

KEIR HARDIE

It is said that the Scots are a politically minded race, but the statement requires some qualification. One cannot, of course, escape the remarkable fact that of the eleven men who have held the office of Prime Minister during the past fifty years, six have borne typical Scottish names and have been of more or less pure Scottish descent, and that generally a large and quite disproportionate number of Scotsmen have been prominent in the political life of the country. But that proves no more than that the Scots have a great inclination and aptitude for English party politics, greater, it may even be, than that of the English themselves. It does not prove that they are politically minded in the creative sense. They may be, but the course of history has not allowed them to show it. As things are, the Scotsman who follows a political career must proceed along the lines prescribed by English convention and accept whatever situation the English genius may create, limitations with which as a rule he is perfectly content. There is therefore no specifically Scottish content in his public life.

He does nothing that could not equally well be done by a Welshman or a Jew, or for that matter an Englishman. To this rule there has been only one exception. Keir Hardie made the one specifically Scottish contribution to British politics, and it is worth while noting that it consisted primarily of the destruction of a peculiarly English institution, namely, the Liberal party. Of course, his ostensible ground of attack was the "capitalist" character of Liberalism, but as Keir Hardie was never able to distinguish clearly between "capitalist" and "English", that hardly signifies.

In an oracular aside in *Endymion* Disraeli hinted that when in the fullness of time Labour threw off the yoke of the Whigs, the movement of revolt would originate in the industrial West of Scotland. Actually the first independent Labour member of Parliament was returned by a Metropolitan constituency, and it was in the North of England that the movement first manifested itself as a serious political force. The West of Scotland, though now fervid enough, was the laggard of the movement, and Paisley, which Disraeli specified as the most likely focus of the new spirit, was in fact the last of the constituencies in the area to abandon its tradition of Liberalism. But these appearances are misleading. Disraeli's prediction was substantially right even to the intuition that the movement would originate in the neighbourhood of Glasgow

rather than in Glasgow itself. Keir Hardie, founder of the Labour party, was a native of the Airdrie district. It was as a local agitator that he conceived his project and took the first steps to realise it. The fact would have no significance if Hardie had been an exceptional man, for genius does not take much account of localities. But Hardie was not an exceptional man. He was, despite his own artless opinion to the contrary, a very ordinary man. Even his best gifts were in no way distinguished. In general intelligence and capacity for affairs he was definitely below the average of the Labour politicians of to-day, and that is not inordinately high. His political value consisted mainly in the fact that he was a typical product of his district, and as such peculiarly fitted to be the initial agent in the destruction of the Liberal party. To describe him as the leader of the Labour revolt against Liberalism would be to attribute to him personal qualities that he did not possess. It would be more proper to say that he was the inevitable "incident" upon which the revolt broke out.

The industrial population of the Clyde valley, in so far as it is not Irish, consists largely of the descendants of West Highland immigrants, people of the short, dark, Hebridean race. They are intelligent and expressive, but volatile, deficient in the individual virtues, and highly susceptible to mass emotions. Such are the overwhelming majority of the Scottish inhabitants of Greater

Glasgow. But when one leaves the riverside and penetrates landward of Glasgow into the black country that lies to the south and east, there is a difference. The Irish and the West Highlanders are there in their tens of thousands, but they have not submerged the original population, who belong to a tougher race whose resistive capacity has more than once changed the course of Scottish history. In the south one is in the Wallace country, the cradle of Scottish nationalism; the east was the stronghold of the Covenanters. Of the native stock of the latter district something has already been said in connection with the Rev. James Begg.¹ They are, in the Scots phrase, essentially "thrawn folk". They are, as Scotsmen go, rather slow-witted and of a perverse and fanatical temper. Their most respectable characteristics are tenacity, courage, and a surly kind of honesty.

Hardie's mother, Mary Keir, came of this uncompromising stock. In Glasgow, where she was in domestic service, she met her husband, David Hardie, a Grangemouth man, who had migrated to Glasgow and who sometimes went to sea as a ship's carpenter and sometimes worked ashore as a shipwright. Mary Keir was the dominant partner from the outset. Upon marriage David Hardie was agreeable to leave the riverside, on which his livelihood had hitherto depended, and migrate to his wife's home in the

¹ *Vide* page 71.

Lanarkshire coalfield. Their first child, James Keir, was born at the mining village of Legbrannock near Airdrie on August 15, 1856.

The change of surroundings was not a lucky one, and in the course of the 'sixties David Hardie, having got a good quiverful without receiving any of the corresponding blessings, returned to Glasgow to seek employment in the yards. As work was hard to get and harder still to keep, the life of the Hardie family in Glasgow presented all the usual features of that painful degree of industrial poverty which verges upon but is never suffered to lapse into abject misery. James, of course, at an early age had to go out to work as an errand boy. There is a Dickensian story of one of his employers, a prosperous and godly baker, who held the accepted view—having no doubt some hard experience to back it—that all errand boys were sons of Belial. One morning, owing to sickness in the home, young Jamie Hardie arrived at the shop late and breakfastless. He was at once haled to his master's parlour—for the good man lived above the shop—to be admonished. The family had just sat down to breakfast, and the smell of eggs and bacon and "baps"—most delicious and indigestible triumph of Scotch bakership—fresh and fragrant from the oven pierced the very soul of the hungry lad. But through the sweet savours came the acrid voice of his master. "Ay, here ye come at lang last. A thocht ye'd maybe forgot us. A'm sure

we're muckle obleeged to yer lordship. But we're daein' fine, thank ye. Mphm. And we could dae fine if we niver saw ye again. . . . Haud yer tongue! Wid ye stan' there and tell me lees tae ma face? A ken yous and the likes o' yous—fine A ken ye. Ye're hert lazy, that's whit ye are. Awa' tae yer wark and thank yer Maker ye hae wark tae gang tae. There's no mony wid gie ye the chance. But min' ye, the next time ye're a meenute behind, it's the kick for you, ma mannie, and nae pey. . . . The impident wee keelie!"

Of course Jamie Hardie offended again before very long and lost his job and a week's wages. His master was a man of his word, whom no tears or entreaties could move in a matter of "principle" to the extent of a hair's breadth, much less to the extent of four shillings and sixpence. There is no occasion to blame him, or to call the religious professions we are told he made hypocrisy. He was simply working according to a rule of thumb which thousands of quite decent men, with their living to get, feel they dare not disobey in any circumstances. But the victims cannot be expected to see it in that light. Incidents like Jamie's dismissal from the baker's shop were painfully familiar to his parents. David Hardie brooded over them, took to reading Tom Paine and Bradlaugh and became a cantankerous freethinker. Mary Hardie also had her thoughts while at her endless toil. She

had no use for her husband's feckless contentiousness on the subject, but she shared his views to the extent of renouncing formal religion—a very remarkable thing in a well-doing working woman of her generation and upbringing. Henceforward no minister, missionary, elder or other emissary of orthodoxy dared cross the Hardie threshold.

At last David Hardie, finding it impossible to get steady employment in the yards, went to sea again, and his family went back to the Airdrie district. The boys got employment in the pits. Graduating from pony-driver to coal-hewer, James worked as a miner through the bad years that fell upon the coal industry in the later 'seventies. Wages, which had been grotesquely inflated during the "boom" that followed the Franco-Prussian war, were now depressed to a starvation level, and there was unrest and agitation in every coalfield. In Lanarkshire conditions were peculiarly bad. The men were powerless for lack of organisation, for their union had collapsed entirely under the financial stress. The coal-owners had no wish to see it revived. Pit managers kept their eyes and ears open, and weeded out without mercy any man who showed speech-making proclivities. Young Keir Hardie soon made himself obnoxious in this respect, with the result that one morning, when he and his brothers were about to descend, they were ordered out of the cage with the

intimation that the management would have "nae damned Hardies in the pit". It proved to be a short-sighted piece of victimisation, for it turned Hardie into a professional agitator. He never worked as a miner again. Removing to Cadzow, he set up in a very small way as a tobacconist and newsagent. Thanks to his mother's constant urgings he had educated himself fairly well for a miner of those days and had learned shorthand. He was thus able to add slightly to his income by acting as Coatbridge and Airdrie correspondent to the *Glasgow Weekly Mail*. The few shillings that he got weekly by his journalistic work were the least part of its importance to him. The *Weekly Mail* belonged to the late Sir Charles Cameron, then and for many years afterwards one of the Glasgow Liberal members of Parliament. It was a stoutly Radical organ, closely packed with crime and local news and enjoying an immense circulation among the working classes of the West. Sabbatarian Scotland not permitting of that evil thing a "Sunday" paper, this purveyor of information and sensation was religiously published on Saturday, but it was on the Sunday that the working man found time to read it as he lay in bed—whence it acquired its nickname of "The Working Man's Bible". The working man himself called it simply the "bluidy *Mail*".

In a big industrial centre like Coatbridge,

therefore, the local correspondent of the *Weekly Mail* was a man of some consequence in working-class estimation. And though it was journalism of the humblest order, it taught Hardie something of the art of news-gathering and gave him facility with his pen. He had a real aptitude for work of the kind, and in the propaganda journalism that he later pursued to the end of his life, though he never wrote anything worth remembering, he was always competent, readable, even lively.

It is well to be quite clear about Keir Hardie's state of mind at this point in his career, for only too easily false deductions may be made from the domestic circumstances of his childhood. His parents' poverty and their anti-religious opinions seem to be perfect conditions for the manufacture of a Socialist pioneer. But in his early days as a trade union official Keir Hardie was not a Socialist. His bitter experiences in Glasgow, where the grim spectre of unemployment constantly brooded over the home, had not filled his young mind with the stern resolve to discover the cause of it all. As a pit worker he had not spent his scanty leisure poring over Marx and learning all about capitalism, surplus value, over-production and the materialist interpretation of history. When afterwards he did turn Socialist his text-books were *News from Nowhere*, *Unto this Last*, and the poems of Robert Burns. He may in later years have dipped into *Das*

Kapital as a professing Christian dips into the Bible; but as for understanding it, that was a feat beyond his intellectual strength, and there is no reason to believe that he ever attempted it. Keir Hardie was fond of books—a trait that he inherited from his mother—but his preferences, though eminently respectable, ran in the direction of “soft” reading—romantic poetry, romantic history and romantic economics.

Also, be it noted, he read the Bible—not to get propaganda out of it, but for his soul’s health. For the curious fact is that, in spite of his parents’ scepticism, he lived and died a devout believer. When he was seventeen the Moody and Sankey Mission arrived, evoking an outburst of religious enthusiasm in the West of Scotland, especially among young men, that endured at fever heat for several years. In due course Keir Hardie succumbed to the general influence and became “converted”. His choice of a denominational connection—for of course he had none through his parents—was interesting and significant. He became a Morisonian. This sect (now merged in the Congregational Union of Scotland) had been founded early in the ’forties by the Rev. James Morison, a young man of considerable talent and learning and most lovable personality, who was deposed from the ministry of the Secession Church for preaching the Gospel in a fashion that was deemed to be Arminian, and therefore heretical according to the Westminster

Confession of Faith. From small beginnings the Evangelical Union (as it was officially called) grew and flourished in a modest way chiefly in the West of Scotland. By orthodox Presbyterians it was regarded with benevolent contempt. Morisonians were spoken of with a slight pursing of the lips as "moral" and "worthy" people, the implied reservation being that the spiritual condition of those who repudiated the doctrine of election and predestination was more than questionable, no matter how Christian might appear their behaviour. This attitude of superior toleration was preserved by those within the fold even when Arminianism had become a commonplace of the Presbyterian pulpit, the reason being that at bottom it was not doctrinal at all but social and traditional. The Morisonians were mostly humble folk, and they had abandoned the Presbyterian order for "independency", a thing that, according to Scottish standards, is peculiarly deplorable inasmuch as, unlike prelacy, it is practised by people who ought to know better. Keir Hardie's reasons for joining the sect are obvious enough. For one thing he was constitutionally a dissenter. He liked being in a minority, and the smaller the minority the better he liked it. For another thing, though he had given up his parents' unbelief, the sentiment of his upbringing remained in the form of an antipathy to Presbyterianism as the religion of the "bosses", which it undoubtedly was. But

the main reason was that Hardie was a very simple, sincere and devout soul. He had been "saved" on the basis of God's free grace to all mankind through the death of Christ, and naturally he preferred to be associated with those who gave that doctrine the central place in their creed and were not, like Presbyterians, obliged to apologise for mentioning it. As a corollary to his church connection he became a Good Templar, a zealous advocacy of total abstinence from liquor being regarded as one of the essential activities of a redeemed soul.

It is important to understand the character of Keir Hardie's religious beliefs, for they are the clue to the origins of his political creed. Generally speaking it may be said that the Moody and Sankey revival was bad for the social conscience in the industrial West. It gave the middle classes, who were powerfully affected by it, a very religious excuse for ignoring the problem of industrial poverty in the sense of applying their intelligence to it, though there was no lack of fussy and sterile philanthropy. For if you really believe that those who are not "saved" will inevitably go to a ghastly and eternal doom, and if at the same time you believe that salvation is to be had for the asking, it becomes your supreme duty to see that as many as possible of your fellow-men are made aware of the Almighty's handsome offer. Nothing else will matter much by the side of this fatal opportunity. You will

not be moved by the nakedness and hunger of your neighbour except in so far as these, being presumptive evidence of sin, prompt you to inquire into the state of his soul. You will give him an old suit of clothes and a plain but wholesome meal, not primarily because his body is cold and hungry, but because if you don't he will probably go away and sin some more, possibly to his soul's damnation. True, you may deplore his poverty, but it will not suggest to you any general problem or self-questioning. You will reason quite correctly—especially if your logic is supported by a comfortable income—that poverty at the worst is only a temporary inconvenience, of no great consequence when compared with the unalterable everlasting issue of sin and salvation. This was the perfectly respectable (as it then seemed) attitude of many wealthy Glasgow men, who spent large sums of money and did not spare themselves great personal inconvenience in order that the poor might have the Gospel preached to them. But one who was himself a poor man, especially one in Keir Hardie's position, was bound to extract a very different philosophy from the doctrine of free salvation. He was bound to interpret the temporal by analogy with the eternal. If it were true, as the Calvinists taught, that Christ died only for the elect, inequality and privilege were inherent in the order of Divine Providence, and man must accept his destiny here and hereafter,

world without end, Amen. But if the Calvinists were wrong, if, as Keir Hardie with all the earnestness of his earnest nature believed, Christ died for the whole of Adam's race, the case for privilege and inequality disappeared. For if God has given His Eternal Gift to the many, why should it be supposed that He has reserved His temporal blessings for the few?

That Keir Hardie reasoned out his position so abstractly and briefly is improbable; but there is no doubt that some such naïve *reductio ad absurdum* represents the process by which he gradually reached the conclusion that men have their material as well as their spiritual salvation within their power, and that nothing stands between them and the enjoyment of God's mercies in either kind but their own perverse will to perdition. Conversion is indicated in both cases. Any doubts Hardie may have had about the legitimacy of the conclusion were removed by Ruskin. It is interesting to note in passing that a young Free Church probationer, Henry Drummond, who also accepted with his whole heart the neo-evangelical theology and who was engaged in home mission work in Glasgow when Keir Hardie was organising miners in Lanarkshire, found his thought moving in precisely the opposite direction—not deducing an earthly paradise from his faith, but building up his Heaven by induction from earthly analogies of doubtful character. It was a case of two

points careering round a circle in reverse ways. Ultimately they coincided. Drummond before he died found himself committed to the Socialist position. Some years elapsed before Hardie's views crystallised sufficiently to enable him to proclaim himself a Socialist, and even then they did not seem to him to constitute any reason for ceasing to describe himself as a Radical supporter of the Liberal party. The break with Liberalism, when it did come, was due to purely personal considerations that developed in the later 'eighties.

During the ten years that intervened, the name of Keir Hardie became familiar to the public. Shortly after he settled at Cadzow, the coal-owners announced a further reduction of wages. The miners decided that they must fight, and Hardie, whose little shop had become the focus of the agitation in Lanarkshire, was appointed agent. The stoppage that followed did not last long. The men were beaten. But it was agreed that Hardie had done his work well, and the reputation he had acquired brought him an invitation from the Ayrshire miners which induced him to leave Cadzow for Old Cumnock, the village that was his home for the rest of his life. His migration to Ayrshire was quickly signalised by the "tattie strike" of 1881, so called because the strikers, having no union and no funds, had to subsist on potatoes supplied by the charity of the local shopkeepers and farmers. On these scanty rations, plentifully

seasoned with the earnest and sometimes impressive exhortations of their leader, they stuck it out for ten weeks. A glorious August morning and the strains of a brass band had heartened them for the struggle, and "the smiling of fortune beguiling" in the guise of an exceptionally fine autumn encouraged them to continue it. But the stars were against them. A prolonged diet of potatoes is a poor provision against a Scotch November, and with the approach of winter the strike collapsed. Hardly had the pits been restarted when a sudden improvement in trade set in which caused the owners to raise wages. The men were jubilant. It was no use telling them that they were sharing in the general prosperity of the industry. They were convinced that the state of trade had nothing to do with it: Keir Hardie and the strike had done it by putting the fear of the Lord into the hearts of the bosses. The task of organising a union, therefore, which occupied the agent for the next few years, was begun under happy auspices.

How Hardie lived during his early days in Ayrshire is a mystery which even his official biographer has been unable to fathom. Frugal and self-denying as he was, it is difficult to conceive how he and his wife—for he married on settling at Old Cumnock—could subsist on the small and irregular payments he got as miners' agent. After a year or two, however, his position improved. He became factotum to the *Cumnock*

News, and that led to a connection with its parent newspaper, the *Ardrossan Herald*, a Liberal organ of considerable influence in North Ayrshire. With the full approval of his employer, an enthusiastic Gladstonian, he took an active part in local Radical politics. By the end of the year 1886 Mr. Keir Hardie felt justified in taking himself seriously. He was making a modest but steady income as a journalist, and he and his employer were on terms of mutual esteem. He was known as an earnest and godly young married man with a growing family. His position as a Labour leader was considerable. He was not only secretary to the Ayrshire Miners' Union, but secretary to the inchoate Scottish Miners' Federation. In the Cumnock district he had become a local hero.

Becoming a hero, even a local one, involves a spiritual change. One sees things in a light not vouchsafed in pre-heroic days. Notions that for long have maintained a shadowy and questionable existence as dreams and grumbles suddenly acquire a solid and respectable standing in one's scheme of life. So it was with Keir Hardie. The Reform Act of 1885 had inspired him with a dream about the political status of the working classes, and also with a grumble about the Liberal party. The industrial workers, being now enfranchised in the counties as well as in the boroughs, were in a position to dominate national politics, if only they would put forth their strength

as the middle classes had done after 1832 with results very beneficial to their own interests. Now it was the working classes' turn. To vote was not enough: they must get into Parliament as well. It was true that of recent years the Liberal party in the House of Commons had included a number of "Labour" Radicals like George Odger, Thomas Burt, Henry Broadhurst and Alexander Macdonald, but the party authorities were inclined to be stingy in the matter of Labour representation and would give away no more than they could help. Scotland had no share in the meagre allowance. Even Macdonald, a Lanarkshire miner from Keir Hardie's own district, had sat for an English borough. In Keir Hardie's view, what the Liberal party needed was a Radical "revival", and, having regard to his local success as a Labour leader, he saw no reason why he should not start it himself, with Ruskinian socialism as the special evangel of the movement. At the moment it happened that a real Liberal candidate was wanted for North Ayrshire. The sitting member, the Hon. H. F. Eliot, who had been elected as a Liberal in 1885, had gone Unionist, and the distracted condition of the party had operated to give him an unopposed return in 1886. But a Gladstonian candidate was to be put in the field at the next election. In these circumstances the name of Mr. James Keir Hardie, journalist, of Old Cumnock, was put before the Liberal Association

with a demand that he should be adopted as their candidate. The proposal was not well received.

It is the quality of Englishmen that they can be serious without being unseasonable. They have a sense of objective situation and can bide their time. Among Scotsmen it is a comparatively rare gift—rare enough, indeed, to make it a constant source of wonder how they ever acquired their reputation for shrewdness.¹ Like the Frenchman, the Scot when he is very much in earnest about anything sees it *sub specie aeternitatis*, sheathed in timeless logic, supreme over all temporal considerations, and any divergence from his view on the part of other people is put down, not to lack of appreciation—for that is inconceivable—but to interested motives. He becomes resentful, querulous, even vindictive. This unhappy temper has been the bane of Scottish ecclesiastical politics. Just a little common sense would have told Keir Hardie that he had chosen the worst possible moment for pressing his claims. The Liberal party, staggering under the weight of an Irish policy that threatened to crush it, was not likely to listen to a proposal that it should carry a little Labour socialism as well. Nor was the mood of “Labour” itself favourable, for the working classes were inflamed by sectarian passion, and in the West of Scotland in particular had been

¹ An exception must be made in favour of the Aberdonian, whose psychology in this as in other respects is by far the most “English” in Scotland.

stampeded by the Unionist cry of "Home Rule means Rome rule".

To all such considerations Hardie was blind, and he had the additional affliction of a very aggressive "inferiority complex". His failure to get the Liberal nomination suggested to him nothing but a middle-class objection to working men in Parliament, and the fact that the person preferred to him was an affluent baronet was not calculated to modify his view or improve his temper. He was put into that dire frame of mind that drives Scotsmen to seek consolation from the only approach to a bad poem that Burns ever wrote :

For a' that and a' that,
Their dignities and a' that,
The pith o' sense and pride o' worth
Are higher ranks than a' that.

As a delegate to the Trade Union Congress of 1887 he took the opportunity of saying what he thought about the direction of the Liberal party. But although he now proclaimed himself a Socialist and delivered a heated attack on Broadhurst, he did not profess to be anything more than a disgruntled Radical who wanted to see a powerful Labour "cave" in the Liberal party. The idea of Labour representation independent of Liberalism had not then occurred to him, and it might never have occurred to him but for Mr. Schnadhorst's little blunder in the following year.

For in 1888, while he was still smarting from his rebuff at the hands of the North Ayrshire Liberals, the representation of his native constituency, Mid-Lanark, was vacated by the resignation of Mr. Stephen Mason, a member of the advanced Radical wing of his party. A hint of Mr. Mason's resignation had reached a much respected Glasgow Irishman (afterwards for many years a Nationalist M.P.) who was keenly interested in Labour representation. This gentleman at once telegraphed for Mr. Cunninghame Graham, who then sat for the North-West Division of Lanarkshire as a Labour Liberal. Mr. Cunninghame Graham hurried to Glasgow, and steps were at once taken to secure the Liberal nomination for Keir Hardie. Keir Hardie sent in his application to the Liberal Association. It was a very civil statement of his eminent qualifications—he was “a lifelong Liberal”, “a staunch Home Ruler” and all the rest of it. Unfortunately, although no formal decision had been taken, the Mid-Lanark Liberal Association were already committed to the Whips' nominee, Captain Sinclair (afterwards Lord Pentland). In addition Sir Charles Cameron's organs, the *North British Daily Mail* and the *Weekly Mail*, were strongly pressing the claims of a third person. But Keir Hardie was not disposed to quit the field. His view of the situation was expressed in *The Miner*, a little propaganda journal he had established at Old Cumnock on his own account. “Much

depends", he wrote, "on the position taken up by the Liberal Association. It may or may not select a Labour candidate. In either case, my advice would be that the Labour candidate should be put forward. Better split the party now, if there is to be a split, than at a General Election, *and if the Labour party only make their power felt now, terms will not be wanting when the General Election comes.*" These words admit of no misunderstanding. The Liberal party was to be forced into making a deal.

Keir Hardie's backers, however, did not take the situation so light-heartedly. A split vote was a serious matter to be avoided, if possible. At this juncture Henry Drummond intervened with a proposal for a round-table conference at his house, which was accepted. The negotiators were Drummond, Lady Aberdeen, Captain Sinclair, Mr. Cunninghame Graham and his Irish friend. Keir Hardie apparently was not invited. After some discussion Captain Sinclair agreed not to press his official claim. The various branch associations were to be allowed a free hand. The way now seemed clear for Hardie, for it was generally agreed that the *Mail's* nominee had no chance. And then the unexpected happened. A rank outsider appeared in the shape of a young Welsh barrister, Philipps by name in those days but now Lord St. Davids, who brought confusion upon the well-laid scheme. Mr. Philipps, with the persuasiveness of his race, stampeded the Mid-Lanark Liberals and secured the nomination

over Keir Hardie and the newspaper nominee, Mr. Macliver.

Keir Hardie was chagrined beyond expression. He began to see red. He would go to the poll in any event. His determination to that effect was sealed by the arrival of £400 towards his election expenses from a well-meaning body that called itself the Labour Electoral Association. T. R. Threlfall, the Association's secretary, came into the constituency to lend his aid, and also, it may be surmised, to keep an eye on the disbursements. Lying in wait for him were Mr. Schnadhorst, Sir G. O. Trevelyan and Mr. C. A. V. Conybeare, with proposals for a deal. After some hours' haggling the terms upon which the Labour candidate was to be withdrawn were agreed. The subsequent interview in which Keir Hardie was apprised of the bargain was so unpleasant that within a few hours poor Mr. Threlfall had fled across the Border never to return. Mr. Schnadhorst tried next, but Keir Hardie wrathfully refused to meet him. Eventually, however, he was persuaded to see Sir George Trevelyan, whose urbanity mollified his manners but did not abate his resentment at the affront he conceived to have been put upon him. The offer of a seat at the General Election and a very decent little salary out of the party funds was rejected as "offensive".

A harder trafficker in human nature than Sir George would have taken the proper measure

of the situation. He would have seen that the uncouth, frowning, rather stupid young man who confronted him was impossible to bargain with at that moment. Sweet reasonableness, such as Sir George purveyed, was wasted on one who, being neither sweet nor reasonable himself, and having had little experience of either quality in others at the pithead, inferred nothing but a design on the part of "English swells" to diddle Scotch working men in general and Jamie Keir Hardie in particular. Well, he would teach them the lesson of Bannockburn over again in Mid-Lanark. They would soon enough sue for peace. With a man of this type, especially one who has a colliers' brass band inside his head braying "Scots wha hae", discussion is out of the question. He is probably dangerous, and the only safe course is to let him have his own way. It is a mistake to anticipate that he will take advantage of a concession to make fresh demands. He is not at all selfish, or even self-seeking, but he is self-centred, and the point at issue, which to you may seem trivial, is to him a point of honour. Once honour is satisfied he is liable to become quite manageable. If circumstances compel you to deny him, do not let the matter end there. At the earliest opportunity put on hypocritical sackcloth and ashes and you will be forgiven. On no account leave him any occasion to regret his obstinacy; for according to his canons of reasoning the event

that proves him a fool proves you a knave, and so he will spend the rest of his life planning mischief against you.

The Liberal party failed to realise these useful truths. They could not, of course, withdraw the adopted candidate, nor did Keir Hardie expect them to. But he left Sir George Trevelyan's presence full of confidence and valour, being persuaded that as soon as the election was over negotiations would be reopened, and that there was nothing to be lost and much to be gained by a demonstration at the poll. There was a remote possibility that he might be returned. More probably he would split the Liberal vote sufficiently to give the seat to the Unionist. In any case he would get enough support to teach the English mandarins the meaning of *Nemo me impune lacessit*. There he judged badly. To carry out his scheme he needed the Irish vote, or a substantial part of it, but his efforts in that direction were in vain. The Irish miners were not going to give away a Home Rule seat simply because some Scotsmen were at odds with official Liberalism. Mr. Philipps was returned, and Keir Hardie was at the bottom of the poll with less than 700 votes. The Liberal party felt that such a result did not call for further action. A little reflection, a little analysis of the figures would have shown them their error. Allowance being made for the heavy Irish vote which swelled the Liberal poll, it would have been

found that, without any organisation to help him, Keir Hardie detached 20 per cent of the native Liberal vote, and that his 600 odd represented the main body of the non-Irish miner electors.

Immediately after the Mid-Lanark by-election Keir Hardie got a few sympathisers to meet in Glasgow and form a Scottish Labour party. The new body professed Socialist principles, but its inspiration was nationalistic. There is no reason to regard it in its inception as anything but part of the simple plan for forcing the hand of the Liberal party authorities which a few weeks before Keir Hardie had outlined in *The Miner*. Formerly, however, his idea had been to carry on the agitation through the medium of the Labour Electoral Association, but, as we have seen, his subsequent experience of that body had not been to his liking and had deepened his distrust of all things English. He was now convinced that Scottish Labour interests would continue to be neglected unless they were pressed by a militant Scottish organisation free of English entanglements. Unfortunately the *personnel* of the new organisation was feeble. Mr. Cunninghame Graham, it is true, was a member. His presence added picturesqueness, but was not calculated to impress anybody with the representative character of the Scottish Labour party. As a political manœuvre the party was an abject failure. It evoked no

response from the Liberal headquarters. Keir Hardie waited in vain for a new offer of terms, and his sense of grievance deepened with every day that passed. He became angry and abusive. "The newly enfranchised workers", he wrote, "are being used for selfish purposes by those who are more intelligent than themselves." That seemed to him to be the only possible inference from the facts of his recent experience. Here was he, secretary to the Scottish Miners' Federation, and admittedly entitled to express the sentiment of a large body of working-class electors. He had made a demand, a very reasonable demand, for some Parliamentary representation of Scottish Labour, which, for all their democratic professions, the Liberal party treated with contempt. When they thought Mid-Lanark was in danger they had tried to buy him off with promises and fine words, but once the danger was past they had no more interest in him. That the Liberal party contained many good Radicals and sincere democrats he was willing to admit, but what could they do so long as the direction of the party remained a close oligarchy that jealously maintained the Whig tradition of government by a ruling class? The workers might try to capture the party, but they would fail because their simplicity was no match for the secular cunning of the Whigs. The only way was to raze the edifice to the ground and build up a really democratic party in its place.

Hardie would probably have arrived at the same conclusion even if he had never heard of Socialism; but if confirmation were needed, Socialism to his mind provided it. What was his unhappy personal experience of Liberal duplicity but an example of the impossibility of co-operation between the workers and a *bourgeois* party?

From the year 1889, when he went to Paris to take part in the foundation of the Second International, Hardie was a fully-fledged Socialist waging inexorable war against the Liberal party. But it was no part of his plan in those early days to take the Red bonnets over the Border. The Scottish Labour party was conceived, not as the nucleus of a British Labour party, but as a movement for the emancipation of Scotland from the tyranny of English political ideas as expressed in Liberalism. Like all anti-English movements in Scotland, it was obliged to look to the Continent for its ideas. Hence the aggressive Socialism that it preached from the beginning. The same phenomenon is being repeated to-day on an even more striking scale. The Labour party having become an English institution, the patriotic fervour of Clydeside now runs in Communist channels, for no purpose but to assert the national differentia.

It was well for Keir Hardie—whether it was to the advantage of British politics is another question—that he was not permitted to continue

in the political career he had planned for himself, which consisted of perambulating Scotland with the Red flag in one hand and the "blue blanket" in the other. His fellow-countrymen were deplorably apathetic. No Scottish constituency seemed to feel that Mr. Cunninghame Graham needed his or anybody else's company at Westminster. When at the General Election of 1892 this Scottish patriot and sworn foe of Liberalism did get into Parliament, it was for a London constituency and with the support of a Liberal party organisation. There was a "cave" of South-West Ham Radicals who were not satisfied that the official Liberal candidate shared their enthusiasm for the economics of Henry George. Why they should have thought of Keir Hardie as a suitable person to explain the beauties of the Single-tax to the West Ham electors does not appear, but choose him they did. He travelled from Old Cumnock to South-West Ham comforted by the assurance that he was practically certain to keep the Liberal out. As it happened, the Liberal did not need any keeping out. He went out flatly and finally in the middle of the campaign by dying. Keir Hardie, in the language of the day, was on velvet. The local Liberals, being unable to put a new candidate in the field with any chance of success, had no option but to concentrate on the "Labour" candidate, who at least could be relied upon to go into the Liberal lobby on all vital occasions. The result was the celebrated

bit of clowning by which the member for South-West Ham saw fit to advertise his arrival at Westminster. Wearing a cap instead of his customary bowler, he drove up in a two-horse charabanc with a bugler on the box. And is it not written of those who disfigure their faces and sound a trumpet before them that they have their reward? Keir Hardie certainly had it. He was seen of men and newspaper reporters, and caused quite a number of old ladies to pass a sleepless night. He was utterly ravished by his new importance, and assumed the air he deemed appropriate to a Man of Destiny. His vision splendid was no longer bounded by the Scottish horizon. It was right that the salvation should be preached to the Scot first, but had not the oppressed wage-slaves of England cried to him to come over and help them? The Scottish Labour party must be enlarged into an independent Labour party of Great Britain.

And so at a conference held at Bradford in 1893 the I.L.P. was born. Keir Hardie was not by any means its only begetter, but being its sole representative in Parliament and editor of its official organ, the *Labour Leader*, he enjoyed most of the honour of paternity. As chairman of the party for the first seven years of its existence he prescribed a policy for it which had at least the virtue of simplicity, viz. to preach Socialism all the time and to annoy the Liberals whenever opportunity offered. The former business was

transacted very diligently and not without effect at street corners. The Socialism was not always good Socialism, but there was no mistake about the uncton with which it was delivered. Keir Hardie saw to that. His own exhortations were much admired and set the standard for his disciples. The quality of his prophetic gift may be judged from the following words addressed to the electors of Merthyr Tydvil :

What is Socialism? It is the return to that kindly phase of life in which there shall be no selfish lust for gold, with every man trampling down his neighbour in his mad rush to get most. Socialism is the reign of human love in room of hate. Socialism means that the land of Wales will again belong to its people. Who made the land private property? Who but the robber band who crossed the marches, plundering, burning and slaying as they went, leaving a trail of red blood and black woe to mark their track as they despoiled a high-souled people of land and liberty? And shall the people of Wales tamely submit to see the land of their fathers remain for ever in the hands of the spoiler? Socialism says no. The first birthright of a free people is to own the land on which they live and from which they draw their food.

Socialism says that in addition to the land, the pits and railways and docks and ironworks and steelworks and tinworks should also all belong to the people and not to a few only. If this were the case, there would be no poverty nor slums, nor half-starved children nor aged poor, nor heart-broken mothers in Wales; nor do I think there would be any drunkenness in Wales; and the ugliness and squalor which meet you at every turn in some of the most beautiful valleys in the world would disappear, the rivers would run pure and clear as they did of yore, and woods would again cover the mountain sides in which

many birds would make sweet melody, whilst in spring the lambkins would sport on the lea, and in the summer the full-uddered kine would come home lowing in the gloaming; and in winter the log would glow on the fire the while that the youths and maidens made glad the heart with mirth and song, and there would be beauty and joy everywhere, for men would be living as brothers in unity and not tearing each other like beasts of prey.

From which it appears that the speaker was acquainted with the works of the Ettrick Shepherd, David of Israel, Lord Macaulay, Dr. Watts, Mr. Ira D. Sankey and other romantic poets. In 1900 the electors of Merthyr showed their appreciation of such brave words by sending him back to the House of Commons, from which the fickleness of West Ham had exiled him since 1895.

The other and more spectacular department of I.L.P. activity consisted in queering the Liberal pitch at by-elections by putting up candidates who could not possibly get in themselves but would probably succeed in their real objective of keeping the Liberal out. The wisdom of the policy was sometimes questioned even by Hardie's most earnest supporters, but he insisted upon it. As Mr. Squeers remarked when he thrashed Smike in the hackney cab, it was inconvenient but satisfying. The Liberal newspapers protested, at first angrily with suggestions of "Tory gold", and then, when that came to look silly, with tearful argumentation about the folly of what they called "splitting the Progressive vote".

Keir Hardie didn't care what they said. He knew that he was not to be bought by gold, either Tory or Liberal, and as for splitting the Progressive vote, that was exactly what he intended, because he believed it to be the only way of liberating democracy from the unconscionable tyranny of the Whigs. The new party of progress must represent a clean break with the Whig tradition, a repudiation of the bad old past and a steadfast outlook on the glorious future. The future, as William James has observed, has a great attraction for idealistic minds because it is a "soft option". Keir Hardie wallowed in soft options. The past has the awkward character of being real, a cruel agglomeration of hard lacerating facts, which soft minds like Hardie's have always sought to belie by the pretence that only the recent past is bad, and if you could only cut it out and short-circuit the present with the remoter ages all would be well for the future.

Fortunately for Labour there were a number of men who, having some glimmerings of political sagacity and political insight, realised that the movement needed something more than the mixture of rancour and unctiousness supplied by Keir Hardie and the I.L.P. To keep Liberals out might be good, but to get Labour men in would be better. A severely business-like organisation called the Labour Representation Committee was set up, and things began to move. Within a few years the Parliamentary Labour party had come

into being—a body very different in temper and outlook from the creature of Keir Hardie's dreams. For auld lang syne he was permitted to lead it for a session; then gently, slowly, but irresistibly, he was propelled towards the shelf. In his heart of hearts he knew what was happening, but his natural vanity enabled him to bear it. Parliament, he freely admitted, was not his *métier*, for what prophetic soul could function under its petty limitations? Of his prophetic vocation he had not a shadow of doubt, and his practical-minded English colleagues were only too anxious to encourage an illusion that pleased him and allowed them to get on with the job. He was at great pains to look the part. In 1906, when the Labour party "arrived", he was barely fifty, but by cultivating his hair and beard—there is much prophetic virtue in a beard—he contrived to give the impression of sixty-five. The tweed cap of 1892 had been discarded in favour of a broad-brimmed sombrero. He wore a flowing tie and smoked a corn-cob pipe. The result was a tasteful human composition featuring Lord Tennyson, William Morris, Walt Whitman, Elijah the Tishbite, Sir Hall Caine, and (though it rather spoiled the general effect) a certain Scotsman named James Keir Hardie.

O sancta simplicitas that thought to have found the mantle of a proletarian prophet in the cast-off rags of Victorian Bohemia! *O sancta simplicitas*

that, with slow but fell loquacity, unexampled dullness and great audibility, sought to rouse the House of Commons to the urgency of building Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land! *O sancta simplicitas* that could imagine hard-headed Englishmen shedding the political wisdom of centuries at the bidding of a bumptious woolly-witted Scotch collier who seemed to have been specially created by Providence to confirm the fine old English tradition that Scotsmen have no sense of humour! *O sancta simplicitas* of the young lady of Riga!

The initial trouble with Keir Hardie was that he had been brought up in the superstition, still widely held north of the Tweed, that almost any Scotsman is superior to every Englishman whatsoever in intellect, morals and spirituality. As the average Scotsman's acquaintance with the English was confined until recent years to commercial travellers, shooting tenants, Parliamentary candidates, and the officers and men of Highland regiments, the error is perhaps excusable. But it is none the less an error, and, to do the Scotsman justice, it is an error of which every Scotsman with any pretensions to common sense disabuses himself before he is many miles over the Border. But common sense Keir Hardie had not, any more than he had the salt and salacious humour by which a merciful Providence has redeemed Scotsmen at large from being the dreariest race of prigs west of Suez. To national conceit he

added the big endowment of personal vanity to which sufficient reference has been made. Sincerity he certainly had, and good intentions, but as his sincerity manifested itself in a petty fanaticism, and his good intentions usually took a spiteful turn, the value of these qualities is subject to a large discount. A genteel taste in reading—"only that and nothing more"—constituted his intellectual equipment for the task of reforming British politics. Altogether it was a sad business, but Providence was not too unkind. The Prophet of Labour was permitted to depart in peace in 1915 in his sixtieth year. He lived to see the Great War, and its bloody proof that the salvation of humanity was not the easy matter that he had been preaching as gospel for thirty years broke his simple heart, and he died. Perhaps it was all for the best in the best of all possible worlds. The Parliamentary Labour party had got beyond his comprehension. Some of its members serenely joined a "Jingo" War Cabinet, drawing their ministerial salaries and grumbling in private about the super-tax like the honest Englishmen they were, while others sate glumly in the wilderness. That was bad—very bad. But at least he died in time to be spared the humiliation of seeing the Whigs, to whose destruction he had devoted his days, taking office in a Labour Government as if it were the most natural thing in the world. *Tamen usque recurrent.*