be left in no doubt as to what Sidney meant.)

The hero is a young doctor who is both made for society and hates it. He uses the pressure of his professional duties to protect himself from people:

It is not so difficult to know oneself as to confess to the knowledge – and beneath his desire to lose himself in his profession, beneath the armour which he wore, he knew the man, like other men, with nerves ready to tremble, and pulses that obey smiles and frowns ... He was what he was [a cynic] because he wished to be, not because he could not help it.

The villain was a journalist and a royalist conspirator against the Third French Republic. He was selfish, lustful, vain and prudent. ‘Before the altars of great principles he did not bow – he stood upon them; they were the pedestals of a statue ... All the force of his affection was retroactive. With him it seemed necessary to have lost, to love at all.’ Although the reader is assured that there was good as well as evil in this character, he might well be excused for being flummoxed by the heroine’s question: ‘How did you expect one to love you, M. de Marzac, when one knows you?’¹²

Sidney was not alone in his troubles. Shaw was busily defending (unsuccessfully) his virginity from Jenny Patterson of Brompton Square,¹³ and Wallas had lost his school-teaching appointment in Highgate over a question of religious conformity. Webb instantly offered to come to Wallas’s rescue. He urged him not to be in too much of a hurry to find another post: ‘I want to say, before I forget it, that what I said at

Hampstead about your not hurrying too much to get a place, if delay was any use – about the money in fact – was fully meant and you can rely on it.¹⁴ He continued:

Character is always the safest investment – of good or of evil. There alone are we quite sure to find the bread after many days. And if Sophocles regarded too exclusively the non-human element in the production of events – we are a little apt to go to other extreme and think that we are entirely ‘the master of things’. Providence – a blind and unconscious and therefore not a malignant Providence, still has the greatest share in running the concern: and I am (partly and occasionally at any rate) a disciple of Mr Micawber, with a faith in things unseen but about to turn up. At any rate much more comes to us than we have worked for, and of this not much more than half is evil.

He warned him:

Don’t be like me, wanting at each step to see my life in advance ... this has landed me in the ‘Impasse dur du bureau des Colonies’ instead of on the ‘Avenue directe a Mon Désir’ to use a directory-al metaphor. If you can only bring yourself to wait calmly, and utilise the time just as though your future were secure, there can be little doubt that it would pay you. So much easier is it to preach than to practice.¹⁵

Although in future years their friendship was to be clouded by differences of policy and temperament, Graham Wallas never forgot how ‘extraordinarily kind and helpful’ Sidney had been in the summer of 1885.¹⁶

Yet concern for his friend brought no release from his own anguish. Nor did a holiday in Brussels followed by long walks round Stonehenge and through the West Country. For a moment Salisbury charmed him, until he pulled himself up and acknowledged ‘better fifty years of London than a cycle of decay.’ Walking from Amesbury he felt ‘almost happy’ in his thoughts and built ‘all sorts of Castles’ until he remembered that he had been drinking beer ‘which always gets into my head’.¹⁷ From Brussels he warned Wallas:

You are only in fashion in being in low spirits. It seems to me that my acquaintances all round are in trouble, (Only Olivier excepted – he is most unreasonably and inhumanely happy, I know). Some who have money are sick about other things. Some are sick about money. Those whose external circumstances are darkest are not the most unhappy. And I, whom nearly all envy; and whom they all persist in regarding as filled with joy, now pass my life in endeavouring to persuade them that

I am a hopeless fraud and entitled to a commiseration which their hard hearts deny – all this means (beyond dull rainy weather) that in my opinion individual happiness is (1) not attainable at all (2) a fixed quantum in each personality, irrespective of events and circumstances (3) nearly the same in each one (4) not worth consideration so far as, with the help of Dr Heidenhoff,¹⁸ we can avoid so doing. (I am afraid a logical deduction would be (1) alcohol (2) opium (3) suicide, but I can't pursue the argument now ...

As to Else (?), she is very well but I am not in love with her and leaving out of account this inexplicable emotion which 'bloweth where it listeth' beyond all ken or reason, I don't think I should have married her. She was not reasonable enough. The Doctor (as Freytag meant) was quite right in objecting to that 'das Leben des geistes sie ist so weit entfernt wie die heilige Elisabeth.' Much of what followed arose simply from her not possessing enough of the calm reason of her husband. I am still convinced that this calm reason unbiased by any prejudice, instinct or emotion, is the highest and best in the world – that it leads only to unhappiness is only of a piece with the rest. I, at least, am not bound to prove everything to be good, just when I feel nearly everything for the bad.

Therefore, since we are both unhappy – or at least not happy – (and both without any real striking reason dazu) let us frankly admire and pity ourselves. Quant à moi, for a miserable man I am still capable of much enjoyment. (Olivier, however, says that my unhappiness is largely due to an ascetic avoidance of enjoyments: ce n'est pas vrai – it is only indolence.) The best enjoyment is in friendly intercourse. When I get back I mean to throw myself metaphorically at the feet of Mrs Olivier (as I have already done in 2 or 3 other households), confess my unhealthy state of mind, and request her to allow me to come occasionally, like Saul, to be comforted by David. Please aid me.

The colour of the wallpaper opposite which I write this, is not unpleasant. There are perhaps other circumstances which adequately account for my being today more than usually discontented with myself (i.e. with the world at large et le bon dieu). It is odd that after having been Pessimist by profession for at least seven years, I should not yet have exhausted all the shock of ever-new surprise and disappointment at finding the world an uncomfortable one. The momentum of existence – the flywheel which alone carries our lives over the 'dead-spot' in the revolution is certainly the most strongly optimistically possible. As indeed it should be, being only the instinct of self-preservation evolved in the race by many aeons' struggle. (Hence by the way the Buddhist Nirvana is wrong – evolutionary false. Query: also George Eliotism?) This is a strange letter. You may find it interesting,

even amusing. Hence I send it. I think it is really from yours sincerely, Sidney Webb.¹⁹

He was still the same Webb at the end of the month. 'I want you to bear with me whatever I may do as I feel desolate indeed. Why did God put such a thing into life?'²⁰ In mid-August he had still 'no repose of mind but a dull self-devouring, which is very restless and impatient'. Wallas had found a post in Germany and had apparently proposed that Webb should take a further continental holiday:

I see no reason [wrote Sidney] why it should not come off, but everything, great and small, has gone wrong with me this year down to my losing 5 shillings at cards the other night – quite unusual for me. It is my 'Pechjar', my star has gone out, and from being a child of fortune, I am reduced to an ordinary mortal.

He explained that although he did not believe in luck, he believed in the belief in it – a rather difficult accomplishment. 'However', he continued, 'it remains still that I was born on a Wednesday':

Now as to my convalescence, I used to feel myself all over every day to see how much I was hurt, and as it were, take the temperature and pulse. My deepest depth lasted about 17–18 days, which seems very short. About the 18th day it occurred to me that after all yesterday was not so bad and had really gone off with comfort. I had been moved into a milder compartment with less flame. There I have been ever since. It is compatible with occasional enjoyment and general absence of acute pain. But periodically I go down into Hell again, no doubt when my 'light is low' and 'all the wheels of being slack'. But the more usual feeling is one of dullness and blackness of things, not acute but massive.

I don't think that the experience is good for character. I noticed, (confirmatory of *But Yet a Woman* and *Through One Administration*) that, a little while I was distinctly more moral than usual. I did one or two unselfish things which I should not have done usually. But that is evanescent. There is an additional cynicism and 'hardness'. I can't charge it with my Pessimism, but because that was real, sincere and thorough five years ago; but it is now realler, sincerer and thorougher. I have no *impulse* to suicide, tho' the thought has never been totally absent from my mind for years. That shows the benefit of settling such questions and also, I think, it is a consequence of more robust health.

It is interesting to notice how much man is still nine-tenths an irrational animal – how little influence the intellect has, compared with that exercised by the emotions. It has been a lesson to me. One sees how

explanations may seem complete, and yet how very far they are from taking account of everything.

I think Dr Heidenhoff is so much needed that he must exist some where. What a sale Lethe-Water would have, done up like Appolinaris, and sent all over the world by a limited Liability Company. Can't you discover such a spring somewhere near Weimar?

One more reflection – as has been said often, it is faith-destroying. I am distinctly *more* atheistic than before and I am afraid also more unsettled as to the Ethical Standard and its application.

I have fallen back into my old life here, reading and loafing and playing cards.²¹

Sidney moved in fear and trembling of something uncomfortable turning up, and his holiday was spoilt by a whole succession of minor mishaps and bouts of severe melancholy. He returned to England in October and could report by the end of the following month:

I have settled down to a very dead level of life – ‘no hope no fear’ sort of existence, which is not incompatible with comfort, although it is with reading or writing much. I think my special disturbing influence has passed off – that is so far as its own form is concerned – and I am much as I was 18 months ago, plus experience and several memories, and a certain unrest, and minus some of my youth and hope.²²

His brother's marriage on Christmas Eve can hardly have improved matters for him. He did not conceal his envy of happily married friends, nor his fear that their marriages would draw them away from him. He ended the year playing chess and whist and lamenting Wallas's absence in Heidelberg: could he not come home and manage a private adventure school where he could experiment? He helped his sister Ada with Virgil and Horace, but went into his LLB exam in January ‘just as I am, without any cram’. In consequence he had to tell Wallas:

I have gone rather a mucker (for me) in the Honours exam, as I am only in the Third Class. But only seven have passed at all (against some 12 last year) out of over twenty, and there is no first class and only one second. Still – it was the equity, which was in fact most iniquitous.²³

Thus Sidney came out of 1885 ‘hardened’ by disappointment and emotional disturbance, and finally freed from the duty of preparing for the next examination. He was already a Fabian, but this as yet signified little. If the society was socialist, it was so only in the vaguest sense. Webb could certainly not have joined the SDF or the Socialist League because these

were, so far as the bulk of their memberships were concerned, predominantly proletarian bodies. Moreover they tended to obscure their own confusion about the nature of socialism and the transition to it behind a show of doctrinal assurance and certainty. The Fabian Society, on the other hand, was decidedly middle-class, and its characteristic members were teachers, journalists or civil servants like Podmore, Olivier or Webb himself. Sidney was much more at home than he would have been in the company of proletarians in whose political capacity he had little trust, and who were too inclined to measure their progress in terms of the latest demonstration in the parks or clash with the police in the streets, rather than by the quality of the discussion. The Fabian might bark about civil war preferable to 'such another century of suffering as the present one has been',²⁴ but this did not commit him to organising an insurrection. If he had bees in his bonnet he knew they were there, and would be grateful to you for removing them. Yet Sidney's identification with the society appears to have developed slowly, and it is highly doubtful whether he would have been able to accept the Fabian 'Basis', with its explicit and unequivocal commitment to socialism, much before the time of its introduction in 1887. In 1885 the society already associated itself with organised socialism. It did so, for example, shortly after Sidney became a member, when it sent a delegate to sit on the Vigilance Committee that arose out of the Dod Street conflict.²⁵ It assumed responsibility for the reputation of socialism in England, when on 4 December 1885 it formally condemned the SDF for disgracing the movement by accepting Tory gold during the general elections.²⁶ The Society was indeed split on this subject and it was through the resignation of its secretary, Frederic Keddell, that a vacancy arose on the executive that Webb came to fill.²⁷ But he appears to have been far too absorbed in his own personal affairs to pay much attention to these events. He looked on the election results from a conventional Liberal standpoint, remarking: 'We have gone a tremendous crash in the towns.' It was the fault, he thought, of Chamberlainism and the 'atheist taint' attaching to the 'Free Schools' slogan, although he acknowledged that it also pointed to the strength of the Church, the 'Free Trade' cry, the Primrose League, discontent with foreign policy, and the defection of the Irish. He expected politics in future to be dominated by the issue of disestablishment.²⁸

Such activity that Sidney engaged in after he joined the Fabian was directed to the critique of anarchism. If this was true of the small part he played in 1885, it applied largely to what he did in the following year. He helped to produce a Tract, *What Socialism Is*, which was designed not so much to propagate a particular doctrine as to clarify the issue between anarchism and collectivism. The conflict between these two tendencies was making itself felt throughout the international labour movement.²⁹

The importance of Sidney's contribution to the debate was that in demolishing anarchism he was bound to propel himself towards collectivism. The more effectively he conducted the polemic against the anarchists the more he undermined the basis of his own Positivist position. It was not easy to complain that the anarchists took an altogether utopian view of the possibility of moralising society at large, while clinging to the view that the captains of industry – of all people – might be made amenable to moral suasion. After all, the anarchists themselves dismissed that as a quite unrealistic expectation.

It must be remembered that Sidney and his friends were still wrestling with Marx, and had not yet arrived at an alternative socialist economic theory. That did not prevent them from summoning a great conference in June 1886 which was attended by delegates from 53 radical, secularist and other such clubs and societies. It was addressed by William Morris and Edward Aveling of the Socialist League; by the anarchist Wordsworth Donisthorpe; by Stewart Headlam for the Christian Socialists; by three Members of Parliament (Bradlaugh, Saunders and Dr G.B. Clark) and many others. Annie Besant, who had joined the Fabian Society shortly after Webb, spoke and so did Sidney himself, but it was a fiasco.³⁰ In fact, Webb's paper illustrated how little the Fabians had to offer at this time. He called it 'The Need for Capital'.³¹ The emphasis was not on the maldistribution of the national income, but rather on the miserably inadequate size of the national product. Too many workers toiled with too few machines. The solution was increased saving along with the introduction of the eight-hour working day and the three-shift system, so as to ensure the fullest utilisation of the productive resources. This would produce more social profit than nationalisation of the land or of interest. The fault of capitalism was not that its property relations were increasingly restricting the development of production – Sidney expressly endorsed Say's law of the market – but that the capitalists, who were alone in a position to save and invest, neglected their duty:

We socialists, following therein the orthodox economists such as Mill and Cairns, accordingly impeach the idle monopolists for a grave dereliction of moral duty, in thus consuming for their own selfish personal benefit so much of the toll wrung from the toil of their less fortunate brethren ...

London was crying out to be rebuilt. 'In every house we want hydraulic lifts, the electric light, the telephone in every home ...'

'We socialists' – socialism meant at this stage 'the enforcement of moral duty', or rather, that is what state socialism meant, for socialists were held to be divided between 'moralisers' and state socialists. The Webb of 1885

had been clearly in the first of these two categories. The Webb of 1886 was plainly becoming closer to the second. He had been forced forwards by the logic of his polemic with the anarchists; by the difficulty of coping with the objections to Positivism raised by Podmore and other Fabians; by the hardening effect of his own personal disillusionments; and by the impact of increasingly bitter social and political conflicts of 1885–6 at which the London unemployed stood near the centre. He now stated: 'I am not a Positivist, and I am by no means sure that the capitalist can be moralised, and I call myself a socialist because I am desirous to remove from the capitalist the temptation to use his capital for his own exclusive ends. Still the capitalist may do good by accumulation.' He was of the opinion that 'Positivists, so far as they have thought out their economic system, came clearly under the definition of socialism.'³² Although he was losing his simple faith in the moralisation of capital, Sidney retained throughout his life a keen appreciation of the merits of Comte and of his English followers. In fact, his mind was so deeply impregnated with these ideas that they entered as a permanent element into his social thinking, causing him to trust to the conscience of the rich as an agency of change, and a condition allowing socialism to emerge as a result of a growing consensus in its favour.

However, the word 'socialism' was not usually employed in the nineteenth century to mean more than the regulation by public opinion or the state of the functions performed by the capitalist. A defining feature of socialism was its belief in the expropriation of the capitalist and performance of the function of accumulation, either by a democratic state or through other institutions of a collective, equalitarian and democratic character. The agitation involving the London unemployed, and culminating in the trial of Hyndman, Burns, Williams and Champion for sedition, directly occasioned Webb's first proposals aimed at enlarging the operations of government to the point at which it assumed the function of the employer. Concurrently with the organisation of the conference at which he spoke on the 'Need for Capital', he helped Frank Podmore to draw up a report on 'The Government Organisation of Unemployed Labour'. The state cultivation of tobacco was hardly a revolutionary – or very sensible – proposal for dealing with unemployment, but it was a beginning. If the report failed to win much support or attention within the Fabian Society or without, it did contain other, more convincing evidence of the inventiveness (and realism) of its authors. It recommends the revival of social life in the villages, so as to diminish the supposed migration from the countryside to the slums; the docks companies were advised to introduce a scheme for the decasualisation of the labour force; the unemployed must be trained for some new trade or calling; technical education and labour bureaux were advocated, along with the municipalisation of the drink

supply, the nationalisation of the railways and universal military training.³³ It was odd and inadequate, but a recognisable start along a path which was to prove distinctive, even when it was not always rewarding.

Sidney was in much better heart by the summer of 1886. He went on a week's walking tour with Pease in Northumberland before joining a party of friends for a holiday in Scandinavia. In Northumberland they went down the Walker colliery 'and realised some of *Germinal* – but our particular conductor was a most prosperous man, house full of furniture, and a Conservative! He was a "viewer", however, a sort of foreman.' But only a small part of the time was spent in social investigation. What Sidney noticed at York – apart from the fact that the whole population seemed to be in transit – was 'a most Romanish reredos in the shape of a triptych by Tinworth of the Crucifixion'. Hull was made memorable, not by the docks, 'but the worst statue I ever saw. There is one of William the Third on Horseback, William dressed like Julius Caesar, with bare head and palm leaves round it, horse and figure completely gilt.'³⁴ In Salisbury in the previous year, he had found the town chiefly remarkable for alehouses, but

the Cathedralosity impressed me; not the thing itself, for that is swept and garnished like a modern workhouse, smells of the builder, all fine new, in the worst nineteenth century style. I don't deny there may be fragments of the old surviving, but the trail of the restoring serpent is over them all and the general impressions of newness. Why, they have actually polished the new pillars, until you can trace each shining Paludina (it is freshwater limestone 'Purbeck marble') across the church. On the roof there are hideous paintings. I fell into the hands of a specially fatuous verger, who recited his mechanical tale into my ear: 'On removing the yellow wash they discovered sufficient of the old paintings to enable the interior to be restored'. 'Why', I exclaimed, 'you don't mean to say it is thought that the ancients painted like that?' He looked at me for a moment, more in pitying sorrow at my stupidity, than in anger, and then began again: 'On removing the yellow wash, etc.' And then, most unkindest cut of all, I contributed 6d towards completing the vandalism!³⁵

If Sidney shared the values of William Morris when it came to Anti-Scrape³⁶ (though Morris would certainly not have parted with the 6d) they were now to make a decisive break politically. On 17 September 1886, a socialist conference was convened by the Fabians at Anderton's Hotel. Webb does not appear to have been a participant, but he certainly supported the majority who favoured organising the socialists into a political party as against the minority, led by Morris, who held that no parliamentary party could exist without compromise and concessions that

must hinder the advance to socialism. So as to save Mrs Wilson and the small band of anarchists whose main base was in the Fabian Society, it was decided to establish a Fabian Parliamentary League. The style and spirit of this League was from the first Webb's and duly became that of the entire Society.³⁷

Yet in 1886 Sidney was one of the most detached, academic and perverse of Fabians. If he called himself a socialist he enjoyed the prospect of tormenting enthusiasts with the orthodox wisdom. He asked Wallas:

What do you think of running a series of lectures in the Fabian this winter on 'The Mistakes of Socialists'? 'Just like the Fabians', they would say. But we must have some new thing. The only other wild suggestion I have is to run a series of lectures to different classes: Address to Aristocrats; Warning to Women; Reproof to Reprobates; Problems for Politicians; and so on. If we could only dare to have an address 'To Men Only' our future would be made. I am afraid one 'To Women Only', say by Mrs B., would not draw.³⁸

'The Mistakes of Socialists' duly appeared as a series of articles entitled 'Some Errors of Socialists and Others'.³⁹ The first error was 'that industrial Progress diminishes the need for technical education'. The second, 'that a large fortune must necessarily have been obtained to the detriment of the wage workers.' Sidney argued that this was not so since large business incomes frequently arose from economic rent of land or rent of ability:

No – the capitalist who makes a large income is not particularly the enemy of the wage-workers he employs; still less is he their enemy if he abstains from consuming this income, and allows it to accumulate. We want many more of such capable 'captains of industry' ... it is not robbery of individual wage-workers against which we plead, but embezzlement for private uses of what should be devoted to general public purposes.

This aroused a satisfactory amount of indignation, after which Sidney's demonstrations that the freeholder was not the only landlord, that socialists should not be in favour of the reduction of tithes, and that the distributor was a productive worker came rather as an anti-climax.

These articles serve to conceal that 1887 was a decisive year for the Fabian Society: the year in which Sidney really took it in hand and in which almost all the most distinguished and enduring features of Fabianism emerged. It saw the publication of *Facts for Socialists*; the formation of the Parliamentary League; the adoption of the socialist 'Basis'; and – in the immediate wake of 'Bloody Sunday' – the first formulation of

socialism (by socialists) as the deliberate extension of the current administrative practices of going institutional concerns.

Facts for Socialists was first published in January 1887. It went through fifty editions and became, perhaps, the most useful, famous and distinctive of all Fabian publications. Yet it was no more than a skilfully ordered and carefully documented version of the first half of the paper on 'The Way Out' which Sidney presented to the Society in March 1885. Its primary purpose was to demonstrate that two-thirds of the national product went to the recipients of the three rents, and that this inequality was the major agency responsible for poverty and distress. As in 1885 he had maintained: 'It is not wise unnecessarily to incur, as the socialists have done, the opposition of the statisticians and economists by decrying their results, when theory results really prove your own case;' so he supported every proposition by reference to recognised and orthodox authority. In part, it was a magnificent *argumentum ad hominem*: essentially, it was an example of a superb and perfectly legitimate literary opportunism.

He began with a quotation from Robert Giffen, who had become the *bête noir* of Hyndman and the SDF, thanks to a paper on 'The Progress of the Working Classes in the Last Half Century'.⁴⁰ Sidney, unlike Hyndman, had acquainted himself with Giffen's entire literary output. And on p. 393 of the second volume of *Essays on Finance*, he fell upon the following: 'No one can contemplate the present condition of the masses of the people without desiring something like a revolution for the better.' This was duly placed at the head of the Tract. If such diligent looking was rewarded even on stony ground like this, it reaped a rich harvest when applied to J.S. Mill or other Liberal authorities. Mill indeed was introduced so as to fill in Giffen's vague admission: 'It is the great error of reformers and philanthropists in our time, to nibble at the consequences of unjust power, instead of redressing the injustice itself.'

The Tract was brilliantly arranged and illustrated with simple and telling diagrams. The size of the nation's income; who produced it; who the producers were; how the idle rich lived; the shares of rent and of interest; of profits and salaries – all this led into the final sections which summed up the division of the product between the classes and the masses, and showed its consequence in 'The Two Nations'. Section X was entitled 'The Class War':

Between the two classes there is perpetual strife. Disguise it as we may by feudal benevolence, or the kindly attempts of philanthropists, the material interest of the small nation privileged to exact rent for its monopolies, and of the great nation thereby driven to receive only the remnant of the product, are permanently opposed. The more there is allotted to labour, the less will remain to be appropriated as rent

(Fawcett, *Manual of Political Economy*, p. 123)... The force by which this conflict of interest is maintained without the conscious contrivance of either party, is competition, diverted, like other forces, from its legitimate social use. The legal disposers of the great natural monopolies are able, by means of legally licensed competition, to exact the full amount of their economic rents; and the political economists tell us that so long as these natural monopolies are left practically unrestrained in private hands, a thorough remedy is impossible.

In its penultimate section, the Tract pointed to 'Some of the Victims of the Struggle': the fifty annual deaths, exclusive of infants, from starvation in London; the streets which were proscribed by the insurance companies because the occupants were bad risks; the 15 312 deaths from industrial injury; the army of 3 000 000 paupers costing £10 250 000 per annum. Since the Tract was concerned with 'facts', the prolonged discussion of 'remedies', which had comprised the second part of 'The Way Out', was dropped in favour of the simple conclusion:

Socialists affirm that the evil can never be remedied until the 'Two Nations' are united by the restitution to public purposes of rent and interest of every kind, and by the growth of social sympathy promoted by the accompanying cessation of class distinctions.

There was no clear indication that this was to be accomplished by statutory rather than by moral methods. It was not until the tenth edition appeared early in the twentieth century that a new section was added which described 'Some Steps Already Taken Towards Socialism'. Once these references to municipal enterprises and death duties made their appearance, the section on 'The Class War' was re-entitled 'The Competitive Struggle' and its first line, 'Between the two classes there is perpetual strife', was deleted.

Sidney was slowly but perceptibly distancing himself from Positivism. The Positivists, who were cited among the authorities in *Facts for Socialists*, were formally abstentionists when it came to holding elected office. A month after Tract 5 had appeared, showing that socialist conclusions could be made to issue out of orthodox economic sources, the formation of the Fabian Parliamentary League signalled commitment to the view that it could equally be made to issue out of existing institutions. Sidney, along with Shaw, Olivier, Bland and Russell, drew up the rules:⁴¹

The Fabian Parliamentary League is composed of socialists who believe that socialism may be most quickly and most surely realised by utilising the political power already possessed by the people ...

The League will endeavour to organise socialist opinion, and to bring it to bear upon parliament, municipalities and other representative bodies; it will by lectures and publications seek to deal with the political questions of the day, analysing the ultimate tendencies of measures, as well as their immediate effects, and working for or against proposed measures of social reform according as they tend towards, or away from, the socialist ideal.

The League will take an active part in all general and local elections. Until a fitting opportunity arises for putting forward socialist candidates to form the nucleus of a socialist party in parliament, it will confine itself to supporting those candidates who will go furthest in the direction of socialism. It will not ally itself absolutely with any political party; it will jealously avoid being made use of for party purposes.

It was stressed that members of the League must make it a duty to take part in the public life of their district. They were to take part in elections, keep watch on public officials, bring pressure to bear on their MPs and make the best use of the local press. They were also expected to 'visit the workhouses of their neighbourhood: and should exercise a careful supervision of local funds'.

In June the Society adopted its celebrated 'Basis', the test of admission, which opened with the words: 'The Fabian Society consists of Socialists'. This did little more than ratify what had become apparent for at least six months. Sidney was now as ready as Shaw and the others to call himself a socialist, and thus go beyond the initial agreement of Fabians in opposing 'the Competitive system' and calling for society to be 'reconstituted in such a way as to secure the general welfare and happiness'. The Basis committed Fabians to work 'for the extinction of private property in land' and

for the transfer to the community of the administration of such industrial Capital as can conveniently be managed socially ... If these measures be carried out, without compensation (though not without such relief to expropriated individuals as may seem fit to the community), Rent and Interest will be added to the reward of labour, the idle class now living on the labour of others will necessarily disappear, and practical equality of opportunity will be maintained by the spontaneous action of economic force, with much less interference with personal liberty than the present system entails.

The Basis concluded by stressing that it was to the development and spread of enlightened opinion that the Society looked for an agency to promote the progress of socialism.

Sidney, unlike Shaw and many other Fabians, was never tempted to consider the advance of socialism in England in any way other than through peaceful progress of law and opinion; through patient educational work and steady use of the existing constitutional machinery of local and central government. 'The doctrines of Socialism can only be extended by bringing about a slowly dawning conviction in the minds of men; it is certain that no more forcible revolution organised by a minority can ever avail, either in England or elsewhere.'⁴² Bloody Sunday, 13 November 1887, appeared to Shaw and others to confirm the correctness of this view. The SDF had identified Socialism with the organisation of the unemployed, and from 1885 they had led them in repeated clashes with the police. There had been moments when they had alarmed respectable society into improving benefits for the jobless, and there had been times when the skill and courage of socialist advocacy appeared to be winning a new respect and prestige for the cause. On 8 November Sir Charles Warren, chief of Metropolitan Police, announced that he was prohibiting all further meetings in Trafalgar Square. On the following Sunday the Radicals, the Irish Nationalists and the socialists marched in defence of the right of public meeting. They were dispersed with great efficiency and brutality by soldiers and mounted police. Shaw recalled:

We skedaddled, and never drew rein until we were safe on Hampstead or thereabouts. Tarleton found us paralysed with terror and brought me on to the Square, the police kindly letting me through in consideration of my genteel appearance. On the whole I think it was the most abjectly disgraceful defeat ever suffered by a band of heroes outnumbering their foes a 1,000 to 1.⁴³

Not one, not one, nor thousands must they slay,
But one and all, if they would dusk the day.

So sang William Morris in his *Death Song for Alfred Linnell*, a victim of police violence. But Sidney was almost certainly not among the marchers, being neither physically nor temperamentally suited to street fighting. Increasingly he was living for the cause, but he was not disposed to think that there was much use in dying for it. Freedom of speech and public meeting was essential to his kind of socialism, as much as it was for the verities favoured by Morris or Hyndman, but he did not speak out of doors. He preferred the debating society, the lecture room, the conference hall and forum supplied by the local parliaments in Lambeth or elsewhere. And just at the time when the socialism of massive class struggles was discovering how far short it fell in mind and organisation for the task it had set itself, Sidney was beginning to detect the first signs of his own

influence on public affairs. In August 1887 the Earl of Wemyss treated the House of Lords to a long address on recent socialist legislation.⁴⁴ He read a long list – what was soon to be thought of as a long Webb-like list – of Bills interfering with freedom of contract, all of which had found their way into law since 1870. ‘The upas-tree of Socialism,’ cried Wemyss, ‘planted by Mr Gladstone in 1870 was now overshadowing our land and attracting every kind of bird of prey to roost in its branches ... nowadays Conservatism appeared to be nothing but the fifth wheel in the socialistic coach.’ There were three sorts of socialism: of the streets; of the professors; of the statesmen. The last was far the worst. Politicians of all parties ‘truckling to the Saxon with his vote and the Irish tenant with his gun’, were in furious competition to reduce liberty and confiscate property. ‘La démocratie c’est l’envie,’ and, it might be added, ‘c’est le vol.’ The Earl found it necessary to draw attention to

the great number of debating Clubs in which socialist doctrines were advocated. In many of these clubs there was a close imitation of parliamentary forms ... There was one in particular which met near where their Lordships were assembled, and was called the Charing Cross Debating Society. The Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury was Mr Champion. Mrs Besant also held office, and the Chief Secretary was the Rev. Stewart Headlam, a member of the Society of Jesus [sic]. The noble earl then read extracts from the Queen’s speech in which deep regret was expressed at the unequal distribution of property, at the luxury of the rich and idle classes which tended to the depression of the poor, and to the wasteful and unbusinesslike management of public departments.⁴⁵

Sidney was delighted:

He told Wallas, he seems to have read our Queen’s Speech to the House. I have heard nothing about the Parliament except a letter from Headlam threatening to resign because our Budget contains no special taxation of ground rents. I am to bring it in on Friday.

The Charing Cross Parliament was founded in the summer of 1887 and in July H.H. Champion was able to inform the House that he had succeeded in forming a Socialist ministry. He was supported by Annie Besant as Home Secretary, GBS at the Local Government Board, Hubert Bland at the Foreign Office, Graham Wallas at the Board of Trade and Sydney Olivier as Colonial Secretary.⁴⁶ Sidney Webb as Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced his Budget resolutions on 19 July. He abolished all taxes on foodstuffs; all duties on hawkers and peddlers, hackney carriage licences;

and inhabited house duty. He put income tax at 2s in the pound, but with the abatement of one-third if the income was earned and an additional one-third if the income was under £1000 a year. He maintained present exemptions.⁴⁷ (In the real world, the standard rate was 8d. It did not reach 2s until the middle of the First World War.)⁴⁸

But what mattered was not primarily that Wemyss should notice Sidney playing Colonial Secretary at Lambeth or Chancellor at Charing Cross, but that he suggested a measure for the advance of socialism which Sidney had earlier rejected but now found relevant and acceptable. Indeed, by adopting and elaborating Wemyss's criteria, he was able to offer a much more optimistic perspective and prospect for socialism than anyone else. Harcourt had still to discover that 'we are all Socialists now,' but Sidney saw the possibilities, from the standpoint of the socialist stage army, of exploiting the neurotic anxieties of the Liberty and Property Defence League. As Webb was ready to surprise the world with the conclusions that he could derive from Ricardo, Mill or Jevons, he was equally prepared to astonish it by discovering that Lord Wemyss was perfectly well balanced. The 'upas-tree' of socialism, far from belonging to the delirium of aristocratic coal-owners, was a reality not to be gainsaid. In 1885 Sidney had impatiently dismissed Chamberlain's assurances that 'the path of legislative progress in England has been for years, and must continue to be, distinctly socialistic'.⁴⁹ In 1887 he began to treat the regulation of the monopolist, not as something opposed to his suppression, but as the beginning of a process which must culminate in it.

A month or two after Wemyss's speech Sidney spoke to the Hampstead Society for the Study of Socialism on 'The Economic Basis of Socialism and its Political Programme'.⁵⁰ For the first time he carefully and publicly distinguished Fabian socialism from ethical and utopian speculations on the one hand and from Marxism on the other. Socialism was not to be reduced to applied Christianity or to a mere ethical theory:

Socialism is a statement of the principles of social organisation and is, I think, compatible with any ethic which recognises the existence of the social organism, and acknowledges human welfare as at least one of human ends. But it is something more than Christianity or any other ethical system, in that it is the incorporation of positive knowledge of the laws of sociological development, and the deduction therefrom of concrete principles of social organisation.

Utopianism was repudiated. 'Auguste Comte, in fact, could foresee no better ideal community than a glorified wage-slavery, with human masters guided by philosophic priests.' As for the fancy sketches of Godwin,

Fourier or Cabet, they had become 'outworn and impossible to use', thanks to an understanding of evolution and of the historic method.

So far Webb went with 'scientific socialism' – but he went still further: 'The key to the confused history of European progress is this notion of a struggle for surplus value, and all revolutions can be shown to have had an economic basis, although our historians have usually ignored it.' The main instrument for the exaction of surplus value had been the organisation of labour. In the early stages, the organisation of labour beyond the family seems to have required slavery, which had once been the only means of social progress. But the power over the labourer has not necessarily always been merely physical. Theological influence has been used to 'divert a portion of the surplus value to "spiritual uses", nourishing (like the meats offered to idols) whole classes of non-producers'.

But with Marx, thus far and no further:

There will never become a moment when we can say '*now*, socialism is established.' The principles of social organisation must have already secured partial adoption as a condition of the continued existence of every social organism, and the progress of socialism is but their more complete recognition, and their conscious social acceptance as the line of advance upon which social improvement depends.

Thus, socialism may have as one of its aspects the continued struggle for surplus value. But more fundamentally it simply develops and perfects institutions and controls, forms of public authority which have long been present, and which the rise of democracy and the problems posed by the industrial revolution require to be raised to a new level.

It was this thesis which Sidney elaborated before the Sunday Lecture Society in the following year and in the Fabian essays in 1889. Hampstead was, appropriately enough, the scene of most of the discussions, formal and informal, out of which Fabianism emerged. The *Argosy*, which Sidney joined in November 1882, always met there.⁵¹ Mrs Wilson's 'Economic Tea Club' and the Hampstead Public Library furnished the setting for the prolonged discussion of Marx. By the end of 1887, with Shaw's conversion to marginal analysis complete, the Fabians had settled their account with Marxism, and were indeed becoming weary and dissatisfied with walking up the hill to meetings of the Hampstead Society for the Study of Socialism, or to the Hampstead Historic. Early in 1888, Wallas remarked to Olivier, Shaw and Webb:

We shall not long be able to work together – I e.g. may at any moment have to leave London and become an usher in a country school – any of

us may knock up or die – especially we ought not to neglect the time between our last H.H.C meeting and Webb’s departure for America.

(Sidney had secured, in view of his excellent services at the Colonial Office, special permission to take three months’ leave to visit America with E.R. Pease).⁵² ‘The summer is really the best time for this kind of work and we shall not have so much lecturing to do.’ What Wallas had in mind was a series of tracts on the law of rent or other economic problems. ‘We could write clearly but scientifically ... *Our Corner* would take them, or better *Reynolds* ... We might offer them to the Fabian to take or leave.’ He felt that the four of them should work alone, ‘since we are the only four people in England who are agreed about anything.’⁵³

Sidney concurred in Wallas’s proposal. They should tell Miss Brooke (secretary to the Hampstead Historic) that they were going to vote against the continuation of the club. The four of them should ‘enrich the world’ with six tracts, each to be begun as an essay, discussed, and revised in the light of discussion. However he was not persuaded that Wallas had quite correctly indicated the area that should be covered. Olivier fully shared Wallas’s opinion of ‘our pre-eminence in our generation’. It was unnecessary to invite lots of socialists to hear the four of them discussing. He thought that the papers should be reprinted ‘at the expense of a joint-stock company, for which reason selected millionaires should be invited to the preliminary discussion’. Shaw dissented from Olivier’s view that they should meet centrally and that the walk to Hampstead was a tiresome nuisance. On the contrary, the walk was the most useful feature of the Hampstead Historic. He thought that they should write a social-democratic history for working men.

Such was the genesis of *Fabian Essays*, arguably the most important single volume ever produced by English socialism. The credit for the original proposal belongs to Wallas. Shaw did the editorial work. It was very much a collective enterprise. Yet Sidney was plainly *primus inter pares*. His contribution was outstanding and crucial to the entire argument of the volume, and in so far as there was a general standpoint that pervaded the book, it was he who had done most to forge it. Of the four friends who were responsible for the bulk of the work, he was the acknowledged intellectual leader, and it was he who shaped what was most distinctive and consequential in its pages. This was fully apparent to a knowledgeable and attentive reader such as William Morris, who saw – and deplored – the Sidney Webb spirit with which the book was pervaded.⁵⁴

Shaw, who opened the volume with an entertaining exposition of the theory of rent, was unique as a writer, but as an economist spoke only as one chastened by Wicksteed and captured by Webb. It was Sidney, not GBS, who first discovered how to derive socialist conclusions from the premises

of orthodox economic thought. Yet this chapter, together with the following one by Sidney himself, provided all the fundamental ideas of the book.

In the 'Historic Basis of Socialism', Sidney elaborated the ideas which he had first publicly advanced before the Hampstead Society in December 1887. He wasted no time before coming to his major idea:

So little element of permanence was there in ... individualistic order that, with the progress of political emancipation, private ownership of the means of production has been, in one direction or another, successively regulated, limited and superseded, until it may now fairly be claimed that Socialist philosophy of today is but the conscious and explicit assertion of principles of social organisation which have been already in great part consciously adopted.

Utopia, even in the form signed by Auguste Comte, has to be rejected as incompatible with our understanding of evolution and our grasp of historical method:

No philosopher now looks for anything but the gradual evolution of the new order from the old, without breach of continuity or abrupt change of the entire social tissue at any point during the process ... History shows us no example of the modern substitution of Utopian and revolutionary romance.

Fabianism conjoins even as it superseded the old radicalism and the old utopian socialism. As a socialism it accepts the Radical inheritance which teaches that changes must be acceptable to the majority, gradual and – 'in this country at any rate' – constitutional and peaceful. As itself a radicalism it accepts that a mere political levelling is 'insufficient to save a State from anarchy and despair'. Thus, Fabianism set out to achieve that convergence of radicalism and socialism which Hyndman had sought to effect in 1881, not by the submission of the pre-socialist 'Left', but through a theoretical and practical compromise: a compromise within which neither side is expected to experience any sense of loss.

Next, Sidney described the disintegration of the old pre-industrial synthesis: an affair of the 'vast impersonal forces'. Where Marx had referred to the bourgeois recruiting its own gravediggers in the shape of the proletariat, Sidney was content to make the steam engine the Frankenstein of capitalist production: the agent immediately responsible for urban democracy, political economy and socialism. Similarly, English political history was not so much a record of 'the battle of democracy' as 'the record of the reluctant enfranchisement of one class after another, by mere force of the tendencies of the age'. In a manner which has since become part of the conventional wisdom, the Second Reform Act is treated as neither the

product of a belief in democracy nor of fear of the ultimate revolutionary politics of the masses, but of competition with the opposing faction. This leads to the conclusion that: 'The industrial revolution has left the labourer a landless stranger in his own country. The political evolution is rapidly making him its ruler. Samson is feeling for his grip on the pillars.'

However, the blind giant has no need to pull the temple of individualism down about his ears. The creed taught in this temple is that of the philosophic radicals. The Chartists, the Owenites, the Tories, the democrats, the Christian Socialists and finally those like Comte, J.S. Mill, Darwin and Spencer who have gained a conception of the organic quality of society, started to drive out the money-changers and to expose utilitarianism as 'a creed of Murdstones and Gradgrinds'. Still more to the point – 'the practical man has been irresistibly driven' beyond individualism. 'The liberty of the property-owner to oppress the property-less by the levy of economic tribute of rent and interest began to be circumscribed, pared away, obstructed and forbidden in various directions.' There follow instructive lists of the industries and services once left to private enterprise and now wholly or partially left to the community. Joint stock companies, successfully conducted by salaried managers, run about one-third of English business. The functionless shareholders of these concerns could be expropriated without dislocation:

Besides its direct suppression of private enterprise, the State now registers, inspects and controls nearly all of the industrial functions which it has not yet absorbed ... the State registers all solicitors, barristers, notaries, patent agents, brokers, newspaper proprietors, playing card makers, brewers, bankers, seamen, captains, mates, doctors, cabmen, hawkers ... Nor is the registration a mere form. Most of the foregoing are also inspected and criticised, as are all railways, tramways, ships, mines, factories, canal-boats, public conveyances, fisheries, slaughter-houses, dairies, milkshops, bakeries, baby-farms, gas-meters, schools of anatomy, vivisection laboratories, explosive works, Scotch herrings and common lodging houses.

In short, the capitalist 'is being registered, inspected, controlled and eventually superseded by the community; and in the meantime he is compelled to cede for public purposes an ever-increasing share of rent and interest'.

The municipalities, as Sidney argued, have done most to socialise industrial life. The 'current radical programme' in London served to state current socialist demands for legislation: the shifting of the whole tax burden on to the recipients of rent and interest, and the gradual taxation to extinction of these categories of income; extension of the Factory Acts

with the recognition of minimum wages and maximum hours; all children to obtain 'the best education they are capable of'; without relaxing the tests against supporting able-bodied idleness; generous provision without stigma for the aged, sick and unemployed; the gradual extension of municipal activity; completion of the remaining planks in the classic radical or Chartist programme.

We were now, so Sidney concluded, on the eve of a 'new synthesis'. This was marked by a recognition of the organic nature of society as something more than an aggregate of its individual units, and the awareness that 'perfect and fitting development of each individual is not necessarily the utmost and highest cultivation of his own personality, but the filling, in the best possible way, of his humble function in the great social machine.'⁵⁵ The conditions for social health were a matter of scientific investigation. The 'greatest happiness' principle was quite acceptable. What could be plainly shown was that it was consistent neither with Benthamite economics nor with the law of rent.

Most of the other essays simply elaborate or apply these ideas. Olivier, assuming a 'positive ethical science', tried to demonstrate that socialist moral ideas already were coming to permeate society, and that 'socialist morality, like that of all preceding systems, is only that morality which the conditions of human existence have made necessary.' Annie Besant, with an exaggeration which Sidney may have found embarrassing, declared that Mr Ritchie had, through the creation of county councils, 'established the Commune'. Society was well on the way to socialism even though there would never be a moment, as Sidney had pointed out, when one could say 'now Socialism has arrived'. Wallas and Clarke and Shaw can all be shown to have borrowed authorities and instances from Webb's armoury. The excitement of the whole volume arises from its confident sense of a world seen afresh, and having thus been seen, becoming impossible to view again in old ways. The sense of socialism, not as imminent revolution, but as an imminent, going institutional concern was peculiarly, although not exclusively, the Webbian contribution to *Fabian Essays*.

The presence of discordant voices among the essayists, whether muttering their reservations *sotto voce*, or crying out in unmistakable protest, served only to point up the distinctive Webbian tone. Shaw's second essay ended with a valedictory address expressing nostalgia for revolutionary socialism even as he gave it up for the Webbian inevitability of a 'sordid, slow, reluctant, cowardly path to justice'. Clarke, while treating the Webbian dose as incontestably necessary, foresaw that some probably 'inefficient method of taxation and public control' over trusts was likely before men came to see the true solution. Annie Besant allowed the possibility of the temporary subordination of the public to the private sector and a consequent 'serfdom' for municipal employees. But only Hubert

Bland rose to an explicit critique of Webb's position. Sidney had acknowledged that the *Zeitgeist* was potent but did not pass Acts of Parliament without legislatures; Bland made altogether more of the need for proletarian class-consciousness and, in particular, for the rise of a distinct Labour Party. While he too went with Sidney in holding that 'the trend of things to Socialism is best shown by the changed attitude of men towards State interference and control,' he added, 'still it must not be forgotten that although Socialism involves State control, State control does not imply Socialism ...' Bland dismissed with contempt Webb's pointing to hawkers' licences as an instance of the progress of socialism and searched, although with modest success, for criteria by which the mere growth of state regulation might be distinguished from socialism properly so called. Allowing that the transition to socialism must be gradual, Bland yet maintained that there was no occasion for halting agnosticism when it came to whether any society was socialist:

We shall be able to say that we have a socialist state on the day on which no man or group of men holds, over the means of production, property rights by which the labour of producers can be subjected to exploitation ...⁵⁶

With the appearance of the *Essays* almost, but not quite all, the distinctive features of Fabianism had emerged. Indeed, by 1887 they would have all been apparent to an informed and discerning observer. Fabianism was a distinctively English socialism, recruiting its leaders and supporters from the new race of professional men, as distinct from professional gentlemen. Its nature was profoundly influenced by the absence in England, during its formative period, of a mass workers' party, and the presence of a tradition, established by the philosophic radicals and continued by the Positivists, of small intellectual ginger groups that reputedly worked to some effect upon law and opinion. In economic theory, Fabianism was distinguished among socialisms by its repudiation of the labour theory of value in favour of a development and adaptation of Ricardian and Jevonian thought. The principal effects of this substitution were to make socialism appear as a conclusion derived from the premises of orthodox political economy; to point up through the notion of 'rent of ability' the important and equivocal position of the professional man; to make socialism depend upon a consumer's economics, emphasising the demand side, rather than a producer's economics emphasising the supply side; and to direct attention away from crises and the long-run tendencies of capitalist production in favour of a kind of static microanalysis which was useful in relation to the critique of particular institutions and in preparation of proposals for administrative innovation. However, the Fabians' essential

achievement did not consist of replacing one kind of socialist economic theory by another. They were more interested in institutional relationships than in economic ones. They saw socialism not as the outcome of a class struggle which could grow ever sharper as capitalism developed, but as the result of a growing consensus which was already emerging around going institutional concerns. Just as socialism was a conclusion immanent within orthodox economic thought, so it was even more seen as immanent within existing administrative practice; it was nothing but such practice fully clothed and in its right mind. 'I draw my conclusions', declared Sidney Webb, 'from other men's premises.' To which Bertrand Russell replied: 'Well, Webb, either the conclusions follow anyway, or else you are guilty of sophistry.'⁵⁷ To this neat bit of repartee there was but one possible response. What Sidney Webb meant was that he appropriated major premises, adding the minor ones so as to arrive at the desired conclusion. And this was a very essential part of Fabianism that had hardly made its appearance in 1889. The Fabians, much more than the philosophic radicals or the Positivists, came to make explicit the *minor* premise of their age. Their speciality lay in formulating *axiomata media* – the propositions that connect the fundamental principle to the particular project. These were the vital links, as the Fabians subsequently taught, without which large principles are of no practical moment, and particular projects 'mere empiricism'! Such middle axioms as

To raise compulsorily the Standard of Life; to enforce a National Minimum in each important point; Collective regulation of all matters of common concern, and so on ... are the instruments by which your fundamental principles can be applied – the lathes in which particular reforms are but the cutting tools to be changed from time to time as the task requires.⁵⁸

The Radical programme which Sidney had cited in his essay came close to formulating some such *axiomata media*, but they had not yet received the prominence they were subsequently to be given. In all other major respects Fabianism had established its essential identity by the end of the eighties.

Before returning to the circumstances of Sidney's personal life it will be useful to explore this summary account of the Fabian presence rather more closely.

Whether considered socially, theoretically or practically the Fabians of the eighties and nineties were the heirs of a tradition stretching back to the philosophic radicals of the twenties and of the Positivists of the sixties and seventies. Although the philosophic radicals have been described as 'intellectuals', this claim could only be validated by reference to their

attitudes and their political conduct – hardly with respect to their social situation.⁵⁹ The intellectuals, in England, were not seen to be specific social stratum in the first half of the nineteenth century. James Mill fully identified himself with the ‘people’, by which he frankly understood the ‘middle rank’ to be the exemplar and the prophet. The values of utilitarianism, which Sidney characterised as ‘Protestantism of sociology’,⁶⁰ were pre-eminently those of the triumphant bourgeois – economy, efficiency and uniformity. Yet as writers, a part of what the Duke of Wellington called ‘the scribbling set’, and as public servants, the philosophic radicals appeared as precursors of the new tribe of professional men. The positivists, thanks to Comte and to the influence of developments in France, were the first – apart, perhaps from John Stuart Mill – to have a clear sense of the alienation of the man of thought from the bourgeois and of the supposed common interest between the intellectual (seen as doctor, teacher and secular priest) and the proletariat.⁶¹ With the positivists there were not only men who spent a large part of their time in unpaid public service on commissions, as Frederic Harrison did, but men who were public employees, like J.H. Bridges and Henry Crompton. In the case of the Fabians there is no mistaking their consciousness of themselves as a contingent almost exclusively recruited from a *nouvelle couche sociale*: the shabby genteel intellectual proletariat.⁶² It is the rise of the newer professions that sets their social tone: administration, accountancy, teaching, journalism. To follow these occupations was to cut oneself off from the rest of bourgeois society, because entry into them was increasingly restricted by formal requirements, and the most successful pursuit of them involved the following of truth or beauty or efficiency for their own sakes. Indeed the pervasive influence of the acquisitive society was held a principal reason for the failure of successful professional practice, which always required the sacred spark of critical detachment, which mercenary interests threatened to extinguish.

If the Fabians had a sharper sense of their own distinct social location, that merely reflected the slow progress of the English intellectuals considered as a distinct social stratum. Like the philosophic radicals and the positivists they arose not merely out of the same social formation, but out of the prolonged personal friendship. As Graham Wallas observed:

The history of any definite ‘school’ of philosophic or political opinion will generally show that its foundation was made possible by personal friendship. So few men can devote themselves to continuous thought, that if several think on the same lines for many years it is almost always because they have encouraged each other to proceed. And varieties of opinion and temperament are so infinite, that those who accept ... each other’s utterances, are generally bound by personal loyalty as well as by intellectual agreement.⁶³

The friendship of Bentham and James Mill, of the Positivists' mumbo-jumbo at Wadham in the mid-century, and of Webb, Shaw, Olivier and Wallas himself confirm the point. It is also significant that the friendship out of which these schools emerged were all London-based. Admittedly this had sometimes a negative impact on their fortunes, but generally it meant that they were all well placed for lobbying and wire-pulling.

The philosophic radicals expressed the values, not of a mere social stratum, still less of an esoteric school, but of a whole class, or at least of the most ambitious, hegemonic part of it. They expressed, most clearly, the opposition of the vigorous, scientific and practical, provincial bourgeois culture to the relatively effete, classical, literary and aristocratic culture of the ancient universities. The Positivists and the Fabians were ultimately at one with their utilitarian precursors in this respect. For both positivist and Fabian were, after all, utilitarian – believing actions are to be judged by their consequences, and impatient with theological or metaphysical arguments. All three groups were equally short with appeals to abstract rightness, and ready to dismiss them as 'nonsense on stilts'. Each of these small groups would have echoed De Tocqueville: 'We need a new science of politics for a new world.' Each believed that it was on the way to discovering that science, urged on, as Bentham said 'by the groans of all'. Sharing certain leading preoccupations – with trade unions, the poor law and education, for example – they were all wire-pullers exploiting a remarkable range of socio-political contacts. All were thought radical and shocking, and all of them wearied of the frivolities and irrelevancies of existing party conflict. Each in turn was to be torn between the hope of capturing one of the existing parties and the possibility of starting *de novo*. Despite this predicament, each succeeded in working to much effect and each endured repeated disappointment with a calm born of the belief that it came as the herald of an immanent consensus that would issue from reason or of history.

Certainly neither utilitarian, nor positivist nor Fabian would have been prepared to serve as crew on that Oakshottian boat which has no destination, no harbour, no floor for anchorage. To keep the ship of state afloat was a necessary but insufficient purpose in politics. What was wanted was a science that could accomplish the organic unity of analysis and ideal. Bentham did it by reducing morality to a kind of 'transcendental physiology': 'Nature has placed mankind under the governance two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.' The positivists did it through the law of the three stages, which were at once an epistemology, a philosophy of history and a programme of social reconstruction. The Fabian did it, although with much more diffidence, by demonstrating that socialism was both the desirable and the inevitable

outcome of the conjunction of democracy and modern industry, and to this discovery of a science of society and a scientific polity is necessarily connected a more or less pronounced tendency to secular religiosity and the cult of the expert. The doctrine of the old faith opens a gap between facts and values. Science, which has torn them asunder, must reconnect them and place ethical judgements upon a sound demonstrable basis. If men are to be delivered only by a new science of politics then – until education has improved the ‘average sensual man’ – much must devolve upon the scientifically trained expert. A certain distrust of the masses was present in the thinking of all these groups, although it was much less pronounced among the positivists, in the relatively quiet mid-Victorian years, than it was in the case of the philosophic radicals or the Fabians. All were disposed, on certain occasions, to play the same kind of equivocal role as the Benthamites played in 1831–2: at once seeking to raise the waves of popular disturbance and to calm them; to rouse a wholesome terror in the ruling class while keeping the actual danger within bounds. This tendency to blow hot and cold was rationalised, principally by James Mill, into a political strategy.⁶⁴

The philosophic radicals, the Comtists and the Fabians comprise a single tradition by virtue of their positivist spirit and their *modus operandi*. But one must resist the temptation of taking them to constitute a progression to the ‘left’. In terms of militancy and a disposition to play with fire, the Benthamites and the Positivists showed much more daring than the Fabians. Mrs Grote was not alone in scorning ‘piddling, domestic detail and amelioration’. Bentham himself despised gradualism and longed for ‘utter, organic, sweeping change’:

Ought it not, – this and every reform – ought it not to be temperate? Well then – to be temperate it must be gradual – to be *well* done it must be *gradually* done. Fellow Citizens! as often as you meet a man holding to you this language, say to him: ‘Sir, we have our dictionary: what you are saying we perfectly understand: *done gradually* means left undone, left undone for ever if possible ...’⁶⁵

Marx acknowledged that the Positivist Beesly had an understanding of crises, and there was indeed an apocalyptic tone in many of his pronouncements.⁶⁶ With the Fabians, visions of catastrophe – if they appeared at all – were always remote and heavily veiled. It is perhaps necessary to make this point, since in their programmes the three schools undoubtedly exhibited a fairly steady progression from individualism to collectivism. The Benthamite enthusiasm for the free play of market forces and enlightened selfishness is replaced by the Positivist insistence on the need for organisation and the moralisation of the capitalist, and finally by

the Fabian call for planning and the statutory enforcement of morals. These changes required a corresponding development in economic thought. The philosophic radicals, particularly through Ricardo, had made an immense contribution. Yet even in Ricardo, not to mention Bentham, they had imposed upon that science a 'bourgeois taint'. Frederic Harrison and the Positivists protested against 'plutonomy' – the turning of economy into a code of morals. Yet apart from J.K. Ingram they numbered no distinguished economist in their ranks. Their critique appeared to be directed merely at changing the terms of discussion, rather than advancing the analysis itself. There was about it too much generality, an air of amateurism. Webb and the Fabians placed themselves deliberately in the line of economic orthodoxy. The crucial paradox about Fabian economics was that it was simultaneously socialist and professional.⁶⁷ Marx was the last great amateur economist, as Darwin was the last great amateur in natural science.

The Fabians habitually talked as if their rejection of the labour theory of value in favour of their own development of Ricardo, and partial adoption of Jevons, constituted their decisive contribution to socialist thought. Wallas, for instance, supposed that it was this which allowed the Fabians to escape from the remorseless logic of a catastrophic class struggle and to offer a perspective of 'more or less'; of a gradual progress towards socialism.⁶⁸ In fact, in their judgement, it makes no difference whether the income of non-workmen is described as a rent secured by monopolists of scarce factors of production, or as a form of surplus value which arises from the difference between the value of labour power and the value it produces. A conflict of interests between the classes is pointed up by either interpretation, and the possibility of either gradually encroaching on the wealth and income of the idlers, or of expropriating them at one blow, would appear to be open on both views. The consequences that flowed from this substitution of Ricardo-Jevons for Marx were more limited, although still highly important. First, the Fabians were, through the concept of the rent of ability, to emphasise both the importance and the guilt of the professional stratum to which they themselves belonged. Webb and other Fabians frequently reproached Marx with obscuring the decisive role of trained and skilled management, and of professional administrators. The analytic demonstration that professional men were rent-receivers but not idlers, guilty but useful, supported the powerful sense which they had of their own equivocal position. Second, by introducing Jevons, the Fabians turned socialist economics away from the 'supply' side towards the demand side. They made it over into a consumer's economics. But in doing so they directed attention away from dynamic towards static relationships. They were left with a socialist economics that offered no account of cyclical movements of capitalist crises.

The Achilles' heel of Fabian economics was not any failure to explain the 'realities of exploitation', but its inability to account for the periodic convulsions of the capitalist system.

Yet the Fabians, it must be insisted, were mistaken in imagining that their most novel contribution lay in their economic theory. That was not, whether in *Fabian Essays* or in their other publications, where the main emphasis tended to be placed. What most distinguished them among contemporary socialists was their preoccupation with institutional relationships rather than with economic ones. What most distinguished man, what was most crucial to being human, was not the continuous self-transmutation of his nature through work but uniqueness as the maker and moulder of institutions.⁶⁹ Social institutions were at once the most influential and the most malleable part of his environment. Contrary to the generally received opinion, what separated the Fabians from the Marxists was less their economics, less their preference for describing property-derived incomes as 'rent' rather than 'surplus value', than their rejection of historical materialism and the class struggle, in favour of an institutional interpretation of history. In a subordinate aspect, socialism might indeed be seen as the continuation in modern form of the long struggle for surplus value. At a deeper level it had to be regarded as the final outcome of a permanent and ever-enlarging principle of social organisation:

The principles of social organisation must already have secured partial adoption as a condition of the continued existence of every social organism ... the progress of socialism is but their more complete recognition and their conscious acceptance as the line of advance upon which social improvement depends.⁷⁰

Marx, attending to the laws of motion of capitalist production, discovered that the working class, alone of revolutionary classes, could have nothing of its own which it aspired to extend or fortify.⁷¹ It was the most revolutionary class in history because it alone could not emancipate itself without abolishing its own conditions of appropriation. Webb and the Fabians, focusing on the trend of institutional development in nineteenth-century England, discovered that socialism was already an active principle and going concern. The workers had everything to gain by enlarging the area of public ownership, service, administration and control. The force of things, political and industrial, was necessarily making in that direction: 'There will never come a moment when we can say: "now Socialism is established!"' Morris and the Marxist might complain that the Fabians reduced socialism to mere machinery; that they confused form with substance; but could they deny that the Ten Hours Act, or sanitary and other legislation, had checked, and indeed reversed, the trend to increasing

immiseration? The demand for the legally enforceable eight-hour day became – at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties – the rallying point for English labour, and indeed for international labour. It served to mask the gap that separated Marxism from both Fabianism and empiricism. Marx had encouraged demands for the legal limitation of working hours. He had helped to write them into the programme of the International. He had announced that victory on such a score would be a triumph for the political economy of labour ('social production controlled by social foresight') over the political economy of capital.⁷² As Marx wrote, 'In enforcing such laws, the working class do not fortify governmental power. On the contrary, they transform that power now used against them, into their own agency.'⁷³ Sidney took a very active part in the campaign for the legal eight-hour day, although he employed himself in rebutting objections rather than rousing the demand for it.⁷⁴ There were enlightened employers who could be brought to accept the proposed measure. If it was legitimate and proper, why not demands for a minimum standard of life? Why not an endless programme of encroachment at the expense of capitalist wealth, income and power? Engels might complain that Sidney and his friends hushed up the class struggle, but he had to concede that as well-documented and effective propagandists they were unmatched.⁷⁵

Such were the distinguishing characteristics of Fabianism as they had come to shape themselves by 1887 and as they became known to a wider public in 1888. In terms of each and of all these characteristics Sidney Webb clearly emerges as the prevailing Fabian. Admittedly Olivier and Podmore were also, as first-division clerks in the civil service, types of the new professional men. But they came from Oxford not Birkbeck. Wallas was fascinated by Bentham and philosophic radicalism and Annie Besant had been deeply impressed by Comte. But no other Fabian could claim, as Sidney could, to be so immersed in the relevant tradition – to have had Bentham for his first teacher, J.S. Mill for his model, and the moralisation of the capitalist as his earliest social idea. Shaw introduced Sidney to Marx, but it was Sidney, as the most professional of Fabian economists, who led the way in wrestling with the German and in supplanting him.

While Shaw was preparing *Fabian Essays* for the press, Sidney was taking three months' holiday in the United States in the company of Edward Pease. They toured an area bounded by Quebec in the north, Richmond in the south and Chicago in the west.⁷⁶ They spent much of their time in Boston where Sidney was deeply impressed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and where he enjoyed the company of General F.A. Walker, the president of the American Economic Association. Apart from Walt Whitman – who was ill – Walker appears to have been the most distinguished American with whom they were able to make an acquaintance.

He had coined the phrase 'rent of ability' in an article in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* in 1887, and it was in the course of the discussion that arose out of this that Sidney had first publicly advanced what was to become known as the Fabian theory of rent.⁷⁷ Webb found Walker to be 'typical ex-militaire, square solid face, great self-reliance and strength; received us very kindly, remembered me, and asked us to dinner, putting us up also at his club'. This was the Tavern Club, a Bohemian institution of only 125 members, who were admitted for their talent. Walker's economics course at MIT was the best Sidney had ever heard of 'but mainly historical and statistical – laboratory methods'.⁷⁸

The buildings in New York were 'high and gorgeous' but the city was generally mean, slovenly and untidy.⁷⁹ Boston was 'good value', but America as a whole was not worth much.

Sidney had taken 300 – 'or was it 100?'⁸⁰ – introductions to the United States. He was already on the way to becoming a public figure well known in London and beyond. From 1884 he had – without noticeably slackening his activity in local discussion groups, 'Parliaments' and debating clubs – taken to formal teaching. Once more following in Positivist footsteps, he had become a lecturer in Political Economy at the Working Men's College. But whereas Frederic Harrison never managed to establish a Church of Humanity among the 'semi-middle class youths ... aspiring to be correct',⁸¹ Sidney soon had a flourishing Fabian 'Group' among the students.⁸² From 1887 he began increasingly to lecture at the City of London College where he himself had once been a student. By 1888 he had so far 'arrived' that he could be invited to address the Sunday Lecture Society: a body which entertained only the most distinguished and famous authorities.⁸³ At the same time he spent Sunday after Sunday addressing local Liberal or Radical associations, branches of the SDF or the William Morris connection at Kelmscott House. While Shaw could choose to speak on some large perennial issue such as 'Wages or Social Democracy', Sidney's contributions were distinguished by their precision and their relevance to some immediate political or social issue.⁸⁴ He worked at teaching, continuously recasting and refreshing his material. Thus, when he returned from America he gave a course of lectures on economic principles in relation to American experience.⁸⁵ One of his most successful enterprises was a course entitled 'Political Economy from *The Times*'.⁸⁶ This was no lazy, chance affair of waiting for something to turn up. The lectures derived from the settled form of the paper rather than from particular news items. The births and deaths column opened a discussion of population, and the social differential in fertility and mortality rates; the appointments column became the occasion for discussion of the supply of labour and the rent of ability; while students were assured that 'nothing in all political economy is so fascinating as the esoteric side of the

“shipping intelligence”. *The Gazette* may be made more interesting than the last new novel.⁸⁷ He knew how to make the dry bones live, and continuous support of his classes bore out the press opinion that he was ‘a trenchant and convincing speaker, an admirable lecturer on political economy, [who] has the rare gift of combining close and accurate thinking with a really popular presentation of economic subjects’.⁸⁸

His writings meant that his prestige grew beyond the circle of his students and the membership of London Radical Clubs and socialist branches. He was required to deal with the intellectual difficulties and the moral perplexities of strangers who wrote to him for counsel. Sir H.B. Bacon wanted to know what were the legislative proposals of the socialists. He was told that

Socialists do not claim to have any panacea in the shape of practical legislation immediately to set things right. Socialism, indeed, emphatically negatives such hope, by asserting that the whole basis of social organisation must be (and is being) changed, before things will be well. Bills in Parliament it leaves merely to party politicians, the chief work at present being to change the *principles* on which these politicians, and the voters, act in social matters.

Having disclaimed any ambition to project legislative programmes, Sidney immediately proceeded to do so, following the exact lines of the Radical programme to which he was to refer in his Fabian essay. Such a programme, he declared, was supported by ‘most thoughtful politicians, as well as supported by the political economists. But they are delayed by the opposition of those who would be (as a class) extinguished by them: i.e. those who now live on rent and interest.’⁸⁹

Some of those who lived on rent and interest found it morally disturbing. Thus E.R. Pease, left £3000 by his father in 1884, resolved two years later to become a carpenter. He held down a job for an hour in America; a week in north London and three months in Red Lion Square making knick-knacks. Webb saw that he was a born secretary and secured his services for himself and the Fabian Society.⁹⁰ He could give no such directly practical aid to Jane Burdon Sanderson who wrote begging for his advice. He told her it would do no good simply to refuse to draw her rent and interest. This would be but to cede them to the persons paying them; by no means necessarily to the worker. Besides, rent and interest properly belonged to the entire community and not just to the individual workers. (Early in 1880 he had demolished Edward Carpenter’s recommendation for passing on wealth, showing it to be useless and probably harmful.)⁹¹ Her duty was to work according to her ability and to consume no more than she needed.

Unless each individual does work equal in utility to the utility of the commodities he consumes, he is a dead loss to the world. The lives of the workers would be happier if he did not exist. This is an appalling reflection and, when once realised, it may serve to correct the inevitable personal bias which leads us to give ourselves to the benefit of the doubt.

However, to work for not less than eight hours a day (it might be unpaid social or political work) and to consume no more than the equivalent of the services she rendered, was not her whole duty. 'It is part of the natural duty of work of rich persons to look after the disposition of their wealth.' For example, to harass the directors of companies in which she might own shares, in the interests of decent working conditions for those they employed:

Even then the present system makes you almost helpless. Women and children will be oppressed and starved *with your capital* whatever you do. If you resent this and groan under the necessity, it seems to me that you should do what you can to alter the system i.e. throw your energy and ability into the cause of Socialism It is impossible that all persons can be equally moralised; therefore the laws and institutions must be altered so as to prevent the immoral people any longer preying unwittingly on the world.

There was a duty to 'spread the light' and to join 'some militant organisation'.⁹²

By the late eighties Sidney was becoming known not only as a gifted and energetic lecturer and writer, but as a potentially formidable political organiser. The *Star* described him as 'that rare combination – adroit manager of men and the enthusiast'.⁹³ He appeared in both these capacities when as secretary of the Holborn Society Liberal & Radical Association he engaged Gladstone in a correspondence at the end of 1888. The Council of the Association told the Liberal leader that it regretted that the party programme was so little calculated to solve the pressing problem of urban poverty. It called upon the party to tax ground rents and values; to improve artisans' dwellings and sanitation; to provide more technical education and evening instruction and recreation for young people; to promote the further utilisation of city endowments; and to work to reducing the hours of labour and bettering the condition of the unemployed. Gladstone could only explain that he had done his best, but had been thwarted by the Tories and the dissentient Liberals.⁹⁴ Gladstone and his friends were to become increasingly aware of the Fabian presence. It was already making itself felt in London politics and in the London press, but these first exercises in permeation are best described in the following chapter.

In the labour movement too, Sidney cut a figure. He was respected and sought out even by those who were remote from him politically. Thus he was invited to become a member of the Committee of the Central Democratic Club, an institution which was intended to provide a meeting place for the leading personalities of the labour, Radical and socialist movements.⁹⁵ In 1889 he enjoyed a very good dinner, at one shilling a head, in the company of Mahon, the club manager, and many others. These included J. Harrison Davidson (brother of the wandering scholar who had founded the Fabian Society's precursor, the Fellowship of the New Life), Eduard Bernstein, Tom Mann, Friedrich Engels and Eleanor Marx. In his after-dinner speech Sidney stressed that friendship was compatible with differences of opinion and dwelt upon the international character of the club. Engels was equally conciliatory, affirming that each nation must determine its own method of propaganda for itself, and seeing beyond all differences, great progress, 'certain victory'. Tom Mann sang 'The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring', adding a 'democratic' verse of his own. Aveling recited Shelley's 'Men of England'. The entire company then roared out, to the tune of 'John Brown', William Morris's 'March of the Workers':

Hark! the rolling of the thunder!
Lo the sun! and lo thereunder
Riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder,
And the host comes marching on.

Sidney and Friedrich Engels went out into the Grays Inn Road and agreed that the wines would have been better for a little more warmth, but were otherwise seemingly well satisfied with the occasion.⁹⁶ It was regrettably not an evening to be repeated, and the club did not prosper. Despite such convivial occasions and despite his growing public reputation, Sidney Webb at the end of the eighties was still beset by his sense of personal inadequacy, still inclined to introspection and to pessimism, still disturbed by sharp recollections of the pain he had endured in 1885. When Pease became engaged to Emily Davidson, Sidney wrote her one of his longest and most self-revealing letters.⁹⁷

27 Keppel Street
Russell Square
12th December 1888

Dear Miss Davidson

I take the very earliest of my opportunities since my return to London yesterday afternoon, to write to you. I am very sorry that you were

away from London so that we cannot talk face to face of the momentous secret which I am strictly enjoined not to impart to anyone – though there are no doubt about 59 similar possessors similarly circumscribed. If you ever come up to London (e.g. to do some shopping) and especially if you are going through London on your way North, please let me have a chance of seeing you, here or elsewhere.

For I have a great desire for your friendship, with the very smallest capacity for acquiring it. I have often envied the ease with which others ‘catch on’ to congenial spirits (E.R.P. for instance, is one such lucky or clever person),⁹⁸ where I simply remain outside.

I am very busy of course, somewhat serious, very analytic and introspective – but I hope passably honest, sincere, and not obviously hateful or repulsive. Yet I seem ‘left out’ in more than one case, and in more than one department of life. (This, however, is by the way) I am at any rate going to begin by a long intimate letter *to yourself*. One of the difficulties incidental to your present position is my uncertainty as to your exact personality. I am writing to you, or to Pease and you, or to you plus Pease? The copyright of a letter remains vested in the writer, and I am compelled to avow a desire that I may be understood as writing only to you, and not to you, plus Pease. I do not forbid you to pass on this letter but should prefer you not to. My own theory of marriage does not involve the merging of identities. I am even against an intellectual communion. Let me assume for the nonce that it is to be a mere partnership. I write to one of the partners only.

I was very pleased when Pease told me his great news soon after we met at Queenstown. Nothing could have pleased me more than that you should marry Pease – unless it was that Pease should marry you – and here as both events happening together. Nevertheless you will perhaps understand that it was with a ‘contraction’ of the heart that I heard the news; and an old wound, which still embitters me was torn open, and bled, as it bleeds now while I write to you these words and I think again of Heine’s song, (Do you remember *Ein Mädchen liebt ein Andern* – I forget whether you read German), and the whole mournful swing of Schubert’s setting of some of them – ‘*Der arme Peter*’, for instance comes back to me, and so on and so on. I mean I am very cross with things in general, and I realise that I am ‘left out’. I am afraid I have a great deal of ‘*Langsam*’ in me – I knew it when I read Mark Pattison’s *Autobiography*.

However my own little woes – now some five years old – are not your fault and I am not irrational enough to grudge others better luck. But I must not disguise the fact that one grievance against you I have – which you must atone for. ‘*L’ami quise marie se perd*’. I am nearly thirty and during the last five years (just those five years too) I have lost

five intimate friends by marriage. With Pease I had become intellectually intimate, though living afar off, and America has made us real friends. We are as Shaw would say ‘even on quarrelling terms’. Now you are to come in and carry him off from me just as our friendship ripens. *C’est dur*. The loss is irreparable whatever you may intend to say. It rests indeed with you to furnish compensation by becoming yourself a friend. I warn you that it is hard to be ‘friends’ with me – I am an exacting person, needing more to be loved, it may be, than capable of loving – a kind of stone wall on which fruit *will* grow but needing a good deal of sun. (NB you didn’t know that I was so poetical did you?)

Having frankly avowed my position towards you I proceed to America. How did you enjoy *your* visit to America? For though to the vulgar eye, and to that of the ticket collector, Pease and I were alone you and I and Pease know that it was a case of ‘one and one and a shadowy third’. Where we went, your wraith went also: what we saw we saw with you, what we thought we discussed in your presence and even for your sake, and I am not sure whether that exacting Goddess whom we all three serve, I mean Humanity, was not sometimes eclipsed by one human.

Now don’t go and suppose that this increase of the party was unpleasant to me. I trust that you will permit me to say that I too felt that I had an interest in the matter, and many and many a time the threeness of our party gave a new zest to the intellectual stimulus of our mutual intercourse. I do not deny that your peculiar relation to us, (as the perpetually present absentee) was occasionally an abnormal factor in our action. For instance, the Post Office became the only public building in each city that we cared ever to visit: we were invariably under the impression that it was the most pressing of our social obligations on each particular day, it seemed inevitably to lie on the nearest road from any point to any other point (which can hardly be possible outside of two-dimensional space) and the quality of the city, the value of our local friends, and even the punctuality of the mails and of those privileged intercommunicators Kennedy Todd & Co. Nor do I deny that I felt a little ‘out of it’ on each of these occasions. That you must forgive me, other people’s old wounds smart when the East wind blows, but mine smart in anybody else’s sunshine. I *could* not write when I was in Pease’s company, the influence was too strong, of his presence and consequently of your own presence, but I hope you understood that, and that my congratulations were not really delayed, even if not actually translated into words and curves of ink.

Now as to the future. I am pleased that you are at Cheltenham, but don’t put off the marriage. Has Pease ever told you of Stepniak’s saying

as to how fiercely Russian Nihilists love, because they know that any moment the end may come. We are all in that position here. Any moment the end may come – do not delay.

And remember the Comtist maxim – one of the many good ones of the Positivists – ‘live openly’. Do not make a mystery or secret of your position now or hereafter. There is no such thing as a self-regarding act. The world is entitled to know exactly how you stand and not only discreditable mysteries, but all mysteries are bad and evil bringing. I began life badly and entangled myself in several private mysteries. These cling around me still, though I have tried to work out of them. This is partly why I have urged Pease to come back to England quickly. I want you to press him to do so. His services would be very valuable in London just now, we are on the crest of a wave, and all hands are needed to keep up the progress and press our advantage. There are astonishingly few workers: and none with just Pease’s qualities, and America was not as fertile as we hoped. There is very little for him to learn there.

This leads me to another point. Do you remember in *Felix Holt* his bitter address to his inamorata as to the pernicious influence of women in dragging men away from lofty ideals and unselfish ends, down to the merely personal claims of family, (of course I do not fear any such evil influence from you – at least, not consciously) – you will not be a ‘basil plant’ but you are undertaking a great responsibility. For good or for evil you are stepping into a position of enormous influence over one mind and centre of action. What influence will that be? This is a very pretty problem in psychology (I hope you don’t mind it being called by so learned a name) and I confess I am a little doubtful as to the result. I had almost wished that Pease had married a stronger ‘Collectivist’. He possesses as Mrs Wilson acutely says the Anarchist mind. His mere existence – proper and decent existence, of course – is a main end to him. He is wedded to an incurable (and vain) personal optimism, which leads him to act in and for himself alone, according to his momentary impulses, extremely well trained impulses, but still *mere* impulses. This is necessarily fatal to social and combined action which I try to think is my own ideal. One person alone can follow his impulses safely, e.g. in crossing a crowded street, but two people together crossing the street must act deliberately in concert, or else separate, or else face the inevitable result, a smash. Now my theory of life is to feel at every moment that I am acting as a member of a committee, and for that committee – in some affairs a committee of my own family merely, in others again a committee as wide as the Aryan race. But I aspire *never* to act alone, or for myself. This theoretically combined action involves rules, deliberation, discussion, concert, the disregard of one’s own impulses,

and in fact is Collectivism or Communism. The contrary habit is logically Anarchism.

Of course Pease is not an Anarchist. He is too clever not to see clearly the obvious inequalities and iniquities of unlimited Individualism, that is – he understands the Law of Rent in its fullest extent, and as he is one of the most unselfish men I know, he acts, in all weighty matters, on Collectivist lines. But he reserves a large sphere of minor matters as practically self-regarding and in these he is an Anarchist. Did you ever hear of the prophecy that a lately married common friend would, although most kind and unselfish, one day eat all the butter on the table, unconscious that his wife had none? (and he *did* too). That will be true – in the spirit – of Pease, unless you send him off on slightly different rails. He has lived too long and too much his own life, to be quite qualified for a Communist Colony. You too, I am afraid, have somewhat of an Anarchist mind. You too have had to live your own life, and to be at any rate intellectually alone. Beware lest you intensify each others individualism in the small matters which make up four-fifths of life, and each of which is unconsciously moulding the character which will hereafter deal with the larger matters – admittedly to be done on Collectivist lines. This need not imply that I am in favour of ‘Merger’ or even of Communism in marriage. Let it be a mere partnership. But let the partners, in every detail, act in and for the partnership – except in such spheres as they may severally act in and for larger Committees. I should like you to read (may I say over again) my paper on ‘Rome’, printed in July and August numbers of *Our Corner*, especially the conclusion. This will throw some light on the criticism I am making. Of course just now this will seem unnecessary to you. One element of your common position is the mutual harmony of thought and action which it implies. (Shaw once said that when we ‘superior intellects’ fell in love, we always felt and said that we were not under any illusion like the common herd, we knew his or her faults and defects perfectly well, and our own position, free from the usual glamour. This, he said, was simply that we were under the spell of just one illusion the more.) Pease is certainly in that position. Are you? Not that I would have you imagine that I am referring particularly to the little trials of married life, or that I am counselling you ‘How to be happy though married’. You will, I think, understand that I am referring to the whole of life’s action, and its effect on the character, and thus on all future action – and the world for ever.

Pease never would discuss plans of travel, we quarrelled daily on this point – as I would not give way. He said that you alone made all his plans when he was with you, and he simply accepted them. This is bad, even ignoble – if it is to be your future habit. It is merely the old bad

theory of marriage inverted. My interest lies in its evil effect on character, his and yours. I want you throughout life, to deliberate, discuss, and concert your every act, in free communion with those with whom you are acting, whether one or many. I am of course aware that all this is very frank – even to impertinence, but it is what I have said to Pease as forcibly as I could and what I would say to you were we together. Beware lest you do the Socialist cause *harm* by marrying one of its most useful members – see you improve his character, and not deteriorate it: see that you increase his energy, and the width of his altruism, not diminish them. See that Pease plus Davidson – *more* than Davidson and Pease separately, not, as is so usual much less. However I won't go on preaching, especially as I have no title to be heard in the matter. I hope that one day we may be friendly enough to talk over such things freely.

Pease told me that you thought me unfriendly to you. That must have been my unfortunate infirmity. From the beginning I had nothing but kindest feelings towards you – yet without the capacity for allowing them to be seen. We scarcely ever met except at Hampstead, though you did once show me how short we all are at 27 Keppel Street. My mother and sister are perhaps matter of fact and sharers in my own coldness, but I can assure you that they would be very glad if you would make them friends.

I have just had a letter from Pease at Philadelphia which I enclose. It will of course take him some time to get to work and be hard for him. Don't let him stay too long.

Will you let me know about work? Perhaps I can help you. Remember that I am rather great at vague knowledge of things in general, and that I have access to the most perfect storehouses. Send me a line when you want to know *anything* and I will find out.

The election of Mrs B Headlam, and another Socialist person, on the London School Board may be of use to you. Do not look for one moment for anything out of London. There is literally no other place worth living in. I have seen a great many others and *I know*.

I can't write all I want to say. I never wrote so long a letter before to anyone, but I have not yet done. Yet I must stop, and so adieu.

Sidney Webb
13/12/88

Webb remarked in his old age that

I have very little knowledge of what has happened to me internally. I am, I suppose, what is nowadays called an extrovert. Things impinge on me and I react to the impact, occasionally with ideas and suggestions

that prove interesting ... I can supply nothing but a series of disconnected accounts, impacts and reactions.

This was a truthful account of what he had trained himself to become, rather than an accurate report of what he had always been. For Sidney at thirty was an introvert whose pugnacious self-assurance in public life hardly concealed his profound sense of personal inadequacy. For him, self-denial meant not renunciation but release. One must recall how intensely he suffered from the pangs of shame and remorse; how they were as vivid and acute in recollection as they had been at the time of commission and discovery; the settled pessimism; the sense of being small and ugly and personally insignificant and unlovable. Where was Dr Heidenhoff with his process of thought extirpation: the process which would select for oblivion the memory of failure and humiliation? He might try to follow Mill's counsel and find happiness as something incidental to work for humanity but, so long as he conceived of humanity as Mill did, its emancipation appeared not merely as unsatisfying, but as dreadful. The will to live an individual life was the survival of the brute in man. One must combat this wrong-headed refusal willingly to bow the neck to the yoke: reject the highest cultivation of our own personality in favour of filling, in the best possible way, our function in the great social machine. Man is a being who forms committees; he must aspire never to act alone.

This is not to deny the reality of Sidney's social conscience, nor does it in any way invalidate his critique of individualism as the mask of exploitation and chaos. But part of the secret of his effectiveness lay in the harmony between his sense of public duty, and his fear of personal freedom and individuality. It is commonly supposed that Webb, like Darwin, sacrificed his own all-round development to politics and investigation.⁹⁹ But was it too much time among the earthworms which led to social inadequacy and cultural one-sidedness, or was it not rather the inadequacy and one-sidedness which sent him to the earthworms in the first place? In this dialectic, what appears first as effect comes subsequently as cause. Webb became, like Darwin, an anaesthetised man, which is not at all the same as being unfeeling. It is the result of a too acute sensibility. The anaesthetised man tries – sometimes with but indifferent success – to localise the anaesthetic and to numb only part of himself. The young Webb loved London, and cared deeply for Wallas and other friends. But this love and friendship came through a purposive rapport. How could such a rapport be achieved in every relationship in life? One could not escape from oneself until the vacant place was filled in the last, the smallest and the important committee. Sidney had to bear the burden of autobiographical reflection, of introspection, of self-pity, until he could submit to that happy yoke.

'Men are like planets,' remarked the hero of *But Yet a Woman*, 'as part of a system they behave themselves well enough, but any one of them, freed from the restraints of others, would rush to destruction.' Happily for Sidney, the stars were in their courses, and within six months he felt the first faint gravitational pull. He was reviewing Charles Booth's great book with its 'terrible numbering of the people'. There he found that 'Miss Beatrice Potter contributes lucid papers on "the Docks", "the tailoring trade" and "the Jewish Community"'. Though sometimes a little hard in tone, and too individualist in economics, these afford important information on disputed points.¹⁰⁰

It is to be hoped that A.J.P. Taylor's opinion that Sidney Webb is 'a door that can never be unlocked' may be revised. The reader should be able to do this for himself without more explicit help from the biographer. Far from being the incorrigible extrovert that he made himself out to be in later life, the young Webb was exceptionally sensitive and vulnerable, one who suffered from shame and embarrassment even more after the event than during it. He longed for 'Dr Heidenhoff's process' and cultivated self-deadness in the professional civil service. An admirer of John Stuart Mill, he must have been familiar with the celebrated message in the *Autobiography* where the author recalled the personal discovery that personal happiness was to be found, not in the search for it for oneself, but in the pursuit of it for others. This was the meaning of the innumerable joinings of societies, clubs, 'parliaments', reform associations and, indeed, the Fabian Society itself which he came to belong to and then to shape. He was entirely satisfied that Shaw should come to be the predominant performer on the *platform* while he prevailed within the *committee*. Shaw found it aggravating that Webb should diminish himself. Webb found it easy and necessary. When it came to the formation of the partnership he found it delightful.¹⁰¹

Part II
The Divided Self:
Beatrice Potter 1858–90

You are young, pretty, rich, clever, what more do you want? I expect you get on well in Society. Why cannot you be satisfied?

Maggie Harkness to her cousin Beatrice Potter, n.d. [1878?]

A woman, in all the relations of life, should be sought.

Beatrice Potter, Diary, 27 November 1887

Why should not the girls have freedom now and then?

And if a girl likes a man, why should she not propose?

Why should the little girls always be led by the nose?

A work girls' song recorded by Miss Beatrice Potter while she was employed in an East End sweat shop in 1888

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

It is not the failure nor the effort tires.

The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

William Empson, Missing Dates

3

The Making of a Gilded Spinster 1858–85

The social distance between the Potters and the Webbs—The ‘Glorified Spinsters’ and the lower middle class—Contrasting trainings, but a common education—The importance of Herbert Spencer—Between Spencer and Chamberlain—Joseph Chamberlain as more than an episode and more than a non-event.

During the prolonged and difficult negotiations, which culminated in the formation of the partnership, Sidney advanced his cause as best he might. Indeed, in his desperation no argument appeared too bizarre to be denied a trial. In one bad moment he even assured Miss Beatrice Potter that whatever else might distance them, they were not separated by the barriers of class.¹ Miss Potter did not record her response to this assurance. But whatever it was may be made the subject of safe conjecture: Mr Webb was an incompetent social investigator or he was impertinent. The possibilities were not mutually exclusive.

Upon no known criteria could Sidney Webb and Beatrice Potter be placed in the same social class. While he was a public employee, the son of a self-employed hairdresser and of a doubtfully qualified professional man, she was the eighth child and eighth daughter of a great capitalist. Richard Potter was so great a capitalist that he could not possibly have known the names of all those who were in his direct employ, let alone of those who were indirectly dependent upon him for their livelihood. He had, to be sure, a first-hand acquaintance with Sidney’s ‘fear of poverty which is worse than poverty itself’. But this had belonged to a particular moment in his career: a moment long since past and one from which he protected his beloved daughters by the size and balance of his portfolio. During the sharp commercial and political crisis of 1847–8 he had lost the greater part of his inherited wealth which he held in French stocks.² He had had to turn his back upon a life as a rentier and a gentleman and become, as his forebears had been, an energetic businessman. He rapidly recouped all that he had lost thanks to a partnership in a timber-works

The Potter family tree

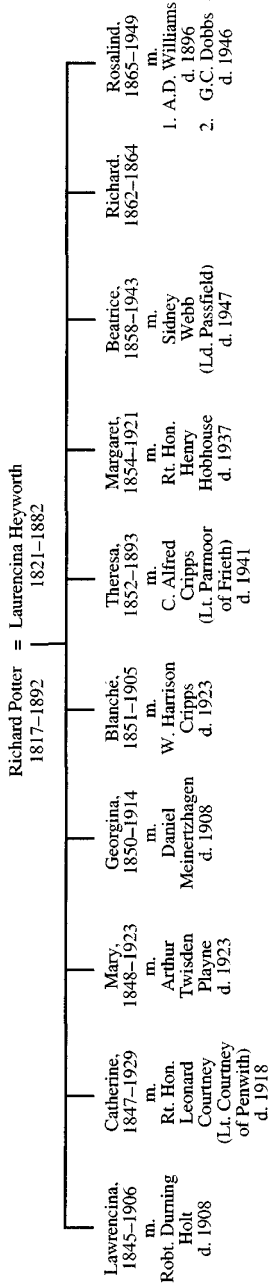


Figure 3.1 The marriages of the Potter sisters into distinguished families. Beatrice and Catherine's unions' were childless but the others produced 43 children.

that made a fortune out of the Crimean War. By the time of Beatrice's birth in 1858 he had found his way onto the board of the Great Western Railway, subsequently becoming president of the Grand Trunk. Henceforth, the family's wealth was affected by economic fluctuations, but they did not disturb its style of life.

Richard Potter's recovery from the shock of 1848 was not entirely due to those traits of character that he might have inherited from his father or grandfather. If he shared their aptitude for business, he affected to have no taste for it. In 1837 he advised his father that he preferred the Bar to entering the family's warehouse in Manchester.³ But only a short experience of practising law was needed to persuade him that this profession was equally disagreeable. After his marriage in 1844 he retired, intending to live gracefully in the South of England. It was the crisis that aroused his slumbering energies and showed that he had his father's calculating intelligence and will to success. To these he joined advantages unknown to his father and still less to his grandfather. He had been sent to Clifton and to University College, London – the infidel institution in Gower Street – the appropriate centre of learning for the son of 'radical Dick', Manchester capitalist and MP for Wigan. It was an old schoolfriend who offered Richard the partnership in the timber-works. His wife, Lawrencina Heyworth, was the daughter of a Liverpool merchant and Radical parliamentarian and had a family background much like his own. It was through her that he entered the world of railways and big capital. Thus, social connection and the increasingly influential cousinhood of the rich provided a safety net for those who fell. Such nets might not be held in place forever. However, Richard Potter, without qualifying for inclusion in the annals of *Self-Help*, answered sufficiently to its values. He was not afraid of work once it became necessary, nor was he one of those dissipated young fops who became 'sodden with pleasure' and unfit for the competitive struggle. He was a fortunate, able and cultivated man, ruthless and cynical in business, loving and indulgent in his relationships with his wife, his daughters and his friends. As his fortune became indestructible, he switched from the Liberals and exchanged Nonconformity for the Establishment; he turned to the Tories during the political crisis of 1866–7. Yet he was not to be passionately engaged by religion or politics.⁴ His attitudes were easy and civilised. He neither disowned his forebears nor did he feel uneasy or disturbed when he was in the company of those who still affected to despise commerce.

The Potter daughters spent most of their early years in Standish, a mansion some eight miles from the timber merchant's firm in Gloucester. When they were not in Gloucestershire or in their London house they were to be found at Rusland Hall in Westmorland or at their mother's favourite residence, the Argoed, in Monmouthshire. Richard Potter frequently travelled abroad in the company of one or more of his daughters.

But if the family can properly be said to have had a home, it was Standish, overlooking the vale of the Severn. Beatrice was born there on 2 January 1858. The house was divided into two parts. The front, facing south-west, was linked by heavily carpeted corridors. In these one passed by the doors of endless bedrooms and sitting rooms, the best drawing room and mother's boudoir, the dining room; then on to the back of the house, to the library and study, the smoking and billiard room. Stone steps and bare, flagged passages connected the rooms at the rear. Here were the house-keeper's room, the rooms of governesses; then, one descended, down through the butlers' and the upper servants' quarters to the lower servants' quarters. Here also were the day and night nurseries, the one bathroom, and the schoolroom where Miss Potter – easily wearying of her lessons – might look down at her friends the laundresses hurrying across the servants' yard or past them to the grooms working in the stables beyond.⁵

All Beatrice's sisters got married before she did. With the partial exception of her one younger sister, Rosie, all of them married their social equals. Three of the elder girls found husbands with substantial property. Lawrencina ('Lallie'), the eldest, married R.D. Holt, who had important interests in Liverpool shipping companies and played a prominent part in the life of that city as a member of one of the ruling Unitarian and Liberal families. Mary, the third daughter, married Arthur Playne, the owner of a cloth mill in Gloucestershire, the only brother-in-law who might have passed for a squire or been described as 'aristocratic'. Beatrice went to the United States with her father and the Playnes two days after her fourth sister, Georgina, married the banker, Daniel Meinertzhagen. Georgina tended to be impatient with young Beatrice for her intellectual pretensions.

The next group of marriages brought Beatrice brothers-in-law who were rather more to her taste. Her second sister, Kate, had been a member of the party that went to America in 1873. While they were making their way back from California, Beatrice was attacked by scarlet fever and had to be carried off the train at Chicago by her father and George Pullman. Scarlet fever was followed by rheumatic fever. Then came the measles. Kate played the nurse and proved herself 'a dear kind devoted sister'. In her diary young Beatrice confided: 'I really have not found out one serious fault.' However, the Potter parents were displeased with Kate since she wished to withdraw from society and devote herself to philanthropic work under the direction of Miss Octavia Hill. Kate's tenacious claim to serve the poor and the suffering was rewarded in 1875 when she was allowed to become a rent-collector in the East End of London.⁶ Despite this renunciation of the world of the gay and splendid she made, in 1883, a highly successful marriage to Leonard Courtney, then Financial Secretary to the Treasury in Gladstone's second administration. Despite

his 'massive intelligence' and immense integrity Courtney never managed higher office. Although she had generous recollections of his contribution to the family's intellectual life,⁷ Beatrice was somewhat disappointed with Leonard in the early eighties. As her father said, he tended to treat politics as if it was a trade secret.⁸ Indeed, the fifth sister, Blanche, by her marriage to the distinguished surgeon William Harrison Cripps, appears to have contributed more to her young sister's education. Beatrice took to some laboratory work under his direction.

The sixth sister, Theresa, married Charles Alfred Cripps, brother to William and subsequent father of Stafford. When he married Theresa, Cripps was a successful young barrister. His complicated and powerful intelligence fascinated Beatrice. He was to enter Parliament as a Conservative in 1895. The seventh sister, Margaret, married a future Liberal Unionist MP, Henry Hobhouse, the elder cousin of the sociologist L.T. Hobhouse. While Beatrice respected Hobhouse, she felt that he was hardly worthy of her favourite sister, the closest to her in years, in interests and in temperament. He lacked liveliness. He took her from the friendly competitor for fatherly regard, who was also a rival in literary accomplishment and a companion in walking, smoking and arguing about political economy or the Religion of Humanity.⁹ On holiday with the Hobhouses in 1881, she noted that Maggie was 'seedy and miserable; the natural result of the conditions of married existence.'¹⁰ The following year she found that she liked Henry better, but that her sister had improved neither intellectually or spiritually. Her powerful faculties were under-employed and she was no longer at peace with herself. Beatrice considered her sister's attachment to individual freedom was deadening her sympathies. She was

strongly averse to the breaking down of the barrier of respectability between the endowed classes and the outer mob of the uneducated and unclothed. And intimacy with the barbarians is dangerous except it be for the purpose of impressing upon them moral maxims which will lead them to a peaceful resignation as they watch those who Have enjoying and wasting while they are dying of hunger. 'Independent circumstances' is the test of superiority; independence is the luxury which will develop virtue, struggling, battling, helping, nothing good will come of it – the pride of respectability will be worn away without which man is the human animal, the lawless passion and fearful power.¹¹

This suggests that Beatrice in 1882 had attained to an independent, critical and emancipated position with respect to class society. In fact no single passage from her early writings could convey the complexity of her attitudes. She had an absorbing interest in social differences. Her snobbery

was nicely regulated, allowing her to despise it when it was paraded by others while enjoying a suitably reserved indulgence in it herself. Thus, while on holiday in the Alps in July 1882 she chanced to meet a Christian Lady who explained to her the perilous nature of foreign travel:

Then *this* morning I sat down on a bench near quite a *ladylike* looking girl: where do you think she came from?

No! Where?

From *Birmingham!*

'Dear me', replied Beatrice sympathetically while silently remarking the strange compromise with the manner of worldliness in a self-professed follower of Jesus of Nazareth. The woman was, she concluded, 'steeped in class prejudice'.¹²

Yet Miss Potter herself had very decided feelings respecting the limitations of the provincial bourgeoisie. These were apparent when she went to Cornwall in the company of her sister Kate to attend the 'Courtney Demonstration'. Here she noticed with interest and satisfaction that Bolitho (the tough country gentleman and great property-owner for whom Leonard had once worked as a bank-clerk) attended the proceedings. Moving on to Plymouth, she then met the local dignitaries and Beatrice studied her sister's class-consciousness. Kate would never have allowed herself to be kissed by the daughter of the leading journalist. Beatrice did permit it and felt warmed by it. But she did not exempt herself from the rule that when Potters felt really superior it was in the presence of smaller bourgeoisie. 'I felt, in the society of the Plymouth worthies, the presence of inferior animals with smaller intellects and colder hearts – but none of the subtle antagonism and contempt of the wholesale trader to his retail brother.'¹³

Only a month or two before her first meeting with Sidney, Beatrice returned to her reflections on the lower middle class. One of the closest friends of her girlhood had been Carry Darling, a school teacher. They spent six months together in Germany. It was Beatrice's first friendship outside her family. In Wiesbaden they would sit together far into the night, their feet cocked high on the China stove, smoking cigarettes and talking philosophy. Friends had helped Carry to spend two years at Newnham. The daughter of the illegitimate son of a squire, she had to seek her own livelihood. Beatrice found Carry's nature 'intensely lovable', but so did others. 'Twice or three times she was engaged or "kept company" for her lower middle class origin showed itself in her love affairs if nowhere else.'¹⁴ She used to pity Beatrice the round of 'Society': riding in the Row, wasting Sundays receiving calls from eligible young men. During the 1880s she went to take up a headship in Australia and

formed a passionate attachment to a married man. Beatrice conjectured that since he was the English master at the boys' grammar school he was 'probably the first really cultivated and attractive man she had come across – for her old loves were of the lower middle class type.'¹⁵ Carry went off to meet her lover in Japan and 'in a sort of queer way' became engaged to the captain of the ship! 'God preserve me', Beatrice concluded, 'from a lover between 35 and 45: no woman can resist a man's importunity during the last years of an unrealised womanhood.'¹⁶ Presumably resistance would be somewhat easier – as well as the more imperative – if the man in question happened to be 'lower middle class'!

But if Carry Darling belonged to a class which Beatrice despised she was also a member of an order with which Beatrice sympathised and with which she felt herself to be closely associated. One of the most distinctive features of English society in the 1880s was the rise of the Glorified Spinster.¹⁷ The Glorified Spinster liked to think of herself in terms of freedom rather than necessity, of heightened ambition rather than reduced circumstances. Yet her connections were decidedly with the lower middle class. Typically she belonged to a child-rich family of one of the less successful members of the business or professional community, a family persuaded of its increasing poverty by anxiety about the butcher's bill and boys too big for their cricket suits. The daughters in such households were apt to fear that they were going to be numbered among the 'superfluous woman'. Privately they were prone to contemplate the advantages of polygamy or the Chinese way with female infants. They were also apt to be 'rebellious' daughters who liked to see themselves striking out for an independent life rather than being compelled to make their own way in the world as a result of altered circumstances. As the supply of employable girls increased so did the demand for their services as nurses, teachers, book-keepers, clerks, librarians, journalists or rent-collectors, or as heads of departments in laundries or other businesses where the habit of giving commands to working-class females was more important than mastery over the technical processes of production.¹⁸ The average income in such employment might amount to between two and three pounds a week, an amount that often signified defeat and drudgery for a married man, but sufficiency for an emancipated girl. Having no one but herself to support and often receiving some occasional help from the more tolerant or affluent members of her family, she might visit the theatre, buy books and take the occasional holiday abroad. Out of the modest comfort of her bed-sitting-room, she proclaimed that if an Old Maid was something less than a woman, a Glorified Spinster was something more. She showed it by her display of perfect indifference towards the weather, her calmness in crowds, her readiness to run for the omnibus. When she met her friends they soothed each others' nerves with the help of cigarettes while

discussing the redistribution of property, the possibilities of euthanasia and the moral lawfulness of suicide.

While the Glorified Spinster was a recognisable type, she often had only a precarious hold upon her own identity. While she might argue with acquaintances about rejecting marriage and breaking with a life of dependence upon her relatives, among her peers she was inclined to admit that it was 'no use blinking the fact that nothing can make up to us women for the loss of human ties.'¹⁹ One could bury one's care under a load of work, but only for limited intervals. Such women had grown apart from their parents. They hoped to see them so rarely that old affection would do instead of sympathy in thought and feeling; but a vague sense of insecurity as well as a sense of obligation to their fathers prevented them from making any clean breaks. As to marriage, they thought it disgusting that men discussed matrimonial matters as they did. 'They talk a girl over; speak of her as if she was an animal; and always imagine she is in love with them unless she snubs them, and then they hate her.'²⁰ But few of them were prepared to renounce marriage altogether. They supposed that there were some men left who believed in women. If they became engaged to one they rejoiced. It would grieve them to give up their work, but 'glorified spinsterhood plus a future to look forward to – even at the cost of losing its halo – is a very jolly form of life.'²¹ But if marriage was problematical, so was employment – despite the increased opportunities of securing it. The root of the problem was inadequate educational preparation: 'Girls brought up at home in a school room or shut up all day with a woman, who perhaps possesses no mind whatsoever, are not fit to live alone or work for themselves or their fellow-creatures.'²² If women with strong individualities were not meant for marriage, what were they meant for? Beatrice's close friend and cousin Maggie Harkness was an excellent example of the Glorified Spinster, but she found great difficulty in discovering work that would satisfy her. She tried nursing and journalism. She thought that the happiest career would be that of an actress. She might have been a doctor, but her own concept of femininity was one of the obstacles in her path: 'If I were a man I should be a doctor – as a woman I can't. I do not believe in women having nerves for operating. I could not cut up a little child.'²³ So she became a political adventuress instead, playing the part of a mysterious, exciting and cynical go-between among socialists and politicians.²⁴

In the early and mid-eighties the Glorified Spinster was identified more by her attempts at leading an 'independent life' rather than by any distinctive independence of thought. In religious matters she tended to attitudes nostalgic and mature. One of Beatrice's dearest friends after 1885, Ella Pycroft, found the old devotional books full of a faith that she no longer shared, but which she still found almost as soothing as the cigarettes to which Beatrice helped to introduce her.²⁵

Ella worked among the poor and she did so in a way that points up the equivocal situation of the Glorified Spinster. She was in a great tradition, for it was allowed that caring for the poor was a decently feminine interest. But whereas this had been seen as an extension of the domestic obligations of respectable women, it was becoming a professional undertaking for those who had no domestic life of their own. The forms of self-indulgence that it masked were changing. As caring for the poor became professionalised it ceased to be an extension of the domestic round and become a possible release from its tedium and emptiness. In place of the satisfaction of playing the great lady were the subtler rewards that some women found in escaping from their own social diffidence or insecurity.²⁶ If upper- and middle-class ladies could always feel more sure of themselves when they were with the poor, the Glorified Spinsters were inclined to think that they could be themselves better when they were with them.

It was with this version of the Glorified Spinster that Beatrice felt herself to be particularly close. Going into the East End in the company of Ella Pycroft, working as rent collector, charity organiser or social investigator, she enjoyed herself. She rejoiced in the absences of restraints that she would have felt in another sphere of life. She discovered that she could visit working men in their rooms without arousing the sexual expectations that would have been present in the case of males from any other class of society.²⁷ A bed was only disturbing if the man was in the habit of flavouring haddock by keeping it behind the mattress.²⁸

But while the Glorified Spinster had lower-middle-class associations, it was despite these that Beatrice valued her. These women, just because they were women striving to become professional people, were much superior to the *petit bourgeois*. This seemed to her to be manifestly true of the energetic, self-respecting, simple, warm, organised working people of the northern factory towns.²⁹ It was also partly true of the vital and humorous casual labourers of East London. This leisure class at the foot of society was envied rather than pitied.³⁰ From an economic point of view a clerk or shopkeeper might be fit for life, as this 'residuum' was not – but if one sometimes feared this self-indulgent sensual mass, one did not have the contempt for it occasioned by the pathetic pretensions and total want of distinction that – so Beatrice believed – characterised the lower middle class.

It must be understood that the Glorified Spinster generally managed to live down her class origins, and that unlike Carry she succeeded in staying on the right side of respectability. If Ella Pycroft or Maggie Harkness had relations with men that were not entirely orthodox they did not positively flout convention. The young Beatrice came to accept what she could not admire. When Ella Pycroft became engaged to Maurice Paul (who was

ten years her junior), Beatrice seems to have felt much as she did when her friend Benjamin Jones, the co-operator, declared that he limited the size of his family by the use of contraceptives. It was distasteful, but it was difficult to formulate an objection to it in a rational form.³¹ However she was quite decided that she was not going to be guilty of lapses that might cut her off from her family or turn her into a social outcast. Thus, after Maggie Harkness introduced her into the 'British Museum set' she bumped into Karl Marx's daughter, Tussy. Miss Potter at once recognised that Miss Marx was no mere Glorified Spinster. It was all very well to proclaim oneself a socialist and an atheist; it was allowable to argue that Christ lacked heroism. But a suspicion of over-indulgences in drugs and of enjoyment of 'natural' relations with the opposite sex was quite another matter. Accordingly, Miss Marx's invitation to Miss Potter to visit her was regretfully ignored. Tussy might be 'comely', her eyes might be 'fine' and 'full of life and sympathy', but 'the chances were against her staying long within the pale of respectable society'. Beatrice saw her own social position as one that conferred upon her great opportunities to play the participant observer, but that social position itself was not to be jeopardised. If she mixed with this fascinating woman she would become more or less connected with her. So Miss Potter parted with Miss Marx and went on to a meeting of the Charity Organisation Society instead.³²

If Eleanor Marx in 1883 seemed likely to become notorious, Mrs Annie Besant in 1887 had already achieved this distinction. In November of that year Beatrice went along to hear her speak at the Eleusis Club. While acknowledging that Mrs Besant was a real orator, Miss Potter felt that it was a revolting spectacle to witness a woman upon a public platform: 'to see her speak made me shudder. It is not womanly to thrust yourself before the world. A woman, in all the relations of life, should be sought.'³³ Beatrice was perfectly capable of sympathising with Mrs Besant, who had been 'robbed of her child', but she was not inclined to associate herself with her. She sensed the insecurity of Annie's relations with the socialists. There was nothing permanent about the lady. She was here today and gone tomorrow. The young Beatrice was not afraid to travel, but she took care never to go on a journey without making sure that she had a return ticket.

Sidney Webb and Graham Wallas were among those who failed to get into the crowded meeting held at the Eleusis in November 1887.³⁴ It was just as well. Had Mr Webb met Miss Potter on that occasion they could not have hit it off. To begin with, Sidney still fell far short of the celebrity that he was to attain subsequently. He would have been bound to defend Mrs Besant as the foremost Fabian of the day, but her opinions on the nationalisation of the railways were not sufficiently well

founded to impress the eighth daughter of a great railway director. Indeed, Mrs Besant's ignorance of the whole subject made Beatrice depressed. How could her attitude towards Fabian socialism have been improved by a presumptuous little clerk, looking up at her out of a grubby collar and daring to lisp out his contradictions in a cockney accent?³⁵ Far from being the same social class as herself, this Mr Webb would be expected to make contact with a Potter only as a passenger (possibly steerage) on the Holt's Blue Funnel Line, as a singularly impecunious client at the bank of the Meinhertzhagens, or perhaps as a patient with a sufficiently interesting ailment to engage the attention of Willie Cripps. Most probably he would meet a Potter only in his role as a deferential civil servant, where he might expect to wait upon a Courtney, a Cripps or a Hobhouse when one or more of them attained to ministerial rank. Perhaps Miss Potter would have eventually recognised that men like Mr Webb were not without interest as the subject of sociological enquiry and were not devoid of merit and political importance. She might – despite his inadequate table manners – have invited him to a meal; but to share anything else with him would have been unthinkable.

* * *

Thus, the unfortunate Sidney, in asking Beatrice to allow that they were of the same social class, had chosen the line of argument least likely to succeed. He would have done far better to suggest that class differences were irrelevant or unlikely to last than to pretend that they did not exist. Beatrice was acutely conscious of their reality and their importance. She was imbued with class pride and it was only in relation to foreigners that her prejudices were still more pronounced.³⁶ His claim to a community of interest with her was far better founded when he pointed not to class, but to culture.

A culture may have its source in the experiences and the aspirations of a class, but it can never be narrowly confined to one. The forms of truth that it most prizes; the standards by which it distinguishes between the beautiful and the ugly; the content that it gives to the impartial rules governing right conduct, may all be recognised to have their origin in a particular social tradition and still be felt to have a universal validity. Thus Sidney Webb and Beatrice Potter shared not a common education but rather an overlapping range of concerns and a common intellectual inheritance.

The experience of formal education was dissimilar if only because Beatrice can hardly have been said to have had much. She did her best to avoid the formal instruction offered to her in the Standish schoolroom, and in this she appears to have had considerable success.³⁷ Mr Pincher had no

equivalent in her childhood experience and she never sat an examination of any consequence in her life. Her frequent illnesses, real or imagined, and an indulgent father who could see little reason why his young daughter should suffer a rigorous discipline, spared her from ordeals in which Sidney delighted. Perhaps it left her without his capacity for unremitting toil or his sense of complete accomplishment. She applied herself to studies, which she enjoyed, but became impatient when she had difficulty, as with mathematics or political economy.³⁸ What began as impatience with herself tended to become impatience with the offending subject and led her to a switch of attention. Her mother's conviction that Beatrice was the least intellectually able of all her children was hardly helpful in correcting this fault.³⁹

Yet the households in Cranbourn Street and in Standish were both libertarian and free-thinking. If the values of hard work were impressed upon the children – always more upon boys than upon girls – this was done by example rather than by attempts at compulsion. If both the mothers were concerned with religious truth, they were free from fanaticism and not alarmed by a spirit of free enquiry. By the standards of the ruling oligarchy, classical antiquity was allowed less than its due importance, but science and useful knowledge were highly valued. Concepts of evolution, the idea of progress and the assumption that methods of natural science might be used productively in relation to social disorders were commonplace. If they were not accepted without question, they were acknowledged to be excellent topics for debate.

If Beatrice took longer than Sidney to make her acquaintance with *Kelly's Directory*, this was not because there was any class of literature which was regarded as undesirably stimulating for young girls. From the Potter library she could take whatever books she chose. With her father or her sisters she enjoyed the greatest freedom of discussion. It was not as a result of overt family pressures that she tended to arrive during her adolescence at suitably maidenly and conventional conclusions. At seventeen she read *Jane Eyre* and found it to be an 'an impure book'.⁴⁰ Victor Hugo was pure. George Sand had an undercurrent of hidden sensuality and was 'impure'.⁴¹ She was her own censor trying, evidently with indifferent success, to protect herself from writers who encouraged her in her own propensity to build fanciful castles in the air: love scenes and death-bed scenes, romance and melodrama. She sometimes felt that the very freedom of her upbringing was a burden to her. It made it hard for her not to waste her time on romantic fantasies. Worse still, when one was encouraged to make up one's mind it was hard to sustain any settled faith in God.⁴² By the time she was in her early twenties Beatrice had discovered George Eliot. Like Sidney she had the greatest affection and admiration for her work. She was her favourite novelist and retained that status until

1881. In that year Beatrice first read Balzac and was fascinated and quite overwhelmed. Never before had she read 'such disgustingly true analysis of mean, base, thought and feeling'.⁴³ A year later she was trying her hand at translation:

Financially speaking M. Goriot was a hybrid between the tiger and the boa constrictor. He knew how to lie in wait, to crouch watching and examining his prey, then opening the cavern of his purse gulp down a mass of gold and, like a gorged serpent resting, digest, methodical, cold and quiescent.⁴⁴

The appalling thought that her father, outside the decencies of domestic life, might behave like that, or that that might not disturb her dear sister Maggie Hobhouse, may have flickered across her mind. In 1882 at the age of twenty-four, she first toyed with the idea of trying to write something publishable. It was to have been an article on Balzac.⁴⁵

In literature, Beatrice firmly preferred prose to poetry. She seems hardly to have read poetry. Most of her recorded reading from late adolescence onwards was in philosophy or history. She read Plato wearily and Bacon with pleasure and benefit. Her studies were under no close direction, but their bias was quite apparent. At nineteen, Harriet Martineau gave her a higher idea of the religion of science, while Buckle's *History of Civilisation in England* left her deeply impressed.⁴⁶ In the next year or two Ruskin and Goethe were mentioned favourably, but it was Lecky, Lewes, J.S. Mill and Auguste Comte who were the authors for whom she had the highest regard and to whom she paid the closest attention. Her reading was not uncritical. Thus Lecky prompted her to question whether there was a correspondence between progress and happiness.⁴⁷ But while she was not as immersed in the English Utilitarian tradition as Sidney, she was carried along by the powerful currents of positivism. It was not surprising that Herbert Spencer, who was supposed to have given the positivist tradition its definitive form, was her closest friend and teacher. The synthetic philosopher, a great but merely literary influence so far as Sidney was concerned, was one of the most important characters in Beatrice's life.

Richard Potter and Herbert Spencer were old friends. They shared a common background in the rising, reforming, non-conforming middle class of the North – or the Midlands in Spencer's case. Their families – with a fearful and predictable monotony – were for the First Reform Act and the New Poor Law and against the Corn Laws and Chartism. Just as Richard Potter had been to University College and had accomplishments outside money making, so Herbert Spencer had practical experience in the running of railways and would have hotly protested against the notion that he was a mere pedagogue like Auguste Comte. As Potter had

about him something of the self-made man who had arrived, Spencer was a self-taught man who had won for himself a position of great eminence in English thought. In the mid-Victorian years, in the eighteen sixties and seventies when Beatrice was a girl, Herbert Spencer was at the height of his powers. The prophet of Evolution and of Progress, he was revered by Darwin. The scourge of classicists, he satisfied the demand that knowledge should be useful in content and systematic in form. He was the dreaded adversary of clericalism, militarism and superstition; his ambition to be a walking encyclopaedia was merely incidental to his purpose of applying the methods of science to the study of society: the creation of sociology. Sociology was indispensable. Once moral rules had lost their supernatural sanctions, right conduct could only be determined and upheld by being shown to be another way of expressing the laws of human survival and development.⁴⁸

Spencer's first book, *Social Statics* (1851), was the best approximation which English middle-class Radicalism could produce to the *Communist Manifesto*. If Cobden's sense for the social foundation of politics and his passionate conviction that bourgeois interest ultimately coincided with those of humanity makes it proper to describe him as a middle-class Marxist, Spencer's sense for the logic of historical process seen as an agency working through, but beyond, human consciousness might earn him the same description. Arguably this is more like the positivist Marxism of Engels than of the dialectical Marxism of Marx. Man's selfish and aggressive nature was the inheritance of his earliest struggles to survive. Granted that men had become selfish there was no avoiding the corollary that all power that is not made accountable to others will be selfishly exercised. Monarchy, feudalism: the record of the latter European aristocracies provided proofs more than were wanted that all irresponsible rulers always had and always would sacrifice the public good to their own benefit. The English landed oligarchy merely furnished the latest example in this squalid story. From the Black Act (9th of George I) which had provided for death without benefit of clergy for those suspected on circumstantial evidence of poaching; through the Enclosure Acts; through reduced taxation of land while other taxes enormously increased; through the perversion of the funds of the public schools – the sorry story ran into the present day. England was still suffering from an electoral system that gave undue weight to the landed interest and the consequences of this were to be seen in the game laws, the law enabling a landlord to anticipate other creditors, to obtain his rent by immediate seizure of his tenants' property and much else besides. 'If, therefore, class-legislation is the consequence of class-power, there is no escape from the conclusion that the interest of the society can be secured, only by giving power into the hands of the people.'

What gave interest to this democratic rhetoric was not that it was carried rather far and included a demand for the nationalisation of land, but that it was grounded in a form of philosophical determinism. 'The course of civilisation', according to Spencer, 'could not possibly have been other than it has been.'

Social Statics was not just democratic rhetoric carried to the point of a demand for land nationalisation. It might indeed be usefully considered as a critique of the hunt, that cherished institution of landed society, but it was a critique. It raised the usual sentimental protest against blood sports and the iniquity of the game laws to quite a different level.

Man in his aboriginal state could survive only by exterminating the lower forms of life that tenanted the earth. He could obtain his happiness only at the expense of other beings. His nature had to become adapted to his circumstances. He had to develop a desire to kill and the capacity to enjoy the sight of pain and anguish. The behaviour of men to the lower animals and their behaviour to each other bear a constant relationship:

The blind desire to inflict suffering, distinguishes not between the creatures who exhibit that suffering, but obtains gratification indifferently from the agonies of beast and human being – delights equally in worrying a brute, and in putting a prisoner to the rack.⁴⁹

This truth was illustrated, according to Spencer, by

the spectators in the Roman amphitheatres [who] were as much delighted by the slaying of gladiators as by the death-struggles of wild beasts. The ages during which Europe was thinly peopled, and hunting a chief occupation, were also the ages of feudal violence, universal brigandage, dungeons, tortures. Here in England a whole province depopulated to make game preserves, and a law sentencing to death a serf who killed a stag, show how great activity of the predatory instinct and utter indifference to human happiness coexisted.⁵⁰

However, lying dormant within man was a capacity to maximise his own happiness by rejoicing in the happiness of others. This propensity dictated the 'law of equal freedom', according to which all men might do as they chose so long as they did not infringe on the right of other men to do likewise. After accomplishing its appointed purpose man's earlier nature must evolve through further functional adaptation into its ultimate state. But this adaptation takes place slowly. The circumstances of human life do not undergo sudden and permanent changes:

Note further that where the destructive propensities have almost fulfilled their purpose, and are on the eve of losing their gratification, they make to themselves an artificial sphere of exercise by game-preserving,

and are so kept in activity after they would otherwise have become dormant. But note chiefly that the old predatory disposition is in a certain sense self-maintained. For it generates between men and men a hostile relationship, similar to that which it generates between men and inferior animals; and by doing so provides for itself a lasting source of excitement. This happens inevitably.

(This was not a chance expression. As already noted, Spencer insisted that the 'course of civilisation could not possibly have been other than it has been.') The desires of the savage acting, as we have seen, indiscriminately, necessarily lead him to perpetual trespasses against his fellows and consequently to endless antagonisms – 'to quarrels of individuals, to fighting of tribes, to feuds of clan with clan, to wars of nations. And thus being by their constitutions made mutual foes, as well as foes to the lower races, men keep alive in each other the old propensities after the original need for them has in great measure ceased.'⁵¹

In modern industrial society men were so mutually dependent upon each other that functional adaptation had to take the form of developing the sympathetic rather than the predatory capacities. The ground for this had been prepared by an earlier clearing away of the inferior races of men: conquests generally have marked the victory of social over anti-social man. Similarly slavery, once a necessary condition for the acquisition of work discipline, had indirectly aided the development of the civilisation which it otherwise confronted as its opposite. The time for the supersession of war and bondage came when the moral sense of men, in adaptation to the changing social state, pronounced them wrong. But 'during man's apprenticeship to the social state there must predominate in him some impulse corresponding to the arrangements requisite ...' Savage selfishness required hero-worship and boundless state power. Changes in the savage character were required to bring about an incongruity with the existing institutions, then revolution more or less successfully (usually less) began to restore equilibrium. But

the same causes which render a better social state possible, render the successive modifications of it easier. These occur under less pressure; with smaller disturbance; and more frequently: until, by a gradual diminution in the amounts and intervals of change, the process merges into one of uninterrupted growth.⁵²

Morality, according to Spencer, was 'a species of transcendental physiology'. Evolutionary progress was, in all its forms, discovered to be the tendency to individuation. By the time Beatrice was five years old he was in possession of that conception of evolution as a cosmic principle which was universally present in organic and organic matter; in the animal

kingdom and in human society. It was, accordingly to *First Principles*, 'a change from an indefinite, incoherent, homogeneity, to a definite coherent heterogeneity, through continuous differentiations and integration'.⁵³ In the words of a mischievous parody, it was 'a change from a no-howish, untalkaboutable, by continuous somethingelsifications and sticktogetherations'.⁵⁴ Right conduct consisted in acting in accordance with the cosmic principle against all despotisms whether of caste, custom, sex or whatever sought to limit individuality.

Already in *Social Statics* Spencer was well supplied with learned illustrations of his evolutionary law as exhibited in the progress from the creatures consisting of nothing but amorphous semi-fluid jelly in the phylum Porifera on to the beings in the Alcyonidae with their digestive sacs and accompanying mouths and tentacles, through to the Corallidae and the Tubiporidae and much, much more besides, but all subserving the same point that evolutionary progress is marked by increasing variety of senses, instincts powers and qualities; a rising distinction and complexity; a more marked individuality. But paradoxically, this tendency to increasing individuality had to be joined with the greatest mutual dependence – a difficulty to be removed only by the adaptation of men such that desires inconsistent with a perfect social organisation would die out. As Karl Marx imagined the communist society of the future as one in which the free development of each had become the condition of the free development of all, so Spencer insisted that within existing society one could witness the maturing of the ultimate man whose individual claims would coincide with public wants:

He will be that manner of man who, in spontaneously fulfilling his own nature, incidentally performs the functions of a social unit; and yet is only enabled so to fulfil his own nature by all others doing the like.⁵⁵

The celebration of bourgeois society was joined to stern lessons for the rich. Woe betide those who kept their eyes too close to the ledger and sold adulterated goods. The young Spencer did not, indeed, go as far as his French counterpart, Auguste Comte, and raise an impertinent cry for the 'moralisation' of capitalists: he was content to demonstrate that mere pocket prudence should induce them to further human welfare.

At the time of Beatrice's birth, Herbert Spencer was already established as sensibly *avant-garde*, respectably radical, utopian in a generally commendable and rather painless way. But he was a radical. Full of the new learning, he was savaging the classicists and calling into question all the assumptions of received educational policy. Like the great Bentham, he accepted nothing because it was customary. Every institution and practice had to justify itself before the bar of a scientific intelligence applying the test of utility. In his *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (1861) he complained that the comparative worth of different kinds of knowledge had

remained unconsidered. The debate on the relative merit of classics and mathematics was a wholly inadequate substitute for the systematic reflection that was required. Education ought to be a preparation for life. Accordingly, it ought to start with a knowledge of the sciences of physiology, hygiene, physics and chemistry which bore most closely upon its preservation. Next come those sciences most closely related to the pursuit of the practical arts involved in the efficient production of food, clothing and shelter. Third in order of importance came everything bearing upon the rearing of offspring. Then came the social sciences capable of making boys and girls into intelligent citizens and good neighbours. Only finally did one reach knowledge of foreign languages and literature; things fit to occupy leisure, but which a leisured class made into nearly the whole curriculum. Since it failed to start with the immediate interests of the child and neglected to develop powers of observation, established educational method was distinguished by an insistence on drill and learning by rote. Instead of being an enjoyable experience of freedom, education became a harsh discipline enforced by unreasoning authority. Following Rousseau, Spencer held that moral training should take the form of allowing the child to suffer the natural consequences of his own action.

Thus, when the philosopher visited Standish he was welcomed as a liberator to the children and a scourge to the governesses. 'Submission not desirable!' he cried as he pointed to the deficiencies of 'stupid persons who taught irrelevant facts in an unintelligible way'.⁵⁶ Beatrice's mother was uneasy. The governess despite being an 'old-fashioned dame' opened her 'pursed-up lips' to good effect: 'You can go out this morning, my dears, with Mr. Spencer and mind you follow his teaching and do exactly what you have a mind to.'⁵⁷ This they did. Scientific expeditions in search of fossils, flowers and insects were likely to become frolics in which Spencer was pelted with dead leaves by the elder Miss Potters while the younger ones engaged in still more direct forms of assault. 'Your children are r-r-r-rude children,' he exclaimed to their mother before leading them off on another outing.⁵⁸ Beatrice loved him very much. When he died she recalled that: 'As a little child he was perhaps the only person who persistently cared for me – or rather who singled me out as one who was worthy of being trained and looked after.'⁵⁹ Nor was that judgement an extravagance occasioned by his passing. She affirmed many years later that: 'It was the philosopher on the hearth who, alone among my elders, was concerned about my chronic ill-health, and was constantly suggesting this or that remedy for my ailments; who encouraged me in my lonely studies ...'⁶⁰

Beatrice's need for Spencer was surely associated with the birth and death of the only son of Richard and Lawrencina. Being the next child after Beatrice, he might well have been regarded as far too successful a

competitor for her mother's affection and attention. Beatrice evidently felt the need to protest her love for her baby brother. Yet in her autobiography she hardly mentions his existence and makes no reference to the wonderfully Victorian scene at his death-bed where the little fellow on Christmas Day promised the adoring and anguished mother that he would never be a bad boy again.⁶¹ Whatever dark and unacknowledged thankfulness Beatrice may have felt at his departure was ill-judged: the boy was soon to be replaced by another daughter; an inadequate substitute, no doubt, but a sufficient reason for continued neglect of the she who was sentenced to be the last but one. Spencer, on his side, had a great need of affection and modest success in securing it. A confirmed bachelor, he flattered himself that George Eliot had been in love with him and that it was only her ugliness that had prevented him proposing to her. He was – as Beatrice herself came to see – anxious to claim her as a substitute for a child and a lover.⁶²

It was not until she was approaching twenty that Beatrice could be expected to tackle the successive volumes of the synthetic philosophy which had been coming from the printers from her infancy onwards and were only now nearing completion. *First Principles* in 1862 had been followed by the *Principles of Biology* two years later. The *Principles of Psychology* went in to a new and revised edition in the early seventies and the *Principles of Sociology* and the *Principles of Ethics* had appeared, at least in part, before the end of that decade. Beatrice went to Spencer in the hope of some release from the torments of religious doubt.

Since she had been fourteen they had periodically afflicted her. In the autumn of 1872 she had caught herself trying to surpass her sisters in the presence of gentlemen. She knew that she was 'very, very, wicked' and that her faith was slipping from her. 'I feel [as] if Christ can never listen to me again.'⁶³ Three years later she found herself more devout and went off to take the Holy Sacrament, but she was still worried by mysteries such as the doctrine of the Atonement, which she found repugnant.⁶⁴ A year later she had shaken off the chains of the beautiful old faith in exchange for Herbert Spencer's doctrine of 'harmony and progress'. She declared herself impressed by his teaching that it was through consciousness of the 'unknowable' that science and religion were to be reconciled.⁶⁵ Apparently this conclusion was not inconsistent with some experiments in spiritualism. (The spirits made the interesting suggestion that she should try to involve her mother in these enquiries.)⁶⁶ Visiting St Peter's in 1880, she felt the temptation to commit intellectual suicide and convert to Catholicism:

My intellectual or logical faculty drives me to the conclusion that outside the knowledge of the relative or phenomenal, I know nothing except

that there must be an Absolute, a something which is unknowable. But whether the very fact that it is unknowable does not prevent me from considering it, or thinking about it, or contemplating it, is a question which Mr Spencer's logic has not set at rest ... But I possess another faculty, the emotional – which is the dominant one in all my better and nobler moments – This spirit unceasingly insists that there is something above and around us which is worthy of absolute devotion and devout worship.⁶⁷

While Beatrice had these understandable difficulties with the 'unknowable' she made her way to a form of reverential agnosticism. This should be understood as having been a balanced regulation of competing moods rather than as a successful reconciliation of hostile intellectual tendencies. Her path forward was not an easy one.

When her mother died in 1882 it was Beatrice who was with her while the other sisters waited downstairs. She died of a bowel condition; her death was noisy, smelly and painful. It left Beatrice with even less faith in the possibility of another life:

As I looked at our Mother dying – I felt it was a final dissolution of body and soul – an end of the personality which we call the spirit. This was an intuitive conviction – on this great question we cannot reason. But though my disbelief in immortality was strengthened, a new and wondrous faith has arisen within me – a faith in goodness – in God – I must pray, I do pray and I feel better for it, and more able to put aside all compromise with worldliness and to devote myself with singleheartedness to my duty'.⁶⁸

She did indeed try to resume the old clothes of religion, but she found that she dared not study Christianity. She knew that it would undermine her faith. 'It is', she recognised, 'unworthy to shrink from examination; unworthy alike of the spirit of the faith and the spirit of the enquiry. God help me!'⁶⁹ But neither God nor Mr Spencer could remove the difficulty. Neither her understanding of the All Mighty nor of the Unknowable could satisfy the conflicting claims of intelligence and sensibility, nor could one more than the other effect the organic unity of analysis and ideal which was so much wanted. She could only acknowledge the conflicting imperatives and allow that they answered to different sides of her nature. All her life she needed prayer without ever being able to give, or even wanting to give, a compelling account of the power to whom her prayers were addressed. Prayer might be best in the context of religious music or architecture, but its validity was quite independent of any theological dogma. It was the occasion of a release from personal

ambition or vanity: a joining of awe and love in the interests of a recovery from littleness: a rejuvenation of moral sense. If it puzzled her, the important thing was that it worked. She felt happier and better for it. Of course, Spencer was undismayed by awe. It had a secure place within his system. 'Awe', he reassured her, 'is quite legitimate. It arises in our minds from a perception of power.'⁷⁰ However, she ought always to remember that the Princes of the Church were as bloodthirsty as their secular neighbours. But that was not in dispute.

Even if Beatrice had not met Joseph Chamberlain in 1883, it is doubtful whether she would have long remained the faithful disciple of Herbert Spencer. There is an irony that overtakes the best – precisely the best – of pedagogues: the capacity that they develop in their pupils makes them into rebels rather than into soldiers of the line. At the same time, this fate is well deserved if the Master pretends to be the creator of a definitive system of thought while insisting that Progress is the central idea of his system. Yet before she was twenty-six Beatrice hardly ventured on any serious or sustained criticism of her teacher. She allowed herself some gentle mockery of the pedantic philistinism with which he responded to Cologne Cathedral. Even he refrained from criticising the interior, but he objected to the curved outline of the spires. "In architecture what I require", he spoke, "is that the lines should be defined, that either they should be continuous or definitely broken. Moreover, the curve is especially objectionable in this case – in so far as Gothic architecture is perpendicular."⁷¹ She glimpsed that it might be a mistake to ransack the universe for illustrations of one's principles instead of finding ways of testing them: Spencer was obsessed with order rather than – as she came to put it – with making 'the order of thought' correspond to the 'order of things'. She began to understand why others might find him repulsive. In his craze for system-building he came to develop one faculty at the expense of all the rest: draining away his capacity for sympathy and a full enjoyment of life, he became more and more crotchety, vain and egotistical.⁷² Indeed, after the appearance of his *The Man Versus the State*, which was full of conviction and intensity of feeling, it became clear that he must pay the price of his ambition to supply a definitive philosophy. It left him with no employment for his declining years but a defence of his principle and an elaboration of it which grew ever more tedious. Already Beatrice sensed what was happening to him. In taking his temperature before embarking on a journey, or looking with trepidation upon each new dish, his hypochondria far surpassed her own. He became increasingly irritated with a world that was out of sorts and stupid enough to question the necessity and desirability of increasing individuation. He came to welcome death even upon his own bleak view of that prospect. Long before the appointed hour arrived he was uttering fearful moans and

asking: 'Why more tomorrows?' By that time not even his beloved disciple could suggest an answer.⁷³

Yet in 1883 she was not tempted to dissent at any point from the conclusions of *The Man Versus the State*, the last great manifesto of the nineteenth century in favour of full-blooded *laissez-faire* written by a thinker of the first order.⁷⁴ She certainly did not detect the signs of self-contradiction and apostasy that socialists, overjoyed by such a notice, believed they had discovered. Spencer did, very much despite himself, make socialists. But if he made Beatrice into one, it was in the most roundabout, remote and indirect way.

It is tempting to conclude that Spencer contributed to the socialist revival only when his influence was topped up with that of Comte.⁷⁵ It could plausibly be argued that this was true both of Sidney and of Beatrice herself.⁷⁶ However, there was a host of ways in which his influence worked itself out while corresponding not at all with his mature intentions: the combative and challenging spirit of his early radicalism; the style of thought and conduct that sent him deliberately to set his face against the churchgoers on Sunday mornings and walk in the opposite direction; his contempt for the privileged status of landed society and his early advocacy of land nationalisation; his bold and uncompromising denunciation of swindling company directors and of shopkeepers who adulterated their goods; his championship of the law of equal freedom and sure sense for a society in which the condition of the free development of each would become the condition of the free development of all; all these things made his defence of unregulated capitalism appear to many of his former admirers to mark him down as a renegade. It was said that he had made more men socialists than the late Dr Marx himself.⁷⁷ Moreover, he had taught a whole generation to think in terms of evolution, progress and the possibility of a science of society based upon the 'organic analogy'. Beatrice recalled that her lasting debt to Spencer was that he taught her 'to look on all social institutions as if they were plants or animals.'⁷⁸ This may appear to be a thoroughly inadequate and pernicious habit of mind in our century, but it constituted an insight into the human condition rather than a denial of it in the last one. The concept of a functional adaptation of social structures, which proceeded willy-nilly and independently of the consciousness of those who furnished the personnel of such institutions, could be rewarding and even revolutionary. Beatrice was to deploy it to good effect in her first book.⁷⁹ For the time being she was oblivious to its more disturbing implications, real or imagined.

In 1883 she was just as oblivious to the contradictions in Spencer that took others forward towards socialism. As early as 1871, T.H. Huxley, a friend of the Potters as well as the champion of Darwin, had argued that

'administrative nihilism' accorded ill with the 'organic analogy'.⁸⁰ If the development of society was analogous to that of organisms, then, surely, one would expect its progress to be marked by ever increasing conscious direction as against dependence upon merely instinctive controls and mindless adaptations. Probably both Spencer and his opponents attached quite undue weight and importance to the organic analogy, but there is no doubt that socialists fancied that they had caught the philosopher out and that they rejoiced in the belief that, whatever Spencer thought he was doing, he was in fact furnishing a scientific foundation for socialism.⁸¹ Beyond this, socialists might point out that *The Man Versus the State* described a process of alleged degeneration which was scarcely explicable on the author's own principles. In that work Spencer drew a picture of the slow but remorseless growth of state control and provision. His illustrative lists running from the Factory Acts through to state education and free admission to museums were indistinguishable from those drawn up by Sidney Webb except that Webb compiled his six years later, made them longer, and saw in the process something entirely wholesome.⁸² There must have been many readers of *The Man Versus the State* who found it a self-defeating book: the *reductio ad absurdum* of classic individualism. Instead of drawing back aghast at all this evidence of legislative enactments that have restricted the freedom of the capitalist in the interests of producers and consumers, they were encouraged to project new measures which were bound to appear as so many despotic and salutary inroads upon the rights of property.

Among these reckless and misguided spirits whom Spencer encouraged rather than subdued were the rediscoverers of poverty: the socialists, and the new radicals of the Great Liberal Party who, under the leadership of Joseph Chamberlain, were busy 'fouling their own nest'. In strict accordance with Spencerian principles the progress of English Radicalism was distinguished by an increasing specialisation of differentiation of function. Whereas in the 1840s the leaders of middle-class radicalism had moved easily from the world of business to the world of politics and the world of letters, by the 1880s they tended to confront each other at the head of distinct establishments. The friendship of Richard Potter and Herbert Spencer depended upon common memories rather than upon any present coincidence of need or purpose. Beatrice's father regarded the philosopher with a benign contempt. He might be an agreeable companion, but he had ceased to be of any practical importance.⁸³ Chamberlain, like Potter, had risen above the hurly-burly of competition to a position of monopolistic or oligopolistic power, but he then chose to renounce entrepreneurial life for political life. Seemingly the politician answered to a different system of controls from the great manufacturer of bolts and screws. It had not always been so. The progress of a culture was experienced as disintegration.

1883 opened with Beatrice fully preoccupied with the syllabus according to Spencer. He might not have proved the positive existence of the Absolute, but his work was a landmark in the history of thought. In particular, he had fully persuaded her that ‘comparative physiology – that is, knowledge of the development of animal life, is the only key to and the only basis for a science of sociology’. In mid-February she had to leave Rusland Hall to take possession of their London home at 47 Princes Gate. She mourned the departure of the student and the entry of the society woman, but the student had not been over-active nor was the life of the society woman to be unrelieved by study.⁸⁴ In Westmorland she had done little sustained work beyond reflecting on whether culture did not increase the power to act while diminishing the desire to do so and whether the application of scientific method was not simply the introduction of justice into our intellectual relationships. In London she was able to find time for a close reading of Willie Cripps’s *Adenoid Diseases of the Rectum* – not the choicest topic in fashionable circles – and to engage in some laboratory work under Cripps’s direction. She prepared specimens of tumour and peppered her diary with such instructive observations as ‘the epidermis and all its appendages are extra vascular’.⁸⁵

The move to London was not, of course, decided upon out of regard for improving Beatrice’s skill in preparing specimens. In March Kate was to make her late but brilliant marriage to Leonard Courtney. This left Beatrice as the one unmarried Potter girl of eligible years. Mournfully she concluded: ‘I was not made to be loved, there must be something repulsive in my character.’⁸⁶ Perhaps it was her attitude to ‘Society’, which she entered consciously as a participant observer. She asked herself whether she was not an ‘unmitigated prig’ to approach Society to learn rather than to amuse.⁸⁷ The trouble was that she could not pretend to be wholly detached from this atmosphere of ‘ease, satiety and boredom, with prospect and retrospect of gratified and mortified vanity’.⁸⁸ She was tempted by the prizes and inclined to imagine that her relative lack of success in making off with them was due to her superior attitude. After a huge party at the Speakers, one or two of which would have sufficed for a lifetime, she fancied that the ‘mental superiority of men [is] greatest in our class. Could it be otherwise with the daily life of ladies in Society ...’, a life dominated by a desire to inch oneself further up the social scale and by dreary and unimaginative discourses on the ‘servant problem’?⁸⁹ ‘At present’, wrote Beatrice in the early spring of 1883, ‘I feel like a caged animal, bound up by the luxury, comfort and respectability of my position. I can’t find a training that I want without neglecting my duty.’⁹⁰

Her duties were diminished by packing her younger sister, Rosie, off to school. This welcome departure occasioned one of Beatrice’s few generous references to the youngest Potter as a ‘sweet, touching character’.⁹¹

Doubtless, Rosie was the least accomplished of the girls, but she also lacked the Potter characteristic of 'a hard self-assertiveness'.

This quality was surfacing again in the father. Recovering from the shock of his wife's death, he began to plan a great new railway amalgamation. Beatrice noticed his shrewdness and sharpness, his cynical depreciation of men and their ways as things foreign to his nature. In his personal relationships he was utterly unselfish and unselfconscious.⁹² She had much conversation with him and asked him for his opinion on schemes for co-operative production. He dismissed them, holding that the efficient operation of industry required the fullest identification between ownership and control. The salaried manager was an inferior being. The best result to be expected from co-operative production would be nothing but the appearance of a new race of capitalists.⁹³ Beatrice was inclined to reason, after the manner of the wages fund theorists, that there was little hope for workmen unless they could restrict their numbers. But she had not studied political economy and felt more than ever a 'wretched little frog' without title to a serious opinion on the subject.⁹⁴

Now that Kate had exchanged her philanthropic activities for marriage, Beatrice was allowed to take her place. In April 1883 she joined the Charity Organisation Society.⁹⁵ This body had been established in 1869 as the Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicity.⁹⁶ Its leading idea was that indiscriminate and unregulated charity did more to promote poverty than it did to relieve it. In ever expanding towns and cities the traditional forms of social control and well-judged acts of charity gave place – so it was thought – to a dangerous remoteness between social classes and an environment favourable to the 'clever' pauper. He was allowed to defeat the salutary purposes of the New Poor Law. He escaped from the principle of relief within the workhouse, under the principle of 'less eligibility', by joining the anonymous, faceless, army of the poor and using his ragged wife and seemingly hungry children to make a 'touch'. Against those who degraded themselves and others by professing poverty and living on their hard luck, it was necessary to mobilise the spirit of business efficiency and of scientific verification. Deeply impressed by the possibility that poverty was becoming a trade, the COS was committed to turning philanthropy into a profession. This meant – along with much else besides – a scrupulous attention to 'case work'. It was not long before Beatrice was making the acquaintance of Mr Pavey, a dispenser who took opium and left his wife to support their three children on fifteen shillings a week. She subdued her feelings of righteous indignation.⁹⁷ It was immediately apparent to her that the COS was an improvement on the former state of things:

One thing is clear to my mind, it is distinctly *advantageous to us* to go amongst the poor. We can get from them an experience of life which is

novel and interesting; the study of their lives and surroundings gives us the facts wherewith we can attempt to solve the social problems; contact with them develops on the whole our finer qualities; disgusting us with our false and worldly appreciation of men and things and educating us in a thoughtful benevolence. Perhaps the worst result for us is that our philanthropy is sometimes the cause of pharasaical self-congratulation.⁹⁸

This was all very well, but what form was 'thoughtful benevolence' to take in the case of Mr Pavey and his family? Beatrice appears to have had recourse to highly effective measures. Ella Pycroft asked:

Do you remember telling me when I first knew you how you had helped to bring about the death of an opium eater in Soho? I couldn't understand then how you could have done such a thing, but now I have come to think that you were right, and right in a most large minded, far-seeing way. I am coming to see more and more that it is useless to help the helpless, that the truly kind thing is to let the weak go to the wall and get out of the strong people's way as fast as possible.⁹⁹

There was more than one way of sharing Louise Michel's conviction: '*La philanthropie, c'est une mensonge!*' Leonard Courtney was fond of repeating that expression over lunch. He would draw his shaggy eyebrows together and parting his capacious lips declare that: 'every day I believe more in undiluted political economy.'¹⁰⁰ Depriving the undeserving poor of life was only a logical extension of depriving them of their liberties, and it was even more economical. One hopes that Mr Pavey's widow grasped these truths, even though her expression of gratitude to Beatrice may have given rise to 'pharisaical self-congratulation'.

However, Beatrice had chosen to join the COS just at the moment when rising unemployment was causing such confirmed advocates of sternness as the Revd S.A. Barnett of St Jude's, Whitechapel, to reconsider their position. During the bad winter of 1880–1 he had favoured giving distressed families relief only on condition that the father was deprived of his liberty of entering the workhouse.¹⁰¹ He noticed that this policy was highly successful in reducing pauperism, but unfortunately did nothing to diminish poverty. Accordingly, in the very month in which Beatrice joined the COS, he published an article on 'Practicable Socialism'. Without making a clean break with the COS, he announced his conversion to the view that the state should provide for the poor. Only the state could release the labourer from a vision of the future dominated by the shadow of the workhouse and the grave. Describing himself as a socialist, Barnett

announced that it was to the government which one must look for better housing, education, medical attention, schools of industry for those fit to work, and pensions for those incapable of working. The costs of these necessary provisions would have to be made by introducing a system of graduated taxation.¹⁰² In the following year Barnett became the first Warden of Toynbee Hall. Beatrice became friendly with him and with his wife. Yet it was not this acquaintance that first disturbed her faith in doctrines that seemed to license her to take the lives of the poor and the worthless.

In June 1883 Miss Beatrice Potter first made the acquaintance of Miss Beatrice Chamberlain: 'essentially provincial: in the good and bad sense'. Also of Miss Chamberlain's father: 'I do and I don't like him.'¹⁰³

She got to know him better in the following month. At a dinner, a Whig peer sat on one side of her while he sat on the other. The peer talked of his possessions; Mr Chamberlain talked of confiscating those possessions for the masses.

Herbert Spencer said that Mr Chamberlain was 'a man who may mean well, but who does, and will do, an incalculable amount of mischief'.

Joseph Chamberlain said that Mr Spencer was, fortunately, in his writings unintelligible: 'otherwise his life would have been spent doing harm.'¹⁰⁴

Miss Potter was still distant from a position in which she could see that both of them were correct.

Joseph Chamberlain was twenty-two years senior to Beatrice. When she was thirteen or fourteen he was Mayor of Birmingham and master of the Liberal Caucus which had emerged after the passing of the Second Reform Act. In those days he had dared to associate himself with the short-lived republican movement and had earned the royal displeasure. If he had been an insolent nuisance in the early seventies, by the early eighties he had come to be regarded as the most dangerous man in England. As President of the Board of Trade in Gladstone's second administration he had determined to do for the whole country what he had already accomplished for his own city: 'Parked, paved, assized, marketed, gas-and-watered and improved.' He declined to be muzzled by office. 'Electrified' by the writings of Henry George and impressed, if not entirely convinced, by Alfred Russel Wallace's case for land nationalisation,¹⁰⁵ he was certain that such works were bound to capture the imagination of the masses and make them eager for political and social reform. Before the Second Reform Act, Richard Cobden had positively complained about the non-appearance of Spartacus; before the Third, Joseph Chamberlain appeared to respectable society to be grooming himself for the part – although the grooming in the strict sense of the term was decidedly incongruous: wearing his monocle and his orchid and sustained by a fortune made out

of his monopoly in bolts and screws, he may have appeared an unusual prophet of republican simplicity. Yet he carried conviction among friend and foe alike. He began by prompting Engels's advice to those who might aspire to form a Labour Party: he took as his rallying point the unrealised points of the Charter. He was for manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, one vote one value and payment of members. He also fully understood that a mere programme of political reform was no longer enough. The parody had to be extended to include 'the Charter and something more'.¹⁰⁶

When Beatrice first made his acquaintance he was embarking on a great programme of public meetings and demonstrations. In March 1883 the Leader of the Opposition, Lord Salisbury, made a courageous sortie into the Birmingham fortress, but only played into Chamberlain's hands. The counter-attack was immediate:

Lord Salisbury constitutes himself the spokesman of a class – of the class to which he himself belongs, who toil not neither do they spin (great cheering), whose fortunes, as in his case, have originated by grants made in times gone by for the services which courtiers made the Kings (renewed cheers), and have since grown and increased while they have slept by levying an increased share on all that other men have done by toil and labour to add to the general wealth and prosperity of the country ...¹⁰⁷

This was widely interpreted as incitement to class hatred, but worse was to follow. In June, Chamberlain participated in a great demonstration in honour of John Bright, a fellow Member of Parliament for Birmingham and the finest representative of a phase of bourgeois radicalism that Chamberlain was bent on superseding. Remarking on the absence of public expenditure or military display on this occasion, he added: 'The brilliant uniforms, the crowds of high officials, the representatives of Royalty – they were absent (loud laughter and cheers) – and nobody missed them (renewed laughter and cheering).'¹⁰⁸ Such words were unforgivable from one who had kissed hands and who was still in office. Whigs and Tories were demented with rage. The Queen conveyed to the Prime Minister her most severe displeasure. The wretched Gladstone was obliged to require the President of the Board of Trade to apologise – which he did, but only in terms of which made matters worse. Radical workmen were delighted. Even revolutionary socialists like Tom Maguire began to look on Chamberlain as something more than an ambitious opportunist, important only as a straw in the wind.¹⁰⁹

Beatrice did not know now what to make of him. They met frequently and had long conversations together in June and July. After these meetings she spent nights sleepless from excitement.¹¹⁰ She was unable to work and found it impossible to think about anything but his striking

personality, his political passion, his immense will power. In one sense the experience did accelerate her progress towards sociology. In September she reiterated her faith in comparative physiology as the basis, but expressed a distrust of over-much reliance upon arguments from analogy. She began to insist that the sociologist should experience the types of mental forces he must study. 'To be a great sociologist', she concluded, 'you must more or less resume in your own nature the complex ingredients mixed in varying proportions, in the units with which you have to deal.'¹¹¹ Accordingly, she was able to find a scholarly justification for spending a whole week with the Chamberlains in Birmingham at the end of that month:

Much might be learnt by studying the life and thought of such a man; discovering how *representative* he was, how much his convictions were the result of individual characteristics and how much they were the effect of surrounding circumstances. They are *convictions passionately held*; his whole energy is thrown into the attempt to realise them. Is the basis of these convictions honest experience and thought or were they originally the tool of ambition, now become inextricably woven into the love of power, and to his own mind no longer distinguishable from it? What is his principle? Is the Government the interpretation [interpret?] of the people's wants? Is it the business of the governing class to gratify the sensations of the great social organism or should the advice of the most intelligent portion of the community be taken as the remedies irrespective of the longings of the patient?¹¹²

Chamberlain's provincial bourgeois background was, on balance, reassuring: 'Coming from such honest surroundings he surely must be straight in intention.'¹¹³ But it was not only his political intentions that interested her. Chamberlain's first wife had died in childbirth, as had his second, Florence. He had remained unmarried for eight years. It seems likely that Beatrice half expected, and certainly hoped, that he would propose to her. He excited her. Such a marriage would be an immense triumph. Chamberlain was a far bigger figure than Courtney or Hobhouse. He might well become Prime Minister, and his wife might exercise an immense influence over him and over events. But did he want her? If he wished to marry her would she be able to influence his intellectual and political development? And if he would allow this, how should that influence be exercised?¹¹⁴

For the moment the questions were unanswerable. She had lost her mother in whom she would have confided, the one to whom she felt she had become so much closer during the last months of her life. Here was a subject that would have allowed her to achieve the sort of intimacy and

admiration that she had missed so much. In the event she turned to her old nurse, Martha Mills, and filled the autumn evenings at the Argoed with reminiscence. Martha had witnessed her mother's courtship. Martha and her mother came from the same stock in the northern manufacturing town of Bacup. Beatrice proposed that she should accompany 'Da', as Martha was called, upon her next visit to the place. "Well, you know I can always go; there's no occasion to wait for that," answered the dear old woman, "but my friends up there would be astonished to see a Miss Potter coming along with us; they are not accustomed to such grand folk. I think they would be what they call 'flayed' by you!" "Oh," cried I, jumping up with the delightful consciousness of an original idea, "I wouldn't be Miss Potter, I would be Miss Jones, farmer's daughter, near Monmouth."¹¹⁵ Thus, this famous visit was a sentimental journey before it was a scientific expedition, an attempt to escape an obsessive preoccupation with new attachments through a renewal of old ones. Upon her return, Beatrice decided not to write up her experiences, but save them, to bank them as security for her claims to 'an individual life'.

In Bacup, Beatrice found no hopeless poverty wasting itself away; no coarse humour and no low, sensual excitements. There were no opium eaters who needed to be put down, no bitter cry to answer or subdue. In Bacup the world exhibited an order pleasing to political economy, charity organisations, and Mr Herbert Spencer. If the meek and the gentle-hearted were sad, that could be attributed to the melancholia and the suicidal mania that Beatrice attributed to the Akeds, her mother's side of the family. If some of the weavers were out of work and trade was worse than could ever be remembered, there was comparatively little poverty. Nobody suggested that it was impossible to get on or improve without individual exertion and voluntary co-operation: 'na makin' of laws', they said, 'can alter that'. Here were working people whose company was charming and restful. They were pious, innocent and dignified. They provided for the needs of this world in their co-operative stores and for their needs in the next through chapels. Beatrice found a community that was not merely reassuring, but admirable in its creativity and simplicity. It persuaded her that: 'one of the best preventatives against the socialistic tendency of the coming democracy would lie in local government.'¹¹⁶

Her account of 'real' working-class life delighted Herbert Spencer. He was very disappointed that she found it – despite her ambition for literary fame – inexpedient to publish. This was just the kind of material that would correct the sensationalism of such tracts as *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*.¹¹⁷ The sentimental outpourings of clerical enthusiasts were calculated to stoke the engines of socialistic agitations and encourage the pernicious political tendencies associated with demagogues like Joseph Chamberlain. But 'while the old political philosopher [was] discussing

with the Editor of the *Nineteenth Century* the desirability of encouraging a beloved disciple to come into the literary arena; the same beloved disciple [was] entertaining – with no untender feeling – the arch enemy; the very embodiment of the pernicious tendency.¹¹⁸

Her tortured state could not endure ‘The “to be or not to be”’, she wrongly concluded, would soon be settled.¹¹⁹ The first report in the journal of the momentous visit was dated 12 January 1884, a week after it had taken place:

Another small episode of my life over. After six weeks of feverish indecision, the day comes. Lounge full of young people and the three last days past in dancing and games: I feel all the while as if I were dancing in a dream towards some precipice. Saturday 5th: remainder of the ball party chatting round the afternoon tea table, the great man’s son and daughter amongst them. The door opens: ‘Mr Chamberlain’: general uprising. I advance from among them and, in my nervousness, almost press six pounds just received into his hand. General feeling of discomfort; no one quite understanding the reason of Mr Chamberlain’s advent. There exists evidently no cordiality between him and his host; for Father in a few minutes retires to play patience with an absent and distressed look utterly disgusted at the *supposed* intentions of his visitor. At dinner, after some shyness, we plunged into essentials and he began to delicately hint his requirements. That evening and the next morning until lunch we are on ‘susceptible terms’. A dispute over state education breaks the charm. ‘It is a question of authority with women, if you believe in Herbert Spencer you won’t believe in me’. This opens the battle. By a silent arrangement we found ourselves in the garden. ‘It pains me to hear any of my views controverted’ and with this preface he began with stern exactitude to lay down the articles of his political creed. I remain modestly silent; but noticing my silence he remarks that he requires ‘intelligent sympathy’ from women. ‘Servility, Mr Chamberlain’ think I, not sympathy, but intelligent servility; what many women give men, but the difficulty lies in changing one’s master, in jumping from one *tone* of thought to the exact opposite – *with intelligence*.¹²⁰

Unable, rather than unwilling, to accept his mastery and to meet his requirements, she advanced as boldly as she dared her ‘feeble objections’ to his general propositions. She owed it to herself and to him to be absolutely sincere:

He refutes my assertions by re-asserting his convictions passionately, his expression becoming every minute more gloomy and determined.

He told me the history of his political career, how his creed grew up on a basis of experience and sympathy; how his desire to benefit the many had become gradually a passion absorbing within itself his whole nature. 'Hitherto the well-to-do have governed the country for their own interest; and I will do them this credit – they have achieved their object. Now I trust the time is approaching for those who work and have not. My aim in life is to make life pleasanter for the great majority; I do not care if it becomes in the process less pleasant for the well-to-do minority. Take America, for instance. Cultured persons complain that the society there is vulgar; less agreeable to the delicate tastes of delicately trained minds. But it is infinitely preferable to the ordinary worker.'

To this Beatrice attempted the rejoinder that the American workers owed any superior equalisation of conditions to the riches of their continent rather than to their political system. She went on to suggest that the American plutocracy seemed richer and more powerful 'owing to the generally corrupt nature of American institutions'. This was hardly calculated to endear her to the brilliant imitator of the American caucus: the British statesman who was 'electrified' by Henry George and whose political style most closely resembled the United States populists:

Not a suspicion of feeling did he show towards me. He was simply determined to assert his convictions. If I remained silent he watched my expression narrowly, I felt his curious scrutinising eyes noting each movement as if he were anxious to ascertain whether I yielded to his absolute supremacy. If I objected to or ventured to qualify his theories or his statements, he smashed objection and qualification by an absolute denial and continued his assertion. He remarked as we came in that he felt as if he had been making a speech. I felt utterly exhausted. We hardly spoke to each other the rest of the day. The next morning when the Playnes had left, he suggested some more 'exercise'. I *think* that both of us felt that all was over between us, so that we talked more *pleasantly*, but even then he insisted on bringing me back from trivialities to a discussion of the intellectual subordination of women. 'I have only one domestic trouble, my sister and daughter are bitten with the women's rights mania. I don't allow any action on the subject.'

'You don't allow any division of opinion in your household, Mr Chamberlain.'

'I can't help people thinking differently from me.'

'But you don't allow the expression of the difference?'

'No.'

And that little word ended our intercourse. Now that the pain and indecision are over, I can't help regretting that absorption in the peculiar nature of our relationship left me so little capable of taking the opportunities he gave me of knowing him.

The Political creed is the whole man – the outcome of his peculiar physical and mental temperament. He is neither a reasoner, nor an observer in the scientific sense. He does not deduce his opinions by the aid of certain well-thought-out principles, from certain carefully ascertained facts. He aims, rather, at being the organ to express the *desires* ...

He was a great leader because he intuitively understood the wants of a class; was capable of articulating them; could reimpress them upon what would otherwise have been a dull, indifferent multitude. His influence would 'depend on the relative power of the class he is adopted to represent':

By temperament he is an enthusiast and a despot. A deep sympathy with the misery and incompleteness of most men's lives and an earnest desire to right this, transforms political action into a religious crusade; but running alongside this genuine enthusiasm is a passionate desire to *crush* opposition to *his will*, a longing to feel his foot on the necks of others, though he would persuade himself that he represents the right and his adversaries the wrong.

She shrewdly recognised that he must hate moderate men most: that he must prefer the adversary who regarded him as the incarnation of the 'evil one'. 'And now that it is all over I have a stunned feeling as I gradually wake up to the old surroundings, and look forward to new modifications of them ... Undoubtedly the Bacup trip is the right direction ...'.¹²¹

Yet throughout 1884 she found it was a direction which was hard to take. He, who could summon up the political spirit in 'the average sensual man', still held her enchanted. Denied this sorcerer, she was still unfit to be the apprentice. And matters were made worse, the denial seeming less than final. In March 1884 she received a pressing invitation from Miss Chamberlain to spend two days in Birmingham. She accepted, noting in her journal: 'I am afraid there is a dash of the adventuress about me and it struck me as rather comically interesting to investigate the topmost of the Caucus ...' For a moment she maintained the superior person tone. In Highbury – the Chamberlain establishment – 'there is very much taste and all very bad ... You long for a bare floor and a plain deal table.' When Mr Chamberlain condescended to appear from his exotic greenhouse he gave her a 'constrainedly polite welcome'. Whereupon Beatrice asked herself, as she sank into a perfectly constructed armchair, 'are we about to

take part in a funeral procession?’ John Bright came in and Chamberlain assumed that he knew her: “‘not me”, say I humbly, “but I think you knew my grandfather, Lawrence Heyworth.” “Lawrence Heyworth”, replies the old man with slow emphasis, “Yes – then you are the daughter of Lawrencina Heyworth – one of the two or three women a man remembers to the end of his life as beautiful in expression and form.”’¹²²

Her mother’s triumph with the father of the older Radicalism can hardly have failed to contrast with her relations with his successor. With Chamberlain she stumbled uncertainly to success and to failure. When she suggested that the side of the Englishman’s nature that had formerly been absorbed in religious enthusiasm was now informing political life, he declared that he agreed with her. ‘I rejoice in it,’ said he. ‘I have always had a grudge against religion as absorbing the passion in man’s nature.’ But when he showed her his orchids she blurted out that that the only flowers she loved were wild ones. Under the circumstances it was hardly fair of her to observe that Joseph Chamberlain had great diplomatic talent, but not in ‘*la recherche d’une femme*.’

‘Is it’, she asked herself,

cold-blooded to write truthfully of one’s relationship to a man? If one tells anything one should tell all ... All the small *affaires de coeur* of past years I have left unmentioned simply because they have not interested me. But Joseph Chamberlain with his gloom and seriousness, with absence of any gallantry or faculty for saying pretty nothings; the simple way in which he assumes – almost asserts – that you stand on a level far beneath him and that all that concerns you is trivial; that you yourself are without importance in the world except in so far as you might be related to him: this sort of courtship (if it is to be called courtship) fascinates, at least, my imagination ... I don’t know how it will all end: certainly not in *my happiness*. As it is, his personality absorbs all my thoughts ... And if the fates should unite us (against *my will*) all joy and light heartedness will go from me. I shall be absorbed into the life of a man whose aims are not my aims ... I hate every form of despotism.¹²³

She went to the Town Hall in the company of Joseph’s son, Austen. Opinion was to be aroused for the coming Reform Bill. She attended to Chamberlain, not to his arguments. She watched closely his brute exercise of powers of command: his extraordinary ability to attract the sympathies of his audience. She cursed her education in relation to Chamberlain much as D.H. Lawrence was to curse his in relation to the snake. How ironical that Spencer – the aged, pedantic, flibbertigibbet who had come to hate life, but who had offered her decisive help in overcoming the shock

of rejection – should now be the occasion of a second and seemingly worse rejection. The training she had received from him appeared as a barrier in the way of her union with the man she loved; the education she had received from him appeared as an insuperable obstacle to it. She might unlearn *laissez-faire*, but she could not unlearn ‘submission not desirable’, even when it seemed as eminently desirable as it did in this case.

There was an unbearable element of uncertainty. In April she reflected that if her refusal to consent to subordination and absolute dependence had ‘cured all desire on the other side’, then she would be ‘mortified’ but relieved:

Ambition and superstition began the feeling. A desire to play a part in the world and a belief that as the wife of a great man I should play a bigger part than as a spinster or an ordinary married woman

led her on –

His temperament and his character are intensely attractive to me. I feel I could reduce the gloom, could understand the mixed motive and the difficulties of a nature in which genuine enthusiasm and personal ambition are so curiously interwoven ... Do I believe in the drift of his political views and do I believe that the means employed are *honest*? ... Once married, I should of course subordinate my views to my husband’s: should, as regards his own profession, accept implicitly his view of right and wrong, but I cannot shrink the responsibility of my judgement before I acknowledge his authority. Social questions are the vital questions of today. They take the place of Religion ... Their solution seems largely a matter of temperament.¹²⁴

She had no devotion to his goals and had to twist her reasoning in order to tolerate them. This was not so serious as her reservations about his means; her suspicion that Chamberlain would never scruple to act from ulterior motives; that he used his supporters for purposes of his own which were distinct from theirs. She despaired of her power to improve him and found some consolation in knowing that she could not do it. ‘I should *not* influence him. He has shown me that distinctly ... It is only when I have simulated “la femme complaisante”, turned the conversation from principles to personalities, that he has desired me.’¹²⁵ She was certainly correct. Chamberlain wanted a helpmate, a reliable admirer, not a partner; an intelligent woman capable of following his political career and not confining her interests to merely personal and domestic life, but one who was totally submissive to his will and purposes.¹²⁶ As May came

without further word from Highbury, Beatrice acknowledged: 'The woman's nature has been stirred to its depths; I have loved and lost.'¹²⁷ Without ignoring her need for the theatrical and a certain romantic reward, which she found in the role of the disappointed lover, she was doubtless at a low point. 'Both ideals have fallen, life alone, life together, remaining only the seemingly commonplace round of private duties.'¹²⁸ For the rest of the year she repeatedly committed herself to one last word on the subject. In October she wrote: 'passion – with its burning heat, an emotion which had long smouldered unnoticed, burst out into flame and burnt down intellectual interests, personal ambition, and all other self-developing motive.'¹²⁹ Longing for love and a settled occupation, desiring the personal prestige that she might have acquired, she resolved that, being unable to live without the help of others, she must live for others. But it was easier said than done: by the end of the year she was asking what she would not give for a mother now. How was it that anyone cared for life?

Despite her misery, Beatrice began to develop new relationships. In November 1884 she noted that she was becoming more intimate with the Booths. In January 1885 Ella Pycroft spent three days with her. Ella was plain-looking, strong, with an attractive sincerity. She was a free-thinker, anxious for work and otherwise indifferent to life. 'We shall', remarked Beatrice, 'get on.'¹³⁰ And so they did. They worked together in the Katherine Buildings near the docks. In February Beatrice studied the papers delivered at the Industrial Remuneration Conference and was particularly impressed by those presented by Benjamin Jones concerning the Co-operative Wholesale Society and one Sidney Taylor on profit sharing.¹³¹ But she was still far away from a condition in which Chamberlain would cease to be her ruling obsession. It remained an open question with her as to whether her observation of East End life and her study of social questions were to be a preparation for life with the Great Man or for a profession in sociology in the style of the Philosopher.

In January 1885 she was expecting Chamberlain to make his intentions towards her clear. The old delusion returned in the spring when he dined with them. He told her that her brother-in-law, Leonard Courtney, was 'an ass'. Nevertheless the Courtneys arranged a picnic so that she could meet him again. 'That day will always remain engraved on my memory as the most painful one of my life. The scene under the Burnham beeches, forcing me to tell his fortune – afterwards behaving with a marked rudeness and indifference.'¹³² Courtney tried to console her and asked her not to seek a life of 'barren brilliances'.¹³³ Kate also advised her that a marriage to Chamberlain would be a 'tragedy: a murder of your independent nature'.¹³⁴

In 1885 Chamberlain had reached his most leftward point. He began the year with his 'Ransom' speech. Addressing the working men of Birmingham

he warned them that the new Reform Act would not bring the triumph of democracy unless they organised: 'If the interest of the great majority is without discipline and without recognised leaders, it will be like a mob that disperses before the steady tread of a few policemen, or before the charge of a handful of cavalry.' But the masses, once organised, would insist that social subjects received far more attention in the legislature than had been the case in the past:

If you will go back to the early history of our social system you will find that ... every man was born into the world with natural rights, with a right to a share in the great inheritance of the community, with a right to a part of the land of his birth ... Private ownership has taken the place of these communal rights, and this system has become so interwoven with our habits and usages, it has been so sanctioned by law and protected by custom, that it might be very difficult and perhaps impossible to reverse it. But then I ask what ransom will property pay for the security it enjoys?¹³⁵

A few days later he exchanged the term 'ransom' for 'insurance': 'What insurance will wealth find it to its advantage to provide?' The answer was free education; local government reform; 'the provision of healthy decent dwellings in our large towns at fair rents; and in the country, facilities for the labourer to obtain a small plot of land.'¹³⁶ These and the other measures he was soon to weave into the Unauthorised Programme were to be paid for by graduated taxation, new death duties and expropriation of unearned increments. Far from being a socialist programme, it was an anti-socialist programme, but few saw it in this light. Gladstone told Lord Acton that he was 'entangled' by it and regarded it as a 'taking into the hands of the State the business of the individual man'.¹³⁷ *Punch* saw Chamberlain as a clown touching the backsides of respectable citizens with a hot poker labelled 'Socialism'.¹³⁸ Whatever he meant, Chamberlain had certainly succeeded in raising the political temperature and drawing the future of private property into the centre of political debate.

In August 1885 Beatrice tried to understand and to stumble along behind him, but she found it hard going. Spencer's past influence was 'over-powering' and she was drawn back to her old teacher's view of the duties of the state:

the free and right administration of *justice* between individuals. But because there has been no justice or rather injustice administered to great classes of men, owing to their powerlessness, great wrongs have arisen. Can these wrongs be redressed? Certainly not by the simple administration of justice – that must be based on the *status quo*. Ought

we then to take from a whole class of individuals that which has been stolen (we will admit the theft) by past individuals of that class in past times from other classes – shall we not offend actively against the very principle we wish to establish? That is the crucial question.¹³⁹

Without explicitly referring to Chamberlain she continued to protest against the language of ‘rights’. It was not rights but renunciation which individuals and classes had to learn. ‘That false metaphysical idea of rights’, said she following Comte, ‘as some unalterable result, determined in quantity and quality, due to all men alike, is working its wicked way in our political life.’¹⁴⁰ Yet she was beginning to see the terms in which a compromise might be effected between Spencer and Chamberlain. Socialists who aimed to levelling *inherited* conditions might be practical. More, this might actually accelerate evolutionary progress by promoting the survival of the fittest. Inherited qualities were, of course, quite a different matter.

Among the motives that led Beatrice to these reflections and that sent her into East End buildings was the sense that there was still a possibility of an alliance with Chamberlain: that her increasing knowledge of social conditions and her growing understanding of his principles would make her more useful and attractive to him. She could not bring herself to believe that all chance of marriage had gone. She declined to give up the hope even when Chamberlain’s sister told her that the brother had never considered it – a proposition that Beatrice could not credit since the sister herself had examined Beatrice about her attitude towards him.¹⁴¹ Accordingly, when in February 1886, she received a letter in the Great Man’s handwriting she was ‘ominously excited’.¹⁴²

Chamberlain had just been disappointed in his hopes of getting the Colonial Office in Gladstone’s third administration and had accepted the position of President of the Local Government Board. Conscious of his impending break with Gladstone and anxious to prepare a comprehensive Local Government Bill, he was obliged to turn his immediate attention to the dangerous situation associated with the unemployed workers’ riots. His doctrine of ‘ransom’ appeared to be entering the arena of practical politics when, under the stimulus of shattered windows in Pall Mall, the Lord Mayor’s relief fund leapt up to £79 000 in a few days. The socialist leaders were arrested, but the government was uncertain how to respond. Campbell-Bannerman, the Secretary of State for War, thought in terms of throwing up earthworks at the mouths of great commercial rivers as a pretext for supplying jobs. The press was full of comments on this and related projects as well as hair-raising accounts of the ‘rioters in their lair’. It was at this moment that Chamberlain’s eye fell upon a letter from Miss Beatrice Potter in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

In it was her first publication opposed to public works for the unemployed. 'I am a rent collector', she wrote, 'on a large block of working class dwellings situated near the London docks, designed and adapted to house the lowest class of working poor.' 'Lack of employment in the East End,' so she argued, 'was not so much the result of a general depression of trade but of the characteristics of a specific, local labour market. During the last half century there had been a decline in the once flourishing trades of the metropolis. They had departed. Unfortunately the workers were not inclined to follow their masters down river or out to the suburbs. There were three main classes of East End workmen: a small number brought up in the traditional trades of the neighbourhood; foreigners attracted by reports of high English wages; and the largest group of all – countrymen pressed out of the ranks of trade in provincial towns and rural districts who thoughtlessly drifted to the great centre of odd jobs and indiscriminate charity.'¹⁴³ They became a 'leisured and parasitic class'. 'The loudly proclaimed "right to work"', said she, 'is only too often translated in their minds to the right to work when, how and as much as they like.' Given that metropolitan life already attracted large numbers of low-class labourers who were already depressing the conditions of life of the stratum immediately above, how foolish it would be to go in for a policy of public works. 'The condition of the London unemployed would be altered in no other way than by the additional discontent involved in the disappointment of false expectations and by the establishment in their minds of a falsely understood right.'¹⁴⁴

Chamberlain asked if he could come and talk to her about this letter which he had read with 'great interest and agreement'. He confessed:

My Department knows all about Paupers and Pauperism, but has no official cognizance of distress above the Pauper line. Yet this is surely the serious part of the problem. I am trying to collect facts from different sources but it is difficult to make them complete. I am convinced, however, that the suffering of the industrious non-pauper class is very great and is increasing. What is to be done for them? I do not quite follow your suggestion. Surely the reason of the distress is that there is an actual insufficiency of employment and not merely that the workers do not know where to find work which actually exists somewhere for them... If the distress becomes greater something *must* be done to make work. The rich must pay to keep the poor alive... It will be necessary in each district to find some poorly remunerated employment which

- a) will not tempt him to remain in it longer than is absolutely necessary,
- b) will not be degrading in its character,
- c) will not enter into competition with workers at present in employment, and

d) is of such a kind that every workman whatever he has done hitherto can turn his hand to it.

Perhaps something like spade labour was wanted to test the sincerity of those who were in want of temporary assistance. Would Miss Potter please let him have her opinion with respect to these 'rather crude suggestions'.¹⁴⁵

Beatrice replied to Chamberlain on 'York House paper' but from Bournemouth in a letter of uncertain date.

You take me out of my depth! When I leave London and the peculiar conditions surrounding the familiar working-class there, I am lost in a sea of general principles and crotchets.

As I read your letter, a suspicion flashed across me that you wished for some further proof of the incapacity of a woman's intellect to deal with such large matters – now if it will in any way serve you, I willingly offer up my thoughts and give that which is needful!

I agree that 'the rich *must* keep the poor alive': always supposing that the continued existence of that section of the poor, with liberty to increase, is *not* injurious to the community at large. And this depends primarily on facts of which I have no knowledge ... You say, that poverty is 'increased and increasing': is it permanent? If the depression be due to a permanent relapse from the abnormal activity produced by the extension of railways etc, depopulation is to some extent a necessity?

But if the lack of employment be temporary, then the question resolves itself into the easier one: will the public works you propose (1) attract the labourer out of unemployment? (2) will they keep the labourer in good, or even in fair, working condition, so that he will be available for true productive service after the bad time has passed?

My objection to Public works within the metropolis was not based on the larger question, upon which I have no right to an opinion, but simply upon the conviction that the conditions to which the state labourer would be subjected within the metropolis, would be hopelessly demoralising. I feel very strongly about this.

Then as to the nature of the work offered. I think there would be two practical drawbacks – and I will illustrate one by a curious Whitechapel fact. 135 men applied to the Relief Committee. They were offered street sweeping at 2/- a day 3d extra for each child. Only 15 accepted, 11 of them went to the work, and 5 stayed. We were much disgusted and thought this was additional proof of the demoralisation of the East End 'out o' works'. But in discussing the matter quietly with the men

attending the meeting room of Katherine Buildings, we found that there was a strong feeling among the better class that unless they were prepared to sink permanently into the ranks of less skilled labour, acceptance of this work would injure their chance (some said irretrievably) of gaining employment in their own trade.

I confess I do not attach much importance to this objection: still it was urged by men who were themselves in work.

To my mind the grand difficulty – would be enforcing good quality and sufficient quantity of work – It would seem to me to require almost a slave-driving body of overseers.

And my impression is, I admit it is not founded on experience, that if the work were sufficiently unskilled *not* to enter into competition with other employment, it *would* be degrading in its nature, likely to become a sham test, and by the subsistence it afforded would increase a parasitic class injurious to the community.

I fail to grasp the principle ‘something must be done’.

It is terribly sad that 100 men should die of semi-starvation, should prefer that slow death to the almost penal servitude offered them by the workhouse – but quite apart from the communities’ [sic] point of view – if by relieving these 100 men you practically create 500 more – surely the unsatisfactory nature of these men’s lives outweighs in misery the death of the smaller number (this statement overlooks the possibility of emigration).

Death after all is a slight evil compared to life under many conditions?

We hear the death-groans of the 100, we do not hear the life-groans of the 500, until it is too late!

If I am wrong, it is not from shallow hard-heartedness, but because I have not sufficient intelligence to see how the measures you propose would work towards the good of the community or even towards the happiness of the class you would relieve ...

I must have expressed myself badly in my last letter. I did not mean the thorough investigation of low-class society in London to affect immediately the present question of want of employment – but –

I think I won’t explain myself – you will say it is a ‘crotchet’!

I have no proposal to make except sternness of the state, and love and self-devotion from individuals, a very old and self-evident remedy!

But is it not rather unkind of you to ask me to tell you what I think? I have tried to be perfectly truthful. Still it *is* a ludicrous idea that an ordinary woman should be called upon to review the suggestions of Her Majesty’s ablest Minister! especially when I know that he has a slight opinion of even a superior woman’s intelligence in these matters (I agree with him) and a dislike to any independence of thought.

I have long ceased to believe in free-will in ideas. We may sacrifice our thought, as we may sacrifice our life, but so long as we live and so long as we think, we must live and think according to our own natures? – even though *we* may be the first to admit that our constitution is [discussed?] and our thought wrong. You will say, this is not relevant to ‘Public Works for the Unemployed’. It is only a feeble excuse for daring to obey you – to obey you in the spirit as well as in the letter!

Believe me.

Yours very sincerely
Beatrice Potter

In a subsequent letter she added an impetuous note.

Now I see I was right not to deceive you. I could not lie to the man I loved. But why have worded it so cruelly, why give unnecessary pain; surely we suffer sufficiently – thank God! – that when our own happiness is destroyed there are others to live for. Do not think that I do not consider your decision as *final* and destroy this.¹⁴⁶

When she talked about being unable to deceive him she was presumably referring to her opinions about poverty and public works. But this second letter was an extraordinary and even hysterical one. Her father had had a bad stroke at the end of 1885.¹⁴⁷ In January 1886 Beatrice had despaired of life and drawn up her own last will and testament.¹⁴⁸ Her balance of mind was disturbed.

After Beatrice’s first letter, Chamberlain had replied that:

I thought we understood each other pretty well. I fear I was mistaken. In the hurry of this life it is not easy to get a clear conception of any other person’s principles and opinions. But you are quite wrong in supposing that I undervalue the opinion of an intelligent woman. There are many questions on which I would follow it blindly, although I dislike the flippant self-sufficiency of some female politicians. Neither do I dislike independence of thought ...

I hardly know why I defend myself, for I admit that it does not much matter what I think or feel on these subjects. On the main question your letter is discouraging; but I fear it is true. I shall go on, however, as if it were not true, for if we once admit the impossibility of remedying the evils of society, we shall all sink below the level of the brutes. Such a creed is the justification of absolute, unadulterated, selfishness, and so we must go on rolling the stone up the hill even though it is almost

certain that it will roll down again and perhaps crush us. I do not think that your practical objections to public work of the kind I suggest are conclusive.

And here he went on to reveal his cynical accomplishment as a statesman:

It will remove one great danger; viz. that public sentiment should go wholly to the unemployed and render impossible that State sternness to which you and I equally attach importance. By offering reasonable work, even at the lowest wage, to the really industrious, we may secure the power of being very strict with the loafer and the confirmed pauper.¹⁴⁹

Accordingly, Chamberlain disregarded Beatrice's counsel and issued a circular concerning municipal relief works. The President of the Local Government Board took as his major premise that it was

not desirable that the working classes should be familiarised with Poor Law Relief ... The spirit of independence which leads so many of the working-classes to make great personal sacrifices rather than incur the stigma of pauperism is one which deserves the greatest sympathy and respect, and which it is the duty and interest of the community to maintain by all the means at its disposal.¹⁵⁰

The local authorities must supply relief work under two conditions. First, the men employed should be engaged on the commendation of the Guardians as persons it would be inappropriate to send to the workhouse because of their previous good character and respectable circumstances. Second, the wages paid would not constitute relief and would not be associated with disenfranchisement, but they should be something less than ordinary wages paid for similar work. Thus, the strongest incentive was to be given to those so employed to return to their previous occupations at the earliest opportunity. This circular was a major innovation, in so far as it accepted public responsibility for the provision of employment in times of exceptional distress.¹⁵¹ For the rest, its policy was close to that of the COS in requiring Guardians to show a new discrimination through what amounted to the casework approach. The dangers which Beatrice anticipated were hardly likely to arise. The only justification for her attitude was her correct perception that the East End labour market was in a state of chronic over-supply. In this part of London misery was permanent and not dependent upon a particular phase in the trade cycle.

Within months or so of his last letter to her, Chamberlain had broken with Gladstone on the Irish question. She went to the House of Commons

to hear the magnificent debate, but she expressed no opinion on the merits of the contending forces. Having accepted Chamberlain's views that democracy and poverty were the questions of the age, she was not disposed to depart from that agenda because he chose to reorder it. Ireland became the ruling idea in British politics and the occasion for a far-reaching reconstruction of political parties, but Beatrice maintained the most complete silence on that subject. She was content to notice how Chamberlain 'won for himself the cheers of the higher class portion of the House' – he who had so recently been denounced as the 'English Robespierre'.¹⁵²

Chamberlain had made an important and exceedingly complicated contribution to Beatrice's development. She had 'been humbled as far down as a woman can be humbled'.¹⁵³ Yet it seemed that it was her own intellectual independence and pride which was, in fact, responsible for her disappointed hopes. She had no wish to reject society, in items of either 'the simple happiness of a woman's life'¹⁵⁴ or social success; *she* had been rejected. But if she had not defied society, she had not diminished herself to suit its requirements. Chamberlain had drawn her away from intellectual pursuits and yet made her return to them with a new sense of urgency. She had been profoundly impressed by the manner in which he seemed to have brought the twin questions of democracy and poverty to the forefront of the public debate. She wished to share his ideals, but she could not fathom his 'principle'. Under his influence she had begun to question the doctrines of Spencer; but she could not bring herself to disregard Spencer's method.¹⁵⁵ She needed an alternative philosophical framework within which political action could be given rational justification and scientific authority. These were not Chamberlain's concerns. His life lay in political action informed with passion and instinct. This left Beatrice with a sense of unseemliness of the struggle for power. She distrusted his practices. She doubted whether his goals were capable of realisation.

* * *

The President of the Local Government Board was not alone in writing to the author of 'A Lady's View of the Unemployed at the East'. It will be recalled that Beatrice, referring to her work in co-operation with Ella Pycroft in the Katherine Buildings, began her article by describing herself as a rent-collector in dwellings 'designed and adapted to house the lowest class of the London poor'. In the dark winter of 1885-6 Beatrice may well have imagined that she would never see the tenants again. She would have to nurse her father and manage his business affairs. She would have to act as guardian to her younger sister, who was showing herself to be increasingly selfish, stupid and unbalanced.¹⁵⁶ Possibly she assumed that

the tenants would not see her article. If so, she was mistaken. It was drawn to their attention and it aroused their bitter indignation.

During 1885 her relations with many of them had been less than happy. She did not want to have to follow the policy of Peabody and Octavia Hill and recruit as tenants only those who were respectable and in secure employment. She sought to fill the rooms while being as proud as Ella of reducing arrears of rent. But in the summer of 1885 she mishandled at least one of the 'roughs' or 'aborigines', having recourse to summary measures where softness would have paid better than hardness.¹⁵⁷ It was easy to see that the right rule of conduct was firmness in enforcing obligations combined with a patient gentleness in the manner of doing so, but it was difficult to apply in practice. The theory was that the respectable tenants would raise the level of the rest. In fact, the respectable kept rigidly to themselves. Sadly Beatrice concluded that this self-imposed isolation was 'the acme of social morality: the only creed one dare preach'.¹⁵⁸ A sweater and his wife, a Prussian Catholic, confirmed her view of the poor tenants as mostly members of a dissolute leisured class. These devout, hard-working sweaters were forced to go into the pubs to round up their workers. They were rewarded with bad work, cadging and thieving. The terrible irony of the 'pub' was that it tended to destroy the fittest and to spare the meanest natures.¹⁵⁹ In the buildings the boys and girls congregated in the water closets on the landings, while for the adults there was no other social centre but the 'pub'. 'A woman, diseased with drink, came up screaming to me; in her hand the quart pot; her face directed to the "public". What could I say? Why dissuade her? She is halfway to death – let her go – if death ends all.'¹⁶⁰ Beatrice had toyed with the idea of trying to get the tenants to run the buildings themselves on co-operative lines. But it was unimaginable that the spirit of the Bacup could be introduced into the Katherine Buildings. 'How can one help these people if they are not worthy of life from an economic point of view?'¹⁶¹

However, in February 1886, against the background of the rioting, which had placed the West End in the hands of the 'mob', Beatrice began to receive reports from Ella Pycroft of a new spirit among the tenants:

It has been a very exciting week at the Buildings, there was a regular mutiny last Tuesday at a concert; they (the men) sang songs I very much disapproved of and Mr Aarons brought forward a friend to sing and dance although Mr Paul and I had distinctly said we would not have it. My black looks stopped the man and Aarons went off to the back of the room in a huff, leaving me to announce the next song. Then Elliott came forward to sing (to help me out of my difficulty I thought) but he made a speech most insolently finding fault with my conduct and I had to answer him and assert my authority; and then Aarons

appealed to the people to know if he hadn't succeeded in amusing them and all the low set applauded him. It was horrid. I talked to the two men after the concert was over and said we were not going to quarrel, but such a thing must never happen again and that I should talk to them another time. And then I went away with my friend Miss Black, the only lady who was there, and got hissed by the rough set as we went out ... they must never have a loose rein again. It has been all my fault for trusting them too much.¹⁶²

Ella went on to report that every room but one in the Buildings was occupied, but the directors showed no gratitude for her reports. One of their respectable tenants, a 'preferable' on the docks, had offered others work, but Mr Gibbs was too lazy to get out of bed to go to it, which just showed how long it took to find the truth about people: 'if a man is constantly out of work it is generally his own fault'. As for the Tripconys and Mrs Sullivan, they would sooner or later have to be evicted just as Beatrice herself had evicted two women for leading a low life.¹⁶³ 'Mrs Sullivan was lent money to start old clothes work and it strikes me she has spent it mostly otherwise. She has been ill so it has been a great temptation, but I should have expected her to be more honest.' It was all so much easier for Miss Octavia Hill who had a more respectable type of tenant and ran only £1 arrears on a £12 rental and was able to make it a condition of allowing arrears during a first illness that the tenant should join a club or savings bank on recovery.

In her next letter Ella described the reception of the article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. She herself thought its conclusions were correct, but 'if you were in the midst of the excitement about this dreadful relief fund, you would have written even more strongly against extra relief.'¹⁶⁴ Maurice Paul saw that one boy read it to the others and great discussion followed:

The excitement amongst our men à propos of socialism, relief works and funds and the eight-hour movement is intense. The talk is of nothing else in the Club room. When we abuse the relief fund and relief works in general and point out the evil that must ensue the men can't help seeing it and agreeing with us, but they come back always to saying 'something must be done'.

Nagle senior was the first to apply for relief at the Mansion House, and, much against my will, I had to say that his story was true. Now numbers are applying. Canon Bradby has to distribute some of the money. At first I said I'd tell him nothing about the people or help the fund in any way, but he simply told me I must ... We are going to get the papers of the Social Democratic Federation to read up the question of the day ... to take down to the club for the men's benefit. They are all

fair traders. I don't think they'd read any book that gave them much trouble though they are so excited about such subjects ... I feel as if a big pan, too heavy to lift, were on the point of boiling over and I was hunting in vain for something cold to put in it and stop it; perhaps the necessary something may be found yet, or the fire may go out. I wish you were here. How you would enjoy arguing with the men.¹⁶⁵

The men were not prepared to wait for the pleasure of Miss Potter's company. A week later Ella wrote further:

Aarons was busily inditing a letter to you last night, so I hope you will receive it in time to send a reply by Monday. Mr Paul says he has told you all the commotion your letter has made, and that you doubted our wisdom in showing the paper to the tenants [but] after all, the results would have been much worse if we had not shown it and they had chanced to find it for themselves. It is satisfactory that they all agree with your opinion as to relief works; and also that there are at least three people who, having read the article dispassionately, understand it and agree with it all. The three are Elliott, Buckley and Lyons.

It would perhaps have been better if we had kept the paper back till we could read it to them and talk over it then and there. It would have prevented the spread of false reports which I have had to contradict all over the Buildings. But, on the other hand, the excitement produced by their misunderstanding your words has made them think over things and acknowledge a few wholesome truths. Aarons was specially angry at your saying the Buildings were 'designed and adapted' for the lowest class of workmen; partly because he will take 'low' to mean 'disreputable'; and partly because he shares our feelings about the construction of the Buildings. But I told him you did not mean to express approval of their construction, but on the contrary had written so strongly against it to Mr Bond that the plans for the new block had been altered.¹⁶⁶

Aarons wrote:

Having read your article in the *PMG* and given it due attention and study, I would venture to point out some errors, likewise some passages that we do not concur with. Before I proceed with this subject we would pay all due deference to the views most ably expressed by you with regard to metropolitan relief works,¹⁶⁷ which I consider to be the main point in your article, but – in dealing with the characteristics of a people – we cannot observe too much caution in our remarks. In sharing the opinion of many others, permit me to add, that I believe you have

the best and kindest of intentions in conjunction with the welfare of the poorer working classes. Tis' an unfortunate fact but the most illiterate mind is too apt to misconstrue *that* which it does not readily and easily perceive, the sequel is it jumps at too hasty conclusions. Such is the case with your article: for, since its publication, it has caused much discontent among us here. We have argued different points over and concluded that you have erred in different respects. There are some passages too which we think require a more definite explanation and which I will make it my duty to point out so that if you will kindly explain these points to our general satisfaction we shall only be too happy to re-establish the good feeling that has hitherto existed among us here towards you.

In the first place you observe, or rather I should say you use this observation, 'I am a rent collector in a large block of working class dwellings, situated near the London Docks, *designed and adapted* to house the lowest class of working poor.' That they are most disgracefully constructed I am prepared to show.

Let us first of all look to the sanitary arrangements here, and although the subject is of a somewhat delicate nature, yet the consequences arising from the bad construction and mismanagement thereof are too serious and evil to pass lightly over. It is true that people of both sexes come in too close contact: nothing more than a thin wooden partition separates the male from the female, so that it invariably follows that should two people of opposite sexes occupy their different sections at one time they must become cognisant of the fact. That horrible vulgarity and wretched depravity have ensued on this very account my own wife and child can testify. You are at liberty to question them on the point if you choose. I would therefore venture to observe that the mode of construction of these places, have [*sic*] not a tendency to improve the condition or impart a finer tone of morality to a people they were *designed and adapted* for, and the sooner some remedy is suggested and acted upon to remove this prevailing evil, the better for all those immediately concerned.

Now turn we to house accommodation. I do not wish to enter too minutely into details, but what I wish to imply is we are not accommodated with even the common and proper facilities for enabling us to keep our homes in common and proper order. Now what is most practically necessary here to those who have a desire to live in cleanliness is a cupboard: 'the thousand and one little sundries', if I may be allowed to use the term, which are indispensable in a home, must be stowed away under the bedstead or hidden in obscure corners. By those who have no regard for even this poor apology for tidiness, they may be found strewn and scattered upon the floor in all directions. Can people

possibly be expected or prevailed upon to keep their homes in proper order while this state of things exists?

There are still a number of discomforts experienced here and felt just as keenly as those I have attempted to describe. For instance, smelly and defective chimneys; draught pouring in from doors and windows (from which understandable sickness has arisen) but above all the horrible stench that arises from the closets (and particularly experienced by the tenants who occupy the double rooms when the so-called system of flushing does not act. When the drainage pipes have been stopped the water has to be cut off or the closets would over-flow). No one passing by the building could fail to notice this nauseous smell all last Summer and how it escaped the attention of the sanitary inspectors I am at a loss to understand. Perhaps nothing but an outbreak of Cholera here next Summer will open the eyes of our directors to the serious consequences which would inevitably await them. In concluding this important subject allow me to observe that there are two important facts laid bare viz that in the construction of these buildings great mismanagement and inexperience has been displayed or an utter disregard and contempt for the virtue, morality, cleanliness, health and comfort of a large body of people, namely the poorer working classes. Having pointed out these facts, the stern duty of the directors is plain. Let them therefore come forward and show their willingness *to act* ere our health becomes endangered and even our children become demoralised and corrupted. Having given you my views upon the subject, let me beg you to accept and frankly acknowledge that the words *designed and adapted* are wholly out of place and too hastily written.¹⁶⁸

Maurice Paul and Ella Pycroft approved the terms of Beatrice's reply and read it to the men:

I don't know that they quite understood it all [remarked Ella], very few of them would be likely to acknowledge that brain-workers were not, many of them, idlers. I suspect they put you down as one and Mr Paul has had to argue hard to convince the boys that he is not one. I don't know what their opinion of me is – perhaps carrying a bag and putting down figures in rent books may be looked upon as some slight work, but of course they would think it much easier to do than hauling about casks in the dockyard ... I was a little sorry that you said your letter was to be destroyed. If it had been left in the room for a day after having been read to the men, I think its 'educational influence' would have been greater. But it was accepted as a peace offering and that was the great point.¹⁶⁹

In fact, Beatrice did not return to the buildings for any length of time until the late summer of 1886. By then she was persuaded that they had been

an 'utter failure'.¹⁷⁰ In arriving at this conclusion she was ignoring the financial aspect. Ella and her co-workers thought 'it would be dreadful if one failed to make the Buildings pay enough percentage.' Thanks to their heroic efforts, the directors had no cause for dissatisfaction on this score. The rents for the 281 separate rooms amounted to £934 at the half year ending in June 1886. Arrears at £31 were less than the weekly collection and bad debts amounted to £8.15s. 6d.¹⁷¹ Ella thought these results quite good enough to justify putting in some shelves upon which the tenants might place their saucepans and kettles. But the directors were slow to appreciate the efforts of their rent-collectors and displayed a large ignorance of the realities of working-class life. If 10 or 20 tenants out of 200 came home drunk on Saturday night, they were apt to think that there was need for greater sternness and for more evictions.¹⁷² They were ready enough to pay for a warden to arm himself with a bullseye and prowl about at night driving vagrants from the landings, but they had no suggestions to make about rooms in which the bugs were so numerous that they could not be cleared out by sulphur.

Discipline was a great difficulty and it sometimes required considerable courage to impose it:

Saturdays are always trying days in the Buildings and today I was pursued and bullied by two people on whose goods I had made the broker levy a distraint, till I didn't know whether I weren't the brute they seemed to think me. I think in one case I was. I had carelessly forgotten to say that the bed wasn't to be seized.¹⁷³

On another day:

I had to give so many notices for quarrelling and to refuse to listen to so many appeals. The Fishers are gone at last and Mrs Fisher is [such] a good-hearted woman in spite of her rowdiness that I hated giving her notice. Her husband burnt the notice before my eyes and they shouted at me until I was really frightened, but we parted the best of friends, poor things.¹⁷⁴

But far worse than the ordeal of having to 'county court' bad tenants for every penny they owed was the consciousness of the hopelessness of help. Injury or sickness was frequently the cause of the most pitiful destitution:

I am trying to bolster up a woman in Katherine Buildings who has been half-starved and she will come back from a Convalescent Home (to which she is going) pretty strong and then it will begin all over again

and I know (or think I do) that if I had left her to die, it would have been shorter misery for her. And I half feel that I am doing wrong to help her and yet I couldn't help it. I wonder if in the next generation people will be strong enough to crush their compassionate feelings and act wisely?¹⁷⁵

In the view of Pycroft, when men got compensation for accidents at work it did them no good. She reported the case of Mr Downs, a steady fellow, who got his ribs and collarbone broken at the docks. Being paid £60 compensation ruined him. For while he banked half of it and paid his debts, he left home on Monday morning in a temper leaving his wife with four shillings – her own earnings and her boy's. He had a pension of £4 a year, which he received for having served 21 years and 125 days in the army. Bradlaugh and Labouchere taught him that it was at the beginning of and end of all injustice that he should get so little when the cowardly officers who had failed in action during the Crimean War had honours heaped upon them. He declared he did not care how little he got so long as they got nothing. Miss Pycroft feared for his sanity.¹⁷⁶ But she also feared for others who received no compensation and no pensions. Thus, Mr Sherman was run over by a cart and his hand was so badly damaged that he could not work. Since he could not pay his rent, she had to tell him that he must go into the Infirmary:

But the tears ran down his cheeks at the thought. The one thing he has is his liberty to sit in his room or hobble to the balcony. He said that he might as well drown himself and for the first time in my life I thought that suicide might be justifiable.¹⁷⁷

Beatrice paid Mr Sherman's rent.¹⁷⁸ She was also the largest subscriber to the boys' club, which was run by Maurice Paul. Maurice Paul considered that 'hardness' was the chief of all the virtues, but when he thought no one was looking he helped Mr Elliott to pay his arrears.¹⁷⁹ Ella Pycroft believed socialists contradicted each other and themselves and was quite sodden with the truths of political economy. But she knew that a woman would rather starve on a pinch of tea in her own teapot – even if the spout were off – than endure quasi-military discipline in some heartless institution.¹⁸⁰

* * *

Beatrice had never intended to devote her life to rent collection. At dinner with the Barnetts she dared to quarrel with the redoubtable Octavia Hill when that lady suggested it was work that mattered and there was no need to conduct a systematic enquiry into where tenants came from, how

much they earned, or why they left or got evicted.¹⁸¹ Barnett was much more sympathetic to Beatrice's position. He warmly approved and endorsed the spirit of her contribution to the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

By bold advertisement [he told her], the rich proclaim £60,000 to be given away. The poor loafers who think themselves hardly treated coming up from the country. (The Common Lodging Houses have filled and the Casual Wards in London have emptied). The dissolute and the idle crowd into the offices opened for relief. At Whitechapel I never saw a sadder group; sad not only because the men and women were thin and ragged, but because they were dissolute, vacant, and full of bitterness. The Police said many were known ... and their talk was low and brutal. Threats to break windows were considered and the lowest morality was boasted of. In Bethnal Green the rush has been so great that many police have been employed and fights are common.

He urged her to write more about the chief effects of the Mansion House Fund. At the same time, he advised her that it was necessary to go beyond COS orthodoxy. The poor might live on third-rate food, but they could not survive on third-rate medical attention.¹⁸²

Beatrice resolved to use such time as could be spared from caring for her father for study. It was necessary to discover the facts and it was imperative to clear one's head with respect to theory. Accordingly, she joined the board of Charles Booth's statistical research unit. Booth was a cousin. She had been seeing more and more of Booth and his wife and – despite his rather smelly house – affection and respect was growing on both sides. Booth was imbued with the tradition of provincial statistical societies that had long been engaged in the collection and enumeration of social and economic facts. He had the moral earnestness of the professional men who built the recently defunct National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.¹⁸³ Under the stimulus of distress, unemployed riots and socialist agitation, he was bent on conducting an exhaustive enquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in London. Along with Beatrice he recruited Maurice Paul, Benjamin Jones, 'Secretary of the Working Men's Co-operative Society', and a trade union secretary named Radley. He subsequently secured the help of other friends, including Canon Barnett, 'a queer, ugly little man, with no attraction of body or manner – but with a *certain* power.'¹⁸⁴ Barnett was knowledgeable and dedicated, but like all the other members of the board he could offer her no satisfactory house of theory. Beatrice was contemptuous of his shallow theology. As for Booth himself, he had positivist sympathies, but for the rest saw the great primary intellectual duty to be the discovery of the facts, their exhaustive enumeration and the expression of conclusions which were to take the form of statistical series.

If Beatrice was apprenticed to anyone it was Booth. She thought of him as the boldest pioneer of the methodology of the social sciences in the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁵ Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* was 'good material spoilt by bad dressing. It is a mine of information – both of personal observation and of statistical enquiry – but there is no opening to it nor any destination reached.'¹⁸⁶ Following a suggestion made by Joseph Chamberlain, Booth used school attendance officers to help him build up a picture of East End life house by house. These reports were then subjected to a process of cross-verification by testing them against census enumerators' returns and information supplied by the Charity Organisation Society and by other bodies. It was, indeed, a Herculean effort carried through without benefit of sampling techniques. Beatrice was the only founding member of Booth's team who was still associated with him when the first volume of findings appeared in 1889. She played little part in the accumulation of the statistics through the interviewing programme, but it impressed her as being one of the indispensable elements in the new social science. The other was personal observation, and in the next three years it was with this task that she was most concerned. But before she could undertake it she felt a need to settle theoretical accounts: a need which she felt much more strongly than Booth himself. They were agreed that the defenders of *laissez-faire* sheltered from facts behind their assumptions, while interventionists tended to get the facts out of proportion and fall victim (so they thought) to the fallacy of selective instances. Yet it was Beatrice who felt most keenly the gap between Grand Theory and mindless empiricism. She grasped more readily than he the force of Darwin's great maxim that one cannot be a good observer without being an active theoriser.¹⁸⁷

In the summer of 1886 she decided that it was imperative for her to come to grips with 'economical science'. Her response to Chamberlain's proposal for public works revealed the extent to which her thought was imbued with the spirit and conclusions of vulgar political economy. She found the subject to be

hateful – the most hateful drudgery. Still, it is evident to me I *must* master it and, what is more, I must master the *growth* of it – for each fresh development corresponded with some unconscious observation of the leading features of the contemporary industrial life.¹⁸⁸

Fortunately, this back-breaking task did not take as long as might have been anticipated. Within a week or two she found that she had 'broken the back of economical science so far as I want it'.¹⁸⁹ In short, she had liberated herself from it rather than mastered it – which is not to diminish or disparage her accomplishment. If economics was not a subject to be

deep-searched with such saucy looks, they might yet be sufficient to detect that it was an impostor when it presented itself as if it were a code of morals and good government. The influence of Comte and his English followers was evident. She followed the Master in making an exception of Adam Smith. Comte had put him in his *Calendar of Great Men* and correctly perceived that he was a moral philosopher who did moral philosophy openly and intelligently and not covertly and badly as so many of his successors had done. Smith did not rely upon a diminished and deformed conception of human nature described as economic man. He did not abstract economic activity from all the surrounding areas of life. He had the historical sense. Beatrice's self-imposed 'drudgery' led her to recover these conclusions and allowed her a sense of making them her own. 'The generalisations upon which he [Adam Smith] based his reasoning were wider and were drawn more from direct observation than from an *à priori* idea of man made up on unconscious generalisation of one type of man, the city man, only.'¹⁹⁰ Ricardo and Marx were, she thought, mistaken in assuming that the acquisitive instinct was equally present in all men. Reserving Marx for subsequent consideration, she presented herself with a good 'Marxist' question: if

the political economy of Adam Smith was the scientific expression of the impassioned crusade of the eighteenth century against class tyranny and the oppression of the Many by the Few; by what silent revolution of events, by what unconscious transformation of thought, did it change itself into the Employers' Gospel of the nineteenth century?

She tried to express her conclusions in two papers which she hoped might find their way to publication: the first was on the Rise and Progress of English Economics; the second – which was not written until the winter – was on Karl Marx's *Capital*. With neither of them did she achieve much public success. Booth told her that the first ought to be put away in a drawer and allowed to mature whilst Spencer and Courtney protested against it very vigorously. Beatrice had objected to the economists' habit of dismissing unemployment or other blemishes on the market mechanisms as 'frictions'. Spencer told her that the economists ought not to be reproached. Characteristically he made his objection through an argument by analogy which depended upon a rigid departmentalisation of thought. Economics was compared to physiology. 'Physiology formulates the laws of the bodily functions in a state of health, and absolutely ignores pathology.' How ridiculous it would be if we tried to readjust physiology to adapt it to pathological states!

Just so it is with the account of the normal relations of industrial actions constituting political economy properly so-called. No account can be

taken by it of disorder among these actions, or impediments to them ... And moreover, if these pathological states are due to the traversing of free competition and free contract which political economy assumes, the course of treatment is not the readjustment of the principles of political economy, but the establishment as far as possible of free competition and free contract. If, as I understand you, you would so modify politico-economical principles as to take practical cognisance of pathological states, [then] you would simply organise pathological states, and things would go from bad to worse.¹⁹¹

Beatrice now saw through this sophistry. Spencer's letter showed that he had 'no historical sense'. As a matter of historical fact physiology had grown out of the study of life in all its manifestations including disease and death. Second, she had no intention of prescribing a course of treatment. She was pointing to the limitations of a mode of thought that might explain some phenomena but could not explain others. Finally, she detected the question-begging way in which Spencer identified 'health' with the normal functioning of a capitalist economy. 'The object of science is to discover what is; not to tell us according to some social ideal what ought to be.'¹⁹²

But while she was breaking free from the hold of vulgar political economy, Beatrice was not prepared to embrace Marx. She came to the conclusion that the labour theory of value was radically defective. Marx reduced all labour to manual labour. He utterly failed to recognise the importance of people like her father who exercised crucially important judgements: whose hunches and intuitions about what to produce when and where were as vital to the satisfaction of social needs as were the physical efforts of labourers. It was hopelessly one-sided to think of exchange value being determined solely by the amount of socially necessary labour time incorporated in a commodity. She made out of Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, not a critique of capitalism, but a critique of Marx. 'In the weird Marxist world' – not at all recognisably the world of Richard Potter –

whilst men are automata, commodities have souls; money is incarnated life, and capital has a life process of its own! The idea of an 'automaton owner', thus making profit without even being conscious of the existence of any desire to be satisfied, is, to any one who has lived within financial or industrial undertakings, in its glaring discrepancy with facts, nothing less than grotesque.¹⁹³

Thus, Marx's concepts of the objective laws of capitalist development were falsified for Beatrice when put to the test of subjective experience: the experience of a class, which was defined for her by its power of

command.¹⁹⁴ And this was occurring just at the time when her objective experience of East End life was encouraging her to question the subjectivity of the 'old philosopher'. But what had she to put in the place of the discarded constructions of rival theoreticians? At first sight, little beyond the linguistic innovations which inexperienced, impatient and ambitious students have always been ready to pass off as original discoveries. Exchange value, so she suggested, was to be understood as the product of 'faculty' on the one side and 'desire' on the other. Even as a mere exchange for the term 'supply' and 'demand', this appeared to be of doubtful originality since Booth employed this language.¹⁹⁵ Yet Beatrice's proposal for amending the vocabulary of economics ought not to be dismissed too quickly as being nothing but an attempt at innovation, pretentious in its intention and awkward in result.

'Supply' and 'demand', it may be conjectured, suggested to her the presence of inhuman agencies tending to find equilibrium in a stationary state. The terms 'faculty' and 'desire' constantly reminded one that economics should be about human attributes and behaviour in the context of the confusion of human nature and not in isolation or detachment from it. 'Faculty' might have a history as 'supply' could not: 'desire' was a far richer concept than 'demand' and much more could be said about it than it was 'fickle' or 'fluctuating'. Thus, to talk in terms of 'faculty' and 'desire' was to open one's mind to the observation of the real changes which they underwent in the life of social institutions, while 'supply' and 'demand' invited one to engage in a priori reasoning. With 'faculty' and 'desire' one comes upon questions to be investigated; with 'supply' and 'demand' as one's analytic tools the conclusions are reached in advance of the enquiry: they offer explanations of what must be the case whether it is the case or not. Thus, it follows from the law of supply and demand that labour goes where it is best paid. But Beatrice knew, as a matter of direct observations, that labour often stayed where it was worst paid. With the demoralised casual labourer who was physically and spiritually unfit for work it made more sense to refer to the economic faculty being 'intermittent' than to remark that their labour was over-supplied. Whereas 'supply' and 'demand' suggested the presence of a self-correcting mechanism; 'faculty' and 'desire' allowed for the possibility that the former might deteriorate into an 'intermittent state' while the latter, being satisfied without the obligation to work, ceased to generate activity and became wholly parasitic.

However muddled and incomplete her observations were about political economy, she had the sense of being released as a social observer free to investigate without coming upon foredoomed conclusions.

She was not about to be seriously discouraged by the suggestions of Booth, or Willie Cripps or Leonard Courtney or E.S. Beesly, that her

conclusions about Karl Marx or about 'economical science' were jejune or mistaken.¹⁹⁶ She felt that she had released herself from submission to iron laws and that she might proceed upon her career as social investigator with a new freedom. In October she went to Bacup where her 'dear Lancashire folk' were not even as far along the road to emancipation from the conventional wisdom as she was. All the men she met took 'little or no interest in politics (they have no votes), their thoughts (are) set on getting on in this world and the next; their conversation consisted chiefly of personalities and religion.'¹⁹⁷ In contrast to the men and women of the East End of London, they seemed to live a life of well-earned, well-paid work in which a tendency to suffer excessive overtime seemed to be the only serious problem. In the East End, she asked,

where is the wish for better things in the myriads of beings hurrying along the streets night and day? Even their careless sensual laugh, the coarse jokes and unloving words, depress one as one presses through the crowd and almost shudders to touch them. It is not so much the actual vice, it is the low level of monotonous and yet excited life – the regular recurrence of street sensations in quarrels and fights, the greedy street bargaining, and the petty theft and gambling.¹⁹⁸

Benjamin Jones blamed the dock employers for paying them so badly; Beatrice blamed them for paying them at all.¹⁹⁹ But this apparent hardness and a continual tendency to return to the old, rigid attitudes of the COS were becoming mixed with a deeper and more rounded concept of East End life. Thus these 'hereditary casuals' who might not be fit to live (economically speaking) had their own splendid qualities even if they were not the same as the workmen of Bacup. So they lived on stimulants and tobacco varied with bread and tea and salt fish, hated regular employment and lived for gambling and other paltry excitements. Yet, if they were late risers, they were also

sharp-witted talkers, and, above all, they have that agreeable tolerance for their own and each other's vices which seems characteristic of a purely leisure class, whether it lies at the top or the bottom of society. But if we compare them with their brothers and sisters in the London Club and West-End drawing-room we must admit that in one respect they are strikingly superior. The stern reality of ever-pressing starvation draws all together. Communism is a necessity of their life; they share all with one another, and as a class they are quixotically generous. It is this virtue and the courage with which they face privation that lend a charm to life among them.²⁰⁰

In the spring and summer of 1887 Beatrice was enjoying an increasingly wide range of acquaintances – from Huxley, a 'broken down old lion',²⁰¹

to Stephen Sim, the stevedores' secretary.²⁰² From Arthur Balfour, saying 'cynical and clever things that are meant to be cleverer than they turn out to be',²⁰³ to Mr Hoffman, foreman in a shoe factory, student of the sweating system and a Methodist preacher ever ready to denounce the wicked indifference of the rich.²⁰⁴ She felt that she was daily learning more and more and she had an encouraging sense of her own increasing powers. She felt an increasing security and happiness in her friendship with the Booths, the Barnetts, Ella Pycroft, Maggie Harkness, Bella Fisher and Carry Darling.²⁰⁵ But she could not bring herself to break altogether with the Chamberlain connection and maintained friendly relations with his daughter and sister. In May 1887 he wrote to her remarking that he had breakfasted with Booth and wanted to know what had to be done about the East End. Charity was hardly imaginable on a sufficient scale:

State employment would give rise to every form of jobbing and extravagance and would interfere with business and private enterprise. Emigration is quite unsuitable to the class most in need of relief. I do not see my way at all and yet I fear that the problem may at any moment be forced upon us in an acute form and while we are still quite unprepared to deal with it.²⁰⁶

Since their correspondence in 1886 he had tried every means to renew the acquaintance. Six or seven times in the year she had refused his overtures.²⁰⁷ Now she gave way. Before going to see him in Birmingham she spent a week in Brighton with Herbert Spencer, but her thoughts were elsewhere. She arrived in Birmingham in time to hear him address a meeting of his old supporters. 'And after he sat down it was natural our eyes should meet in the old way.'²⁰⁸ Despite the fact that they had been moving in different directions since February 1886 and he now appeared as the guardian of law and order: despite the fact that he behaved towards her like 'the triumphant lover' – as a man who is sure of his conquest – she invited him to visit her father and herself. He came but it only served to add a week's unhappiness to the long chain of misery. Again feeling overrode dignity: she told him that she 'cared for him passionately'.²⁰⁹ Having told him that, she desired that they should not see each other again. He appealed to her generosity:

Why are we never to see each other again? Why can we not be friends – 'camarades' – to use your own expression? I like you very much – I respect and esteem you I enjoy your conversation and society and I have often wished that fate had thrown us more together. If you share this feeling to any extent why should we surrender a friendship which ought to be good for both of us?

I have so much confidence in your generosity as well as in your good sense that I am encouraged to make this appeal to you in what I feel to be a very delicate matter.

The circumstances of my past life have made me solitary and reserved, but it is hard that I should lose one of the few friends whose just opinions I value and the sense of close regard and sympathy would be a strength and support to me. I cannot say more. You must decide, and if it is for your happiness that we should henceforth be strangers I will make no complaint.

I return your letter, as you wish it, but there is surely no reason why you should be ashamed of feelings which are purely womanly and for which I have nothing but gratitude and respect.

I am always

Yours very sincerely
Joseph Chamberlain²¹⁰

Beatrice tore out the pages of her diary for June to August 1887 and put them in an envelope along with this letter of Chamberlain's. She did not look at them again until May 1890. She caught herself gloating over his political setbacks as a heaven-sent vengeance on her deep humiliation – a humiliation which she accused him of glorying in and wishing to prolong. She was ashamed of these feelings. She tried to understand how she must have appeared to him:

First, ... as a self-opinionated person, too full of her own ideas to sympathise with his. At other times as an uncontrolled emotional woman – now refusing to see him, then expressing in naked written language the depth of her feeling. Naturally enough he was puzzled – dreading to be refused – frightened of being caught – and amazed by my perfect self-possession in conversation and argument. In short – whatever may have been his faults towards me – there were ample in myself to account for all the suffering I passed through. Can I be brave and sensible and once for all vow that I will forgive and forget?²¹¹

After the summer of 1887 there were no more emotional encounters between them. In the following year his engagement was announced to the daughter of the American Secretary of State for War. She gasped as if she had been stabbed.²¹² She went to pray in the still, silent spaces of St Paul's. The week of his marriage was spent in a state of utter nervous collapse. Yet she saw with increasing clarity that there was something wrong with the political tone which could allow him to become 'the

darling of aristocracy'. She was able to tell herself with growing assurance that the development of an important part of her personality would have been stopped or stunted had she married him. But she also came to take satisfaction in recording how men had found her attractive only to be dismissed by her with contemptuous indifference. Thus, when she saw that the eccentric anarchist, Auberon Herbert, was considering a proposal of marriage, she asked herself: 'Did I laugh or did I shudder?'²¹³ When Professor Edgeworth – fresh from dancing on Karl Marx's grave in the company of Sidney Webb²¹⁴ – showed her 'the furtive glance of unsatisfied desire', she remarked: 'Tiresome man. He misunderstands my characteristic frankness and takes it for encouragement to friendship.'²¹⁵ She recovered from the last disastrous meeting with Chamberlain by visiting the Booths. She had developed a close and intimate relation with Charlie, 'but without passion or the dawning of passion'.²¹⁶ Yet early in 1889 she noticed that: 'It would be strange if the close personal relationship between me and (Charlie) had not ended. Mary (Booth) has been generous – thoroughly generous – but for the last year the warm affection between us has been cooling.'²¹⁷ Mary tried to make up for it by signing her letters: 'Yours ever, with love and love again in good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over.'²¹⁸ As Beatrice remarked, 'God knows celibacy is as painful to a woman (even from the physical standpoint) as it is to a man. It could not be more painful than it is to a woman.'²¹⁹

4

From Social Investigator to Socialist 1885–90

'A Lady's View of the Unemployed at the East'—Its reception by the tenants, by Canon Barnett and by the President of the Local Government Board—Emancipation from political economy and rejection of Karl Marx - The firm of Paul, Potter and the work of Charles Booth—Evidence to the Lords Committee on Sweating—The pleasures of slumming and the duty of sternness—Beatrice's progress towards collectivism in practice and in recollection—Bertrand Russell's paradox and the divided self.

In her old age, Beatrice offered a tidy and persuasive account of how she came through social investigation to socialism. In her recollection it appeared as a smooth, logical progression. It began in her experience of East End life. It was this that led her to the recognition that the landlord and the capitalist must be made subject to all-pervasive control. Subsequently she saw that control was not enough: it was powerless to eliminate cyclic crises of capitalist production or to establish a 'national minimum' of civilised existence. Nor could any amount of regulation touch the morally debasing character of profit-making. Finally, it was the co-operative movement, with its 'production for use', which led her to perceive an alternative to modern business enterprise. Beatrice affirmed that this line of theoretic progress had been completed by 1890, but she did not attempt to date each successive phase.¹ The problem about her recollections is how far this 'order of thought' corresponded with the 'order of things' and in terms of what sort of time-scale.

'A Lady's View of the Unemployed at the East' gave no hint that she had embarked on this progression, for it was in perfect accord with COS orthodoxy. She was opposed to public works. She saw the main difficulty in terms of hordes of rustics being attracted into London by the prospect of sensual excitements and indiscriminate charity. She had nothing to offer but loving kindness from individuals and sternness from the state. Admittedly she did show an historical sense not usually found in charity

organisers. She drew attention to the decline of London's traditional industries and she pointed to what is called the 'vertical disintegration of production' which characterised the tailoring and furniture trades.²

She did not publish again until October of the following year. Yet despite the fact that she had by now studied the political economists and found them wanting, and spent much time talking to dockers and port employers, her position was still largely consistent with COS attitudes. She deplored the failure to find substitutes for traditional forms of social control. 'Respectability and culture have fled, the natural leaders of the working class have deserted their post; the lowest element sets the tone of East End existence.'³ Heavy blame was still attached to those who – acting out of a combination of fear and stricken conscience – supplied indiscriminate charity. Yet she began to see that indiscriminate employment – the habit of the dock companies of offering work without reference to character – might be a yet more important consideration. Casual employment on the docks was identified as encouraging parasitism. It was not merely the failure to distinguish the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving poor', but the failure to attend to the distinction between the regularly and the casually employed which was responsible for so much suffering and demoralisation. By carefully noticing the difference between the permanent employees on the docks (the 'Royals' and the 'ticket' men) on the one side, and the mass of casuals plus the two thousand members of the really 'criminal class' on the other, Beatrice helped to break up the conventional view of dock life in which the 'dockers' were seen as the undifferentiated refuse of the labour market. Once her distinctions were recognised, the way was opened up to protecting those who were economically 'fit' by restricting competition from the 'unfit': the parasites who were 'eating the life out of the working class, demoralising and discrediting it'.⁴

In short, by the end of 1887 she was coming to see that the organisation of the labour market might be more important than the organisation of charity so far as dock workers were concerned. She blamed 'individualism run wild' and complained that everything was ordered for that 'spoilt child of the nineteenth century – the consumer'. She went on to argue that

The only radical remedy is a kind of municipal socialism, which many of us would hesitate to adopt, and which in the case of the docks and the waterside would take the form of amalgamation under a Public Trust. This would facilitate a better organisation of trade and admit the dovetailing of business.⁵

This won for Miss Potter the affectionate regard and respect of the more advanced section of dock workers who were striving to build up trade

union organisation. In November she attended a dockers' meeting addressed by Ben Tillet. Although she declined to speak herself – being nervous of doing so and thinking it unwomanly – she was cheered to the echo. She found Tillet well intentioned, but given to sensationalism and intellectually inadequate.⁶ She had herself made it plain that experiments in municipal socialism were fit subjects for consideration rather than for immediate adoption.

Her article on dock life had concluded with the words: 'In short, if society is to be reconstructed on a socialistic basis, the workhouse of today will only foreshadow in the severity of its regulations the workhouse of the future.'⁷ She assumed that the better organisation of the labour market would simply make the case of the demoralised and destitute workless worse than ever. For them, society could have nothing to offer but the bare necessities of existence supplied within the conditions of restraint. Beatrice could understand the temptation of the 'socialist' docker who could not resist pilfering tobacco before it was burned as 'undeclared' by Customs House officials.⁸ Like Charles Booth,⁹ she could enjoy the East End and respect the quick wits and the generous practical communism that lent a charm to life among the people there. But her sympathetic insight never extended to an indulgence when it came to work discipline. She would have had no patience with the docker who remarked: 'If you are made permanent you are made a white slave of directly; you are transferable from here to there and everywhere.'¹⁰ From her standpoint that freedom could be secured only by perpetuating a process of deterioration, parasitism and decay. Accordingly, she had not placed herself outside the pale so far as the COS was concerned. Indeed, at the beginning of 1888 she wrote an article in the *Charity Organisation Review* in which she reiterated that the root of the trouble in the East End was not to be found in a system of employment nor in a method of trading, but in 'the mental and physical shortcomings of the human material'.¹¹

However, she tried to persuade the COS that even if the shortcomings of the 'human material' were basic, the structure of the labour market was important. If a public trust might help in the docks then the growth of large-scale trading, as against small-scale, might do much to alleviate suffering in the tailoring trade. She had become a friend of John Burnett, sometime secretary of the engineering union and subsequently Labour Correspondent to the Board of Trade. She was impressed by his account of how the rise of the sewing machine had, allegedly, transformed the journeyman tailor.¹² 'Instead of a complete tailor, we have cutters, basters, machinists, fellers, buttonhole workers, and general workers, all brought to bear on the construction of a coat.'¹³ She was ready to accept Burnett's definition of 'sweating' as an evil resulting from the excess and abuse of the 'contract system' under which work was let out by middlemen.

Direct experience of working in the sweatshops contributed to a revision of her opinions. She began learning how to 'sweat'. In April she settled at 56 Great Prescott Street to begin life as a working woman. She went off to a co-operative workroom to be taught how to finish a pair of trousers. Without really having mastered the art of 'besting' she went off trudging around the East End in search of employment.¹⁴ It was no easy task to find it:

The sun's rays beat fiercely on the crowded alleys of the Jewish settlement: the air is moist from the heavy rains. An unsavoury steam rises from the downtrodden slime of the East End streets and mixes with the stronger odours of the fried fish, the decomposing vegetables, and the second-hand [*sic*] meat, which assert their presence to the eyes and nostrils of the passers-by.

For a brief interval the 'whirr' of the sewing machines and the muffled sound of the presser's iron have ceased. Machinists and pressers, well-clothed and decorated with heavy watch-chains; Jewish girls with flashy hats, full figures and large bustles; furtive-eyed Polish immigrants with their pallid faces and crouching forms; and here and there are poverty-stricken Christian women – all alike hurry to and from the midday meal; while the labour-masters, with their wives and daughters, sit or lounge about the house-door, and exchange notes on the incompetency of 'season hands', the low price of work, the blackmail of shop foremen; or else discuss the more agreeable topic of the last 'deal' in Petticoat Lane and the last venture on race-horses.¹⁵

Miss Potter, aping the manner and accent of a work-girl, enquires 'do you want a plain 'and?' She is embarrassed by the awkwardness of her own performance and rouses the suspicion and curiosity of her respondents. Eventually she finds employment at a shop run by a one-eyed Jewess at 198 Mile End Road. Her co-op training has not equipped her for the work of an unskilled trouser hand. A neat and respectable married woman sacrifices her own time (she is paid by the piece) to teach her the task. But respectability is not the keynote. The pressers use much foul language propositioning the younger girls around the table while the older women exchange gossip. One girl is said to have had three babies by her father and another has had one by her brother. Beatrice thinks that most of the girls are decent enough but 'full of enjoyment of low life and promiscuous courting':¹⁶

'I say, Milly' shouts one to the other, 'you can tell that bl—y brother of yours that I waits 'alf an 'our for 'im houtside the Paragon last night. I'll be blessed before I serves as 'is Round the Corner ag'in.'

The pale girl who sits beside Beatrice is a quick worker, but she can earn no more than one shilling a day. At the tea break she offers her neighbour some bread and butter:

'No thank you', I answer.

'Sure?' and without more to do she lays a thick slice in my lap and turns away to avoid my thanks. A little bit of human kindness that goes to the heart and brings tears into the eyes of the investigator.

After twelve hours in a sweatshop Beatrice went home:

'I'll be married in a week' are the last words I hear passing from Jo to Harry, 'and then my wife shall keep me.'

'I'll go to the bl—y workhouse', jokes Harry, 'if I don't get a gal to keep me. I won't sweat here any longer for 5s. a day.'¹⁷

Beatrice subsequently worked for a few hours at two other shops, but found them of no interest. When she was invited to give evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Lords which was enquiring into the sweating system she did so on the understanding that she would not be asked to speak on the basis of her own direct experience.

She appeared before the Committee on 11 May 1888. Her evidence showed that she had made a considerable advance from the position that she had adopted, under the influence of Burnett, five or six months earlier:

'How would you define the sweating system?' enquired the Earl of Dunraven from the Chair.

'I should say that an enquiry into the sweating system was practically an inquiry into all labour employed in manufacture which has escaped the regulations of the Factory Act and trades unions.'¹⁸

She explicitly repudiated the view that 'sweating' could be regarded as a consequence of the subcontracting method of trading, drawing attention to worse cases of sweating where there was no subcontract. In particular, she pointed to women out-workers who generally got less than those employed in the workshops. She held that the irresponsibility and bad work done meant that employers 'have to take it out in one way or another. There is an enormous number of goods spoilt and not brought in on time, and that sort of thing, so that the honest have to pay for the dishonest ...'

Thus, in May 1888 Beatrice had a useful analytical definition of sweating. It hardly prepared their Lordships for the descriptive and prescriptive parts of her evidence.

‘Should we leave it all alone or not?’

‘I really have not any opinion about it.’

‘But do you not think that there is a very strong case for legislation?’

‘Not in the tailoring trade.’¹⁹

There were two considerations that accounted for Beatrice’s caution and agnosticism. First, she was persuaded that sentimentality and sensationalism had to be avoided at all costs. As in the case of the docks, so in the case of the tailoring trade: it was necessary to distinguish between the different types of work being done and the contrasting situation of different types of worker. She was anxious to discredit the view of the sweater as an all-powerful exploiter draining away the life-blood of the wage-earners. ‘In the busy season’, she explained, ‘they [machinists and pressers] swear at their employers; in the slack season employers swear at them.’²⁰ She apparently left some members of the Select Committee with the sense that she was heartlessly minimising the amount of suffering. Lord Sandhurst remarked:

‘We have had some very strong evidence on this Committee as to the exceptional poverty of the tailors and tailoresses; from what you have seen of them do you consider that they are a population in extremely miserable circumstances?’

‘Not the Jewish section and not the coat trade.’

‘But the gentile population?’

‘Trouser, vest and juvenile suit makers are exceptionally poor.’

‘Did you hear of any cases of starvation?’

‘Not of actual starvation.’²¹

Earlier she had been asked:

‘Do you think the coat makers are able to take care of themselves?’

‘Yes, except as regards sanitation. In the lowest class of domestic workshop the standard of sanitation and over-crowding is very low; no doubt about it; but that is their particular taste.’

‘You think they do not feel it?’

‘I do not think they feel it very much.’²²

But it was not only this *sang froid* attitude which stopped Beatrice calling for legislation. Having conceded that sanitary standards were low, she was asked: ‘Do you think there would be any danger if better sanitation were insisted upon that it might raise the cost of producing these goods?’ She replied that

‘it would tend to drive the trade into the lower channels of home work, and that you would have that fringe, as I call it, of the women making

a coat for 7d, getting bigger and bigger. I think if you touch anything you must take the whole thing, and deal with the home work too.'

'Your principal remedies or suggestions would be that the landlord should be made responsible, and that sanitation should be better looked after?'

'Yes, if you do anything. Of course, I think there is a good deal to be said for doing nothing; but if you do anything, I think you must extend the remedy over the area of the evil. You must not just take the top part of it and deal with that alone, and drive the trade into lower channels.'²³

In retrospect Beatrice was profoundly distressed by the character of the evidence she gave to the Lords committee and by what she imagined to be the way in which it had been received by the press. Her Superior Person dismissal of the committee – it was 'not made of stuff fit for investigation' – swiftly gave way to a fear that she had misled it and that she had been detected by the *Pall Mall Gazette*.²⁴ Chamberlain's engagement had been placarded all over London at the end of April. She was suffering intensely and the thought that she had been found out as a liar made 'the laudanum bottle loom large as the dominant figure.'²⁵ According to the printed report she concluded her testimony in the following manner:

'How long have you been at work in the tailoring trade?'

'Three weeks inclusive of the training I got.'

'The whole time in one shop?'

'No I worked altogether in five shops, but I could not keep my place in the coat shops, for the reason that coat work is so very much more skilled than other work.'

'You worked the usual twelve hours a day?'

'Yes.'

'Besides that, you have had a large personal experience of the way work is carried on in people's homes?'

'Yes as a rent-collector.'²⁶

In fact, she had told the Committee that she had worked in sweatshops for a longer period than three weeks. When she received the proof of her evidence she corrected her 'hasty exaggeration' by pretending that the mistake had not been made by her, but by the short-hand writer or the compositor.²⁷ But even this 'corrected' statement was still most misleading. She had worked the twelve-hour day on only two days running and over a much longer period than three *consecutive* weeks. It was not merely her incompetence that prevented her from working for longer periods: it 'would simply imply more mental and physical endurance

than I possess'.²⁸ Had she made that confession to the Committee it might seriously have diminished the weight that was attached to her testimony. The opponents of the sweating system, whose 'hysterical' and 'sensational' statements she was anxious to discredit, would have been quick to point out that her experience supported their view that a sweatshop was 'unendurable'. Thus, she had not even got to the point where Herbert Spencer's caution was relevant. He advised her:

Bear in mind ... that the experiences which you thus gain [by participant observation] are misleading experiences; for what you think and feel under such conditions are unlike what is felt and thought by those whose experiences you would describe.²⁹

Tortured by her own conscience and terrified that she would be detected as a liar, Beatrice imagined that the press had found her out. In fact the *Pall Mall Gazette* did not question her veracity, but her competence and sensibility. However, it did so in exactly the terms that she would find most wounding. It mocked her as a 'lady amateur' and scorned her for suggesting that the victims of the sweating system were 'rather well off'.³⁰ Her friends advised her against making any response or explanation. Lord Thring assured her that the *Pall Mall Gazette* was not admitted into his house and that the Archbishop of Canterbury and all the other members of the select committee 'thought that you gave most valuable evidence in a ladylike and unassuming manner.'³¹ Booth was particularly firm in advising her against drawing any further attention to the episode.³²

Beatrice wisely took Booth's advice. She followed up her evidence with an article on East London labour. While maintaining her stance as the discriminating realist opposed to the indiscriminating sentimentalist, she broke new ground. Earnings were not, she insisted, uniformly low. Excluding the general hand of the domestic slop-shop whose earnings never exceeded one shilling and sixpence and frequently fell below one shilling for twelve hours' work, East End coat-making allowed a rate of four pence and a halfpenny per hour for males. Females received two pence and a halfpenny, while nine pence an hour and six pence an hour were high watermarks. The middleman – supposedly occupying a crucial exploitative position between the wholesaler and the retailer – was largely a myth. The Jew competed with the provincial factory workers, not with skilled English tradesmen working on the old traditional lines of one man, one garment. Moreover, the well-to-do sweaters ran workshops where physical conditions often compared favourably with those prevailing in the ordinary, provincial clothing factories. But 80 per cent of sweaters were small men. Big employers in London were handicapped by

high rents, high costs of fuel and the irregularity of demand. This was good observation and it furnished support for the anti-socialist (or a-socialist) conclusion that it was exactly the absence of the capitalist employer, independent of and distinct from, the wholesale trader, able, to some extent, to resist the constant pressure of competing firms in the direction of cheap, intermittent, and low-class production that was the curse of the East End.³³ The multiplication of small masters was due to the ease of entry into the trade and the Jewish love of *profit* as distinct from other forms of money-earning.

Yet while she maintained much of the 'tough-minded' tone of her testimony to the Lords Committee, Beatrice began to offer a rather fuller account of sweating. To the committee she had identified it analytically; now she did so descriptively. Sweating meant over-crowded and insanitary workshops or living rooms; long and irregular hours; constantly falling prices and a comparatively low rate of wages for the mass of the workers. Its condition was – as she had said – the absence of regulation whether by trades unions or by the state. The soul of the sweater was not merely to be found in the ignorant consumer buying 'balloon coats' held together with soap; nor in the grinding wholesale slop trader; nor in the rack-renting landlord; but in the 'evil spirit of the age, unrestrained competition'.³⁴ She now paid warm tributes to the efforts of the trade unions. The solution must lie either in the restriction of the supply of labour or else in enforcing a higher standard of life among female, foreign and unskilled English workers through the extension of the Factory Acts or the Public Health Acts.³⁵

In her last article of the 1880s, Beatrice turned her attention to the problem of Jewish immigration. As had become her habit, she prepared to write the piece through an extensive programme of meetings and interviews. She wrote:

I feel uncomfortable every time I see these dear, kind Jews – they have been overwhelmingly kind to me; but I fear they will look upon my paper as an unwarranted attack upon the Jews; they will take all I say good of them as mere truism and will resent the rest.³⁶

In fact, the main weight of her article was directed against such anti-Semitic slanderers as Arnold White, who painted a picture of the Jews as 'destitute foreigners' living in conditions which resembled 'those of animals'.³⁷ Beatrice thought that experience of Christian brutality and the virtue of training in the Talmud had made the Jews much superior to their Gentile neighbours in the East End. 'In the Jewish inhabitants of East London we see ... a race of brainworkers competing with a class of manual labourers.'³⁸ She saw that the Jewish Board of Guardians ought

not to be confused with an English parochial body and that it was a vulgar prejudice to suppose that it performed analogous functions. The records of organised Jewry illustrated

the skill, the tenacity, and, above all, the admirable temper with which our Hebrew fellow-countrymen have insinuated themselves into the life of the nations, without forsaking the faith of their forefathers or sacrificing as a community the purity of their race.

But while Beatrice saw that 'Jewish charity does not tend towards the demoralisation of individual recipients', she did believe – and rightly – that the Jewish Board of Guardians fostered 'the artificial multiplication of small masters.'³⁹ This was achieved by loans to men who had qualified themselves to become sweaters by working at starvation wages and for an enormous number of hours. In an earlier piece she had maintained that 'the strongest impelling motive of the Jewish race was the love of *profit* as distinct from other forms of money-earning'.⁴⁰ She now maintained that 'though possessed of many first class virtues, the immigrant Jew is deficient in that highest and latest development of human sentiment – social morality'. She did not mean to imply that they were anything other than law-abiding. Quite the contrary, but

the Jew is quick to perceive that 'law and order' and the 'sanctity of contract' are the *sine qua non* of a full and free competition in the open market ... in the case of foreign Jews it is a competition unrestrained by the personal dignity of a definite standard of life, and unchecked by the social feelings of class loyalty and trade integrity.⁴¹

This judgement of 1889 points more definitely to Beatrice's rising faith in the capacity of the labour movement than to any prejudice against Jews. She never suggested that Jewish immigration was a major factor making for sweating. She thought that there was something distinctively Jewish in the division of labour in the tailoring trade, but she saw that this was competitive with provincial factory production rather than with the skilled English tailor making high-quality goods. She thought that the Jewish community in East London was progressive in that it was constantly sending out successful immigrants even while new fugitives from the pogroms came in. This flow of Jewish immigrants needs to be contrasted with the stagnant pool of unskilled female labour in which one found the most exploited and dispirited labourers in the East End. And the terrible but progressive experience of the Jew was associated with the permanent helpless and hopeless state of his Gentile neighbours. Rather like Marx himself, she saw in the Jew – or rather the immigrant Jew – the

embodiment of the idea of capitalism.⁴² He seemed

to justify by his existence those strange assumptions which figured for *man* in the political economy of Ricardo – an always Enlightened Selfishness, seeking employment or profit with an absolute mobility of body and mind, without pride, without preference, without interests outside the struggle for the existence and welfare of the individual and the family. We see these assumptions verified in the Jewish inhabitants of Whitechapel; and in the Jewish East End Trades we may watch the prophetic deduction of the Hebrew economist actually fulfilled – in a perpetually recurring bare subsistence wage for the great majority of manual workers.⁴³

The study of the Jewish community first appeared in Charles Booth's *Life and Labour* (1889). The volume also contained reprints of two earlier articles by Beatrice. Booth stressed the general community of view between himself and his contributors and called for 'limited socialism – a socialism which shall leave untouched the forces of individualism and the sources of wealth.'⁴⁴ Perhaps it was out of deference to this commitment to 'limited socialism' that Beatrice struck out from her piece on the dock workers the conclusion relating to the increased severity of workhouse regulations in a socialistic society. Sentimentalists and libertarians might have thought that a serious objection to socialism, although it is doubtful whether Beatrice or Booth would have thought so.⁴⁵ In the year in which she expressed that opinion Beatrice remarked that the Cornish Christians thought of individual suffering to be relieved rather than of the common good. 'And I maintain that *I* am the true socialist through my willingness to sacrifice the individual to the community.'⁴⁶

There is no other evidence that she ever described herself or thought of herself as being a socialist in the 1880s. Her evidence to the Select Committee and her studies of East End dockers, tailors and Jews show how slow she was to advance towards socialism. She had indeed cautiously advocated the setting up of a public trust or board to regulate employment in the docks, but what she wanted to restrict was competition; she never argued that public ownership was preferable to private ownership *per se*. Despite the recollection of her old age which placed her recognition of the need for 'an all pervading control, in the interest of the community, of the economic activity of the landlord and the capitalist' in the 1880s it was not until May 1890 that she passed from opposition to such control, or from a halting agnosticism concerning its feasibility, to open and vigorous advocacy of it.

What was it that transformed her attitude between the time when she gave evidence to the Lords Committee and the presentation of its report? First, perhaps, the report itself, along with the preceding volumes of evidence: 'the whole staff of working factory inspectors, and the whole body of trade unionists examined by the Committee, recommended the extension of factory jurisdiction to the sanitation of all workshops.'⁴⁷

Sanitation was exactly the matter about which Beatrice in May 1888 had been most ready to allow the need for legislative action. However, in June 1890 she dismissed with scorn a restriction of reform to this one subject. The noble lords proposed 'that for sanitary purposes all workshops (domestic and otherwise) should be treated as factories'. 'But why should we stop here?' asked Beatrice. Showing quite a new mastery of the Workshop and Factory Act of 1878 and the Public Health Act of 1875, she went on to propose detailed amendments of those measures together with changes in the Local Government Act, to achieve 'the tuning of these three great legislative instruments to one common note of strength and harmony'. If public opinion was not ripe for the socialist answer to the labour problem, then the employer had to be made responsible for the performance of his duty by legislative enactments reinforced by the pressure of public opinion and by trade unionism. Only thus could the 'hideous social evils known as the Sweating System' be rooted out.

Between the last of Beatrice's descriptive studies of East End life and this programmatic piece written in the spring of 1890 lay months of increasing involvement in the affairs of the labour movement. The editor of the *Nineteenth Century* had asked her for an article on co-operation. The subject had already occurred to her and she resisted the advice of Alfred Marshall and others to turn her attention to women's employment and leave co-operation to others better qualified in economic science.⁴⁸ She began the work in February 1889, after long talks with her most intimate working-class friends Burns, Benjamin Jones and J.J. Dent. She also went back to Bacup and other northern towns. At Hebden Bridge she stayed with the widow of an ironfounder and rejoiced in her 'true Yorkshire straightforwardness and cordiality'.⁴⁹ She saw many co-operators and attended their meetings. She also met a number of young men from Oxford and noted that they and the co-operative working-class people formed a mutual admiration society: 'common condemnation of the capitalist class and money-making brainworkers: a condemnation the form of which bordered precariously on cant, and was clearly the outcome of ignorance'. Yet after having spent six months in close association with the co-operators and their leaders at every level, having scrupulously observed what she took to be their strengths and their weaknesses, she could observe:

how inexpressibly ugly are the manners and ways of a typical middle-class man, brought up in the atmosphere of small [sic] profit-making

[securing profit by] ‘driving other chaps’ – a phrase which represents in Howard Collins’ mind the great world of invention and enterprise; for the small manufacturing and retailing tradesman’s business is a matter of driving and ‘doing’ workers and customers. And experience of this class makes me wonder whether ‘profit’ is not on the whole a demoralising force, whether a system of standard salaries and standard wages, such as is being gradually evolved by joint-stock and co-operative enterprise, is not a higher form of industrial organisation? Should not the use of a man’s faculties after he has received his maintenance be dedicated to society? [She had become well acquainted with the head of the immense Co-operative Wholesale Society, J.T.W. Mitchell, who lived in small lodgings in Rochdale on £150 a year.] Is not profit-making the sharing of unlawful gain? And are... not... the forces of public opinion and the natural evolution of industry tending in that way?

Some such conclusion I am coming to in my study of the Co-operative Movement. It seems to me to have been essentially a movement *not* towards the sharing of profits by workers, but towards an unconscious realisation of the socialist ideal of officially managed business on the basis of voluntary association.⁵⁰

But co-operators were muddled about much. They did not know how to regulate their relations with the trade unions. This – together with the great dock strike of the summer of 1889 – increased Beatrice’s interest in the whole world of labour. She had no first-hand acquaintance with the gas-workers or the match-girls who had led the first struggles of the new unions of the unskilled, but she was an authority on the docks. In the great struggle organised around the demand for ‘the tanner’ – that is, a basic wage of sixpence an hour – she found a new and astonishing evidence of the vitality and creativity of the organised working class. By the end of August she was becoming more and more excited by the success of John Burns and her old friend of two years back, Ben Tillett:

Certainly the ‘solidarity of labour’ at the East End is a new thought to me ... an extraordinary manifestation of practical sympathy, of effectual help, has been evolved among all classes at East London – skilled artisans making common cause with casuals.⁵¹

She thought that it proved the possibility of an ‘organised Labour Party in London’ which would have a powerful lever for ‘working its own will’. Yet she feared that success would be as transient as in the great battles waged by the dockers in the early seventies: battles of which she had learned in long conversations with management and men during her investigations in 1887. But her own work in that year seemed irrelevant: ‘the great

instinctive movements of the mass are perhaps, after all, more likely to [have an] effect than the carefully reasoned judgements of the scientific (or pseudo-scientific?) observer.⁵²

It was in the midst of the dockers' struggle that she went off to the Trades Union Congress at Dundee. She had already had some slight experience of these large trade union gatherings and had noticed that the established labour leaders regarded the lower grades of workmen as almost as objectionable as the capitalist employers. At Dundee she soon made the acquaintance of the leaders of the 'old unionism', the chairman and the secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC:

This morning, while I was breakfasting Shipton ... joined me. His view of the dock strike is strongly adverse to the men and is visibly biased by his antipathy to, I might almost say hatred, of Burns ... 'The way the strike was begun', he remarked, 'was illegitimate. No responsible leader of a Trade Union which had funds of its own to lose would treat employers in that fashion. Ben Tillett drew up a letter demanding certain concessions and sent it with a letter asserting that if these demands were not conceded by 12 o'clock that morning, the men would come out. Just fancy expecting a manager to decide a question of enormous financial importance without consulting his directors! Then Burns came on the scene with his intense desire for notoriety and his foreign ideas of the solidarity of labour which he is trying to foist on trade unionists. But it won't work. Each trade has its own interests and technicalities ... Look how the Knights of Labour have failed! That sort of thing is bound to break up in the end. Capital has only to sit still with folded hands. If the Dock companies stand out – if they are able to resist the other capitalist interests which are causing the strike to get their own way – if they can resist this pressure the whole combination will break down and the workers will dribble back.'

So spoke Shipton. Clearly, whatever might be his sympathy for dock labour his dislike of a socialist victory was the stronger feeling:

Shipton is not an attractive man. Small, with a weasel-like body and uncertain manner; an uneasy contorted expression; grey eyes with an absolute lack of candour or frankness – with that curious film over them which usually denotes an 'irregular' life (he is a widower of some fifty years old who neglected his wife) deep furrows under the eyes and stretching from the nostrils round his mouth. A black beard, neatly trimmed – a general attempt at middle class smartness – completes the outward man ... I should imagine that in his heart of hearts he has little

sympathy with the workmen: that he prizes his position as an official for the power it brings.⁵³

After breakfast with the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee, Beatrice took luncheon two days later with its secretary, the formidable Henry Broadhurst MP, the first workman to secure office in a government and the *bête noir* of Keir Hardie and the socialists. She smoked a cigarette with him steady in the belief that the cigarette would be 'the wand' with which the woman of the future would wield influence over men.⁵⁴ What ever influence the cigarette may have had on Broadhurst's attitude towards her was as little compared with his relief on learning that she was an anti-suffrage woman, one of a number of distinguished ladies who had signed a piece in the *Nineteenth Century*. Broadhurst immediately thought that she must be sensible when he discovered she had signed a document declaring that the 'emancipating process has now reached the limits fixed by the physical constitution of women'. And that giving women the vote would only change them from sympathetic and disinterested creatures into hotter partisans than men.⁵⁵ Beatrice received his congratulations with a thankfulness that was mingled with an unexpressed contempt. She saw that he was a 'middle-class philistine to the backbone; ... his view of women is typical of all his other views: he lives in platitudes and commonplaces.'⁵⁶

Yet these hard and accurate judgements of the leaders of the 'old' unions did not imply any uncritical or easy admiration of their rivals. The veterans like Shipton and Broadhurst were at least knowledgeable, which was more than could be said for many of the socialist leaders who indulged in dirty, personalised attacks which were full of envy and malice and showed a contempt and hatred for the facts. From her dear but unscrupulous friend, Maggie Harkness, Beatrice had formed the impression that many of the socialists and new unionists were hirelings of the Tory caucus. For the rest, they were 'beardless enthusiasts and dreamers of all ages and conditions'.⁵⁷ As for the socialist laird and MP, Cunninghame Graham, he was swiftly dismissed as a 'poseur', an 'enthusiast' and an 'unmitigated fool'.⁵⁸ Indeed, at Dundee it was only John Burns who impressed her as a man of conscience and of will, but she sensed that he was destined to depart from the socialist camp. As she sailed down the river or sat at the head of the table at a reception, she concluded that most of the delegates were a 'fine-looking, able set of men', but with a great trust in the established leaders and a profound suspicion of the socialist parvenus.

In the following month the dockers carried off their 'brilliant victory' and in November she went to hear Tom Mann address a meeting of co-operators at Toynbee Hall. How much more impressive he was than the famous men of parliamentary Liberalism that she had come across in the

last few months! Even when he was only groping after the facts, he compared favourably with John Morley – terrified of the socialist challenge in Newcastle, and talking about social questions without beginning to understand them.⁵⁹ Even when he was recklessly boasting that the workers could wring anything out of the dock directors, he seemed a man of purpose and of earnestness when put alongside Sir Edward Grey, who had confided to her how torn he was between his love of sport and his sense of public duty.⁶⁰ Beatrice was deeply impressed by Mann's assertion: 'Socialism means the co-operative organisation of industry when no one shall be outside. This was the ideal state towards which they were all striving. But so-called co-operation, like the trade unionism of the fossil unions, had denied this faith.' She noticed the contradiction that occurred as he went on to discuss the task before the dockers. She noticed it but she did not revel in it:

We are determined [said he] to eliminate the riff-raff: the wretched wastrels that have disgraced the docks. The end of this week we close our books. We must be hard-hearted and clear-headed; it is no use gushing over the out o'works. We want men who grasp the problem, who see that if we are to raise the status of our members we must keep them with sufficient wages to provide food, to keep up their physical strength, with constant employment to prevent them from being loafers. The other men at the Dock Gates must 'clear off'; with us there is no room for them; no doubt there are other social movements to provide for them; but our movement is to eliminate them.⁶¹

Tom Mann impressed her, but only a month earlier she had projected collaboration with Auberon Herbert in writing an 'individualist' novel.⁶²

For Beatrice, 1890 began with a further crisis in her father's health. She loved him, yet she found herself wishing for the release which would come with his death. While he lived he seemed to exile her from the triumphant upsurge of the new trade unionism which had made – whatever its limitations – the magnificent conquest of the docks. She retained her friendship with the representatives of the older trade unionism, but it was Tom Mann, Ben Tillett and John Burns who seemed to have evoked unsuspected forces beyond routines of store and chapel on the one hand, and the chaotic parasitism of a lost residuum on the other. Together with the philosophic spirit of Dent, the opportunism of Benjamin Jones, the marvellous business capacity of Mitchell, they seemed to be the harbingers of a new world of labour: makers of a labour movement full of dynamic possibilities. Then there were the able young men who had written *Fabian Essays*, who commanded respect and who might prove of first-rate importance once the surge forward of trade unionism had received its first check.⁶³ What with her brothers-in-law supplying her with an entrée into the life of established society, what with her privileged social

position, she ought to have a unique opportunity to observe and, perhaps, to influence events. She heard now – more distinctly than before – the voices of the wrecks, the waifs and strays of civilisation echo off the walls of the luxurious homes of her relatives. Yet it was not these voices that made up the ‘bitter cry’ to which she had to harken. The cry she most attended to was that of brains, doomed to the treadmill of manual labour, asking for a career in which ability would lead; this – for her – was ‘the bitter cry of the nineteenth century woman’.⁶⁴ It was the women and the workmen, as Comte had said it would be, but it summoned her beyond Positivism:

And the whole seems a whirl of contending actions, aspirations and aims, out of which I dimly see the tendency towards a socialist community, in which there will be individual freedom and public property, instead of class slavery and private possession of the means of subsistence of the whole people. At last I am a socialist!⁶⁵

Miss Beatrice Potter first met Mr Sidney Webb in January 1890. It was not until after that meeting that she declared herself a socialist. It was not until after that meeting that she saw how the pervasive control of the landlord and the capitalist might be established in practice. Before then she had doubted whether it was either possible or desirable. Very sensibly, she had regarded ‘half-measures’ as likely to prove worse than useless. Yet this conviction that pervasive control was necessary was recalled as the starting-point of her journey towards socialism. Perhaps she had seen that ‘whole measures’ were desirable at a much earlier date, but, if so, she had not known how to devise them. As for the cyclic crises – which she remembered as the second item in her instruction – she had shown next to no appreciation of their reality since she was far too preoccupied with the problem of the chronic over-supply of labour in the London labour market to trouble about them. Her distaste for the acquisitive motive at the heart of capitalist production had been made more evident – but not much more. It was not getting rid of capitalists, but ending capitalist *competition*, which had been the distinguished preoccupation of her early writings. As for ‘co-operative production for use’ – as distinct from co-operative organisation for retail distribution – she may have shown more sympathy for it than her father had done; but she had no more confidence than he had in its ultimate success.

In short, her recollection of ‘how I became a socialist’ is better read as a persuasive statement of why her reader should become one than as a true record of her own progress. What stood between the pessimistic, *sang froid* testimony to the Lords Committee in May 1888 and the optimistic affirmations of February and June 1890 was the ‘explosion’ of the new unionism

and the exceptional knowledge of administrative law and the extraordinary capacity for administrative innovation of Mr Sidney Webb.

* * *

Bertrand Russell once remarked that: 'If you set down a list of Beatrice's leading characteristics you would say – "What a dreadful woman!" But in fact she was very nice. I had a great liking and respect for her. I was always delighted by a chance of meeting her.'⁶⁶ Unfortunately he declined to enlarge upon this paradox or to attempt an explanation of it. When it was reported to others who had known and admired her, they felt confident that Russell was saying something shrewd but they were unable to explain what it was.⁶⁷

Perhaps the 'Russell paradox' should be understood as a reference to the 'divided self': the nasty characteristics belonging to a 'false-self system' which concealed a second self which was nicer and 'more real' than the first.⁶⁸ Undoubtedly, Beatrice had a precarious sense of her own identity. She saw her early life in terms of a struggle 'to be herself'. For most of the time that struggle was regarded in quite a commonplace way: it was a matter of circumstances that were beyond her control. She was trapped between her duty to her father and her desire for an independent life. Her mother's death, her father's illness and her sisters' marriages left her with a duty that seemed to her undeniable and inescapable. But Beatrice was well aware that this was a superficial and inadequate way of thinking about her predicament. Beyond the rivalry between the dutiful daughter and the Glorified Spinster there were deeper and more permanent divisions. When she came to discuss them in public it was in terms of the continuous controversy between an ego that affirmed and an ego that denied. Yet that account of her divided self – moving and truthful as it was – stopped short of completeness. Of course she was torn between affirming and denying the possibility of a social science, just as she was restlessly preoccupied with the problem of how the conclusions of such a science might be related to the affirmations of her religious and moral experience,⁶⁹ but in *My Apprenticeship* this discussion of the divisions in her internal life was made to accommodate conflicting purposes. After all, the dilemma that she described could be counted an eloquent proposal of certain problems that existed in their own right and that could be shared with the reader. At the same time, it could be taken as an oblique reference to depths of personal experience, which could not be easily disclosed. The ego that affirmed and the ego that denied were made to appear respectable by being presented as contenders from different logical worlds, rather than the representatives of warring psychic states. The opposition between religion and science was not merely the opposition of

heart to head, but of self to self. *My Apprenticeship* offered an 'acceptable' account of an aspect of her alienation in place of a full account of it.⁷⁰

Beatrice saw her mother as a 'divided personality': a woman who was for ever repressing her humanity out of regard for her class responsibilities and her deference to the teachings of political economy. After her mother's death, Beatrice felt much closer to her than when she had been alive.⁷¹ She persuaded herself that she too was a 'duplex personality'. She referred to 'the nether being in me; the despondent, vain, grasping person – the Heyworth – doomed to failure. Linked to this nethermost being was the phantom of mother – the gloomy, religious [person] affecting asceticism and dominated by superstition.' The second self was

essentially a realist in intellectual questions, a rationalist in metaphysics and therefore a sceptic of religion. This is the happiest and perhaps the highest expression of my ego. But alas! This being has its life and origin in my sensual nature: it springs from vigorous senses and keen perceptions. If I were a man, this creature would be free, though not dissolute, in its morals; a lover of women. These feelings would be subordinate to the intellectual and practical interests, but still the strong physical nature upon which the intellectual is based, would be satisfied. And as I am a woman, these feelings unless fulfilled in marriage (which would mean destruction of the intellectual being) must remain controlled and unsatisfied, finding their only vent in one quality of the phantom companion of the nethermost personality – religious exaltation.⁷²

Doubts about her own identity were not confined to a particular moment, nor were they always expressed in terms of the division between being a Heyworth and being a Potter. As hinted at earlier, when she contemplated Catholicism she rejected it as a 'suicide': an execution of one ego by another.⁷³ She asked herself to whom it was that she writing in her diary. The question perplexed her in terms of her own internal life and not in relation to the public or to posterity.⁷⁴ There were times – as in the matter of her evidence to the Lords Committee or at critical moments in her relations with Chamberlain – when she found in her conduct an 'irresponsibility' which resembled being occupied or possessed by someone else. Perhaps part of the attraction of playing at being other people – Miss Jones, the farmer's daughter from Monmouth, or a representative of Singer's sewing machines or a Jewish immigrant or a sweated worker – was that the participant observer's rational duality was a comforting release from the irrational duality of her ordinary experience.

The 'false-self system' is supposed to have its origins in the attempts of a child to respond to what he thinks is demanded of him by his family: a response which is made at the expense of his capacity for independent experience and a free relatedness to others. In Beatrice's case, her problem

of identity was most closely connected to her femininity. As a child she felt unwanted and unloved by her mother. Her mother, reared by and with men, disliked women. Her father, having no sons, treated his daughters as if they had the intellectual capabilities of men and something more. The death of 'Dicky' made it all the more important to achieve 'masculine standards'. This meant defying the ruling idea of femininity as signifying sentimentality, softness and want of intellectual powers. Spencer's notion of the scientific attitude, his belief that people could be studied just like plants or animals, encouraged a frame of mind in which callousness could be confused with detachment. If she was to be noticed and valued, Beatrice imagined that she had to deny herself as a woman, not merely in immediately sexual terms, but also in terms which left other aspects of her nature unfulfilled. Her sex had a reputation, which had to be lived down by cultivating 'hardness' and 'inhumanity'. In no other way would her testimony as a social investigator be taken seriously, nor would she achieve the literary fame that had eluded her mother.

To insist that Beatrice felt she was divided against herself is to draw attention to one of her most pronounced characteristics, but it is not to assert that she was 'schizoid'. She managed far too well for that description to be applied to her. To explain her 'hardness' by reference to a false-self system is not to explain it away, nor is it to uncritically subscribe to a concept of human nature in which all negative characteristics are dismissed as 'unreal' or 'unnatural'. Some of her least lovable qualities can be quite sufficiently understood in terms of her class experience and not in terms of her particular position within her family. Her snobbery and arrogance were convincingly spontaneous and were produced without any special effort on her part. They survived her recognition that she had been born into a class that gave orders rather than obeyed them.⁷⁵ They rarely figured as the subject of her periodic exercises in self-criticism.

Yet while resisting an interpretation of Beatrice's personality which is cast within some ready-made and tidy scheme, it remains a fact that Russell must have been referring – in some sense – to her divided self. Otherwise, he was talking nonsense and just the sort of nonsense that he – beyond any other Englishman – was least likely to talk. Therefore, it must be presumed that he intended to point to a division in Beatrice's behaviour which was seen, perhaps, as a contrast between the more conspicuous and 'public' aspects of it and the less easily identified and enumerated 'private' aspects. Moreover, he may have detected that few of her faults and limitations enjoyed security of tenure. There was scarcely an assumption underlying her thought and conduct which might not come to be summoned up for review: interrogated and – if found wanting – dismissed. It was as if she had contrived to match each flaw in her nature with some complicating or countervailing tendency.

Thus, it was decidedly disagreeable that she described the weakness and the wickedness of her fellow humans with far more relish and with far more memorable exactitude than she displayed in the short notices that she accorded to their virtues. Moreover, she could be merciless and hard in practice as well as in theory. She was prompt to punish, prompt to hurt and even destroy those whom she regarded as 'worthless'. Her habit of severe self-criticism cannot entirely excuse her. Her protracted attempts to be honest with herself, to condemn herself for pride or for vanity, too often had a Rousseauesque touch about them. Her ready acknowledgement of her own faults was noticed, stood on its head and turned into grounds for further self-congratulation. Yet it was a mark of her integrity that she found herself out when she played this game.⁷⁶ Moreover, when others also found her out, the love that she had for her friends was strong enough to endure their cruelty towards her. Thus, Maggie Harkness was repeatedly 'bitchy' and treacherous in her relations with Beatrice and yet Beatrice remained loyal and loving towards her.⁷⁷

Next to her 'hardness', Beatrice exhibited arrogance; a willingness to play the boss, whether in relation to her invalid father, her younger sister or the unfortunate tenants at the buildings. The fact that she had noticed the despotic disposition of Octavia Hill did not prevent her from displaying, from time to time, a similar trait herself. Yet she recognised the moral excellence of collective self-help. She respected and admired the culture of the co-operative societies. She wanted the tenants to manage the Buildings. Her opposition to co-operative production depended upon convictions about the efficient organisation of business and not upon hostility towards the ideal of self-management as such. Democratic collectives might replace capitalists; but she denied that they could dispense with the services of professional experts. How proletarian democracy was to come to terms with professional managers and administrators was one of the crucial areas in which the debate between the ego that affirmed and the ego that denied was carried on.

In addition to a convincing show of hardness, arrogance and snobbery, Beatrice also gave an impression of narrow-mindedness and philistinism. She displayed indifference amounting to disdain for the pleasures of eating and drinking. She occasionally went riding (first horses and later bicycles), but she had no interest in sport or games. She had virtually no appreciation of art other than literature and in literature her enjoyment was almost completely derived from modern prose works in English or French. She had little or no taste for poetry, nor in her early life for music. In intellectual matters she seemed to exhibit an obsessional singlemindedness. There was something in her inhumanity and isolation of mind that was reminiscent of Spencer. But whereas he led 'a spider-like existence; sitting alone in the centre of his theoretical web catching facts', she

deliberately repudiated universality in favour of hunting down the facts relating to one or other of her 'specialities'. Yet if one watched her closely it became apparent that she was restricting her field of vision in the interests of efficiency rather than through an inability to do otherwise. Beyond Beatrice the active investigator was the contemplative Beatrice, a ruminative and critical person. She never put aside for more than brief intervals ultimate philosophical questions. Perhaps if she had been to a university she would have had all that nonsense about the relationship between facts and values knocked out of her before she was twenty-five. But one doubts it. Her spirit of restless and devoted questioning never left her, and this helps to explain the affection and respect Bertrand Russell felt for her.

A descriptive summary of Beatrice's character may be cast in the form of a balance sheet, but the character itself can only begin to be understood in terms of the dynamics of a divided self. The fact that the horrors of the sweating system so slowly and imperfectly aroused her compassion or her indignation is indeed explained by the standards that shaped her false self. It was not simply class selfishness that prevented her from believing that there was much that could be done. It was more to the point that she imagined she ought not to feel like a woman if she was to become a competent social investigator whose testimony would be taken seriously. She had therefore to deny the prompting of her own nature if she was to become the sort of person she thought she wanted to be.

Such a divided self necessarily had an aggravating, half-emancipated character. But those who are inclined to scorn Miss Potter for her failure to make a clean break from her family and with established orthodoxies and conventions need to remember that in late Victorian England there was no intelligentsia in the continental sense of the term. There was no sizeable and well-defined order of men and women in which all aspired to independent thought and rejected all authority in heaven or on earth. Even William Morris or Bertrand Russell lacked the kind of rootlessness that was required. In the 1880s a lot of talk about apocalyptic crisis and claims to millenarian vision needed to be treated with scepticism. Secularists, socialists, libertarians and vegetarians might all proclaim the existence of two camps and enquire which one you were going to join, but the suggestion that they promised a comprehensive change rarely carried conviction even among themselves. Beatrice had, accordingly, to make her way forward with painful, halting steps. Granted the traditional wisdom that holds that two is company but three a crowd, the discordant and divided self must find a companion who is 'selfless' in the strictest possible way. The divided self needs another who has no internal life, but who is fulfilled in living vicariously in the collectives to which he belongs. One who is ready to treat marriage as a partnership, as the ultimate committee within or over which he will preside as an intelligent, helpful and

disinterested chairman. Such men are hard to find. They must be tested in fire and in flood before their credentials are recognised.

APPENDIX: BEATRICE POTTER VERSUS BEATRICE WEBB: TOWARDS AN AUTOCRITIQUE

Like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Beatrice Potter had the gift of intimacy. She did not confront her readers; she enticed them. *My Apprenticeship* is one of the compulsory delights for the student of late-Victorian England. This masterpiece was first published in 1926. In that case, the reader may ask, why not reserve an account of it for a later volume?

The short answer is that such a conventional treatment would make unreasonable calls upon the reader's memory or send the reader back to the chapter which they have just read or else involve an unacceptable amount of repetition. The device represented by a note like this may disturb the conventional notion of a biography, but that is a small matter.

Readers will probably recall how Beatrice introduced *My Apprenticeship* by reference to a

continuous debate between an Ego that affirms and an Ego that denies ... Can there be a science of social organisation in the sense in which we have a science of mechanics or a science of chemistry, enabling us to forecast what will happen, and perhaps to alter the event by taking appropriate action or persuading others to take it. And secondly, assuming that there be, or will be, such a science of society, is man's capacity for scientific discovery the only faculty required of the reorganisation of society according to an ideal? Or do we need religion as well as science, emotional faith as well as intellectual curiosity?⁷⁸

The reader should have been left in no doubt that this was a central preoccupation for the young Beatrice. As she indicated, it was also a crucial question for her sister Margaret as well as for some of her most influential teachers such as Frederic Harrison. Yet it is misleading in so far as it is *over-cognitive*. The divided self inhabited worlds below the cerebral one. The need to satisfy her strong sexual desires and to make a marriage as socially distinguished as that of her elder sisters was in conflict with her pursuit of intellectual independence and intellectual distinction. Which was it to be? Her suitors shared her doubts on the subject and drew back before the adverse possibility. The divided self has to be understood in terms of the trials and the struggles of women in mid- to late-Victorian England, particularly for Glorified Spinsters, which had more immediate terms of reference than the rivalry between science and religion.

BEATRICE POTTER'S MENSTRUAL CYCLE FOR 1886

Date	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1	?D	D	P	P		P	P					D
2		P	P	P	P	P	D					
3		P	P	P	PD	P						P
4	P	P	PdD	PpD	PD	P			D			P
5	PD	P	PdD	D	P							P
6	P	P	P	PD	PD							P
7	P	P	P	P	P							P
8	P	PD		P	P			D				P
9	P					D					PdD	P
10	P										PdD	P
11	P	dD		dmD	D		Dd			D	P	P
12		D								P	P	P
13		D								P	P	P
14		D	D							P	P	P
15		D	D		D					P	P	P
16							D		PD	PD		
17				D	D				P	PpD		
18				D	D				P	P		
19				D	D	D	D	P	PD	D		D
20								P	P			
21								PD	P			
22								P				D
23							P	PD				D
24					D	Dd	P	P				D
25						P	P	P				Dd
26	D					P	P	P				
27			D			P	P	P				
28	D				D	P	P					
29			PD	D	P	P						
30			P		P	P			dmD			
31	D		P		P		D	D		D		P

Key

P = supposed regular paramenstruation on the assumption that this lasted seven days and 20 August was the third of these.
 D = Diary entry
 d = depression, irritability or lethargy
 dm = mixed with the above

Notes

During 1886 Beatrice Potter made 33 entries in her diary: of these 10 were made during her presumed paramenstruation, while 7 more were made within 3 days of either end of it. There is, therefore, a tendency to greater frequency of entry during the paramenstruation – around a third instead of nearly a quarter. Of the 33 entries, 7 exhibit total, or almost total depression, irritability and lethargy: of these 5 were made during the presumed paramenstruation and 1 of the remaining 2 could be accommodated on the assumption of a 3-day span of irregularity.

Note that the 'hysterical' letter of, or about, 6 March, from Beatrice to Joseph Chamberlain would have been written close to or during the cycle. Was one of the functions of the diary to allow the painless expression of depression, irritability and lethargy? Was there a going into purdah among middle-class women at such times? May we assume that Beatrice, as one of so many sisters, would be relatively well informed when she judged (20 August 1886) 'not that I suffer much'? Would she have noticed irregularity? She noticed only lethargy – to be unaware of the source of depression and irritability seems unusual: see K. Dalton, *The Menstrual Cycle*, 1969. Harriet Blodgett, in her admirable *Centuries of Female Days: English Women's Private Diaries*, 1988, p. 42, draws attention to the extreme rarity of references to 'the curse'. She misses the references in Beatrice's diary, even though Beatrice is treated as one of her leading cases.

Beatrice's opposition to feminism and to political equality between the sexes was not primarily a matter of the opposition of many feminists to special factory legislation for women. As a young woman she herself was strongly opposed to it. Her conviction that women should keep their distance from politics in general and the Irish question in particular related to her love for Joseph Chamberlain, a love which had a depth and importance not fully disclosed in *My Apprenticeship*. To go for politics in general and the Irish question in particular opened fresh possibilities of differences with the 'Great Man'. It was best to distance oneself from them and concentrate on matters of social welfare and reform. After all this was simply an enlargement of the woman's accepted traditional role of carer for the poor, the frail and unfortunate, raised to a new level by a 'masculine' cast of mind. The neglect of the Irish question is one of the great deficiencies of *My Apprenticeship* considered as a guide to contemporary politics.

That great book is more deficient still when it comes to the discussion of the alleged growth of social compunction among the middle class, which Beatrice in retrospect discovered to be one of the grand facts of the 1880s. How did this grand fact relate to the rising importance of the Charity Organisation Society and the stern policing of mendicity in the metropolis and further afield? It was hardly honest of Beatrice to pass over her own part in bringing about the death of a drug addict and her murderous attitude to those who were thought to be unfit for economic life. As has been shown, the young Beatrice was one of the many middle-class observers who treated political economy as a code of morals and concluded that the best place for many of the wretched of the earth was simply beneath it. Of course she became a socialist. However, her account of how this happened can be shown to be rather misleading if her autobiography is compared with her journals. Mrs Webb's account of her conversion is neat and tidy. Its function is to persuade you to become a socialist, not to explain how she became one.⁷⁹ According to *My Apprenticeship* it all began with her experience of East End life, which brought a conviction of the need for an all-pervading control, in the interests of the community, of the economic activities of 'the landlord and the capitalist'. (This conviction was not prominently displayed in Miss Potter's testimony to the Lords Committee on the Sweating System.) But she concluded that state regulation and trade union intervention could not correct cyclic crises: the alternate spells of over-work and unemployment, inflation and depression. (This was not the ascendant difficulty in the East End where there was a chronic *over-supply* of labour.) Yet Mrs Webb recalled that, 'This national minimum of civilised existence to be legally ensured for every citizen, was the second state in my progress towards socialism.'⁸⁰ The third stage came with pondering upon 'the psychological evils of a community permanently divided into a nation of the rich and a nation of the poor, into a

minority always giving orders and a vast majority always obeying orders'. Matthew Arnold, unheeded by his own generation, had been right! 'Our inequality materialises our upper class, vulgarises our middle class, brutalises our lower.'

Finally, Mrs Webb recalled that it was her study of the co-operative movement and her subsequent work on trade unionism that impressed upon her the possibility of Britain without capitalists: 'a possible alternative to modern business enterprise'. Although *My Apprenticeship* acknowledged that it was the presence of Sidney Webb that immediately preceded the discovery, 'At last I am a Socialist',⁸¹ his contribution is understated, as we shall see in the next chapter.

What was the diary for? Was it no more than an exercise yard for the development of her literary skills? Was it always her intention that it should be only for her own eyes? Did she imagine that it would be an aid to her development as a writer, but also a means of keeping a watch upon herself and becoming an instrument of her own moral improvement? It performed all these functions, their relative importance changing over time. However a few generalisations are possible.

The length of the entries varied inversely with the importance of what she was doing. A Victorian lady's diary was likely to be best tended when she had 'the curse'. She was likely to have gone into purdah once a month. Beatrice was able to compare her own experience with that of her nine sisters. She considered that she did not have too bad a time of it. One entry in the diary – better journal – allows a prediction and retroaction of her menstrual cycle.⁸² This can then be related to the degree of depression and misery in the journal. The whole exercise is highly conjectural and subjective.

The 'discoveries' (concerning the menstrual cycle) must not be allowed to obscure the far more interesting division within Beatrice Potter-Webb's divided self. The paradox identified by Bertrand Russell between Beatrice's most conspicuous and unpleasant characteristics and her delightful and engaging ones has already been noted and it is appropriate to conclude these observations by pointing up this enigma. How could the greatest modern British philosopher, the heroic defender of common sense, find a reality beyond appearances, an essence in Beatrice that was so at odds with her outward show? The provisional answer is that she never stopped asking questions.⁸³

Part III
The Early Years of
the Partnership 1890–2

She is too rich, too beautiful, too clever. But there is no class divergence between us.

Sidney, in the 1890s

[He is a cross] somewhat between a London card and a German professor.

Beatrice

Together we could move the world. Marriage is a partnership. It is the ultimate committee.

Sidney

If you lose at Deptford, I will spend the whole day kissing you.

Beatrice

I was lifted shoulder-high ... I felt inclined to go round by Cannon Street, in order, like Jack Cade, to smite London stone with my umbrella and to shout into the night: 'Now is Mortimer Lord of London.' But I went to the Central Telegraph Office instead.

Sidney

5

The Formation of the Partnership 1890–2

Beatrice and Sidney compared—The engagement with co-operation and the compact between Sidney and Beatrice at Glasgow—Sidney's reaction to Beatrice's mistrust—The vicissitudes of the 'working' compact and the relationship—Sidney leaves the Colonial Office and takes to journalism—*The Eight-Hour Day*—Collaboration leading to intervals for 'human nature'—Proposed marriage and the Potter family—The rebellion in the Fabian Society against the 'Webb party'—*The London Programme* and the London County Council—Marriage.

Beatrice never expressed anything but admiration for Sidney's learning and industry. As for physical appearance or sexual attractiveness, he was no match for Joseph Chamberlain. It was not merely that Chamberlain's social and political position was far more impressive and prestigious. He was not simply in Parliament and the cabinet. He was making a bid for national and imperial supremacy. The monocle and the orchid were more commanding than the pince-nez and the goatee. The tall, commanding man from Birmingham had a presence received to the somewhat Cockney Londoner of Cranbourn Street. Yet Webb's physical appearance was not to be despised. Bernard Shaw pointed out that he resembled an improved version of Napoleon III. Emma Brooke, the novelist and Fabian, found Sidney an attractive and desirable figure. She cast him as the hero in one of her works. She had him, as an attractive as well as an exceedingly able man, assassinated by an anarchist!

Beatrice's feelings towards Sidney must remain the subject of speculation because he was trying out how to impress her; because her feelings were not constant; because she had strong sexual disappointments and sexual desires; because she occasioned strong feelings of social as well as sexual failure; because she enjoyed passing herself off as the disappointed lover; because she imagined it was Woman whom he was worshipping through her. She experienced a whole complex of feelings associated with prolonged virginity and deferred adolescence. Sidney suffered from colds

and other commonplace ailments. Beatrice appears not to have cared to notice these minor maladies. She came to welcome what she termed 'intervals for human nature'. This precluded all forms of nursing or mothering.

They were drawn together by a common culture; a similar cast of mind; closely shared political and social ideals; and the close fit between their different attainments, skills, experiences and goals. They were both the products of the provincial bourgeois culture of which Herbert Spencer was the prophet: Spencer, who had been Beatrice's earliest friend and teacher, and whom Sidney had saluted from afar as 'the Bacon of the Second Renaissance'. They both retained Spencer's love of systematically arranged facts, as well as something of his complacency about problems of ultimate value. They both gradually came to recognise that Spencer's 'social organism was never organic',¹ and that there was a basic contradiction between his appeal to this principle and his insistence on individuality as the goal of life. They both turned towards Comte in search of some correction for Spencer's extreme doctrinaire individualism, which appeared year by year to become more untenable and preposterous. In the founder of sociology they found a critique of 'metaphysical' individualism, an acknowledgement of the claims of organisation, and of the proletariat. They found also an attempt to meet the demand of religious-minded agnosticism for liturgical forms and – more important – reconciliation between the world of fact and of value which the nineteenth century had torn asunder.

It was from Spencer and from Comte that they derived their taste for that 'delicious positivism' that discloses the gap between pretension and performance, and sets the world by its ears even as it puts it back on its feet. Sidney had uncovered the unconscious socialism that underpinned legislative programmes and administrative actions; Beatrice was in the process of disclosing that the co-operative movement was about a democracy of consumers rather than, as it obstinately supposed, about a democracy of producers. Each was disclosing realities that had been obscured by defunct ideologies, justifying and rationalising those realities and, in doing so, alerting streams of tendency into currents of thought. Some thinkers pretend to raise thought to action; Sidney and Beatrice were equally inclined to pretend that they did the reverse: that their thoughts were but statements of the principles of going institutional concerns. Progress implied a coincidence between impending change and moral imperative: between necessity and desire.

Marx could be made to reinforce these dispositions. Both of them had, in the same year, tried to settle their accounts with him. Sidney wrote with more learning and competence than Beatrice, but to much the same effect. The principal flaw in the labour theory of value and in the labour metaphysic was its failure to allow for the varieties of work and the crucial importance of managerial and professional functions. They did not

wholly deny the political capacity of the working class. Sidney knew the London working men's clubs and made a high estimate of their political importance. Beatrice admired the democracy of consumers, which she found in the co-operative movement. But they were as impressed by the inadequacies and limitations of these institutions as they were by their successes. The complete emancipation of the proletariat could not be secured by its own unaided efforts. The 'Labour Party' needed the administrative and political experience of the younger radicals, just as it had to be informed with socialist ideas and understanding which had to be brought to it from without. Similarly Beatrice was convinced that the workers could not secure the control of industry through their own producers' associations which necessarily lacked the capital, the commercial skills and the line of command needed for the efficient operation of modern business.² When she asked him why there had been no revolution in England during the Napoleonic wars, he answered:

There might have been a Jacquerie or a bread riot, but the descendants of Cromwell's Ironsides were too busy running cotton mills and fitting out ships; and without them, I think there could, at that time, have been no strength anywhere.³

In Sidney's opinion there never was a time when the working people could achieve a revolutionary reconstruction of society, relying on themselves alone.

Other middle-class socialists, like Hyndman or William Morris, were content to appear as mavericks who had broken with their class, but Sidney and Beatrice saw themselves as members of an advance party recruited from among a new social stratum which was in the course of coming over to socialism. They were, both of them, self-consciously 'professional people', impatient with amateurism whether in social service, research or administration. Each had had to work and sacrifice to become a professional person. And both of them felt, along with the joy and significance of disciplined intellectual effort, a high sense of responsibility (and an oppressive weight of guilt) about how they used their faculties and how they disposed of their 'rent of ability'.

Yet Sidney's self-denial went altogether deeper and was more literal than Beatrice's. His ambition, which she – unconsciously, no doubt – helped him to realise, was to cease to have any meaningful 'internal' life. To become unconscious of personal history and identity; to respond actively and usefully to external stimuli; to obliterate the distinction between public and private faces – hence Sidney's baffling simplicity. Once the minimum demands of that part of his nature that could not be compounded had been met, he could wholly renounce personality and personal power in favour of anonymous influence. In this he was like

Lenin: he combined a unique simplicity and integrity with a ruthless, calculating and complex political strategy. Kant's maxim, that a man should always be treated as an end and never as a means, can never impress those who treat themselves as means. He was the most disinterested of schemers. He was an intriguer who was 'spiritually unveiled'.⁴ He left all but a handful of his political opponents at a loss. Even as he bribed them or coerced them, they knew that he reproached them. He was, not only intellectually, but also morally, an extremely formidable man.

For Beatrice, self-obliteration was also a programme, but one she could never realise. She told him that she had been warning herself

against the personal note – the intolerable 'I' or 'our' – against the consciousness, quite as much as the expression of egotism. Undoubtedly it is inexpedient – because it arouses antagonism and creates a silent distinction which grows in the day of success and bursts into flame in the day of failure.⁵

But characteristically the concealment of self was, for Beatrice, not a condition of her moral being so much as a matter of good manners.

Superficially well-bred persons learn to hide their consciousness of self – hence the charm of good society – really well-bred people have not got it – hence *Social leadership* – when breeding is combined with capacity.⁶

She was left, as he was not, with time on her hands, cut off from her work and from public concerns. Again and again she summoned herself to appear before that private tribunal in which she was the accused, the prosecutor and the judge. Here she was charged with vanity; cross-examined about self-pity; condemned for indulgence and sentenced to hard labour. Yet she was a habitual offender: a veritable old lag in relation to the stringent requirements of that exacting moral law that she would impose upon herself. Unlike Sidney, her consciousness of self was ineradicable. He needed her so that he might lose himself in the last collective; she needed him as an extension of herself.

Both of them had an overwhelming sense, ascetic and evangelical, of duty: of self-denial, renunciation and submission, which were hardly consistent with the direct exercise of personal power. Sidney, without ever aspiring to be the Man of Destiny, was eager to be his confidential clerk. Nor was he above an occasional chuckle at the great man stumbling over his lines. How, he wondered, could Mill ever have imagined that life could become uninteresting in a mass democracy?

To play on these millions of minds, to watch them slowly respond to an unseen stimulus, to guide their aspirations often without their

knowledge – all this, whether in high capacities or in humble, is ... [an] endless game of chess, of even extravagant excitement.⁷

He wanted Beatrice to help him move the world. And she too felt the romance of the great machine of government, longed to use it to make the homes of the poor as 'dignified, restful and orderly as the official residence'. She deliberately planned to do it through developing a 'close intimacy' with the permanent officials of the departments of state and the leaders of popular organisations.⁸ For such large and selfless ends they would intrigue and scheme; Sidney finding pleasure in it, Beatrice some sadness, in that 'Florence Nightingale, Octavia Hill and Tom Mann should distrust her as one who was prepared to exploit her influence over men for her own ends'.⁹

Sidney and Beatrice complemented each other. He had a deep emotional need for her: she needed to arm herself with his immense capacity for work. She thought of herself as an originator rather than as an executant. She was wearied and exhausted by prolonged application to the 'mechanics' of learning. Moreover, he brought experience of the workings of central government; a lively sense of the possibilities of municipal enterprise; and an acknowledged position in the leadership of metropolitan radicalism and socialism. She, in turn, had access to 'Society', which meant opening the doors, not merely of the 'gay and the splendid', but of the grave and the earnest. The Courtneys and the Hobhouses belonged to the heart of the prosperous and assured, humane and improving, established and respectable Liberalism, which Sidney had hitherto had to approach from without. Still more important, Beatrice had begun to acquire a feeling for the qualities of provincial working-class life, and had begun to acquire an understanding some of its institutions. The co-operative movement had far more vitality and importance in Lancashire or Durham than it had in the metropolis. As Beatrice identified the limitations, as well as the successes, of the voluntary social and industrial institutions of the working people, so Sidney was impressed by the inadequacy of a merely working-class socialism or labour politics. By putting their insights and conclusions together, separate and competing movements could be shown to complement each other. Sidney and Beatrice discovered their personal need for each other while they were in the process of redefining the labour movement. This was, indeed, what they were doing. The dynamic, institutional, tripartite conception of the world of labour was at once their discovery and their programme. Sidney brought more to this redefinition than Beatrice, for he had largely anticipated her critique of the co-operative movement. However, he lacked her sharp appreciation of its positive achievements, and before he met her he tended to treat the co-operators as competitors of the socialists in the

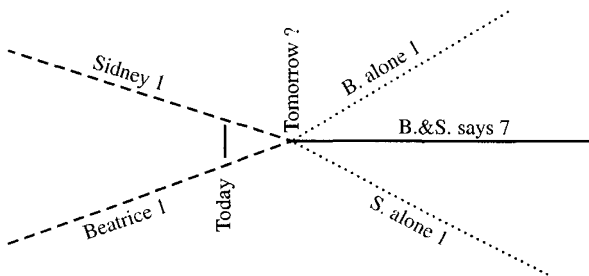
work of social reconstruction.¹⁰ *Fabian Essays* displayed a complete indifference to co-operation and to trade unionism.

Sidney and Beatrice knew that they were complementary, but they did not make this discovery at once nor did they make it simultaneously. If powerful forces drew them together, there were others, seemingly no less powerful, that worked to keep them apart. They were divided by class and style of life; by manner and by physical presence; as well as by apparent differences of temperament and disposition. Sidney, who fell 'head over heels' in love with her at their first meeting,¹¹ now doggedly denied, now furiously strove to overcome, all the impediments she discovered in the way of their union. He conceded that

There is much to be said in presumption against marriage out of one's *class* – if by class is meant that very real difference which is the product of different educations, social traditions etc. But there is surely not much to be said against marriage out of one's *position*, i.e. the position of one's family.¹²

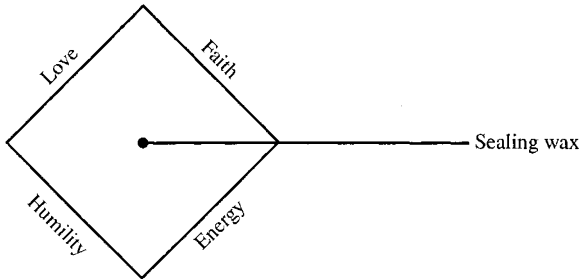
However, Beatrice's favourite sister, Margaret Hobhouse, was adamant. 'Better marry a man with heart disease than some little fellow with no position.'¹³ In the end, Beatrice advised Margaret to mind her own business, but before that stage had been reached the 'ego that denied' had enjoyed many a triumph over 'the ego that affirmed'. The forces that drew them together worked powerfully to cement the relationship; but they were not well adapted to initiating it. Only Sidney's astonishing persistence and determination protected the partnership and allowed it to emerge out of the terrible storms and buffetings to which it was periodically subjected throughout the course of its future.

During the development of the partnership both Sidney and Beatrice had recourse to the graphic arts to describe their hopes and fears with respect to their relationship. Sidney presented his suit thus:



(4 December 1890)

Beatrice expressed her feelings by the means of the following strange device. She drew Sidney's particular attention to the need to focus his 'morbid effort' in 'Humility' while at the centre she placed a blob of sealing wax explaining that she was simply devoting herself to keeping these qualities constantly before her.



(January 1891?)

Under these circumstances it seems appropriate to supply the diligent reader with a chart of the history of their courtship, taking Sidney's emotional temperature as the most convenient guide and measure.

He was in love with her from that first meeting which had been arranged by Margaret Harkness early in January 1890. She took an instinctive liking to him but – as always with Beatrice – this was fully consistent with her most merciless criticism. She thought that he was

somewhat between a London card and a German professor. To keep to externals: his pronunciation is Cockney, his 'Hs' are shaky, his attitudes by no means eloquent – with his thumbs fixed pugnaciously in a far from immaculate waistcoat, with his bulky head thrown back and his little body forward, he struts even when he stands, delivering himself with extraordinary rapidity of thought and utterance and with an expression of inexhaustible self-complacency.¹⁴

By April Beatrice had carried her analysis beyond the 'externals':

'I have done everything I intended to do', said the little man. 'I have a belief in my own Star.' 'Take care, Mr Webb,' say I in a motherly tone, 'don't be complacent about small successes.' Poor Sidney Webb: I surprised him by my sympathy and 'unholy knowledge' (as he termed it, of men's feelings) into a whole history of his life, his thought, feeling and action. 'You reduced me to a pulp by your sympathy, and then

impressed your view on me; you have made me feel horribly small – you have given me an altogether different sense of proportion – and yet I don't believe that I look at things in a disproportionate way,' says the little man defiantly. 'Come, Mr Webb, you can feel that you have humbled me by making me a socialist.'

I am not sure as to the future of that man. His tiny tadpole body, his unhealthy skin, lack of manner, Cockney pronunciation, poverty, are all against him. He has the conceit of [a] man who has raised himself out of the most insignificant surroundings into a position of power – how much power no one quite knows. This self-complacent egotism, this disproportionate view of his own position is at once repulsive and ludicrous. On the other [hand], looked at by the light of his personal history, it was inevitable. And he can learn; he is quick and sensitive and ready to adapt himself. This sensitiveness, combined as it undoubtedly is with great power, may carry him far. If the opportunity occurs, I think the man will appear. In the meantime he is an interesting study. A London retail tradesman with the aims of a Napoleon! A queer monstrosity to be justified only by success. And above all a loop-hole into the Socialist party: one of the small body of men with whom I may sooner or later throw in my lot for good and all.¹⁵

Sidney thanked her for her frank friendliness, an attitude which was, he thought, 'as valuable as it is rare'.¹⁶ He declared that she had humbled him – and much more seriously than she realised. He confessed to further faults and weaknesses. He was, he confided, extremely liable to be influenced by those around him and, far from being a 'fatuously self-confident person' was prone to a sinking of the heart and a feeling of despair as he approached each new intellectual challenge.¹⁷ He described himself as 'timid and cursed with looking before and after, fearing to hear the "ground whirl of the perished leaves of hope"'. (Did you credit me with knowing my Rosetti?)¹⁸

Yet he yielded nothing to her intellectually. He told her, in tones of confident pugnacity, of

the long rolling fight all over the country into which the Fabian Society, and I in particular, am being more and more drawn. You need not fear our taking up any impractical or sectarian attitude: we are indeed constantly seeking chances of translating the crude abstractions of the doctrinaire socialist into the language of practical politics. But it is difficult to know how to treat the Liberal leaders. They are generally such poor creatures and so hopelessly 'out of it'. I wish their education could be taken in hand in some way that would save the Fabian Society from becoming more and more conceited. But really every day makes me inclined to say 'I told you so' over some event or other.¹⁹

1 Beatrice Potter's birthplace, Standish House, near Gloucester (as it appeared on a postcard from c. 1914–18). This was one of the three country houses owned by the Potter family.

2 Sidney Webb's birthplace, 44–45 Cranbourn Street, near Leicester Square (as photographed for the London Transport Executive in 1904). These were the Webb family's only properties. The hairdressing sign would have been present in the year of Sidney's birth.

3 A Potter family group in 1865. Lawrencina and Richard Potter (*seated*) with daughters Georgina, Mary, Margaret, Beatrice, Theresa and Blanche (*left to right*).

4 Charles Webb, Sidney's father, in the uniform of The Queen's Westminster Volunteer Rifles.

5 Elizabeth Mary Stacey, Sidney's mother.

6 Joseph Chamberlain (as he appeared on a visiting card presented to the Potter household).

7 Sidney Webb.

8 Sidney Webb (as he appeared at about the time of his marriage to Beatrice).

9 Beatrice Webb (as she appeared at about the time of her marriage to Sidney).

10 Sydney Olivier.

11 Graham Wallas.

12 Bertrand Russell.

13 George Bernard Shaw.

Four of Sidney Webb's key Fabian friends

He disagreed with Beatrice regarding the poor law. He held that there was no point in tinkering with it. It needed to be entirely replaced by a great, organic, democratic and generous reform while it was still 'safe'. 'I cannot promise to obey,' he warned her. 'I will however learn.'²⁰

It was with respect to the co-operative movement rather than the poor law that Sidney had the best opportunity of learning from her and he seized it eagerly. She suggested that he should accompany Ella Pycroft and herself to the co-operative conference which was to be held in Glasgow at the end of May 1890. On the first day of the meeting Sidney and Benjamin Jones publicly made a compact between the co-operators and the socialists:²¹ a compact which Sidney and his fellow Fabians followed up with letters to the *Co-operative News*. The Fabian Society offered to supply free of charge lectures to any co-operative society in the United Kingdom. Many old co-operators thought that a 'good spirit-stirring speech was better than any lecture', and others – like E.O. Greening – objected that the Fabians were opposed to co-operation; neglected the need for gradualness; and wanted to subject the workers to the rule of petty politicians. Sidney skilfully avoided all polemic; won the guarded support of G.J. Holyoake; got numerous Fabian lecture courses established. He taught that 'the real import of the Co-operative movement ... is not profit-sharing but the collective control of the consumer over industry: not the division of so-called "profits" among a large number, but their elimination as far as is safely possible'.

At the same time he struck a new and conciliatory note which he had learned from Beatrice. 'The "democratisation" of the retail trade and of some branches of industry can, it has been triumphantly proven, be effected by the Store and the Wholesale, where neither the national government nor the local authority could yet venture to step in.'²²

The Fabian 'offensive' in the co-operative movement in 1890 was, in its way, as much of a positive contribution towards developing a new sense of the labour movement as was the effort of socialists, Mann and Tillet to the organisation of the unskilled.

But there was another compact or 'concordat' concluded at Glasgow. Unlike the one concluded between Sidney and Benjamin Jones, it was private as well as being far more ambiguous. On a bridge above the Clyde two socialists reached a working compact. She warned him that it was 100 to 1 against its leading to more than friendship. 'If it weakens you', said she, 'give it up. Do you promise?' He promised, adding,

'However it ends I will make it serve my life – my work shall be both more vigorous and higher in tone for it. I will *make* you help me, and I will insist on helping you – our relationship shall be judged solely by the helpfulness to each other's work. Forgive me if I say that I believe

that if we were united we could do great things together – I will not bother you with that; but I will vow solemnly that even if after a time we part, I will do better things for our friendship than I could have done without it.’

‘One more thing’, said Beatrice, ‘promise me not to let your mind dwell on the purely personal part of your feeling. I know how that feeling unfulfilled saps all the vigour out of a man’s life. Promise me to deliberately turn your mind away from it – to think of me as a married woman, as the wife of your friend.’

‘That I can hardly promise. But I will look at the whole question from the point of view of Health: as you say, I will not allow myself to dwell on it – I will suppress the purely personal feeling – I will direct my imagination to strengthening the working tie between us.’

One clasp of the hands and they were soon in a warm discussion of economics. ‘*Finis*’, wrote Beatrice in her diary,²³ but Sidney spent the night in reading the book of Job in his hotel bedroom, and conjecturing whether the pious donors of bibles had ever imagined that it might serve a need such as his.

On returning to London Beatrice too spent a sleepless night, perplexed and miserable about the misunderstandings that she felt surrounded their concordat. She wrote to Sidney:

Do not let us misunderstand each other. It is the first time in my life that I have granted friendship to a man who has desired something more. But the motive which has led me to depart from what I conceive to be the safe and honourable course, has not been that I think there is any probability (I might almost say *possibility*) of a closer tie, but that I regard our work of greater importance than our happiness, and that I feel the enormous help we may be to each other. But I feel that this is a one-sided bargain, since your happiness is more involved than mine – it is you and not I who runs the risk of suffering. Now, I almost fear from your last words yesterday, that you look upon our working friendship as a *means* and not as an *end* – that you hope and expect that it will lead to something more; and that in your words and manner to me you will be constantly expressing that hope and that expectation.

I want you to think this over very seriously; I want you not only to consider your own health and happiness as of the utmost importance (since the value of your work depends on them) but I want you to realise that you will be betraying my confidence and trust, if you allow yourself to build up a hope or allow others to suspect, that we are more to each other than frank friends with a common faith and common ends.

Personal happiness to me is an utterly remote thing; and I am to that extent 'heartless' that I regard everything from the point of view of making my own or another's life serve the community more effectively.

But you are still young and have life before you; you can hope for happiness as well as work – if your imagination were free you might find one who could give you the love of a young life – of a life which has not been forced through the fire and forged into a simple instrument for work.

I have tried to put the question of the continuance of our friendship from *your* point of view. My own point of view is simply this: if I find that our friendship leads to constant perplexity and anxiety on my side, or if I find that it leads to surmises and expectations in the minds of others, I shall retire absolutely and entirely from it. I do not want mystery and perplexity to hinder the little bit of work I have to do, and I cannot afford to lose my reputation as an honourable and healthy-minded woman.²⁴

Sidney was appalled by her mistrust: mistrust of him, of herself, of all warmheartedness. He told himself he could live on cold iron, but he feared even to consider it. He assured her that he could not and would not wreck his life. That he was in love, as Austria goes to war, with limited liability. 'It does not mean that I love you less, but that duty has so far become organic with me. *That* you at any rate will understand and believe.' And yet in the next breath he confessed: 'I am horribly afraid now it would be too much for me.' He begged for a detailed concordat:

No one could be less skilled than I am in 'making love'. I could not woo you by my manner even did I wish. I *did*, and realised how completely I failed, even to make you suspect. (How *glad* I am that I failed, for you would not otherwise have suggested to me to go to Glasgow.) You can torture me horribly. I had vaguely thought that I would give no woman this power over me – in my pride!

He was willing to wait seven years, if need be, even if his Rachel failed him in the end:

But you said some horrible things on Friday night; you inevitably made me fear that you might possibly *refuse* to recognise any possible chance of change. You almost posed as being willing to sacrifice everything to your intellectual work – to sacrifice not only any potential feeling of your own, but with it all another's life. Now I do not need to remind you, who see all these things so clearly, that you have scarcely any right to do that. You would be wanting in faith and honour and justice. You would be making an idol unto yourself. Your altruism would become an egoism. And your work would unconsciously suffer. You would lose

your subtle sympathy. You would still believe that you could see, with an even clearer vision, and you would be all the while becoming blind – blind to all the finer shades and impalpable differences which make the difference between Truth and Untruth. You would have dried up ‘warm-heartedness’ in order to get Truth – and you would not even get Truth.

I am capable of sacrificing more than you dream of. I could be as great an adjunct to your intellectual life as you are to my moral being. Of course I stand to gain by far the most, because I gain your intellect too, and cannot give you moral help. But *together we could move the world*.²⁵

Beatrice responded:

Let it be as you say. I will not withdraw my friendship unless you *force* me to do so, by treating me otherwise than as a friend, or by making it apparent to the world that there is ought but ‘camaraderies’ between us ... Your letter has touched me deeply *but it must be the last word of personal feeling* – I shall try to grow worthy of that reverence you are giving ‘Woman’ – through me – a reverence which must ennoble the nature that receives.²⁶

(He had remarked that he now knew what Comte was driving at by his apotheosised woman.) She spent the last afternoon in May praying in Westminster Abbey that she would be worthy of having a man’s soul in her keeping.²⁷ At the beginning of June she was kneeling in the cathedral at Cologne meditating on the dark and bright sides of tenderness:

I prayed – I prayed – I implored help and guidance to be humble and pure – to be worthy of the position of influence I have gained. My life is passing by swiftly, like the strong current of the Rhine ... And thus I thought of the worship a man is giving me – not me, but Woman through me – and I prayed again that I might make my life a temple of purity wherein to receive it. And I, so vain, so impure – God help me.²⁸

She returned to London in July:

I go this morning to take the Sacrament in St. Paul’s. Two months of enjoyment and rest – of friendship and beauty – must now be followed by nine months of strenuous work – enlightened by love and guarded by purity – body and soul [a] living sacrifice to humanity – to obtaining the noblest outcome for Humanity.

Temptations have passed from me since last I took the Holy Sacrament. The sin of egotistical despair and discouragements, the

sharp pangs of bitter hardness, no longer attract and taunt me. But with success in work [she was about to begin writing her book on the co-operative movement] and love in relationship arise the subtler sins of self-congratulation and self-indulgence. Now that I rest in the consciousness of fulfilment, in the blessedness of Love, I ought to fight against these more hidden enemies.²⁹

Sidney was never able to find in old or new liturgical forms any help in rededicating himself to humanity. On his thirty-first birthday he thought a lot about the value and purpose of life, but he did not consecrate himself to the service of man:

That is not our English way, but I resolved that I would be resolute against my two great temptations (1) Undue devotion to my own fixed purposes and (2) that indolence which disguises itself beneath the feeling of 'inability to create today'.³⁰

From the end of May until mid-August the partnership was maintained as the kind of working compact that Beatrice found acceptable. On political matters, Sidney was as uncompromising as ever. For example, he told her quite frankly that, despite their merits, her proposals for outlawing sweating 'fell below maximum political effectiveness'. But with respect to his personal manners and conduct he was suitably distant when he was not being patient and humble:

Yes you are quite right in your criticism of my egotistical loquacity. I must and will learn reticence ... My loquacity has led me to be frankness itself in all my diplomacy and, like Bismarck, I have acquired thereby a reputation for deepness and even duplicity. I agree that this is an evil and I will learn reticence ... I treasure up what you say about not boasting of my small successes in manipulation. I *will* be more reticent – *mit deiner Hilfe!* Now tell me of other faults.³¹

She did so. In gratitude he cried out: 'Surely Comte was right in making women the inspirers and guardians of morality.'³² But no one should suspect the identity of his Clothilde de Vaux. On that subject at least, he would be reticent. And yet while he was at her feet and while he was avowing that he had no lover's arts and that even if he had, the notion of 'winning' her favour was abhorrent to him, he was subtly suggesting that her lack of feeling for him might signal a defect in her moral nature. Goethe, he warned her, was 'an awful example of the result of pure intellect'. What was its culmination but selfish anarchism? Goethe talked of self-mastery, but surely this must be a special demon of temptation. What did Goethe ever renounce? He never learned to see himself as a soldier in

the great army of humanity. He never saw that ‘we have no right to live our own lives’. Aloof, denying his manhood, fancying that everything could be settled by pure intellect, he diminished his effectiveness as a teacher. He proposed to give up all for truth, and ended with his absurd refutation of Newton’s option which made him the laughing stock of scientific Europe.³³

This was sufficiently dignified and Aesopian to be received without protest. Before he left on his holiday, and immediately after she had returned from hers, they met. To his delight he found her ‘*ravissante*’ and ‘angel-good’. It was all he could do to avoid saying goodbye in a way which would have broken their concordat at once.³⁴ Thus dangerously encouraged, he went off with Shaw to Oberammergau and there, sitting on the hill of the Silver Crucifix, he wrote to her:

Did you see in Frankfurt the Ariadne of Bannecker? It is a wonderful but meretricious nude, supposed to represent earthly love – but she is not in love at all – *il y a toujours un qui aime et une qui se laisse aimer* – (alas) – and this is merely ‘*une qui se laisse aimer*’. You see by this time I know the difference. It is not a moral but an immoral sculpture, it does not make one understand the highest, but only the lowest side of life.³⁵

‘Another time,’ replied Beatrice, ‘write such a letter if you like but do not post it.’ It was an ‘abominable’ letter and had it not been the outcome of evident emotion, she would have been obliged to describe it as a ‘gross impertinence’:

If you value the continuance of our friendship, exercise a little more self-control – and occasionally think of me, and of my comfort – do not be always brooding on my effect on your life and your own feelings. It is truly masculine! I do not quite know what the word ‘Love’ conveys to a man’s mind; but that is not what a woman understands by Love – Love to us has in it some element of self-control and self-sacrifice. I can now say that I have honestly tried to be as frank as I know how – it remains for you to determine whether I am to feel free to be ‘as kind as I can’; or whether I am to treat you ... as one against whose assumptions I must be perpetually protecting myself. I have lent you friendship – on trust – it is for you to pay me back that – before you ask me to give you more ... For Heaven’s sake let us have no more of it – I am sick and weary of the question – don’t provoke me again.³⁶

‘I will not offend again,’ he replied, ‘you shall not need to write me another such letter: a terrible letter.’³⁷ Yet what was he to do? It seemed to him that she had called him into full being only in order to torture and

diminish him. Was the comic who was inwardly sober a more pathetic figure than he who was reputedly conceited while all the time he was torn by diffidence and self-distrust? He told her:

I think you are partly responsible for this. You called me into consciousness of myself by believing in me, and since then I have been much oppressed by responsibility. You pointed out some of my faults and thus destroyed what self-satisfaction I ever had – and I don't think I ever had much of *that* form of self-deceit.³⁸

She began to exert a profound influence on the direction of his activities. She made him gradually diminish the amount of time that he spent on ephemeral journalism and the day's propaganda and organisation, although this was what he thought he did best. Although she looked to him to help her to master Marshall she discouraged him from attempting his own *Principles*. On her advice he gave it up, but this left him with a sense of failure.³⁹ More positively, it was her influence that helped him to project the lecturing campaign, which the Fabians mounted within the cooperative movement at the end of 1890. Still, when Beatrice asked for criticism, she got it. He told her that she underestimated the power of 'party' in social reform:

It hurts me to believe that you have never belonged to a Liberal Association! Is that so? Consider how hard it is for the labourers round you to pluck up courage even to run a Liberal Association, which is the elementary form out of which all revolts grow. And I think you will one day feel the need of more obviously and actively repenting about woman's suffrage. Are you quite 'honest' about that? All of which I feel very impertinent.⁴⁰

He risked 'impertinence' again by dissenting from Beatrice's interpretation of the Passion Play which they had both separately seen that summer at Oberammergau. She thought it had the feeling of a social revolt. He dissented:

Pontius Pilate somewhat restored my male self-complacency. My profession made me realise entirely his position. I should have acted just as he did. And I can't help feeling that Jesus did not give him a chance. The least bit of energetic defence would have enabled Pilate to save him ... The fact is that I do not greatly worship the Jesus type: you will understand why I have a vague feeling that he ought to have 'taken it fighting' to some extent, at any rate to the extent of making a reasonable defence. No wonder the disciples 'scattered'. The beauty of sacrifice qua

sacrifice does not adequately appeal to me. There ought to be a reasonable calculation of means to ends, an attempt at adaptation to the environment – not necessarily precluding such actions as that of John Brown ... It is sometimes one's duty to 'use oneself up' as a cannon ball.⁴¹

Beatrice, despite her occasional revulsion of feeling, liked Sidney. If she was occasionally imperious and exacting, she had a high regard for his intelligence and learning. She wanted to retain his friendship and the friendship of his friends. She specially liked Graham Wallas, Sidney's closest friend:

He is so perfectly sincere and naively enthusiastic. And he has [here she showed her acuteness] quite a teacher's faculty for imparting all he knows, and great generosity in giving it. But what charms me is the perfect sort of relations between your little knot of men – it is singularly trustful – you really care for each other ...⁴²

Wallas visited her while Sidney was away in Europe. She had less success with Shaw. He announced himself outraged at her suggestion that a poverty-stricken, busy man like him should be imperiously summoned down to talk to her. 'To think that I should have lived to be sampled – to be sent down on approval or return – to be inspected by daylight by a fastidious young lady in search of an eligible socialist society to join.' He commanded her to practise her speaking and to turn no more socialist heads with her wiles.⁴³

The concordat restored, she went off to Yorkshire to attend the Economic Section of the British Association. She and Sidney stayed in the Midland Hotel, Leeds. They travelled back from Bradford together along with Llewellyn Smith. They were in a third-class compartment. At 11.30 p.m.

A variety artist jumps in – a pretty, smart, foreign Jewess, decidedly the worse for liquor – forthwith addresses herself to the gentlemen in the carriage; these leaving us at the next station, turns to my two companions. Tells us the details of her life, becoming more and more racy. L. Smith collapses in the corner, looking alternatively severe and unalterably amused. SW, by whom she sits, tries to keep her in order by enquiring, in the most fatherly manner, into her earnings and into the statistical side of her profession. Whereupon I get interested and show signs of listening. She immediately brightens up and leaning across SW tells me in a loud whisper about her latest tights and the sensation they created, remarking that she did not mind speaking of such a subject to a

husband and wife. I bury myself in the corner; L. Smith shakes with laughing and SW begins hurriedly another statistical enquiry. And it ends by the young lady offering to introduce him as a performer on the variety stage, looking doubtfully the while at his big head and little body!⁴⁴

On the way back to London they travelled ‘first’ and were spared all intrusion. Sidney told her about his examination successes and read her to sleep with Morris’s *A Dream of John Ball*.⁴⁵

Thus in September 1890 the relationship appeared to be tightening. In the following month Sidney visited Charles Booth and tried to convince him that the municipalities and the co-operatives could be efficient without competition. Since Booth was one of Beatrice’s closest and most respected friends, he was desperately anxious to stand well with him. But their meeting was not a success. ‘I cannot,’ wrote Sidney, ‘be other than myself, and I can and will not meet people, even my superiors in years and experience, except on terms of intellectual equality and sincerity.’⁴⁶ Unfortunately Beatrice had confided in the Booths, and Charles warned her that Sidney was not man enough for her and that she would grow out of him.⁴⁷ This warning appears to have had its effect and throughout the autumn her heart was hardening against her friend.

At the end of November Haldane came to see her to discuss the possibility of an alliance between the progressive Liberals and the Fabian socialists. She felt well prepared for the encounter since Graham Wallas had only just left her and she fancied she was quite *au fait* with Fabian strategy. After seven hours of negotiations, Haldane began to explore the possibilities of an alliance of another sort. She tried to impress him with the advantages of celibacy for the Apostles of the new creed, but he continued to send out scouts in all directions. At last she said: ‘Ah, Mr Haldane, I will let you into the secret of woman’s unmarried life. In my days of deep depression I brood over matrimony – but it is an alternative to suicide.’⁴⁸ Haldane threw up his hands with an ‘uncomfortable laugh’ – as well he might, for Beatrice had more than half persuaded herself that she meant it. Family responsibility kept her from her work. Marriage, particularly marriage to an active politician, would present fresh impediments to her career. It would be ‘an act of *felo de se* for a speculation in personal happiness’. And what a speculation! She became more than ever decided that personal passion had burned itself out and that what little might remain haunted her memories of Joseph Chamberlain.

Sidney sensed the change of attitude and fought desperately against it:

I am not deceived. I know that I deceive myself when I pretend to estimate you and criticise you, and count up your good qualities and your

drawbacks. It is the 'indefinable you' that I want – bother your qualities and the defects of your qualities.⁴⁹

If it was the painful memory of Chamberlain that came between them, let her remember Shaw's saying that 'grief of two-years' standing is nothing but a bad habit,' as he had been told in his own case in 1885 – 'Don't nurse your Kummer'. He sent her *Dr Heidenhoff's Process*, which he considered a very good guide to 'cerebral hygiene'.

I believe that good cerebral hygiene consists largely in 'selecting' one's impressions so that the mind dwells upon those only that have a good effect on the mind ... Remorse e.g. is very dangerous. We need just remorse enough i) to make us remember that it is *disagreeable* to sin, ii) to impress us with the need for *caution* when again approaching the chance for sin.⁵⁰

But outside Heidenhoff's laboratory, the sponge of oblivion cannot be passed over an item of memory without reducing the capacity for feeling and experience. As the recollection of her 'humiliation' receded, Beatrice became more convinced that, although she was susceptible to the charm of being loved, she was not capable of loving. Sidney complained:

You have an undercurrent of 'anti-male' feeling, which no doubt answers to some part of your rather wide experience, but which I simply don't understand ... I think the 'subjection of women' is bringing a growing anti-male tension which seems to me (though not unmerited) very bad in its results. It would be an evil thing if women, in any sense, formed a huge Trades Union or protective confederacy against men.⁵¹

Since she was unmoved by the rather clammy sensuality of Rossetti, he decided that she must be afraid of the claims of romantic love. He told her of the German girl who had remarked that no woman would ever marry Sidney Webb because she could only be his '*Zweite Braut*'. 'I *hope* you will never be more than this – I have tried and I intend to try to make this so – with your help.'⁵²

But at the end of the year – while he lay stricken with scarlet fever – she told him that she did not love him: that she found him personally unattractive: that she doubted whether she ever could bring herself to submit to a close relationship with him. She sometimes felt that even his friendship was distasteful to her and that friendship led to misunderstandings. He took her 'playful words' seriously and became presumptuous. Therefore it would be best if they saw nothing of each other and stopped being intimate friends.⁵³

O love, my love! If I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring.
How then should sound
Upon Life's darkening slope
The ground whirl of the perished leaves of hope
The wind of Death's imperishable wing!

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

He raged. He burnt some of her letters. He cursed and abused his best friend, Graham Wallas, for no reason, and he could not explain himself to Wallas or anyone else for she had forbidden him to mention her. He told Beatrice that she had been principally responsible for the misunderstandings that had wrecked his suit. He would never have dreamed of 'precipitating things', had it not been for an oversight of hers.⁵⁴

Yet it was characteristic of Beatrice that, while she told herself that all was over, and while she acted out the drama of breaking the tie asunder, she left herself a loophole which would allow some relationship to be maintained. If he swore to stop writing her intimate letters; returned all the ones that he had received; swore that no more letters existed; and declared that if friendship should lead again to hope, he would not reproach her if she married another man – then he might still write to her provided he addressed her as 'Miss Potter'.⁵⁵ He accepted that, 'I am like Auguste Comte: as I cannot have what I want, I make a virtue of wanting only what I can have! But the friendship of Clothilde de Vaux was invaluable to Comte, in developing all the better side of his nature.'⁵⁶ (It can hardly be said to have improved the Frenchman's sense of humour. Sidney managed a wry joke – he would really have to get the Liberal Party to write 'the abolition of scarlet fever' into its programme. John Morley would accept this, since scarlet fever was a serious infringement of individual liberty and totally inconsistent with self-help.)⁵⁷

While he was convalescing, Sidney meditated a new plan of life. Beatrice had told him that she would far rather marry a clerk in the Colonial Office than a parliamentarian,⁵⁸ but since she would not marry him he would ignore this. He had to conquer his 'bourgeois' preoccupation with security. Despite the fact that it would come as a grave shock to his parents, he decided to leave the Civil Service and to try and earn his living by journalism and scraps of practice at the bar.⁵⁹ He had already finished his *Socialism in England*, was working at a book on the eight-hour day with Harold Cox and was preparing another on *The London Programme*. In association with Massingham he already had half a career in daily and weekly journalism. Closer association with Haldane and Grey only persuaded him that the need for someone in Parliament, or at least on the London County Council, was very great.⁶⁰

Beatrice, on his insistence, sent her subscription to the Fabian Society, but she was going through a crisis with respect to her new-found faith in socialism, and was questioning whether political commitment was consistent with scientific research and scholarly distinction.⁶¹

While allowing that he might sacrifice thought to action too much, he reminded her that there were advantages in 'joining one's party'.⁶² For the rest, he used the distance which Beatrice had imposed upon him to become 'placidly aggravating'. Late in January 1891, Beatrice's friend, Mrs Green, widow of the political philosopher, used some remark of Sidney's as a pretext for asking about her attitude towards him. Beatrice, in turn, used the incident to revert to her imperious, exacting and threatening tone. She told him that

Mrs Green's surprise and curiosity were very painful to me. Moreover it makes it increasingly difficult for me to remain on terms of friendship. I have no intention of losing her respect, or of hiding things from her, or even of going out of my way to explain my motives. But you have forced my hand, and laid me open to the reflection of being rather a vulgar coquette. I regret all the more this slip as hitherto you have acted with so much honourable discretion – so that you have made a delicate position possible for me.⁶³

He dismissed this in a line or two, remarking that it was no fault of his that Mrs Green suspected their relationship – or rather what had been their relationship. He went on to discuss London politics and Buxton's Bill against sweating.⁶⁴ It began to dawn on Miss Potter that she had to reckon with a form of Gresham's law in this matter of reprimanding Sidney and consigning him to outer darkness. Besides, the man was so extraordinarily industrious and useful. In between engaging in a polemic against Courtney in the *Economic Journal* in February and finishing his book on *The London Programme* in April, he complained about Harold Cox not being able to keep up with him on their eight hours book.⁶⁵ At the same time he read the manuscript of Beatrice's work on co-operation:

Shall I be quite candid? Do not take it amiss if I confess to a slight feeling that you have taken too long over it. The book will not be a *very* great work; and you could have written it more quickly if you could have had anything of the nature of what the racer calls a 'pace-maker'.⁶⁶

As her thoughts turned to a big work on trade unionism, he encouraged her to consider collaboration with Llewellyn Smith. He told her:

You do not write quickly or easily: what you ought to get for this work – perhaps this is what you seek in Llewellyn Smith – is a secretary who could seize your ideas, arrange your materials, and leave you only

to revise the MSS and rewrite just where you felt inclined. This is how most of the great statesmen do their work, and I think it is economical.⁶⁷

Showing no jealousy of Llewellyn Smith, he suggested that she should invite Wallas – for whom he had never felt any jealousy – down to stay with her. In the middle of March he did allow himself one line of personal feeling: ‘The great secret of life is not to expect too much from it. After all the world is neither black nor white, but grey – a kind of pepper and salt mixture – and only children cry for sugar instead. (I am a child) Yrs, Sidney Webb.’⁶⁸

The following month Beatrice went for a six weeks’ stay with Alice Green. They went together to the co-operative congress at Lincoln, and Sidney accompanied them. On the way back he placed his hand on hers and it was not withdrawn. Beatrice was being taken more and more into public life. She had given her first series of lectures before a distinguished audience that included Herbert Spencer, Frederic Harrison, Haldane and Massingham.⁶⁹ She was working to secure an appointment for herself as a sub-commissioner to the Royal Commission on Labour over which her brother-in-law, Leonard Courtney, presided. She was ‘cheeky and impertinent’ to him and he was contemptuous of her, so nothing came of it except a closer identification with Sidney, who had already crossed swords with Courtney.⁷⁰ Her thoughts were increasingly taken up with plans for a great book on trade unions. She knew that she needed Sidney. She was drawn to him by affection and gratitude, although marrying him would be ‘an act of renunciation and not indulgence of self as it would have been in the other case’.⁷¹ Considered as renunciation, she decided that there was much to be said for it. On 20 May 1891, in the Devonshire House Hotel, they became secretly engaged and embraced each other for the first time.

For Sidney their relationship had to be described in cosmographic imagery. They were to be thought of neither as sun and planet, nor as planet and satellite, but as each an entire solar system, and when solar systems came together, it was a big thing.⁷² He knew that man was a planet who needed to be part of a system, if he was not to rush to destruction. He did not admire dated Ptolemaic systems but – if she willed it – there should be an improvement on Copernicus, and ‘Bee’ should be the sun in the new Webbian cosmology.⁷³ He loved the way she dilated her nostrils; he loved her ‘chiffy blouse’; he loved her haughty and imperious manner; he loved her faults:

Your wilfulness, your natural ambition – indeed they are not in themselves faults at all ... What the world wants is not men and women ideally perfect in character, but warm-hearted, thinking, throbbing, *erring*

fellow creatures – truth through warmheartedness, character through action.⁷⁴

With her it was different:

On the face of it [she wrote] it seems an extraordinary end for the once brilliant Beatrice Potter (but it is just because it is not an end that she has gone into it) to marry an ugly little man with no social position and less means – whose only recommendation – so some may say – is a certain pushing ability. And I am not ‘in love’, not as I was.⁷⁵

She did not let him forget that it was a case of beauty and the beast. He acknowledged that it was so and begged only that it might not turn out to be an affair of Titania and Bottom.⁷⁶ He kissed her photograph and, never having dreams (or at least having no recollection of having had them) – wished to dream. Did she ever, he wondered, kiss his photograph? ‘No dear, I do not even look at your photograph. It is too hideous for anything. Do be done in a grey suit by Elliot & Fry and let me have your head only – it is the head only that I am marrying!’⁷⁷ She advised him: ‘Get a new tie and string to your pince-nez and look after your pronunciation. You can’t afford not to be careful about externals!’⁷⁸ He sent her a new portrait:

I fear I can’t put a better part of me, and perhaps by upright living I may get some kind of light in my face which will take off its ugliness. But if it has found favour with you, I can easily put up with caricatures and repulsion of others.⁷⁹

Beatrice had brought Sidney almost to the point of accepting the Comtian doctrine respecting the moral superiority of women. But it was Sidney rather than Beatrice who practised Comte’s maxim: ‘Live Openly’. He was free, as she was not, from doubts and equivocations. He responded to life with a warmth, simplicity and directness which she found it difficult to attain. When it seemed likely that there would be a renewal of the struggle in the docks, he told her: ‘I had a real “rush” of pity, and I felt I could give up life and even give up you, if I could prevent the suffering it will cause.’⁸⁰ She admired the genius of Tom Mann, but thought that ‘even the best of the dockers bear the brand of London cunning and London restlessness.’⁸¹

She told herself that she regretted having to sacrifice her capacity for appreciating art and music and literature so that she could investigate labour movements:

We will try to have a little culture ... try with a humble and reverent attitude; we shall enjoy the atmosphere of culture even if we do not

acquire the substance; and by a judicious choice of friends, we may get glimpses into the land of promise, which we will do our level best to make possible for others.⁸²

‘Dearest,’ he wrote, ‘I confess to a low taste. I *like* the kitchen of life.’ Yet he saw that ‘we must save our whole selves alive if we are to do our best work’.⁸³ He therefore asked her to help him learn the language of the arts. This was surely an unintended irony, for in literature at any rate, his knowledge was far wider and his judgement surer than hers.

In the autumn of 1891 Beatrice helped C.T. Ritchie to organise a debating club in the Stroud Valley. At first all went well and Sidney was invited to come down and speak. Before he was due to arrive, Beatrice gave an address which caused great excitement and thoroughly annoyed Sir John Douglass, the great Tory landlord. Mary Playne was much distressed and begged her to get Sidney to cancel his visit. Beatrice decided to comply with her sister’s wishes, despite the fact that she thought it good to rouse the valley out of its deadening torpor. Sidney, however, refused to write a letter to Ritchie pretending that he had another engagement.

Surely [she wrote] you owe it to me to make my relations with my family as pleasant as possible – it is not too much to ask of you to throw over a wretched little Club! Of course I can’t force you to do it, but if you care for my feelings at all, you will write by the evening’s post to Mr Ritchie stating simply that you are unavoidably prevented by an important political engagement from coming down to Gloucestershire on 28th. Anyway, I can’t have you here on the 28th.⁸⁴

‘Dearest Bee,’ he answered, ‘do not love me less because I *could* not do what you asked.’⁸⁵ She had taught him a franker, simpler truthfulness. She would not expect him to be subservient to her every word. They ought to add together, not to merge, their moral intuitions.⁸⁶ In the end he gave way, but only after he discovered that she had already said that he would not be coming.

At the end of 1891 Richard Potter’s long illness was drawing to its close and Beatrice was understandably torn between sorrow and relief. She was perplexed as to how she ought to feel. He told her:

If you feel on the whole glad, – feel glad and say so. If you feel solemn, be solemn. Do not feel or say or think what you imagine you ought to feel, say or think – that is the usual horrible mockery of an English funeral.

There is death on earth, but no *Death* with a big D. This personification of Death – a kind of bogey man – is answerable for much of our

false sentimentality on the subject. Dearest – *moi qui vous parle* – I am feeling horribly faint at the thought that either you or I must be ‘lost’ one day, to the other. It is no use crying ‘Peace, Peace’ where there is no peace. I am not reconciled to death – we must bear it, but I will not pretend that I will acquiesce in it.

And since we *must* part one day and our bodies – Sweet, *qui nous appartient à toujours* – must be put away – and our minds cease – since it must be so, let it add a new sanctity to our love – not only that but to our view of human life. A few precious years is all we have for each other and for the world – let us never profane those years. The greatest Blasphemy seems to me to be doubt – of love, of life, of progress. Help me to keep us both from Doubt.⁸⁷

It was the wholeheartedness of Sidney’s love and his perfect integrity that gradually conquered Beatrice’s doubts. She had doubted whether marriage would really aid her work. ‘I love you,’ she told him, ‘but I love my work better.’⁸⁸ He showed her that this was a false antithesis. He was tempted by opportunities of entering the House of Commons, but if this seemed to threaten her career, he would be well content with a career of usefulness in the LCC. If his socialism meant that some of the ‘old’ unionists might be more reluctant to talk to Beatrice about trade unionism, lists of provincial Fabians furnished by Sidney could supply useful contacts. If the great task which she had set herself seemed overwhelming, he would find her a research assistant and come himself to help her sort and arrange the ever mounting mass of facts. As early as August 1891 she was recording: ‘We allowed half an hour for confidential talk and “human nature” and then worked hard at the Ironfounders’ Records. Then lunch, cigarettes, a little more “human nature”, and then another two hours work.’⁸⁹

Nor did she find these intervals for ‘human nature’ disagreeable. ‘It is very sweet, this warm and close companionship in work.’⁹⁰ Her engagement in May had been a cool, deliberate step: by the end of the year she found in it a source of unconscious, growing happiness.⁹¹ In October she had chanced to see Chamberlain and his wife, who travelled part of the way on the same train as she did. She had doubted whether she could ever again feel for any man as she had felt for him. Now she could tell Sidney:

Dearest – it caused me no pang; he was looking self-complacent and self-conscious (he has lost his old look of fervid intentness) and I thanked Providence that I was travelling third class in search of knowledge and not first class in his train. The little wife looked plain and insignificant, but good and sweet – somewhat doll-like. They seemed to

me an absolutely suited pair – both enveloped in a sense of social prestige and material comfort: he the dominant male and she – *la femme complaisante*. I felt a grim satisfaction that he was so mated; and I grieve to say that I felt a bit contemptuous (it was unchristian to say the least of it). Perhaps if he had seen the elderly spinster occupant of a 3rd. Class carriage, he would have felt like feelings.⁹²

A few days after Richard Potter's death on 1 January 1892, Ella Pycroft heard that Beatrice was going to marry Sidney:

I'm just going to tell you the absolute truth, Bee – and that is that I should be quite genuinely glad if I thought you cared for him one half as much as he does for you – but you know when we were talking of marriage the other day I felt as if you hadn't the remotest idea of what love meant in my sense of the word – perhaps I'm wrong, and at any rate you may learn to know if you don't know, and then it would be all right. You're quite right, one wants intimacy of thought and comradeship, but marriage ought to be something much more than that.⁹³

Ella's wise cautions would have been appropriate at the time of the engagement; by now they were already out of date, and every passing day made them less relevant. All the elements of hardness and cruelty went out of Beatrice's writing. 'We love each other devotedly,' she wrote. 'We are intensely interested in the same work. We have freedom and means to devote our whole lives to the work we believe in. Never did I imagine such happiness open to me. May I deserve it.'⁹⁴ Sidney asked: 'Can't you be a little haughty or imperious or exacting for a change? I have a sense – delightful – of getting deeper and deeper into your debt.'⁹⁵ By the spring of 1892 she did gently reproach him for having more of the husband's manner, but then she herself was writing like a wife. 'I have been meaning to advise you not to bring the thick flannel night-shirt. I notice you always have a cold when you return home and I am pretty sure that it comes from changing from flannel to cotton night-shirts.'⁹⁶ He had written earlier in May: 'I don't feel today as I have done on former days when we have parted. This time we have gone beyond the former stage: I feel as if I was separated – not from my love – but from my wife.'⁹⁷ (From this point until their marriage in July their letters are incomplete and many sheets are missing. Deeply as they cared for historical accuracy and completeness there were evidently some phases of their life which they thought better closed against prying eyes, even those of the 'great-grand niece' or 'unemployed intellectual' who would come to write their biography.)

There were of course difficulties with families and friends. She dreaded the cramped, ugly, lower-middle-class character of Sidney's home, until

gradually her dislike of these unfamiliar surroundings ‘disappeared in the blessedness of love’.⁹⁸ The Booths did not want to know Sidney and she cried about it.⁹⁹ Spencer took away his literary executorship from her and she managed to laugh:

‘I cannot congratulate you,’ observed the philosopher, ‘that would be insincere.’ ‘You see that he has succeeded in marrying me, Mr Spencer – that shows he has a will.’ ‘Undoubtedly,’ groaned out the philosopher, ‘that is exactly what I fear – you both have wills – and they *must* clash.’¹⁰⁰

Sidney had the rather painful and laborious task of calling upon her sisters and her brothers-in-law:

Dearest, my impression is that your sisters are not very able women in the intellectual way. Really, Mrs Holt is the cleverest of the lot; and your trained intellect stands out as quite alien to them all. I have been amused to watch how they all rush at me with futile little arguments, utterly lacking in logic or acumen, their husbands meanwhile looking on indulgently and, when appealed to, sweetly and quietly putting them straight – I don’t wonder that you got on best with the said husbands ... a set of remarkable men, each in his own way. (I except the Williamses whom I have not seen, and the Playnes whom I have not seen for two years.)

But I don’t want to ‘run down’ your sisters. They have all been exceedingly kind, and they are at least as clever as the ordinary women of society, and the ordinary mother of a family. Only, you see, one expected *your* sisters to be something more. Especially does one miss the logic and the intellectual atmosphere which you bring to everything. Mrs H[obhouse] talked most about Luxury – its evil, and yet how impossible it was to have things orderly and clean without accepting the whole conventions of one class. She said the servants would not allow any deviation.

As you say, these people are not really conscious of the existence of Poverty. Indeed Mrs H. struck me as unconscious that there were any individuals of the same *species* as herself who had less than £5000 a year.

Mrs Hobhouse had discussed the impending wedding. I said I hoped there would be no ceremony. She said: ‘Where will it be? I suppose the Registry Office. I much prefer the Church.’ I said I supposed it depended on one’s opinions. She replied, ‘O not at all. I myself am advanced!’ And then I fled.¹⁰¹

In fact not all the sisters were ‘extremely kind’, and he had one of his colds which he felt made him ‘more than necessarily mean and small and ugly’.¹⁰²

Mrs Playne vexed me with her ostentation of cynicism; her admiration for Lottie Collins, the singer and dancer of 'Ta-ra-ra' and so on. She seemed to be bent, probably, quite unconsciously on sounding all the depths of me that she disliked. I am quite sure she thinks me horrid, and oddly enough, still on entirely wrong grounds.¹⁰³

It was not pleasant to be quite so frankly despised. And if the Hobhouses or the Courtneys did not regard him as vulgar, he had the impression that they did see him as rather like Chamberlain at the corresponding stage of his career: cool; superficially able; somewhat unscrupulous politically; a pushing, rising young man. This too was 'a little horrid'. He did not think he was in danger of Chamberlain's fate but he begged his Bee to save him from it.¹⁰⁴

Sidney was probably quite right about how the Hobhouses regarded him. But in their eyes it was decidedly to his advantage that he was noticed in *Times* leaders, and coming to be spoken of as an important man in radical and socialist politics. He was within their political world, even if he had entered it by another door and occupied a different position inside it. After all, he had just been returned eighth behind Lord Carrington to the Executive of the National Liberal Club.¹⁰⁵ He dined with Sir Edward and Lady Grey, acted as a private legislative draftsman for Sydney Buxton and was a close friend of R.B. Haldane's. These men were political opponents to Liberal Unionists like Courtney or Hobhouse, but they were not beyond the pale. Webb was lower-middle-class, a socialist wire-puller, but he might have been far worse. Had he been committed to independent working-class politics and appeared as the spokesman of the 'Labour Party', communication would have been infinitely more difficult, and the barriers of class would have been far higher. A little playful radicalism or socialism was one thing; the organisation of an independent class party of the proletariat were quite another. Here there was a departure between the conditions that were formative of the partnership and those that favoured a fully defined consciousness of what the labour movement was and must become. Beatrice and Sidney were drawn together by the discovery of how the great voluntary associations of co-operation and trade unionism, in which she was primarily interested, needed to be complemented by what he had already projected in terms of socialist policies for local and central government. Much of the charm of their association lay in the way in which the interests, knowledge and experience of one seemed to disclose the appropriate sphere of activity for the institutions with which the other was concerned. Thus, Beatrice had identified the barriers to the further extension of the co-operative movement.¹⁰⁶ For example, there were social barriers. The very rich (who did not matter) and the very poor (who did) were shut out. Sidney's response

was to argue that: 'As we cannot make co-operation fit our residuum, we must make our residuum fit for co-operation.'¹⁰⁷ The co-operative store flourished in regions such as Lancashire, where the Factory Acts had done most for the compulsory elevation of the poor. Again, Beatrice found that large-scale enterprise presented administrative and financial barriers to the advance of co-operation, but Sidney could demonstrate that these barriers could not stand against the claims of municipal enterprise. But while they thought about trade unionism and co-operation in class terms, they did not think that socialism required a third working-class institution: a Labour Party. Had Sidney been any other kind of socialist than a Fabian one, had he trusted, as other socialists did, in the political capacity of the working class, it is doubtful whether Beatrice would ever have had the patience to develop their work and their friendship.¹⁰⁸ But had Beatrice not come from the world of prosperous, humane and established liberalism, Sidney might have been more strongly tempted than he was to pursue the tactic of pressure from without rather than permeation from within. He might have arrived earlier than he did at the full, modern, tripartite conception of the labour movement. In fact he always equivocated about the necessary class character of a socialist party – but then, that kind of equivocation surrounded the Labour Party itself.

It was when Sidney's hopes of marrying Beatrice had all but perished that he resolved to spurn the security of the Colonial Office and take full-time to journalism and politics. The founding of the *Star* in January 1888 under the editorship of T.P. O'Connor MP had opened doors for him. Not that O'Connor was sympathetic, but H.W. Massingham, the assistant editor, was a radical with Fabian leanings. The inevitable rows culminated in O'Connor selling out in July 1890. 'The paper', declared Webb, 'will remain under Stuart'¹⁰⁹ and Massingham, that is (I say it to you only) me. I need hardly say that this will further exalt our power.'¹¹⁰ And so, for a time, it did. Sidney and Shaw were able to get any inspired 'par' into it whenever they liked. The foundation of the *Speaker* under the editorship of T. Wemyss Reid in January 1890 also – despite Shaw's initial misgivings¹¹¹ – supplied them with another valuable medium. Massingham quarrelled with Stuart who drew £1000 a year for himself out of the *Star* and finally resigned from it in January 1891. A couple of months later he went on to the Fabian executive. When Sidney finally left the Colonial Office in September 1891, he and Massingham went into a kind of partnership, Sidney being paid £200 a year for writing a half-column of a London Letter which they prepared for *The Bradford Observer* and other provincial papers.¹¹² If he pushed himself, Sidney found he could manage as many as ten articles (including London Letters) in seven days.¹¹³ In the first seven and a half months that followed his resignation from the civil service, he earned £200 from daily journalism, contributions to learned

journals or heavier periodicals, and royalties on his books. On the top of this he had made investments which brought him in £80 during this period.¹¹⁴ Massingham advised him to marry a woman with £1000 a year:

‘You mean Beatrice Potter?’ ‘No, no. Potterism is to be taken with a large grain of salt. I don’t know that you wouldn’t find that you had *bitten off more than you could chew*. And I don’t think that she has much money, she doesn’t live like it. No, don’t marry a clever woman, they’re too much trouble.’¹¹⁵

But three months earlier, walking hand in hand across the moors of northern Norway, Sidney had been in earnest conversation with Miss Potter:

I don’t want to influence you [she said] in the detail of what you do, for everyone must work out the detail of his own life; but I think it is time you deliberately planned what you intend to be – and that you made everything else fall in with that.

You forget [he answered] that has been impossible hitherto. I have decided that I want to take part in the government of the country according to socialist principles. I also want to think out the problems of socialist administration before they come up for settlement.

Quite so. That is exactly my view of what you want to be. But writing ‘London Letters’ ... won’t help you to *that*. You know that I think more highly of your abilities than you do yourself. So I don’t mind saying that in order to become a first-rate administrator you want more education in the technique of administration, and in order to think over the various social problems, you want technical knowledge of those very questions! The LCC will give you the one – helping me will give you the other.

I agree with you about my deficiencies [said he] but I think there is a danger that in trying for big things we may diminish our usefulness – that in refusing the smaller influence one gains by casual journalism, one may be neglecting the only work one is capable of doing well. To help you will be one of my principal aims – but for other reasons. What I am undecided about is whether you are not (and I also) too ambitious for me – whether you are not expecting too much from me.

No, I don’t expect anything in particular from you. I do not know whether you unite the qualities and whether the opportunity will offer itself for you to become a really big man. About that I do not much care. We are not responsible for your abilities or for the natural circumstances which might make those abilities ‘the talent of the hour’. But it is clear that your abilities are sufficiently good to enable you to do first-rate work on the County Council for instance. In the County Council alone

there is a magnificent field for administrative ability – and for that handling of men in committees in which you excel. And that work is infinitely more important at the present moment than any amount of smart journalism. And what is equally significant, there are apparently few (if any) men who are at once willing and able to do it – while journalists of every degree of smartness abound, and after all, though I do not think you are a first-rate political instrument – so far as we can see there are no men in political life who are at once good instruments for making Public Opinion and good instruments for executing it. You unite these qualities of thinking and acting; though we are uncertain to what degree; and you also have the means to do the work which is most useful to the community. We are both of us second-rate minds; but we are curiously combined – I am the investigator, and [you] the executor – and we have a wide and varied experience of men and things between us. We have also an unearned salary. This forms our unique circumstances. A considerable work should be the result; if we use and combine our talents with a deliberate and consistent purpose.¹¹⁶

As soon as he was out of the Colonial Office Sidney let it be known that he was in search of a winnable seat on the LCC. Offers to nominate him came in from many constituencies in London. He settled for Deptford. Beatrice sent him £100, which he imagined would cover his expenses. It was given and received in a simple manner without the slightest embarrassment on either side. 'Yes, you shall give me a cheque for the County Council expenses; it won't come to £100 at most – and I shall be the Member for Potter!'¹¹⁷

However, this comradely attitude towards Sidney's election campaign did not extend to the Fabian Society. For a year Shaw had been predicting trouble: 'The seismological signs indicate that we are all spoiling for a fight. What is more, the revolt is going to be against the Webbian opportunism.'¹¹⁸ It duly began in December 1891 when Sidney, at the age of 32, found that he had 'lost the confidence of a certain section of the younger members by entering upon public life as a candidate'. The revolt was headed by John Burns and Hubert Bland, both of whom made 'bitter and malicious' speeches.¹¹⁹

Sidney liked to think of the Fabians as the 'Society of Jesus' of socialism – 'without, I hope, the mental subjection which Protestants accuse the Jesuits of, and also without the moral shiftiness'.¹²⁰ The rebellion made him feel 'very weak and incapable, and full of a sense of my own unworthiness and want of strength to cope with the difficulties of democracy'.¹²¹ Although he tried to persuade Beatrice that the Society did not mean much in his life, this was manifestly untrue. It was the only place where he could hope to speak his whole mind and where he felt completely at

ease socially. If he went to the National Liberal Club he knew that half the members thought of him as a vulgar and subversive figure, and that John Morley suspected him of intriguing against him.¹²² If he went for a beer with a dozen socialist gas stokers and sang the Marseillaise in English, he knew that they were struck by the difference between his hands and theirs, and that they suspected him of being a trimmer.¹²³ He was himself perfectly clear about where he stood: 'Whatever John Morley may think, I am a Girondin not a Jacobin.'¹²⁴ He added: 'I don't *want* to be a Girondin but it is so necessary to protest against those who wish to be extreme at all costs, even with loss of practicability, that I always expect to rank as a Girondin.'¹²⁵ Having thus placed himself in the revolutionary tradition, he concluded: 'It seems evident that the Fabian Society is by no means exempt from the usual failings of revolutionary movements ... the revolution devours its children, I have always foreseen it.'¹²⁶

Although his candidature was the immediate issue involved in the rebellion against him, there was a complex background of personal and political antagonisms. His relations with John Burns and the proper shape to be given to the demand for the eight-hour day; his quarrel with Hubert Bland and the problem of the bearing of socialism upon the rise of a 'Labour Party'; his own personality and the subtle interdependence of his notion of socialist strategy with his conception of socialism itself – all these were elements in the struggle.

John Burns was a handsome, witty, forceful labour leader who exiled himself to the vastness of his own unconquerable vanity. Sidney had helped him in private and 'boomed' him in public,¹²⁷ but Burns did not welcome the prospect of sharing the limelight with Webb on the LCC. Besides, there was a real issue of principle between them on the eight hours question. It will be recalled that this was the decisive rallying point for all the forward forces in the world of labour during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This was the slogan that promoted the transition from radicalism to socialism, which linked socialism to the new unionism, which aided in the recovery of the tradition of the International and the spirit of internationalism. Burns's reputation, like those of Mann, Champion and Hardie, was bound up with advocacy of the eight-hour day. So was Sidney's. Along with Harold Cox, he had made the fullest, clearest, most detailed and lucid case for legislation.¹²⁸ Burns knew very well that Webb was the man with the telling facts who could show that 82 per cent of the drivers and firemen employed on the railways in March 1890 were working more than 12 hours at a time. That he could discover a tramcar conductor in Bradford who regularly worked 115 hours a week for three shillings a day. But Sidney distinguished himself from Burns and other socialists, not merely by gladly undertaking to meet and to beat the economists on their own ground, but by taking pains to minimise the

'true' conflict of interests between employers and employed, and by making only sternly practical and gradualist proposals. One had, Webb insisted, to make allowances for different types and classes of worker, and one had to take proper account of the implications of shift systems, overtime, waiting time and emergencies. He said that

in industrial organisation any sudden change – however good – produced a serious dislocation; but almost any gradual change – however important – could be endured without social injury. Time was of the essence of the matter.¹²⁹

He therefore presented the advance to the eight-hour day as a matter of stages. It should be inaugurated by being applied in all work for public authorities and made a condition for securing government contracts. This should be followed by the limitation of the hours of labour in industries and services in which such hours were excessive, and where there was no direct problem of foreign competition: for example in transport, gas and distribution. Finally, the government ought to adopt the principle of 'trade option' – a principle which the Fabians had advanced as a novelty in a draft bill they had prepared in 1889 and subsequently discovered to be already incorporated in a Factory Act introduced in Victoria, Australia, in 1885.

Burns rejected the principle of trade option – contracting in to the eight-hour day, in favour of 'trade exemption' – contracting out of the eight-hour day. In Sidney's view this showed him at his worst. The important thing was to carry any eight-hour resolution at the TUC and that – he thought – would be quite difficult enough.¹³⁰ In the event Burns was proved right, for he succeeded in carrying his 'hard' version of eight hours at the Congress of 1890. Sidney acknowledged that this was splendid, as well as surprising. Yet he clung to the old position of trade option because he thought it important to conciliate the powerful forces in Lancashire and in Northumberland and Durham which appeared to remain unalterably opposed, and because he wanted to 'build a bridge for the opponents' of the whole concept. 'But,' as he added, 'Burns no doubt is thinking more of the influence on the masses.'¹³¹

Bland, at the head of the younger and more impatient element within the Fabian Society, was now also thinking in terms of 'influence on the masses' and wanted to throw the whole movement 'into the Labour Party'. Sidney, in an unsuccessful speech, resisted this demand (and defended his candidature as a 'progressive' for the LCC). He contended that: 'Our business is to convert the whole community to socialism.' Every Fabian ought to do what best he could, whether in Liberal or Labour circles, to win men for socialism, for they must reach all sorts of people if socialism was to triumph. Certainly one might try to imitate the Irish Nationalists and create a small, determined, disciplined party in the

Commons that would sell its votes for 'Labour' measures. But this would be a degradation of politics, and it might be doubted whether concessions wrung from reluctant leaders and carried out by unbelieving ministers would ever be ultimately effective. What was wanted was not a mere Labour Party, but a collectivist party. 'Labour', with its energy and determination, was an indispensable element within such a new organisation, but it was quite insufficient, taken by itself. The new party required the support of the younger radicals who could bring to it experience of public life and of administration, and the ideals and the principles of the socialists, upon which its action must be based. The Fabian Society should play a great but unobtrusive part in the formation of this party. But if it was to do so, it must not delude itself that workmen were spontaneous socialists, and it must no more 'give itself away' to the Labour than to the Liberal Party.¹³²

Bland and his young supporters were unconvinced that you could thus hunt with socialist hounds while running (in Deptford) with the Liberal hares. Had they known of the full extent of Sidney's involvement with Schnadhorst, Stuart and the other Liberal organisers, they would certainly have pointed to the contradictions – although not to any want of integrity – that characterised this policy. Thus, before he had gone to the United States in 1888, Sidney, in his capacity as a member of the Holborn, the Westminster and the London University Liberal and Radical Associations had printed a private and confidential memorandum addressed to the leaders of London Liberalism.¹³³ The object was to indicate how the mass of metropolitan wage earners was to be united to the Liberal Party. The Tories and the Unionists held 51 out of London's 62 seats. Sidney showed the 'chill indifference of the masses' to official Liberalism by graphically demonstrating the geographical distribution of electoral apathy. While London Liberalism had seen the flight of the 'money-bags' to the Unionist seceders, the rapidly growing workers' clubs, many of which were organised in the Metropolitan Radical Federation, scornfully repudiated the word 'Liberal', mingling derision with indifference when presented with the party's official programme. In Sidney's view:

Further evidence of this alienation can be seen in the new 'Labour Party'. Scarcely a week passes without some attempt to form a local branch, or a local 'Labour Union' of some sort. The air is thick with their draft constitutions, draft programmes, draft titles and so on. Most of them come to nothing, and it may well be doubted whether the time is ripe for a separate National Labour Party, but every attempt at its formation indicates working-class disgust with official Liberalism.

Nor was there any occasion for surprise that workmen should talk of Liberalism as a sham, when the most brutal employers – like Bryant & May – went in for Gladstone worship. And the Party's Nottingham

programme (1887) offered the dock labourers and sweated trouser-hands of 'outcast London' nothing but Home Rule, registration reform, abolition of entail, disestablishment of the Scottish Church and local government reform. Was it not shameful, conscious hypocrisy to pretend that 'one man, one vote' meant manhood suffrage when all that was intended was the abolition of plural voting, or to talk about 'free land' when all that was meant was the abolition of entail? Sidney concluded that if the Liberals were to survive in London they would have to adopt a 'Labour Programme' as frankly and as wholeheartedly as they had adopted Home Rule. But in the same document he clearly indicated the difficulty:

The continued support of the capitalist as such necessarily involves the continued alienation of his 'hands'. It is perhaps irrelevant to enquire which, for 'the Party of the Masses', is the honest course. The masses still however expect some honesty even in politicians.

He confronted the Liberal Party leaders with a stark statement of the realities of class:

The material interests of these two great parties [*classes*, RH] are diametrically opposed to each other. No last compromise between them is even possible. On the one hand is the great mass of the workers by hand or brain, who will naturally insist on social arrangements which shall enable them collectively to enjoy the whole produce of their toil. On the other hand stand the classes which such social arrangements would necessarily completely eliminate: the idle recipients (from their unseen economic slaves) of tribute, called by the euphonious names of rent and interest. Between these two economic classes stands the middle class, the great majority of its members receiving, under the name of profit, both wages and interest. By its education, its share of the economic tribute, and its social aspirations, this middle class is always being subtly drawn towards the other 'classes', which, as a class, it dislikes and envies. By its history, its traditions, its politico-religious feelings and its dislike of aristocratic rule, it is impelled to resist those classes.

Thus, Bland and his comrades could have pointed out that Sidney's strategy depended on the highly dubious assumption that such vague and uncertain considerations as 'history', 'tradition' and 'politico-religious feeling' could be effectively appealed to and made to override the sharp promptings of 'economic tribute', 'education' and 'social aspiration'. As for the wire-pullers and party managers to whom Sidney was more especially appealing, would they not defer the hour when they would be compelled

to make the choice with which he said they were confronted? Webb himself had admitted that there would probably be many more attempts to divert attention from the central social issues by going in for a 'cry' against the House of Lords or enlarging on the splendours of jingoism.¹³⁴ How long must they wait before they cleared the political ground of such irrelevancies? Sidney declared that he wanted to save the Liberal Party from becoming a merely middle-class party, like the German National Liberal *Partei*. 'I believe that would be bad and I have played to save it from that fate, even if it should imply Morley's resignation.'¹³⁵ But why would it be bad? Why did he ignore the fact that the shrinking of German Liberalism down to a mere middle-class grouping was associated with the rise of the first mass socialist workers' party in Europe? No doubt because that was a Marxist, an impossibilist party, which did not recognise that socialism was a matter for 'the whole community'. And also because there were good people in the English Liberal Party: people who accepted the claims of Labour and were inclined towards socialistic measures. Who were these good people? Well, Sidney's host when he stayed at Hanover House, Leeds, was the second most influential man on the executive of the National Liberal Federation:

He is a good honest fellow, evidently a pattern of all the bourgeois virtues, anxious to do as much for the Labour Party as he can, and believing in its *future* influence, but as he is also the most influential man ... what he can *do* is not very much.¹³⁶

Bland and the young guard were in rebellion against the 'Webb party' and the policies that gave rise to such a paradox as this. They were impatient with the politics of influence, which they associated, quite rightly, with a whole host of compromises and equivocations. They wanted to escape from them by making a clean break in favour of a Labour Party. But they themselves were ill-placed to play much part in that game. They might triumph over Sidney for a moment, but they could not consolidate their victory, or make it a genuine point of departure in the history of the Fabian Society. Sidney's strength lay in the fact that no one in the Fabians could doubt his personal disinterestedness:

No one has the least ground for saying [he wrote] that I have ever tried to form a 'Webb' party; or that I have been loath to lend an anonymous hand to any movement. I am, in fact, much too proud inwardly to care very much about getting the actual credit of any piece of work. I want things done – I do not want to do them myself.¹³⁷

His candidature for the LCC might momentarily obscure this from the eyes of the younger Fabians, but it could not be in question among the older ones. It was this reputation for personal integrity, which shielded

him when he got himself into equivocal situations. And, of course, the politics of permeation did lead to endless equivocations: to a constant tendency to exaggerate successes and to minimise costs. Given that projects for launching a labour party were in the air, it was rather invidious for a leading socialist to have repeated secret talks with Schnadhorst about lists of 'Labour' – i.e. Lib-Lab-candidates.¹³⁸ Again, since the Fabian Society was associated with other socialist organisations in a public agitation for the restoration of free speech in the metropolis, it was risky for Webb to have private interviews with government representatives aimed at a mutually acceptable accommodation.¹³⁹ It might also be thought odd that Webb, as the author of a singularly objective and impartial history of socialism in England, which encouraged Hyndman to hope that he might yet become a Marxist,¹⁴⁰ should anonymously contribute to the *Financial Reform Almanack*.¹⁴¹ This was, after all, a handbook of middle-class radicalism that bore on its cover a portrait of Cobden, and declared itself for 'Economic Government, Just Taxation, Perfect Freedom of Trade'.¹⁴² The fact that he had warm disagreements with Schnadhorst, got free speech restored without bloodshed as a result of his talks with Sir Charles Russell, and said nothing that he did not believe in the Cobdenite journal, was not to the point. In the eyes of militants and men of principle he was keeping company with the enemy. He did feel uneasy about these charges. And, whatever Shaw might say, it was the case that 'permeation' did mean compromising, and 'soft-peddling' and 'back-scratching'. Not all the concessions could be expected to come from one side. Thus, when Sidney was looking for a seat on the LCC he promised to help non-socialist politicians to get the workers' vote.¹⁴³ Sidney knew that he was a Girondin and he confessed that he was prone to the typical Girondin failing:

Time was I shrank
from what was right
For fear of what was wrong.¹⁴⁴

Behind the debate in the Fabian Society on permeation versus independence – and still more manifestly behind that controversy within the British labour movement as a whole – lay a more fundamental dispute about the nature of socialism itself. Bland had already taken Sidney to task about this matter in *Fabian Essays*, where he had disassociated himself from the view that socialism could be equated with the indefinite extension of state ownership, regulation and control. William Morris, in a criticism of Edward Bellamy, had disclosed the issue much more adequately and explicitly. According to Morris, Bellamy was

perfectly satisfied with modern civilisation, if only the injustice, misery and waste of class society *could* be got rid of; which half-change seems

possible to him. The only ideal of life which such a man can see is that of the industrious *professional* middle-class men of today purified from their crime of complicity.

Bellamy's mind was 'fixed firmly on the mere machinery of life'.¹⁴⁵

It has been shown that Webb had a high regard for Bellamy. The 'half-change' in the life of the individual, which Bellamy had imagined in *Dr Heidenhoff's Process*, had been treated by Webb as more than an acceptable fictional device. He thought it a guide to cerebral hygiene. Much as one might cut out a diseased appendix, individual life could be renewed by cutting out shame and remorse. For all his commendations of an 'organic' view of society as opposed to the atomistic or mechanistic concept, Sidney thought of socialism as modern civilisation minus the recipients of rent and interest, and the irrational and wasteful allocation of resources that their presence entailed. To him 'half-change' seemed both possible and eminently desirable. Thus, in his book on the eight-hour day he concluded:

If machinery lowers human beings below the level of monkeys in order that they may earn their living we can, at any rate, limit the period of monkeydom. If we cannot make the work manly, we can insist that the workers should have the leisure to become men.¹⁴⁶

Elsewhere he asserted: 'Prophets nowadays do not found a partial community which adopts the whole faith; they cause rather the partial adoption of their own faith by the whole community.'¹⁴⁷ The belief that this was possible, together with a vision of socialism in terms of the supremacy of the values of the professional stratum and the universalising of their conditions of life, was what separated Webb from Morris and made permeation thinkable to the one and unthinkable to the other. To Morris, a socialism that stopped at abolishing the existing division of labour along with the existing division into classes, which complacently assumed the values of the existing professional strata without seeing how their taste and judgement and style of life were corrupted by their share in privilege and power, was hopelessly unimaginative and unambitious. To Webb, to forego opportunities for enlarging the sphere of social control and provision, in order to retain the purity of your vision of a wholly human society was an act of grotesque inhumanity and folly. Socialism was, he insisted, 'the truest opportunism'.

Beatrice advised Sidney to prepare his deliberate withdrawal from the Fabian Society and to turn his attention – and that of financial supporters, such as Daisy Reeves – to the trade unionists:

But above all there should be no overt rupture – you should be benign and patient and perfectly without personal feeling, withdrawing your

active help and allowing them to make muddles and feel their own incompetence – without withdrawing yourself ... The policy now, I am certain, is to starve the Society so that it shall find its own level. You have been over-feeding it, with the risk of its becoming a dangerous and noxious monster ... it cannot be made into a strict 'instrument of progress', its material is too poor.¹⁴⁸

In fact the rebellion soon blew over. On New Year's Day 1892 Sidney delivered a sermon at the South Place Chapel in which he adopted a reassuringly fierce tone:

Not in Thibet alone do rotatory calabashes satisfy the consciences of the pious; and Roman Catholics have no monopoly of the purchase of indulgences. I am afraid that I must own to an ingrained disbelief in the value of sermons, with or without God.

His text was 'Peace on Earth' but 'the modern commercial world lives in a state of perpetual social war, which was none the less war because the powder used is smokeless and noiseless.' By the bitterest of all ironies, he concluded, 'Peace on Earth' has been caught up and adopted as the precept, not of the poor and the oppressed but as a security to those who profited from it.¹⁴⁹ Undeterred by the Fabian rebellion, he persisted with his candidature and, declaring himself a Fabian, secured the active support of many members of the Society. Indeed he addressed an audience of Fabians who were going to lecture on the LCC elections within a month of Bland's attack on him. This was important, for it was impossible to work a borough like Deptford, which had 100 000 inhabitants and 12 000 electors, within the legally set limit of £100. The procedures and regulations laid down for the LCC had been modelled upon those for a ward of a town council, and were quite inadequate for the colossal magnitudes of London. It was therefore a great help that, well before polling day, he had as many as nine volunteers working for him for nothing.¹⁵⁰

Presenting himself as 'a Londoner born and bred', and as one who had made London questions the chief study of his life, Sidney mounted a masterly campaign which sent his Conservative opponent down to complete defeat. To begin with he prepared an election address which J.W. Benn, the 'Progressive Whip' and a man not particularly friendly to Webb, recommended as a model.¹⁵¹ Every point in this succinct document was enlarged upon in his book, *The London Programme*,¹⁵² and a cheap edition of that work was brought out in time for the struggle. The so-called Moderates, declared Sidney, wanted the LCC to be no more than the old Metropolitan Board of Works. But the first task was to enlarge the powers and functions conferred on the LCC by the Local Government Act of 1888,

and to make it 'a mighty instrument of the People's will for the social re-generation of this great city'. This meant the abolition of vestrydom and the rule of a miserable oligarchy mostly consisting of small shopkeepers anxious to escape the operation of the sanitary laws.

'I am', said Sidney, 'in favour of replacing private by Democratic ownership and management, as soon and as far as safely possible.' It was easy enough to sneer at 'gas and water socialism', until one discovered that only half the houses in London had a constant supply of water, and that while this cost less than £700 000 per annum to the water companies, London paid £1 700 000 for it. It was much the same story with gas, and there were private monopolies at the docks and in the markets. But London lay under the shadow of centralised bureaucracy as well as in the grip of private monopolists: it paid for a police force it did not control. Mr Gladstone might pay what compliments he liked to our 'admirable police', yet Trafalgar Square showed that 'the London police will lack the very necessary support from London public opinion until they transferred to the control of the LCC'.

The first care of a London County Councillor must be for his poorer fellow citizens who were daily being crushed down by the 'competitive struggle'. London had 100 000 permanent paupers. 22.3 per cent of London's deaths took place in the workhouse or the public hospital. London had 238 separate hospitals competing with each other without regard to local needs. There was an overwhelming case for supervision; inspection; audit; and systematic co-operation. There must be a Poor Law Council for London, and an end to the inequitable rating of rich and poor districts and the great divergences in the conduct of Boards of Guardians in their treatment of paupers. But beyond all this:

Some kind of pension scheme for the aged; some means of completely separating our collective provision for the sick and infirm from the Poor Law system; a more humanising nurture of the fifty thousand children to whom the State stands as parent; and some special provision for the technical training of the chronically unemployed unskilled labour class – all these are but the local completing of the great reform of 1834... Discrimination by classes must supersede discrimination among individuals, which has been found impossible.¹⁵³

By municipal death duties, by the taxation of ground rents, by the recovery of the inheritance which had been filched from London by the City corporations, which spent a fifth of their considerable income on official dinners, an end could be put to paying tramwaymen four shillings for a sixteen-hour day. The example of Liverpool could be followed in the matter of adequately housing the people through public building

programmes. 'I am in favour,' declared Webb, 'of trade union wages and an eight-hour day for all persons employed by the Council. I am dead against sub-contracting, and would like to see the Council itself the direct employer of all labour.' He worked hard at organising the trade union vote and, despite a 'dig' at Tom Mann in *The London Programme*, he secured Mann's enthusiastic support.¹⁵⁴ He created a special trade union committee, which included a Tory, to aid his campaign. But he also succeeded in arousing enthusiasm in less likely quarters. At a meeting with the Temperance Party he produced a great effect by exhibiting a map of London with all the public houses marked by red dots. He called it 'London's scarlet fever' and pointed out there were three times as many pubs in the metropolis as there were bakers' shops. (It was not his fault if his audience took such diligent collection of statistics to imply that he was at one with them on the need to close down public houses.)¹⁵⁵ When he went to deliver a sermon on municipal virtue at a Wesleyan Chapel he took good care to prepare an abstract of it which he sent to five religious newspapers.¹⁵⁶ He so far stirred up the Chapel vote that he soon had ministers taking the chair for him at meetings of their own congregations. Such was his ingenuity that he persuaded Miss Orme, a rival of Beatrice's and a most orthodox person, to preside at one of his meetings.¹⁵⁷ Booksellers might fear to exhibit copies of *The London Programme*, but the issue could not be in doubt. Beatrice promised to spend all Sunday consoling him with kisses if he lost,¹⁵⁸ but when the count began it was evident that he was holding his own even in the 'swellest districts' and was leading by two to one everywhere else. Despite a splitting headache he managed a victory speech and then, as he recalled,

was lifted shoulder-high by an excited mob, carried downstairs to the imminent risk of scraping the ceiling with my nose, and so out into the road amid a fearful uproar. I picked up Galton, and took refuge in a hansom, leaving a howling mob parading New Cross Road.

I was *delighted* with the general result elsewhere. It is a simply gorgeous justification of Fabian electioneering, and ought to do something to convince the provincials that our game is the right one – and also to give us the control of London politics for the next three years. I felt inclined to go round by Cannon Street in order, like Jack Cade, to smite London stone with my umbrella and to shout into the night: 'Now is Mortimer Lord of London.' But I went to the Central Telegraph Office instead.¹⁵⁹

Within a month he found himself on three committees: the Parliamentary, Local Government and Taxation, and the Public Health and Housing Committees. These were the ones he particularly wanted to be on, but he was also on the Special Water Committee, which was in virtual evasion of

the rule that no one should be on more than three.¹⁶⁰ In May he was appointed chairman of the Technical Education Committee:

Lord Rosebery who was in the chair to start us was evidently astonished, and rather cast about for an old member, but Lord Hobhouse and Sir T. Farrar pressed for me, and the committee was evidently 2 to 1 on my side (against Hogg). So I was installed in the very high chair which Lord R. vacated ... it was decided that I was to prepare a memo to lay before the committee next time.¹⁶¹

At the end of July Beatrice and Sidney married and they went first to Ireland and then to Scotland on their honeymoon. 'The people', so Sidney gaily reported from Ireland to Graham Wallas, 'are charming, but we detest them – as we should the Hottentots – for their very virtues. Home Rule is an absolute necessity in order to depopulate the country of this detestable race!'¹⁶² In Dublin they had a spell of unsuccessful investigation into union records. In Belfast they met peculiarly unpleasant employers, who prided themselves on being able to get 'female flesh and blood and bone for 5/- a week or less'.¹⁶³ In Glasgow Sidney complained dreadfully about being sent out in the evenings to collect information in the working-class suburbs,¹⁶⁴ while Beatrice stayed at home. But then they had enjoyed 'two delightful days of real honeymoon in the Wicklow hills'.¹⁶⁵

If Beatrice was still occasionally touched by doubt, for Sidney 1892 was a year of boundless happiness and triumph. Two years earlier, marriage had appeared to her a form of *felo de se* – fortunately in Sidney the 'death wish' had been strong. The 'partnership' was not only a term which he was the first to coin; it was his love and persistence which had ensured its formation. While she told him: 'However old your coat may be (and that is of no importance) *brush* it! Take care of your voice and pronunciation: it is the chief instrument of influence. Don't talk of "when I am Prime Minister"; it jars on sensitive ears,¹⁶⁶ he could promise:

You shall feel my arm under yours whenever you are tired; my strength around you whenever you are weak; my love embracing you whenever you are lonely; my skill and knowledge and facility as a basis whenever your finer taste and insight needs a foundation and a background.¹⁶⁷

He saw, as other perceptive men and women came to see, that although if you listed Beatrice's characteristics you would say 'what a horrid woman', there was behind the haughty and exacting, imperious and pious, cruel and insensitive displays – a good, loveable and immensely able person. To begin with she brought less to their relationship than he

did. He was more knowledgeable. He converted her to socialism, and had already anticipated some of the essential features of her argument about the co-operative movement. Her secure income helped him after he had left the Colonial Office, but he had already resolved upon that step before they became engaged. Yet she had come to share his vision. He had insisted that together they could move the world; recast the map of learning; be inventive of new policies and institutions. She shared that faith and that resolve. Their partnership was to last for fifty years: it required only five before promise turned to achievement.

Part IV
The Early Work of the
Partnership 1890–1905

'We are all Socialists now.'

Sir William Harcourt, 1889

'Oh we are all burglars now.'

Sir William Harcourt, 1893

'It will be said of us as it is of Sir Gilbert Parker – in the dead silence of the night you hear a distant but monotonous sound – Sir Gilbert Parker climbing, climbing, climbing.'

Sidney to Beatrice, June 1904

6

Democracy and the Labour Movement 1892–8

Why they wrote the *History of Trade Unionism*—How they wrote it—A measure of their achievement—Towards a re-statement of Democratic Theory—Towards a new political economy—A novel interpretation of the relationship between socialism and the labour movement—The Webbs' influence upon the world of Labour: Mann and Broadhurst: Lenin and Bernstein.

Between 1891 and 1898 the Webbs laid the foundation of labour history and opened the way to the systematic study of labour institutions and of industrial relations. To recall the names of those who might dispute their claim to precedence and pre-eminence is to discover how far the Webbs were from meeting any effective challenge. British industrial conditions had, of course, long aroused the interest and excited the curiosity of foreign observers. Friedrich Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* had included a sketch of labour movements. The Comte de Paris had published a study of *The Trades Unions of England* in 1869. Two years later Dr Lujo Brentano had produced his *On the History and Development of Guilds and the Origin of Trade Unions*. But Engels's work, so far as workers' organisation was concerned, was necessarily slight. The Comte de Paris derived almost all his material from the Reports of the Royal Commission on Labour which sat from 1867 to 1869, and Brentano, despite his real merits, was badly mistaken about the origins and defining features of trade unionism itself. The English authors who attempted large-scale works on labour made little of the historical component, and what they attempted was subject to the same limitations as those found in the works of foreign scholars. Thus, W.T. Thornton's important book, which helped to discredit the wages fund doctrine, followed the Comte de Paris in its heavy reliance on the evidence given to the Royal Commission.¹ The historical chapters of George Howell's *Conflicts of Labour and Capital* (1878) are simply a plagiarism from Brentano, in which renewed

currency is given to the opinion that modern unions are the lineal descendants of the craft guilds. When Beatrice began her investigations into the history of the trade unions the only secondary sources of any value were fragmentary studies of particular unions, of strikes, or of attempts to establish institutions for collective bargaining and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Occasionally there was a short book or monograph that was not to be despised, such as Fynes's *The Miners of Northumberland and Durham*, or the essay in contemporary history by her friends Llewellyn Smith and Nash, *The Story of the Dockers' Strike*. But usually such help came only in the form of a few articles: Brentano's piece on the Engineers, or Beesly's on the Carpenters and Joiners. The English Positivists had indeed produced several pioneering studies and Frederic Harrison, another loyal friend, had once projected a full-scale study of the English wage-earners.² They were talented people and Sidney and Beatrice fully acknowledged their helpfulness to them during the nineties, but unlike their master, Auguste Comte, they were intellectually short-distance runners, whose stamina was used up in articles, essays and reviews. When Beatrice was working on the co-operative movement she had at least the benefit of the earlier work by George Jacob Holyoake; there was no Holyoake when it came to writing a general *History of Trade Unionism*.

Yet to establish the Webbs' status as pioneers in the field of labour history in general and trade union history in particular is to do them too little honour. The *History of Trade Unionism* of 1894, with its companion volume, *Industrial Democracy*, still stand as the greatest achievements in the fields of study that they inaugurated. There has been no want of able successors, many of whom the Webbs inspired and encouraged. Yet after fully a century, no one has attempted to supplant their general *History of Trade Unionism*, nor has anyone succeeded in producing a work which could compare in point of originality and comprehensiveness with *Industrial Democracy*, which has been described by a distinguished authority as 'the best single book ever written on the British Trade Unions'.³ Despite many valuable elaborations and emendations, the terminology and the categories first devised by the Webbs have remained in use. Despite severe criticisms – some of them entirely justified – the chronology they established still organises research. It was not only in the nineteen-fifties that students began to become aware of how far they had taken for granted a conceptual framework which they had received from Sidney and Beatrice. Whitehead, with pardonable exaggeration, described the history of philosophy as 'a footnote to Plato'; with considerably less exaggeration the history of British trade unionism has been a footnote to the Webbs.

Yet the massive and incontestable character of Sidney and Beatrice's achievement as historians has seriously obscured their significance as political theorists. In the eighteen-nineties they were wrestling with the 'problem of democracy'. Their conclusions on this subject have hardly

received from historians of political thought the attention they deserve. It will be shown that – far from reiterating the conclusions of John Stuart Mill – they anticipated the discoveries of Anglo-American political scientists and Italian sociologists. Their appreciation of the importance of the permanent civil service in representative government placed them far ahead of Bagehot, as Bagehot's recognition of the crucial importance of the cabinet placed him in front of Mill. Not only did they use trade union experience to draw attention to the place of the salaried officer and professional expert in the formal theory of representative government; they established the basic principles of a sociology of working-class leadership. Long before Roberto Michels demonstrated 'the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy',⁴ the Webbs showed a clear appreciation of many of the administrative and psychological factors which caused officials to acquire powers which the members never intended to confer upon them. They were not inclined to share Michels's pessimism, nor were they tempted to treat tendencies as 'iron laws', but they saw how full-time leadership changed the social status of workmen, and could engender conflicts of outlook and interests between the leaders and those to whom they were formally accountable.

These studies of working-class history and institutions allowed the Webbs to attain new insights into the relationship between socialism and the labour movement. They challenged received opinions about the transition to socialism, and they disturbed the assumptions of the orthodox concerning the character of the future socialist society. Their conclusions lent little support to the view that the working class would spontaneously pass from sectional trade-union consciousness to socialist class consciousness. Socialist ideas were not the peculiar possession of the working class, nor would they be arrived at by the workers' own unaided efforts. And just as socialism was not destined to replace the ameliorative efforts of co-operation or trade unionism during the transition period, so it would not render them redundant after socialism itself had been established. The *function of the great voluntary associations of working men and women* would certainly change with the progress of social democracy, but it was not to be expected that the need for them would vanish or that their importance would appreciably diminish. This was a perspective which made the socialist presence in the labour movement, and the possibility of a labour alliance, much more acceptable to working-class leaders than the impatience or indifference with which their efforts had hitherto been received by socialist theoreticians. It allowed the Webbs to win, for a time and in a measure, the confidence of the most diverse workers' representatives, and to engage in collaboration not only with Tom Mann but also with Henry Broadhurst. The Webbs made no immediate practical contribution to the formation of the Labour Party, in the guise of the Labour Representation Committee, in 1900, but they did a good deal to contribute

to the climate of opinion in which that party could take shape. The origins of the Labour Party have, indeed, been considered much too exclusively in terms of those who were personally or organisationally 'present and correct', to the neglect of modes of thought and feeling that were relevant without being so easily recognised or mustered. Just as Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald were imperfectly representative of the sentimental Walt Whitman–Edward Carpenter–ethical society tendency, so Edward Pease was an inadequate representative of the hard-headed opportunism of the Webbs. These two pervasive tendencies complemented one another within the Labour Party, giving to its dedicated pedestrianism a high moral tone. Nor was the influence of the Webbs' vision of socialism and the labour movement confined to Britain. Bernstein and Lenin helped to introduce their researches to the German and to the Russian publics, and it can be shown that both revisionism and Bolshevism bore considerable traces of a close and critical reading of their work.

These large contentions concerning the Webbs' intellectual achievement in the eighteen-nineties might be thought to supply quite a sufficient basis for detailed discussion and examination. However, Sidney and Beatrice saw themselves as doing more than opening a new field in historical research, or recasting democratic theory, or reinterpreting the relationship between socialism and the labour movement – they aspired to write a work for their own time that would be as influential and definitive as *The Wealth of Nations* – to create a new political economy, to draw anew the map of learning. Where the ancient cartographers had written, 'Here there be savages', they wrote the history of labour. They explored the rainforests that the political economists had defoliated and petrified. But the Webbs did nothing in particular in the 1890s which began to matter half as much to them as what they fancied themselves to be accomplishing in general. This was to be a new way, the assimilation of the social to the natural sciences, a new science of politics which the entire revolutionary tradition acknowledged to be the prerequisite of a new world. Indeed, they were not concerned with a new discipline merely, but a new relation between disciplines; and not with thought only, but with thought in its relations to action: with living as well as with learning. And they tried to create the institutions as well as the conceptual framework of the new third culture. In this they failed, for their ambition outran their daring and perhaps exceeded their time and their chances. They distrusted abstract economics, but they were unable to establish a new political economy. The old political economy was disintegrating thanks to the work of Marshall on the one side and the Webbs on the other. Marshall – proceeding from the general to the particular – from the One to the Many – found it hard to get beyond that theoretically ubiquitous, but socially insignificant being, the 'marginal shepherd'. The Webbs wanted to reverse his procedure. They made the sons of poverty assemble, but only

in the end to show them prostrate before the marginal productivity theory of wages. The effectiveness of trade unions, their ability to raise wages, depended upon their contribution to efficiency – although efficiency was conceived in broad and imaginative terms. They saw themselves – in Beatrice’s language – doing what the economists had failed to do: comparing the ‘order of thought’ with the ‘order of things’. But however fruitful this may have been, it did not result in the highest kind of achievement: the transformation of the order of thought itself. They created a new school of economics and political science, not a new political economy. In consequence, their theory of the labour movement became excessively institutional, and they failed to supply a theory of economic growth and social accounting adequate to their vision of the social democracy of the future.

During the 1880s Sidney had, in his lectures on trade unions, considered the theoretical possibility that unions might confer upon the workers some of the monopolistic advantages enjoyed by the controllers of the other factors of production. The rise of the new unionism of the unskilled, and in particular the drama of the great strike at the London docks, had compelled socialists to attend to trade union problems. Webb had himself been actively engaged in securing subscriptions to the dockers’ strike fund.⁵ That great conflict of 1889 had already made inconceivable the indifference which the Fabians, in common with many other socialists, had treated the trade unions only a few months earlier. However, it was certainly Beatrice, rather than Sidney, who first projected a study of trade unionism. Her study of the co-operative movement had obliged her to consider its relation to trade unionism. These relations were, in practice, by no means entirely amicable. Disputes arose over the wages and conditions of co-operative society employees, and there was a disposition on both sides to treat the two great voluntary movements of working men and women as rivals and competitors, rather than as complementary institutions. Beatrice’s ‘discovery’ that the true sphere of co-operation’s usefulness lay in the organisation of consumers rather than producers was calculated to reduce rivalry with the unions. In the early nineties both Sidney and she went to great pains to persuade unionists and co-operators that they ought to abandon all pretensions to organise the process of production and look instead to the growth of municipal and state enterprise.⁶ If a careful investigation into the history and structure of the co-operative movement could lead to rewarding guides to action, the same lesson might be expected to derive from a comparable study of the unions. The good and evil, scope and limits, of trade unionism were not to be settled by reasoning *a priori*, but by careful investigation and research. The Webb way was not to present policy recommendations from on high, but to make them proceed – or appear to proceed – from an objective examination of the subject’s own success and failure.

Beatrice had first clearly projected a study of trade unionism early in 1891 at the time of her estrangement from Sidney. After their engagement in May she continued to bear the brunt of the work, spending much of her time in the industrial North, interviewing, attending meetings and searching for records. Until March 1892 Sidney was too preoccupied with winding up his civil service career, and developing his new ones in journalism and politics, to give her more than incidental advice and assistance. However in January 1892 they did appoint a joint secretary-cum-research assistant, F.W. Galton, a skilled engraver and metalworker. He was a student at the Working Men's College and was, as Sidney remarked, one of his 'children'.⁷ To begin with, all Galton's efforts had to be concentrated in the election campaign at Deptford, but after this had been brought to a successful conclusion he went up to help Beatrice in the North. The fact that she constantly travelled about in the company of a young unmarried man and even stayed in the same public houses with him caused some of her sisters almost as much anxiety and dismay as her impending marriage to Sidney. Galton, for his part, found Beatrice a much more exacting employer than the other one. Every weakness and shortcoming was subjected to merciless criticism. He had, she decided, to be properly trained, and in view of Sidney's fatherly and indulgent attitude towards him this task must largely devolve upon her.

Until the time of their marriage Sidney was continually reproaching himself about 'The Book'. He had insisted that this was to be given the highest priority in their partnership and yet she was doing almost all the work. She was frequently exhausted by the labour of collecting material and distressed by the difficulties of reducing it to order. He swore that after their marriage the main burden should pass from her shoulders to his, and so it did. By the time the first draft of the book was in preparation, around the end of 1892, Beatrice was becoming painfully aware that it was Sidney who was doing most of the work and her complaints about her own 'parasitism' led to their first – not very serious – quarrels. The fact that first Beatrice and then Sidney played a predominant part in the work has to be understood not merely in terms of their temporary circumstances but also of what proved to be their permanent roles. Broadly speaking, Beatrice began their books and Sidney finished them. She was the initiator of this and most of their subsequent works. She had a keen eye for the gaps in learning and was bold and imaginative in her proposals for filling them. She was also pre-eminent with respect to those skills which are most serviceable in the earliest stages of historical and social research. She knew how to gain the confidence of trade union officers, how to get them to talk, part with their records, and let her watch the institution at work. Thus she was by special resolution admitted to the historic rules revision meeting of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.⁸ More than once she attended a

conference of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, to the great astonishment of journalists, all of whom had been excluded. 'Sitting for five or six hours in a stinking room with an open sewer on one side and ill-ventilated urinals on the other is not', she noted, 'an invigorating occupation.' Yet she considered that the experience was fully justified from the research standpoint. 'I am glad I came. These two days debate have made me better appreciate the sagacity, good temper and fair-mindedness of these miners than I could have done by reading endless reports ...'⁹ Nor was she any less successful in establishing friendly relations with the first-level leadership in the pit villages than she was with Ben Pickard, whom she privately considered to be a 'cross between a bulldog and a pig'.¹⁰ She was no less studiously attentive at a branch meeting of the Oldham Weavers, than at the Executive Committee of the Cotton Spinners. In chance conversation, and in the ordinary affairs of life, Beatrice was apt to be quick to pride. She could 'quite accidentally' remark to a well-meaning young Tory: 'We shall not wish to convert you, my dear Bill, you are not up to our standard;'¹¹ but as an investigator she trained herself to be infinitely patient and sympathetic. She endured endless irrelevancies, let error pass uncorrected and prejudice have its head, in the hope that she would earn access to the information she was seeking. And in the content of research, if not always of 'persuasive entertaining', her artfulness did not betray her. She cultivated the old unionists 'because they have the records,'¹² but even a wily and experienced operator like Henry Broadhurst with his 'greasy, unctuous, middle-class, wire-pulling manner' would draw up his chair, look benignly through his 'fat-surrounded eye' and start to confide in her.¹³ Her ulterior motives did not tell against her because she was deeply interested in personal character and genuinely enjoyed the gossip. Besides, as she acknowledged, it sometimes helps to be a woman.¹⁴ For example, she noted that Robert Knight, the autocratic leader of the boiler-makers, considered that a woman could not be interested or involved in internal intrigues. At first she would not be taken seriously, but before he knew where he was, an official of this sort could find himself absorbed in the problem she was investigating and which he had never reflected upon before in this way.

Thus Beatrice's strength lay in her unusual success as an interviewer who could win the confidence of her respondents, and persuade them to give her privileged access to research material. She was far less effective when it came to recording and ordering the material and putting it into its final form. She not only found 'serious' writing difficult, she could not even write legibly – a severe drawback to literary collaboration. Moreover she was easily wearied by sustained thought or reading and (like many others) felt humbled by Sidney's apparently unlimited capacity for work. She was vexed by the fact that he appeared to be doing all the solid labour. She used to console herself with the reflection

that she was the originator, the architect and the inspirer. She once publicly explained:

He does the work and I do the inspiration. That I think will be the ultimate position – women to inspire everything and the men to do it. Women have resource and intuition, and more audacity than men, but men have the greater capacity for hard work. My husband and I work together. I bring him the material and he deals with it. As he writes, I sit beside him with my notes. He criticises my plan and I criticise his execution, and so we get on by pulling each other's work to pieces.¹⁵

The concluding part of this passage is not easily reconciled with the defiant over-simplification of its opening sentence.

If it is broadly correct to say that Beatrice began the *History of Trade Unionism* (and most of their other books) while Sidney finished them, it would also be true to observe that she was the mistress of the 'spoken word' while he was the master of the 'written one'. While she excelled as an interviewer and could in conversation make a fresh interpretation take fire, he knew how to tear the heart out of a document, record it, remember it, and furnish it as an instance or use it as a connecting link. Most of their celebrated notes were made in his swift, legible hand. The first drafts, once they had passed beyond a set of headings or propositions, generally came from him. Because his knowledge was so large, his memory so retentive, his energy so prodigious, it was sometimes assumed that he was insensitive and without the creative spark. Such an assumption has no rational basis, and can be explained by Sidney's special kind of selflessness on the one side and a sharp sense of inferiority on the other. He had no interests or ambitions or even identity of his own which he wished to assert within their partnership or beyond it. She needed to reflect on their respective contributions. He did not. He delighted in her happiness. Admiring her gifts, he objected only if she called them into question. It is unimaginable that he could ever have been brought to protest against any claim, however, extravagant, that might have been made on behalf of her own creative prowess. But just as she did, in fact, contribute to the execution of their work, so was he a great deal more than a willing and exceedingly powerful horse. In their trade union studies some of the most important argument certainly owed more to his experience and to his suggestions than to hers. From the beginning he was ready to make general comments on problems of structure and method. In September 1891 he was questioning whether she ought to spend so long on Tyneside:

The best knowledge is *comparative* knowledge and, in acquiring it, the *first instances studied are studied under the least advantageous circumstances*. Hence the argument for not trying to *finish* one district before

having seen some others ... You are obviously right to see the pit village. You need not apologise for that; it is an obvious necessity. 'Ça donne de la physiognomie', as a French official once told me. The work, as you hint, is unlimited in possible extent. But we need not necessarily exhaust our material or terminate our researches on the first publication. We might publish two volumes to begin with (one of material) and afterwards go on to deal with other aspects.¹⁶

Even the Webbs themselves could not have precisely determined the contribution of each partner. The pre-eminence of one or the other with reference to particular skills was never equivalent to a monopoly of them. The *History of Trade Unionism and Industrial Democracy* were not, like their *Problems of Modern Industry*, a putting together of separately written chapters. They were the result of a general fusing of minds. Nor should it be forgotten that Galton and others made important contributions to these two books. Had it not been for Galton they would certainly not have been written as quickly as they were. While they were in Netherhall Gardens, Hampstead, during their first months of marriage he used to arrive at 10.00 a.m., and he came earlier after they moved in 1893 to what became the famous workshop and salon, 41 Grosvenor Road. By the time he arrived they had finished breakfast, read the papers and spent an hour or so dealing with correspondence. Over a cigarette they decided on the theme or problem they were going to tackle that morning. Galton went upstairs to sort out the relevant notes. When he came back he might find Beatrice striding about the room, suggesting some hypothesis or other, while Sidney introduced confirmatory or awkward facts and considerations. Then they would sit down, sometimes side by side, on other occasions each at one end of the table, and start to drive through the material. Lunch was at 1.30 and it was unusual for either of the Webbs to touch *The Book* again that day. Four afternoons a week Sidney would rush off to the London County Council while Beatrice strolled on the Heath, went house-hunting or visited Morris to select furniture or wallpaper. Occasionally she joined Galton for another couple of hours work before Sidney came back for supper. But digging up specific facts, checking references and generally taking charge of everything which could be reduced to a routine fell to the lot of their devoted research assistant. The talk over the simple meat supper was of LCC doings, or of an interview with a cabinet minister, or of some projected reform. Sometimes they would entertain a few working men friends, but more commonly they spent the evening alone in 'peaceful happiness' while he read to her or worked at LCC matters.¹⁷

This sort of procedure would hardly do when a book was ripening. When this point was reached they went off with Bernard Shaw and Graham Wallas to stay either at the Argoed or else at some cottage in

the country. It was at the Argoed in September 1893 that Wallas severely criticised the first chapter of their *History*. In consequence Beatrice reordered it, while Sidney wrote to her draft. Meanwhile Shaw worked almost every morning on the book and largely remodelled the third chapter. 'Sidney certainly has devoted friends,' remarked Beatrice, 'but then it is a common understanding with all these men that they use each other up when necessary – that is the basis of the influence of the Fabian Society in contemporary political thought. The little group are practical communists in all the fruits of their labour.'¹⁸ This 'practical communism' was applied to *Industrial Democracy* as well as to its predecessor. However irritated Beatrice became with Shaw's cruelty and vanity towards women (his cold philandering; what she called his 'sexual vanity – delight in being the candle to the moths'), she was deeply impressed by his generosity towards Sidney and herself. 'With extraordinary good nature he will spend days over some part of our work, and an astute reader will quickly divine these chapters which Shaw has corrected and those which he has not – there is a conciseness and a crispness in parts subjected to his pruning knife, lacking elsewhere.'¹⁹

Method – the large shadow which the small body of sociological knowledge casts before it – interested the Webbs almost as much as it has pre-occupied their successors. However, it left Sidney and Beatrice in a less exhausted condition. They tended to reflect about their methods after, rather than before, they employed them.²⁰ Just as they were inclined to confuse social studies with sociology, and sociology with the description of social institutions, so they tended to confuse methods with techniques.²¹ Their naiveté in these matters has been the subject of much harsh speaking. And if one takes seriously the final account which they offered of their approach to trade union studies there is, indeed, a vision to dizzy and appal. In 1932 they recalled:

When we had actually completed and published our *History of Trade Unionism* (1894) after three years' collection of facts from all industries in all parts of the kingdom, which we had arranged more or less chronologically, we found to our surprise that, apart from the vague generalities in common use, we had no systematic and definite theory or vision of how trade unionism actually operated, or what exactly it effected. It was not till we had completely resorted all our innumerable sheets of paper according to subjects, thus bringing together all the facts relating to each subject, whatever the trade concerned, or the place, or the date – and had shuffled and reshuffled these sheets according to various tentative hypotheses – that a clear, comprehensive and verifiable theory of the working and results of trade unionism emerged in our minds to be embodied, after further researches by way of verification, in our *Industrial Democracy* (1897).²²

The view that writing history involved collecting all the facts – or at any rate a very large number of them – was an opinion the Webbs shared with Acton, and which E.H. Carr has termed ‘the nineteenth-century heresy’.²³ They did repeatedly talk as if there was a ‘hard core’ of fact in history and a ‘surrounding pulp’ of disputable interpretation. They evidently imagined that their *History* constituted such a ‘hard core’, while *Industrial Democracy* corresponded to the ‘surrounding pulp’ – save that the Webbs were not prepared to allow that there was much room for dispute, and they clearly supposed that writing economics or sociology was a higher order of intellectual activity than doing history:

With history, [wrote Beatrice] the threads are supplied by the chronological order – you can weave these threads into any pattern; bring one of them to the surface and then another. But with analysis of facts, the threads are hypotheses: to be tested in strength and consistency before you dare weave them into conclusions and illustrate them with facts.²⁴

This passage certainly implies a naive realist view of history, in which historical events are considered as pre-existing happenings that occupy a chronological order, which it is the job of historians to come upon. Accordingly interpretation is thought of in the arty-crafty term of ‘patterns’ to be woven, reduced to an affair of art rather than of science. The Webbs, it has been asserted, were mere narrative historians, indifferent to explanation. They set out to tell a story, and they were negligent when it came to ‘the primary economic forces’. Consequently their chronology – although influential – is alleged to be seriously misleading. They were without the analytic tools at the disposal of contemporary historians.²⁵

This type of criticism has a limited validity, but it is very much more limited than those who embrace it imagine. When one is entering virgin territory there is generally so much to see that one can return with helpful maps and useful reports without having first deeply pondered what one is going to look for. But there will be neither map nor report if one tries to describe everything. As historians the Webbs would have disappeared without trace had they really supposed that all facts are created equal, and that each fact has an inalienable right to speak for itself. There are occasions when the Webbs saw this quite clearly themselves. Beatrice wrote:

No doubt the sequence involved in history is as artificial as are the groups involved in classification. How silly it is to suppose that the facts ever tell their own story – it is all a matter of arranging them so that they may tell something – and the arrangement is a purely subjective matter.²⁶

Doubtless this observation is as inadequate from one side as the earlier one is from the other. The subtle dialectic between facts and interpretations is not to be described easily or briefly. Yet it shows an awareness of the problem. Those who venture to write for the first time the histories of civilisations or classes or movements cannot but be guided by established schools of historical interpretation and by analogies drawn from other departments of historical learning.

A general *History of Trade Unionism* might have been written from the standpoint of its leaders and heroes. Without organising their work around this theme, the Webbs made important concessions to this Carlyle-like approach. They accorded a disproportionate amount of their space to trade unionism's great men, particularly when they saw in them precursors of their own style of activity. Thus it would be generally agreed that they exaggerated the contribution made by Francis Place to the repeal of the Combination Acts. Then again, trade union history might be written by analogy from military history as a record of battles fought, and the Webbs did not fail to chronicle the bigger and more consequential strikes and lockouts. But it was not in the changing fortunes of the struggle, nor even in the conditions of peace or victory that they found a unifying theme. Theoretically it would have been possible for Sidney and Beatrice to have written their history as social history; to have interpreted trade union development in terms of the 'making of the English working class', to have related the progress of sectional and general movements to the shifting state within the class and to the vicissitudes of class consciousness. They were, of course, alive to the contrasts between the unionism of the artisans, the factory workers and the unskilled. It would have been impossible to neglect these considerations in the early nineties when, at the TUC, the battle was being fought out between the 'old' unionism of the craftsman and the new, general and industrial unionism of the semi-skilled and the unskilled. Yet they made no sustained attempt to work out how changes in the economy, in the organisational structure and in the social attitudes of different strata bore upon the character and the fortune of the trade union movement. They denied that there could be a history of the manners and the customs of the working people. History, they argued, must 'if it is to be history at all, follow the course of continuous organisations.'²⁷ When the general history of British trade unionism comes to be rewritten it will certainly be done in terms of manners and customs, and of the socio-economic life upon which trade unionism acted and reacted. But there is a sense in which discovery must precede explanation, and until the institutional history of labour had been written it was hardly possible to write that social history which is causally prior to it, for the sufficient reason that the number of facts to be ordered can be multiplied indefinitely. Yet even this proposition has an air of patronising magnanimity. The way in which

we write history is not, as some pundits innocently suppose, a mere matter of the analytic tools and instruments that other disciplines have graciously placed at our disposal. When it is said, 'If history is to provide explanations, it must be equivalent to sociological studies of the past,'²⁸ it is forgotten that it is equally true (and it is not entirely true) that if sociologists are to supply explanations, they must be equivalent to historical studies of the present. In the writing of history the causes we pursue are at least as relevant as the techniques that are to hand. The Webbs wrote the *History of Trade Unionism* as part of the political history of England; they wrote an institutional history, because they hoped and expected that organised labour would transform the world. It is not to belittle the magnificent achievements of some contemporary historians of labour to point out that it is a falling away of faith in the organised labour movement that has accelerated and directed many of their researches. As much as the Webbs – as much as all vital historical work – their effort has been directed by a pre-occupation with present rather than past experience. This is not a reproach. This is what distinguishes the historian from the antiquarian.

The Webbs saw trade union history as part of political history. Their chronology was shaped with reference to two major types of political considerations: the changing relations between trade unions and the state, and changes in the government and administration of the unions themselves. Far from setting themselves no higher task than supplying a readable and accurate narrative, they wanted to accustom trade union readers to think about their progress in the past in terms that would condition their programmes in the future. They therefore placed special emphasis upon the struggle for a secure legal status and the method of legislative enactment, along with a careful consideration of the increasing scale of unionism and the growing division of labour and specialisation of function that distinguished its internal government. This did not cause them to neglect entirely other considerations, or to ignore the 'primary economic factors'. Thus, in their account of the origins of trade unionism the Webbs went out of their way to rebut the 'institutionalist' approach of Brentano, who sought to establish their continuity with the craft guilds. The Webbs convincingly demonstrated that there was no direct affiliation between unions and guilds.²⁹ The presence of certain common features could not be allowed to obscure the profound difference in structure and in function. The differences between these institutions had to be understood in terms of the transformation of the journeyman into a fully fledged wage-labourer, without prospect of personal property in the means of production. They saw that this state of affairs could precede the rise of machine industry. The growth of the division of labour, and an increase in the minimum amount of capital required to establish a business, were, in the Webbs' opinion, the causative factors behind the

transformation of occasional meetings of journeymen into settled institutions of wage-earners.³⁰ They made good use of comparative method to support their conclusion. For example, they showed that the worsted industry in the West Riding produced trade unionism on lines already familiar in the West Country while weavers in the West Riding, where capitalist relations were relatively undeveloped, remained unorganised:

It is easy to understand how the massing together in factories of regiments of men all engaged in the same trade, facilitated and promoted the formation of journeymen's trade societies. But with the cotton spinners as with the tailors, the rise of permanent trade combinations is to be ascribed, in a final analysis, to the definite separation between the functions of the capitalist entrepreneur and the manual worker.³¹

Having discussed the origins of trade unionism, the Webbs proceeded to divide trade union history into four periods: the struggle for existence (1799–1825); its revolutionary period (1829–1842); the age of the 'New Model' unionism (1843–1875); and the rise of the new unionism of the unskilled in the late eighties. The exact dating suggests that they imagined that one period could be precisely marked off from another. In fact they were well aware that this was not the case, and they tried to explain some of the conflicts within the movement by reference to the presence of vestigial elements left over from earlier times. Moreover, they recognised that they could not do justice to their subject if they neglected important sectional developments which could not always be neatly put away within these big boxes.

The details of this chronology were already coming under some criticism in the Webbs' lifetime, but it is only since their death that a minority of trade union historians have declared that it is structured 'around obvious formal events', and that it is misleading and useless. Yet their cry for a rephrasing of history which will 'satisfy the standards of contemporary historians' has not been answered. There has been plenty of detailed criticism, but no large-scale reconstruction.

The Webbs' critics ought to take care before they complain about their alleged attention to 'obvious formal events' lest they betray their own want of the historical imagination. What made these events 'obvious'? To whom did they become obvious and when? How much force has the word 'formal' here?

It is sometimes said that the Combination Acts were not crucial, as is supposedly implied by the Webbs' styling the years 1799–1825 'The Struggle for Existence'. Parliament and the courts had other resources against unionism at this time, and were in no way dependent upon these measures. Nor did they bear down with any uniformly oppressive weight

upon organised workmen. On the contrary, numerous instances can be given of trade societies that continued to function openly and undisturbed. Had the Combination Acts been as important as the Webbs imagined, it is hardly possible to understand how they could have been repealed with Parliament scarcely noticing what it was doing. Thus the authors of a work which aspires to bring the Webbs up to date complain that

This story of legal emancipation, is sometimes written as if the unions depended on the law for their existence, and had wrested every element of their legalisation from an unwilling and hostile legislature, dominated by a class implacably opposed to trade unionism. Both these suppositions are incorrect.³²

A careful reading of the second chapter of the *History of Trade Unionism* shows that Sidney and Beatrice were well aware of the variety of oppressive instruments which were at the disposal of the state and the employers. They also emphasised that in certain trades and regions unionism enjoyed a comparative immunity from the severities of the law, and pointed out that there were numerous metropolitan craft trades that have 'never been more completely organised' than they were in these years.³³ They placed special emphasis on legal constraints and penalties because they believed that 'it was a change of industrial policy on the part of the Government that brought all trades into line, and for the first time produced what can be properly called a Trade Union Movement.'³⁴ The point is taken in one full-scale study of the period: 'It was Pitt, who by passing the Combination Acts, unwittingly brought the Jacobin tradition into association with the illegal unions.'³⁵ The Webbs stressed the immense significance of the state, simultaneously withdrawing all the paternal protection that it had accorded to workmen who had petitioned for their rights while subjecting their associations to a general prohibition. Both Professor Aspinall and E.P. Thompson have made the same observation with immense force and effect.³⁶ The Webbs' critics have been beside the point here as elsewhere, because they ignore Sidney and Beatrice's avowed intention of writing a general political history of a movement, rather than a detailed account of the industrial vicissitudes of particular trades.

There is a more substantial objection to the Webbs' characterisation of 1829-42 as 'The Revolutionary Period'. They undoubtedly exaggerated the personal role of Robert Owen, and in so far as they equated revolutionary unionism with general unionism, they failed to notice that the first attempts at this came in 1818 not in 1829.

This last correction was clearly made out by G.D.H. Cole.³⁷ It is also to Cole that the honour belongs of having made the first significant revision of their third period: the age of the new spirit and the new model, the

domination of the trade union world by national craft unions based on centralised finance, the principle of high contributions and high benefits; and wage policy based on attempts to control the supply of labour. Despite one defiant charge that the 'new model' must be dismissed as an 'historical fiction',³⁸ the Webbs' treatment of craft unionism in the third quarter of the nineteenth century is generally allowed to be still the best single exposition of the subject. Cole – wiser than some of his successors – did not question the authoritative account of the characteristics of the 'new model', but confined himself to demonstrating that its writ did not run as widely as the Webbs suggested; that the principle of 'amalgamation' was not necessarily associated with industrial pacifism and that George Potter (a *bête noire* of the Webbs) was a more consequential figure than they were inclined to allow.³⁹ H.A. Clegg, who is otherwise prone to fall into the trap of considering the Webbs' achievement in terms of his own interests and objectives rather than theirs, makes one further substantial correction when he suggests that Sidney and Beatrice failed to realise how far, in the classic craft unions, central financial controls were compatible with local autonomy in trade policy. In their *History* – as distinct from *Industrial Democracy* – they made light of unilateral regulation by means of which craft unionists, without engaging in collective bargaining, but falling back on out-of-work benefits, imposed their will upon employers in relation to workloads. As Clegg argues, this omission leaves their readers unprepared for the great conflicts which were soon to break out over job control.⁴⁰

If one passed from a consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of their characterisation of periods to their detailed treatment of men and events, one would be struck by the general richness and reliability of the *History* as a source, despite its occasional errors and omissions. Of course they made mistakes, even when they were discussing the mid-Victorian years which they understood so well. Yet Frederic Harrison, who had played a prominent part in the sixties and seventies, could confess to them that he was surprised 'how much it tells me that is new to me, and how fully it explains movements in which I took part, but never till now have understood as a whole and in all their effects.'⁴¹ Thus, they gave particular attention (rightly) to the building trades, but did not so much as notice Richard Harnott, the remarkable leader of the stonemasons.⁴² They condemn (rightly, despite attempts at revision) George Potter, the 'strike-jobbing' enemy of the 'Junta', but they do not manage to describe his relationship to the *Bee-hive* newspaper quite correctly.⁴³ They make Karl Marx read the Inaugural Address to the first meeting of the International, and they left this error substantially uncorrected even after Beesly had told them that Marx's pronunciation of English made it impossible for him to address a large meeting.⁴⁴ They overestimated (perhaps deliberately) the

role of John Burns and Tom Mann in the rise of the 'new unionism', while they explain the decline of the movement by the onset of a depression that did not begin until after the decline had started.

Matters such as these are the concerns of professional historians. It is more important to consider criticisms of a less technical order. The charge has been made from the Left that the Webbs adopted a 'superior person's' attitude towards the working people, while critics on the Right have argued that they tried to draw the wrong morals from the experience they recorded.

The Webbs would have been surprised by the reproach that they were lacking in a sympathetic insight into their subject. As Beatrice began to find her way through trade union archives she did, indeed, reflect that: 'There is something very pathetic about the records – the struggle with the archaic spirit in every union. The miserable, petty passions which are always threatening to subvert the unions; and the crude economics of the leaders.' Yet she continued:

But on the whole they have been just as right as the employers in their economics – perhaps righter in their economics than the professors. Does not this arise from the fact that they – the union leaders – have had the right object in view: the making of Man, whereas the economists and the employers have had the making of commodities?

If there were occasions when she privately expressed impatience with workers' representatives (the Derbyshire miners' officials were 'stupid, stupid, stupid, like the men!'),⁴⁵ there were many others when she was roused to unqualified admiration and respect. In their *History*, and still more in the companion volume, they showed a profound insight into the problems and attitudes of the organised working class and transcended the narrow horizons of bourgeois respectability. They remarked that

No discovery is more astounding to the middle-class investigator than the good natured tolerance with which a Trade Union will, year after year, re-elect officers who are well known to be hopeless drunkards. The rooted dislike which working men have to 'do a man out of his job' is strengthened, in the case of a trade union official, by a generous recognition of the fact that his service of his fellows has unfitted him to return to manual labour.⁴⁶

They paid tribute both in public and in private to the high qualities and elements of greatness that they discovered in trade union leaders of the most various types and schools: to Burt, to Burns, to Mann. They pointed out that the trade union officer has to add to personal self-control

‘strength and independence of character, a real devotion to the class from which he has sprung, and a sturdy contempt for the luxury and “gentility” of those with whom he will be brought in contact.’⁴⁷

Far from suspecting that they showed too little sympathy and respect for trade unionists, the Webbs were fearful lest the influence of their work would be diminished as a result of the reader detecting the bias in their favour. The criticisms that have subsequently been made of them on this account largely arise from the same source as those concerning the structure and chronology of their book: they showed an excessive respect and regard for stable institutions while adopting a superior and condescending attitude to the relatively unorganised, ephemeral, fitful movements of protest and revolt. When it came to handling these developments the Webbs certainly were prone to the ‘superior person’ attitude. There can be little doubt that Thompson had Sidney and Beatrice, among others, in mind when, in his *The Making of the English Working Class*, he declared that his purpose was to ‘rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” handloom weaver, the “utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott from the enormous condescension of posterity.’⁴⁸ The Webbs understood the tragedy of these people, but they understood it from ‘without’. Of men petitioning Parliament against the introduction of new machinery they wrote: ‘The artisans had a grievance – perhaps the worst that any class can have – the degradation of their standard of livelihood by circumstances which enormously increased the productivity of their labour. But they mistook the remedy.’⁴⁹ They thought the workers ‘slow’ in seeing how they needed to respond to the break-up of eighteenth-century state regulation of industry.⁵⁰ Luddism was an infantile disorder to be dismissed in a sentence. The moderation and restraint of the labour aristocracy was favourably compared with the ‘petulant rebellions of hunger strikers’,⁵¹ and the ‘puerile and sometimes criminal’ practice of mystic initiation rites and fearful oaths.⁵² They assumed without discussion or serious investigation that machine-breaking was a blind reaction, as irrational as it was ineffectual. Labour historians now recognise that this was a partly mistaken – and wholly inadequate – conclusion.⁵³ Similarly, when the Webbs discussed Owenism and Chartism there was a tendency to adopt the ‘don’t-let-it-happen-again’ tone of a sententious schoolmaster. Owen and his supporters are marked down for failing to master ‘the law of economic rent’; while Chartism, although ‘made respectable by sincerity, devotion, and even heroism in the rank and file ... was disgraced by the fustian of ... its orators and the political and economic quackery of its pretentious and incompetent leaders, whose jealousies and intrigues ... finally brought it to naught.’⁵⁴

In short, the Webbs were at their best when they were discussing, not ‘the Democracy’ of the first half of the nineteenth century with its fierce

protests and millenarist expectations, but the institutionalised democracies of the second half, in whose increasing membership and efficiency they saw the measure of trade union progress. They were inclined to explain the passing from one style of movement to the other in excessively intellectualist terms. They thought it had to be understood by 'the spread of education' and 'more practical counsels', and they took 'the effect of economic changes' to be a secondary consideration.⁵⁵ This helps to account for their failure to approach the workers responding to the predicaments of the repressive and revolutionary periods with the 'caution and humility' that they might otherwise have done.⁵⁶ However the main source of this failure lay deeper – in Beatrice's alarmed distrust of turbulent crowds; in Sidney's scepticism about the practical usefulness of the sacrifice on the Cross; in a profound conviction that social progress must come gradually through and around going institutional concerns.

The charge brought by critics on the Right, that the Webbs drew wrong practical lessons from the experience they described, is most conveniently discussed in relation to *Industrial Democracy*, a companion volume which fully worked out their view on the political and economic implications of trade unionism, and developed the few programmatic suggestions made in the *History* into a coherent body of doctrine.

The Webbs had opened their *History* with a definition of a trade union as 'a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their employment.'⁵⁷ In *Industrial Democracy* they set out first to describe how these institutions were governed; how slowly and painfully the workers had discovered how to reconcile administrative efficiency with popular control. Second, they supplied an extremely detailed account of how they functioned, identifying and describing the methods of mutual insurance, collective bargaining (a term which they were the first to coin), legal enactment, and the wide number of restrictions and devices that would now be called 'unilateral' or 'autonomous' job regulations. They showed that these methods had different implications and rested on different assumptions. The first three depended on what they termed 'the device of the Common Rule', and assumed that individual bargaining tended to depress the conditions of the wage-earners' working life to the lowest level. By contrast, the device of the 'restriction of numbers' – the limitation of entry into a particular trade – was not a universal feature of trade unionism. They attempted to disentangle the conflicting policies of trade unionism in reference to three doctrines: of vested interests, of supply and demand, of the living wage. In the third section of their work they tried to evaluate the economic implications of these methods. Here they saw themselves as offering a new, realistic and inductive analysis of the business world. In so far as they succeeded in depicting the economy in terms of a network of

bargains, made in imperfect markets, in which the impulse to cheapness was transmitted from one stage of bargaining to the next until – with all its accumulated weight – it settled like an incubus upon the isolated workman's means of subsistence, they advanced understanding. But however salutary their heavy emphasis on market imperfections, they pointed to (rather than anticipated) the work of E.H. Chamberlin and Joan Robinson in the 1930s, and the more recent theory of countervailing power elaborated by J.K. Galbraith. They took the existing conceptual framework of economics into closer relation to the real world, but they did not revolutionise that framework, nor did they even manage to add to it or reorder it. They simply laid hold of the Marshallian marginal productivity theory of wages and related it, not to trade union policy conceived a priori, but to actual policies pursued. In the final part of the book they completed their elaboration of the new theory of democracy, and discussed the place of trade unions in the transition to a future socialist state.

Industrial Democracy is the most original and comprehensive book ever written about the English trade unions. Its riches are such that even more than one hundred years after the first edition it can still suggest fresh lines of research. It was wonderfully architected – always one of the strengths of the Webbs' literary work. By enclosing all their research within a discussion of democracy, they brought the reader back to his starting-point, but at a higher level, and in such a way that everything they had taught him was recalled and effectively deployed in the conclusion. But although they were marvellously successful in organising a vast amount of seemingly disparate material, their arrangements had certain defects and was open to some objections. Thus, by beginning with trade union government and by treating the unions of the miners and the cotton operators as ideal types towards which the whole trade union world was supposed to be tending, the Webbs cut themselves off from certain insights. Professor H.A. Turner has shown how rewarding it can be to relate trade union organisation more closely to function, and to consider carefully the implications of the historical order in which what he terms 'open' and 'closed' unions emerge in a particular industry.⁵⁸ But the reader will hardly expect too close, critical examination of *Industrial Democracy* in these pages. He must be content with a discussion of those themes that reveal most about the Webbs, and that bear most directly on their public life.

Whereas the *History* opened with a clear definition of a trade union, the Webbs made no comparable attempt to stipulate what they understood by industrial democracy. They used the term in three different ways. In the first part of the book it simply means the procedures and institutions of trade union government. Elsewhere they made it stand for the extension of public control and ownership to successive branches of economic life so as to confer upon the citizen a similar control over industrial affairs

to that which he was supposed to exercise over political ones. In the last part of the volume the term is used in such a way as to incorporate and synthesise these two earlier definitions. It comes to mean a system of industrial relations in which arbitrary and irresponsible power has been replaced by the continual adjustment of interests between the leaders accountable to the workers on the one hand, and the public servants accountable to the community as a whole on the other.

The Webbs introduced their new theory of democracy by accepting the disarmingly familiar proposition of Lincoln's: a government of the people, by the people and for the people. They then demonstrated that if the attempt was made to take this literally and confer on everyone an equal voice in the taking of decisions it was bound to break down. They showed that the early English trade unions had tried to practise such a primitive democracy in which every member was to have an equal say in the taking of every decision. Accordingly business was conducted through general meetings, and the simple offices of chairman, secretary, door-keeper and so forth were allocated by rota. These simple arrangements were found to be incompatible with the requirements of a militant struggle against hostile employers and repressive public authorities. They were also inconsistent with the growth of the organisation. The same logic which associated wage-earners together in a town led them to associate in each region, and nationally, and even internationally. The affairs of the society now required that some civil servant, some one member, should devote himself to the increasing secretarial and organisational work – and that some body should come into being charged with shaping policy for the organisation as a whole. Yet the membership was extremely reluctant to accept the need for increasing the division of labour and the specialisation of function. It had resort to the referendum and the initiative and the device of a rota by which each branch in turn would have responsibility for attending to national administration. The Webbs pointed out that the vestiges of these procedures could still be found in the trade union world, but they held that they were all misconceived. If such arrangements were at all effective in retaining popular control, then they were found to lead to bankruptcy or chaos; more usually they resulted in magnifying the very oligarchical control they were designed to prevent. The salaried officer ran rings round inexperienced lay executives and used referenda to legitimise what were, in reality, his personal decisions.

Thus the workers were brought tardily to an understanding that democracy, in organisations of any size, required representative institutions, and they came to see that a representative must not be confused with a mere delegate: 'a vehicle' by which 'the voices' could be mechanically conveyed. But the construction of an effective representative assembly was no easy matter, particularly for workmen. The Webbs were the first to detect the 'cruel irony' that confronted them.

Whatever may be the natural endowment of the workman selected by his comrades to serve as a representative, he starts unequipped with that special training and that general familiarity with administration which will alone enable him to be a competent critic and director of the expert professional. Before he can place himself on a level with the trained official whom he has to control, he must devote his whole time and thought to his new duties, and must therefore give up his old trade. This unfortunately tends to alter his manner of life, his habit of mind, and usually also his intellectual atmosphere to such an extent that he gradually loses that vivid appreciation of the feelings of the man at the bench or the forge, which it is his function to express. There is a certain cruel irony in the problem which accounts, we think, for some of the unconscious exasperation of the wage-earners all over the world against representative institutions. Directly the working-man representative becomes properly equipped for one half of his duties, he ceases to become specially qualified for the other. If he remains essentially a manual worker, he fails to cope with the brain-working officials; if he takes on the character of the brain-worker, he is apt to get out of touch with the constituents whose desires he has to interpret.⁵⁹

Middle-class observers who still declare themselves perplexed by unofficial strikes, and who complain that the unions cannot control their members, might do worse than to ponder this shrewd account of the members' difficulties in controlling their unions.

However the Webbs were not driven, as Roberto Michels was driven, to the conclusion that there were no intentions so pure, nor rules so perfect, that democracy could be proof against 'the iron law of oligarchy'. They found in the federal parliament of the cotton-spinners and the coal-miners a way of escape between the horns of the dilemma. They noticed that these assemblies implicitly recognised the impossibility of reconciling in any one person the conflicting requirements of a representative. Accordingly they sent *both* rank-and-file members who were still working at their trade and knew where the shoe pinched *and* the salaried officers of the districts. The one type of representative could articulate the wishes of the members at large, and give a democratic legitimacy to decisions arrived at; the other was wise to the way in which rules of procedure and intricate technical matters could be used by other professional experts to secure privileged access to policy-making for themselves, and the Webbs assumed he would be quick to expose such attempts should they be made. Thus:

The specialisation of the executive into a permanent expert civil service was balanced by the specialisation of the legislature, in the establishment

of a supreme legislative assembly, itself undertaking the work of direction and control for which the members at large had proved incompetent ... To balance the professional civil servant we have, in fact, the professional representative.⁶⁰

The stress on the importance of federal institutions is less important and novel than the extreme emphasis placed upon professionalism. It must be remembered that the conventional wisdom about representative government in England took no account of the power exercised by professional civil servants. When Beatrice's brother-in-law, Leonard Courtney, published his *The Working Constitution of the United Kingdom* in 1901, he made no reference to the bureaucracy and treated the 'departments' merely as 'offices'. It was not until Lawrence Lowell published his *The Government of England* in 1908 that a more realistic view of the role of the permanent official became current. It is instructive to notice that Lowell found in the Colonial Office (Sidney's old 'department') his most striking examples of departmental power, and the inversion of the formal relationship that was supposed to govern the work of the officials and their Minister.⁶¹ The Webbs had a lively appreciation of the real and growing power of the professional civil servant, and they made it plain that they recognised this power as present in affairs of state and not merely in trade union government. But even more striking was their concept of the 'professional representative' as the indispensable counterweight to the professional administrator. The implications of the distinctions they drew here have still to be thoroughly received into political consciousness. To be a professional representative was – within the trade union movement – to be a salaried official performing a representative function in conjunction with lay colleagues. In the developing industrial democracy of the future – in industrial democracy in its third sense – it was to be someone quite different, an expert *parliamentary* representative: a person quite unlike the amateur politician; an accessible and attentive listener; one able to discern the will of the silent or the inarticulate; a man able to determine precisely the wishes of his constituents. He would need these skills, not because he would be a glorified delegate, but because he would transform the whole etiquette of parliamentary life by actively trying to win his constituents. He would understand that the final command of his constituents would have to be obeyed and he would be ready to obey it but, because this was understood, he would as 'professional debater' conduct 'a propagandist campaign' with the greatest zeal and the greatest educational effect without fear of the consequences. Unlike the amateur politician of the eighteen-nineties, the future professional representative of proletarian constituencies would owe his position not to wealth or prestige or to notoriety. He would not vote as he thought fit in the intervals between the

pursuit of his business or pleasure. He would be 'selected for natural aptitude, deliberately trained for his new work as a special vocation, devoting his whole time to the discharge of his manifold duties, and actively maintaining an intimate and reciprocal intellectual relationship with his constituency.' The ultimate tendency of trade union and working-class democracy must – the Webbs thought – be to exalt the real power of such a professional representative and to differentiate his functions from those of the ordinary citizen on the one hand and the otherwise uncontrollable expert administrator on the other.

Plainly this new statement of democratic theory was not only different, but in some respects diametrically opposed to the 'primitive' democratic ideal of 'equal voices' and the absence of any settled differentiation of function. Sidney and Beatrice did not for one moment attempt to conceal this transformation. At its best democracy meant a form of government in which assent and efficiency were mutually reinforcing. In 'primitive democracy' assent was given to projects; in representative democracy it was confined to the more substantial matter of results.⁶² Democracy, in its primordial innocence and simplicity, dispensed with leadership, élites and expertise; representative democracy in its fully developed form meant 'universal specialisation and delegation';⁶³ it meant that 'division of labour must be carried into the very structure of democracy'.⁶⁴ Of course it was paradoxical that in a developed modern democracy, a man appeared as servant in respect to those matters in which he was most expert, and as master over what he knew no more about than anyone else. Yet, in this, there was strength and wisdom. For in our time the best and most autocratic government is powerless without the support of the 'average sensual man'; while the 'average sensual man' will discover that he is the subject of a 'terrible engine of oppression' if he allows even the wisest of men 'the union of knowledge, capacity and opportunity with the power of untrammelled and ultimate decision'.⁶⁵ But in the fully developed political or industrial democracy 'though it is the Citizen who, as Elector or Consumer, ultimately gives the order, it is the Professional Expert who advises what the order shall be'.⁶⁶

Yet there was a continuity between 'primitive' and fully perfected democracy, despite the stark contrast between their structures: a continuity that allowed the individual to sense that he was regaining indirectly and collectively all that he had lost directly and individually. In all its forms democracy was distinguished by equality of opportunity and 'acute consciousness of the interests of the community as a whole'.⁶⁷ In the fully developed industrial democracy there would certainly be intense specialisation of function and everybody would mind everybody else's business, yet freedom would be greatly enlarged. Democracy was indeed incompatible with liberty, if liberty was understood as every man being his own

master, but that was incompatible with mass society, the division of labour, civilisation itself.

Just as the Webbs' political theory was distinguished from J.S. Mill's by its recognition of the importance of the permanent civil service and the professional expert, so was it quite distinct in its interpretation of freedom. In the *Essay on Liberty* freedom was defined as 'doing what one desired'. In *Industrial Democracy* it was defined as 'such conditions of existence as do, in practice, result in the utmost possible development of faculty in the individual human being'.⁶⁸ Mill's definition was intended to be a report on how he took the words liberty or freedom to be currently used: the Webbs confessed that theirs was a persuasive definition framed in accordance with what they took to be socially desirable, but they supposed no other sort of definition was possible. It was consciously and deliberately intended to relate to the laudatory, emotive meaning of freedom, not to the absence of restraint, but to the presence of a particular type of organisation. Whereas Mill feared that democracy might prove inimical to liberty, the Webbs saw democracy as the only way of securing the largest amount of it. They went so far as to cite, with apparent approval, Sir John Seeley's remark that 'liberty, in fact, means just so far as it is realised, the right man in the right place.'⁶⁹

It would be unwise to rush to the familiar conclusions and declare that in truth the Webbs were 'not democrats'; that they were 'antipathetic to the liberal state'; that they neither understood nor valued liberty. Even their most severe critics would have to allow that, as a matter of historical fact, Millite liberalism had been associated with permissiveness towards the encroachments of the rich and the strong upon the poor and weak. As the Webbs remarked: 'What particular individuals, sections or classes usually mean by "freedom or contract", "freedom of association" or "freedom of enterprise" is freedom of opportunity to use the power that they happen to possess: that is to say, to compel other less powerful people to accept their terms.'⁷⁰ No one can read Mill's essay without becoming aware of its preoccupation with the freedom of the 'cultivated' person: the person whose faculties have already been relatively highly developed. It is this being who is supposed to be confronted with restraints which may be imposed by some collective: the state, or organised public opinion. The whole tradition of Millite liberalism, which treated freedom as equivalent to doing what one desires, or the absence of restraint, was so vulgarised that it became associated with the ideal of the minimal state. Freedom is the absence of restraint – therefore any increase in the power of the state diminishes freedom. It was not recognised that this proposition was either a tautology or a *non sequitur*: for it is indeed a *non sequitur*, unless freedom means the absence of restraint *by the state*. The Truck Acts, for example, greatly enlarged the freedom of most persons who were affected by them, although they enlarged the powers of the state and restrained employers.

However, the Webbs' critics would hardly be satisfied with this style of apology. It might explain how Sidney and Beatrice came to abandon a common-sense notion of what we mean by freedom; it could not justify the thoroughly pernicious way in which they abused the language. They should have contented themselves with pointing out that the state is not the only agency that imposes restraints; that there are occasions upon which the net result of increased state regulation is to increase the freedom of more people than the number whose freedom it diminishes; that freedom is not the sole good, and that there are circumstances in which it should not be preferred to equality of welfare or security. What cannot be excused is defining freedom in such a way as to make it consistent with forcing people to do what is good for them when they don't want to do it.

It must be conceded at once that no one can properly be said to be acting freely unless he is 'doing as he desires', but although this is a necessary condition for freedom, it is not a sufficient one. The Webbs' search for a more 'positive' conception of liberty was based on sound instinct. If men, in doing what they want to do, act either from desires which have been implanted in them by others, or have been shaped for them within an environment that restricts unduly the development of their critical and other faculties, we hesitate to describe them as exercising a free choice.⁷¹ Moreover as soon as attention is turned to the relative freedom enjoyed by men belonging to different social classes, Mill's simple and obvious criterion suddenly becomes inadequate. No one seriously proposes to discuss the relative freedom of two citizens in terms of the ratio of each man's voluntary actions to all the actions he performs – even if one added the refinement of some sort of weighting system to allow for the varying intensities of the desires that were thwarted or satisfied. One is obliged to take account of different ranges of choice, as well as the number and significance of unimpeded choices made within each range. The citizen who has had much invested in the development of his faculties plainly enjoys more freedom than the one upon whom little has been spent. At the end of the day the factory worker who is released from monotonous toil or the housewife who in no longer chained to the kitchen sink may do what they desire, but it is absurd to contend that they are therefore as free as those who develop their faculties through their work rather than in spite of it. In the exercise of their freedom they are still limited by the experience of their subjection. From the formal standpoint of Millite liberalism they are free to go to the concert hall, the public library or the university extension lecture, and they would experience the pain that is associated with a loss of freedom if they were formally forbidden to do so, but that cannot obscure that they have less chance of so choosing, and that this is a loss of freedom, whether it is felt to be such or not. An adequate account of freedom will be as concerned with the way in which desires are shaped as it is

with the extent to which they are satisfied. This in turn discloses a further dimension of the problem which is recognised in the Webbs' approach, but not in that of Mill: freedom is a matter not merely of curbing authority, but of concentrating it in our own hands.

Thus, while it is always dangerous nonsense to talk about freedom being the 'right man in the right place', or to pretend that a man is free when he is being compelled to develop his faculties, it was eminently sensible of Sidney and Beatrice to reject a definition of freedom that made it no more than 'doing what one desires'. By referring to the conditions of existence in their bearing on the development of faculties, they were directing attention to matters that are now habitually – save amongst the most doctrinaire schools – taken into account in the discussion of freedom. As the skills and resources for contriving the wants, and shaping the behaviour, of others become increasingly perfected and concentrated in the hands of a few controllers, complacency about the autonomy and originality of voter or consumer preferences becomes impossible. It is necessary to consider not merely what men want to do, but the opportunities they have had for developing their own tastes, inclinations and powers of discrimination. One can never recognise a free choice from one particular taste or inclination rather than another, but one must never fail to ask how far socio-political arrangements in all reality enlarge or diminish the capacities and faculties upon which the range of choice depends. For the Webbs, freedom was not to be opposed to organisation, but to depend upon a particular form of it.

From the concluding part of their book, where they discuss the place of trade unionism in the industrial democracy of the future, an outline of that organisation emerges.

The Webbs did not use the term 'social democracy', but their whole argument was directed to showing that only within a social-democratic state could trade unions fully develop and attain their maximum usefulness. Autocracies might conceivably accept the objectives of trade unionism, but they could never reconcile themselves to trade union structures and methods. Middle-class republics in which office was monopolised by old-fashioned liberals were bound to disbelieve in the possibility of unionism attaining its aims, and they were certain to dislike its devices. Only in the social-democratic state – a state in which the rulers actively used their political power to promote the efficiency and welfare of the citizens, while being liable to be periodically and peacefully removed from office by those citizens – could trade unionism attain the most favourable conditions for its own development.

This did not mean that trade unionists could expect to carry on in exactly the same ways as they were (1897) accustomed to do, nor did it mean that the relative importance of the several methods which they

employed would remain undisturbed. Those methods of unilateral or autonomous job regulation which were associated with the doctrine of vested interests and led to an allocation of resources contrary to public policy must decline in significance. It would be made relatively easy to discard these methods because of the introduction of the state of redundancy and retraining schemes – or, as the Webbs put it,

Equitable consideration of the interests of existing workers will no doubt be more and more expected, and popular governments may even adopt Mill's suggestion of making some provision for operatives displaced by a new machine. But this consideration and this provision will certainly not take the form of restricting the entrance to a trade, or of recognising any exclusive right to a particular occupation of service. Hence the old trade union conception of a vested interest in an occupation must be entirely given up – a change of front will be the more easy in that, as we have seen, no union is now able to embody this conception in a practical policy.⁷²

Likewise the method of mutual insurance was expected to decline in significance:

Hitherto, the actuarial defects of the Friendly Society side of trade unionism have been far outweighed by the adventitious advantages which it brought to the organisation in attracting recruits, rolling up a great reserve fund, and ensuring discipline.⁷³

But the care of the sick and the injured and elderly, along with the burial of the dead, were destined to become a matter of public provision; while the 'complete recognition of Trade Unionism as an essential organ of the Democratic State',⁷⁴ to which all workmen would be expected to belong, would mean that the unions would have other ways of attracting and holding members.

Although Sidney and Beatrice referred to trade unionism as the organ of the democratic state, they did not mean to imply that the unions would forfeit their independence, lose their character as voluntary associations and no longer engage in collective bargaining with employers. Trade unions were not just incidental to capitalism but had a permanent function to fulfil in the democratic state. In the course of the transition to that state, they stood as a rampart against social oppression by giant trusts on the one side, and powerful agencies for combating the 'industrial parasitism of sweat-shops and small-scale production on the other'. Under socialism the directors of industry would remain biased in favour of cheapness and of every process that lowered costs of production. Such

managerial attitudes were necessary, but they needed to be checked and controlled. What to produce, and how to produce it, were matters for professionally trained experts, not for trade unionists, to decide. But 'if the democratic state is to attain its fullest and finest development, it is essential that the actual needs of the human agents concerned should be the main consideration in determining the conditions of employment.'⁷⁵ The unions must be able to offer a real challenge to bureaucratic stupidity or official oppression. In all large-scale organisations there is need to check the malice, caprice and heedlessness of official superiors. The managers and directors of industry, as brain workers, could 'never be personally conscious of the conditions of manual labourers'.⁷⁶ The unions must be strong enough to compel public attention and to take strike action if necessary.

Thus the unions would continue to employ the method of collective bargaining. Their continual attempt to raise the level of their own common rules respecting wages, hours and working conditions would still be a dynamic element in the economy and would succeed in so far as it, directly or indirectly, raised the net marginal productivity of labour. However, the unions' attempts at raising the level of their common rules would be checked by the unfettered discretion of management to substitute factors within the productive process, and by the effect upon employment of increases in the price of the product. (The Webbs assumed that out-of-work benefit would be one of the few provisions made by the method of mutual insurance which would retain its importance.)⁷⁷ Unlike the 'Doctrine of Vested Interests', the doctrine of 'Supply and Demand' would retain some of its importance, but it would 'manifest itself exclusively in the persistent attempts of each trade to specialise its particular grade of skill, by progressively raising the level of its own Common Rules'.⁷⁸ The device of the restriction of numbers would have to be abandoned as contrary to public policy. Collective bargaining would continue, but it would continue subject to increasing concern for the maintenance of the interests of the community. It was not to be expected that the state would stand idly by in the face of serious or repeated instances of industrial dislocation resulting from strike action. It would act by 'authoritative fiat', and supersede free bargaining with some form of compulsory arbitration.⁷⁹

'Democratic public opinion' would also scrutinise the way in which each trade used its strategic position to promote its own interests. It would ask whether its demands were directed to satisfying the appetites of the 'average sensual man', or whether they were conducive to his 'efficiency as a professional, a parent and a citizen'.⁸⁰ It would frown upon exalting wage demands to the exclusion of those concerned with hours, holidays, health, comfort and refinement in the conditions of work. This

would require more foresight and self-control among the workers, and increased capacity of the civil service of the trade union movement. With the spread of the co-operation and the progressive municipalisation and nationalisation of public services, the unions would come more and more to resemble a professional association:

The conditions of employment depending on the degree of expert specialisation to which the craft has been carried, and upon public opinion as to needs, each Trade Union will find itself, like the National Union of Teachers, more and more concerned with raising the standard of competency in its occupation, improving the professional equipment of its members, 'educating their masters' as to the best way of carrying on the craft, and endeavouring by every means to increase its status in public estimation.⁸¹

It was already 'ludicrous' to think of all the manual workers lumped together in a labouring class confronting the capitalist. Already trade unionism had encouraged the infinite grading of the industrial world into separate classes 'each with its own corporate tradition and Standard of Life, its own specialised faculty and distinctive needs, and each therefore exacting its own "Rent of Opportunity" or "Rent of Ability"'.⁸² The effect of trade unionism was not only to promote a trend to 'professionalism' among the workers; but by the use of common rules it was helping to extinguish the small master and favour the growth of large-scale industry. This meant extending a similar grading to the brain-workers of industry. 'In place of the single figure of the "capitalist entrepreneur", we watch, emerging in each trade, a whole hierarchy of specialised professionals – inventors, designers, chemists, engineers, buyers, managers, foremen and what not – organised in their own professional associations.'⁸³

Because of its flexibility and because of the need to check bureaucratic excesses, collective bargaining would retain its place in the trade unionism of the future. But the Webbs were in no doubt that it was the method of legal enactment that had the greatest career of usefulness before it; just as it was the doctrine of the living wage, rather than the doctrines of vested interest or supply and demand, which was destined to become the leading principle of the trade union world. The doctrine of the living wage meant the recognition of a national minimum: 'the deliberate enforcement, by an elaborate labour code, of a definite quota of education, sanitation, leisure and wages for every grade of workers in every industry'. Public opinion would come, not merely to support the unions in making such a demand; it would positively insist upon it. But its insistence would be ineffectual without the active assistance of the trade union movement in embodying it in successive Acts of Parliament, ensuring that

it was enforced, and causing it to be promptly and intelligently adapted to changes in industrial conditions.⁸⁴ But industrial regulation was not the only matter upon which the fully developed democratic state would require the counsels of working-class organisations. No legislation or administration would meet the needs of manual workers unless it was informed by an understanding of their problems, which only trade unions could supply. This 'service of counsel' was destined to be one of the most important functions of the trade unionism of the future.⁸⁵

To fulfil this and its other functions the new trade unionism would have to be organised by craft, nationalised in its scope, centralised in its administration and served by its own expert official staff. Local branches and lodges would, however, remain 'the local centres of the union's intellectual life' and they would increase their activity. With 'the increasing use which the Democratic State may make of Trade Union machinery', the branch would be expected not only to administer 'the all-important out-of-work donation supplemented, as this may be, by a grant from public funds', but also to conduct technical classes, collect statistics and disseminate information. While there would be rigorous central control of strike funds, the branches would have the task of policing nationally negotiated agreements, and 'constantly considering the particular needs and special opportunities of their own localities.'⁸⁶ Through exploitation to the full of the possibilities of federation, the unions would combine the advantages of each specialised section raising the level of its own particular common rules, with the capability of presenting a common front to common employers. Finally, on the federation of craft and occupational unions within each industry, would come a reconstructed TUC – a federation of the whole trade union world energetically lifting the national minimum for the whole wage-earning class.

The political programme of this restructured trade union movement would have two main planks. First to establish and maintain freedom of association: a satisfactory legal status for trade unionism itself. The Webbs sensed the way the wind was blowing, and they stressed the importance of trade unions ensuring that neither parliament nor the courts made anything actionable or criminal, when done by a trade union or its officers, which would not be actionable or criminal when done by a partnership of trades in pursuit of their own gain. The unions had to be perpetually on guard against any 'insidious weakening of their influence' such as would result from 'payments of national insurance funds or employers' benefit societies'.⁸⁷ More positively, the TUC must make – and would be inevitably driven to make – the establishing of a national minimum of education, sanitation, leisure and wages the major plank in its programme. This was a principle of crucial importance which, amid all the changes and diversity of industrial life, the unions needed to keep

steadily before them: to ingeniously apply, intelligently demand and see sternly enforced.

For the Webbs, the fully developed industrial democracy of the future was necessarily a social democracy in which industries and services were wholly or largely municipalised or nationalised. But it was a remarkable characteristic of their book that they did not see a demand for this as something that would arise simply, uniformly or spontaneously in the trade union world. 'Trade Unionism has no logical connection with any particular form of ownership of land or capital, the members of British trade unions are not drawn as trade unionists unreservedly either towards individualism or towards collectivism.'⁸⁸ Poverty no doubt disposed workers in general to favour a more equal sharing of the fruits of their combined labour, but trade unionism was consistent with a very wide variety of attitude towards this 'most momentous issue of modern democracy'. Sectionalism was one of the most deep-rooted characteristics of trade unions, and some unionists calculated – probably rightly – that they would get better terms from a capitalist employer than from a democratically controlled public authority. Sidney and Beatrice believed that there were a large number of issues and interest – ranging from the political and religious to the social and recreational – in which wage earners had neither distinctive purpose nor expert knowledge. The future democracy was not to be thought of in terms of the hegemony of a particular class having some unique vision of life totally reordered in accordance with a comprehensive principle. Rather was it to be considered in terms of the continual adjustment of interests of men as producers, consumers and citizens, where the final accommodation is made in the light of the permanent interests of the community as a whole.

Industrial Democracy was a great book, too great a book to have justice done to it by a summary discussion. Like other great books it was long and demanding. In consequence there has been a pronounced tendency to genuflect before it rather than to reflect about it. It has been commended and condemned on the strength of second-hand accounts, rather than upon the basis of first-hand acquaintance. Its subtleties and qualifications have been drained away in the interests of this or that preconceived and tendentious interpretation of what the Webbs 'really meant'. In fact – subject to certain important qualifications and limitations – the Webbs of the eighteen-nineties emerge as essentially democrats and libertarians who achieved a unique prescience concerning the future of trade union structure and policy. But at every point their opinions are permeated with values and preoccupations peculiar to the new professional stratum of the British middle class.

They were democrats in so far as they insisted that the authority of the decision-makers must depend upon the consent of the governed. They

knew how difficult it was to discover the conditions of this dependence and how likely it was to be limited in practice. It was partly for this reason that they insisted that, in a fully developed democratic state, there had to be more than one channel of popular control: that men must be represented not merely as citizens, but also as producers and consumers. Perhaps they were too sanguine about the success of cotton operatives and miners in checking the tendencies to oligarchy. They were certainly hugely optimistic in implying that their federal parliaments supplied a model that could or would be adopted by the entire trade union world. Recognising the role of the professional expert and his indispensable contribution of efficiency, they made a virtue out of necessity and declared the division of labour to be essential to modern democracy. Accordingly they concluded that democratic control must be exercised with reference, not to projects, but to results. They also supposed – with a simplicity characteristic of their time – that since the division of labour was a condition of maximum efficiency for the collective, it would similarly enlarge the all-round development of the individual. There was no evidence for this assumption, and it was against the probabilities. Unless it is accompanied by a policy of deliberate and continual remanning, any division of labour tends to develop skills and dexterities at the expense of ‘the utmost possible development of faculty’.

Yet the Webbs were, by intention, libertarians. They criticised the individualist doctrine of liberty, not merely because it could be shown to be incompatible with equality or security or welfare, but because it was largely bogus considered as a doctrine of liberty: it was the flag beneath which the rich and the powerful invaded the liberties of the poor and the weak. Although ‘to be able’ and ‘to be free’ are not synonymous expressions, it was the merit of the Webbs to discern the relationship between them; where, thanks to alterable socio-political arrangements, the faculties of men are stunted, they enjoy less freedom than would otherwise be the case, even when they are doing what they desire. They saw that in modern society freedom must be considered in the context of organisation and not in terms of its absence. If they had too little respect for the judgement and discrimination of the ‘average sensual man’, they knew that puritanism could be the foe of liberty and that it was often ‘the vicarious asceticism of a luxurious class – which prefers to give the poor “what is good for them”, rather than that in which they can find active enjoyment’.⁸⁹ Although they noticed the resemblance between their insistence on the distinction between expert knowledge and ultimate control, and Auguste Comte’s proposal to put constitutionally untrammelled authority in the hands of a centralised administration, subject only to the continual moral influence of the spiritual power (made up of a medically qualified secular priesthood supported by workmen and women), they remarked

that it was not merely the fantastic form of Comte's projection that separated it from their own. Comte's separation of the powers would not be real or lasting. His administration would be irresistible. The experts, whether in science or administration, were indispensable to democracy, but neither separately nor conjointly could they be entrusted with the power of ultimate decision, if liberty was to be secure.⁹⁰ The Webbs had an extravagant confidence in the application of science to human affairs, but they knew perfectly well (when they bothered to think about it) that its findings could not be construed as a code of conduct, and they explicitly rejected the view that there could be a positive science of morals.

The Webbs' precepts and prophecies concerning the future of trade union structure and policy have been the object of severe criticism by conservative and right-wing historians and commentators. In particular their complaint that the TUC failed to give a clear lead to the movement as a whole, that its parliamentary committee failed to function like a cabinet supported by an adequate professional staff, has been taken as showing a real want of insight into the wise prejudices of the practical and capable men who stood at the head of the movement. The historian of the TUC remarks that

The philosophy of the Webbs was antipathetic to the Liberal State. They held the Trades Union Congress in contempt because it did not sweep away what they regarded as shibboleths and adopt a new 'scientific' basis of organisation. The very things which made the TUC a success were what they despised most: its loose method of organisation, its lack of central control, and the adoption of *ad hoc* policies to meet situations as they arose, instead of a clear-cut plan of campaign to achieve the kind of society they held to be desirable.⁹¹

Ben Roberts is quite correct when he implies that the Webbs did not regard the mere maintenance of a centre for the promotion of the common interests of trade unionists as something which in itself constituted success. Sidney and Beatrice certainly believed that trade unionism ought to aim at something more than simply responding to events as they arose. While recognising the obstacles to united action which the profound sectionalism within the movement presented, the Webbs believed that it could and should rise to a class programme which would be directed to the causes of working-class hardship and subjection, and would not be confined purely to dealing with the effects that preceded from these causes. The TUC and the entire trade union movement came to occupy much the sort of relationship to the state that the Webbs described. Indeed it is familiarity with a regime in which the government may be committed to the provision of a national minimum standard of life and to continuous

consultation with trade union leaders that obscures the novel and radical character of the vision the Webbs attained in the 1890s. Whether attention is directed to the growth of legal enactments, or to the decline of the method of mutual insurance, or to the increasing propensity of the state to regulate and control collective bargaining, one is brought to the conclusion that Sidney and Beatrice were uniquely successful in foretelling the shape of things to come. Perhaps they were wrong in imagining that changes in these directions were socially desirable, or perhaps they were mistaken that their advent would have been hastened by a more active and determined campaign on their behalf, but in either case the *onus probandi* lies with their critics. As to their alleged antipathy to the 'liberal state', it would be more to the point to complain of their apparently uncritical and complacent attitude towards its pretence of neutrality and impartiality. The state, as they foretold, has been ready to proceed by 'authoritative fiat' in the face of industrial dislocation, but it has never under any circumstances or in a single instance taken action that strengthened the bargaining power of the workers at the expense of their employers.⁹² It has, indeed, used its opportunities as a conciliator to hasten peaceful settlements, but whenever it has acted by 'authoritative fiat' it has been to introduce strike-breakers, or to mobilise public opinion against labour rather than to challenge the position of management. In the concluding part of *Industrial Democracy* the Webbs were true to the spirit of the *Fabian Essays*: the transition to the fully developed industrial democracy of the future is marked, not by the dramatic death-throes of capitalism nor by its impassioned repentance, but rather by ever more shadowy presence until, at last, like the character in O'Casey, it is 'silently seen no more'.

The *History* and *Industrial Democracy* immediately secured the respect and attention of the academic world. But behind the expressions of gratitude and admiration there was frequently a reference to the interested and committed character of the Webbs' book. Geoffrey Drage, secretary to the Royal Commission on Labour, was particularly outspoken, and called into question the disinterested and scholarly nature of the *History of Trade Unionism*. He had been provoked into his outburst by Beatrice, who had written a most severe criticism of the approach adopted by the Commission. She complained about the miscellaneous, long-drawn-out and desultory superficiality that marked the Commission's enquiries. She pointed out that it had failed to discover and verify the facts relating to the several issues it investigated. For example, they had failed to approach the eight-hours question empirically, and, as she triumphantly demonstrated, the facts about the size and distribution of trade union membership were more fully disclosed by Sidney and herself than by the entire Commission with all its assistants. The recommendations of the

majority were dismissed by Beatrice as conservative and nondescript. Fifty thousand pounds of public money had been spent so as to allow such cultivated dialecticians as Gerald Balfour and Professor Marshall to score verbal victories over working men and conduct a crusade against social democracy.⁹³

Drage took the unusual step of replying to these charges and he did so in highly personal terms. He asserted that Beatrice was aggrieved because she had not been appointed as assistant commissioner, and that Sidney had been humbled by the Commissioners when he had given his evidence before them. He went on to 'expose' *The History of Trade Unionism* as an enormous piece of special pleading on behalf of the new unionism.⁹⁴ In the course of his attack, he was guilty, not only of misinterpretations, but of direct misquotation. Beatrice had to be restrained by Sidney, Shaw and Wallas from honouring him with a reply.⁹⁵

There was however one argument in Drage's article that Beatrice was to recall forty years later as having been strangely near the mark.⁹⁶ He alleged that

The so-called Socialist movement in England is an effort on the part of the lower middle class to obtain social recognition, political power and place, by means of the trade union movement which it dislikes and misrepresents. Political power is at present in the hands of what one may call the upper middle class – that is, the class educated at the large public schools. This class Mrs Webb and her friends dislike almost as much as they do the old trade union leaders.

The fact is that the average Eton or Winchester boy [Drage had been to Eton] and the average trade unionist have much the same self-respect and self-reliance, and much the same admiration and capacity for self-denial which is so abhorrent to the advocate of State interference, State pensions, and grandmotherly legislation generally. The average girl from Lady Margaret Hall shares the prejudice of the wives and daughters of trade unionists as to the Socialist doctrine of free love and other extreme views of the new woman as exhibited in the 'new' literature. Neither men nor women of the class above referred to have as yet shown much liking for the Marx-Aveling philosophy, which may be roughly compared to that of the tailless fox of the fable. Advocates of views which involve loss of self-respect and self-reliance generally desire to persuade other men and women that these qualities are despicable.

The strength of the labour movement in England and the reason of its success as compared with foreign movements lies in the fact that the lower middle-class proletariat, who cannot dig yet are not ashamed to beg, have hitherto been unceremoniously pushed aside at the Trade Union Congress.⁹⁷

He concluded:

What is important is not the high-sounding reforms like old-age pensions, on which the lower middle class expect to ride to power, and in the administration of which they hope to find jobs for their poets, moralists, lawyers and economists, but questions like the testing of weighing machines, and the lack of lifebelts on canal boats, which provoke Mrs Webb's ridicule.⁹⁸

At first sight, Drage's suggestion that the Webbs – these lower-middle-class socialist intellectuals – were distrusted in the trade union world might appear to be justified. In 1893–4 the Webbs were going through a 'left' phase, but they did not appear to be making much headway with the new unionists, or in establishing themselves with the forces which were promoting the rise of an independent working-class party. Disillusionment with the poor performance of the Liberal government and pressure associated with the advent of the Independent Labour Party led Shaw and Sidney to produce their manifesto, 'To Your Tents, O Israel', at the end of 1893,⁹⁹ but this document, while saddening Haldane¹⁰⁰ and infuriating Massingham,¹⁰¹ appears to have made a very limited impression in the world of labour. It appeared to put paid to the policy of permeation without contributing significantly to the development of some new agency of socialist advance. In particular, it did not bring John Burns into closer relations with the Fabians. Beatrice considered that Sidney and Shaw and Wallas needed to add such a popular tribune to their circle if they were to make the greatest impression on public life. They saw a good deal of Burns at Grosvenor Road and noted that he expressed increasing admiration for professional men, but that this was associated with growing contempt for his own class. Beatrice was brought sorrowfully to acknowledge that, despite his magnificent presence and great qualities, Burns was incapable of being a good colleague: his vanity and ambition precluded it.¹⁰²

If the Webbs could not achieve a close working relationship with the biggest figure of the new unionism, how was it to be expected that they would be able to exercise any influence on the representatives of the old? They had now added to their identification with the campaign for the legal eight-hour day, a break with Liberalism which could not endear them to the Lib-Lab leaders at the head of the TUC. In their *History* they had severely criticised the 'front bench' of the Trades Union Congress for its want of ideas and its failure honourably to apply resolutions that were carried against its wishes. In these circumstances Drage appeared to be on safe ground when he dismissed the Webbs as isolated figures without influence in any quarter of the labour world. In fact he knew better.

He had been present when Sidney gave his evidence to the Royal Commission and he knew, or at least strongly suspected, that Webb was the author of the minority report formally attributed to Tom Mann.

Sidney gave his evidence to the commission in June 1893, just about the time when his 'left' phase was beginning. His remarks were generally distinguished by a bold and aggressive tone. He did not hide his irritation with the way the Commissioners appeared to him to be misunderstanding their task. He showed a marked impatience with Leonard Courtney's loaded questions, and with the manner in which Alfred Marshall confused enquiry by a Royal Commission with a *viva voce* examination at Cambridge. After the first day, Beatrice took him to task for his rudeness and he subsequently made a gracious apology for any discourtesy he had shown.¹⁰³ But if Beatrice was embarrassed by Sidney's plain speaking, the working-class Commissioners were grateful for a display of the kind of impatience which they themselves were coming to feel. Although he expected to be asked about matters of fact rather than opinion, Sidney used the opportunity to elaborate his proposals for the extension of 'collective philanthropy' and municipal enterprise. These proposals caused Sir Michael Hicks Beach to speculate about the consequences for the rates:

If the rates increased what would happen then?

Webb: I think in all probability the amount received by the owners of rent in London would be diminished.

Sir Michael: Supposing it had to go as far as 20/- in the £. What then?

Webb: That is a consummation I should view without any alarm whatsoever.

Sir Michael: The municipality would then have rated the owners out of existence?

Webb: That is so.¹⁰⁴

Gerald Balfour asked Sidney whether he did not think it might be perfectly sound to regard neither socialism nor individualism as absolute principles:

Webb: I seldom, I think, use the word 'absolute' myself. I never know what it means.

Balfour: Let us put it this way: Do you not think it might be perfectly sound in logic and in practice, to regard both individualism and socialism as essential elements in any constitution of human society to which we can look forward?

Webb: I think that view will always commend itself to Englishmen.

Balfour: Does it commend itself to you?

Webb: No.¹⁰⁵

Once the Webbs were persuaded that the Commission was at best an academic exercise, at worst part of a campaign to discredit social-democracy, they began to take active steps to counteract its influence. They arranged, through Massingham, for the *Morning Chronicle* 'to run down the Commission and show up the futility of its investigations.'¹⁰⁶ They opened up communications with Tom Mann so as to secure a minority report. Tom was delighted to have the assistance of 'Lord Sidney' or 'father Sidney' or 'Uncle Sidney' as he variously addressed him.¹⁰⁷ In fact from Mann's point of view there were only two difficulties: first, Sidney's draft of the minority report was inclined to be rather too extremist. He told Webb:

While I endorse all you have just forwarded, I do think it has been written when you were in a somewhat different mood to that in which the previous portions were prepared. This on women workers and arbitration is a slashing into the capitalist system on lines that I often indulge in on the platform but which are not of the staid, dignified character of the early portions and which I understood you to say was a necessary style to achieve success and with which I agreed. The first is S.W. the second is T.M. – as regards style, though it may be S.W. in specific recommendations.

He added: 'Don't alter it if you think it is not too stiff,' but went on to reiterate his main point, that while some of these passages were 'all right from a bouncing trade unionist ... don't forget how damned respectable and considerate I am for others' feelings, eh?'¹⁰⁸

The second difficulty was how to persuade the other workers' leaders on the Commission to sign such a minority report. Tom Burt was the father of Lib-Lab parliamentarians and there was no prospect of winning his support. The chances of getting Mawdsley, the most prominent of all the Tory trade union leaders, seemed equally remote. Not long since he had told Webb and Shaw to take their 'frenchified' looks and 'Cockney' impertinences elsewhere. Lancashire operatives understood their own interest on the eight-hour question and all else quite well enough. They were not going to be 'led into a pitfall by the London school of inexperienced would-be leaders of trade unionism who arrogate to themselves the power to rectify all the evils pertaining to our social life'. When Beatrice had told him she was going to marry Sidney, he had sworn and cursed, declaring that he had always thought that she had belonged to 'them'. He would rather she had married Auberon Herbert.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Mawdsley saw that it would be difficult for him to accept the do-nothing position of the majority of his fellow commissioners, and he was as weary as Tom Mann with the logic-chopping of Leonard Courtney and the circumlocutions of Professor Marshall. He duly arrived at 41 Grosvenor Road.

Sidney stood in front of the fire and read out the parts of the report which would affect him most. Tom Mann played up by making advanced criticisms which allowed Sidney to endorse Mawdsley's expressions of dissent. Soon the cotton workers' leader was treating the document as his own and expressing his profound satisfaction with its practical and detailed proposals. With Mann and Mawdsley agreed, the assent of two further labour leaders on the Commission – Austin and Abraham – was easily secured.

Mawdsley did insist that the word 'socialism' should be struck out of the report, but it otherwise remained in all its essentials as Sidney had drafted it. It began by criticising the methods of the majority and the paucity of their recommendations. It declared that the fundamental cause of industrial disputes was to be found in the poverty and subjection of the wage-labourers, many of whom were overworked, in overcrowded and unhealthy conditions, for wages that were inadequate to keep body and soul together. One in three of them ended his days in receipt of poor relief and died in the workhouse or the workhouse infirmary. This state of affairs could not be understood except in relation to the fact that two-thirds of the annual product of the community was absorbed by one-fourth of its members:

The social and economic progress of the workers depends in our judgement, mainly upon the systematic development of democratic public activity in its three principal forms – the national or municipal administration of such industries as can conveniently be managed socially, the regulation of private enterprise in industries not yet taken over by the community, and the public provision – through the taxation of rent and similarly unearned income – of educational and other facilities necessary for the mental and moral development of all classes of the community.

This was followed by a series of specific recommendations for the reform of the sweated trades; the prevention of excessive hours of labour; and the promotion of regularity of employment. The report concluded:

The whole force of democratic statesmanship must, in our opinion, henceforth be directed to the substitution as far as possible of public for capitalist enterprise, and where this substitution is not yet practicable, to the strict and detailed regulation of all industrial operations, so as to secure to every worker the conditions of efficient citizenship.¹¹⁰

This report was soon circulating as a cheap pamphlet in thousands of copies. Beatrice was surely entitled to congratulate herself on a triumph over the Labour Commission which had tried to shut her out, and tried to deny socialists' belligerent rights.

Dear old Leonard [Courtney] who told us with pompous superiority that they were all agreed; and that there was no prospect of any Minority Report – and we had it all the time, lying on our table, and had been putting the last touches to it that very morning. Certainly persons with brains and independent means may have a rare good time in the part of permeator or fly on the wheel.¹¹¹

But it was not only a personal triumph: it was an event of great social and political significance that four trade union leaders of such high standing and diverse opinions, could be brought together on the basis of what was – in all but name – a socialist programme.

It demonstrated the practical possibilities of the conception of the relationship between socialism and the labour movement that the Webbs were elaborating in their own great books of the eighteen-nineties. Socialists were not necessarily doctrinaire enthusiasts setting up in competition with trade unionism for the loyalty of the working class. They accepted that trade unionism had a permanent, if changing, sphere of usefulness. They could be professional experts, ready and able to assume the role of clerks to the trade union movement. Close and respectful students of the long, spontaneous efforts of working men to limit competition and raise their standard of life, they could be inventive and pragmatic when it came to drafting those distinctive programmes for labour which more and more working men were coming to respect and demand from their leaders. Even Henry Broadhurst was not above turning to the Webbs, and Sidney wrote his minority report for the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor.¹¹²

Thus, the suggestion made by Drage and accepted by a number of historians, that the Webbs were isolated from the trade union leadership and distrusted by them, is not in close accord with the facts as they stood in the early 1880s. If labour leaders did show some reserve towards them, it must be remembered that the workers' leaders habitually showed a great deal towards each other. As the 'new unionism' receded – leaving a permanent deposit of organisation and principle behind it – conflicts over policy were overshadowed by conflicts between personalities. In March 1894 when the Webbs were seeing a good deal of Burns and Broadhurst, Mann and Mawdsley, Beatrice sketched a depressing picture of the condition of the TUC:

From all accounts the Parliamentary Committee is torn asunder by jealousy and suspicion of leading members. Fenwick [miner, Lib-Lab MP and secretary to the Parliamentary Committee after the retirement of Broadhurst in 1890] resolutely refused to move, indolent and reactionary. Burns – not over certain that the Parliamentary Committee

should get the credit of his work. Broadhurst – trying to out-Herod Herod in order to get back to his position as paid secretary. Mawdsley and other officials, preoccupied in their own society's work, generally go to sleep at sittings, and arouse themselves when awake in getting Tillet against Burns, and Broadhurst against Fenwick.¹¹³

This was not a situation in which anyone, either directly or indirectly, stood much chance of doing consistent, purposeful work. Although in terms of character and intelligence they greatly preferred Burns to Broadhurst, the Webbs found themselves trying to help the latter when Burns engineered the famous coup by which the TUC standing orders were overturned, block voting introduced, and the trades councils and 'unattached' socialists excluded from Congress. Broadhurst came to them for help because he found himself in danger of exclusion. He asked Sidney to draft alternative standing orders, but it was too late.¹¹⁴ Burns who, a few months earlier, had seemed 'excessively friendly' and 'relying a good deal on the Fabians for advice', had cut off his nose to spite his face, and there was nothing to be done about it.

In the course of writing their two books the Webbs had been brought into contact with all the leaders of the trade union world, and had come into service as the clerks of organised labour. They aspired to be the tutors in general to the trade union world and, although this was an ambition bound to inspire resentment, they succeeded to a certain extent, to be measured by the immediate access which they gained to the ruling councils. Modesty is becoming to historians, but the fact remains that he who interprets the past of a nation or a class or a movement must powerfully shape its future. The Webbs informed the British labour movement with a Fabian sense of destiny, and in theory and in practice contributed to a special order of trade union–socialist collaboration.

Nor was their influence confined to Britain. When Shaw addressed the International Socialist Congress held in London in 1896 his paper reflected in its details, as well as in its general spirit, the results of the Webbs' trade union studies. This was particularly evident in the section of his speech concerned with 'Fabian democracy' and his eleventh resolution which repudiated the referendum and direct democracy as likely to 'place the organised, intelligent and class-conscious Socialist minority at the mercy of the unorganised and apathetic mass of routine toilers, imposed upon by the prestige of the aristocratic, plutocratic and clerical forces of reaction'.¹¹⁵

By a paradox there were two men in the Socialist International who were particularly influenced by the Webbs' work, and who were responsible for introducing them to the German and Russian publics: Eduard Bernstein, the prophet of revisionism, and V.I. Lenin, the founder of

Bolshevism. In his old age Sidney was to give an inaccurate and muddled account of the matter. He made Bernstein the translator of *Industrial Democracy*, and Lenin the translator of the *History of Trade Unionism*.¹¹⁶ In fact, the Russian translation of the *History* was supplied by a Menshevik, the Mensheviks deriving particular encouragement from the story of the legal emancipation of the British unions.¹¹⁷ Lenin and Krupskaya, in exile in Siberia, translated *Industrial Democracy*. The Webbs, being ill-informed about the essential facts of the matter, can hardly have understood what the Russian Marxist valued in their work. Indeed, even today there is an element of conjecture in the answer. However, it is in Lenin's classic monograph *What is to be Done?* (1902), which was concerned with the organisational principles of a revolutionary workers' party, that one discovers most of the direct and indirect evidence of the Webbs' influence.

Lenin appears to have drawn on the Webbs' work at several crucial points. First, he refers directly to their book in the course of his polemic against the 'primitiveness of the Economist' – the 'economists' being those who wanted the Russian working class to subordinate the political to the economic struggle, and who called for a broad, democratic form of organisation. Referring to the Webbs' 'interesting chapter'¹¹⁸ on primitive democracy in English trade unionism, Lenin argued that even apart from the requirements of the struggle against absolutism, his opponents were adopting an unrealistic position. Second, Lenin was concerned to discredit the theory of 'spontaneity': the view that the working class will come to socialism of its own accord, and as a result of its own experience. The 'economists' argued that it was wrong to think in terms of the political struggle, but necessary to give the economic struggle a political character. 'Read the works of the thoroughly scientific (and thoroughly opportunist) Mr and Mrs Webb,' replied Lenin, 'and you will find that the British trade unions long ago recognised and have long carried out the task of giving the economic struggle itself a political character.'¹¹⁹ The Webbs had shown this, but they had also shown that trade union politics did not lead spontaneously or inevitably to socialist politics. Third, Lenin, in insisting 'that the history of all countries shows that the working class exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness,' went on to argue that modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as modern technology, and that 'the vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia'.¹²⁰ Leaving their differences about the exact nature of economic science on one side, the Webbs' work fully supported this conclusion. Indeed, the Fabians and the Bolsheviks were unique in the Socialist International in the candour and persistence with which they made this point. Fourth, Lenin, in waging war upon 'primitiveness', laid as much stress as the Webbs did upon the need for professionalism. If Sidney and Beatrice demonstrated for the

English labour movement that the professional expert, whether civil servant or representative, was of decisive importance, Lenin demonstrated that for Russia only a party of professional revolutionaries who utterly rejected amateurism would be of any effect. Fifth, the Webbs' concept of the place of the professional representative in democratic organisation is strikingly similar to the Leninist conception of the role of the professional revolutionary within 'democratic centralism'. Both the Webbs and Lenin transcend the traditional distinction between the delegate and the representative. The new professional leader is to be accorded an active and creative role denied to the delegate without enjoying the autonomous judgement and independence of his constituents associated with the classic notion of a representative.

It is not being suggested that Lenin derived his conceptions from the Webbs; it is being conjectured that he made use of their material and that he critically worked through some of their theoretical ideas in the course of arriving at his own standpoint. Upon Bernstein on the other hand, the Webbs exerted an influence that was formative and persuasive. This was denied by Bernstein himself,¹²¹ because he was anxious to insist upon the originality of his revisionism and to establish its source in the Marxist tradition. He got to know the Webbs during his 'years of exile' in England, and formed a high opinion of them (particularly of Sidney) despite the fact that he was unaccustomed to their matter-of-fact and unashamedly middle-class way of addressing socialist meetings.¹²²

In his old age Sidney was under the impression that Bernstein had translated *Industrial Democracy* into German. According to Webb, Bernstein was 'severely' blamed for introducing such heretical ideas to the socialist flock; he narrowly escaped dismissal from his party offices. But these very ideas presently became the basis of much of the 'revisionism' which, he thought, had – unfortunately very tardily – since transformed the programme of the German Social Democratic Party.¹²³ In fact, it was R. Bernstein – not Eduard – who translated *Industrial Democracy*. Eduard's contribution was limited to writing an afterword to the first German edition of the *History of Trade Unionism*.¹²⁴

By 1895 the German trade unions had funds and members enough to make themselves heard in the councils of the Social Democratic Party, 'and the Party did not always like to hear what the unions had to say.'¹²⁵ In this situation Bernstein took from the Webbs a sense of the invincible, primary and permanent character of trade union organisation and consciousness. He declared that the unions were 'indispensable as organs of democracy and not merely as temporary coalitions'. The revisionist perspective of social reform – itself partly shaped by Bernstein's acquaintance with England and with the Fabians – offered a prospect of a much better rapport between the unions and the party. (Both would be concerned with

making the most of immediate opportunities, and the unions would not be required to subordinate their everyday work and struggle to the long-range revolutionary objectives of the party.) But while Bernstein associated himself with the Webbs' conception of the trade unions' large sphere of independence and practical usefulness, he fully subscribed to their view that they were not qualified to take the management of the economy into their own hands. Bernstein's famous and fatal utterance: 'I have extraordinarily little interest or taste for what is generally called "the final goal of socialism"'. This aim, whatever it is, is nothing to me, the movement everything,¹²⁶ was anticipated almost word for word by Sidney a few years earlier: 'My view of Socialism is not that it is a kind of heaven, a kind of stationary state, but a principle of action.'¹²⁷

Lenin and Bernstein were both interested in the Webbs' books because of the light cast upon the problem of 'trade union consciousness' versus 'socialist consciousness', upon the problem of the correct relationship between trade union organisation and political organisation. The answers that were supplied to these challenges had to vary according to national circumstances – to the level of development of the labour movement at a particular time besides such other differences as might arise from conflicting concepts of 'class' and 'state', 'capitalism' and 'socialism'. In the infant Russian labour movement of the 1890s, to accord primary importance to the economic struggle and to trade union organisation was equivalent at best to surrendering the political initiative to the bourgeoisie; at worst, surrendering to absolutism. Therefore, Lenin used the Webbs to reinforce his attack on spontaneity and to reinforce his case for the leading role of a disciplined party of professional revolutionaries. In Russia one could believe in the imminent revolutionary crisis and the duty of subordinating all else in order to prepare for it; but in Germany a crisis appeared more and more distant. Instead of increasing immiseration, the German working class experienced the continual expansion of capitalist production combined with improved social security, thanks to the provisions made by Bismarck and maintained by his successors. In these circumstances it was bound to appear that the socialist party, if it was to maintain its hold on the trade unions, could do so only by slackening it. The unions had to be accorded parity of esteem with their elder and better – the party. Therefore Bernstein used the Webbs to make out what amounted to be a case for the sufficiency of trade union consciousness within modern capitalism.

In England the Webbs, in common with other socialists, were obliged to take as their starting-point the primacy – in point of time and mass loyalties – of the trade union movement – a movement that was 'outside' politics and independent of all parties, with the partial exception of the Great Liberal Party. They saw that the trade unions could be won for socialism

only if it was presented to them as a more favourable environment in which they could continue to pursue their familiar policies and procedures, and which did not seriously modify their independence. Socialism was accordingly presented as the fullest and most perfect form of democracy: a mere logical extension of modern radicalism and an elaboration of some of the implications of trade unionism itself. In short, the conflict between the short-run aims of the unions and the long-run goal of socialism tended to be obscured when it was not obliterated altogether. The primacy of trade union consciousness was taken for granted, whether one thought of socialism being promoted through a reconstructed Liberal Party or – as the Webbs occasionally did – through the creation of a new party into which the unions would enter as an important component. As has already been pointed out, the Webbs' systematic and thorough development and popularisation of the past and future of organised labour needs to be taken into account in interpreting the origins of the Labour alliance. But while Sidney and Beatrice helped to prepare the climate in which trade unionist-socialist association became possible, they did not prepare opinion for the shocks that were bound to disturb it. In their brilliant projection of the advance to a fuller and more perfect democracy they failed to discuss the implications of a mixed economy, and they failed to envisage a situation in which the national minimum would extend beyond a definite quota of education, sanitation, leisure and income to the right to work, to full employment. Once this happens, the conflict between trade union consciousness and socialist consciousness can no longer be concealed. If the unions carry on with sectional, competitive collective bargaining, then the state will be driven to take coercive measures against them to check inflationary pressure. In doing so the state turns the wages question from an industrial into a political, from a sectional into a class issue. If the unions recognise this situation for what it is, then they are obliged to exchange mere trade union consciousness for socialist consciousness; they are compelled to stop thinking in terms of partial and limited responses made in relation to one class of economic decisions (wages) and to see that their priorities can be achieved only if they are able to exert control over the determination of other categories of decision bearing upon other incomes, investment and prices. To the extent that the English labour movement has been imbued with mere trade union consciousness it is ill-prepared for such a challenge. Whether it will be surmounted and the English working class will go forward to industrial democracy is one of those questions which, as Sidney and Beatrice used to say, 'make the future interesting'.¹²⁸

7

Heroic Opportunism: Towards a Third Culture and Education in London 1893–1905

Webb's odd 'silence' about education in 1892—The Technical Education Board and the machinery of 'capacity-catching'—Foundation of the LSE and the 'profession' of social science—The reorganisation of London University—The battle over the Education Acts of 1902 and 1903—The third culture and the balance sheet of a heroic opportunism.

When Sidney Webb conducted his campaign in Deptford in 1892 as one of the two 'Progressive' candidates seeking election to the London County Council, he had next to nothing to say about educational policy or provision. If this was ironical in view of how much he himself owed to further-educational institutions in the metropolis, it was still more so in relation to his future career. For if Webb made his influence felt in relation to many departments of London government, it was in the field of educational provision that he made his mark. Indeed, within the next ten years he became the most important single influence upon learning in London and a man to be reckoned with when it came to the shaping of great national measures.

Webb's failure to make education an issue in Deptford is not to be understood in terms of any concessions to that 'tadpole philosophy' of which some authors suspected him and which so frequently attracts self-made men. Despite much harsh speaking he never felt the temptation to play the part of a frog, croaking out a mock encouragement to the less fortunate of the species to follow his example. Neither to shed their tails, nor to distend their mouths and stomachs and hop, as he had done, nimbly on to dry land. He never argued that because he had got out of the pond, it could be left stagnant. Men might resemble tadpoles in being unequal in

terms of their natural endowment, but that never became a reason for treating men like tadpoles – certainly not if they were Londoners.¹

Nor was this strange and ironic silence to be understood as the result of a paucity of ideas. By 1892 the Fabians had quite overtaken the Social Democratic Federation as the carriers of the most advanced socialist programme in relation to education. It is arguable that in 1888 Sidney had helped to involve the Fabians in the Democratic Committee for the School Board more in the interests of improving them as electioneers than in the interests of London education as such, but no such uncertainty can be attached to his subsequent activities. In the same year, he had tried to impress upon the Liberal Party's managers the importance of the subject. He had argued that they ought to be committed to enabling all the children of London, 'even the poorest', to obtain the best education that they were able to assimilate. What that meant in practice, so he maintained, was the abolition of all fees whether in board or voluntary schools. In turn, that required an increase in the government grant and the formation of a proper Ministry of Education. Moreover, after children had concluded their elementary education on a full-time basis there ought to be provision for its universal continuation in evening schools 'in all cases' together with 'abundant scholarships' to secondary schools for those capable of benefiting from them. This implied, for Sidney, the registration and inspection of all private educational establishments.²

As for the higher learning, in the late eighties Sidney was giving public voice to the long-standing and deeply felt contempt which he had for Oxford and Cambridge. He saw them as the spoilt children of higher education. They were centres of social prestige rather than of learning. He insisted that they shut out strenuous effort in favour of a well-mannered indolence. They had long lost any claim to consideration as leaders of advanced thought – as anyone with the smallest concern with the progress of biology or sociology must be aware. If they had importance, it lay in their role as preparatory schools for the ruling class – or '*classe dirigeante*', as he preferred to call it. He viewed them as preparatory schools in which idlers were prepared for mockeries of careers as religious instructors, defenders of the Empire or, worst of all, in what they insolently and shamelessly described as 'public administration'. At every point Sidney's concern for the under-advantaged children of London was matched by his derision for the pampered youths and maidens who inhabited the colleges and halls of the ancient universities. As for their teachers, he fancied that even the best of them suffered from the cardinal vice of traditional university life – the separation of thought and action. They deserved their undergraduates: seven out of every ten of whom he considered to belong to that 'unthinking "Junkerthum" which, in such an inquiry, counts for no more than the "pigs and philesters" whom Heine excluded from the population of Göttingen'.³

However, Sidney was always more interested in the waste attendant upon neglect than he was in the waste attendant in extravagance. He cared more for the potentialities lost through under-expenditure upon the talented poor than he did about the cost of cultivating the undistinguished children of the rich. He never valued justice as much as opportunity. He frequently imagined that the best way of approximating to the former would be found through an extension of the latter. Justice was easily confused with envy and malice; by avoiding that confusion one increased the chances of passing off a concession to equity as a contribution to efficiency.

This is not the spirit normally associated with rallying cries. Yet Sidney had powerfully contributed to such a cry several months before he went to Deptford. He had helped to frame a statement of educational policy, which became recognised as 'a landmark in the educational history of the labour movement' and 'a mine of ideas for socialist and Labour candidates during the following decade'.⁴ In Fabian Tract No. 25 Sidney began by following faithfully in the footsteps of the Social Democratic Federation – free school meals and trade union conditions for school board employees. These were demands that had been made familiar already by Annie Besant and others. Nor was the Tract breaking new ground when it reiterated the Nonconformist demand for the discontinuation of public money to church schools and the secularist call for an end to Bible lessons and prayers. But it went on to effectively occupy the greater part of the territory that lay between these proposals and the claim to secondary education for all. It called for an enormous increase in expenditure. It wanted improved school buildings with better-decorated classrooms and more ample playgrounds. It required more teachers, smaller classes and more higher-grade and evening schools. Then it raised the whole issue of special schools for the physically handicapped and the mentally retarded. It demanded the provision of crèches in every infant school and a vast extension of kindergarten. It advocated – in one and the same breath – a great development in the provision of manual education and the raising of the school leaving age to fourteen. Teachers and women were to be made eligible to serve as school inspectors and there were to be unsectarian training colleges. Board Schools were to be empowered to finance scholarships to secondary schools out of public funds. It was impossible to go further without making the imaginative leap involved in the demand for 'Secondary Education for ALL!': a slogan still some ten years ahead of the labour movement's consciousness.

The obvious, but not entirely adequate, answer to the question, 'Why did Webb fail to make these points at Deptford in 1892?' is that they were not what his old master, Jeremy Bentham, would have called 'agenda'. To give them prominence would have been to choose the wrong issue and the wrong election. Deptford was one of the most depressed parts of

London. Its population had doubled in twenty years while employment had been reduced as a result of the closing of its dockyard and foreign cattle market. Consequently, it had more than its fair proportion of the 100 000 families dwelling in the metropolis and less than its fair proportion of jobs. Accordingly, Sidney concentrated on housing, sanitation and securing an adequate water supply together with a proposal for the reorganisation of the docks under public management. The first plank in his platform was the need to secure further powers for the LCC to ensure the efficient government of London.⁵ If Sidney already knew that this would mean encroaching upon the powers of the London School Board, he took care not to enlarge upon that subject. For the time being, Fabian Tract No. 25 could be regarded as addressed to the school board, rather than county council electors, and it was soon to exercise a 'very great influence' in that quarter.⁶ Webb behaved as if anything but silence on educational matters could only confuse and divide the voters. The Deptford parent of a child of an age below twelve or thirteen was not helpless when it came to promoting his or her educational opportunity. He was an elector and he had only himself to blame if the London School Board fell into the hands of religious obscurantists like the Revd J.R. Diggle. He could prefer the infinitely more enlightened administration associated with T.H. Huxley or Annie Besant, as many Londoners did. In theory, the power was there to be exercised if the electors chose to use it. There were few other aspects of metropolitan life of which the same could be said.

The parent who strolled past the board school might console himself with the thought that his son or daughter was receiving the elements of knowledge: being kept off the streets, and not being indoctrinated with one particular creed or faith. He might equally well curse and fume at the expense he was being put to as a ratepayer. Or complain of being deprived of the earnings, which he might otherwise expect his children to contribute to household income, or shake his head over the godlessness and infidelity to which he imagined the youngsters were being exposed. But whether the board school aroused his approval or disapproval, the sight of it could not occasion the same sense of powerlessness as the pavement along which he was walking. If it was badly paved, ill-lit and dirty, he hardly knew how to call anyone to account. This elementary matter was not the responsibility of some clearly identifiable body of men, such as those who sat on the school board or the county council. It was, rather, the preserve of vestrymen about whose hole-in-corner proceedings he could know little and about whose jobbing or cheese-paring policies he could do less. If he left the pavement to enter one of London's great markets, boarded a tram to go home, turned on the tap, lit the gas, each of these four simple operations was associated with the payment of a tribute to a monopolist.

At the summit of this mountain of traditional privileges and impudent extortion there were to be found, so he was told, the great London livery companies. If there was an honest member of the 'Court of Assistants' he was to be discounted as mere protective covering for his turkey-guzzling and champagne-swilling colleagues: the misappropriation of the inheritance of the greatest city in the world. The presence of such people at the centre of London's life was a hateful anachronism wholly at odds with the development of civic pride and public duty.

Placed in this context, the 'silence' of Sidney and most other Progressive candidates about educational matters becomes rather more intelligible. What they wanted was a London County Council that would be able to be more democratic and more effective than the old Metropolitan Board of Works; a council which would be able to make war on the abuses, ancient and modern, of the 'monopolists'. The presence of the London School Board, despite its limited jurisdiction, meant that at least a part of metropolitan life was managed in accord with the requirements of modernity, efficiency and accountability. Accordingly, education was not 'agenda'.

However, matters were more complicated than this. During the election campaign a body describing itself as the National Association for the Promotion of Technical and Secondary Education addressed an appeal to the electors. It drew attention to the fact that county councils had been empowered to act as providing bodies under the Technical Instruction Act of 1889. It pointed out that under the Local Taxation Act of 1890, county and county-borough councils in England and Wales might appropriate the proceeds of beer and spirits duties for the purpose of technical education within the meaning of the Technical Instruction Act. It complained that only Middlesex and London were failing to do so. It deplored the argument that the money was wanted for the relief of the rates. It dismissed with contempt the objection that this 'whisky money' might only be available for a limited period. It exposed as little better than humbug the suggestion that the only proper fund for financing educational expansion, beyond the elementary level, was to be found in the coffers of the city companies and guilds. It cited with approval the judgment of the *Trade Unionist* that

it ought not to be possible for a body like the LCC to vote away its share of the grant, amounting to no less than £163,000 in relief of the rates, as it did last year ... To wait until the City Guilds can be made to disgorge is a fantastic and perfectly preposterous attitude.⁷

Sidney was a contributor to the *Trade Unionist* and he wrote signed articles for it throughout the period of the election campaign.⁸ Beatrice's old friend, Hubert Llewellyn Smith, was the Secretary of the National

Association for the Promotion of Technical and Secondary Education. H.D. Acland MP, another associate of the Webbs and the nearest thing to an Education Minister in Gladstone's last administration, was also heavily involved. The right hand knew what the left was doing. As a Progressive candidate Sidney was hardly in a position to scold his colleagues and predecessors for failing to do their duty: but he could rejoice when others did so. He neither inspired nor dictated the London Programme, but he did succeed in writing it, popularising it, and occasionally – as the Progressives' licensed 'dreamer of dreams' – introducing one or two 'premonitions' into it. Thus, the most attentive reader could find nothing about education if he consulted the table of contents or referred to the index, but if he read it – and it was eminently readable – he would have come across Webb playing at being the chairman of the Finance Committee. In his 'budget' speech Sidney referred to the cost of a new teaching university for London: the extension of evening classes: the establishment of a small public library in each ward and the provision of free breakfasts for needy children. He concluded this section of his imaginary speech with a genuflection to the independence of the School Board, but followed it immediately with a clear statement of intent, ten years ahead of its time, to supersede it through a single educational authority for the whole of the metropolis:

As the School Board, like the Poor Law Council, is formed by independent election, I have, in this Council, no further comment to make upon its work. But I may observe that the decision to place under the control of a single administrative authority the whole of the educational work of the metropolis, from the infant school to the University, and from the crèche to the technical college, bids fair to make the 'educational ladder' really open to all London's children, and to do something, in one city at any rate, to make up for the lamentable want of a genuine Minister of National Education.⁹

Most New Liberals and Progressives would never have stood for this if they had thought for a moment that it was 'serious politics'. The New Liberalism proudly insisted on its continuity with the old when it came to a defence of liberty against monolithic administrative projects. The proposal that there should be 'a single administrative authority for the whole of the educational work of the metropolis' was as likely to have aroused its fears of 'Bonapartism' as one for the establishment of a Ministry of Justice.¹⁰ Nor did it favour a steep increase in public expenditure on education or anything else. It was the misappropriation of public money rather than socialistic proposals for altering the proportions as between public and private expenditure that served as the Progressives' rallying

point. The 'moderates' might accuse them of planning to raise the rates, but they could sincerely reject that charge and point out that they had no designs on the hard-earned income of the middle classes as such. Their target was only the rent rolls of ground landlords, the extortionate profits of monopolists, and the property and income of those city companies that had wrongfully expropriated the inheritance of London.

The expression 'New Liberalism' was first coined in 1889¹¹ – the year of the new unionism's greatest triumphs. As the new unionism made its biggest impact upon London so the New Liberalism was first made flesh in the shape of London's Progressive Party. But the Progressives were as much a response to the 'backward' as to the 'advanced' character of metropolitan life. London was not only a place which had more than its due proportion of socialists and new unionists, but was also a provincial backwater at the heart of an empire: the last fortress of Old Corruption left standing sixty years after the passing of the Great Reform Act. It was a place where the Old Liberalism still had useful work to do, but it could do it only by harnessing the support of new social and political forces. The slogan: 'Home Rule for London!' nicely expressed an attachment for Mr Gladstone while making a discreet protest against treating the Grand Old Man's obsession as if it was an adequate substitute for an order of political priorities. But that slogan also suggested continuity with the traditional liberal concern for political and administrative, rather than social, reform. Sidney believed that they could be made to pass from the one to the other. If he could teach them expediency they would learn principle. Indeed, it was one of the distinctive features of Fabianism to treat expediency – not as the point of departure from 'principle' – but as a way of arriving at it. However, this required that Webb should follow one course of action as lobbyist, another as draughtsman and yet another as candidate. Thus, in the matter of educational policy he could be demanding, imaginative or discreetly silent as circumstances required.

When Sidney went to the offices of the LCC at Spring Gardens in mid-March 1892 he was – according to the *Daily News* – one of the first to arrive and he took his seat high up in the chamber. In fact, he was one of the last to arrive and took his seat low down. As he remarked to Beatrice: 'Thus is history written.'¹² In fact, the history of the LCC was to be neither made nor written in the council chamber, but in committees. Webb rejoiced in the LCC's 'discovery' of government by committee. Committees were his natural habitat. He was on the Progressive Party Committee and on seven others before the first council meeting ratified these appointments. It was the function of the Progressive Party Committee to resolve all key decisions on policy and personnel in advance. Prodded by John Burns who was mindful, no doubt, of the old adage concerning idle hands and the Devil and wanted no interference in his own sphere of activity, Sidney was

immediately placed on several committees and soon on more! The list comprised seven committees by the end of 1892. In addition to the four previously noted – Parliamentary, Local Government and Taxation, Public Health and Housing, and the Water committee – he also joined two more; the Appeals committee and the Establishment committee. He was made vice-chairman of Local Government and Taxation.

Even the first four committees would have been an evasion of a convention, which ruled that no one should be on more than three. Yet one more was to be added to the six. At the beginning of March 1892, Sidney had an important conference with Sir Thomas Farrer, who had been first chairman of the 'Progressist' Party and had become vice-chairman of the Council in 1890. Farrer 'spontaneously suggested' that Webb should become chairman of the Technical Education committee. Sidney had already reckoned that he would have to spend nearly twenty hours a week on Council business, but he showed no hesitation in accepting the proposal. His only regret was that he was not on the Highways committee!¹³

By 4 March he was discussing with Llewellyn Smith how best to enlist his help and advice. The following day he was reporting to Beatrice that he had been making arrangements with Quintin Hogg, an alderman and principal patron of the Regent Street Polytechnic, as to how best to get the 'technical education question brought on next Thursday when the estimate comes up'.¹⁴ (He had, of course, also had a word with Evan Spicer, who was chairman of the Finance committee.) 'It so happened' – as Beatrice charmingly remarked – 'that SW's first motion on the Council was one proposing that a committee should be appointed to consider whether the Council should not proceed under the [Technical Instruction] Act.'¹⁵ There is no proposal in politics that it is harder to resist than a call for an inquiry. This is the magic wand that unites all and sundry since those who imagine it will prepare the way for change are joined by others who notice that it will defer it. Sidney's first motion was carried *nem. con.* Moreover, he was left to choose the committee – always subject to maintaining the exact party balance on the Council. In latter years Sidney often explained how, in his anxiety to put on the ablest members from the various sections, he found he had not provided for a chairman, as practically all his nominees proved to be chairmen of other committees. He was virtually driven 'to preside himself'.¹⁶

Such tales magnified the Webb reputation for both modesty and cunning. In fact, the 'Polytechnique men' on the Council did not relish the prospect of a full inquiry. No matter how hard Sidney looked to preparing the ground and reassuring everyone that it was safe to proceed, those who were already associated with great and established institutions of technical education were uneasy. When Webb's committee met Lord Rosebery was in the chair and called for nominations. Although Sidney

was proposed, Rosebery cast around for older members. Hogg, head of the 'Polytechnique party', secured a nomination and only retired in Webb's favour after Lord Hobhouse and Sir T. Farrer had spoken in favour of the Fabian. That evidently much astonished his lordship, who hastily vacated the (embarrassingly high!) chair in favour of Sidney. Webb promptly undertook to prepare a memorandum for the next meeting, which would lay down the scope of the inquiry. The decision as to who was to be employed to conduct it was postponed.¹⁷ Sidney himself appears to have been undecided between two outstanding candidates: Dr William Garnett and Hubert Llewellyn Smith. In the end he resolved the difficulty in a characteristic manner by securing the services of them both. While Smith prepared the report on the state of technical education in London, Garnett was recruited as permanent secretary to what became the London Technical Education Board.

For the purpose of the inquiry, Llewellyn Smith had everything to recommend him. He was respected as a scholarly authority on economics and as a contemporary historian. He was, through Beatrice, a friend. Above all, he was already exceedingly well informed about the subject and a determined advocate of increased educational provision. His approach was marked by a serious historical perspective and a lively appreciation of social needs. He believed that Victorian England had inherited not one educational tradition, but two. The first he identified with the Renaissance and the scholastic and classical tradition of the grammar school; the second he associated with the Reformation and the customary apprenticeship of the workshop. He saw both traditions as defective in so far as they identified learning with mere instruction and sacrificed the development of faculty to the acquisition of knowledge. He shared Matthew Arnold's concern about 'the immense social loss to the country in an age of social and political change and upheaval, caused by the inferior training of the mass of the middle class, on whom so much depended.'¹⁸ Secondary education was a class question and, in the first instance, a middle-class one. Like Bryce, he inclined to see secondary education as something to be devised for those not wholly absorbed in daily toll. Such a conception corresponded to existing social reality in London where he found that the institutions of higher day and evening schools catered for that small minority that continued their education beyond the age of twelve or thirteen. The secondary schools, whether they were 'endowed' or 'proprietary' or 'private adventure', were reaching barely 3 per cent of the population outside the City and Westminster. They were schools attended by the sons of clerks, tradesmen, manufacturers and professional men. The working-class contribution to the secondary school population was small and drawn almost entirely from 'the upper stratum'. In Bethnal Green there were 47 working-class children in secondary

schools and in Poplar there were 27, but of these only 3 in Bethnal Green and 1 in Poplar were the sons of labourers.¹⁹

From these facts Llewellyn Smith drew the conclusion – a surprising one for us – that it was middle-class education that was the most neglected. He argued that

it is the development of universal primary education that has brought with it the need for some capacity-catching machinery for selecting the most promising boys from the elementary schools, and carrying their education to a higher point. Whether in turn this – the modern – idea will give place to the idea of universal secondary education, is a question for the future. The present problem is to devise the best machinery for selection.²⁰

On existing evidence he was persuaded that the social class of the majority of boys selected by scholarship did not, and would not, greatly differ from that of the other pupils of secondary schools. Only the fringe of the working class could be or would be touched. However, it was at this point that the distinction, such as it was, between secondary education in general and technical education came in. He wanted to catch the brightest children and to improve the chances of working-class boys by lowering the age of selection for scholarship to ten or eleven while introducing maintenance grants which would rise with each year that a child was kept at school. Yet he feared that what this would do no more than

take a few boys from one class, and place them among a number of boys of another class, coming from a different kind of home and aiming at a different kind of career. The newcomers must assimilate themselves to their new surroundings under the penalty of miserable isolation during their school career ... In other words such sons of artisans as secure scholarships tend to receive in the higher school the stamp of middle-class ideas, and an almost irresistible bias towards a middle-class trade or profession ... [If the workmen's children were not to aspire beyond their station in life] some powerful corrective must be applied ... a larger infusion of some form of manual or practical instruction ... a more practical and modern curriculum.²¹

Clara Collet made the same point with respect to working-class girls:

The domestic needs and habits of different classes vary considerably, and there may be a danger that in promoting the secondary education of girls of the working classes along the same lines as those pursued by the girls of the middle classes, their domestic happiness may be sacrificed to a theoretical equality.²²

Yet despite these anxieties the National Association for the Promotion of Technical and Secondary Education came to the conclusion that

the most urgent need of our time is to provide facilities for the secondary education of workmen's children, and in the interests of all classes, it is highly desirable that this education should be given as far as possible in the same schools as those attended by the middle class.²³

But while Llewellyn Smith and his collaborators were far from consistent about class priorities in education and about the distribution, if any, between secondary and technical education, they were well informed about the inadequacies of the system and of the provisions for post-elementary education in London so far as the lower middle and upper working classes were concerned.

Llewellyn Smith's reports showed those existing provisions for secondary and technical education to be woefully inadequate. He reckoned that there were probably under a thousand scholarships in the whole of London leading from elementary to secondary schools. In the largest single category of secondary school – the private venture school conducted for the profit of the master – there was an immense and damaging turnover. (There were approximately 450 of them and in 1889–90, 71 had disappeared and 38 new ones had arisen.²⁴) Even in the endowed and proprietary secondary schools there was little attempt to break with the old tradition of purely literary training. It was a tradition, which was not appropriate to the 'neglected' middle class and perhaps worse than useless for the fringe of the working class that entered secondary education.

By 1893 Sidney was armed with the facts and fortified by expert opinion. Even so he was obliged to be both cautious and inventive. If there were few who were prepared to oppose technical education outright, there were many that were uncertain about what it was or else fearful about certain ways of promoting it. Thus, the SDF while favouring 'industrial education' as the best education for all classes, echoed the old slogan of the Socialist League according to which technical education was 'a capital idea for the capitalist'.²⁵ William Morris took the sense of these objections. While insisting that education was a dangerous gift to give slaves he feared that technical education would deaden the spirit of artistic life. Trade union opinion was also characterised by divisions and equivocations. The 'old' unionists attempted a novel distinction between technical education, of which they approved, and 'trade teaching', of which they did not. The new unionists tended to argue that all workers, not just the labour aristocracy, ought to have a chance to acquire skills and improve them. Yet they were not free from misgivings, and suggested that ends would be promoted that were unwelcome and non-educational.

Employers were necessarily influenced by the characteristics of the particular labour markets with which they were confronted. Nor were representatives of secondary and higher educational institutions much less wary. Their attitude was bound to be affected by how any increased expenditure was to be channelled and controlled. Finally, within the LCC itself there were men, like John Benn, who had taken an active interest in providing scientific and technical instruction in various trades, who felt that it was the duty of the city companies to meet the bill. They were zealous defenders of the interests of voluntary organisations already in the field. They were conscious of the need to keep down rates. They were set to take offence at any innovation that they had not thought of themselves or that might be construed as exposing a tardiness on their part to accept responsibility.

Accordingly Webb was content to wait nearly a year in order to unite his Technical Education committee behind agreed proposals. On 29 January 1893 the committee asked the council to accept responsibility for seeing that every district in London was adequately provided with technical education from workshop to university level, taking account of local occupational structure. Opportunity was to be enlarged. Yet as much emphasis was placed upon preventing wasteful overlapping in provision as upon closing gaps in it. The committee asked for little financially and for much administratively. It requested the council for no new rates, but only for one-third of the funds received from the beer and spirits duties. On the other hand, it asked the council to share its responsibility with other parties. It called for the creation of a Technical Education Board, upon which only twenty places would be reserved for councillors while fifteen went to outside interests. Webb saw no future in the LCC setting up new institutions in rivalry to the polytechnics or other established bodies. His committee wanted to add to them and to coordinate their work; not to supplant them. To be sure, this would have to be conditioned upon certain rights of scrutiny and representation. If the claim to scrutiny and representation was to be acceptable it needed to be matched by according to the school board, the City and Guilds Institute, the Head Masters' and the Head Mistresses' Associations and certain other bodies, representation upon the new Technical Education Board itself.²⁶

Thus, Sidney took to the council a report which was carefully researched and well informed: an economical response to a great challenge upon ingenious and yet balanced lines to a profound administrative problem. These qualities were not, however, sufficient to ensure an easy passage for the report. Webb anticipated the difficulty, and took pains anonymously to mobilise pressure on his fellow councillors before the crucial debate occurred.²⁷ He was not entirely successful. Benn wanted to make the council acceptance conditional upon the City livery companies contributing

for the same purpose one-tenth of their corporate income. He pointed out that Webb had asked the companies what they were doing and had found that it was disturbingly little. Was it good enough to chalk on the walls of the City Halls 'Pay What You Owe' and then to run away?²⁸ Sidney disposed of this 'wrecking' amendment by expressing his sympathy with its intention and suggesting that it should be modified in the sense that the companies should be 'invited' to contribute their fair proportion to the cost.²⁹ If he had himself asked for all the 'whisky money' he might have had a great deal more trouble in negotiating this obstacle. Nor was this the only difficulty that had to be surmounted. Many councillors were uneasy about the notion of setting up a board in which the LCC was to share power with other bodies. Even when Sidney had managed to subdue the anxieties about this as a matter of principle, he had to deal with detailed objections that this body had not been invited or that one had been over-represented. Why was London University not represented? Webb replied that it should be once it had become a teaching institution and not merely an examining one. He successfully resisted that amendment, but he was unsuccessful when it came to proposals from 'Labour' councillors that the London Trades Council should have extra places at the expense of the London School Board. If Sidney was privately not too disturbed by being defeated on this issue, he took good care to keep his opinion to himself.³⁰ More important, he took steps to ensure that the council would never again meddle with his committee to such effect. He secured agreement that the Technical Education Board should not have to report to the council every week, but only once a quarter. He also saw that it was released from the usual obligation of a committee to expend no more than £50 at a time without the council's consent. Thus while the TEB required powers of inspection and control over other bodies, it succeeded in releasing itself from customary forms of scrutiny. To further enlarge the effective independence of the committee, Sidney developed the habit of not only drawing up the agenda but of drafting, in advance, the conclusions he wished it to arrive at. If there was a contentious point he included it twice so that if it was struck out in the first instance it might survive in the second. Moreover, if he negotiated a contentious issue through the board he avoided contention occurring in the council by circulating notes to all councillors in advance explaining the grounds of the board's decision. Nine times out of ten such proposals went through without debate.³¹

The Technical Education Board met for the first time on 28 April 1893. Quintin Hogg, Sidney's rival of a year earlier, proposed that Webb be elected chairman and this was carried unanimously.³² He served in this capacity until 1898 and during the first two years of the board's life he also belonged to seven of its key sub-committees. But it was not Webb's

way, for all his phenomenal energy, to take all the work on his shoulders. He fully appreciated the importance of delegation, and never feared to enlist the collaboration of gifted and independent colleagues. Thus, Garnett came in as secretary, but Llewellyn Smith's services were retained by inducing the council to nominate him a member of board. He subsequently became a member of the Royal Commission on Secondary Education (the Bryce Commission). Sidney and Garnett were among those who gave evidence and they all played into each other's hands in the most accomplished manner.³³ Meanwhile, close contact was maintained with Acland so that the board might lawfully construe technical education to cover virtually everything save ancient languages and theology.³⁴ Beatrice's old friend and collaborator Ella Pycroft was placed in charge of the domestic economy classes for girls, expanding existing provision, training teachers and giving to the work a special relevance for working-class rather than middle-class households. For example, the girls were taught how to cook for a meal for an entire family using a single saucepan.³⁵

Nor did Webb neglect public relations. He did not rely only on the representative character of the board to ensure that all concerned knew about its work. In the first year no fewer than four major conferences were convened with interested groups of trade unionists. Thus, on 4 July 1894 there was a conference of the book, paper and printing trades held at County Hall. Fears were very forcibly expressed that technical education was tending to lower the price of labour by increasing its supply. Webb could use his unique knowledge of the trade union movement to show insight into these anxieties. Indeed, he entirely removed them by promising that the board would give instruction only to those actually engaged in the trade.³⁶ From the beginning he used the press to publicise the board's work, making particular use of *London*, the journal of the Reform Union. On 22 October 1894 a new monthly, *The London Technical Education Gazette*, appeared. It was intended to be an organ of communication between the board and all interested in technical education. It survived until March 1904 when the Education Committee under the London Education Act of 1903 superseded the board.

The expenditure of all this political energy and intelligence resulted in achievements in which Sidney always took special pride. First, the board extended educational opportunity in several ways, but principally through its scholarship ladder. When he presented his first report to the council in January 1893 Webb drew a shameful comparison:

Six times as many people attended evening classes in Manchester as in London, and Manchester would not make a sixth of London. Every year 100 000 children leave our Board Schools. Their education should be continued for at least three years afterwards, that is, there ought to

be between 300 000 and 400 000 young persons in evening classes. They number less than 30 000 taking the students at all classes of science, art or technology.³⁷

Four years later he was boasting that London's capacity-catching machine was 'the greatest the world had ever seen'.³⁸ In its first year the board established 500 junior county scholarships for children from households in which earnings did not exceed £3 per week or £150 a year. These covered fees and a small sum intended as compensation for loss of earnings. Above the junior scholarship there were intermediate and senior ones sharply tapering off in number, while competition was enlarged by making children from higher-income groups eligible. But in 1894 the board devoted only a tenth of its total expenditure of £80 000 to scholarships.³⁹ It asked a host of secondary and higher-grade schools, polytechnics and commercial colleges to expand their provision in exchange for grants. Thus, when it came to training Ella Pycroft's 'little housewives', the board offered money to each of the recognised London polytechnics on condition that a school of domestic economy was established where girls who had completed their elementary education could be trained to become homemakers. These classes should involve at least six months' full-time work. The scholarship girls were to have free food and clothing made by themselves, other pupils paying a 'moderate fee'. Battersea Polytechnic was to get a grant in exchange for establishing a college for the teachers with a view to a continuous extension of the movement.⁴⁰

Second – and hardly less important – the board raised standards. In 1893 it issued a circular to technical institutes offering grants upon conditions intended to ensure: (a) the invariable performance of practical, experimental or laboratory work by the students themselves; (b) discouragement of mere lecturing, or book work, in physical science; (c) abandonment of 'farming' classes to the teachers; (d) freedom to teachers to substitute other courses or methods from those proscribed by the department; (f) greater regularity of attendance; and (g) reduction of the high fees hitherto charged for certain subjects.⁴¹ Arrangements were immediately made for the proper inspection of grant-aided institutions of secondary education.

Third, in the same circular the board made it plain that it wanted greater co-ordination of the educational institutions with which it dealt and that it was determined, not only to help in filling gaps, but also to eliminate wasteful overlapping. In general it encouraged existing institutions to take fresh initiatives, but occasionally, as with the establishment of a new technical school in Hoxton, it took matters directly in hand. By 1894–5 it had begun to promote the higher education of clerks in London by organising a course specifically designed to bring them up to the level of their 'German rivals'.⁴² When 'others' took important initiatives, as

with the foundation of the London School of Economics, the board was at hand to give its aid. Finally, the TEB by skilfully publicising these activities powerfully contributed to preparing educational and governmental opinion to regard the county councils as the appropriate *de facto* authorities for all secondary education. Thus Garnett and Webb – with Sidney taking the lion's share of the questioning – induced the Bryce Commission to look to the county councils as the proper bodies to be entrusted with secondary education. This is not to imply that Bryce's recommendations were entirely welcome to Webb. The Royal Commission proposed that the distinction between 'secondary' and 'technical' education should be maintained; elementary education was to be left to the school boards, technical to the TEB, and a new authority, which might be modelled on the TEB, was to take charge of 'secondary' education. In his evidence, Sidney, in the interests of removing all restrictions on the work of the TEB, had tried to diminish to vanishing point the distinction to which the Commissioners were so attached. This led to some entertaining exchanges:

- 'You spoke' [remarked Dr. Fairburn, one of the Commissioners] 'about secondary education proper. May I ask you what you meant by that?'
 'I should be very loath to give a definition unless that of all education between the elementary standards and the University.'
 'This is evidence on technical education?'
 'I should be sorry to define technical education as exclusive of secondary education, or secondary education as exclusive of technical.'
 'Then do we understand that the Committee you represent has the whole field of technical education for its own?'
 'The functions of the Board are of course limited by its powers, and its powers are only those that are given by the Technical Instruction Acts. I understand therefore that we could not aid the teaching of Greek, unless Modern Greek, nor the teaching of Latin, nor History, and probably literature. But I do not know quite what other subjects would fall outside the definition in the Technical Instruction Acts.'
 'Still, an education which excludes the subjects which you have just alluded to can hardly be recognised as secondary?'
 'That is a matter of opinion upon which I should not like to express myself. It is simply a matter of definition.'
 'It does not cover the whole field that lies between the elementary schools and the Universities?'
 'Certainly it does not.'⁴³

Llewellyn Smith intervened:

- 'With reference to that, is it not the case that the Technical Instruction Acts do not exclude the Board from aiding schools which are giving

instruction in the subjects you named, provided they also give instruction in the subjects falling within the Technical Instruction Acts?’

‘That is so and as I shall have occasion to show we have aided schools which call themselves Secondary Schools and which do teach the subjects.’

Sir John Hubert asked: ‘Have you aided any Grammar Schools?’ When Sidney affirmed that the board had done so, the Dean of Manchester quickly observed: ‘So your Secondary Education after all is “proper”?’

To this Sidney cheerfully replied: ‘I had not suggested that it was not.’ As he made clear in subsequent answers:

It is not within our function to take care that the study of literature, for instance, does not suffer; but one cannot ignore the fact that by being able to endow the teaching of science, languages, commercial subjects, economics, and numerous other things under the definition of technical education, and not being able to endow the teaching of some other subjects, so long as there is no other body which is able to supply any makeweight, it is impossible but that those other subjects should not somewhat tend to be neglected. Consequently, speaking as a citizen and without reference to technical education, one cannot help feeling that the inequality must somehow or other be redressed.⁴⁴

It was not, in his view, to be redressed by establishing some other body responsible for part of the post-elementary education: it was ‘almost inconceivable’ that it should be done. Bryce wanted to attempt it, but Sidney had administrative convenience and history on his side. As with the distinction between technical and secondary education, there was little to choose between having history and having administrative convenience on one’s side.

Yet if the work of the TEB was ‘hardly ever criticised’, it did have its critics. If Sidney was responsible for enlarging the educational opportunities of Londoners he did not enlarge them by so much. If the cost of his ‘capacity-catching machinery’ ran to £80 000 at the outset, and rose to £120 000 by 1896, throughout its entire lifetime the TEB never had recourse to raising the rate that the Technical Instruction Act of 1889 had made permissible.⁴⁵ Moderates and Progressives might view that with satisfaction, but was it not a proper subject of discontent among socialists or among educationalists who knew the extent of London’s untrained ability?

Then, again, as ‘Labour’ critics were bold enough to point out, ‘opportunity’ was enlarged far faster than ‘equality’ was approached. The TEB

might insist that it was promoting the education of the poorest of London's children, but its own statistics hardly bore out that conclusion. The *Technical Education Gazette* might notice, ever and anon, that the majority of scholarships went to the children of the 'working class'. But that majority was never large, never grew at a dramatic rate and was always achieved by amalgamating the impressive achievements of journeymen's offspring with the distressingly poor results achieved by the sons and daughters of unskilled labourers.⁴⁶ John Burns, Ben Tillett, Will Crooks and Keir Hardie found plenty to grumble about. They did not stop grumbling after Webb had been forced to increase the representation of the London Trades Council at the expense of the London School Board, nor when the minimum scholarship was raised from £5 to £10 so as to make the sacrifice relatively easier for working-class parents to bear. The petite bourgeoisie was the main beneficiary. The poorer districts were being neglected. Working-class children were being imbued with middle-class standards, as exemplified by that worthless character the University Man. (As Will Crooks pointed out, 'there never was a university man yet who built a ship or a house, or rendered any service to the community ... He wanted education extended to the poorest of the poor, and it would do no harm to society, he imagined, if they had educated scavengers.')⁴⁷ Keir Hardie complained that the scholarships inculcated the worst type of middle-class competitiveness.⁴⁸ Nor was it the workers' leaders alone who discovered that the work of the TEB was deformed by the values of existing society. Feminists pointed out only a third of the scholarships were for girls and that many of these were devoted to courses of study which confirmed them in their role of 'little housewives'.

Sidney met these objections as best he could. He reminded the feminists that there simply was not the same demand for education for girls. If girls had had to be adjudged by equal standards they would hardly have gained one-quarter of the scholarships never mind one-third. Similarly, with respect to the 'bad districts' he pointed out that thirty scholarships were reserved for the least successful schools. Yet the success of the TEB was undoubtedly purchased at the price of accommodation to the requirements of the existing order. The method of averting hostility by befriending all and sundry had its costs. If it was silly to complain that the TEB saved the endowed schools by giving them conditional aid, Sidney himself drew the line at subsidising private venture schools. By 1900 he had got himself into the ridiculous position of attacking the livery companies in print while he was defending them in the council and committee as indispensable participants in the TEB. He was dismissing John Benn's statements about their extravagance and waste even when they were based on his own *Facts for Londoners*.⁴⁹

An important reproach against Sidney during the formation and fertile years of his leadership in technical education (1892–5) is that he held a

constant ideal before him – but that it was administrative rather than educational. He knew, in other words, how London education should be organised, but he had not asked himself what it was to be for. It might be argued – and very plausibly – that he dismissed theory and was impatient with definition because he was anxious to get things done and like most men who care to get things done did not care too much about what it was that he was doing. This is nearer the mark than the objection that he was an incorrigible elitist whose deepest commitment was to building capacity-catching machinery rather than to a concern for the children of London taken as whole. He wanted every Londoner to have an educational opportunity that would be at least equal to that enjoyed by the children of the superior artisan.⁵⁰ If he believed, as he certainly did, in the unequal endowment of capacity, he affirmed his faith that even the dullest razor ought to be given the sharpest possible edge.⁵¹ He never deluded himself that the capacity he was catching began to approximate to all the capacity that needed to be caught. But he declined to defend inertia behind the walls of principle or postpone the elevation of some children out of a misplaced sense of justice towards the rest. He had made it plain that he was not going to be detained by protests to the effect that he was giving inequality a protective colouring. Nor could he understand the objection that the ‘do something’ policies of today might become the mothers and fathers of the ‘do nothing’ policies of tomorrow. How could he, when he was already so ambitious for tomorrow?

On Monday, 13 August 1894 Sidney was in Oxford reading a paper on the economic heresies of the LCC to the Economic Section of the British Association. It will be remembered that his activities on the council were by no means confined to the pioneering work of the TEB. His subject on this occasion was the employment policies of the council and he defended it in a long, heavily documented argument. He successfully conveyed the impression that he was spokesman for the Progressive majority while implying that progressive policies were ‘socialist’ and anathema to those who fancied themselves to be the defenders of economic orthodoxy. The heresies were three in number. First, the LCC followed the practice of the London School Board in insisting that not less than the standard rate of wages should be paid. This meant paying the union rate in each trade and never paying less than sixpence an hour to adult males or less than eighteen shillings per week to women. As recently as November 1892 Lord Farrer himself had declared that the council in adopting the standard rate would ‘lose its independence ... Be run by trade unions ... be bound hand and foot to obey their orders.’ Sidney suggested that Lord Farrer himself would now recognise that that was ‘alarmist’. It meant paying a moral minimum wage to the unskilled, keeping them above Booth’s poverty line and paying the negotiated rate for skilled men. Nobody would

recommend that county councils should buy engineers or medical officers in the cheapest market, but 'owing to the extraordinary ignorance of the middle and upper class' it was wrongly thought to be another matter when it came to 'common workmen'. Second, the council imposed these policies upon private contractors, thus, allegedly, diminishing the contractors' freedom and raising costs. But this, Sidney argued, was to confuse the contractors' expenses with the community's costs. The council was not abolishing competition, but shifting its plane from mere cheapness to industrial efficiency and ingenuity. Finally, the council had encouraged the heresy of getting rid of the contractor altogether by executing its own works directly. Sidney demonstrated, with a wealth of detail, that some contractors had conspired together not to compete with each other, and so to induce the council to abandon its fair wages clause. 'The Council preferred to abandon the contractor' – at least once it found that it could effect a net saving of nearly 50 per cent by doing the work itself. Sidney concluded that the integration of productive processes under the direct control of salaried managers accountable to the consumers had been the way forward in British business history for the last twenty years and if it was economic heresy it was increasingly industrial orthodoxy.⁵²

The delivery of this paper at Oxford confirmed Sidney in his status not only as a recognised leader of the Progressive Party but also as a recognised economist. He had got in – if only just – upon the right side of the professionalising process that had been going on in British economics since about 1890. A profession requires a definitive text and a recognised corpus of theory. Marshall had met this need with his *Principles*. When this book appeared many had the experience – so indispensable to professionalism – that 'this is what I have been saying' or that 'this is what I should have said'. This was true in Sidney's case. But professionalism requires more than a minimum agreement about scope, methods and conclusions: it presupposes organisation strong enough to include all the 'recognised practitioners' while excluding the rest. It is a painful, tension-ridden process. In 1889, Sidney had written defiantly to Marshall: 'If I am wrong in my economics I shall be glad to be corrected.'⁵³ He was admitted in the following year as one of the founding members of the British Economic Association, along with five other Fabians.⁵⁴ Yet there was an active distrust on both sides. Webb feared that the *Economic Journal* was going to be a mere individualist organ and that it was being established to queer the pitch for the *Oxford Economic Review*.⁵⁵ If he was happy to join the Economic Association he was also a member of Professor James Bonar's Economic Club, which was founded about the same time and which admitted only those who were able to 'furnish satisfactory evidence of Economic Training'. In 1894 it had 56 members. It was exclusive. Yet it combined an old mixture of established academics like Marshall,

Cunningham, Edgeworth, Foxwell and L.L. Price with civil servants like H. Llewellyn Smith and influential investigators such as Sidney and Beatrice, Ella Pycroft and Charles Booth. Then there were publicists, such as Schloss, and charity organisers like C.S. Loch. In short, the early 1890s represented the formative years of English economics, a period marked by rival journals and competing attempts at organisation, an age distinguished by halting steps away from mere amateurism. It was a time in which conflicting ambitions met in terms of a drive to shut out the negligible, while admitting all those who had a legitimate claim to attention.

One of the critical moments in this long professionalising process occurred in Oxford on the very day after Sidney delivered his paper on the economic heresies of the LCC. (It may safely be presumed that he was present.) A number of reports were delivered by members of a committee, which Professor W. Cunningham of Cambridge presided over. The topic was 'Methods of Economic Training in This and Other Countries'. A tone of anxiety and of the most profound gloom pervaded the discussion. In the United States economics was supported by an enthusiastic public opinion and in universities it escaped relegation to the position of a subject outside the usual curriculum. In England, if it appeared in the curriculum at all, it was as a subordinate and narrow subject:

In the University of London, Economics holds no position but the somewhat unfortunate one of a subject for candidates proceeding from the BA to the MA degree in Moral Science, a position which at once restricts the number of students likely to study it and prevents its study from exhibiting much beyond the knowledge of general theory. It is not a subject, either optional or obligatory, at any other examination.

At Oxford it related to little more than certain prescribed passages in Adam Smith and Walker. At University College, Nottingham, the same professor taught history, literature and economics. Only at Cambridge, under Marshall, was the position markedly better, since economics entered examinations for three degrees. But feelings about Marshall were equivocal. After the appearance of his *Principles* in 1890 British economists felt that little more needed to be done on the general theory of value. But the standing and growth of the profession required that it should change the popular impression of the economist as 'a compound of text-book theory and ignorance of fact'. Perhaps Marshall for all his talk about the Cambridge method of finding the One in the Many and the Many in the One was not the man for that. Others besides Sidney might have written, 'I do feel a sort of reverence for Marshall as our leader in economics and I always uphold him as such. But I wish he would lead a little.'⁵⁶ Perhaps Cambridge was not the best place for leadership. The people who stood in

most need of a training in economics belonged to a *'nouvelle couche sociale'* to whom that place was closed.

As Marshall himself noted, the study of economics did not lead to high financial rewards. If the prevailing indifference was to be overcome then economics would have become part of the professional qualification of lawyers and civil servants, as was the case in many other European countries, notably in Austria, Germany and to a lesser extent France. In England it was not regarded as a necessary part of any professional curriculum.

At Oxford on 14 August 1894 a clear consensus was arrived at. If economics was to become an influential profession then some regular system of teaching had to emerge. This teaching had to have a character, which made the subject realistic and useful as well as intellectually elegant. The influence of foreign, chiefly German, economists had to be recognised, and the subject had to come to terms with the 'peaceful political revolution by which power had been transferred to the working classes', while thought had been more and more impressed by the doctrine of evolution. Economics must become part of any professional curriculum and no longer left as a cinderella subject within universities. The responsibility for encouragement rested entirely with educational bodies.

It is a fair conjecture – although no more than that – that Sidney Webb left this meeting to go to Borough Farm, a couple of miles south-west of Godalming, where Beatrice, Wallas and GBS were staying. In his pocket he had a letter dated 2 August 1894 from a Derby solicitor, W.H. Whiston, enclosing a copy of the last will and testament of H.H. Hutchinson. This eccentric old gentleman had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Fabian Society. However, he took the decidedly un-Fabian step of blowing his brains out. He left an estate to the total value of some £20 000, of which about half was absorbed by bequests and legacy duty. The balance went to a trust to be administered by his daughter, Constance, and by Webb. He had never met Sidney, but he made him chairman of the trustees who were to be five in number. The other three were the Fabians De Mattos, William Clarke and E.R. Pease. The trustees were directed to apply the money 'at once, gradually and at all events within ten years to the propaganda and other purposes of the said [Fabian] Society and its Socialism, and towards advancing its objects in any way they deem advisable'.⁵⁷ According to Graham Wallas, the London School of Economics – unlike most important institutions – was born at a precise time and place: 'a certain day in August 1894' at the Borough Farm. Sidney and Beatrice 'woke up early, had a long discussion, and at breakfast told us that part of the money would be used to found a school in London on the lines of the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* in Paris.'

Beatrice first referred to these events 'a few weeks' after they occurred. Sidney had already been warned by Whiston that, as 'Old Hutch' was

undoubtedly of unsound mind, he had taken steps to improve the widow's position under the will. (She had been left only £100 a year, which Webb suggested should be immediately doubled.) 'The question', wrote Beatrice in late September, after the Hutchinson family had shown no intention of disputing the will,

is how to spend the money. It might be placed to the credit of the Fabian Society and spent in the ordinary work of propaganda. Or a big political splash might be made with it – all the Fabian executive might stand for Parliament! and ILP candidates might be subsidised in their constituencies. But neither of these ways seems to us equal to the occasion. If it is mainly used for the ordinary work of the FS, then it will merely save the pockets of the ordinary subscribers or inflate the common work of the organization for a few years beyond its normal growth. Moreover, mere propaganda of the shibboleths of collectivism is going on at a rapid rate throughout the ILP – the ball has been set running and it is rolling down the hill at a fair pace. It looks as if the great bulk of working men will be collectivists before the end of the century. But reform will not be brought about by shouting. What is needed is *hard thinking*. And the same objection applies to sending non-descript Socialists into Parliament. The Radical members are quite sufficiently compliant in their views: what is lacking in them is the leaven of knowledge. So Sidney has been planning to persuade the other trustees to devote the greater part of the money to encouraging *research* and economic study. His vision is to found, slowly and quietly, a London School of Economics and Political Science – a centre not only of lectures on special subjects, but an association of students who would be directed and supported in doing original work.⁵⁸

It is easy enough to draw together the considerations that brought forth this proposed line of action. Not least in importance was Beatrice's preference for research as opposed to mere politics. Then there was Sidney's hostility to Oxford and Cambridge, his admiration for the laboratory method in economics, exemplified by the MIT. He was aware of the failure, hitherto, of the TEB to meet that need for higher commercial education which Llewellyn Smith had identified in his initial report. These considerations must have added to the impact of the discussion at the British Association on the unhappy state of economics teaching in Britain. It is more difficult to grasp how the Webbs proposed to surmount the extraordinary difficulties that stood in their path. Could the Fabian be induced to believe that the founding of an academic institution was consistent with the terms of the Hutchinson Trust? Would it be found to be so if it were tested in a court of law? How was the Fabian to be reassured

without arousing the suspicions of the TEB, the Chamber of Commerce or the railway companies whose support would be indispensable? After all, the Hutchinson money could be used for little more than pump priming. Where was an adequate staff to be found or suitable buildings secured?

Hutchinson's choice of trustees was extremely fortunate from Webb's point of view. Once Sidney had made it clear that he wanted to behave generously towards her mother, Constance Hutchinson gave her unqualified support to the proposal to use most of the money for educational purposes. On 2 September 1894 she warned that Whiston, the family lawyer, 'has no sympathy with father's wishes'. Characteristically, Webb immediately persuaded him to act on behalf of the executors. Pease, Webb's most devoted admirer, could be relied upon under all imaginable circumstances. The remaining Fabians were manageable, although they probably required to be managed in opposed ways. W.B. De Mattos was the lecture secretary of the Society. In proposing that a substantial portion of the Hutchinson money should be used to fund a lecture in the provinces, Webb effectively diminished the likelihood of any resistance from that quarter. Indeed, the notion of a 'London School' might be presented as but a more permanent and institutionalised expression of the concept that informed the lecture programme. Moreover, De Mattos's advocacy of 'free love' and his habit of ravishing the daughters of Fabian worthies made it difficult for him to be too quarrelsome. William Clarke was a much more considerable figure. Somewhat austere, aggressive and made irritable through ill health and overwork, he might have offered a formidable challenge. However in 1893, in a discussion of the 'Limits of Collectivism', he had gone on record that

The Universities and higher colleges should be left a good deal to themselves ... The special schools which are now arising over England and America for imparting higher education through the best teachers indicate what the best of the future will be like. They will far more closely resemble the University of Paris in the Middle Ages than the aristocratic English collegiate system of later times.⁵⁹

(Clarke had been one of the first non-collegiate students admitted into Cambridge. His purse not being long enough to pay college bills, it had been a blow to him until he concluded that a college was only a glorified public school). Thus he shared with Webb a resentment against an ideal of a university which reduced itself to a device for giving the youths and maidens of the upper classes a 'ripping time', while subscribing to the view that learning and research would either make socialists of their own accord or else not at all. Thus, contrary to received opinion, Webb was fortunate in his Fabians.

This became apparent as soon as the trustees decided that they had better consult the Fabian executive regarding their proposal to improve the settlement so far as the widow was concerned. There was something uncommonly like nervous insecurity in the terms that Sidney – on behalf of the trustees – addressed the executive when it met on 28 September. He absented himself from the meeting, preferring to communicate by letter. Hubert Bland immediately noticed the contradiction between Webb's insistence that the executive must not encroach upon the prerogative of the trustees and his request that it should approve of what they intended to do on behalf of the widow! Olivier held that the executive was the sole arbiter as to what were and what were not the purposes of the Fabian Society. It was only after a prolonged debate that it was decided *nem. con.* not to take any steps to upset the arrangement. Shaw, who had represented Webb at the meeting, advised that Bland must be given 'a proprietary interest in our projects'. Webb attended to this by making Bland a member of an administrative committee, which took over some of the functions of the trustees so far as the government of the new school was concerned, rather than a trustee. Olivier was brought on at the same time. It was of course now far too late for them to affect the crucial decisions about how to dispose of the Hutchinson money. Indeed, it was too late for Shaw himself. He had quite taken Webb's point that the money would be wasted if it was publicised in such a way as to persuade Fabians that they had no need to make the same calls upon their pockets, as they had done before. He evidently did not realise until too late that 'the acquiescence of the Fabian Executive went a long way towards freeing the Trustees from any obligation to consult the Fabian Society'. Within a year Shaw himself was sending vain and brilliant protests to Beatrice about Sidney's 'atrocious malversation' of the bequest. The great entertainer showed an entertaining *naïveté* when he complained that Sidney, in treating of 'Hutchinson business' at executive discussions, exhibited 'an appalling want of sense of the situation'. He attained to the highest reaches of absurdity when he insisted that 'the Collectivist flag must be waved and the Marsellaise played if necessary in order to attract fresh bequests.' If Sidney was outwitting businessmen and was found out it would be declared an 'uncommonly smart thing'; but if, on the other hand, he was to be discovered outwitting Fabians, including George Bernard Shaw, it would be a very great outrage!

All that is necessary [so Shaw assured Beatrice] is to avoid shocking the common sense of the public and the ILP or Fabian critic by talking about academic abstraction and impartiality. Even if such a thing were possible its foundation out of Hutchinson's money would be as flagrant a breach of trust as handing it over to the Liberty and Property Defence

League since it was expressly left to endow Socialism. Further, the Fabian executive must not be told that it has nothing to do with it ... My dismay when Webb did not even understand why the subject had been put on the agenda paper was acute. Please show him this letter and allow it to rankle.⁶⁰

The time had passed when it might rankle. Sidney had already received an 'opinion' from Haldane, which confirmed that the trustees had an unfettered discretion when it came to deploying the Hutchinson money. Whether this was 'bad law' is as unimportant as whether Sidney also asked Haldane whether he would be in order in endowing a disinterested and unbiased educational institution, so long as he believed that such an institution would tend to support and promote the findings of Fabian socialism. The law knows no trespass unless it would be found to be such in the courts, nor can ordinary moral principles be brought to bear upon omniscience – especially when assumed so simply and felt so sincerely. As for Shaw – within a few weeks of receiving his letter Beatrice had made the acquaintance of Charlotte Payne Townshend:

We, knowing she was wealthy and hearing she was socialistic, interested her in the London School of Economics. She subscribed £1000 to the library, endowed a woman's scholarship and has now [September 1896] taken the rooms over the School at Adelphi Terrace, paying us £300 a year for rent and service. It was on account of her generosity to our projects and 'for the good of the cause' that I first made friends with her. To bring her more directly into our little set of comrades I suggested that we should take a house together in the country and entertain our friends ... Graham Wallas bored her with his morality and learning. In a few days she and Bernard Shaw were constant companions.⁶¹

Miss Townshend had succeeded Constance Hutchinson as a trustee in November 1895. She married Bernard Shaw three years later.

As for other leading Fabians, Sidney was at pains to consult them. Moreover, members of the Fabian Society might enroll as students at the school at half price – the balance being made up out of the Hutchinson Trust. In the first year of the school's life one out of every six students was a Fabian.⁶² Had Graham Wallas been appointed as first director of the school as Webb had intended he should, its socialist bona fides might have been above suspicion. In the event Wallas declined that honour.⁶³ Confronted with so much cleverness it is understandable that some historians have questioned whether Webb ever seriously intended that this invitation should have been accepted. If Webb knew that Wallas had little capacity for what he called 'business', he must also have suspected

that Wallas had little taste for it. By offering his leadership he may have contrived to disarm real or imagined critics without risking being lumbered with a republican and an infidel who was *persona non grata* with some members of the educational establishment in London.⁶⁴ However, Sidney appears to have taken Wallas's refusal of the appointment as a genuine setback. He described it in these terms in a private letter to Pease, a quarter in which deceitfulness would appear to have been nearly unnecessary.⁶⁵

In any event the selection of W.A.S. Hewins as first director was – given that the Fabian hash had been settled – greatly to be preferred. Sidney and Beatrice had first met him while visiting the Bodleian in pursuit of their trade union studies. They had not been well received by the librarian but Hewins, a tutor at Pembroke College, had come to their aid. He was accordingly a man of some academic standing. He had been a serious, if unsuccessful, contender for the chair of economics at King's College London. Although not a socialist in any serious sense of the term he had been a member of the Christian Socialist Guild of St Matthew and addressed reproaches to unregulated capitalism half out of nostalgia for the Middle Ages and half out of regard to the requirements of imperialism. In economics he favoured historical and applied studies to 'abstract theory'.⁶⁶ (It was not until 1897 that, through Cannan, the LSE offered a course which went beyond 'descriptive economics', to one dealing with 'the leading principles of economic history'.) Although he grew impatient with students and with teaching in ways Wallas was not to do, Hewins was emphatically a man with a taste for great enterprises. He was free, as Wallas was not, to go along to the Chamber of Commerce and try to solicit funds with the assurance that 'the School would not deal with political matters and nothing of a socialist tendency would be introduced.'⁶⁷ And it was perfectly plain that if original research projects were to be carried out and more and more students enlisted in three-year coursework, the funds would have to come from more regular and more assured sources than the Hutchinson Trustees or Charlotte Payne Townshend. Sidney set out to secure a regular income from the Technical Education Board. His request was for £500 a year in respect of higher commercial education, 'on the understanding that the proposed subjects and lecturers be submitted for the approval of the Board in consultation with the London Chamber of Commerce and that the Board's grant be restricted to such lecturers and subjects.'⁶⁸ He succeeded and – with the most active help from Beatrice – went on to secure endowments and gifts from great financial and industrial institutions, as well as from such rich men as Rothschild and Passmore Edwards. By the turn of the century the LSE had the most swell board of directors of any educational institution in the metropolis. It enjoyed the active support of the Earl of Kimberley and Lord Rosebery, and the

blessing of the chairman of the LCC and of the Bishop of London – Dr Mandell Creighton, who laid the School’s foundation stone on 2 July 1900 and became president of the Court of Governors.

There were, to be sure, a number of dissatisfied and ill-disposed persons who did their best to make trouble. For example, James Ramsay MacDonald found it decidedly unsatisfactory that no part of the Hutchinson money was employed to make him either a Member of Parliament or a university lecturer. (Sidney and Beatrice doubted his qualifications for the first of these positions and were confident that he would prove entirely inadequate in relation to the requirements for the second. MacDonald retaliated by complaining first that it was improper that the Hutchinson money should be used for purely academic purposes and subsequently that it was improper that public money should be used to advance the interests of Fabian socialism! Outmanoeuvred by Webb and bewildered and perplexed by Sidney’s obscure opinion concerning the relationship between learning and politics, MacDonald gave Pease some advanced notice of his own priorities. ‘Golf’, he remarked, ‘is better than Socialism.’)⁶⁹

Was the LSE the fruit of bad faith on the part of the Webbs or was it, as one of its principal apologists has contended, the offspring of ‘dual inspiration’ rather than of ‘double think’? Webb’s admirers find it perfectly natural that when he was speaking to socialists he drew attention to one side of the school’s activity and when he was dealing with businessmen or public authorities he attended to another. The presence of Graham Wallas, the lectures on German social democracy by Bertrand Russell, the teaching undertaken by Sidney and Beatrice themselves, together with the preferential treatment accorded to Fabians who enrolled as students, might all be taken as evidence of respect paid to Hutchinson’s purpose. On the other hand, when dealing with the Chamber of Commerce or the TEB it was useful to refer to Hubert Hall’s course on palaeography and diplomatics, not to mention the lecture on railways by W. H. Ackworth – a subject upon which good Fabians considered him to be ‘hopelessly wrong and invincibly stupid’. Certainly, the majority of teachers either were non-socialist or actively opposed to socialism. Throughout their lifetime the Webbs exercised the decisive influence over the choice of director and until after the First World War every director was identified with imperialism. Undoubtedly Sidney and Beatrice imagined that this ensured respectability while shutting out the main enemy: the backward elements who still championed abstract deductive methods, individualism and *laissez-faire*.

If University College, ‘the infidel institution in Gower Street’, aroused a strong initial hostility, there is no doubt that the LSE was for long the subject of uneasiness and mistrust.⁷⁰ The Webbs’ accomplishments, their

energy, devotion, capacity for research and their personal disinterestedness generally protected them from crude reproaches about bad faith. However, not even the most plausible and sophisticated account of the 'dual inspiration' of their enterprise could shield them from the charge of self-deception and 'double-think'. The belief that the advancement of learning in the social sciences must promote the advance of Fabian Socialism was absurd, since it required knowledge of conclusions as yet unknown. Of course Sidney would have denied that he was pretending to this omniscience. He would have brushed such logic-chopping aside and confessed that he was acting on a well-educated hunch. He who gets things done is to be detained by neither timidity nor by pedantry.

But the trouble with 'the man who gets things done' is that he rarely knows what he is doing! It seems more than likely that Webb was acquainted with the essential history of University College and that the example of that institution, as much in their different ways as MIT or Columbia College, or the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* in Paris, contributed to the idea of the school. Yet the problem of starting with £10 000 rather than £160 000 merely symbolises the differences in the degree of difficulty. It was not only that the utilitarians had a stronger material base.⁷¹ They came to protest against religious tests, and other forms of exclusion. They had all the self-confidence that comes from a sense of the perfect match between their wider economic and social ideals and their educational activity: the most perfect freedom and independence ought to distinguish human experience in all the departments of life. The Fabians did not begin by searching out the limits of these contentions, nor did they attempt a restatement of the relationship between learning and living. The LSE was never thought of as a workers' educational institution. If Sidney and Beatrice began by drawing up a list of researchable questions, they were in no position to design a new map of learning, although they made an immense contribution to the development of labour studies and of public administration. It was with the founding of the school that the difficulties of opportunism first became apparent. It was an exciting place, but it was never to be entirely free from a sense of *mauvaise foi*. All Sidney's skill at manipulating and evading was required to reassure this eminence and that interest. He was even forced to withdraw for a time from the government of the place when certain railway directors proved to be less complacent and easy-going about 'dual inspiration' than he was himself.

With the school established, Sidney became more than ever anxious to see the formation of a teaching university in London. Plainly the standing of the LSE would be enhanced and its future secured if it could be incorporated within such an institution.⁷² Unfortunately the proposals of the so-called Gresham Commission of 1894, while recommending this

development, failed to reassure and placate all the interested parties. As Webb had sought Richard Burdon Haldane's opinion concerning the legality of his administration of the Hutchinson trust, so he now sought his collaboration in the interests of this great undertaking. 'What', inquired Haldane, 'is your idea of a University?' 'I have', replied Sidney, 'no idea of a University, but here are the facts.' There is no reason to suppose that the report of this exchange is apocryphal.⁷³ Since Haldane had been educated in Göttingen it was only to be expected that he would begin with 'the Idea'. Sidney's impatience with this manner of proceeding was soon to become a matter of public record. When Lord Milner admonished him before a Royal Commission on University Education, remarking, 'I thought the state and the university were absolutely incompatible terms,' Webb answered: 'Again I suggest that we had better throw overboard the idea of a university and the idea of the state; it does not help us at all.'⁷⁴

To give short shrift to metaphysical enquiries is no proof of mindlessness. If Webb was unable or unwilling to supply an abstract idea of a university, he had an exceptionally clear and distinct vision of what the University of London should be like. It became a compelling vision because it was not plucked out of the air but appeared to issue from a keen appreciation of the realities of social geography and the possibilities of public administration. It joined a subdued and mild-mannered criticism of 'ancient places' to the enthusiasm of civic pride, democracy and imperialism. It accommodated existing interests even as it transcended them. It conveyed both the difficulty and the elegance to be expected of a new and hard way of thinking about the structure, function and purposes of public institutions. It was a style of argument that outraged the traditional intellectuals to begin with but left them nonplussed or more than halfway persuaded by the end.

London University should not compete with Oxford or Cambridge at undergraduate level. It should have its own standards of excellence, which were to be worked out in relation to the needs and opportunities of the metropolis:

It may be at the outset be admitted that for any university of the Oxford or Cambridge type the metropolis is perhaps more unfit than any other spot that could be chosen. By no possible expenditure could we create at South Kensington, in the Strand or at Gower Street, the tradition, the atmosphere, the charm, or the grace of collegiate life on the Isis or the Cam. Nor is it possible to secure, amid the heterogeneous crowds of London and all its distractions, either the class selection or the careful supervision required by the parents of boys fresh from Eton and Harrow, with two or three hundred a year to spend in pocket-money ...

Now that Oxford and Cambridge are open to students of all creeds and all races, no parent, living himself away from London, wishing to place a boy of eighteen amid safe and advantageous social surroundings, would willingly send him to live as an undergraduate in London lodgings.

The typical undergraduate would be Londoner living at home and coming from a household sustained by an income of under £1500 a year.

These limitations had to govern the curriculum and the character and the geographical distribution of the teaching. On the other hand there was practically no limitation on size.⁷⁵ The whole of Scotland maintained four successful universities for a population which was only two-thirds of the size of this place, which was better thought of as a province than as a city. If Paris and Berlin could successfully compete with scores of other universities and yet enroll in their universities 12 000 students each, London might easily expect 20 000:

Exactly as the "middle-class" origin of the typical London undergraduate by opening up a clientele of enormous extent, makes possible a large university so his professional needs compel an intensive culture of each subject unknown at the older seats of learning.

This new race of students had to make their way in the world. They needed a 'technical school for all the brain-working professions', albeit one that would encourage the 'subtle cultivation of the imagination and generosity of aim'.

However, the very practical and humdrum character of London University meant that its teachers must excel in their specialisms, even if they fell short of men of a large and general culture. And this meant that a rightly organised and adequately endowed London University must become 'the foremost post-graduate centre of the intellectual world.' Above and beyond the bread-and-butter democracy of undergraduate studies there must arise 'a new aristocracy of advanced students' drawn from London and from all over the world by the prospect of a 'post-graduate life unattainable in the more leisurely cloistered homes of university culture'. (Here Sidney's argument was informed by a correct appreciation of developments in the United States, which has – as yet – received little notice or understanding in England.) The highest function of a university lay in the *production* rather than in the distribution of learning. And for Webb the advancement of learning was not mainly a matter of *culture* – a knowledge of the past and present achievements of mankind – but of *science*. What Bacon meant by the advancement of learning had come to mean

costly laboratories and experimental workshops in physics and chemistry, hospitals and asylums for medicine and surgery, schools for

pedagogy, documents and social institutions actually at work for economics and political science ... It was by no mere accident that Davy and Faraday, Huxley and Tyndall, Sir Joseph Hooker and Mr. Herbert Spencer, all worked in London.

It followed that the constitution of the new university should fearlessly face these limitations the better to make the most of these advantages. Organisation ought to be by faculties, not by colleges. Unicellular organisation, as in the provincial universities, or multicellular replicas of the same elementary types as at Oxford and Cambridge, must give place to a more highly organised structure: highly differentiated faculties capable of dealing with all the appropriate teaching and research from one end of London to the other. Professorial megalomania must be redirected away from the disruptive work of raising the prestige of each collegiate unit and brought into the service of the faculty so as to enhance the reputation of the whole university. Extreme local dispersion of 'mere undergraduate teaching' had to be coupled with a centralised and highly organised intercourse between all the teachers in any given subject. For properly qualified undergraduates, the university must offer an open door at approved courses at polytechnics or adequate institutions in such 'unacademic places as Tottenham or West Ham'. For the hundreds of post-graduates, it would supply, at centrally located institutions, care by the ablest and most distinguished of professors for whom undergraduate teaching had become of strictly secondary and subordinate importance. Thus, the teaching staff should exhibit 'multiplicity of grade and diversity of type'. Within each faculty the many professors would each concentrate on particular aspects of their subject rather than pretend to do justice to it as a whole:

The principal professors, on whom mainly we depend for research, should, of course, have life tenures, high salaries, and abundant leisure, whilst the bulk of the university teachers required by so extensive an undergraduate population as that of London will necessarily be engaged for short terms, earn only modest salaries, and work at times and seasons convenient to those whom they serve.

Each faculty having a central college as the headquarters of its particular kind of learning would need not only its own specialist library, but its own business manager or secretary. His business should be not to teach or investigate but to attend to the multifarious administrative work. His duty would be to ensure the faculty attended to the requirements of the senate, that those engaged in teaching and research had the resources they required, and to make sure that in every district of London the sort of

learning associated with the particular faculty was adequately provided for. He would try to raise additional funds. In short, he would undertake all the work for which teachers had neither the time nor the training. (Sidney never ceased to be astonished that while no university administrator imagined that he was competent to be a professor of Arabic, every professor of Arabic fancied himself to be a first-class university administrator.)⁷⁶

But if organisation had to be by faculty rather than by college, the pivot had to be the senate. Only through a powerful senate could unity be given to the whole university. This meant that the senate must wield the power of the purse. It had to be able to appoint and pay all the principal professors and be in the position to find the money for the appointment of additional staff and so to determine where they would be most serviceable. Such a body must be no mere academic council or professorial board. Beside some of the leading professors it should number among its members 'eminent doctors and lawyers, engineers and business men'. Not only the professoriate and the graduates should be represented on the senate but also 'the Inns of Court, the City Companies, the City Corporation and' – obviously – 'the London County Council.'

Webb concluded by specifying what was wanted in each of the main faculties and by costing it. With respect to the arts, 'the characteristic need of and special opportunity of London is a great school of languages.' At least fifty languages from Annamese to Zulu were taught in other European universities. To match this required a new income of £30 000 or £40 000. In science and engineering, University College should become a great centre of original investigation in pure science (£250 000), but in addition there should be a British Charlottenburg – an extensive and fully equipped institute of technology (£500 000). The Faculty of Medicine would require the most radical reorganisation so as to release the great hospitals from the duty of teaching raw students and allow them to engage in more systematically organised research into cancer and phthisis (£250 000 for a school of preliminary medical studies). The faculty of economics and political science – centred in the LSE – needed a capital sum of a quarter of a million to supply, not more buildings, but more professorships. In the Faculty of Law, £10 000 a year from 'the great and wealthy lawyers' would suffice to make a start with those advanced studies in legal history and scientific jurisprudence, and comparative legislation and international law that were so much wanted. Webb concluded that the new university could get off to good start for an overall expenditure of about five million pounds, half of which would come from individual donors and half from the rates:

It may be that we must forego in London University the culture born of classic scholarship and learned leisure. But if we can show that there is

no incompatibility between the widespread instruction of an undergraduate democracy and the most effective provision for the discovery of new truth; between the most practical professional training and genuine cultivation of the mind; between the plain living of hard working students of limited means and high intellectual achievements, we shall not, I venture to believe, appeal in vain. London University must take its own line. They are futile dreamers who seek to fit new circumstances to the old ideals; rather must we strive, by developing to the utmost the opportunities that the present affords us, to create out of twentieth century conditions new kinds of perfection.

From 1895 until well after 1900 the Webbs tirelessly reiterated both in public and in private this lucid argument. But it had no easy triumph. There were powerful interests that felt either threatened or ignored. In 1896 and again in the following year the bishops took the lead in inducing the House of Lords to throw out private members' bills based upon the recommendations of the Gresham Report. These reactionaries were aided and abetted by the staff at University College and similar institutions who insisted that the supreme power in any new university must be in academic – that is, professorial – hands. At University College these impossibilists were so intransigent that they declared themselves in favour of a second university with no external examinees at all. This was bound to be opposed by the existing graduates through Convocation and in Parliament by their representative Sir John Lubbock. More in sorrow than in anger, Haldane felt that he had no choice but to resign from the governing body of University College.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, within the LCC, it was slowly dawning on John Burns and other labour representatives that when Sidney talked about combining in this new university 'a sane and patriotic Imperialism with the largest minded Internationalism' the empire in question was not so much the British as his own. The TEB; the LSE; a whole new university! Then indeed might 'Uncle Sid', the learned, self-effacing friend of labour, strike his umbrella against London stone and cry out into the night: 'Now is Mortimer Lord of London.'⁷⁸ What was all this clever comparison of the boy going to Oxbridge from Eton and Harrow with £300 in the way of pocket-money with the typical Londoner coming from a household with less than £1500 a year to live on, but so much eye-wash? It is doubtful whether there was a single household dependent upon wage-derived incomes that could marshal £500 a year, never mind three times that sum. The suspicion was bound to arise that Webb was looking after his own: that this great 'undergraduate democracy' of his had a decidedly lower-middle-class character.

Such were the impediments the Webbs and Haldane had to remove from their path. They began their joint operation in good earnest after the

second defeat in the Lords in 1897. At first sight it is difficult to make out how they managed to co-operate to such effect. They had all been friends for some years. Sidney and Haldane were both learned in the law. And they were both able to think about university education without forever harking back to the unrivalled excellence of Oxford and Cambridge. But Haldane was a metaphysician and a sensualist. When he wasn't engaged in high thinking and lusting after first principles he was in pursuit of high living, being exceedingly fond of what Beatrice called 'choice edibles'. He consumed them to the accompaniment of 'portions and potions of nicotine and alcohol, also of select quality'.⁷⁹ He thoroughly enjoyed high society provided it had – as with the 'Souls' – some literary interests and artistic pretensions. Beatrice fancied that he had been converted, 'in a sort of vague metaphysical way to the principles of Collectivism'. But it was necessary to keep dinning it into him. In moments of impatience she told him: 'what *we* think today, *you* will think tomorrow.'⁸⁰ In fact it appears to have taken about a month. It took Beatrice rather longer than a month to recognise that Haldane himself was a dab hand himself at public-spirited conspiracies and adept at manipulating 'influential persons into becoming followers of Rosebery and members of the *clique*. Be it said to his credit, that he has some extent manipulated us into this position.'⁸¹ Webb and Haldane were both essentially 'behind-the-scenes' men. Neither had any strong identification with Party. Together they brought chivalry and high-mindedness into plotting and intrigue.

Haldane recalled how they laid siege to the citadel:

We went round to person after person who was prominent in the administration of the existing university. Some listened, but others would not do so and even refused to see us. In the end we worked out what was in substance the scheme of the London University Act of 1898.⁸²

It would leave Convocation unduly powerful but it was the best that could be managed given the existing balance of forces and state of opinion.

Haldane then went to see Balfour – soon to be Prime Minister and to play at playing the philanderer – with Beatrice. After consultation with his colleagues, he informed Haldane that the government, without staking its life on the matter, was prepared to adopt the measure as its own.⁸³ Sir John Gorst introduced it into the House of Commons. Haldane himself made the greatest speech of his parliamentary career on its behalf. Afterwards both Chamberlain and Asquith assured him that it was one of the very few occasions in which a single contribution to debate had converted a hostile or indifferent House.⁸⁴

This was a decisive moment of triumph, but it did not put an end to the struggle to establish the new university on sound lines. The Act set up a commission to devise a detailed constitution. Fortunately, Dr Mandell Creighton, Bishop of London and an old friend of the Webbs and of the LSE, was a member of it while Lord Davey, who was counted by Beatrice as an 'old acquaintance', became chairman.⁸⁵ Despite his growing difficulties with the members of the LCC and with Ramsay MacDonald in particular, Sidney was able to get financial support from that quarter. Accordingly, he appeared on the governing body not only 'mentally on the spot' long before his fellow senators had arrived there, but with a considerable power of the purse in his own hands. Nevertheless the chancellor, vice-chancellor and registrar, whom Beatrice described as representing respectively 'apathy, stupidity and ill will, each carried to its nth', often vexed him.⁸⁶ The endless little dinners for senators were not always successful. As late as May 1902 Sidney was overstretched and had to ask Beatrice to help with the latest article on London University. He muttered plaintively: 'I am not a big man. I could not manage any larger undertakings.' Beatrice comforted him. She told him that it was commendable to be so aware of one's own limitation.⁸⁷

For the greater part of 1898 the Webbs went away on a tour of the English-speaking world. On the way home Sidney was already beginning to turn his mind to the great educational muddle and the way out. Lord Salisbury's administration had already made an abortive attempt at an Education Act in 1896. This attempt to conserve the traditions of the past while supplying the needs of the future, to protect the interests of the Church while acknowledging the claims of economy and efficiency, aroused more hostility than support. A.J. Balfour apparently regarded the government's setback with a gentlemanly complacency. He reputedly observed, 'In these matters I am a child.' This infuriated Beatrice, who observed:

We do not want clever school boys at the head of our great departments ... Who would trust the building of a bridge to a man who started with such an infinitesimal knowledge of engineering as Balfour or Gorst have of national education and its machinery?⁸⁸

However, if the Tories were incapable of designing new machinery some of them were perfectly capable of putting a spanner in the works. Gorst, vice-president of the Privy Council Committee on Education, appears to have conspired with some of his officials to multiply difficulties so as to undermine the *status quo* and make possible changes of the sort that he favoured. After the failure of the 1896 Bill, he chaired a committee that examined the method whereby the Science and Art Department distributed

its grants. It found against the school boards, some of the best and brightest of which had been developing higher elementary work for children who stayed on until the ages of fifteen, sixteen or more, and had pioneered evening classes for adults. Adopting Gorst's advice, the Department resolved that from 1897 the counties and the county boroughs should be recognised as the authorities for secondary education. Through further administrative steps Gorst went on to diminish the school boards and to reduce their opportunities for promoting advanced work. Finally in June 1899 a school of art in London – backed by members of the Cecil family – brought an action against the London School Board in which it complained of competition it was suffering from evening classes run by the Board. The district auditor, Cockerton, disallowed expenditure from the rates by the LSB towards the running of science or art schools.⁸⁹ Here were or were to be administrative steps, quasi-judicial decisions and judicial ones and interim legislative measures which destabilised, every bit as much as they stabilised, all preparatory to accomplishing in 1902 what could not be done in 1896. A conspiracy blessed by the Cecils and the Duke of Devonshire, designed by Gorst, worked out by his lieutenant Robert Morant? And of Webb? Where did he stand? Was he numbered among the conspirators?

Initially, almost certainly not. It was not his style. 'What I like about you, Webb,' said Graham Wallas to Sidney having watched him rush towards a moving railway compartment, 'is that you don't care about style.' In fact, it was a feature of Webb's style as social engineer that he hated the demolition work. If he was devious it was always in the interests of construction. It was not until Sidney and Beatrice had left the country that his successor as chairman of the TEB, a moderate, applied under the revised education code to be recognised as the sole recipient in London of grants from the Science and Art Department.⁹⁰ William Garnett subsequently claimed that he was responsible for this initiative, as he claimed the credit for encouraging the action that culminated in the Cockerton judgement which made a new Education Act imperative.⁹¹ Perhaps he was too proud to allow that he was merely Sidney's cat's-paw in all this, but there is no evidence to support such a conclusion. Webb was impatient with nonentities. One of the costs of declining to employ them is that those who are appointed may act off their own bat. On the other hand, it may be doubted whether Garnett would have dared to act as he did if he had anticipated that he would arouse Webb's active hostility. Moreover, in the original statement of his vision of London education the place accorded to the school board is anomalous. It is deferred to as an established democratic power, but how it is to be accommodated within the new comprehensive system is left unclear. Finally, it was certainly convenient that Sidney could come before the Fabian Society as one who was

entirely innocent of spilling the board's life blood and who came rather to bind up its wounds and to secure its future. The proposals that he laid before the Society in 16 May 1899 expressly defended the schools boards in London and in the larger provincial centres. Sidney began by exposing the reality of the existing 'muddle', went on to identify the possible responses to it and then cleverly suggested that there was one – and only one – way out that would be acceptable to intelligent, practical and progressive minds. It was not perfect, but he was subsequently to demonstrate the ways of making the best of it. The muddle lay in having ten cabinet ministers who shared some responsibility for various kinds of educational provision but who gave little or no evidence of trying to thrash out some concerted policy. But if the position at the centre was bad enough, it was far worse locally. There were some districts that could barely supply the most minimal needs. However, if there were some places where rent and rates were hardly being spent at all, there were others where the school boards were responsible for one sort of school and the county, borough and urban district councils for others. The boards had – in theory at least – no restriction on the size of the resources at their command, but only upon which they might expend them. Their rival authorities suffered no restriction upon the upward reaches of the educational world, which they might aid, but had restricted rating powers. This division of labour – one that was still most imperfectly achieved in practice – led to rivalry, prejudice and unbalanced estimates of real needs. Chaos, arbitrary separation of one part of education from another, stupendous inequalities and 'a policy of drift' prevented administrative unity and coherent schemes.

One response would be to adopt the Nonconformist and Liberal cry, 'school boards everywhere and for everything'. But to this there were – so Sidney maintained – insuperable objections. To begin with, over one third of England there were no school boards. To set them up where they were not wanted or petitioned for or where they were not absolutely required by the failure of the 'voluntary' or Church schools would be 'politically impossible'. Second, the great majority of school boards – 2085 out of the total of 2527 – had populations of less than 5000. The notion that they could supply a comprehensive educational service was plainly absurd. Accordingly, to make the school board the sole authority for all education would involve scrapping nine-tenths of them and reconstituting them on a much larger basis. But even were it possible, which person would want to infect secondary and technical education with the deplorable strife that surrounded the boards' provision of the purely elementary sort?

Another possibility would be to abolish all the existing responsible bodies and to replace them with a new educational authority, which would take responsibility for freshly drawn districts. This project would be revolutionary enough to mobilise the 2527 school boards and the 1200 county,

borough and urban district councils against it without removing the theological differences and sectarian passions that constituted such a large part of the difficulty. Besides, 'We have, in fact, ceased to believe in the need for *ad hoc* authorities. During the last sixty years they have been as far as possible absorbed and abolished.'

Webb concluded – leaving the Poor Law on one side for his present purpose – that the way out lay in trying to concentrate in a single, elected body for each locality all the public business that ought to be entrusted to localities. This meant that outside London and the county boroughs, the county councils should take over the functions of the school boards and become responsible for every kind and grade of education within their area. By a statutory requirement to appoint special educational committees, the county and borough councils should ensure that they could co-opt educational experts and, in particular, overcome the disability that women could be members of school boards but not of councils. The admitted problem of hugeness could be dealt with by a limited delegation of powers to local committees. As to the great problem of existing voluntary schools, this should be dealt with by allowing the council to offer substantial grants in aid. The grants would be to improve efficiency and raise teachers' salaries in exchange for rights of inspection and audit, exercise ultimate control of appointments and dismissals, and obtain a general right of surveillance and report.

As to the case of London and the 62 county boroughs, there the school boards would be left 'for the most part' untouched. The LCC's spending powers – outside the powers of the School Board – should henceforth be unlimited. The School Board should have the power 'to terminate its own existence' if it so wished on transfer of those powers to the municipality.

For the rest, the new Board of Education (established by an Act of 1899) should have far-reaching powers of inspection, criticism and audit of all types of educational provision that depended upon any degree of public funding. Without striving after 'rigid uniformity', it ought to have the means of providing for both 'the highest specialist efficiency' and for 'the national minimum'.

Webb concluded that to provide a ladder whereby a few could climb from elementary school to university required an administrative unity, which would ensure that every rung on it was kept in good repair. His critics – at the time and subsequently – ignored or dismissed his insistence that this ladder was *not* the democratic ideal. In highlighting him as an apostle of 'National Efficiency' they wholly discounted his remark that: 'What the national well-being demands, and what we must insist upon, is that every child, dull or clever, rich or poor, should receive all the education requisite for the full development of its faculties.'⁹² His adversaries evidently assumed – rightly or wrongly – that Webb himself was

uninterested in what he really took to be 'sentimental twaddle'.⁹³ Doubtless they suspected him of equally disgraceful insincerity when he observed, 'Our plan is to extend popular control and popular assistance to every branch of education.'⁹⁴

Sidney's opinions occasioned the most bitter conflict within the Fabian Society itself. Two of its most admirable eccentrics, Stewart Headlam and Graham Wallas, were leading members of the London School Board. Between them they marshalled a searing passion and a searching scepticism against Webb to such good effect that it was not until January 1901 that Tract 106 went to the printers. Its claim to being the most famous and influential of all Fabian Tracts rests upon the assertion that Gorst asked for 50 advance copies and that the government's measure corresponded to it closely save for the fact that all the school boards outside London were abolished.⁹⁵

The debate within the Fabian Society anticipated the larger and still stormier one that was developing without. Sidney was not merely impatient for what he termed a 'Truce of God' in the schools: he was incapable of understanding the passionate indignation of Nonconformists at having their money – or worse still, their children – taken from them and delivered into the hands of the parson. He correctly sensed that these excitements had more to do with the nineteenth century than with the twentieth. Convinced that his complacency concerning the Almighty would come to be widely shared, he made little effort to understand the holy passions that were now aroused. Even if he had tried it is doubtful whether he would have managed it. But whereas Sidney made light of subsidising religion out of the rates, pointing out how little of the child's time would be occupied by it, Beatrice was rather in favour. She assumed that a purely secular education would be equivalent to making 'pure materialism' into the 'national metaphysic'. The lie of materialism was worse than the untruths of Christian doctrine. Presumably, the pernicious nature of 'materialism' consisted in its supposed contempt for awe and wonder about the origins and nature of the human condition; in its failure to recognise how transient were all the greatest interests of the hour, and how important it was to occasionally distance oneself and to purify oneself through sacred music and through prayer. Besides, most Englishmen, if they thought about it at all, thought of themselves as Christians.

Beatrice wrote:

I see no way out of the dilemma, but the largest variety possible of denominational schools, so that there may be the utmost possible choice for parents and children, and, let me add, the widest range of experiment as to the results of particular kinds of teaching on the character of the child and its conduct of life.⁹⁶

Sidney saw his own and the Tory government's proposals as a way, not of propping up the Church, but of gaining control over its educational work in the interests of the children. So far as London was concerned there was overwhelming evidence of the higher attainments of those who went to the board schools rather than to the 'voluntary' ones. Why then abolish the school boards? The Nonconformists, the Liberals, the Progressives, the TUC and the great majority within the labour movement saw them as instruments of democratic control which had shown themselves to be capable of a progressive extension of their functions through higher-grade work and evening classes for adults.

It must be remembered that the Webbs and the Fabians were taken by surprise when Robert Morant succeeded in getting the abolition of all school boards outside London written into the government bill. Nevertheless they had certainly favoured a great reduction in their number. As against their defenders, Sidney and Beatrice insisted that the boards' achievements had been patchy and that they afforded no sure escape route from the power of squires, parsons and cheese-parers. Even in London the Revd J.R. Diggle had held power for considerable periods, and Diggleism had stood for economy in everything and obscurantism.⁹⁷ So when the government finally turned its attention to the greater deferred issue of educational authority in the metropolis Sidney surpassed himself in the energy of his wire-pulling on behalf of the LCC. The school board was now so isolated that it was virtually doomed. The main danger was the fear and loathing with which many senior Conservatives approached London and its government. They felt for it almost as much as the men of Versailles had dreaded the Commune of Paris thirty years earlier. There was a project for emasculating the LCC by making the new educational authority depend upon the metropolitan boroughs which had been established as a result of the London Government Act of 1899. There was talk of creating a vast new, *ad hoc* authority. After the full strength of Nonconformist outrage began to disclose itself at the polls through by-election results there were even rumours that school boards had to be retained. At this critical juncture the Webbs got little help from Robert Morant, who declined to co-operate with them, making excuses to the effect that he was overworked and that his 'rotten' staff was not fit for anything.⁹⁸

The Webbs' response to this situation was to entertain the Prime Minister; to pass days and nights in conversation with Members of Parliament; and to try their powers of persuasion on Anglican and Catholic dignitaries. The churchmen had to be persuaded that if power passed to the boroughs they would be faced with the power of the elementary school teachers and that the LCC would be more considerate. But this in turn required that the Progressives – by now thoroughly alert to Fabian intrigue and manoeuvring – had to be persuaded to ignore the

clamour of many of their own supporters and accept the need to extend their powers. The press had to be tuned and worked as never before.⁹⁹ But when the government unveiled its proposals in the summer of 1903 all this effort appeared to have gone for nothing. The Conservatives resolved to take something from each of the distinct schemes that had been under consideration. The new authority was to have 97 members, of which 36 were to be appointed by the LCC, 36 by the metropolitan borough councils and 25 co-opted, plus 5 more from the old school board.

This curiously ramshackle construction rather confirmed Morant's gloomy account of how matters stood within the administration. It pleased hardly anybody. While the school board condemned it, the LCC announced that it would prefer the school board to it. It did nothing to stop the majority of Progressives complaining about the anomaly of paying teachers' salaries out of public money while continuing to subject them to religious tests. The Fabian executive condemned the Bill as practically unworkable and the society went on to demand complete administrative control under the LCC. Thirteen resolutions were adopted, framed as definite amendments to the bill. In June 1903 *Fabian News* was able to demonstrate that eleven and a half of these were accepted by the government and they duly became law.

This was a great triumph from the Webbs' point of view. Far more clearly than in the case of the 1902 Act, the London Education Act of 1903 was inspired by them. If Beatrice was growing tired, Sidney was still bursting with energy and determination when all his adversaries were running out of steam. It only remained for him to point out how to make the best of the new measure and to sum up twelve years of achievement in his book *London Education*. As he observed with satisfaction: 'the London County Council can now (with the help of new and increased Government grants) equip London with a complete educational system, as efficient in its own way as the fire brigade'.¹⁰⁰

In 1892 Sidney Webb had set out on his career as educational reformer with little more than a vision.¹⁰¹ Twelve years later the vision had been realised in all its essential administrative and institutional respects. Moreover, the vision as amended in practice had become larger rather than smaller. The history of English education can show no comparable achievement by one man, neither before nor since – at any rate, not within such a limited span of time and to the accompaniment of much else besides. With patience and intelligence each advance was made into the stepping-stone for the next. Each lucky chance and each authentic improvisation was kept in place in relation to a governing purpose and a steady ideal. But this heroic opportunism had its costs in personal and social relationships. And over the record of it hang questions about its own ultimate nature and essential worth.

He who pulls himself up by his own bootstraps would do well to ponder the fate of Antaeus. As Sidney mounted his own 'educational ladder' he distanced himself from the earth in which he had his roots and from which he drew his strengths. His disinterestedness became open to question. His closest friends reproached him with malpractice. Labour men came to agree with Old Etonians who pronounced him to be a mere intriguer for the lower middle class, while Nonconformists and Progressives discovered him to be a Tory. Over the future of the London School Board and the Education Act of 1902 he came into conflict with one of his oldest and closest friends, Graham Wallas. Graham Wallas charged Webb with double-dealing, while Sidney dismissed Wallas's insistence that education must be primarily concerned with the fullest development of the faculties of all children by a conventional reference to the demand side – by a reminder that most boys and girls would have to go into menial employment.¹⁰² By 1904 Sidney and Beatrice were secretly looking forward to the defeat of their own Progressive Party at the approaching LCC elections. They went to the length of drawing up a list of their 'enemies' whose political ruin they would welcome.¹⁰³ Although the Fabian Society had affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee at the time of its formation in 1900, the Webbs ignored it. Thanks to them the Fabian Society appeared to have cut itself off from the labour movement.¹⁰⁴ It was isolated and distrusted. This was in no small measure due to the fact that it was identified with an educational policy that seemed far more conventional and far less ambitious than that of the Trades Union Congress. (Despite some backsliding, the TUC had committed itself to a programme of secondary education for all through a common school.)¹⁰⁵

Thus, if the Webbs' achievement was undeniable it was certainly purchased at a considerable cost. Moreover, the question arose as to whether the achievement was not merely a matter of administrative tidiness rather than of cultural innovation. Webb had a keen sense for the two cultures, but had he any inkling of the possibilities of a third? He certainly had a keen eye for the limitations of that classical, literary and aristocratic culture whose twin summits rose at Oxford and Cambridge. He knew it had been in retreat, but he did not imagine that it had been reformed out of existence. The gentlemanly, leisurely, socially exclusive, complacent and still theology-tainted learning that flourished by the Cam and by the Isis had not become a merely vestigial presence because it was obliged to make some concession to modern mathematics, to economics and to mechanical engineering. It remained a fit object for progressively informed aggression. As for provincial bourgeois culture, which had been nourished by the Scottish experience of the democratic intellect and by a number of literary philosophical and lunar societies; long before it took a shape – in Gower Street – it is not clear that Sidney had thought through his attitude

towards it. It found favour with him in so far as it arose out of protest against the old cultural hegemony and in so far as it stood for an open, practical, useful and scientific style of learning. Did he imagine that all that was wrong with it was that it was inadequately endowed and insufficiently specialised and differentiated? In educational policy, were the new utilitarians obliged to be nothing but the old ones writ large?

At his best the Fabian came forward as the genuine protagonist of a third culture. This was not – and never could be – a matter of designing new maps of learning as distinct from planning new expeditions: it was concerned with proposing fresh problems, not imposing new conclusions. The third culture could no more quarrel with the second than it could with the first over the merits of different sorts of mathematics or physics, or even perhaps French. It could and – to the eternal credit of Sidney and Beatrice – it did suggest that history should be extended to allow for the annals of toil and to make ready for the advent of the democracy by reflecting about the rules of democratic public administration. (The conspicuous failure to enquire how the democracy would distribute scarce resources between competing wants, once the ‘democracy of the market place’ had been dispensed with, was explicable, but not excusable.) The inhibitions of the new utilitarians – their silences and their propensity to be devious and to hush things up – were all related to the discontinuities between their socio-economic position and that of their predecessors.

The Benthamites had a prosperous ‘material base’. They had to go cap-in-hand to no one but themselves or their own supporters. In the 1820s the bourgeois Radical had much that he could identify as his own and which he could declare himself ready to defend and fortify. Their socialist successors enjoyed no such prosperity. In the 1890s what little they had by way of a party of their own was in decline. When that party recovered in the following decade the experience of Ruskin College suggested how difficult it was for the third culture to emulate the second. The new professionalism had come to reinforce mere wealth, to ensure that every educational institution was limited. In default of a labour or socialist treasure, the Webbs drew upon imperialism. They assumed, without discussion or reflection, that its power and interest could be substituted for the power and interest that they wanted – just as they assumed that if they were presently enlarging the opportunities for children of the lower middle class then that must lead on to the emancipation of the proletarian child, rather than to delay that happy advent. No evaluation of the Webbs’ heroic opportunism would be adequate that failed to take a full and searching account of its squalid, imperialistic side.

Unlike William Morris’s, the Webbs’ concept of socialism did not extend to a notion of New Man. For example, they were reconciled to the fact that for the foreseeable future vast numbers of men and women would have to

endure the 'monkeydom' of factory, mine and mill. All that socialism could offer these unfortunate beings was a prospect of shorter hours and improved wages and conditions. It could also supply them with a governing elite, which would be fully imbued with the values and standards of the best professional men. These expert administrators would put as much time and effort into perfecting their own training as good medical men put into theirs and they would serve the citizenry with a similar sense of proper priorities. The Webbs were certainly alert to an unresolved conflict within provincial bourgeois culture: its celebration of individuality and its cultivation of a professionalism that exalted service and discipline above self and beyond personal aggrandizement. Sooner or later this third culture, with its stern lesson for the rich and its solace for the poor, would use the resources of public authority to displace the wealth and power of land and capital. In the meantime there was nothing for it but to exploit the craze for imperialism and to bring it into the service of social reform. The legacy of Rome and the example of the Japanese had to be employed against the traditions of Manchester. The purpose of the democracy had to be cultivated beneath the protective shade of empire. Nonconformity had to be beaten into submission by the state while the state succumbed to the claims of society.

Socialism and imperialism were beating on the same drum. They sent the same message to individualism: the greatest object in life is not the highest cultivation of the self: 'Renounce, renounce, renounce.' In the end it was into the service of this confusion that so much of the Webbs' clarity went.

8

Squalid Opportunism: Fabianism and Empire 1893–1903

Burns and the coup against the socialists at the TUC—The Webbs' alienation from organised labour—The accommodation to imperialism—Travels in the United States, New Zealand and Australasia—The Boer War—The absence from the LRC foundation meeting—Intrigues with the Liberals—The Co-efficients—The measure of the Webbs' social imperialism.

In November 1893 Shaw and Webb published 'To Your Tents, O Israel'. It announced their disillusion with the Liberals and all their works (or rather want of them) and proclaimed the need for a Labour Party rooted in the trade unions. In the *History of Trade Unionism* and still more clearly in the companion volume of 1897 the Webbs clearly gave to Labourism its historical perspective and its line of march. Clearly, a Labour Party was needed to complete the tripartite institutional world of labour in which man must be represented as a citizen as well as a producer and a consumer. In 1900 they were still as impressed as ever with the deficiencies of the existing party system. Yet they were not numbered among those who met at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, on Tuesday, 27 February 1900 to set up the Labour Representation Committee. The Fabian Society was represented and it went there with the Webbs' blessing, but it was a blessing of a very perfunctory sort. They were making their escape from Labourism at the very moment when the Labour Party was being born. They were in the course of exchanging that 'small world' so wanting in big men for high political society which was so wanting in realignments and rejuvenation. They believed that the future of socialism lay in encouraging the small, turning movements of imperialism rather than in the mindless rhetoric and half-hearted effrontery of Keir Hardie and James Ramsay MacDonald. With the single exception of the LSE the Webbs showed little enduring parental feeling for their offspring. They were inclined to abandon them as soon as they could

walk. In this instance they escaped the squalid proceedings in the maternity ward altogether.

In measuring the stages of their escape from Labourism one must take the measure of their starting. 'To Your Tents' was a decidedly 'trendy' document. It was about the challenge of the ILP from without and the dissidents' voices within the Fabian Society. These were the imperatives that it answered as much, or more, than those arising from the indulgent and delinquent behaviour of Gladstone's last great Liberal administration. This is the context in which complaints about its over-hasty fault-finding with ministers who were doing their best need to be considered. Beatrice never cared for it. She was unsurprised when it turned out to be one of the divisive rallying cries of the 1890s. She deplored the sorrow of Haldane along with the anger of Massingham. She plainly believed that her boy and 'the Sprite' (George Bernard Shaw) ought not to have gone in to this enterprise without the aid of a man of true political stature. 'What the [Fabian] Junta needs to make it a great power', she mused, on the eve of publication, 'are one or two personalities of weight, men of wide experience and sagacity, able to play a long hand, and to master the movements.'¹ Tom Mann was too fickle: too given to 'light-headed changes of front on all questions human and divine.'² Keir Hardie was a token Fabian whom she neither liked nor understood. The best bet appeared to be John Burns. She saw him quite frequently in the autumn of 1893. Sidney had a high opinion of him. Beatrice knew of no one else who could

so complete the Fabian trio [of Wallace, Shaw and Webb] and make it thoroughly effective. If Burns would come in and give himself away to the other three as they do to each other – the Fabians could dominate the reform movement. Burns is, in some respects, the strongest man of the four.³

But even if Beatrice did not ponder the conceptual difficulty inherent in the notion of a self-effacing strong man, she was quite clear that Burns suffered from 'an instinctive fear of comradeship'. After spending a morning with him, she summed up:

A man of splendid physique, fine and strong intelligence, human sympathy, practical capacity, he is unfitted for a really great position by his utter inability to be a constant and loyal comrade. He stands absolutely alone. He is intensely jealous of other labour men, acutely suspicious of all middle-class sympathisers; whilst his hatred of Keir Hardie reaches the dimensions of mania.⁴

The validity and importance of these insights was demonstrated a year later when Burns played a central role in the TUC coup. After the 1894 congress the Parliamentary Committee, to which Burns belonged, changed

the basis of representation. The 1895 congress was convened upon the basis of fresh rules, which its predecessors had had no opportunity to consider. From this time forwards only those employed at their trade or the professional officers of affiliated organisations could attend as delegates. The trades councils were excluded. Block voting was introduced. The effect of these changes was to exclude Keir Hardie and to diminish socialist representation. The Webbs found the way in which these alterations had been brought about distasteful but they persuaded themselves that their own influence would remain as strong as ever. Still understandably elated by their success in uniting the minority of the Royal Commission on Labour behind their own proposals, they believed that 41 Grosvenor Road might remain the intellectual HQ of the entire movement. At the Cardiff TUC they entertained Mawdsley, the Tory leader of the cotton workers, to dinner after he had got the coup ratified by a congress that could hardly do otherwise without condemning itself. Beatrice marked the occasion in her diary with a magnificent phrase: a muddled thought and an absurd expectation. She decided that Mawdsley was 'far too cynical to be suspicious'. She went on to conclude: 'Whether or not we use Mawdsley, we may rest assured that he will use us: which after all is all we desire.' Finally she remarked: 'Poor Burns, to have ousted Keir Hardie from the Congress and let in Sidney Webb to the Parliamentary Committee!'⁵ It is doubtful whether Sidney himself was as optimistic about the implications of Coal and Cotton collaring congress. It is certain that his socialist commitments were firmer than hers and that he saw it as indispensable to the unions that they should assume a general political role. (Beatrice doubted the wisdom of such a development.)

In the event the coup did not tend to increase the number of proletarian leaders who visited Grosvenor Road. Coinciding as it did with the departure of the failed Liberal government, it tended to the estrangement of the Webbs from organised labour. The Liberals were brought down not because they were inattentive to the requirements of the national minimum in relation to health, education or housing but rather in the matter of cordite for the army. Under these circumstances Keir Hardie and his supporters became the Liberals' companions in disaster rather than their supplanters. The Webbs were quicker to learn 'the lesson' than other socialists were and Hardie was quicker to brand them for it as 'the worst enemies of the Social Revolution'. Indeed, he did so before the event. Beatrice had it that it was Sidney, rather than the pair of them, who held a little dinner for Hardie and Mann from the ILP and Pease and Shaw from the Fabians, with MacDonald and Frank Smith as conciliators, late in January 1895. Anyway, Beatrice was by no means unhappy with Hardie's characterisation. For her part, she saw in Hardie's insistence on a clear separation from the Liberals only a design that would allow him to boss the movement. He was a lower type than Tom Mann, who was possessed

with a genuine religious zeal worthy of a secular church. She concluded: 'No great transformation is possible in a free democratic state like England unless *you alter the opinions of all classes of the community* and, even if it were possible, it would not be desirable. That is the crux between us.'⁶ Accordingly, Beatrice took the results of the election in her stride. Four days before the country went to the polls she attended a meeting of the London Trades Council at which there was hardly an allusion to that approaching event. It was but another proof of the political incapacity of the trade union world. She was unsurprised and almost satisfied by the defeat of Keir Hardie and the other Labour men. The ILP would no longer be able to advance its futile and absurd policy of abstention and wrecking to block 'the more reasonable policy of permeation and levelling up'. Like the official Liberals, who had given 'numberless signs that our opinions were discounted', the election ought to have been a salutary lesson. Having held aloof from both the ILP and the Liberals, the Webbs could conclude, 'The rout of both, therefore, is no defeat for us. It leaves us free, indeed, to begin afresh on the old lines – of building up a new party on the basis of collectivism.'⁷

The international socialist congress which was held in London the following year (1896) merely confirmed Beatrice in her opinion that the important distinction in politics was not that between workmen and non-workmen, but between thinkers and non-thinkers:

The rank and file of Socialists – especially English Socialists – are unusually silly folk (for the most part featherhead failures) and heaped together in one hall with the consciousness that their every word would be reported by the world's press, they approached raving imbecility. The confusion of tongues, of procedure, the grotesque absurdity of masquerading as 'nations', and you have the factors for a hideous fiasco from the point of view of public opinion. The Fabians sat silent taking notes as reporters for the capitalist press... The Fabians at any rate write history if they do not make it.⁸

The prominence that this congress gave to the problem of anarchism and the anarchists could not but appear to the Webbs to make it absurdly *passé*. They longed for 'a quiet exchange of thought and experience between the cultivated and intellectual socialists of all countries'. They could endure the company of Kautsky and Adler since for all their Marxism they were men of established political position, which set them above the 'frothy irresponsibility of our English movement'. As for the Belgian leader, Vandervelde, he was 'a man of quite exceptional charm and distinction – a scholar and a gentleman'.⁹ But for the rest, the Fabians could only go out of their way to distance themselves as far as possible from the deplorable tone of the entire proceedings. Shaw warned the

congress against the absurdity of ‘Socialists denouncing the very class from which socialism has sprung as specifically hostile to it.’ This characteristic confusion between the characterisation of a class and of a small, unrepresentative contingent recruited from within it was followed by a most unfamiliar preoccupation with war and foreign policy. It was decidedly a straw in the wind that these matters which had hitherto been dismissed as being as irrelevant to the Fabian as metaphysics or the institution of marriage should suddenly be elevated into by far the longest section of the report.¹⁰

The section began with a peculiarly traditional, ritualistic and un-Fabian denunciation of standing armies, as having more bearing on the war of classes than that of nations. It then affirmed that huge armaments spread universal fear and paralysis to the advantage of only the smallest states. It went on to protest that it was capitalist concern for the vested interests of chartered companies that prevented ‘order and public responsibility in the colonisation and settlement of new colonies’. The great European states, unable to undertake the world of colonisation themselves, were being brought to war, ‘not only with barbarous races, but with one another, in defence of enterprise over which they have no control’. The Fabians concluded by warning the workers against an appeal to national pride and explaining that it was only capital that stopped the army being an instrument of ‘national greatness and honour’.

It is unclear as to whether Beatrice put this down to the account of ‘the thinkers’ or the ‘non-thinkers’. However, in the same year Sidney himself was revamping his *The Difficulties of Individualism* so as to take account of the newly discovered importance of adequate supplies of cordite. The references to a new feudalism, ‘based upon the tenure of capital ... against which the democracy sullenly revolts’ and to the ‘irresponsible personal authority over the actions of others – expelled from the throne, the castle and the altar – [which] still reigns almost unchecked, in the factory and the mine’, were retained. But the pursuit of personal gain was newly found to present ‘its most serious difficulty [in] its effect upon the position of the community in the race struggle. The lesson of evolution seems to be that international competition is really more momentous in its consequences than the struggle between individuals.’

Thus in 1896 there was a shift in emphasis away from what democracy compelled to what the interests of the race required. One discerns the introduction of that strange Fabian dialectic in which competition is to be superseded at home in the interests of its better pursuit abroad. The sentiment that

We dined, as a rule, on each other.
What matter? The toughest survived

was being brought under the sway of ‘the negation of the negation’.

It is doubtful whether in 1896, in distancing themselves from organised labour while beginning to accommodate themselves to imperialism, the Webbs were consciously subordinating themselves to the requirements of the 'School', but they were certainly serving them. It was one thing for Sidney to give a sermon in a Congregational chapel in the North on the morality of the child labour laws and another for him to be associated with the failed endeavours of the class warriors on the national stage. Under any circumstances it is doubtful whether he would have thought it suitable to expend the Hutchinson bequest in helping James Ramsay MacDonald to set up ILP branches, but when such activities could be funded only at the expense of the LSE it made him more disinclined to favour it. Similarly the Webbs would have been likely to have welcomed collaboration with Haldane under most circumstances, but the aid he was able and willing to afford them as educationalists made it all the more imperative to cultivate him. It was not until 1903 that the Webbs consciously recognised that they would have to pick their public political opinions in the interests of maintaining the school's reputation. But long before poor Hutchinson's intentions had been thus turned inside out they had an instinct for those associations that would protect their young and those that would work to a reverse effect. It was better that the arch permeators should themselves be permeated by one wily fat Scotsman than that they should be emasculated by the enthusiasm of one thin one.

In 1897 the Webbs had completed *Industrial Democracy* and felt themselves to have done with their major contribution to labour historiography and to labour studies. They were already contemplating their next great intellectual undertaking – the history of English local government. They were planning their tour of the English-speaking world, a sort of busman's holiday which was to take them to the United States and Australasia. If they were still engaged by the concerns of labour, labour's engagements were no longer favoured by fortune as they had been some ten years earlier. Then both Sidney and Beatrice had been aroused from their dogmatic slumbers by 'the full, round orb of the dockers' tanner'. In 1897–8 one of the longest and best established of British trade unions was going down to defeat before the employers. Sidney fully involved himself in playing the adviser to Barnes, the leader of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. But he was powerless to save them from defeat: from selling the pass, as he saw it, of national collective bargaining for the 51-hour week. In truth, this was a critically important moment in the great, triumphant 'employers' offensive' that marked the turn of the century. Threatened by increasing international competition, armed with the new American lathe, supplied with a sufficiently versatile class of machine-minders, the employers resolved to be masters in their own shops. They were determined to devise the division of labour and introduce their own

mode of remuneration or in agreement only with specific groups of workmen. In vain did Sidney insist upon the union putting itself right with public opinion. In vain did he urge a full commitment to the utmost possible efficiency in exchange for assurances respecting national collective bargaining and the defence of the minimum standard. In vain did he champion the authority of the centre against the claims of rebellious voices from below. When the Webbs left for America the employers appeared to be well on the way to the old ascendancy which had seemed to be in jeopardy ten years earlier.

In the six years since their marriage Sidney had gradually been accepted into the family. But in the households of Beatrice's sisters there was little evidence to be found to suggest that the perspective of altering the opinions of all classes of opinion offered a better prospect for collectivism than an exclusive reliance upon labour. Leonard Courtney remained as impervious to the difficulties of individualism as ever. Henry Hobhouse, who 'alone among my brothers-in-law ... welcomed Sidney with grave courtesy into the family', remained an incorrigible mugwump. But it was Alfred Cripps who displayed attitudes that most clearly threatened Beatrice's perspective. Starting with him at Parmoor she noticed that there was

No nonsense about enlightenment, or any impartial study of the common weal ... He is of course, far too clever not to compromise – but his compromise will always be the best compromise for his class and not the best of the community ... Sharp wits are all that are required to perceive an attack upon the fundamental principles of 'private property and the growth of the Empire' – sharp wits, and physical force are all that is needed to defend them ... Having decided to stand by his class, being honestly (and no doubt justly) convinced that that class has everything to lose and nothing to gain by an alteration in the status quo, the one thing needful is to appeal to the popular suspicion, fear, prejudices and fallacies to keep back any further reforms. I do not mean this as a moral indictment [*sic*]. Alfred's original conviction that it is desirable that an upper class, owning most of the property and keeping the control of the nation, should exist is a proposition which can be perfectly well defended. But it is a proposition which, in face of a political democracy, it is impossible to state overtly and equally useless to attempt to prove ... Alfred Cripps is far too clever not to perceive that the real interest of the people is hostile to that of the classes – to meander about like Henry Hobhouse attempting to discover the common weal argues simply, to his mind, a lack of capacity. There is no common weal – there is a solution which will suit the 'haves', and a solution which will suit the 'have-nots', and there is, of course, a compromise ...

Alfred's temperament and intellectual position is interesting because I think it is typical of the intellectual tone of the genuine conservative.¹¹

Yet whatever the deficiencies of the brothers-in-law in relation to facts and reasoning, and however inconsiderate it was of them to leave the whole onus of economic discovery and political education to be borne by those who valued complete social democracy, they had their uses. An example was when it came to securing a charmingly fitted cabin for a voyage across the Atlantic; cried R.D. Holt:

Come and look at your cabin, you will see what an advantage it is to be connected with the commercial aristocracy. The White Star Line has treated you as well as a Duke: could not have done better if you were HRH himself. Come along, come along, this way: we'll show them, Betty, what we have done for them.¹²

They did nothing for Sidney, who soon became a wreck from seasickness. But Beatrice spent the time walking the decks enchanting the Yorkshireman who had turned revolutionary adventurer in Brazil.

The Webbs left England towards the end of March 1898. They spent three and a half months in the United States visiting New York, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Ithaca, Harvard, Boston, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, Denver, Leadville, Salt Lake City and San Francisco.¹³ On 10 July they were aboard the *Coptic* bound for New Zealand via Honolulu. They arrived in Auckland on 3 August. They left Wellington for Sydney on 2 September. They spent a couple of months in Australia before returning to England in December.¹⁴ The young C.P. Trevelyan accompanied them. His family connections were useful, although Sidney and Beatrice were already overloaded with introductions. For the rest, Charles was not too interesting. He was inclined to be stingy and Sidney had to supply the tips, which he forgot to leave. In New Zealand he went in for a lot of singing which Beatrice found of uncertain quality. It was there that he alarmed his elders by swinging himself across the flooded river at the loss of his baggage. He was to be a life-long friend, but at this stage he was found unworthy of one of Beatrice's celebrated portraits.

The Webbs were never at their best when observing societies other than their own. As on this occasion they usually compromised their discipline as social investigators in the interests of a holiday, which they needed, but which they were temperamentally incapable of taking. They were armed with introductions, which took them into the society of all manner of men and women, including two future presidents of the United States, the prime minister of New Zealand and countless eminencies in Australia.

But they had no intention of making the English-speaking world into one of their 'subjects'. Accordingly, they attempted no extensive or systematic background reading. Their special interest was to be in the institutions of local government, but they appear to have been unacquainted with J.P. Goodnow's work and they did not seek him out in Columbia. They were equally ill-prepared for their Australian visit. They were very ready to learn, but more in the sense of picking things up than in coming to understand. They did not expect to be surprised nor did they intend to carefully compare. They protected themselves from over-exertion by considering academics in terms of their appearance and manners and politicians by their intellectual powers.

This is not to suggest that the Webbs were incapable of shrewd insights or that their self-assurance invariably expressed itself in terms of supercilious judgements. Beatrice complained about the American distrust of representative assemblies, found the House of Representatives extravagantly absurd and looked forward with an almost misanthropic satisfaction to the prospect of the total submission of these amateurs to the rule of professional bureaucrats. Yet she also anticipated Lincoln Steffens in her understanding of the shallowness of the good government reformers and in her appreciation of how Tammany Hall performed social functions that helped to maintain it in power. Her distaste for the vulgarity and corruption of much in United States political life did not prevent her from recognising the good manners and the vitality of American social life.

This nine-month tour of the English-speaking world ought to have accelerated the Webbs' progress away from Labourism towards imperialism, but there is hardly any evidence that it did so. Certainly they took little interest in American labour or labour conditions. They did not seek out trade union organisers or socialist leaders, although they visited Jane Addams at Hull House, Chicago, a rough equivalent of Toynbee Hall. In noticing the highly effective business organisation and productivity of the Carnegie works in Pittsburgh, they did not fail to notice too that the employers were the worst kind of sweaters. When Haldane suggested that they should approach Carnegie on behalf of London University, Beatrice declined to have any doings with that 'reptile'. The Webbs failed to consider the extent to which the Carnegie men were simply unable to gain acceptance into the older upper-class structure of Pittsburgh.¹⁵ However, her leading complaint against him was not so much that he had smashed trade unionism, but that he and his associates took no responsibility for the municipal government of the city, which they disfigured and polluted. In Australasia, on the other hand, they took the most energetic interest in the experiments in conciliation, arbitration and labour legislation generally. In New Zealand, the family association with Richard Oliver, Otago businessman and leader of the opposition, did not prevent

them from recognising in R.J. Seddon, the Liberal leader and Prime Minister, an archetypal representative of a labourist political culture. He might introduce his daughters as 'The Honourable Miss Seddons', and in the presence of a gang of workmen shout to his Minister of Public Works, 'Take that bloody excrescence down.' But the Webbs saw clearly that these deplorable vulgarities did not warrant his critics' charges of corruption and that it was absurd to talk of Tammany in connection with New Zealand. Of all the countries they visited they understood and enjoyed New Zealand best precisely because of the then absence of millionaires, the employers' fear of the law and the approach to social democracy. Although Sidney, referring to the immediate political scene, found the explanation of the whole position in Seddon's personality, Beatrice saw that he had been selected by a new political culture:

Most of his impulses are vulgar, none of them are distinguished. For all that, I still believe that his dominant desire and most permanent impulse is to conduct the business of government so as to obtain the greatest advantage for the majority of the people, with the expectation that, if he does so, he will be kept in office. That the great advantage is, to his mind, always material and immediate, is another way of saying that he is no philosopher and cannot be ranked as a great statesman. But what chance is there in a political democracy, of ousting such men from power when the leaders of the Opposition, however well mannered and scrupulous in their transaction of public business, are consciously or unconsciously impelled by one directing motive – the immediate and material interests of the minority of property-owners.¹⁶

Of course, this keen appreciation of the realities of class did not prevent her from keeping her distance, everywhere she went, from the 'SDF types' whose ugly jaws and low foreheads signalled a mindless ferocity. She even managed to discern their presence as a faction within the Democratic Party in the House of Representatives:

ci-devant workmen with rough clothes and awkward manner, undeveloped young men with narrow chests, low foreheads and red ties – what we should call SDF youths – whose occupation in the House seems to be heckling and disturbing the speaker of the other side.

She compared them with the Senators – 'large headed fine featured men with grave and dignified manners; almost punctilious in their behaviour.' Towards the end of their Australian tour the Webbs were actually taken prisoner by the SDF types. They had done their best to keep off platforms, although they had both addressed the Wellington Trades Council on their

last night in New Zealand. In Melbourne Sidney refused to give the Victorian Socialists a lecture, but a public reception was advertised all the same:

In an out of the way, dirty and badly ventilated place we met our poor relations, the believers in socialist shibboleths: a nondescript body of no particular class, and with a strong infusion of foreigners; a Polish Jew as secretary and various other nationalities, (among them black) being scattered among the audience. The chairman was the usual SDF young man, with narrow forehead, retreating chin and dirty coat, and the inevitable red tie.

After Beatrice had skilfully evaded the issue of women's suffrage, 'Sidney in a wily address tried to explain the Fabian policy of permeation.' As a result the chairman, in his concluding remarks, recommended the meeting to adopt 'Mr Webb's suggestion of taking the capitalist down a back street and then knocking him on the head!' Only the Webbs' enforced visit to the Melbourne Cup afforded a comparable instance of total mutual incomprehension.

Long before 1898 Beatrice had been in the habit of passing judgement on national character and racial disposition with a complete disregard for the need for verification and the other canons of social investigation upon which she normally insisted. Having taken care to remind any future reader of her travel log that these were but the jottings of a tourist, she felt free to pronounce upon the blacks at the Howard University for 'coloured folk'. These young victims of mechanical drilling in classics, mathematics and theology were

of all degrees of blackness (some of the coal black, with animal features, other quite white and refined looking, but with some hidden trait of negro, forbidding them intercourse, on equal terms, with the surrounding population) gathered together to take part in a sniffing little religious service. They were all so anxious to learn their lessons, so docile and modest, so naively anxious not to be physically repulsive – in a word so painfully conscious of their inferiority of race. In their wistful expressions – deprecating repulsion – one thought one could read past and future tragedies of feeling.

At least this had some redeeming ambiguities of feeling and understanding as compared with other assurances concerning 'Jewish intelligence' or the 'base' Irish. Without making a single reference to the central importance of ethnicity in American society she concluded that the Americans were 'the most intelligent and the least intellectual of the white races'.

As for the Hawaiians, the difficulty was to decide whether their troubles were more due to their fatalism or to their 'ever present and urgent lasciviousness'. Perhaps the New Zealanders, 'an easy-going race', had 'just a suspicion of the Polynesian!' Before she got to Australasia Beatrice came near to setting up what might have been a researchable problem. Noticing that 'the Chinese are great favourites with the ruling class of the ruling race' in Honolulu, and that 'the Jew and the Chinaman' resembled one another 'in combining a low standard of life with ambition and persistent industry', Beatrice minded herself to ask about the relative rent-producing faculty of various races and the bearing it might have upon the standard of life. But one is reminded of the essential casual character of all these references to race and race relations by the total indifference shown by the Webbs to the contrasting positions of the Maoris in New Zealand and the Aborigines in Australia. Perhaps Sidney lost his patience with this chatter and gently reminded his beloved that the whole notion of 'Race' was unscientific, atavistic, a mere vestige of tribal superstitions and to be employed only in the interests of manipulating imperialist silly-billies. Yet if reflections on racialism were avoidable, a consideration of militarism and imperialism must have appeared inescapable. The United States was going to war with Spain. Australia was on the point of federation, which meant rethinking internal relations between the states and redefining the relation with the Crown. In fact, as was to prove the case with the Chinese revolution of 1911 and forced collectivisation in Russia in 1932, the Webbs regretted that their arrival should have coincided with such disturbances. It was decidedly tiresome that that Americans were obsessed about Cuba when they had come to investigate local government. It was some consolation to have some meetings with Theodore Roosevelt. His deliciously racy conversation made Beatrice excited and prim. 'B (a Senator) came up to me and said that he was in favour of going to war but did not agree with my reasons', Roosevelt reported to her. 'Go to war because you don't like god, if you please, but go to war', she excitedly noted the great man as replying! Beatrice found it unedifying that accusations of stock exchange corruption should be bandied about as motives for or against peace.

Sidney took the trouble to give his account of the issues in a special report to the *Echo* – a journal in which the Webbs had acquired a small financial interest. He found the predisposing causes in 'The financial interests... Cuban Bonds... the Sugar Trust... needy American carpetbaggers.' But this was a 'newspaper war', for the 'money power' on balance had preferred to maintain peace. While allowing that there was genuine sympathy for the Cuban freedom fighters and while noticing Roosevelt on the ennobling influence of war in offsetting a sordid commercialism, Webb predicted that the American people 'might be chastened by defeat, but it will never be improved by victory'. Witnesses to the annexation of

Hawaii, the Webbs were of the opinion that it would bring untold millions to the resident capitalists by ridding them of the United States import duty on refined sugar while ‘the whole American people took a childish delight in the new militarism.’

Of course a knowing and disparaging attitude to others’ imperialism may coexist with a more indulgent one towards one’s own. This possibility lurked in Beatrice’s insistence upon the ‘French’ character of American patriotic sentiment. She was referring to the nation’s sense of property in the universal principles of human deliverance as formulated in the second half of the eighteenth century. But she did not go on to propose the case for the sleeper and more pragmatic style of empire-building any more than she welcomed the occasional invitation to herald the approaching advent of Anglo-Saxondom around the globe. On an October evening in Melbourne the Webbs dined with Isaac Isaacs, destined to become the first native-born governor-general of Australia. ‘He was an imperialist and the night he dined with us he began by a rhapsody over the Empire; when he saw, however, that we were not impressed he went on to explain his new bill against Usury.’ Sidney and Beatrice returned to England via the Red Sea. Even if they had gone back around the Cape it is doubtful whether they would have been any more imperialist than they had been when they set out nine months earlier.

Upon returning to 41 Grosvenor Road, the Webbs lost no time in immersing themselves in their old concerns. In relation to the LCC, Sidney was more inclined than ever to make clear the limited character of his ambitions, in exchange for having his own way in all that pertained to the Technical Education Board. At the school he was soon busying himself again about everything, from getting economics acknowledged as a science within the new university to the provision of linoleum. Beatrice visited her sisters and went down to see Herbert Spencer, who had invested everything in the Linotype Company in the interests of breaking the power of the compositors. By the middle of 1899 the Liberals, in pathetic disarray and aware that they were short of talent, had Sidney at Lord Tweedmouth’s, dining off gorgeous plate in the hope of inducing him to stand for Parliament. They made a ‘dead set’ at him, but he would have nothing of it. His only regret, so he assured Beatrice, was that he had failed to impress upon his host and upon the other guests what had to be done if they were to win London.

Beatrice noticed that Sidney was as energetic as ever, but ‘his energy is perpetually seeking the line of least resistance for the cause he believes in – and the line of least resistance for his cause is the line of least advancement for himself.’¹⁷ If it at least occurred to Sidney that he might go for the Liberals, it never occurred to him at this time that he might identify himself with ‘Labour’. By the second half of 1899 the leading political issues

had become the future of secondary education and the Boer War. On both these issues the Webbs were either totally opposed to the direction in which Labour was moving or out of sympathy with its temper. In the same month in which J.R. MacDonald was elected secretary of the Labour Representation Committee, he resigned from the Fabian Society – formally because it refused to make any pronouncement on the war, in practice because it was in the hand of a pro-war majority. Sidney belonged to that majority despite the fact that in his heart of hearts he was pro-Boer by sentiment, thought the war would have been avoidable up to the point at which the South Africa Company had been granted its charter and distrusted Chamberlain and Milner. However, the war having begun, all the recrimination was useless. Henceforth the Transvaal and the Orange Free State must be within the British Empire. As the war dragged on far longer than anyone had expected, he resisted all Beatrice's suggestions that he should read the Blue Books. Loathing the whole business, he resolved to practice what Auguste Comte called 'mental hygiene'. In other words, he 'carefully avoided anything on the subject'.¹⁸ Beatrice's own position was less agonised. In 1895 she had not only greeted the advent of Tory government with some complacency, but had indulged in some conventional banalities. She had written:

The whole mind of the country is at present [8 October 1895] absorbed in foreign politics. There has been a dramatic interest in the Transvaal events. Secrecy in international matters has, I think, been finally discredited so far as England is concerned. And the occasion has found the man. Joe Chamberlain is today the national hero... In these troubled times, with every nation secretly disliking us, it is a comfortable thought that we have a Government of strong, resolute men – not given either to bluster or vacillation – but prompt in taking every measure to keep us out of a war and to make us successful should we be forced in it.

Five years later the doings in the Transvaal were acknowledged to be 'an underbred business' and even the 'national hero' was accused of 'vulgarly provocative talk'.¹⁹

Yet Chamberlain was still allowed to have convictions 'and he expresses them honestly and forcibly – qualities at present rare in the political world'. Beatrice concluded: 'To my mind, given the fact that the Boers were fully armed, confident in their strength, and convinced of our weaknesses, war was inevitable.'²⁰ At best Beatrice too came to occupy a kind of middle ground from which she tried to placate and correct – if not to mediate – between the conflicting views of her sisters and her brothers-in-law. One month she would wring her hands over the fact that 'The Boers

are man for man, our superiors in dignity, devotion and capacity – yes in *capacity*’, and ask herself whether it would not be good for the British as a ‘ruling race’ to take a beating. Then a month or two later she would tease her sister Kate Courtney, whose husband had sacrificed everything for his pro-Boer convictions, by agreeing with her that ‘Kruger really believes in God, and God’s Government of this world.’ Having cheerfully admitted as much Beatrice added: ‘Which proves to me he is an impossible person for the rest of this wicked world to treat with.’ In *Fabianism and Empire* Bernard Shaw gave the Society the edge on all disputants by drawing attention to the way in which the interests of the vast black majority were disregarded by both the white imperialists and the white colonialists. Long after the war was over Beatrice took pleasure in recalling this sensitivity which the Fabian was almost alone in displaying. But it had been little more than a characteristic Shavian debating point. The neglected claims of five or six million ‘Kaffirs’ were of incidental and quite subordinate importance in relation to the main thrust of the argument. Progress consisted in the submission of the more backward to the more advanced civilisation. It was a nice matter to determine whether one had to be more of a cosmopolitan or more of an Irishman in order to entertain, without a qualm, this sort of historicism.

In trying to account for the Webbs’ absence from the Memorial Hall meeting it would be a mistake to attach too much importance to the mutual distrust between themselves and J.R. MacDonald. All the recognised Labour leaders were pro-Boer and all of them were equally inclined to side with democracy and Nonconformity in the emerging debate on education. The Webbs were unequalled in their grasp of history and the historical possibilities of labour at an institutional level, but they had long ceased to begin to think about the organisation of class power. Besides, in the case of the Labour Party this appeared as a baffled instinct that had been reduced to the narrowest and most precarious party ambitions: a party without members, without leaders and without principles. Such a nondescript institution hardly held out the prospect of becoming institutional. Perhaps, among its founders, there was an awareness of spiritual possibilities, which were not the subjects of bargains or the spatchcock organisational arguments. If so that was what the Webbs understood and cared for least. They knew the labour movement but they were disinclined to enter into communion with it. The religion of socialism was a tiresome irrelevance to such an irreligious person as Sidney. As for Beatrice, if a religion of socialism was possible at all, it was far too arduous a project to be effected by the likes of Keir Hardie or Ramsay MacDonald. So great were these difficulties that she herself was reduced to assigning religion and socialism to quite distinct compartments of her personal life, religion belonging to the most exclusive and inaccessibly

personal part of it. She valued loving kindness and respected fellowship, but found a summons to 'fraternity' impossibly indiscriminate. As for moral indignation, which was so much in demand within the Labour Party during the Boer War and after it was over, Beatrice found it profoundly distrustful:

Well, rightly or wrongly we don't believe in moral indignation ... Don't believe in publicly expressing dislike of conduct about which we don't *know* more than the ordinary man. Moral indignation is self-righteous and often perilously near hatred, and is apt to take you into dangerous places – I mean dangerous from the standpoint of public welfare. It may be your duty to intervene, either with words or deeds, to prevent wrong happening, but why be indignant? We are all of us miserable sinners and mental defectives – that is the fate of the human being, and is not a fate which he has brought on himself. One must assume free will in oneself – but in so far as the conduct of others is concerned I am a 'determinist'.²¹

With this sort of lofty austerity and high-minded mumbo jumbo the British Labour Party had nothing to do. Whatever the disadvantages of too much moral indignation they must be small compared with those of spiritual pride. Within it the deliverance of the Nonconformist conscience might be sloppy, but it was not to be confused with the sins of the intellectual pride found among Unitarians, spiritual pride found among Quakers or with the insolence of high-minded social investigators.

Apart from the fact that the Webbs' grasp of the institutional world of labour outdistanced their comprehension of the social and cultural history of the British working class, they preferred the cultivation of going political concerns to the heavy work of pioneering fresh ones. A successful intrigue was more attractive than the joy of the battle. So it was while Labour was beginning its long and hesitant march away from Liberalism that Sidney Webb was busy encouraging Lord Rosebery's 'Escape from Houndsditch.' (see p. 325) It was a measure of the witlessness of the 'recognised Labour Leaders' that not one of them pointed out that it was he, Webb, who was trading in the second-hand clothes market and that Lord Rosebery could be made to serve as nothing – not even a tailor's dummy!

The Tory khaki election of 1900 was a foregone conclusion. In retrospect, it seems more remarkable for the limited character of the Tory gains rather than anything else. Beatrice regarded it with a certain grim satisfaction. She concluded that the electors had shown common sense. The Liberals were plainly too divided to govern. The pro-Boers, under the leadership of Lloyd George, took up what Beatrice regarded as a 'hopelessly unpopular cause'. They acted in the tradition of the Victorian moral

reformer: people who cared less for outcomes than the public articulation of right thinking and good feeling. The Liberal Imperialists (the Limps), Asquith, Haldane and Grey, egged on by the Tory press, supported the war. From across the floor of the House, Joe Chamberlain was regarded with a jealous malevolence. His imperialism of industrial capital had not by 1900 found its expression in protectionism, but considerations of party were underpinned by differences of economic interest and social connection. He might well have subscribed to Beatrice's account of the Limps: 'They are so desperately in awe of the City, consider the opinions of *The Times*, and have their eye of the goodwill of the manufacturers – even on that of the brewers. Intellectually, they are more with us than the more Radical section; but they have no pluck and no faith.'²²

They also had no leader, despite the fact that they were ready to play the devoted lieutenants to Lord Rosebery, if only that vain, perverse and aloof figure would allow them to do so. The unfortunate Henry Campbell-Bannerman presided over this shambles and did his best to avoid being captured by either side. However, in the summer of 1901, commenting on how the British Army tried to cope with guerrilla war by establishing concentration camps, he let slip the fatal words – that these were 'the methods of barbarism'.

The Liberal leader's words were first spoken in June 1901 at a dinner in the Holborn restaurant. This aroused a 'Liberal taste for dispute by public banquet' or 'war to the knife and fork', with which Sidney found himself involved.²³ Under the influence of another Balliol man, Lord Milner, Asquith took his differences with his leader to the vote. The Liberal Imperialists determined to celebrate this defiance with a dinner in Asquith's honour. 'We are fighting for our lives,' Haldane explained to Beatrice, 'both Asquith and I would attach much importance to Sidney being present at the dinner; we do not like to press it, because the whole movement may be a failure.' Webb agreed to go, insisting that he attached no importance to it and even less to his own presence at it. He would do it because he had no strong convictions about the immediate issue and it might be a duty to friends who were at least not hostile to 'our views' as others were. 'And now that he has agreed to go', wrote Beatrice:

I am worrying about it. First and foremost, I know he loathes the war; he thinks the whole episode of the Rand and the Chamberlain negotiations a disgrace to this country (though he attributes the inevitability of the war to the granting of the Charter to the SA Co, and the discovery of gold on the Rand); he distrusts Milner; above all he feels uncertain as to his own opinions; having carefully avoided reading anything on the subject. 'It is not my show,' he has often said when I have suggested he should read blue-books. From a more selfish point of view, it suits him

not to be on either side so as to get what he can from both for his own projects.²⁴

In the event, the dinner went off all right. Beatrice in the company of her sister Margaret Hobhouse viewed it from the gallery. Sidney, she noticed, 'Was amongst the most distinguished of the guests.' Asquith did well but suffered by comparison with Rosebery's 'artistically sensational utterance'. With Rosebery there still remained a problem, not of art, but of substance. Haldane and Shaw now pressed Sidney to supply Rosebery with a domestic policy that would allow him to systematically destroy Gladstonianism, rid the Liberal Party of its old-fashioned image and challenge the Tories, whose conduct of the war had been so deficient, from the standpoint of national efficiency. Webb undertook the task. The result appeared in the September issue of *Nineteenth Century*, improved by an occasional suggestion from his wife and a dash of literary genius from Shaw, under the title of 'Lord Rosebery's Escape from Houndsditch'. It proved to be the most 'social' of all the manifestos of 'social imperialism'.

Webb argued that Lord Rosebery could not possibly waste his time patching up the old clothes of Gladstonian Liberalism: he must needs lead a regenerate Opposition – which was not necessarily one with the Liberal Party. Liberalism had done good work in the past – but it had done it. In the new century, men were thinking, and would continue to think, in terms of communities rather than of individuals. Obsolete hypotheses about people rightly struggling to be free and the principle of nationality were nothing but 'Fenian abstractions'. These abstractions were but individualism writ large. According to this outmoded dogma, each distinct race (there were no distinct races) had an inalienable right to self-government irrespective of its consequences for the world at large.

It was wrong to think of the South Africa War as being to blame for the Liberals' misfortunes. They had been in decline since 1874. The war had merely changed indifference into unpopularity. What was wrong with them was not so much their Little Englandism as their administrative nihilism. The Gladstonians were incorrigible destructives and moralists, blind to the fact that the state, that greatest of co-operative societies, required our first loyalty. As to the socialists, their 'boom' during 1885–92 had collapsed because they had nothing to say for themselves on the great rising issue of imperialism. Keir Hardie, by out-Morleying Morley, had put the ILP out of the running. What agitated the electors was shame: shame at the slackness of merchants and traders. What was wanted was a full-scale assault upon the sources of national inefficiency. A war against industrial parasitism would, by extending the Factory Acts, lead to the creation of that material and moral minimum indispensable to the rearing of an Imperial Race. The submerged one-fifth must not be housed, washed

and watered worse than horses. The Public Health Acts had to be enforced and three rooms and a scullery made to take the place of the neglect of local government. The severity of the workhouse and the withholding of all aid to the able-bodied were applauded, but the vast majority of paupers did not belong in that category. There must be humane treatment for the aged, scientific provision for the sick, and the best possible rearing of the children of the state. (Not a single pauper child in all London had ever won a junior scholarship.) An end had to be put to 'parsimonious thriftlessness. The 50 000 indoor pauper children and the 100 000 pauper sick constitute no trivial part of the human material out of which our Empire had to be built.'

Similarly in education, where the law was held to be in advance of its administration, the national minimum had to be enforced. 'It is in the class-rooms of these schools that the future battles of the Empire for commercial prosperity are being already lost.' These things were every bit as much great imperial needs and great imperial questions as the want of a 'system of scientific fighting [in place of] our present romantic and incapable soldiering'. What were wanted were not jingoism but virility in government. Sidney assured his readers that 'Jingoism is going the way of all rowdy fashions when they have been slept on.'

A month later Beatrice was carrying this message to Oxford. A month after that Sidney had tarted it up for the Fabians in the shape of Tract 108 on *Twentieth Century Politics*. And a month after that Lord Rosebery at Chesterfield, after doing something to placate the pro-Boers, explained that the Liberals must abandon their old shibboleths and go for national efficiency. Campbell-Bannerman was not alone in detecting Sidney as the *eminence grise*. He told Herbert Gladstone that the Chesterfield speech was an affront to Liberalism. 'Efficiency as a watchword! Who is against it? This is all mere réchauffé of Mr Sidney Webb, who is evidently the chief instructor of the whole faction.'²⁵ Rosebery himself had, indeed, been delighted with Webb's offering. He wrote to Beatrice advising her to keep her husband out of London or have him protected by the police, 'for his life can hardly be safe since the publication of his article in the *Nineteenth Century* – the most brilliant article that I have ever read for many a day.'

Haldane and Asquith were equally enthusiastic and were all for getting Sidney into the House. But even if Beatrice would have stood for it – and she would not have been prepared to do so in the short run – the time for that was already passing or past. The Rosebery–Webb combination was most imaginable in terms of some profound realignment in party politics. As Chamberlain made his peace with Balfour and as the Boer War drew to an end the old party lines became more secure.²⁶

In 1902, organisations such as the Liberal Union and Beatrice's dining club, the Coefficients, came into being, but they were born too late for whatever chances they might have had. The Coefficients was established

in November 1902 as a sort of shadow Ministry of All the Talents, except that it was more talented and more bizarre than such ministries tend to be and had no prospect of becoming a ministry. Beatrice carefully omitted all reference to it in *Our Partnership* and all the other participants came to be inclined to a comparable reticence or forgetfulness. Sidney Webb wrote to H.G. Wells in September 1902:

Dear Wells, The Dining Club takes shape; and I am asked by the half a dozen members who have nominated themselves the first members to invite you pressinglly to join. It is proposed to restrict the number to ten or twelve; to arrange for about eight dinners a year, mostly at a restaurant at the members' own expense; that the subject of all discussions should be the aims, policy and methods of Imperial Efficiency at home and abroad; that the Club is to be kept carefully unconnected with any person's name or party allegiance; and, in particular, it is not to be talked about – prematurely.

The first step is to meet at dinner at 41 Grosvenor Road on Thursday 6 November at 7.45 p.m. to discuss final membership and all arrangements. Kindly book this date at once, and fail not.

The printed minutes of the Coefficients record that

On 6 November 1902 at a dinner given by Mr and Mrs Sidney Webb, it was resolved to found a dining club to be known as the Coefficients. The original members were Mr L.S. Amery; Lieut. Carlyon Bellairs, RN; Sir Clinton Dawkins, KCB; Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Grey, Bart. MP; Prof. W.A.S. Hewins; Mr H.J. Mackinder; Mr L.J. Maxse; Hon. W.P. Reeves; Hon. Bertrand Russell [who resigned on 15 June 1903]; Mr Sidney Webb and Mr H.G. Wells.

The founder members were the main participants, but Bernard Shaw was among those who participated from time to time.

The Coefficients achieved nothing in any direct or immediate sense. Yet the record of their proceedings is unrivalled as a source for studying social imperialism and the state of mind of some of the most eminent British politicians and intellectuals at the start of the twentieth century.

They began by asking: 'How far and on what lines are closer political relations within the Empire possible?' They had no difficulty in agreeing that there ought to be periodical conferences between imperial ministers and the ministers of the self-governing colonies. They all followed Reeves in this as they all concurred in the view that a community of sentiment needed to be kept up. They had much more difficulty with the management of imperial commerce and defence than with the merely political question.

Accordingly they went on, under Hewins's leadership, to look at what was shortly to become an issue of the first importance. How far and upon what conditions, is preferential trade within the empire attainable or desirable? Doubtless Hewins, who was shortly to become Chamberlain's right-hand man rather than Sidney's, took the 'radical' view that former markets were being 'narrowed down'. Flourishing industries were shrinking and there was a period of relative decline. Under these circumstances, armaments could only be maintained if we looked to the markets and sources of supply within the empire. But against this and against appeals to the historic example of the Zollverein, and the contemporary example of imperial self-sufficiency supplied by the United States, the 'conservatives' disputed even relative decline. They insisted that if revenue presented any difficulty it would be because of the political difficulty of squeezing enough out of the propertied classes. This was followed by a couple of meetings in which the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States was the main issue. Only mass emigration from the United Kingdom to Canada could avert starvation in the event of war. Sir Clinton Dawkins thought that to avert such a war the British would have, among other things, to dispose of the Irish Question and resentment concerning their pretensions to commercial supremacy. The suggestion that America would be more sympathetic if Britain were to further republicanise its institutions elicited no permanent support (only Wells thought that the monarchy was expendable).

In historical retrospect, the fifth meeting of the Coefficients on 27 April 1903 was one of the most important. Upon that occasion Sir Edward Grey attempted to deal with the question 'What should be the relations of Britain to the great European powers?' He argued that hitherto it had been wise for Britain to back the Triple Alliance, since this had been in the interests of peace and had given us a free hand against in the French in Egypt. However, Germany, rather than France, was becoming suspect and restless. Our difficulty was that we could secure the friendship of France only by arriving at some far-reaching agreement with Russia. Thereupon the Coefficients divided as between those who held that we should compromise with Russia (at Germany's expense), those who felt that Russia was never to be trusted, and those who believed that Germany indubitably aimed 'to take our place in the trade and shipping of the world'. While all present agreed that Russian expansionism in Asia raised the most fundamental problems, there were still some who felt that we ought not to be pushed into the forefront to oppose the one or the other.

At its sixth meeting the Coefficients abandoned such diverse and difficult problems as to whether hostilities with Russia should be postponed in the interests of checking German ambitions. They addressed the

delightful question, 'For what end is a British Empire desirable?' The minutes record that, after Amery's opening address,

There was a general agreement among members that in practice the Empire was for them an object in itself, an ideal that had gradually grown up in their minds, which it did not occur to them to refer to any standard, but which was to them in itself a principal standard by which they judged political issues. To use the words of one member, he 'no more asked himself why he became an imperialist than he asked why he fell in love'.

(This was the point at which Russell, for all the fact that he had been keen on the war, decided to resign.) The others – or some of them – tried to supply their reasons for this infatuation. They found them in the impotence of small states, the dialectic through which the colonies democratised England while England delivered the colonies from parochialism, and the preparation that the empire supplied for the union of Anglo-Saxondom. As for 'Oriental or Uncivilised people', some members thought our rule over them a subordinate or even an objectionable part of our political condition. Fortunately,

it was generally agreed that one's rule over subject races was a duty which we could not abandon and which conferred considerable advantages. It provided a large field for our commerce, it contributed to our military strength and it afforded scope for the development of a very high type of individual whose existence tended to react upon and stimulate our democracy at home.

Besides, we were very considerate to our subject races:

It was also further suggested that if these people were not directly ruled by a higher race, they would acquire some of the powers conferred by modern civilisation, such as the use of arms and machinery, without absorbing the moral and political elements of civilisation, and thus become a menace to the civilised world.

It was not until their seventh meeting, held almost exactly a year after their foundation, that the Coefficients turned to the question 'How far is it possible by legislative regulation to maintain a minimum standard of National well-being?' As opener, Sidney rehearsed the arguments that were familiar from the 'Escape' and earlier writings. But he broke new ground in suggesting that the notion of the national minimum could be extended to cover 'the prevention of marriages of persons diseased or otherwise physically below a certain standard', while proposing that

education to the ages of 18 or 21 might be made to incorporate a 'system of physical and military training'. Evidently the discussion turned largely upon the problem of how far a protective tariff was a logical complement to the systematic application of the national minimum:

It was urged that just as it was necessary to have legislation in order to enable the individual to maintain a higher standard, so a State which endeavoured to set up a higher standard required to be protected ... It was suggested that just as there could be an 'abyss' of casual work population in a great city, so there might be an 'abyss' nation ... picking up whatever casual work circumstances brought it.

At the next meeting H.G. Wells attempted to answer the question, 'What is the proper scope of municipal enterprise?' He demonstrated, to general satisfaction, that the existing scale of local government areas was 'an inconvenient anachronism'. Sir Clinton Dawkins followed, on 'What form, if any, of compulsory service is possible and desirable?' On this matter there 'was a remarkable degree of unanimity among members'. A great physical improvement and a consequent prolongation of working life would compensate for the immediate loss of working time. But the great point was that National Service should be seen as a measure of insurance:

The enormous fabric of British credit now rested on a very slender and delicate basis, and anything like a successful raid on England, or even the mere fancy that such a raid was possible, might create a terrible panic, and finally shift the world's centre of capital to some other country.

Moreover, it was noticed that progressive taxation 'involved considerable danger in the creation of a large irresponsible community. This would be counteracted by the imposition of the personal tax of service'. In subsequent meetings Mackinder argued that higher education should be made free to all qualified to benefit from it, while Haldane argued for devolution of powers to local government aided and partially controlled by the device of grants in aid. After Maxse had offered some reflections on *savoir-faire*, Birchenough made some suggestions about the linguistic unity of the empire. Newbolt defended the monarch (H.G. Wells dissenting) while L.S. Amery addressed himself to the problem, 'How far is it possible to evolve a system of national ethics for the British Empire?' He began by giving short shrift to the competing notion of the brotherhood of man. It was evident that that would not do at all, since it

involved the sacrifice of all those virtues which had developed under the influence of the ideal of patriotism. Moreover, it did not provide to a

sufficient extent for the element of a community of conflict. It provided no element outside to be resisted and overcome.

On the other hand, the empire preserved that good thing, an enemy – powers of darkness and oppression, anarchy and outer chaos – requiring to be set in order to be kept out. At the same time it was an ideal almost as wide as the ideal of humanity, from which it differed ‘quantitatively rather than qualitatively’. The British Empire was to be the new religion, which meant for Amery submission to an intense feeling of overmastering purpose. Despite some hesitation and confusion at this point there was general agreement that ‘Prussian efficiency and Japanese bushido required to be grafted on English justice, English public spirit, and English patriotic idealism, to produce the desired end.’

In the light of this it is hardly surprising that H.G. Wells found himself in some difficulty when at the next meeting he tried, *à propos* of the future of the coloured races, to define civilisation in terms of the conditions of internal and external peace. The majority of Coefficients were evidently agreed that this would not do at all. After all, the Australian ‘blackfellows’ were peaceful while ‘almost all the great civilising nations have been war-like’. They concluded that civilisation was about efficiency and powers of organisation. However, they could find no justification for the view that the lowest races should be exterminated or even permanently enslaved. They were, so it was thought, capable of elevation.

Similarly, when Pember Reeves suggested that militarism had no redeeming features, his fellow Coefficients disputed his use of terms. No one had anything to say in favour of Prussian militarism (the military domination of civilian life) but devotion to efficiency in all matters, including military ones, was no evil. Conscription was not more brutalising or more deadening than the division of labour within modern industry and might lance ‘the cyst of individualism’. On 17 April 1905 Webb gave what appears to have been a rather boring paper on ‘The Future Revolution in English Local Government’. A couple of months later the regular meetings of the Coefficients appear to have come to an end. Haldane had warned Webb that social reform could come only in association with imperialism and only by slow turning movements. After four years’ experience in courting Rosebery and the Limps and acting as convenor to the Coefficients, it must have become apparent to Sidney that these turning movements were wondrous slow and far from sure. Of course his patience would be more explicable if he was an imperialist *per se*. But was he?

Towards the end of his life W.A.S. Hewins had a chance meeting with Beatrice Webb in London. Recalling their happy association in the founding of the LSE, he extended the area of nostalgia to include their commitment to imperialism. He was astonished when Beatrice laughingly

rebuked him. 'We were', she assured him, 'never imperialists.' He was being asked to believe that the Webbs had used him. That his successors as directors of the LSE, Reeves and Mackinder – all imperialists and all Coefficients – had been used also to compromise the claims of learning and respectability with those of socialism. The Webbs escaped the reproach of having been imperialists by insisting that it had never been anything more than hypocrisy and trickery.

There was 'something in it'. Undoubtedly the New Machiavelli bore a striking resemblance to one of the Babes in the Wood - but to which one? It must not be imagined that in these great matters of war, race and empire, Sidney and Beatrice were entirely of one mind. Beatrice confessed in 1900 that 'we don't quite agree. Sidney is on the anti-war side of the line, I am on the 'war was inevitable' side, but we are both of us so close to the dividing line that we can still go on holding hands!' Similarly, if both of them occasionally used the vocabulary of racism, Sidney was ready to caution against it, while Beatrice was ready to dwell upon its immense, if yet to be determined, importance. The commonplaces about the national and imperial interest came more readily to her lips than to his. On the other hand, it was Sidney, with his indifference to large statements of principle, who showed no scruple in latching on to them. As he explained to Herbert Samuel, what mattered in political thought were the *axiomata media* which connected the fundamental principle to the particular project. Without these middle axioms such as 'collective regulation of all matters of common concern', the principles were but hot air and the projects 'merely empirical'. As already noted (p. 63), when he told Bertrand Russell that he liked to draw his own conclusions from other men's premises' and the philosopher replied, that then the conclusions followed anyway and were either not to be thought of as his or he was guilty of sophistry, Sidney doubtless thought that provided he had control of the *axiomata media* that objection fell.

However, the central difficulty of the social imperialist project was whether the major premise, the duty to advance the interests of empire, was consistent with the minor premise, the need to develop an imperial race, so that they might be made together to yield the conclusion that the interests of empire required us to elevate, compulsorily, the standard of life. The majority of politically conscious workmen believed that imperialism, far from making for social reform, did exactly the opposite. This has been taken to be the distinctively proletarian ground of opposition to the Boer War. If one looked at the excuses made for deferring the introduction of old-age pensions, for example, the priority to be given to defence had had a high place. Curiously enough, the Webbs never appear to have reflected about this question. They never decided whether J.A. Hobson was correct in maintaining that empire was at the cost of the metropolitan

working class, or whether Cecil Rhodes was right in believing that it could be made to buy off the social revolution. They approached the problem in an exclusively intellectualist way. Since John Morley and other champions of the minimal state were Little Englanders, it followed that the imperialists who were already thinking in communities must incline to do so at home as well. Sidney was neither a Jingo nor a Little Englander: he was a Greater Londoner. If the highest object of public policy was the prosperity of the London School of Economics or the progress of the new Charlottenburg, then doubtless the imperialists were the best bet. To insist that this was the decisive consideration may seem preposterous. But when Hewins decided to throw in his lot with Chamberlain and go for an imperial tariff, the Webbs were agreed that whatever his own opinion might have been, Sidney would have to have opposed this project in the interests of maintaining the school's reputation for detachment. (Fortunately, he was, on balance, hostile to Chamberlain's proposals. He had been a better Fabian and Fabianism was essentially about socialism in one country. He would have had to come closer to Shaw, who recognised the absurdity of worshipping at the altar of free trade.) There was more to the Webbs' imperialism than an unheroic and rather mindless opportunism – but not much more. They were deeply persuaded of the futility of turning one's back on on-going institutional concerns, such as the Church or the empire. No doubt Sidney sincerely believed that the empire had to be the 'unit of consideration'. Any mere revulsion against it would simply play into the hands of irresponsible adventurers:

Our own duty with the British Empire is, not to 'run' it for our own profit, or with any idea of imposing Anglo-Saxondom on a reluctant world, but to put our best brains into the task of so ordering it as (consistently with the paramount aim of its maintaining as a whole [sic]) to promote the maximum individual development of each geographical unit within its bounds.

Within this benign framework the non-adult races were to be improved out of existence. Simultaneously, by properly attending to the task of averting race deterioration at home, the prospect of the country falling into the hands of the Irish, the Jews or the Chinese was to be avoided. Not all these demagogic appeals or paranoid anxieties found full expression during the period 1901 to 1903, but it was within these years that the foundation for them was laid.

To take the proper measure of the Webbs' social imperialism it is necessary to understand the profound transformation that took place in their location within the family circle and the wider social world during this period. They did, indeed, drift into imperialism. Their relatively moderate

or detached attitude towards the Boer War facilitated this process since 41 Grosvenor Road became a haven open to the warmongering and the pacifist brother-in-law alike. From Sister Kate, Beatrice learned at first hand what it was like to be completely out of it, for Leonard Courtney was made to pay very heavily for his principled opposition to British imperialism. For the first time the Webbs were free from all taint and fully acknowledged as distinguished members of the family. This could hardly be otherwise, for 1901 to 1905 might be characterised as their prime-ministerial years. Their circle was dominated by Prime Ministers past, present and future, together with those who aspired to that office or who were connected with it in one way or another.

First, there was the former premier, to whom they were introduced in the interests of one of Haldane's fantasies or intrigues. Beatrice had been utterly done up after a week of dissipation. Dining with Alfred Cripps in a private room in the House of Commons – 'a veritable hole of Calcutta' which had proved too much for Margaret Hobhouse – she struggled on chatting with Carson, 'a clever, cynical and superficial Irishman'. Then there had been a little dinner on Friday. On Sunday she had supped with Willie Cripps. On Monday she had debated in the Chelsea Town Hall with an anti-regulationist. On Tuesday she had dined with the Creightons and Professor Ramsay to talk London University. Then on Wednesday

we dined with Haldane to meet a select party of Roseberites including the great man himself. Haldane sat me down next to Lord Rosebery against the will of the latter who tried his best to avoid me as neighbour, but all to no purpose. Haldane insisting on his changing places. At first he avoided speaking to me. But, feeling that our host would be mortified if his little scheme failed utterly, I laid myself out to be pleasant to my neighbour, though he aggravated and annoyed me by his ridiculous airs: he might be a great statesman, a Royal Prince, a beautiful woman and an artistic star, all rolled into one. 'Edward', called out Lord Rosebery to Sir Edward Grey as the latter, arrayed in Court dress, hurried away to the Speaker's Party, 'don't tell the world of this new intrigue of Haldane's.'

And I believe Lord Rosebery winked as he glanced at me sitting by him.²⁷

As she subsequently noted:

Unmarried, living a luxurious physical but a strenuous mental life, Haldane's vital energies are divided between highly skilled legal work and the processes of digestion – for he is a Herculean eater. He finds his relaxation in bad metaphysics and in political intrigue – that is, trying

to manipulate influential persons into becoming followers of Rosebery and members of his *clique*. Be it said to his credit, that he has to some extent manipulated us into this position.²⁸

Two years later she was taking the Prime Minister himself into dinner. 'I say 'took' because he was so obviously delivered over into my hands by my kindly hostess who wished me to make as much use as possible of the one and a quarter hours he had free from the House.' She found Balfour modest, unselfconscious and intellectually serious in a way in which Rosebery was not:

I set myself to amuse and interest him, but seized every opportunity to insinuate sound doctrine and information as to the position of London education ... Three dinner parties and two evenings at one's house in eight days is severe! But it seemed desirable to give a Conservative-LCC dinner and a London University reception; and also a Limp dinner, and a Limp reception. Then there was a dinner to Lady Elcho to acknowledge her kindness to us in Gloucestershire and our introduction to Balfour, an introduction which may have good results. So I asked her to meet John Burns, the Shaws, H.G. Wells, and Asquith ... Asquith was simply dull. He is disheartened with politics, has no feeling of independent initiative, and is baffled by Rosebery, shuns and is snubbed by Campbell-Bannerman. He has worked himself into an unreal opposition to the Education Bill. He is not really convinced of the iniquity or unwisdom of the Bill he is denouncing. He eats and drinks too much and lives in a too enervating social atmosphere to have either strenuousness or spontaneity. Clearly he is looking to the money-making Bar for his occupation in life. As a lawyer he is essentially common quality; [with] no interest in, or understanding of, legal principles; no ingenuity or originality in making new influences or adapting old rules to new conditions. However, he is under no delusion about himself; he has resigned himself to missing leadership.²⁹

Other future Prime Ministers who had not yet made the mistake of crossing the Webbs fared rather – if not much – better. 'For three days I have been off with strained eyes', Beatrice recorded in July 1903:

Strained not with work, but with dissipation of strength at four dinners last week ... My diet saves me from worse ills than mere fatigue. Unfortunately I don't always stick to my regime – specially when I am bored.

We went to dinner with Winston Churchill. First impression: restless – almost intolerably so, without capacity for sustained and unexciting

labour – egotistical, bumptious, shallow-minded and reactionary, but with a certain personal magnetism, great pluck and some originality – not of intellect but of character.³⁰

Quite a little Joe in fact, had it not been for his being a Little Englander at heart and for his penchant of looking ‘to haute finance to keep the peace’.

As for he who lusted most for office and who was never entirely absent from her thought, he who was most powerfully called but never managed to be chosen, she had to get on with his daughter and she met him now and again with diminishing emotional perturbation. His great physique, like that of the nation’s as a whole, was deteriorating. But she was just in time to offer a last salute to the slipping monocle and the dropping orchid. ‘We lunched at Chamberlain’s,’ she recorded on 17 June 1904. ‘I sat on one side of my old friend’ – this obsession with the details of processioning and positioning is characteristic – ‘and we talked without constraint.’ This is extremely doubtful. ‘He is obsessed with the fiscal question – has lost his judgement over it – refuses to think or talk of anything else.’ Under the circumstances this was wholly understandable. ‘He looks desperately unhealthy, rather thin too; a restless look in his eyes’ – under the circumstances this must be allowed to be forgivable – ‘bad colour, and general aspect of “falling in.”’ What does this mean? ‘But I should imagine that there is plenty of force in the man yet; an almost mechanical savage persistence in steaming ahead.’ Good gracious me! He had been the Colonial Secretary, not the First Lord of the Admiralty! ‘I tried to suggest the “national minimum” as a complementary policy to export duties.’ Good try, girl! ‘I have no prejudice against it’, he answered, ‘but it would not do for me to suggest it – it would be said that I was trying to bribe the working class.’ Game, set and match to Mr Chamberlain? Game and first set to Mr Chamberlain! It would have been the match as well had he not gone on to remark: ‘If I had been Prime Minister, you would not have had the Education Act.’ ‘The one and only reason’, said Beatrice sweetly, ‘for my not regretting that you are *not* Prime Minister.’ And with that she went off to comfort Mrs Chamberlain. ‘There must be times when the great personage with his irritability, one-sidedness, pitiful unhealthiness and egotism and vulgarity, is rather a heavy handful for that refined and charming little lady.’³¹

Bonar Law was present at this lunch, but apart from noting the fact Beatrice paid no further attention. However, this neglect was more forgivable than the Webbs’ dismissive attitude towards Campbell-Bannerman; their failure to even consider Lloyd George’s importance for popular politics; and their failure to restore relations with J.R. MacDonald. MacDonald would hardly have declined if they had invited him to join them in high political society. However, he was busy spreading tales about Sidney and

Beatrice making money out of the 'School': a particularly unpleasant fabrication which was made into a grotesque one by the Webbs' gifts to that institution and their practice of teaching there without payment.

Of course there was relief from 'dissipation' in going off together to study prisons or sewers or some other aspect of the history of local government. In particular there was the pleasure of long stays with Bertrand and Alys Russell at their home at Friday's Hill or as companions on a cycling holiday in Normandy. Beatrice had some difficulty in categorising Bertie. Since he was a grandson of Lord John – 'Finality Jack' – Russell he too had the prime-ministerial connection, but Beatrice decided that despite the incomprehensible nature of his enquiries he was an expert: 'an expert in the art of reasoning, quite independently of the subject matter'.³² She also decided that the Russells were the most attractive married couple she knew. When they became more and more estranged she made every effort to comfort Alys and to help them to repair their relationship. She also tried to help the philosopher in his career: 'Can you and Alys come to lunch on *Thursday* 10th and meet Mr Balfour? I am taking him to Bernard Shaw's play. Could you not take tickets for that afternoon? It will be well for you to know Mr Balfour – in case of Regius Professorships and the like!'

The Russells were coming to be preferred even to the Shaws. As early as 1899 when the Webbs used to dine sumptuously in Charlotte's flat above the LSE, Beatrice watched George Bernard Shaw in his 'fitful struggles out of the social complacency natural to an environment of charm and plenty' and asked herself: 'How can atmosphere be resisted?'³³ Five years later she found the smart world tumbling over one another in the worship of Shaw. Even the Webbs had a sort of reflected glory as his intimate friends. If his self-conceit was proof against flattery, that hardly made the transformation scene less remarkable: 'the scathing bitter opponent of wealth and leisure – and now! the adored one of the smartest and most cynical set of English Society.'³⁴ (Not let it be noted of the electorate. Sidney was a good deal of time puffing Shaw in the *Daily Mail* and otherwise trying to get him elected to the LCC in 1904. He was above having anything to do with such orthodox devices as election addresses or polling cards. His own invention insisted that he was an atheist and though a teetotaler would force every citizen to imbibe a quarter of rum to cure any tendency to intoxication. He laughed at the Nonconformist conscience, chaffed the Catholics about transubstantiation, abused the Liberals and contemptuously patronised the Conservatives.)

Beatrice was intermittently aware that she and Sidney were themselves at risk of becoming a supporting act in these performances in which the smartest and most cynical set of English society enjoyed being so safely outraged. Between meeting Prime Ministers she sometimes suspected that

entertaining the Webbs – as persons with a special kind of chic – was becoming a requirement in parts of fashionable society.³⁵ Her old friend and teacher, Frederic Harrison, had observed long ago that a little playful radicalism went down very well in the highest circles of the aristocracy. Occasionally, she noticed that it was unwholesome, but she was very reluctant to allow that it was futile. Incapable of distinguishing between the ruling class and the governing oligarchy, she deluded herself into supposing that it was all in a good cause, and anyway it did not do any harm to Sidney. All power resided, so she persuaded herself, in the hands of a ruling clique. Thus, in the London educational world, no one could resist Sidney because he was in the little clique at the centre of things and had the LCC power of making grants.³⁶ Government by cliques might not be quite wholesome if the hidden hand was less efficient and less beneficent. But then politics, so she told herself, was a by-product of their lives. 'If we came to throw our main stream of energy into political life, we should have to choose our comrades more carefully.'³⁷ In that case she could never have allowed Haldane to suggest that they should work with such 'a loathsome person' as 'Imperial Perks': 'a combination of Gradgrind, Pecksniff and Jabez Balfour.'³⁸ It would have been intolerable to feel that one was becoming so near to being 'both a spy and a traitor'.³⁹ Although she periodically remembered that she would look to a different social base than that considered by the Limps, her prevailing mood for most of the time was one which inclined her to

detach the *great employer*, whose profits are too large to feel the immediate pressure of regulation and who stands to gain by the increased efficiency of the factors of production, from the ruck of small employers or stupid ones. What seems clear is that we shall get no further instalments of reforms unless we gain the consent of an influential minority of the threatened interest.⁴⁰

Sidney was fully party to the politics of permeating the ruling cliques. But since those distant days when Beatrice had cured him of his habit of starting sentences with the words 'when I am Prime Minister', he had passed beyond the reach of personal and social ambition:

Sidney is simply unconscious of all the little meanness which turns social intercourse sour: he is sometimes tired, occasionally bored, but never unkindly or anxious to shine, or be admired, and wholly unaware of the absence of, or presence of, social consideration. I verily believe that if he were thrown, by chance, into a company of persons all of whom wanted to snub him, he would take up the first book and become absorbed in it, with a sort of feeling that they were

good-natured enough not to claim his attention, or that they did not perceive that he was reading on the sly. And the greater personages they happened to be, the more fully satisfied he would be at the arrangement; since it would relieve him of any haunting fear that he was neglecting his social duty and making others uncomfortable. On the other hand, whether in his own house or in another's, if some person is neglected or out of it, Sidney will quite unconsciously drift to them and be seen eagerly talking to them.⁴¹

One day Beatrice found three separate entertainments which she would like to have gone to – Lady Wimborne's, Arthur Balfour's and the Duchess of Sutherland's evening parties. Having spent a great deal of money on a new dress, she wanted to parade herself. But Sidney was obdurate. He told her:

You won't be able to work the next morning, and I don't think it is desirable that we should be seen in the houses of great people. Know them privately if you like, but don't go to their miscellaneous gatherings. If you do, it will be said of us as it is of Sir Gilbert Parker – in the dead silence of the night you hear a distant but monotonous sound – Sir Gilbert Parker climbing, climbing, climbing.⁴²

Nor did Sidney, for all his marvellous simplicity and wonderful self-deadness, manage to work the ruling cliques in the way in which he intended without losing the confidence of his old friends. Wells, an acquaintance refreshingly plebeian and made perceptive by envy and malice, warned that Sidney appeared too 'foxy' and that 'he had better fall back on being an enthusiast'. Besides, was he not in the end the junior partner who would finish up serving his wife's reactionary and anti-radical purposes?⁴³

By the end of 1905 Mr Balfour no longer felt that he needed to be Prime Minister in order to complete the picture of 'the really charming man'.⁴⁴ On 22 November the Webbs were dining with Lord Lucas in his great mansion in St James's Square and Beatrice was feeling a bit ashamed of herself for dissipating her energies in this 'smart but futile world' when in came the PM to 'dissipate' her regrets. 'It is always worthwhile, I thought, to meet those who really have power to alter things... He was looking excited and fagged on the eve of resignation.' The Webbs lunched with him six days later before going off to see *Major Barbara*. On the way to the theatre the Prime Minister apologetically explained to her why he could not supply her with better colleagues on the Royal Commission on the Poor Law, to which she had just been appointed.

At least both the Webbs could point to places on Royal Commissions as some reward from these prime-ministerial years. Even the cultivation of

Rosebery had been worth £5000 or more to the School. But as to rest there was little to show for it all. Those whom they had cultivated least had been swept back to office over a divided and exhausted Tory government by trade unionists and Nonconformists raving about peace and liberty, Chinese coolies and untaxed breakfast tables. Beatrice ought to have counted herself jolly lucky that John Burns, newly appointed as president of the Local Government Board, went straight to 41 Grosvenor Road from congratulating 'Sir Enry the new Premier' on this his 'most popular appointment'. Instead, she grew weary of his boasting. 'Don't be too doctrinaire about the unemployed, Mr Burns,' said she. To which he replied, 'Economise your great force of honesty, Mrs Webb.'

A record of failed intrigue is not improved by a want of diplomacy. The question of whether 41 Grosvenor Road was occupied by the New Machiavelli or by the Babes in the Wood has already been raised. There were times when it was difficult to determine the answer.

It is difficult to class the Webbs as racists. They did not employ the vocabulary of biology, but of education. The division was not between peoples of different colour, but of different opportunity and experience. The distinction was between the 'adult' and 'the non-adult races'. It was condescending and patronising and opportunist. It was not a concession to the prejudices of Gobineau or to those that were to become identified with Adolf Hitler.

Part V

Epilogue

And we are, as I said in my diary when we were first engaged, 'second rate minds – neither of us are outstandingly gifted – it is the "combinat" that is remarkable'. And this brings me to the criticism of the Webbs which seems to me simply funny: we are said to lack 'humanity', to be strangely inhuman. Why? Because we have continued to be devoted to each other and have worked together ceaselessly, without friction! Why should an unblemished monogamy be considered 'inhuman'?

(D, 25 September 1933)

Beatrice Webb: 'Marriage is the waste-paper basket of the emotions.'

Virginia Woolf: 'Wouldn't an old servant do as well?'

Beatrice: 'Yes, I dare say an old family servant would do as well'.

The conversation took place in September 1918, but this characterisation of marriage was well established as one of Beatrice's stock remarks.

See L. Woolf, *Beginning Again*, 1964, pp. 116–17

9

An Ideal Marriage?

Beatrice's attitude of superiority—The marriage as a business relationship—Beatrice's sexual impulses and 'relapses'—Sidney's attitude—The achievements.

The Webbs always had at least two domestic servants. Had it been otherwise, Sidney would have had to do the washing-up. He would have done it uncomplainingly, even joyfully. Meanwhile, Beatrice (who was over eighty before it first dawned upon her that she could not boil an egg), would have sat upstairs smoking a cigarette, her feet on a stool, reflecting about the unanticipated and wasteful implications of social equality.

Beatrice distanced herself from the organised feminist movement, showing towards it indifference, standoffishness or hostility. But her most characteristic attitude was one of superiority. This proceeded from her sense of being a successful feminist in her own practice. She had achieved equality and, perhaps, something more. When she joined with other eminent women – most of them merely the wives of eminent men – in opposing the extension of the suffrage on the grounds that power corrupted women's nature, she was already indulging in the most ruthless type of sexual politics at the expense of every vulnerable male in sight.¹ When she refused to follow Alfred Marshall's advice and specialise in the study of women in industry, she knew that she would never achieve full parity of esteem with male social investigators by going along that road.² When she provoked the 'screeching sisterhood' by declaring: 'I never saw a man, the most inferior, but I felt him to be my superior,'³ she had already concluded a contract in which the most perfect intellectual equality had been conceded and a good deal more besides. In disassociating herself from the individualist ladies crying out for rights which they had no notion of how to exercise – unless it was at the expense of their proletarian sisters – she left herself free to campaign in the Westminster Vestry for more public lavatories for women – something which required more daring than many 'a more advanced' woman could have managed.⁴ Having got herself involved with the essentially timid and woolly-headed International

Congress of Women she suddenly discovered the importance of principle and withdrew from the executive because it would not abandon the practice of morning prayers. She found this proceeding wanting in consideration of the claims of Jewesses and religious-minded agnostics like herself.⁵ Until she made her very dignified and qualified repentance in 1906,⁶ Beatrice's persistence in these attitudes was related to her own success in turning the tables on the opposite sex.

This did not mean that Beatrice identified with other emancipated women who lived their feminism out in the practice of life. She saw herself as superior to them as well. Thanks to the benign influence of her father and Herbert Spencer she had not had 'to struggle against the prejudice and oppression of bigoted and conventional relations to gain her freedom', a struggle which might demoralise those who were forced to engage in it. Such a woman as Maggie Harkness had 'never been disciplined by a Public Opinion which expects a woman to work with the masculine standard of honour and integrity'.⁷

In *Our Partnership* Beatrice concealed the extent to which her marriage was thought of quite literally as a business arrangement. As she admitted on her side (and she had the whip hand economically) it was a cold-blooded calculation. 'To the well trained commercial mind there is charm,' she wrote, 'in making the ideal bargain, the best possible to both partners.'⁸ As to the nature of the bargain: the woman was to take the unimportant decisions. The man was to take the important ones. And she (Beatrice) was to determine which was which!⁹ (It does not matter if the story is apocryphal; it supplies an excellent first approximation to reality.)

Few ideal marriages are childless, but there were to be no children. Sidney would have liked to father Beatrice's child, but he would certainly not insist upon it. In any case she was over thirty and childbirth in the 1890s carried far greater risks than was to be the case a hundred years later. Chamberlain's first two wives had died in childbirth. A family would inevitably hinder her in the pursuit of her professional career and have costs for both their research and public life. From the standpoint of the British race it was obviously deplorable that the Shaws, the Webbs and (before 1921) the Russells had no offspring. She sometimes suspected that it might be damaging, even to the quality of the existing elite, never mind the future generations. But, on balance, it was a necessary decision and a right one – at least for her. In politics she would accept the subordinate role of the wife. However, her conception of that role involved initiatives, which hardly conformed to conventional expectations on that subject. (She rejoiced in providing Sidney with an entry into circles that he would have otherwise found inaccessible. But she would have been insulted if anybody had ever suggested that *she* thereafter displayed the customary political and educational passivity of the woman.) However, the main

thing was that politics was to be treated as secondary to research. Sidney was not to accept any invitation to a station in public life that would prevent this or seriously hinder it. Despite the fact that he contributed far more to their joint work – at least to the drudgery of it – than she did, here she was to be treated as fully equal. He was not to get ill. He was not to get tired. Nor was he ever to complain about the austerities of their domestic regime even if he was to be spared the full rigour of her own more Spartan excesses. Fortunately for Beatrice, she found, in Sidney, a man who was able to accept these arrangements – one who was ready (in exchange for a delightful companionship or an occasional ‘interval for human nature’) to accept that reversal of conventional marriage roles which she was looking for. For him the yoke was paradise – even while she still indulged in occasional fantasies concerning the monocle and the orchid.

These fantasies did recur. In recording them and in reflecting about them Beatrice’s working feminism was revealed at its fullest extent and confronted with its ultimate predicament. Beyond the transitory joys of vengeance and atonement; beyond the happiness of creative work together; the bargain had sentenced what she often took to be the deepest (as well as the worst) side of her to a state of internal exile.

Her strong sexual impulses were not fully satisfied. In acknowledging their strength she put herself in advance of Olive Schreiner and the vast majority of emancipated women of her time. In sensing the relationship between these impulses and the highest and most ephemeral side of her experience, she entertained a shamefully radical prospectus. In facing that her passion for Chamberlain was related to a desire to submit to the most masterful figure of the time, she brought herself to the conundrum that was to confront succeeding generations. If full sexual realisation comes only in submission, how is that to be reconciled with liberty and equality in every other department of life? How was the woman who ought always to be sought to be reconciled with the woman who was bound to assert herself?

It is difficult to be sure when Beatrice first discovered the difficulties of the working feminist who simply reverses the established terms of sexual chauvinism. Probably she was more aware of the improvement in Sidney before she fully realised the limitations of her own happiness. Staying with the Trevelyans over Christmas 1895, she rejoiced in the way in which her husband listened to G.M.’s historical essays and gave hints: drawing out, appreciating, criticising. ‘The perfect happiness of his own life has cured his old defects of manner – he has lost the aggressive, self-assertive tone, the slight touch of insolence which was only another form of shyness – and has gained immeasurably in persuasiveness’.¹⁰ She concluded that: ‘All ties should be made secure – to be broken only by mutual

consent and for very sufficient reasons... How I hate Anarchism in all its forms.¹¹ Yet in relation to Chamberlain she herself was still subject to what she called 'relapses', despite the fact that she could assure herself that 'I am absolutely happy with Sidney – our life is one long and close companionship; so close it is almost a joint existence.'¹² Even at the beginning of the Boer War she was mortified to find that she was striving, rather unavailingly, to meet criticisms of 'Joe' from Sidney and Leonard; and that she was 'prey to an involved combination of bias and counterbias...'¹³ Then, in the spring of 1900,

The last three months have not been satisfactory. My work has not had my best thought and feeling, foolish day-dreams based on self-consciousness and personal vanity, foolish worrying over an investment in the *Echo*, which is likely to be a dead loss and may involve us in legal complications – a certain physical revulsion to intellectual effort – have all combined to make my work half-hearted and unreal. Sidney is free from all these defects and every day I live with him the more I love and honour the single-mindedness of his public career and his single-hearted devotion to his wife. And every year I appreciate more fully the extraordinary good luck which led me to throw in my lot with him. (So much, one might remark for 'the well-trained commercial mind'!) Just as it was the worst part of my nature that led me into my passionate feeling for Chamberlain so it was the best part of my nature which led me to accept Sidney after so much doubt and delay. And certainly, just as I was well punished for the one, I have been richly rewarded for the other course of feeling and conduct. And yet, notwithstanding the conviction, I find my thoughts constantly wandering to the great man... Sometimes I think I should like to meet him again. At other times I reject the thought as a needless expenditure of feeling.¹⁴

Two months later, after a large dinner party of Haldane's, the Webbs were walking along the terrace of the House when the 'Great Man' appeared. She introduced him to her husband. 'I think you were in my Office, Mr. Webb,' said the Colonial Secretary. 'That is hardly correct,' replied Sidney. 'When I was there you were not.'

The return of the old aggression was accidental; quite unintended. He had meant to say that he had not had the honour of serving under Chamberlain. Beatrice was sure of that. She was equally sure that there was still a bond, 'a bond of sentiment between us – I for the man I loved – loved but could not follow'.¹⁵ By the end of the year rumours of Chamberlain's separation from his wife led Beatrice to experience

a whole month of suspense... And then a morbid consciousness that owing to that most unfortunate meeting on the terrace in the

summer there are some persons who are going about attributing to me the separation, *I* who have never met her, and *I* who have only seen him once in thirteen years... *I* must turn my thoughts away. All *I* want to feel certain of, in my own conduct, is that if ever *I* meet him again my whole influence, if *I* have any, shall be devoted towards their reconciliation.

And to think that I am over forty and he is over sixty! What an absurdity!¹⁶

On New Year's day 1901 Beatrice attempted a long retrospect:

Possibly I owe a debt to Chamberlain. He absorbed the whole of my sexual feeling, but I saw him at rare intervals and loved him through the imagination, in his absence more than his presence. This emotional preoccupation made my companionship with other men free from personal preferences and deliberately controlled with a view to ends.

As to Sidney:

His lack of social position, even his lack of personal attractiveness gave him, in relation to me, the odd charm of being in every respect the exact contrary to Chamberlain and my ill-fated emotion for that great personage ... The fact that neither my physical passion nor my social ambition were stimulated by the relationship seemed in itself an element of restfulness and stability. Then again my pity was appealed to. I felt his love for me was so overpowering that his life and work might be wrecked if I withdrew myself. Added to all these thoughts and feelings there was a curious strain of altruistic utilitarianism. I had a competence, more than enough to sustain one intellectual worker. I had social position of a kind, I had knowledge of men and affairs; all these Sidney lacked to be successful. Why not invest my different kinds of capital where it would yield the best results from the standpoint of the community? And so we pledged our words at the Co-operative Congress, May 1901 ... We are still on our honeymoon and every year makes our relationship more tender and complete. Rightly or wrongly we decided against having children. I was no longer young, he had been overworking from childhood ... Our means though ample for ourselves and our work, would not have allowed a family and continued expenditure upon investigation and public life. But perhaps the finally conclusive reason was that I had laboriously and with many sacrifices transformed my intellect into an instrument for research. Child bearing would destroy it, at any rate for a time, probably altogether ... On the whole I do not regret the decision, still less does Sidney ...¹⁷

Even before her reunion with Chamberlain it had occurred to Beatrice that women might relinquish the bonds of unblemished monogamous love in favour of having one man for one purpose and another man for another.¹⁸ She discussed polygyny without embarrassment and noticed that despite the enormously disproportionate profligacy of the male, 'scientific breeding' could hardly be confined to the selection of the man. Moreover she discerned that 'women's sexual feeling towards the man is, in many cases, indistinguishable from her reverence towards and obedience to the Priest; religious sentiment being related to sexual instincts.'¹⁹ However, in view of contemporary ignorance about the importance of genetics in the history of society and her own revulsion at the prospect of 'anarchy' she briskly turned her back on these conjectures and insights and closed the door firmly behind her.

Of course Sidney shared neither Beatrice's sexual discontents nor her propensity to romanticise nor her religiosity.²⁰ He was unable to conceal from her that he thought of her preoccupation with 'prayer' and the rest of it as 'neurotic'.²¹ He would have nothing to do with it, save as the loving companion who patiently reintroduced her to the therapy of everyday life. Yet these differences between them in point of mind and temperament were certainly far more important than their differences of opinion over feminism, socialism or the Boer War, or the occasional 'tiffs' which occurred in the course of their joint research. These were all minimal and marginal. It is hardly surprising that the perfect harmony of their research, in which Beatrice would throw in a problem or a hypothesis and Sidney would torment it with his learning, occasionally broke down. She confessed:

Sometimes I am a bit irritated because ... he will not listen to what seems to me a brilliant suggestion – dismisses it with 'that is not new' or with a slightly disparaging 'hmm'. But I generally smile at my own irritation and take back any idea to clear up or elaborate or correct with other thoughts or to reject as worthless. Sometimes I flare up and scold – then he is all penitence and we kiss away the misunderstanding.²²

These small differences did not diminish the most fruitful partnership in the history of the British intellect. Even by 1905 it had done enough to fulfil the promise which Sidney had insisted that it would realise – together they had 'moved the world' – if but a little way and not always just as they intended. They had completed one immense research project and had advanced into another. They had played a great part in the reshaping of educational institutions in London, creating an environment in which they hoped that the new learning might take root and grow. Fabianism had become the most characteristically English form of socialism and they had managed, with varying degrees of success, to expound and apply it to

astonishingly large and varied audiences. Yet, however wonderful the achievements of the 'combinat', it was flawed by a persistent evasiveness: a failure to identify and confront certain crucial issues. Thus, the failure to examine the arithmetic of imperialism or ask what were the cultural possibilities of publicly funded education or to examine how ruling cliques were related to ruling classes may be related to a failure of communication within the partnership itself. As it was, a dangerously large number of unexamined assumptions and neglected major premises were allowed to occupy the territory which lay between Beatrice's excursions into metaphysics and Sidney's world of the axiomata media.

Revolutionaries may object that these evasions relate to matters of very different degrees of difficulty and importance. They may complain that it is part of the very nature of reformism to be impatient with every question that might get in the way of its practice and to pretend that it is only through practice that they can be answered. But the Webbs were not merely practitioners within the English reformist tradition; they must be numbered among the makers of it. However late in the day, they did contemplate alternative possibilities. *'And what'* asked Beatrice, *'exactly is the daily life you ought to live if you wish to be, and to be thought to be, a genuine revolutionary?'* Characteristically, Sidney dismissed this as a quite unrealistic question, which could have no consequence for the Webbs who had no intention of so ordering their lives as to be, and to be thought to be, revolutionaries.

Conservatives may object that it was of very little consequence that Beatrice's propensity to interest herself in the big questions was never brought into a complete relationship to Sidney's capacity for supplying answers, since the pursuit of progress, whether in one way or another, is always a mistaken enterprise. They might recall the words of Goethe: *'To think is easy: to act is difficult: to act in accordance with one's thoughts is the most difficult thing in the world.'* But Sidney and Beatrice both knew their Goethe. They would have pointed out that his remark should be read, not merely as a note of caution, but as a word of consolation and hope.

Halfway through their lives the Webbs had accomplished much. Fabianism had become the most distinctive and influential mode of socialism in England. Sidney and Beatrice had laid the foundations of modern labour historiography. They had begun an equally distinguished, multi-volume study of English local government. They had enlarged technical education in London. Sidney had gone on to enlarge educational opportunity more generally. With Beatrice he had founded the LSE and with Haldane helped to make the Imperial College of Science and Technology the new Charlottenburg near the head of a great new *teaching* university. These accomplishments would have been enough in themselves to ensure

the Webbs' enduring fame and importance. However from 1906 to 1947 they did much more: they discovered one of the few great principles of public administration as they set about the abolition of the Poor Law and the prevention of destitution. (Beatrice assumed the leading role in this campaign.) They came back from the Orient to engage with syndicalism and to mount a formidable critique of it. Beatrice could hardly face the horrors of the Great War. Sidney urged her to follow the example of the French peasants and to continue to cultivate their fields directly behind the line of fire. This meant immersing himself in the activities of the War Emergency Workers National Committee and the Campaign for the Conscription of Riches. This in turn led to the new constitution of the Labour Party and the formulation by Webb, with Henderson, of the 'infamous' Clause IV.

With the peace Sidney went on to the Sankey Commission on the Coal Industry. This led to his adoption as Labour candidate for Seaham Harbour. He became a member of the first Labour government in 1924. The Webbs had then to confront the experience of the General Strike. While Sidney did his best to cope with the realities of cabinet and parliament, Beatrice devoted herself to cultivating friendly and productive relations with the women of Seaham Harbour and attending to mending the manners of the ladies who came into the social life of the House of Commons. As Colonial Secretary in the second Labour administration, Sidney appeared to switch his support away from the settlers in Palestine and Kenya in favour of the indigenous population.

With the Great Slump came the downfall of the second Labour government. Beatrice dismissed the 'flies on the wheel of world welter' while Sidney cursed the 'pigs' at Transport House as well as the American bankers. The turn towards Soviet Communism had begun. It continued as they visited Russia. Was it continuous or discontinuous with earlier efforts? Was it as simple and uncomplicated as Ernest Gellner took it to be or was it far more complicated than he and others allowed?²³

'The strangest couple since Adam and Eve.' 'Two typewriters beating as one.' The witticisms about the Webbs are stale and inadequate. Their individual characteristics need to be rediscovered. For example, Beatrice's tendency to believe that manners maketh man inclined her to celebrate good ones in a way which could be rather hard and vulgar, while Sidney was inclined to confuse the art of the possible with the possibility of being artful. They both tended to underestimate the costs of their childless marriage. Beatrice was astonished that a child should confuse her style with that of a princess. Russell's daughter Kate recalled that when the Webbs were staying with her family in Cornwall she bumped into Sidney in one of the darker corridors. 'Lend me your eyes,' said he to the terrified child. No doubt Bertrand gave his daughter a clear and correct account of

Sidney's intended meaning. The intention was to value and reassure, not to frighten and dismay.

In looking forward to the second part of their lives and concluding this account of the formative years we leave the Webbs as observed by Mildred Minturn at Friday's Hill in late June 1901:

The Russells and Logan [Pearsall Smith] have a sort of confession they put their friends through – a series of questions which if answered truthfully bring out practically all a person's character. I shall never forget Mrs Webb laying bare her soul before us all, looking awfully handsome, her dark face flushed with excitement, slouched back in a big chair by the fire, smoking cigarette after cigarette, her bright black eyes snapping as she brought out one surprising confession after another. She had only married her husband because she wished to write her [*sic*] Trade Union book with him. The devotion for which they are notorious came after. She thought one of her principal faults was cruelty and she knew she was not quite a lady! That almost finished us all – for sheer audacity and indecency of self-revelation one could hardly go further.²⁴

When Beatrice advised Sidney that she was embarking on a second autobiographical volume, he responded, 'yes, but no personalities please'.

Notes and References

1 The Shaping of a Professional Man 1859–85

1. Notes on Sidney Webb supplied to Barbara Drake by Sidney's brother Charles, n.d. (1948?); hereinafter referred to as CWN (R.H. Tawney Coll. LSE). See also B. Webb, *Our Partnership*, 1948, p. 2; hereinafter referred to as *OP*. The spelling of the street name has been variable, but the modern practice, which is followed from this point forwards, is to drop the 'e'.
2. Enumerator's Return; Census 1861, Public Record Office.
3. Marriage certificate, Somerset House.
4. Enumerators' Returns, Peckham; Census 1851 and 1861. Will of James Webb; Passfield Papers (hereinafter PAS).
5. CWN.
6. M.I. Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism*, 1961, p. 28.
7. *Daily News*, 31 May 1865, where some 400 names are listed in alphabetical order.
8. GBS to SW, 26 March 1946.
9. SW to S. Olivier, 7 July 1885.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Enumerator's Return, 44 and 45 Cranbourn Street; Census 1861, Public Record Office.
12. Poor Rate Book, Westminster City Archives, acc. no. 938, class no. A883/A13.
13. S. Webb, *The Way Out*, March 1885; (PAS VI/19).
14. S. Webb, 'Reminiscences No. 1 Trade Unionism', *St Martin's Review*, October 1928, pp. 478–81.
15. *Ibid.*, and CWN.
16. S. Webb, *The Ethics of Existence*, 1880–1 (A talk to the Zetetical Society; see the abridged prospectus of October 1881); PAS VI/3–4.
17. Webb, 'Reminiscences ...'
18. CWN.
19. S. Webb (unsigned), 'Banks of Today' (review of P. Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons*), *International Review*, 3 September 1889.
20. *Ibid.*
21. CWN.
22. Webb, 'Reminiscences ...'
23. CWN and G. Wallas, Note on meeting with S. Webb etc.; Wallas Coll., LSE, Box 11, Biographical material.
24. CWN. (She won the Society of Arts Gold Medal – open to all England – for the greatest number of first-class certificates in one year.)
25. Wallas, Note.
26. For useful discussion see J.A. Banks, 'The Challenge of Popular Culture', in P. Applean, W.A. Madden and M. Wolff (eds), *1859: Entering an Age of Crisis, Indiana*, 1959.
27. *City of London College, 1848–1948* (1948?).
28. Educational Awards; PAS 111/21.

29. Representations of the Birkbeck student committee (S. Webb, secretary), 8 January 1880. Minutes of the Committee of the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution, 1880.
30. Wallas, Note.
31. S. Olivier, 'Not Much', in M. Olivier (ed.) *Sydney Olivier: Letters and Selected Writings*, 1948, pp. 31 et seq. and p. 227.
32. SW to GW, 14 June 1887.
33. Educational Awards; PAS 111/21.
34. 'I do see much of myself in Pattison': SW to GW, 8 June 1885.
35. M. Pattison, *Memoirs* [edited by Mrs Pattison], Macmillan, London, 1885.
36. S. Webb, 'The Factors of National Wealth' (April 1889?) (notes for series of lectures on Capital to City of London College); PAS VI/38-39.
37. VI/1 (n.d., but delivered in June 1876 since it refers to an article by Gladstone on the Courses of Modern Religious Thought having appeared in 'this month'. The article was published as 'The Courses of Religious Thought,' vol. 28, in the *Contemporary Review* June 1876, pp. 1-26.)
38. *Ibid.* (written on the back of the above).
39. SW to GW, 24 December 1885.
40. 'Theological influence has been used to direct a portion of the surplus value to "Spiritual Uses", nourishing (like the meats offered to idols) whole classes of non-producers.' S. Webb, 'The Economic Basis of Socialism and Its Political Programme' - address to Hampstead Society for the Study of Socialism, December 1887; PAS VI/33.
41. G.A. Williams, *Rowland Detrosier: A Working Class Infidel*, Borthwick Paper No. 28, York, 1965.
42. Zetetical Society, Abridged Prospectus, October 1881; PAS VI/4.
43. N.E. Himes, *Medical History of Contraception*, New York, 1963, pp. 243-59.
44. J.M. Davidson, *Eminent Radicals In and Out of Parliament*, 1880, pp. 191-9.
45. R.J. Harrison, 'The Positivists: A Study of Labour's Intellectuals', in his *Before the Socialists*, 1965, pp. 251-342.
46. PAS VI/3.
47. J.S. Mill, *Autobiography*, 1873, pp. 133-4.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
49. Witness, for example, F.L. Lehman, 'Pessimism, Positivism and Socialism', *Today*, n.s. vol. II, no. 2, August 1884, pp. 263-74.
50. S. Webb, 'The New Learning of Nineteenth Century: Its Influence on Philosophy' (n.d., 1880?); PAS VI/2.
51. PAS VI/5.
52. C. Darwin, *Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, vol. II, 1868.
53. Anthropometric test of SW by Francis Galton, 13 September 1884.
54. *The Star*, 1889?; newspaper cutting PAS VI/95/xiv.
55. Bertrand Russell's recollection, in an interview with the author, January 1967.
56. E. Brooke, *Transition*, 1895, pp. 100 et seq. (Miss Brooke was secretary to the Hampstead Historic Club and was a member of Argosy, which Sidney joined in November 1882. Sidney appears as Philip Sherridan.)
57. Lady Simon of Wythenshaw's recollection in an interview with the author in 1966.
58. G.B. Shaw, *Sixteen Self-Sketches*, 1949, p. 65.
59. *Ibid.*
60. GBS to SW, 23 March 1946.
61. GBS to SW, 31 January 1934, cited by BW, D, 1 February 1934.

62. St John Ervine, *Bernard Shaw*, 1956, pp. 68–9.
63. S. Webb, 'The Works of George Eliot' (n.d., 1881?); PAS VI/6.
64. Wallas, Note.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Sir J. Stamp and others, *Graham Wallas, 1858–1932: Memorial Address 1932*. Contribution by Lord Passfield, pp. 9–10.
67. SW to GW, 29 January 1886.
68. SW to GW, 24 December 1885.
69. *Ibid.*
70. H. Sidgwick, 'The Theory of Classical Education', in F.W. Farrer (ed.), *Essays on a Liberal Education*, 1868, pp. 81 et seq.
71. *The Debater*, 11 October, 10 November and 22 December 1883; and 8 March and 26 April 1884.
72. *Ibid.*, 2 February 1884.
73. SW to GBS, 11 August 1883; Shaw Coll. BM Add MSS.
74. SW to GBS, 4 November (1884? 1883); Shaw Coll. BM Add MSS. 1884 according to BM but almost certainly 1883 since SW refers in this letter to being off tonight to explain to his confiding students why feudalism collapsed. SW lectured on the 'Rise and Fall of Feudalism' (VI/10), and on the following Sunday on the 'Growth of Industrialism' (VI/11). Between 1883 and 1887, 4 November fell on a Sunday only in 1883.
75. SW to GBS, 5 August 1885; Shaw Coll. BM Add MSS.
76. SW to GW, 17 August 1885.
77. S. Webb, 'Rent, Interest & Wages: Being a Criticism of Karl Marx and a Statement of Economic Theory', 1886; PAS VII/4.
78. S. Webb, 'The Economic Function of the Middle Class', lecture to the Argosy Society, 6 February 1885; PAS VI/20. First given to the London Dialectical Society, 2 April 1884, and published in the *Church Reformer*, 16 June 1884, with slight variations in form.
79. [1885?]; PAS VI/25.
80. Webb, 'Rent, Interest & Wages: Being ...'.
81. Leaflet, Working Men's College, '8 lectures on Economic History of England'; PAS VI/16. (PAS VI/17 appears to be notes for the last part of this course.)
82. Working Men's College, 1883–4 (leaflet advertising SW on Political Economy). Recommended books; PAS VI/8.
83. Webb, 'Rent, Interest & Wages: Being ...'.
84. Marx's account of the managerial expropriation of this old function of the capitalist did not appear until the third volume of *Capital* was published. Accordingly Webb could not have been familiar with it in 1886.
85. *Ibid.*
86. Webb, 'The Economic Function ...'.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*
89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*
91. *Ibid.*
92. *Ibid.*
93. 20 March 1885; PAS VI/19.
94. S. Webb, 'Rome: a Sociological Sermon', *Our Corner*, vol. XII, 1888, pp. 53–60 and 79–89.
95. E.S. Beesly, *Catiline, Clodius and Tiberius*, 1878.

2 The Prevailing Fabian 1885–90

1. E.R. Pease, *History of the Fabian Society*, 2nd edn, 1925, pp. 46 and 52.
2. R.C.K. Ensor, *England, 1870–1914*, Oxford, 1936, p. 99.
3. G.D.H. Cole, *British Working Class Politics 1832–1914*, 1941, p. 80.
4. G.B. Shaw, 'What's in a Name? How an Anarchist Might Put It', *The Anarchist*, March 1885.
5. *The Anarchist*, July 1885.
6. 'Propagandist Fund', *ibid.*, March 1885.
7. SW to GW, 30 November 1885 (they do not appear to have been published).
8. S. Webb, 'Considerations on Anarchism', 1885?; PAS VI/18.
9. S. Webb, 'What Socialism Is', *Practical Socialist*, June 1886, p. 116.
10. SW to GBS, 5 August 1885 (GBS/BM).
11. SW to GW, 28 May 1885.
12. A.S. Hardy, *But Yet A Woman*, Boston, 1883.
13. J.P. Smith, *The Unrepentant Pilgrim*, 1966, pp. 170–1.
14. SW to GW, 21 June 1885.
15. *Ibid.*, 8 June 1885.
16. *Ibid.*, 2 July 1885.
17. SW to S. Olivier, 7 July 1885.
18. E. Bellamy, *Dr Heidenhoff's Process*, New York, 1880.
19. SW to GW, 2 July 1885.
20. *Ibid.*, 26 July 1885.
21. *Ibid.*, 17 August 1885.
22. *Ibid.*, 30 November 1885.
23. *Ibid.*, 29 January 1886.
24. G.B. Shaw, *A Manifesto*, Fabian Society Tract No.2, 1884.
25. For an account of the success of the socialists and Radicals in asserting the right to free speech in Dod Street, Limehouse, see for example: G. Elton, *England Arise*, 1931, pp. 119 et seq.
26. Pease, *History*, pp. 49–52.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
28. SW to GW, 30 November 1885.
29. G.D.H. Cole, *History of Socialist Thought*, vol. II, 1954, *passim*.
30. Report of the Proceedings of the Three Day Conference, June 1886 (MSS, LSE). Also *Practical Socialist*, July 1886.
31. PAS VI/28.
32. S. Webb, 'Economics of a Positivist Community', *Practical Socialist*, February 1886. Abstract of the paper together with the discussion and Podmore's criticisms.
33. Pease, *History*, pp. 57 et seq.
34. SW to GW, 7 August 1886.
35. SW to S. Olivier, 7 July 1885.
36. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris*, 1955, chapter 6.
37. G.B. Shaw, *The Fabian Society: Its Early History*, Fabian Tract No. 41 (originally published in 1892 and under this title in 1909), Fabian Society, 1984 (published as Tract 493 in a facsimile edition of the 1909 reprint).
38. SW to GW, 7 August 1886.
39. *Practical Socialist*, February to June 1887.
40. C. Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism*, Oxford, 1961, p. 55.
41. *Practical Socialist*, vol. II, no. 14, February 1887.

42. *Our Corner*, June 1887.
43. 22 November 1887; in D.H. Laurence (ed.), *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters 1874–97*, 1965, p. 177.
44. Cited in Thompson, *William Morris*, p. 585.
45. *The Times*, 16 August 1887.
46. SW to GW, 17 August 1887.
47. *Our Corner*, July, August and September 1887.
48. See 'Income Tax Rates and Yields 1798–1939', in B.R. Mitchell and P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, Cambridge, 1962, pp. 427–9.
49. Notes for lectures to Working Men's College, 1884–85; PAS VI/17.
50. PAS VI/33.
51. *Argosy*: Annual Report of the Society, July 1883.
52. SW to Mr Meade, 18–21 April 1888, with notes by his superiors in the Colonial Office.
53. GW to SW (n.d. but 'probably written in May 1888' according to a note in Wallas's hand) and with replies added or attached by SW, S. Olivier and GBS; Wallas Coll, LSE, Box 10.
54. See the review of *Fabian Essays* by William Morris, *Commonweal*, 25 January 1890.
55. These words were taken directly from his *Rome: A Sociological Sermon*, to which reference has already been made above. Webb frequently cribbed from his own work.
56. G.B. Shaw (ed.), *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, 1889. The 6th edition appeared with an Introduction by Asa Briggs in 1962.
57. Russell's recollection, given to the author in January 1967.
58. SW to Herbert Samuel, 20 March 1902; Samuel Collection A/15, House of Lords Record Office.
59. J. Hamburger, *Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Radicals*, Yale, 1965; and R.J. Harrison, 'Intellectuals in Nineteenth Century Politics', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1966, pp. 563–7.
60. S. Webb, 'The Historic Basis of Socialism', in Shaw (ed.), *Fabian Essays*, p. 45.
61. A. Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 1848, translated by J.H. Bridges, 1865, p. 136.
62. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Fabians Reconsidered', in *Labouring Men*, 1964, pp. 250–71.
63. G. Wallas, *Francis Place*, 1898, p. 65.
64. J. Hamburger, *James Mill and the Art of Revolution*, Yale, 1963.
65. S.E. Finer, *Sir Edwin Chadwick*, 1952, p. 14.
66. R.J. Harrison, 'E.S. Beesly and Karl Marx', *International Review of Social History*, vol. IV, parts 1 and 2, 1959, pp. 22–58; 208–38.
67. See pp. 62–3.
68. GW to E.R. Pease, 4 February 1916; Wallas Coll.
69. This is a proposition which has the form of a large empirical generalisation, but which functions as a category through which evidence is collected and organised, rather than as a proposition to be tested by the evidence itself.
70. *Ibid.*, 8 June 1885.
71. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848.
72. K. Marx, *Inaugural Address to the International Working Men's Association*, 1864.
73. H. Collins and C. Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, 1965, p. 118.
74. See Chapter 4: 'The Formation of the Partnership'.

75. F. Engels to V. Sorge, 18 January 1893; *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on Britain*, Moscow, 1962, p. 576.
76. E.R. Pease, 'Recollections for My Sons', unpublished MS begun 10 March 1930; Pease Coll., Nuffield College.
77. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, April 1887 and *QJE* 11, 1888, cited in A.M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884–1918*, Cambridge, 1962, p. 40.
78. SW to GW, c/o Kennedy, Todd & Co, 63 William Street, New York, 13 October 1888.
79. SW to GW, 17 September 1888.
80. E.R. Pease, 'Recollections ...'
81. F. Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, I, 1911, p. 255.
82. Membership List, 1891; Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.
83. Sunday Lecture Society, *Proceedings 1869–90*, 1890. SW lectured on 'The Progress of Socialism: Its Effect on Social Welfare' on 22 January 1888.
84. See, for example, the Sunday Lectures advertised in *Reynolds* between 8 January and 3 June 1888. (Thus on 8 January 1888 SW spoke to the Socialist League at Kelmscott House on 'The Irish National Movement and Its Bearing on Socialism', and on 3 June 1888 to the Chelsea Branch of the Social Democratic Federation on 'Socialism on the School Board'.)
85. Lecture course begun at City of London College, 14 January 1889; PAS VI/37.
86. PAS VI/37, begun on 14 October 1889.
87. *Star*, about October 1889.
88. PAS 95/XIV.
89. SW to Sir H.B. Brown, 5 August 1888.
90. E.R. Pease, *History*, p. 59.
91. *Practical Socialist*, February 1886.
92. SW to Jane Burdon Sanderson (photocopy), National Library of Scotland.
93. *Star* [?], n.d., 1889; PAS VI/95/xiv.
94. *Daily News*, 5 September 1888 (correspondence between SW as secretary of Holborn Liberal and Radical Association and Mr Gladstone).
95. Letters of J.L. Mahon to F. Engels concerning the Central Democratic Club, 17 April 1889 and 22 May 1889, in Thompson, *William Morris*, pp. 872–4.
96. *Star* [?], June 1889; PAS VI/xi.
97. Pease Coll., LSE.
98. Everyone else found Pease remarkably stiff and difficult to approach!
99. L. Wolf, 'Political Thought and the Webbs', in M. Cole (ed.), *The Webbs and Their Work*, 1949, pp. 251–64.
100. *Star*, 7 May 1889 ('The Great Eastern Question: Mr Charles Booth's Terrible Numbering of the People').
101. Sometimes surprise is expressed that Webb, Olivier and other civil servants were able to engage so often and so actively in politics. It must be remembered that to begin with the Fabian Society, before the publication of *Fabian Essays* in 1889, was not regarded as a serious political organisation or much of a party until it affiliated to the Labour Party in 1900. That professional civil servants would join working men's clubs was hardly considered possible. The local parliaments at Charing Cross or Lambeth were not worth worrying about. Curtailment of the party political life of civil servants occurred more usually after 1900. Sydney Olivier after 1900, rather than Sidney Webb before, ran into serious difficulties. See A. Lawrence Lowell, *The Government of England*, vol. 1, 1908.

3 The Making of a Gilded Spinster 1858–85

1. See below, p. 178.
2. G. Meinertzhagen, *From Ploughshare to Parliament: A Short Memoir of the Potters of Tadcaster*, 1908, p. 266.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
4. S.A. Tooley, 'The Growth of a Socialist: An Interview with Mrs Sidney Webb', *The Young Woman*, February 1895. ('I am afraid I was a revolting daughter', laughed Mrs Webb, 'for both my father and mother were Conservative and Church people, having left Liberalism over the proposed extension of town suffrage in 1867.')
5. B. Webb, *MA*, p. 49.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 175–6.
8. D, 15 October 1882.
9. B. Webb, *MA*, p. 146.
10. D, 22 January 1881.
11. D, 20 September 1882.
12. D, 24 July 1882.
13. D, 12 March 1887.
14. D, 30 September 1889.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. 'The Glorified Spinster', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. VIII, 1888, pp. 371–6; M. Harkness's letters to Beatrice, 1878–90; E. Pycroft's letters to Beatrice, 1885–90.
18. C.S. Hadland, *Occupations of Women Other than Teaching*, paper read to the Oxford Conference of the Head Mistresses' Association, 1886, pp. 14.
19. E. Pycroft to BP, 6 July 1886.
20. M. Harkness to BP, n.d. [1878?].
21. E. Pycroft to BP, 21 September 1888.
22. Harkness, *op. cit.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. D, 13 November 1889 (Maggie claimed to have paid Keir Hardie's election expenses, acting as a go-between for the 'underground Labour party' of Champion, Burns and Mann. She insisted that she was indifferent to their cause and only wanted to observe for the purposes of research. One day she would bring it all out in a book. Beatrice did not approve of this kind of participant observation. The rising social investigator looked at the aspirant political reporter with 'blank amazement, in face of such utter deficiency of honour'. She put it all down to the requirements of the struggle, or rather the habits of mind that the struggle had occasioned).
25. E. Pycroft to BP, 14 August and 12 September 1886.
26. J.E. Carpenter, *Life of Mary Carpenter*, 1879, for a leading example before the rise of the Glorified Spinster.
27. D, 1 November 1887.
28. D, 6 May 1887. (This was the custom with some London dockers. The had-dock was first dried in the chimney.)
29. See below, pp. 113, 155–6.
30. D, 8 March 1885 and 8 November 1886 ('The bright side of East End Life is the sociability and generous sharing of small means ...').

31. D, 22 February 1888.
32. D, 24 May 1883.
33. D, 27 November 1887.
34. D, 8 June 1933.
35. As already noted, Bertrand Russell affirmed that Webb had a cockney accent. However he considered that 'almost all Englishmen had cockney accents' – an opinion which rather diminishes the value of his testimony; but, see below, p. 179, for stronger evidence.
36. The young Beatrice found the Germans: 'dirty, slovenly looking creatures. So underbred and rowdy looking'; D, 15 June 1877. She was not favourably impressed by the Magyars; D, 5 October 1877. The French were ingratiating but she found something 'curiously agreeable' in the ugliness of the Dutch; D, 27 June 1882. At least they did not make her 'shudder' as the proximity of 'John Chinaman' had done when she visited San Francisco; D, 7 November 1873. She never admired any of the Chinese before Mao Tse-Tung. However she always had admiration and affection for Jewish genius and vitality; D, 19 September and 1 November 1875, 12 October 1878.
37. B. Webb, *MA*, p. 60.
38. 'I am simply ridiculously stupid with arithmetic – a sort of paralysis taking place in my brain when I look at numbers'; D, 13 August 1882.
39. Lawrencina Potter's Diary cited by B. Webb, *MA*, p. 11.
40. D, September 1875.
41. D, 15 June 1887.
42. For example: D, September 1874 or D, 14 September 1882.
43. D, 22 June 1881.
44. D, 27 August 1882.
45. D, 14 September 1882.
46. D, 1877.
47. D, 14 May 1881.
48. Apart from Spencer's own works, see J.D.Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer: The Evolution of a Sociologist*, 1971, and the useful volume of extracts from S. Andrews (ed.), *Herbert Spencer: Structure, Function and Evolution*, 1971.
49. H. Spencer, *Social Statics*, cited in Andrews, *Herbert Spencer*, p. 218.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
53. H. Spencer, *First Principles*, 1863, section 57.
54. T.P. Kirkman, *Philosophy Without Assumptions*, 1876, p. 292.
55. H. Spencer, *Social Statics*, cited in Andrews, *Herbert Spencer*, p. 250.
56. B. Webb, *MA*, p. 25.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
61. Lawrencina Potter's Diary, January 1865. Beatrice's references to her relationship with her little brother are distinguished by being both perceptive and austere. *MA*, p. 11. The earliest of Beatrice's known letters (reproduced on the accompanying page) assures her mother that 'I love little Dicky very, very much'. The last of the three brief references to him in *My Apprenticeship* is interestingly indirect: Beatrice's earliest memory was of being hurled out naked into a corridor by his nurse; *MA*, p. 58.
62. D, 27 December 1883.

63. D, Autumn 1872.
64. D, 27 March 1875.
65. D, 16 March 1876.
66. D, Autumn 1877.
67. D, 14 September 1880.
68. D, 23 February or 6 May 1882.
69. D, 14 September 1882.
70. D, 2 July 1882.
71. Ibid.
72. D, 5 May 1883.
73. D, 8 December 1903.
74. H. Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, 1884.
75. G. Lichtheim, *A Short History of Socialism*, 1970, pp. 173–4.
76. Beatrice recalled that it was Frederic Harrison, the leading English Comtist, who first ‘explained to me the economic validity of trade unionism and factory legislation.’ MA, 1926, p. 145. Unfortunately she does not state when he first offered this explanation (which might have been at any time from the late seventies onwards), nor when she first found it persuasive. She saw a lot of Harrison in 1886: D, 28 May 1886; but while she would have been more receptive to his arguments at this time than in earlier years she was certainly not swiftly converted by them.
77. ‘Probably no one – not even Dr Marx himself (his works being inaccessible in English) has done so much to promote the spread of socialistic ideas as Mr Spencer...’. F. Fairman, *Herbert Spencer on Socialism*, 1884, p. 16. Among other socialist writings that found contradictions in Spencer and which attempted to show that ‘logically’ he was making for socialism, see H.M. Hyndman, *Socialism and Slavery*, 1884; E. Ferri, *Socialismo e Scienza Positiva*, Rome, 1894; G. Lacy, *Liberty and Law: An Attempt at the Refutation of the Individualism of Mr Herbert Spencer*, 1888.
78. B. Webb, MA, p. 38.
79. B. Potter, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*, 1891. The central theme was the contrast between the intentions and purposes of the co-operators and the functional adaptation of the movement independently of these intentions to the work of retail distribution.
80. T.H. Huxley, ‘Administrative Nihilism’, *Fortnightly Review*, vol. x (n.s.), 1871.
81. Both Spencer and his critics tended to forget that argument from analogy is never conclusive. Mrs Sarah Howard has drawn attention to a distinction made by Spencer but forgotten by the socialists and subsequent commentators, between inner and outer regulatory systems in the higher animals and higher societies. The inner regulatory system was concerned with sustenance and requires no centralised response: the outer regulatory system is concerned with the environment and aggression. Spencer thought that this distinction supported the division of societies into lower ‘militant’ and ‘higher’ industrial types.
82. Compare H. Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, 1969, p. 107, with S. Webb in G.B. Shaw (ed.), *Fabian Essays*, 1908, pp. 147–8.
83. B. Webb, MA, 1826, p. 23.
84. D, 14 and 22 February 1883.
85. D, 23 April 1883, 2 May 1883.
86. D, 1 February 1883.
87. D, 31 March 1883.

88. D, 22 February 1883.
89. D, 1 March and 11 March 1883.
90. D, 31 March 1883.
91. Ibid.
92. D, 15 May 1883.
93. D, 20 March 1883.
94. D, 24 March 1883.
95. D, 30 April 1883.
96. C.L. Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society, 1869–1913*, 1961.
97. D, 20 May 1883.
98. D, 18 May 1883.
99. E. Pycroft to BP, 15 July 1886. (They first met in January 1885 (D, 16 January 1885.) It is not certain – merely probable – that Pavey was the man in question; nor is it possible to discover exactly how Beatrice contributed to his death.)
100. D, 10 September 1883.
101. C.L. Mowat, *The Charity Organisation Society*, p. 117.
102. S.A. Barnett, 'Practicable Socialism', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. XIII, April 1883, p. 554–60.
103. D, 3 June and 27 June 1883.
104. D, 18 July 1883.
105. J.L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain, I*, 1932, p. 385.
106. Ibid., chapter XVIII.
107. Ibid., p. 392.
108. Ibid., p. 393.
109. T. Maguire, 'Chamberlain and Socialism', *Progress*, vol. v, July 1885, pp. 316–20.
110. D, 27 July 1883.
111. D, 17 September 1883.
112. D, 26 September 1883.
113. Ibid.
114. This also seems to relate to 26 September 1883.
115. B. Webb, *MA*, 1926, pp. 152–4; D, 31 October 1886.
116. Ibid., pp. 154–62.
117. [A. Mearns], *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, 1883. Its publication is generally accepted as crucial to the 'rediscovery' of poverty in the 1880s. The original attribution to Mearns has been challenged in recent years: see the more recent attribution to William C. Preston in the Leicester University Press, Victorian Library edition, 1970, edited and introduced by Anthony S. Wohl.
118. D, 31 December 1883.
119. D, 27 December 1883.
120. D, 12 January 1884.
121. Ibid.
122. D, 16 March 1884.
123. Ibid.
124. D, 22 April 1884.
125. Ibid.
126. See the terms of his tribute to his second wife; Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, p. 207.
127. D, 9 May 1884.
128. Ibid.

129. D, 15 October 1884.
130. D, 16 January 1885.
131. D, 14 February 1885.
132. D, 12 May 1886 (retrospective entry).
133. L. Courtney to BP, 28 July 1885.
134. K. Courtney to BP, 23 July 1885.
135. J.L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, p. 549.
136. *Ibid.*, p. 551.
137. *Ibid.*, p. 564.
138. *Punch*, 14 February 1885.
139. D, 7 August 1885.
140. D, 'Sunday' 1885 (between 29 January and 14 February 1885).
141. D, 6 March 1886 (retrospective entry).
142. *Ibid.*
143. This contention about heavy rural immigration is not supported by modern social historians; see G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, Oxford, 1971, p. 148.
144. B. Potter, 'A Lady's View of the Unemployed at the East', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 February 1886, p. 11.
145. J. Chamberlain to BP, 28 February 1886.
146. For the initial letter of uncertain date, but attributed by Peter Fraser (*Joseph Chamberlain: Radicalism and Empire, 1886–1914*, Cassell, 1996, p. 123), probably correctly, to 4 March 1886, see JC 5/59/1, Chamberlain Papers Birmingham University Library. For the subsequent letter, which Chamberlain apparently did indeed destroy, see D, 6 March 1886.
147. D, 19 December 1885.
148. Beatrice Potter, Last Will and Testament, 1 January [1886?]. (She bequeathed all her cash to Leonard Courtney 'towards the achievement of his political causes'. She 'earnestly begged' that her diary be destroyed. 'I should prefer that no one should have looked at them. If death comes it will be welcome for life has always been distasteful to me ... (PAS).')
149. J. Chamberlain to BP, 5 March 1886.
150. Local Government Board Circular, 15 March 1886, cited in S and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History*, II, 1929, pp. 646–7.
151. J. Harris, *Unemployment and Politics*, Oxford, 1972, p. 76, argues that the Webbs and other students have exaggerated the importance of this circular. Yet despite the fact that some local authorities had anticipated the circular and despite the fact that Chamberlain sought to strengthen rather than supersede the Poor Law, the problem of the unemployed did appear in a new light by central authority.
152. D, 12 April 1886.
153. D, 4 April 1886.
154. *Ibid.*
155. BP to Anna Swanwick, n.d. (July?) 1884 reprinted in *MA*, pp. 191–3. She begins by declaring herself agnostic on all questions 'divine and human'. Goes on to question democratic theory and enthusiasm and the wisdom and capacity of the masses and their leaders. But then she questions Spencer's 'materialism': that is, his alleged attempt to reduce the higher to the lower sciences and makes cogent criticisms of his organic analogy. She rejects Spencer's misuse of theory, but she supports his resistance to programmes for state intervention. If she 'were a man, and had an intellect' she would be a sociologist and independent of both Spencer and Chamberlain.
156. D, 1 January 1886.

157. D, 15 September 1885.
158. D, 8 November 1886 (partly retrospective).
159. D, 15 September 1885.
160. D, 8 November 1886.
161. Ibid.
162. E. Pycroft to BP, 9 February 1886.
163. Beatrice to her father, n.d. [August 1885].
164. E. Pycroft to BP, 19 February 1886.
165. Ibid.
166. E. Pycroft to BP, 26 February 1886. (Edward Bond, a fellow of Queen's and a Director of the East End Dwellings Co that owned the Buildings, became Conservative MP for East Nottingham 1895 to 1906.)
167. When the Whitechapel Mansion House Relief Committee offered street sweeping at 2/- per day to 130 men, only 13 accepted and half of them threw down their brooms and left. The less skilled men in the Buildings wanted such work, but skilled furniture workers considered they would never get work in their trade again if they accepted it. E. Pycroft to BP, 4 March 1886.
168. Joseph Aarons to BP, n.d.
169. E. Pycroft to BP, 4 March 1886.
170. D, 8 November 1886.
171. E. Pycroft to BP, 6 July 1886.
172. E. Pycroft to BP, 15 July 1886.
173. E. Pycroft to BP, 14 August 1886.
174. E. Pycroft to BP, 4 September 1886.
175. E. Pycroft to BP, 15 July 1886.
176. E. Pycroft to BP, 21 August 1886.
177. Ibid.
178. E. Pycroft to BP, 4 September 1886.
179. E. Pycroft to BP, 26 February 1886.
180. E. Pycroft to BP, 12 September 1886.
181. D, 12 May 1886.
182. S. Barnett to BP, 26 February 1886.
183. T.S. and M.B. Simey, *Charles Booth: Social Scientist*, Oxford, 1960; B. Norman-Butler, *Victorian Aspirations: The Life and Labour of Charles and Mary Booth*, 1972; E. Yeo, 'Social Science and Social Change', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1972.
184. D, 28 May 1886.
185. B. Webb, *MA*, p. 247.
186. D, 29 August 1887.
187. T.S. and M.B. Simey, *Charles Booth*, p. 248, draw attention to this difference. They remark that if Booth had had the gift for imaginative hypotheses, which Beatrice wanted, 'objectivity might have been sacrificed to theorising.' The risk is undeniable. However, the question is whether sociology would have been advanced or retarded by running it.
188. D, 2 July 1886.
189. D, 18 July 1886.
190. B. Potter, 'The Rise and Growth of English Economics', 1886, unpublished.
191. H. Spencer to BP, 2 October 1886.
192. D, 4 October 1886.
193. B. Webb, *MA*, p. 445. This improves the language of her unpublished 'The Economic Theory of Karl Marx' without disturbing its sense.

194. B. Webb, MA, pp. 43–5.
195. However, there is a suggestion that it was Booth who borrowed from Beatrice; M. Paul to BP, 15 September 1886: ‘You had better be quick with your idea or Booth will forestall you ... I was chuckling as I came home in the train last night when I was talking to him about the labour-market and heard him using almost the same ideas as yours though not in quite the same learned phraseology about “faculties” and “desires”. I know you don’t mind me making fun of you – it is all good humoured.’
196. C. Booth to BP, 21 September 1886; D, 20 March 1887.
197. D, 31 October 1886.
198. D, 8 November 1886.
199. D, 13 April 1887.
200. B. Potter, ‘The Dock Life of East London’, *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxii, October 1887, pp. 496–7.
201. D, 6 May 1887.
202. D, 24 March 1887.
203. D, 6 May 1887.
204. D, 24 March and 13 April 1887.
205. D, 10 December 1886.
206. J. Chamberlain to BP, 19 May 1887.
207. D, 8 August 1887.
208. D, 9 June 1887.
209. D, 8 August 1887.
210. J. Chamberlain to BP, 1[?] August 1887.
211. D, 8 May 1890 (inserted at the end of vol. 14).
212. D, 26 April 1888.
213. D, 18 September 1889.
214. See above pp. 28–9.
215. D, 4 June 1889. Also Beatrice’s note on an undated letter to her from Edgeworth.
216. D, 8 August 1887.
217. D, 11 February 1889.
218. M. Booth to BP, 20 June 1889.
219. D, 7 March 1889.

4 From Social Investigator to Socialist 1885–90

1. B. Webb, MA, pp. 391–3.
2. P.G. Hall, *The Industries of London Since 1861*, 1962, p. 55.
3. B. Potter, ‘The Dock Life of East London’, *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxii, October 1887, pp. 494.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 496.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 498. Leonard Courtney was greatly distressed by the reference to the consumer as spoilt child. See his letter to Beatrice, 14 August 1887.
6. D, 27 November 1887.
7. B. Potter, ‘The Dock Life of East London’, p. 499.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 487.
9. M. Booth to BP, n.d. [1887], for Charlie’s delight in East End food and the way the life relaxed him after his business concerns.
10. J. Lovell, *Stevedores and Dockers*, 1969, p. 36.

11. B. Potter, 'The Sweating System', *Charity Organisation Review*, no. 37, January 1888, p. 15.
12. D, 18 October 1887. Burnett seemed 'hard-headed', humourless, good mannered and dignified. He was impressed by the progress of socialism and sympathetic to it, while dismissing the socialists as 'loungers'.
13. B. Potter, 'The Sweating System', referring to a report by Burnett.
14. D, 11 April 1888.
15. B. Potter, 'Pages from a Work Girl's Diary', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxiv, September 1888, pp. 301-14. Reprinted as 'The Diary of an Investigator', in S. and B. Webb, *Problems of Modern Industry*, 1898, pp. 1-2.
16. D, 11 April 1888.
17. S. and B. Webb, *Problems*, p. 19.
18. First report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System, 30 July 1888. Beatrice's evidence, 11 May 1888: questions 3246-3415, pp. 319-33.
19. *Ibid.*, questions 3348-9.
20. *Ibid.*, question 3292.
21. *Ibid.*, questions 3390-2.
22. *Ibid.*, questions 3303-4.
23. *Ibid.*, question 3339.
24. D, 12, 16 and 25 May 1888.
25. D, 27 August 1888.
26. First report from the Select Committee, questions 3411-13.
27. B. Webb, MA, p. 324.
28. B. Potter's draft letter of the summer of 1888 to editors; included in a section of the Passfield Papers and entitled, 'B. Potter to Friends 1884-1892'.
29. H. Spencer to BP, 21 November 1887.
30. 'The Peers and the Sweaters: A Day in the House of Lords', [unsigned] *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 May 1888, pp. 2-3.
31. Lord Thring to BP, 8 June 1888.
32. D, 21 August 1888.
33. B. Potter, 'East London Labour', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxiv, August 1888, p. 176.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
36. D, 11 February 1889.
37. A. White, 'The Invasion of Pauper Foreigners', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxiii, March 1888, pp. 414-22.
38. B. Potter, 'The Jewish Community', in C. Booth (ed.), *Life and Labour*, 1889.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 574.
40. B. Potter, 'East London Labour', p. 176.
41. B. Potter, 'The Jewish Community', p. 598.
42. K. Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in *Karl Marx, 1818-1883. Early Writings*, translated and edited by T.B. Bottomore, 1963, pp. 1-40. This is the most accessible source for Marx's review of Bruno Bauer, 'Die Judenfrage' (1843) which was published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (1844).
43. B. Potter, 'The Jewish Community', p. 590.
44. *Life and Labour*, p. 590.
45. J. Brown, 'Charles Booth and Labour Colonies', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., vol. xxi, no. 2, 1968, pp. 349-61.

46. D, 15 March 1887.
47. B. Potter, 'The Lords and the Sweating System', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxvii, June 1890, pp. 885–905.
48. D, 8 March 1889.
49. D, 15 March 1889.
50. D, 30 October 1889. H. Collins was an executor of Spencer's.
51. D, 29 August 1889.
52. Ibid.
53. D, 1 September 1889.
54. D, 28 May 1886.
55. 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxv, June 1889, pp. 781–8. Mrs Broadhurst signed this 'appeal' along with Beatrice, Mrs Huxley, Mrs Humphrey Ward, Mrs Lynn Linton, Mrs Beesly, Mrs Bagehot, Mrs Asquith, Mrs Matthew Arnold and many others.
56. D, 'Tuesday' [first week September 1889].
57. Ibid.
58. D, 18 September 1889.
59. D, 11 February 1889.
60. D, 13 March 1889.
61. D, 19 November 1889.
62. D, 22 September 1889. (However, her contribution was to be confined to working out the plot and providing the characters while he supplied the reformed world on individualist lines.)
63. B. Potter to J.C. Grey [November 1889?].
64. D, 1 February 1890.
65. Ibid.
66. Author's interview with Bertrand Russell, 19 January 1967.
67. For example, Dame Margaret Cole.
68. R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 1960.
69. B. Webb, MA, pp. XIII–XIV.
70. Ibid., p. 279. In the discussion of her 'dead point' she hints at the deeper levels of her 'divided personality'.
71. Ibid., pp. 11 et seq.
72. D, 10 December 1886.
73. D, 14 September 1880.
74. See the Appendix to this chapter.
75. B. Webb, MA, p. 43.
76. D, 17 November 1889.
77. M. Harkness to BP, 24 August 1879. 'I wonder very much if you will ever fall in love with anyone. I suppose you will live above the herd and never do anything so vulgar. I do not mean fall foolishly in love, so as to injure your prospects in life, but I wonder if you will care for any man more than you do for yourself. Anyway, if I live long enough, I shall have the satisfaction of seeing you in love ten years after marriage. I fancy that it will be a mild and amiable passion.' D, 11 February 1889, for Beatrice's expression of continued love for this false friend.
78. B. Webb, MA, 1926, pp. xiv, 2.
79. Ibid., 'Why I became a Socialist', pp. 346–415.
80. MA, p. 392.
81. D, 1 February 1890.
82. Ibid., 20 August 1886.
83. R. Harrison, 'Bertrand Russell and the Webbs', *Russell*, n.s., vol. 5, no. 1, summer 1985, pp. 44–9.

5 The Formation of the Partnership 1890–2

1. J. Bowle, *Politics and Opinion in the Nineteenth Century*, 1954, p. 227.
2. B. Potter, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*, 10th impression with a new preface, 1930, pp. 149 et seq.
3. SW to BP, 12 December 1891.
4. L. Woolf, *Sowing 1880–1904*, 1960, p. 68: ‘Sidney’s façade was no façade at all’; p. 71: ‘I have never known anyone who had no carapace or façade at all, but I have known people who had extraordinarily little, who seemed wonderfully direct, simple, spiritually unveiled.’
5. BP to SW, 22 June 1890.
6. BP to SW, n.d. [22 August 1890?] (item 10).
7. SW to BP, 21 September 1890.
8. D, 14 August 1891.
9. D, 13 January 1891.
10. S. Webb, ‘The Economic Limitations of Co-operation’, *Co-operative News*, 12 January 1889.
11. Herbert, First Viscount Samuel: Notes on a Visit to Passfield, 22 August 1944 (Samuel Collection A/119/9).
12. SW to BP, 4 January 1892.
13. BP to SW, 3 January 1892.
14. D, 14 February 1890.
15. D, 26 April 1890.
16. SW to BP, 30 April 1890.
17. *Ibid.*, 14 May 1890.
18. *Ibid.*
19. SW to BP, 30 April 1890.
20. SW to BP, 14 May 1890.
21. D, ‘First Day Congress’, 24 May 1890.
22. ‘Fabian Society Lectures’, *Co-operative News*, 27 September 1890. SW’s letters appeared in the issues for 30 August and 4 October 1890, Holyoake’s in the issue for 1 November, and Greening’s in that for 22 November 1890.
23. D, ‘The Glasgow Congress’, 23 May 1890.
24. BP to SW, n.d. [28 May 1890?] (Item 3).
25. SW to BP, 30 May 1890.
26. BP to SW, 31 May 1890.
27. D, 31 May 1890.
28. D, 1 June 1890.
29. D, 27 July 1890.
30. SW to BP (day after his thirty-first birthday).
31. SW to BP, 16 June 1890.
32. SW to BP, 24 June 1890.
33. SW to BP, 19 June 1890.
34. SW to BP, 29 July 1890.
35. SW to BP, 2 August 1890.
36. BP to SW, n.d., [about 7 August] (Item 13).
37. SW to BP, 11 August 1890.
38. SW to BP, 26 August 1890.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. SW to BP, n.d. [13 August 1890?].

42. BP to SW, 23 August 1890.
43. GBS to BP, 6 October 1890.
44. D, 7 September 1890.
45. *Ibid.*
46. SW to BP, 15 October 1890.
47. D, 22 October 1890.
48. D, 1 December 1890.
49. SW to BP, 12 October 1890.
50. SW to BP, 11 October 1890.
51. SW to BP, 30 November 1890.
52. SW to BP, *ibid.*
53. BP to SW, n.d. [2nd week December 1890?] (Item 29) and also [3rd week December 1890?] (Item 31).
54. SW to BP, letters of 4, 5 and 6 December 1890.
55. BP to SW, n.d. [end December 1890?] (Item 31).
56. SW to BP, 30 December 1890 (returning her letters); on Auguste and Clothilde, 14 December 1890.
57. SW to BP, 14 December 1890.
58. BP to SW, n.d. [2nd week December 1890?] (Item 29).
59. SW to BP, 27 January 1891.
60. *Ibid.*
61. BP to SW, 13 January 1891.
62. SW to BP, 19 January 1891.
63. BP to SW, 21 January 1891.
64. SW to BP, 22 January 1891.
65. SW to BP, 3 March 1891.
66. SW to BP, 14 March 1891.
67. SW to BP, 6 April 1891.
68. SW to BP, 14 March 1891.
69. D, 11 April 1891.
70. D, 21 April 1891.
71. D, 22 May 1891.
72. SW to BP, 30 May 1891.
73. SW to BP, 23 June 1892.
74. SW to BP, 25 May 1891.
75. D, 20 June 1891.
76. SW to BP, 3 November 1891.
77. BP to SW, about 21 August 1891 but n.d. (Item 43).
78. BP to SW, n.d. [mid-October 1891?] (Item 63).
79. SW to BP, 23 September 1891.
80. SW to BP, 'Wednesday' [23 October 1890?].
81. D, 13 January 1891.
82. BP to SW, 11 December 1891.
83. SW to BP, 9 December 1891.
84. BP to SW, n.d. [mid-November 1891?] (Item 79).
85. SW to BP, 20 November 1891.
86. SW to BP, 21 November 1891.
87. SW to BP, 31 December 1891.
88. BP to SW, 'Last day of Newcastle Congress', 12 September 1891?
89. D, 11 August 1891.
90. *Ibid.*
91. D, 17 December 1891.

92. BP to SW, n.d. [late October 1891?] (Item 67).
93. E. Pycroft to BP, 10 January 1892.
94. D, 4 May 1892.
95. SW to BP, 7 January 1892.
96. BP to SW, n.d. [29 May 1892?] (Item 34).
97. SW to BP, 3 May 1892.
98. D, 21 January 1892.
99. D, 15 July 1891.
100. D, 21 September 1892.
101. SW to BP, 24 March 1892.
102. SW to BP, 22 March 1892.
103. SW to BP, 21 May 1892.
104. SW to BP, 24 March 1892.
105. SW to BP, 6 March 1892.
106. B. Potter, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*, 1930, pp. 225 et seq. (But SW gave her particular help with this chapter; see p. xxi.)
107. S. Webb, 'The Best Method of Bringing Co-operation within the Reach of the Poorest of the Population', Manchester, n.d. [1891?] A paper presented to the Lincoln Congress of 1891.
108. B. Potter, *The Co-operative Movement*, p. ix.
109. Sir James Stuart (1843–1913), Professor of Mechanics at Cambridge and Liberal MP for Hoxton 1885–1900; for Sunderland 1906–10.
110. SW to BP, 16 June 1890.
111. GBS to T. Wemyss Reid, 14 January 1890; in D.H. Laurence (ed.), *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters 1874–97*, 1965, pp. 234–5.
112. SW to BP, 31 October 1891.
113. SW to BP, 13 September 1891.
114. SW to BP, 1 April 1892.
115. SW to BP, 15 September 1891.
116. D, 7 July 1891.
117. SW to BP, 9 December 1891.
118. GBS to Sydney Olivier, 16 December 1890; Wallas Coll., LSE.
119. SW to BP, 12 December 1891.
120. SW to BP, 9 October 1890.
121. SW to BP, 12 December 1891.
122. SW to BP, 16 June 1890.
123. SW to BP, 21 September 1890.
124. SW to BP, 16 November 1891.
125. SW to BP, 25 November 1891.
126. SW to BP, 12 December 1891.
127. S. Webb, 'John Burns', [*Political World*, 1889?] (Album of Press Cuttings 95/xiii).
128. S. Webb and H. Cox, *The Eight Hours Day*, 1891.
129. *Ibid.*
130. SW to BP, 7 September 1891.
131. SW to BP, 9 September 1891.
132. SW's notes of his speech enclosed with his letter to BP of 12 December 1891.
133. S. Webb, *Wanted, a Programme, An Appeal to the Liberal Party* for private circulation only (August 1888), p. 16.
134. S. Webb, *Socialism in England*, 1890, p. 131.
135. SW to BP, 17 September 1891.

136. SW to BP, 25 October 1891.
137. SW to BP, 'Wednesday' (23 October 1890?).
138. SW to BP, 23 September 1891.
139. SW to BP, n.d., May 1892? (end sheet only). See also GBS to Jim Connell 8 June 1892 in Laurence (ed.), *Collected Letters*, p. 341. See also G. Wallas to Sir Charles Russell, 18 June? 1892 in which GW wants help in getting out of a very ugly business resulting from Hyndman's charge that the Fabians were going to the Home Office behind the backs of other socialists.
140. H.W. Hyndman to SW, 25 May (1890?).
141. SW to BP, 5 December 1891.
142. *Financial Reform Almanack*, Liverpool, 1892.
143. SW to 'my dear Fenton', 3 March 1891, asking if he might get adopted for West Islington. 'Of course, I should in that case stand by Lough and back him for Parliament.'
144. SW to BP, 16 November 1891.
145. W. Morris, *Commonweal*, V, no. 180, 22 June 1889, cited in A.E. Morgan, *Edward Bellamy*, New York, 1944, pp. 401 et seq.
146. S. Webb and H. Cox, *The Eight Hours Day*, 1891, p. 243.
147. S. Webb, *Socialism in England*, 1890, p. 7.
148. BP to SW, n.d., December 1891 (Item 89).
149. SW, Peace on Earth, 1891; PAS VI/52.
150. SW to BP, 6 February 1892.
151. SW to BP, 25 January 1892. (His election address was sent to BP with a letter on the back of it, 11 February 1892.)
152. S. Webb, *The London Programme*, 1891.
153. S. Webb, *The London Programme*, pp. 99 et seq.
154. SW to BP, 30 January 1892.
155. Ibid.
156. SW to BP, 14 February 1892.
157. BP to SW, 1 January 1892, and SW to BP, 4 January 1892 (Miss Orme not cordial) and SW to BP, n.d. [1 January 1892?] (Miss Orme takes chair at one of his meetings).
158. BP to SW, n.d. [February 1892?] (Item 18).
159. SW to Graham Wallas, 6 March 1892; Wallas Coll., LSE.
160. SW to BP, 23 March 1892.
161. SW to BP, n.d. (end sheet) between 7 and 10 May 1892.
162. SW to G. Wallas, 29 July 1892.
163. D, 16 August 1892.
164. BP to G. Wallas, n.d., from Glasgow [August or September 1892?].
165. D, 16 August 1892.
166. BP to SW, n.d. [August 1890?] (Item 13).
167. SW to BP, 28 December 1891.

6 Democracy and the Labour Movement 1892-8

1. *On Labour*, 1869; the second edition of 1870 was reprinted in facsimile in 1971 by the Irish University Press.
2. R.J. Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 1965, p. 341.
3. E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, 1964, p. 255 fn.
4. R. Michels, *Political Parties*, 1915. (First English edition; translated from the Italian by Eden and Cedar Paul.)

5. *Daily News*, September 1889; PAS VI (the Spoken Word)/95: album of press cuttings.
6. B. Potter (Mrs S. Webb), *The Relationship Between Co-operation and Trade Unionism*, Manchester, n.d. [1893]. Being a lecture to a conference of trade union officials and co-operators at Tynemouth, 15 August 1892.
7. SW to BP, 2 November 1891.
8. D, 2 July 1892.
9. D, 16 January 1896.
10. D, 17 January 1896.
11. BP to SW, n.d. [summer 1891?], Item 42.
12. BP to SW, n.d. [24 October 1891?], Item 66.
13. D, 14 February 1890.
14. BP to SW, 24 January 1892.
15. *The Gentlewoman* [!], 12 March 1904.
16. SW to BP, 18 September 1891.
17. F.W. Galton, 'Investigating with the Webbs', in M. Cole (ed.), *The Webbs and Their Work*, 1949, pp. 29–40; also D, 21 June 1893.
18. D, 17 September 1893.
19. D, 24 May 1897.
20. D, 19 October 1897. She had been reading Sach's *Botany* and Darwin's *Prefaces* to prepare the introduction to *Industrial Democracy*.
21. S. and B. Webb, *Methods of Social Study*, Longmans, 1932, p. 94.
22. *Ibid.*
23. E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, 1961, p. 9; 2nd edition, 1987, p. 15.
24. B. Webb, *Our Partnership*, 1948, p. 47; hereinafter *OP*. *OP* here reproduces a *Diary* entry at the Argoed for 8 August 1895.
25. V.L. Allen, 'Valuation and Historical Interpretation', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. XIV, no. 1, March 1963, pp. 48–58.
26. B. Webb, *OP*, p. 44; D, 10 July 1894.
27. S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, 1911, p. lxi; hereinafter referred to as *TU*. All references are to the 1911 edition.
28. V.L. Allen, 'Valuation' p. 51.
29. *TU*, pp. 12 et seq.
30. V.L. Allen's account of the Webbs' opinions on this subject is particularly inaccurate and misleading, and his own version of the 'economic pressures' responsible for the change is vague and unsatisfactory. 'Valuation', pp. 55–6.
31. *TU*, p. 35.
32. H.A. Clegg, A. Fox, and A.F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889, vol. I, 1889–1910*, Oxford, 1964, p. 46.
33. *TU*, p. 75.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
35. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1963, p. 500.
36. A. Aspinall, *The Early English Trade Unions*, 1949.
37. G.D.H. Cole, *Attempts at General Union*, 1953 (in its original form this appeared in 1939).
38. V.L. Allen, 'Valuation', p. 54 (Clegg *et al.*; *A History*, p. 7, offers a much more moderate criticism).
39. G.D.H. Cole, 'Some Notes on British Trade Unionism in the Third Quarter of the Nineteenth Century', *International Review of Social History*, vol. 2, 1937, pp. 1–23.
40. H.A. Clegg *et al.*, *A History*, p. 38. See also Clegg's contribution, 'The Webbs as Historians of Trade Unionism 1874–94', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, no. 4, 1962, pp. 8–9.

41. F. Harrison to BW, 5 May 1894.
42. R.W. Postgate, *The Builders' History*, 1923. (While making those and other criticisms, the author found that his own research 'merely served to confirm and heighten my opinion of the learning, good sense and industry which have gone to the making of that [a reference to *TU*] remarkable book'; p. xvii.)
43. S. Coltham, 'The Bee-hive Newspaper: Its Origin and Early Struggles', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History*, 1960, pp. 174–204.
44. E.S. Beesly to BW, 8 May 1894.
45. D, 12 November 1893. She was staying at the Angel, Chesterfield: 'a stupid, stolid lot of men characterised by fairmindedness and kindness – but oh! how dense! The officials are of the ordinary good type, hard-working, narrow-minded, whisky-drinking, self-complacent persons: excellent speakers on the one question of Miners' Trade Unionism, and competent negotiators, but stupid, stupid, stupid, like the men! Is it the (?) quality of the whisky these good fellows drink – without being drunk – or is it brain work carried on by an uncultivated and untrained mind? How can anyone fear anything but unmitigated conservatism from the English democracy.'
46. *TU*, p. 455.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 458.
48. Thompson, *The Making*, p. 12.
49. *TU*, p. 47.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
53. E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Machine-Breakers', in his *Labouring Men*, 1964, pp. 5–22.
54. Thompson, *The Making*, p. 158.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 592.
57. In deference to socialist criticisms they amended this definition in the 1920 edition: replacing the words 'of their employment' by the expression 'of their working lives'.
58. H.A. Turner, *Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy*, 1962.
59. S. and B. Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, first published 1897; hereinafter referred to as *ID*. Unless otherwise stated, this and all further references are to the 1911 edition.
60. *ID*, pp. 59–60 [in edition of 1902].
61. A.L. Lowell, *The Government of England*, 1910, vol. 1, pp. 177 et seq.
62. *ID*, pp. 60–1.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 848.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 843.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 844–5.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 845.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 809.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 847.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 847.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 847.
71. The reader may recall that at the end of the Korean War the prisoners on both sides exercised a free choice which appeared to entirely satisfy the Millite requirements, but provided a universal (and probably justifiable) scepticism.

72. *ID*, pp. 809–10.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 828.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 828.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 821.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 824.
77. *Ibid.*, pp. 828–9.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 825.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 814.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 816.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 826.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 843.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 843.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 817.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 830.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 848.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 840.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 832.
89. *Ibid.*, pp. 362–3.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 845–6.
91. Cited in R.J. Harrison, 'Practical, Capable Men,' review of Ben Roberts on the history of the TUC, *New Reasoner*, vi, 1958, p. 104.
92. See the authentic, authoritative work by V.L. Allen, *Trade Unions and the Government*, 1960.
93. B. Webb, 'The Failure of the Labour Commission', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxxvi, July 1894, pp. 2–22.
94. G. Drage, 'Mrs Sidney Webb's Attack on the Labour Commission', *ibid.*, pp. 452–67.
95. D, 21 September 1894.
96. D, 9 August 1932. It is presumed that this entry related to Drage: BW was musing over the death of Graham Wallas. ('The purpose of the Fabian Society', wrote an angry Tory journalist in 1894 'is to substitute for the present governing class of public school and university (Oxford and Cambridge) men, lower middle class men like Sidney Webb'. Well, well, if we examine the personnel of the two Labour Cabinets and reflect on J.R.M.'s premiership and Snowden's presence in the National Government of 1932, the Tory sneer of 1894 has proved to be an accurate forecast. But this reflection cannot be cast on Graham Wallas...')
97. G. Drage, 'Mrs Sidney Webb's Attack', p. 455.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 460.
99. Originally: Symposium – 'What Mr Gladstone Ought To Do', *Fortnightly Review*, 53, 1893, pp. 276–87; parts by Shaw and Webb.
100. R.B. Haldane to SW, 2 November n.d. [1893?].
101. H.W. Massingham to SW, 3 January 1893 ('utmost sorrow ... measureless regret').
102. D, 17 September 1893.
103. B. Webb, *OP*, p. 40; D, 24 December 1893.
104. Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission on Labour (June 1893), 17 November 1892, Q. 3886–88.
105. *Ibid.*, Q. 3918 and 3921–2.
106. D, 21 September 1894.
107. T. Mann to SW, 9 November 1893, and eight other letters to 27 April 1894.
108. T. Mann to SW, 9 November 1893.

109. BP to SW, 21 January 1892.
110. RCL, Final Report (Minority), 1894, vol. xxxv, pp. 127 et seq.
111. D, 25 December 1893.
112. D, 2 March 1894.
113. *Ibid.*, 2 March 1894.
114. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1895.
115. Fabian Tract No. 70, 1896, p. 14.
116. S. Webb, 'Reminiscences No. 1, Trade Unionism', *St Martin's Review*, October 1928, pp. 478–81.
117. Ex-ambassador Ivan Maisky in an interview with the author in Moscow, July 1966.
118. V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, Selected Works, vol. 2, 1936, p. 156.
119. *Ibid.*
120. *Ibid.*, p. 61 (citing Karl Kautsky).
121. P. Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism: Eduard Bernstein's Challenge to Marx*, New York, 1962, p. 108.
122. E. Bernstein, *My Years of Exile: Reminiscences of a Socialist* (Tr. Edward Miall) 1921.
123. S. Webb, 'Reminiscences'.
124. S. and B. Webb, *Die Geschichte des Britischen Trade Unionism*, Dietz, Stuttgart, 1895. E. Bernstein's '*nachwort*' was omitted from the second edition, published in 1906.
125. P. Gay, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
127. Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission on Labour, *op. cit.*, Q. 3931.
128. *ID*, p. 71.

7 Heroic Opportunism: Towards a Third Culture and Education in London 1893–1905

1. R.H. Tawney, *Equality*, 1931. It should be noted that this work was dedicated 'with gratitude and affection' to Sidney and Beatrice Webb.
2. S. Webb, *Wanted a Programme*, An Appeal to the Liberal Party for private circulation only (August 1888), pp. 14–15.
3. S. Webb, *Socialism in England*, 1890, ch. v
4. W.P. McCann, 'Trade Unionist, Co-operative and Socialist Organizations in Relation to Popular Education, 1870–1902', PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1960. This is a first-class piece of scholarship and the author's judgement commands respect.
5. *Kentish Mercury*, 21 January 1892.
6. McCann, 'Trade Unionist, Co-operative and Socialist Organizations', p. 23, where it is argued that Tract No. 25 had little effect upon the school board elections of 1891 but that a slightly revised edition of 1894 had 'very great' influence in that year.
7. National Association for the Promotion of Technical and Secondary Education, *The LCC and Technical Education: An Appeal to the Electors*, n.d. [1892].
8. S. Webb, 'The Labour Interest in the County Council Election', *Trade Unionist*, 23 and 30 January; 13 and 20 February; 5 March 1892.
9. S. Webb, *The London Programme*, 1891, pp. 175–6.
10. In fact Webb proposed to deprive the Home Secretary of control of the Metropolitan Police: *ibid.*, p. 137 et seq.

11. P.F. Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 24, p. 166.
12. SW to BP, 16 March 1892.
13. SW to BP, 4 and 23 March 1892.
14. SW to BP, 5 March 1892.
15. *OP*, p. 78.
16. *Ibid.*
17. SW to BP, n.d., but between 7 and 10 May 1892.
18. Arthur H.D. Acland and H. Llewellyn Smith (eds), *Studies in Secondary Education*, 1892, p. 11.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 162 et seq.
25. McCann, 'Trade Unionist, Co-operative and Socialist Organizations', ch. IV, 'The Labour Movement and Technical Education'.
26. *London*, 16 February 1895.
27. *London News*, January 1895. Reference is made to this article by E.J.T. Brennan, 'The Influence of Sidney and Beatrice Webb on English Education', MA thesis, University of Sheffield, 1959. This is a work of outstanding excellence and I am indebted to it at many points in this chapter.
28. A.G. Gardiner, *John Benn and the Progressive Movement*, 1925, p. 172.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *London*, 16 February 1895.
31. *London*, 22 August 1895.
32. TEB Minutes, 28 April 1894.
33. Royal Commission on Secondary Education, vol. XLIV, 1895. See in particular evidence given by Webb and Garnett on 29 May 1894: Questions 2537–2858. Hereinafter referred to as 'Bryce'.
34. B. Webb, *OP*, p. 80, but this is rather too complacent. See W. Garnett, 'A Retrospect', *Educational Record*, April 1929. Beatrice herself described this as 'an authoritative account of the TEB': *OP*, p. 81, fn. 1.
35. *London*, 5 October 1893.
36. *London*, 24 June 1897.
37. *London*, 2 February 1893.
38. *London Technical Education Gazette*, February 1897.
39. Brennan, 'The Influence of Sidney and Beatrice Webb on English Education', pp. 82–3.
40. *London*, 26 October 1893.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, 22 August 1895.
43. Bryce, Q. 2568–76.
44. *Ibid.*, Q. 2644.
45. Brennan, 'The Influence of Sidney and Beatrice Webb on English Education', p. 117.
46. The *London Technical Education Gazette* published tables giving the occupations of the parents of all candidates for scholarships, both successful and unsuccessful. Unfortunately these tables appeared only intermittently and the classification of occupations was changed from one year to another. However, in the last of these returns made in 1903, workers took 370 of the

- 607 scholarships, or 60.9 per cent. Out of the total, general labourers took only 44 scholarships; carpenters and joiners alone accounted for 22; compositors 19, and other skilled workers in printing and publishing a further 27. Journeymen tailors took 10. Over the years the children of widows did particularly well and the sons and daughters of schoolmasters peculiarly badly. In the first three competitive examinations, for instance, schoolmasters' children accounted for 46 candidates but only four were successful.
47. *London*, 16 February 1893. For John Burns's allegation, that 'the work lads had not that access to the funds of the Board which the lower middle classes were securing', see *London*, 25 February 1897. Webb's rejoinder was that 'at least 5% of the scholarships went to the children of unskilled labourers'!
 48. *The Times*, 1 August 1896.
 49. Brennan, 'The Influence of Sidney and Beatrice Webb on English Education', p. 117.
 50. *London*, 12 October 1893.
 51. F.E. Willard, 'A Scientific Socialist', *British Weekly*, 29 June 1893. Sidney's observation was made in the context of a discussion in which Beatrice maintained, 'I never saw a man the most inferior, but I felt him to be my superior.'
 52. S. Webb, *The Economic Heresies of the LCC*, 1895.
 53. SW to A. Marshall, 28 February 1889.
 54. *Economic Journal*, vol. 1, 1891.
 55. SW to BW, 23 February 1891.
 56. *Ibid.*, 30 October 1890.
 57. S. Caine, *The History of the Foundation of the London School of Economics*, 1963.
 58. B. Webb, *OP*, pp. 85–6; D, 21 September 1894.
 59. H. Burrows and J.A. Hobson (eds), *William Clarke: A Collection of His Writings*, 1908, p. 42 (the article first appeared in the *Contemporary Review*, February 1893).
 60. G.B Shaw to BW, 1 July 1895, Burrows and Hobson, *William Clarke*, pp. 45–7.
 61. D, 16 September 1896.
 62. W.A.S Hewins to E.R. Pease, 19 October 1895; Fabian Collection (FC), Nuffield College.
 63. SW to W.A.S Hewins, 24 March 1895: 'Graham Wallas now decides after all that he cannot undertake the Directorship! This is an unexpected blow.' Five days later Webb wrote again: 'The Hutchinson Trustees decided yesterday to go ahead with the proposal of a London School of Economics and Political Science on the lines which you and I worked out together. They attach great importance to securing your cordial assistance and, indeed, unless you can undertake the Directorship and carry out the scheme it will probably have to be abandoned.' (Hewins Papers, University of Sheffield)
 64. SW to BP, 4 January 1892.
 65. SW to E.R. Pease, 25 March 1895; FC, Nuffield College.
 66. W.A.S. Hewins, *The Apologia of an Imperialist*, 1929, and his papers at the University of Sheffield.
 67. Lady Beveridge, *An Epic of Clare Market*, 1961, cited in Caine, *The History of the Foundation of the London School of Economics*, p. 43.
 68. Caine, *The History of the Foundation of the London School of Economics*, p. 42, being a recommendation of the TEB, 6 May 1895.
 69. J.R. MacDonald to E.R. Pease, 1 July 1897. (FC, Nuffield College)
 70. It was almost equally likely to arouse socialist hopes, particularly from abroad. As early as 23 July 1895 Lily Von Gizycki wrote to Beatrice from Berlin urging the claims of Tonnies: '[H]e is one of our best representatives

- of Scientific Socialism [sic] and consequently denied a University post in Germany.' She thought that the LSE would be 'a high school for Socialism'.
71. L. Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, vol. II, 1900, pp. 32–3.
 72. SW to E.R. Pease, 17 July 1907, reporting that Hewins had been appointed Professor of Political Economy at King's College and that this was an honour for the School. Webb added that it also 'increases his claim to the future Professorship in the New University – and almost ensures what we have been playing for, viz. The inclusion of the School in the future University and thus our virtual command of the Economic Faculty...'; FC, Nuffield College.
 73. E.J.T. Brennan, *Education for National Efficiency: the Contribution of Sidney and Beatrice Webb*, 1975, p. 139. As the following note suggests, there is no need to consign this episode to the category of 'Webbian folklore'.
 74. Royal Commission on University Education (The 'Haldane Commission') – 6 vols., 1910–13. Appendix to the 1st Report, Minutes of Evidence, July 1909–April 1910. SW gave evidence on 18–19 November: see Questions 395–607. For Milner's exchanges with Webb see particularly pp. 34–6. This is the hard evidence for Webb's response to requests for his idea of a university. The objection that it is not evidence of what transpired in a private conversation between Haldane and Webb some ten years earlier is valid, but it makes it more likely that it did. There is no evidence that Webb ever sympathised with that way of proceeding. There is remarkable consistency in the progress of his opinions on the subject of London University from 1892 to 1909. Thus a lot of his evidence to the Haldane Commission in 1909 was taken from his *London Education* of 1904, much of which drew on his 'The making of a University', *Cornhill Magazine*, vol. XIV, April 1903, pp. 530–40. This, in turn, contained expressions as well as ideas lifted from his own contributions to the *Nineteenth Century*, June 1902, and to *The Times* in June 1901. If Webb's position develops it does so only in becoming more detailed and precise, bolder and more self-confident. If he told Haldane that he had no idea of a university, but here are the facts; he certainly advised Milner: 'it does not help us at all. If you go far enough back the University and State were coincident; they were both *Universitates* and I think you need not be troubled by either the etymology or the history ... If the State gives a Degree, it will be only doing what the Pope of Rome has done.' The nearest Sidney came to satisfying those who required his idea of a university was to point out that his proposals conformed to the Spencerian notion that progress was marked by a growing differentiation and specialisation of function. Spencer's maxim was congenial rather than formative. Indeed, it is hard to see how it could have been formative. In practice Sidney was working up the principles of a new discipline – that of public administration. He was applying them – or in Brennan's admirable phrase 'teasing them out' – in relation to the specific problem of the case for a teaching university in London. It will be argued that he was doing so in relation to some premonition – however vague – of the deficiencies of the two cultures and the need for a third. There is no intention to conceal the fact that his approach to this great undertaking was sometimes preposterous or naive. Thus, when Milner protested that his proposals would place too much power in the hands of state officials; he replied: 'But I never object to the tramcar that I go home in being in the hands of officials.' 'I want to suggest', interjected Sir Robert Morant, 'that that was just the point. Education is different from providing trams ...' (p. 37) (On Sidney's propensity for confusing education with other public

services including the fire brigade see also p. 60). All quotations from Webb in this note come from his contribution to the *Cornhill Magazine*, unless otherwise stated.

75. This was an aspect of the matter about which Sidney did become more aggressive and expansionist as time passed. Asked by Milner at the Haldane Commission whether it would not be best to confine the University of London to the area of the LCC, while trying to establish other Universities at Brighton and Colchester, Webb replied: 'No I think it would be disadvantageous to Brighton and Colchester not to be included in a larger entity and I do not think it is at all disadvantageous to London to include so large an area.' He drew the line at including Oxford and Cambridge with their 'malarial marshes' and thought that a University for all England would preclude competition, emulation and differentiation, which were good things in this context. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
76. '[T]he Professor of Arabic is as much an amateur, when it comes to administering, as the administrator is when it comes to professing Arabic, and with this further drawback that the Professor of Arabic thinks he understands administration, whereas the administrator knows that he does not understand Arabic.' *Ibid.* Sidney became a Professor of Public Administration.
77. R.B Haldane, *An Autobiography*, 1929, p. 125.
78. See Chapter 5, p. 212.
79. B. Webb, *OP*, p. 96.
80. D, 3 May 1897.
81. D, 28 February 1902; *OP*, pp. 227-8.
82. R.B Haldane, *op.cit.*, p. 125.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 124, and R.B. Haldane to A.J. Balfour, 16 October 1897; Haldane papers, National Library of Scotland.
84. R.B Haldane, *Autobiography*, pp. 127-8.
85. B. Webb, *OP*, p. 102.
86. D, December 1900.
87. D, 4 May 1902.
88. D, Whitsun 1896.
89. Brennan, 'The Influence of Sidney and Beatrice Webb on English Education', pp. 50-1.
90. *Ibid.*
91. Education Reform Council, *Education Reform: Being the Report of the Education Reform Council* (Published for the Teachers' Guild of Great Britain and Ireland), 1917. Foreword by William Garnett, chairman of the Education Reform Council, pp. ix-xxxii.
92. Fabian Society, *The Education Muddle and the Way Out*, Tract No. 106, 1901. Pease's attribution of authorship to Sidney is supported by a letter to him from SW, 3 May 1899: 'Here is the (that is, my) gospel on the Education muddle ... If we publish this it will enhance our practical reputation.' Pease's qualification to all his attributions - 'they were probably amended by the Society', E.R. Pease, *History of the Fabian Society*, 2nd edition, 1925, p. 289 - is supported by some references. Thus, about a year later Sidney complained in a letter to Pease, 17 May 1900, that the Tract was all right in substance, but did not 'lap to the eye'. The Executive would not, he thought, accept it without much discussion. However, on 28 December 1900 Sidney wrote to Pease, remarking, 'Here is the Education Tract'. It was an urgent matter since its publication ought to precede the possible announcement by the government

- of its Bill on 14 February (FC, Nuffield College). It is clear that Sidney took the initiative, that he 'prevailed' in all essential respects and that he had the last word. It is not certain that he made no concessions on minor questions or verbal ones to meet the requirements of 'sentimental twaddle'.
93. 'The idea that education is valuable for its own sake he clearly regarded as no more than sentimental twaddle.' – B. Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870–1920*, 1965, p. 204.
 94. Fabian Society, *The Education Muddle*, p. 20.
 95. E.R. Pease, *op. cit.*, p. 144. On 8 May 1901 SW wrote to Pease that Gorst's speech on the Government's Education Bill was full of echoes of the Tract. SW wrote to BW, 7 May 1891: 'Gorst is even now introducing his Bill about which we know nothing yet.' (This letter is not reproduced in MacKenzie.) Thus, the extent of the liaison between Webb and the Fabians and Gorst and the government ought not to be overestimated.
 96. Brennan, 'The Influence of Sidney and Beatrice Webb on English Education', p. 53.
 97. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
 98. R. Morant to SW, 16 January 1903; PAS.
 99. D, 1 February 1903: 'Harmsworth ... handed over the direction of the campaign in the *Daily Mail* to Sidney'; and *OP*, pp. 257–8 and footnote.
 100. Fabian Society [SW], *The London Education Act 1903: How to Make the Best of It*, Tract No. 117, February 1904, p. 2.
 101. In her old age Beatrice wondered whether there had been a vision or a grand design from the beginning. Brennan, 'The Influence of Sidney and Beatrice Webb on English Education', discounts it. However he mistakenly asserts: 'there is no mention of the subject of education in ... [t]he important *London Programme*', p. 6.
 102. SW to G. Wallas, 4 December 1902.
 103. D, 15 June 1903 and 7 March 1904.
 104. Beatrice did, however, press Pease to take a more active interest; FC, Nuffield College.
 105. B. Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, pp. 196–207.

8 Squalid Opportunism: Fabianism and Empire 1893–1903

1. D, 17 September 1893.
2. A. D. 12 October 1893.
3. D, 17 September 1893.
4. D, 12 October 1893.
5. D, 9 September 1895.
6. B. Webb, *OP*, p. 123.
7. *OP*, p. 127.
8. *OP*, p. 134.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Report on Fabian Policy*, Tract No. 70, 1896.
11. *OP*, p. 130–1.
12. Cf. the reference to this incident in the published version of the Diary, vol. 2, p. 138.
13. See David Shannon (ed.), *Beatrice Webb's American Diary*, Madison, 1963.
14. See A.G. Austin (ed.), *The Webbs' Australian Diary*, Melbourne, 1965.
15. J.N. Ingham, *The Iron Barons*, 1978, p. 37.

16. *Visit to New Zealand in 1898: Beatrice Webb's Diary with Entries by Sidney E. Webb*, Prince Milburn, Wellington N.Z., 1959, p. 31.
17. D, 15 May 1899.
18. D, 1 July 1901.
19. D, 10 October 1899.
20. D, December 1899.
21. D, 25 September 1933.
22. D, 9 July 1901.
23. R. Jenkins, *Asquith*, 1967 edition, p. 136.
24. D, 9 July 1901.
25. G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*, 1971, p. 132.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
27. D, 16 March 1900; B. Webb, *OP*, p. 198.
28. D, 28 February 1902; B. Webb, *OP*, pp. 227–8.
29. D, 28 November 1902; B. Webb, *OP*, pp. 248–9.
30. D, 8 July 1903; B. Webb, *OP*, p. 269.
31. B. Webb, *OP*, pp. 292–3.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
33. D, 30 October 1899.
34. D, 14 October 1905.
35. B. Webb, *OP*, p. 275.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
39. *OP*, p. 227.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 304–5.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
44. D, 23 July 1903; B. Webb, *OP*, pp. 270–1, sets this on 24 July.

9 An Ideal Marriage?

1. 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. xxv, June 1889, pp. 781–8.
2. *Ibid.*
3. F.E. Willard, 'A Scientific Socialist', *British Weekly*, 29 June 1893.
4. 'Mrs Webb pointed out that Westminster...had failed to provide lavatory accommodation for women. Mrs Webb strongly repudiated the suggestion that there was a prejudice among women against patronising these public institutions. "That", she said, "was purely a man's notion which influenced some vestries..."' Beatrice added that there should be more lavatories for each sex and that they should be free. She explained that she was not in favour of women going on vestries as women, but as citizens who sometimes had specialised qualifications and leisure not possessed by men. Women were fully equal to men in point of administrative capacity; *London*, 13 December 1894.
5. The International Congress met in London in July 1899 (D, 3 July 1899). Since within two years Beatrice was showing the most perfect indifference to the claims of the Nonconformist conscience in relation to the Education Bill, it seems proper to interpret her gesture as a mere pretext for distancing herself from the pious 'do-gooders' whom she felt would do no good.

6. *The Times*, 5 November 1906 (reprinted in *OP*, pp. 362–3).
7. D, 13 November 1889 (for the context of these observations see the earlier reference in Chapter 3, n. 24).
8. D, 24 May 1897.
9. M. Cole, 'Partners in Tranquillity', *Manchester Guardian*, 13 July 1959. Mrs Cole dedicated her book on *Marriage* to the Webbs. Since that marriage was childless this was a curious decision. The presence of children might have softened the Webbs' censorious attitude towards 'the average sensual man' and enlarged their understanding of the humdrum requirements and pressures of life. Had they been parents they would surely have found it more difficult to cut themselves off from the pleasures of painting and music and sport in pursuit of 'the kitchen of life'. In being less odd or eccentric, they might – to a degree – have become more effective.
10. D, 'Xmas' 1895.
11. D, Brighton, n.d., but early 1896.
12. D, 26 March 1896.
13. D, 10 October 1899.
14. D, 22 May 1900.
15. D, 4 July 1900.
16. D, 16 November 1900.
17. D, 1 January 1901.
18. D, 29 June 1898.
19. It is unfortunate that we are forced to rely so heavily upon Beatrice's testimony about Sidney. Without denying that he enjoyed exceptional health and displayed remarkable energy, his letters to Beatrice suggest the average sort of incidence of colds, depression (usually occasioned by her absence) and the occasional attack of anxiety and self-doubt. Beatrice chose not to notice and she edited these matters out of her account of 'the Other One' at the beginning of *Our Partnership*. She allowed that she herself was given to romanticising. Perhaps her accounts of her relapses were overdrawn in the interests of adding yet more interest to her diary. After publication of *My Apprenticeship* in 1926 many people tried to get themselves 'in'. Beatrice had the advantage of being able to start earlier! It should also be noticed that the powerful 'relapses' that occurred at the turn of the century coincided with what may have been the onset of the menopause (D, 28 November 1901). Shortly afterwards she took to severe dieting as a cure for the temptations of vanity and of the flesh. She contemplated an enforced simplicity of life. 'If I were to follow my *selfish desires* I should force on my household and all my acquaintances rigid abstinences so that I might not have the bother of refusing to eat and drink what does not agree with me. But the love of the love of others and the power that results from love – that indeed is an all powerful temptation.' D, 15 March 1902.
20. 'Sidney does not sympathise with my faith in prayer, and, perhaps in his heart of hearts, regards it as "neurotic" ...' She had taken to going to church, sometimes more than once a week, and read a good deal of theology. D, 21 July 1902.
21. D, 4 August 1903.
22. D, 4 August 1932.
23. Gellner must be acknowledged as one of the most distinguished thinkers of our time. Yet he appears to be deranged when it comes to judging Sidney Webb: '[T]here can', asserts Gellner, 'be few examples of comparable *trahison des clercs* ... these morally criminal and empirically absurd conclusions. He

[Sidney] was simply a self-righteous and uncritical b.f., to whom the fate to starved Russian peasants or liquidated intellectuals was of little concern.' The depth of Gellner's revulsion is hard to credit. 'The man who regurgitated phoney statistics to cover up for gulags, who, unbelievably, endeavoured to justify the Moscow trials, and who was eager to marry a woman who openly expressed her physical contempt for him, but who helped his social ascension, so that he is open to the suspicion that his snobbery trumped his sensuality...'; 'No School for Scandal', Ernest Gellner reviewing Ralf Dahrendorf's history of the LSE in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 May 1995. No second volume is needed to establish that the Webbs were not so foolish, nor as wicked as Gellner in his tantrum imagined.

24. Sheila Turcon (ed.), *The Diary of Mildred Minturn Scott*, 1995.

Select Bibliography

A: MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

There are more than forty collections of papers. However, by far the most important are those housed at the London School of Economics.

The Passfield Papers

This collection consists of the mountain of Beatrice's diaries and letters, the molehill of Sidney's examination certificates and a few more official things.

The Graham Wallas Papers

Also housed in the LSE; important, particularly for the young Webb.

The Olivier Papers

At Rhodes House, University of Oxford.

The Hewins Papers

At the University of Sheffield.

B: WORKS BY THE WEBBS

Publications of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: An Interim Check List, LSE, 1973, pp. 36. Lists 440 items written by one or the other of them or both together. This includes translations and subsequent editions. It is not quite comprehensive so far as articles are concerned: it misses, for example, 'The Economic Limitations of Co-operation', *Co-operative News*, 12 January 1889. It also occasionally fails to date and place items: the 'Sociological Sermon in Rome', which appeared in *Our Corner* in volume 12, 1888, is the first item listed, but is deficient in these respects. There is no attempt to identify letters or paragraphs contributed to papers or journals.

If these are shortcomings, the immense labour involved in compiling a list must not be underestimated. Nor should small fault-finding be permitted to obscure the great scholarship involved in the preparation and publication of this 'interim check list'.

The appearance of *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb* and *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, edited by N. and J. MacKenzie in three and four volumes respectively, makes more accessible the documents in the LSE.

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