

THE LESSER FABIANS.

By: Eric Hobsbawm.

Probably no part of the modern British socialist movement has attracted so much research since the war as the early Fabian Society. There are a number of doctorate theses about it in print and in typescript. Mrs. Margaret Cole has recently published what amounts to its new official history. The numerous historians who have studied the origins and early years of the Labour Party, have also had their say about it. Consequently the general nature of the Fabians and their contribution to the labour movement before the first world war - after 1914 it ceases to be of any importance for some decades - is by now quite well understood.

We know that there is no truth in several myths propagated by the first official Fabian history, Edward Pease's. The Fabians did not start as a gradualist movement, but only developed into one towards the end of the 1880s, largely under the influence of Sidney Webb and his 'old gang', which dominated the society thereafter. They were in no sense the pioneers of the Labour Party. On the contrary, they put their money on the 'permeation' of the Liberal Party and at certain moments sections of the imperialists and higher civil servants. They opposed the formation of the ILP, missed the opportunity of leading the movement for an independent labour party, and though they joined the Labour Representation Committee, they almost resigned from it in the early years, and paid no attention to the young Labour Party until the permeation policy had become evidently bankrupt just before 1914. Moreover, though their gift for public relations has led many people to believe in their and the Webbs' remarkable success in influencing the development of local government, education and social legislation, in fact most research shows that their influence has been very much exaggerated.

Time rather than research has also led us to another revision of Fabian history. Like Edward Pease, most marxists have claimed that the Fabians' major achievement was to turn the British labour movement away from Marx and towards a gradualist social democracy. This is undoubtedly correct. More than this: they actually provided much of the ideological foundation for continental revisionism, as Eduard Bernstein, its founder (and who knew them well in London) admitted. Of course, here again it is easy to exaggerate the Fabians' independent contribution: there were enough powerful reformist elements in the British labour movement even without Sidney Webb. However, what is more obvious now than it was in the past, is that by the standards of the Labour Party today, Sidney Webb and the early Fabians were not extreme reformists but dangerous radicals. They, or rather the Webbs and Shaw, took socialism seriously, as is shown by their subsequent political evolution. They never doubted that it meant the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and they eventually recognised in the Soviet Union the pioneer of a new civilisation. This does not offset the fact that, for most of their political lifetime, their powerful influence was thrown onto the side of the right wing of the labour movement; but it should not be

forgotten. They were, marxists will think, for most of their life mistaken about the tactics of achieving socialism, but in the end the Webbs and Shaw frankly admitted their mistake.

In general, therefore, the picture of early Fabianism is reasonably clear. In detail, however, there are many aspects of it which are still unknown, or known only to a handful of research workers. One of these is the nature of the ideas of the lesser contributors to the famous Fabian Essays of 1889 , a book which, like so many important books in the history of the socialist movement, is more often referred to than read. The following pages deal with these men: Hubert Bland, William Clarke, Graham Wallas and Sydney Olivier. (Mrs. Besant has been omitted, since she can hardly be classified as a Fabian and her connexion with the society was shortlived anyway). They illustrate the complexity of the intellectual and social elements which went to form the early British socialist movement of the 1880s and the original Fabian Society. They also illustrate the absorption of Fabianism by Sidney Webb, which gradually eliminated the other elements or allowed them to drop out of sight.

No biography of Bland exists, but that of his wife (Doris Langley Moore, E. Nesbitt, 1933) contains much material. For his ideas Essays by Hubert (1914) is important. A biographical memoir and selection of articles by Clarke is available in J.A. Hobson and H. Burrows, William Clarke (1908). There is no biography of Wallas, but cf. Economica XII (1935) 395 ff and Political Quarterly, 1932, pp 461 ff. For Oliver, see M. Olivier, Sydney Olivier, Letters and Selected Writings (with a memoir, 1948). But most of the following discussion is based on the writings of these men in Fabian Essays, in socialist and other publications of the 1880s and 1890s, on letters and other material in the Fabian Society archives, the Wallas papers, and on references in the works of other contemporaries.

I.

Hubert Bland (1855-1914) was in many ways the most anomalous of the leading Fabians. A Tory and imperialist by origin, where others came from, or via Liberalism, he came to socialism via aestheticism and William Morris. An open distrustful of the theory that all collectivism was socialist, one is not surprised to find him at daggers drawn with Webb, and a permanent opposition within the Fabian Executive. Most readers of Fabian Essays will have been struck by the fact that Bland's dissents completely from Webb's whose ideas it describes as "sham socialism".\* R.C.K. Ensor was to make this contrast into the basis of an extremely acute analysis of Fabian policy later. For Bland, as for other socialists, the impracticability of violent revolution had been demonstrated in the middle 50s; though not its undesirability.

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\* F.E. 212-13

He concluded, somewhat in the manner of Hyndman and German Social-Democrats, that it was impossible until "the capitalist system has worked itself out to its last logical expression" - "the well-defined confrontation of rich and poor"\*; a point of view with which even Shaw on occasions showed sympathy. Like most others he envisaged the struggle as a political one, fought between a party of the masses and a party of privilege, a split forecast by the Home Rule crisis of 1886; like many others he did not exclude a gradual transition to socialism. But "the ballot box (is) merely a war-engine with which to attack capitalism".\*\* In the long run the interests of capitalists and workers were incompatible, though the fact that Radicals and Socialists shared a desire to extend democratic rights blinded many Fabians to this. The 'conversion' of the Liberals was an illusion, based on the inadmissible identification of 'state control' and 'socialism', and the belief of the imperceptible passing of capitalism into its opposite. To rely on changing the character of the Liberal Party by pressure from within was to make a ridiculous underestimation of the adaptability, patience and delaying power of capitalist politicians, and might well lead merely to harnessing the socialist horse to the capitalist cart.

Essentially this was a slightly more sophisticated version of the social-democratic and marxist case against Fabian permeation; and Bland was, of course, an active member of the Social Democratic Federation. Beyond a conviction that something more was wanted than doctrinaire street-corner propaganda he had little in common with his colleagues. His criticisms of Webb's views were particularly acute, being clearly based on close acquaintance. Thus he was the first to notice the dual nature of 'permeation' - the belief that Liberals could be converted to socialism, held simultaneously with the belief that they may have to be coerced by mass pressure. Thus again there was effective venom in the description - clearly aimed at Webb - of the

"not yet wholly socialised Radicals or Socialists who have recently broken away from mere political Radicalism and are still largely under its influence of party ties and traditions. They are in many cases on terms of intimate private friendship with some of the lesser lights of Radicalism and occasionally bask in the patronising radiance shed by the larger luminaries. A certain portion of the "advanced" press is open to them,..Of course none of these considerations...reflect in the very least on their motives or their sincerity; but they do colour their judgment.....'"\*\*\*

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\* F.E, 202-3  
 \*\* F.E. 202-3  
 \*\*\* F.E.215

And Bland was the first Fabian clearly to describe Bismarck's policy as one of 'erecting timely legislative breakwaters' against the 'swelling tide of socialism'.\* Why did he then remain in the Fabian leadership? One can't escape the impression that it was largely to assert his right to do so, as an original member, against the reformist interlopers of later years; but it is difficult to see why he did not transfer his activity to the Independent Labour Party as well, as so many others did. However, as the years went on, his uncompromising radicalism mellowed a little. Palliatives (the word is still redolent of Hydman) "came into the way of our direct march" - but they were necessary, and in any case they were "symptoms of a disease we could not cure, but only alleviate"\*\* The fault lay not in adopting reformism, but in allowing socialism to be "lost sight of altogether" - as for example, in the Webbs' Minority Report. But as Bland aged, and Socialism came no nearer, one can understand such concessions.

Yet if his objection to Webb and Liberals made Bland an acute critic of 'permeation', his natural conservatism blinded him to very similar weaknesses on the other side. "The usefulness of the Society" he wrote to Pease at the time of the Boer War "will be entirely crippled if we throw ourselves dead athwart the Imperialist or any other strong streams of tendency. . . . We may possibly be able to do for "sane" Imperialism what we have already done for "sane" Socialism".\*\*\* If Webb's views on Liberals had been illusions, then so were Eland's on Conservatives; and one sympathises with Olivier who jeered about "sane imperialism - the corned beef as distinct from the roast beef party".\*\*\*\* So Bland continued, "holding a watching brief for the Carlton and Army and Navy", \*\*\*\*\* sporting his bourgeois morning dress and monocle, with as much care as Shaw his Jaeger suit, maintaining his Catholicism and his suburban mistresses with holy pride, running a sprawling bohemian menage, writing his articles in the 'Sunday Chronicle' for northern artisans, and prevented from spiting Webb only when his inborn toryism drove him together with the remainder of the old gang against younger rebels. He was, by all accounts, an unpleasant personality, but a great debater, and one whose writing occasionally compels a reluctant respect. If he frittered away his talents, they must have been considerable, for in the company of Shaw, Webb and Wallas he somehow held his own.

II:

William Clarke's case (1852-1301) is far more instructive. He represented a trend whose importance in British life has rarely been recognised because it has never, as on the continent, been organised in independent parties, leftwing, anticlerical and radical: the Mazzinian or Camille Pelletan type. Clarke, like H. W. Massingham, was a pure specimen of the radical intellectual, whose genuine enthusiasm for democracy did not stop short with the achievement of political reform but pressed on logically towards the economic reform which alone could give reality to

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\* -ibid 210

\*\* - To E.Pearse 5.11.1911 (Fabian Archives)

\*\*\* - To E. Pearse, 17.10.1899 ditto )

\*\*\*\* - Olivier to Pearse, 20.10.1899 ditto)

\*\*\*\*\* - S.G.Hobson to Olivier, 24.10.1899(Fabian Archives)

to the political. He was an admirer of Mazzini and Whitman and his able political theory was a logical attempt to put the absolutely desirable concept of 'democracy' in a definite historical setting, with the help of the marxist analysis - though Clarke appears, personally, to have been opposed to political Marxism.

The democratic movement (of which Radicalism and Socialism were parts), the theory ran, was not the result of accident, but of specific 19th century conditions, for

"the massing of men together changes the conditions or production and distribution, creates vast and striking inequalities of human condition, and so produces the social forces from which democratic progress springs". \*

The development of capitalism, tending inevitably towards the victory of trusts and monopolies (Clarke travelled and lectured much in the U.S.A.) merely intensified this trend. Two things followed from this analysis. One was that the attempt to turn the clock back by trust-busting or 'three-acres and a cow' was doomed and useless; unless there was to be socialism, there would be monopoly capitalism and not a hypothetical free enterprise economy. Clarke made this point more strongly than most; and it may explain why his 'Fabian Essay' was the most universally popular of all, for both Marxists and Webbiens united in their firm conviction - as against cooperators, Owenites and others - that the past was irrevocably dead. (Only later did some, like the Webbs, absorb the doubts of orthodox economists and query the inevitable progress of monopoly capitalism. The second conclusion was, that capitalism became progressively less compatible with democracy.

"Liberty to trade, liberty to exchange products, liberty to buy where one pleases.....subjection to no imperium in imperio; these surely are all fundamental democratic principles. Yet by momopolies every one of them is either limited or denied. Thus capitalism is apparently inconsistent with democracy as hitherto understood..... Collision between the opposing forces is inevitable". \*\*

Clarke was at considerable pains to divorce democracy from capitalism, the democratic movement from laissez faire and Cobdenism, which 'intrudes into the legitimate succession' of radicalism. Democracy was in the interests of all; though social developments made the town workers into its chief carriers. The intrusion of the middle class and the British party system had obscured this; but fortunately with the breakdown of the party system - largely through the "entering wedge of the socialist movement" it was once again becoming clear.

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\* "To-Day" december 1888

\*\* F.E. 98.

Presumably because a democratic movement now existed free from the disturbing influence of also having to stand for certain vested interests. Fortunately English economic development, and hence English social legislation was more advanced than that of other countries. Democracy in its social and industrial aspects - i.e. socialism - was therefore likely to grow without those "wider developments of revolutionary socialism" of the continent "identical though its doctrines may be at bottom with those of Marx".\*\* Thus for instance, English socialism was likely to be decentralised, not centralised as in the marxian pattern. But while Clarke desired nothing more than the end of the class war the existence of which he assumed, he had no illusions about socialism by consent. Liberals must be pushed to the left by the pressure of the organised working class vote, and perhaps by such pressure as that exercised in the early '80's by the Irish and their satellite Scots and Welsh movements; for 'Ireland is the nemesis of the English ruling class' and aimed at economic and social revolution, as the Land Act of 1881 showed.\*\*\*

Democracy (I can find no clear definition of the term in Clarke) was an end in itself. But was it also an effective, practical system of government? Clarke took some trouble to defend it against the traditional criticisms of sluggishness, timidity and conservatism. Democracy could exercise volition. The very fact that it was now turning to the solution of administrative problems, the question of poverty and industrial organisation proved that it was progressive - certainly more so than the orthodox parties which refused to face these problems. But this suppleness and awareness of democracy was not accidental. It was in tune with science - not only because it depended on social and technical conditions which also made possible the advance of science, but even more so, because it relied on a scientific analysis of social development and thus 'carries science to a higher point'. Here lay the importance of Marx. "Ricardo merely states what is, Marx shows why it is. As soon as people grasp the main points of Marx they will change what is into what ought to be" - for, of course, the recognition of historical trends did not mean that democrats waited for their spontaneous working out. "The time will come when the general drift of Marx' explanation of the economic evolution will be as much an article of faith of the social creed as is Darwin's explanation of biological evolution".\*\*\*\* Scientific socialism thus 'affords the groundwork of an art of social life - i.e., for the application in the State of the results of economic knowledge". On this basis democracy rested secure.

This analysis had, it is clear, numerous points of contact with the Fabianism of 1888; and its practical conclusions were the same, though Clarke was not a regular member of the discussion circles which hammered out Fabian theory. Yet, even if we did not know of his frictions with Shaw, his furious detestation of 'permeation' and his belief that the Fabians had no 'ultimate aims' or if they had, they differed from his own, \*\*\*\*\*

\* Political Science Quarterly, Dec.1888, 564

\*\* ibid, 564.

\*\*\* Ibid, 560-565  
\*\*\*\* To-Day, loc.Cit.

\*\*\*\*\* Shaw to Wallas 16.12.1890 (Wallas Papers)

it is equally clear that the points of contact were limited. Webb derived from orthodox intellectuals, administrators and businessmen anxious to develop a theory more in accordance with the facts of post-laissez-faire than that current in 1850-70; Beatrice from the Social Conscience, Shaw, for personal reasons; sank his private rebelliousness in Webb's reformism. But Clarke derived from generations of radical cobblers, pamphleteers and artisans halfway between manufacturers and factory-workers, fighting a life-long struggle for "freedom" against "privilege" - the always active, always submerged tradition of British Jacobinism. Between Chartism and the 1880's it had hoped to achieve its millennial ends through an alliance with business; now it was once again prepared to strike out independently. Sooner or later the current would carry most British Jacobins towards a sort of socialism, and into the Labour Party. But what distinguished Clarke's knot of petty-bourgeois intellectuals from Fabians and other socialist pioneers was their unshakable, religious, belief' in Liberalism as the cause of Progress and their reluctance to break with it until it collapsed into the arms of the 1916 Coalition. While the Fabians moved in the orbit of liberal radicalism, the jacobins gravitated towards them; Clarke, Massingham and others. When they moved away from it, they shrank back. Gradually a knot of such left-wing liberals, often, as individuals, much more radical than many Fabians or I.L.Pers formed outside socialist groups and clustered round various newspapers and reviews, such as the Progressive Review, Clarke, J.A.Hobson, Massingham, and later the Echo and Daily News. They had their brief day after the Boer War, when they appear - with the help of other radical groups in the Party - to have persuaded the Liberal Party into collectivism, as the Fabians had vainly attempted to do in 1888-93. They were undoubtedly the intellectual begetters of Lloyd Georgeism, not merely, like the Webbs, the drafters of some of its reform measures. But by that time William Clarke was dead. He had resigned from the Fabian Society in 1897, after some years of inactivity.

Clarke's peculiar contribution to this left-liberal group lay in his attempt to base the future of democracy squarely on the Marxist historical analysis; but like so many left-wingers in the '80's, he vastly overrated the speed of the approaching capitalist crisis. The end of the Great Depression, the victory of Imperialism and jingoism among the broad masses thus left him peculiarly defenceless. Mazzinian democracy rested on the assumption that men desired it as an absolute end. This was not so. There was not., Clarke concluded in 1899, a general trend towards democracy, as he had previously supposed. The ideal of the English people "does not include what they understand as liberty, it does not include the faintest aspiration towards equality".\* But the iron laws of capitalist development could not be broken, and Britain was falling behind in industrial development. Imperialism could not permanently help it. It thus faced the choice either of becoming an agrarian peasant country, or, more likely, a parasitic playground for the U.S.A. and the dominions. But this would not be compatible with democracy. Elsewhere in Europe democracy might go on evolving, though probably not along parliamentary lines. Clarke's "Social

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\* Contemporary Review - Jan.1899.

Future of England" said little which was not also said by Shaw's plays, by Hobson's 'Imperialism', in forgotten articles which recorded the disillusionment of the radical left between 1895 and 1900, the horror at the discovery that the stream of progress had apparently suddenly reversed itself; the despair, often unacknowledged, of ever achieving socialism. Clarke's despair, however, is more poignant and more terrible even than Shaw's, for the dispassionate logic in which it was expressed. He had long felt it. As the 1890s drew on, he had gradually withdrawn from active politics, from propaganda and from much political journalism and concentrated on writing essays and middles, chiefly in the Spectator. He had made a career as a leading political journalist, not merely through the 'self-help' of the young East Anglian noncollegiate student at Cambridge, but as part of a campaign for the 'cause'. He had succeeded because the provincial lecturing, the voluminous journalism happened, after 1870, to have become a fairly lucrative profession rather than because he had set out to earn money. He had succeeded in making a living, but failed in fighting for democracy.

The photographs show a clumsy, sad-looking man with thin hair and light eyes; one cannot help feeling that there was something roman about this awkward, underrated figure. Certainly he was a writer of clarity and power.

### III:

Graham Wallas (1858-1932) shared some things with Clarke; a fervent belief in Liberalism, the instincts and automatic gestures of liberal democracy, and a relatively brief stay in the Fabian Society, which he left because of his objection to its anti-liberal trend. It is no accident that he was, and Clarke was not, a member of the original quadrumvirate which formulated Fabian ideas. Perhaps because he came not from struggling East Anglians and a non-collegiate career at Cambridge, but from Shrewsbury and Corpus Christi, Oxford, he was far more of a moralist, and certainly a more ingrained gradualist. In fact, with Webb, he was the most 'instinctive' gradualist among the Fabian leaders. However, we have less direct information about his Fabian views than we would like; for, with the exception of his Fabian Essay he wrote little on political subjects but scattered articles until after his resignation. The Life of Place may be regarded as an example of Fabianism in action, but its political theory is implied, if not allegorical. Nor does the Fabian Essay on 'Property' fill the gap, being little but a series of extremely able footnotes to now forgotten controversies of the '80s, interspersed with moving moral reflections. Wallas was undoubtedly the best academic brain among the brilliant Fabian group; though, as he was to discover, the right outlet for his fervent moral passion for social service was to prove not politics but educational administration, and above all, teaching. By all accounts he was a teacher of the very highest gifts. Certainly the best of him went into these long series of lectures and classes, first in adult education, later at the London School of Economics, which have been largely lost. Much of our picture of his Fabianism must therefore be pieced together from fragments.



Wallas' earliest socialist article - he joined the Fabians in 1886, though he had known Webb since 1882, through Olivier, a fellow Oxonian - was concerned, typically enough, with 'Personal Duty under the Present System'. Wallas indeed approached socialism primarily, one might say exclusively, as one concerned with standards of personal behaviour: driven by the social conscience, impelled by a revolt against 'faith'; his first overt act of rebellion was to resign from his position as a master at Highgate school 'on a question of "religious conformity'. The social conscience led him to socialism, doubt and rationalism to the belief in gradualness. Clearly individualism had to be rejected, or interpreted in the elastic manner of Mill's utilitarianism, to allow for selfless service to the community. But once it had been so reinterpreted, as Sidgwick pointed out, the case against socialism was one of pure expediency. Wallas, younger than Sidgwick, had fewer inhibitions about associating the term with the specific programme of the collectivisation of the means of production, and declaring it as a nobler ideal of life than individualism.

Yet in one respect Wallas' conception of socialism was similar to the vaguer ones of his predecessors: the only vested interests it recognised as standing in its way were ignorance and sluggishness, the only obstacles technical ones inherent in the nature of so great a social transformation and (this is where Wallas made his peculiar contribution to the social sciences), in the nature of political man and political operations in the modern world. "Socialism hangs above them . . . ready for them if they will but lift their eyes";\* "if once we can get the working man to understand how easy it is to get national education paid for out of that surplus product of their labour which is at present absorbed by the monopolist classes, it is difficult to say what may not follow".\*\* Hence Dallas' impatience with the controversies between Jevons and Marx, purely verbal arguments as he thought, to be solved on a pragmatic basis in favour of Jevons.

But this attitude was saved from utopianism by Dallas' brand of rationalism, and transformed into a far subtler theory of gradualism than that of any other Fabian. There were two possible ways of approaching political problems, the religious and the scientific. The religious propaganda for a pure faith neglected opportunities for compromise in the hope of a more complete success in the future. But history had shown that such tactics must either succeed completely or fail completely - for if they failed to achieve their object, they would have made no impression at all on the institutions they set out to overthrow. This Wallas believed to have been the case with Chartism. But if they succeeded, would they not then, like the original Christian Church, sweep away in their triumph all achievements of the past, including the unquestionably good ones like Greek thought and Roman law. The scientific method, on the other hand, meant constant doubt. True, in "watch(ing) the way each principle works . . . and ascertaining its limit of validity"\*\*\*there was the danger that analysis would impede action, but the results would be better and more lasting. Moreover, history showed that social changes proceeded slowly. The change from one society to another was the gradual

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\* F.E. 148-9

\*\* MS address on Education (Wallas Papers)

\*\*\* "The Issues of the L.C.C. Election" (Fabian News, March 1895).

rearrangement of a pattern of life, in accordance with the "slow and often unconscious progress of the time-spirit",\* though the rearrangement could be speeded up by determined bodies of men with clear ideas. A cautious, compromising, realistic policy of slow changes, of small increments either way, small but cumulative reforms would therefore be the best. To speak of the achievement of socialism as though it were the storming of a fortress was wrong. There was no fortress, because there was no 'enemy'; capitalism and exploitation were not 'single fact(s) to be destroyed by the shock tactics of class war and forcible revolution.\*\* Moreover as a matter of fact, the most powerful engine of social change was one which least lent itself to the military metaphor: it was the growth of social passion. 'Dallas was the one Fabian who said, loudly and unambiguously:

" We rejoice that the common social feeling which we like all other men are conscious of, is yearly increasing now, and is likely to increase still faster in the future. we rely on that as the motive power that will drive the engine of reform."\*\*\*

Like Clarke, Dallas too had made his politics depend on one assumption, which seemed axiomatic in 1890, but less convincing subsequently.

Wallas' Fabianism was thus so 'natural' and so much in tune with the trend of the Fabian discussions, that it is not surprising to find, in practice, that it was indistinct from the more precise versions of Shaw and Webb. Where it reinforced them, it found no independent expression; where it differed, it was as yet in so subtle and intangible a form that it hardly seemed important. It was only after his breach with the Society that the personal Wallas emerged; and this is not therefore the place to outline or to assess the work of the author of "Human Nature in Politics" and the "Great Society" which no longer fit into the Fabian framework into which the earlier Wallas had still fitted. Why did he cut loose? Ostensibly because of disagreements on policy and political attitude. But behind these there was perhaps another disagreement: on personal duty, on the essentials of socialism. Increasingly Wallas had become dissatisfied with the belief, upon which the Fabians acted, that the transition to socialism must be envisaged in terms of economic and administrative reforms alone, that the Fabians had 'no distinctive opinions' outside their specific sphere of 'practical democracy and socialism'; though they had never claimed that this would solve all problems. He had protested, more strongly than the others, against the marxist 'economic interpretation of history' - "the narrow and mechanical reference of all human actions to economic motives".\*\*\*\* He had stated in print, even earlier than Shaw, the power of human personality to overcome - or at any rate to short-circuit - historical development. Where Shaw and Webb retained the traditional socialist assumptions that the economic solution of the problems of capitalism must be the condition of the solution of the moral ones, if they did not automatically lead to it, Wallas, acutely

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\* F.E. - 131

\*\* Men and Ideas (1940), 104.

\*\*\* Sunday Chronicle, 1890, "The Motive Power of Socialism" (Fabian Cuttingc

\*\*\*\* Men and Ideas, 104. Book)

conscious that socialism was not the "only condition of human happiness" \* slipped easily into dealing chiefly with its other conditions. The of reforming tactics became the analyst of social and political psychology. Perhaps the disappointment of the '90s played its part in this too, perhaps the experience of the political committee of the Eleusis Radical Club and the experience of school-board and London County Council would have, in any case, led him to query orthodox liberal-democratic theory in his way, as the Webbs queried it in theirs, and as dozens of scholars and investigators all over Europe were querying it at the same time. However, the Wallas of 'Human Nature' and the 'Great Society' was no longer a Fabian, except in the sense that all progressive Englishmen interested in social reform were Fabians; and social reform was an increasingly subordinate interest with him. He was, as he had always been, a liberal (in the broadest sense); emphasising 'toleration' perhaps a shade more than 'equality'; 'peace' - for which he fought hard and actively with men like Lowes Dickinson - rather more than the abolition of exploitation; an occasional ally of the Webbs, but chiefly and increasingly, a teacher. He was even doubtful whether he could any longer call himself a socialist.

#### IV:

Like Wallas, Sydney Olivier (1859-1943) came to socialise) as a member of the upper class burning to save his soul through service. It is this, indeed, which linked him with Fabianism, with which otherwise he had little emotional sympathy. There is no doubt of his fervour. "The activity (of socialists)" he wrote in his Fabian Essay, typically enough on the Moral Basis of socialism "is followed because it is seen to be reasonable, because it is the path indicated by common sense towards the satisfaction of the individual passion for the extension of freedom and love",\*\* and throughout his early years we find many echoes of his original Positivism. He had earlier rejected Marx precisely because he appeared to him to underrate the importance of disinterested social dedication, and indeed, by the insistence on the class basis of socialism, to discourage it. Clearly it was this - as well as the usual dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of early socialist tactics - which made Olivier anxious to discover a theory of socialism which would suit people like himself; and, together with his three friends, to formulate it. Yet once the Oxford man had been granted his specific place in the fight for Socialism, Olivier was prepared to make him a strong radical. He was an active member of the revolutionary Social Democratic Federation and a contributor to its paper 'Justice', even while writing his Fabian Essay (which, incidentally, continues to speak of 'social revolution'.) Within the Society he was a consistent supporter of the left; every group of rebels against the 'old gang' from the early '90s to H.G. Wells could normally rely on his active help; especially on imperial questions, for the eminent colonial civil servant was a fire-eating anti-imperialist. For of course if socialism was too big a matter for the proletariat alone, it was also too big to be cramped into Webb's framework of administrative and economic reform. Why did not the Society take a stand against the Boer War? The official Fabian attitude that "we are not well enough informed about the problem, and will arrange a winter course of lectures on it" petrified him.\*\*\*

F.E.148

\*\* F.E.120

\*\*\* Olivier to Pease 20.10.1899 (Fabian Archives)

"Imperialism is...a living power because it represents a sort of primitive avatar of real elementary force; certain very successful methods and discoveries of the low-grade will-to-live...you can't get ahead of a real elementary force except by going better in elementary force yourself. That is what the Liberal Party did once aspire to do and succeeded in doing: that is what Socialism came to the front with and formed, inter alia, the Fabian Society. And if the Society...or the Executive should suppose that the question of this war in South Africa does not concern it, or should fail, after facing it, to come to one particular and definite line of conclusion, it will mean that the dry-rot that has collared the Liberal Party...has also got hold of the Fabian Society, and really there is no further reason for its separate existence".

The outburst is typical of Olivier; the criticism curiously parallel to Wallas'; nor was Olivier answered by being fobbed off as 'always the enfant terrible of the Society, subject to sudden and feverish outbursts, the results doubtless of compulsory restraint in another place'.\* Few Fabians could genuinely share Webb's reaction to the 'slump in socialism', to draw in his horns, and, in the interests of 'practical success' to limit his proposals and plans to a progressively narrow field, until their their connexion with socialism seem - to the outside world - remote. Moreover, of course, Olivier's interests had always been peripheral to Webb's Fabianism. The subjects which he burned to discuss - morality and ethics, 'Socialist Individualism', socialism and the family, foreign trade, art and literature, and above all, colonial problems were mostly those on which the Fabian Society had then no special opinion. He was even heard to cast doubts on the traditional Fabian economic analysis, the 'rent' theory which was the cornerstone of the Society's Basis. Fortunately, however, Olivier's career as a distinguished public servant kept him frequently abroad, and very much out of the active socialist movement after 1890. He therefore did not suffer so violent a depression as other socialists, and retained his connexion with the Society, though resigning from its Executive over South Africa. Certainly he maintained enough buoyancy to welcome H.G. Wells as an ally in the attempt to reform it.

Olivier's smaller articles and lectures, so far as I am aware, contain merely a series of supplements to standard socialist discussion; some of them not peculiar to him; speculations about the disintegration of great towns and the growth of the simple life under socialism, predictions of the supersession of the family, tempered by reminders of the strength of the family instinct and so on. But in the Fabian essay we do detect something of the specifically Olivierian approach, embedded in much that was common ground to all the Essayists except Bland.

\* Bland to Pease 17.10.1899 (Fabian Archives)

Socialism, whatever else it may be is "primarily a property form..... an industrial system for the supply of the material requisites of human social existence." \*

The moral justification of socialism is utilitarian: as a system better able than the existing one to supply the material needs, and to create the conditions for "the realisation in individuals and in the State of the highest morality as yet imagined by us". But morality itself is at bottom social - outside society moral standards cannot exist, inside it, "those actions and habits are approved as moral which tend to preserve the existence of society and the cohesion and convenience of its members" and the other way round. The progress of moral ideas is "the progress of discovery of the most reasonable manner of ordering the life of the individual and the form of social institutions under the contemporary environment". The ideal morality would be one in which the moral would be regarded merely as rational, the immoral as irrational, diseased or insane. Of course among the social forces shaping morality we must count not merely the material desires, but the 'social instincts' without which no society could in any case exist. In fact, therefore, the "intricate tissue of moral consciousness" from which moral decision and action arises is "the recognition by each individual of his dependence on society or sensitiveness to its interest". \*\*

But as society changes (and here Olivier echoes the marxian theme) moralities which were previously socially useful become so merely to a minority which rules the society, no longer to the majority of its members. But precisely at the point where the parallel marxian argument announces: here begins an epoch of revolutions, Olivier, Comtist and Fabian, argues: here begins the re-education of the rulers. This, however, can only be done by and through a change of social institutions. But the social institutions are being changed every day. The factory system, machine industry, etc., have abolished individualist production. Ethics must follow suit. Indeed they do. "The expectation is already justified by the phenomena of contemporary opinion. The moral ideas appropriate to Socialism are permeating the whole of modern society. They are clearly recognisable, not only in the proletariat, but also in the increasing philanthropic activity of the members of the propertied class who, while denouncing Socialism as a dangerous exaggeration of what is necessary for social health, work honestly enough for the alleviatory reforms which converge irresistibly towards it". \*\*

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\* F.E. 103-12.

\*\* F.E. 127

Olivier had arrived where he began in his protest against the "perverse socialism" of the Marxists. The argument, with its semi-positivist background, is very Oliverian; yet it fits easily into the general Fabianism of his colleagues. Perhaps a shade too easily. For, at bottom, the element which kept Wallas and Olivier together with Shaw and Webb was a common faith in the growth of social love as a practical alternative to social revolution, not merely a desirable one; just as the heterogeneous crowd of mid-eighties' socialists had been kept together by a common belief in the imminent end of capitalism. Both were illusions. "When one disappeared, the movement of the 80's broke up. When the other disappeared - or was seriously weakened for several years - the Fabians too tended to break up. What remained for the decade of 1895-1905 was the Webbs, and a small and unimportant group carrying out their personal policy. After 1905 even that came under attack.

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