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THE
LIFE, TIMES, AND LABOURS
OF
ROBERT OWEN

BY
LLOYD JONES

EDITED BY WILLIAM CAIRNS JONES

FOURTH EDITION

LONDON
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1905

SOME OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"This book commemorates two pioneers of Co-operation—Robert Owen and his younger friend and ally, Lloyd Jones. Both were men of great energy and unbroken courage; both were moved to indignation by public wrong, but sanguine of its ultimate redress."—*Manchester Guardian*.

"Those who are interested in the social problems of our day—be their personal attitude towards them what it may—will find the perusal of this clear and temperately written memoir reward their attention; and it is none the less valuable because it shows us so many rocks to be avoided."—*British Weekly*.

"The biography written by the late Mr. Lloyd Jones is at once instructive and helpful, for besides narrating Owen's career, it gives a good review of the entire social history of the years through which the celebrated socialist lived"—*New Era*

"Almost as much is to be learned from Owen's mistakes and failures as from his successes; and Mr. Lloyd Jones' narrative—the narrative of an eye-witness and fellow-labourer—remains, and is likely to remain, the standard authority upon a most interesting and suggestive life, and one of the best sources of information respecting a crucial epoch in the history of British industry"—*Literary World*.

DEDICATED
TO
EDWARD VANSITTART NEALE, Esq.
IN TOKEN OF THE ESTEEM
IN WHICH HE WAS HELD BY THE AUTHOR

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Sketch of the Author.

WHEN the republication of "The Life, Times, and Labours of Robert Owen" was decided upon, it was suggested that if I were to write a short notice of my father, to be prefixed to the work, it might impart to it a slight additional interest, in the eyes of some of its readers in the co-operative movement. I received, at the same time, concerning the character of what I should write, one or two suggestions, of which I have availed myself.

Though the following sketch is not intended to be in any sense biographical, I may state that my father was, as his name implies, of Welsh extraction, being the descendant of a Glamorganshire family. During the Revolution of 1688, an ancestor of his, one Morgan Jones, served under William of Orange as an officer of cavalry, and, after the Battle of the Boyne, settled in Ireland as a stock farmer. In 1798 my grandfather, who was at the time a youth living in Dublin, took part in the insurrection. On the capture of

Lord Edward Fitzgerald, he made his escape to the Wicklow Hills, where a number of the insurgents, gathering head, fought a skirmish with a body of troops by whom they were defeated ; when my grandfather, travelling by night and hiding during the day, made his way farther south. Ultimately he became a small employer of labour, in the fustian-cutting trade, in Bandon, where he married, and where my father was born in the year 1811.

Subsequent to the insurrection, and after settling in Bandon, my grandfather turned Roman Catholic. This was, I believe, to a considerable extent, due to the fact that, living in the midst of an English Protestant settlement, where religious prejudice was, even for that period, unusually strong, he witnessed much that revolted his sense of justice on the one hand and excited his sympathy on the other. In any case, it would appear that, to the last, he remained a steadfast convert to Roman Catholicism. But, though in many people belief, of whatever nature, is the result of early training and association, I imagine that my father must, while very young, have developed tendencies which were unfavourable to an acceptance of many things involved in an adherence to the faith in which he had been educated. I should suppose moreover that my grandfather had none of the narrowness which commonly belongs to converts from one religious faith to another. I take him to have been a very liberal-minded man of good information and reading, as I have heard my father mention that he himself was familiar with the names of many celebrated authors while he was still a child, and long before he read their works. This may have helped to

impart to him that great fondness for books which, as was well known to those who were intimate with him, was one of his chief characteristics.

My father's knowledge of literature was extensive and varied. To many who had intercourse with him, his reading might have appeared to be more or less confined to subjects an acquaintance with which was essential to the part he took as an advocate of political and social reform. But, though he had not the same opportunity of utilising it as he had of utilising information acquired through a study of political, social, and economic questions, perhaps the most remarkable thing in connection with his reading was his knowledge of English poetry, from the earliest writers down to those of the present day. In this branch of literature, his reading had, over a long series of years, been very extensive, insomuch that there was hardly a poet belonging to any period of our history with whom he was unacquainted. His memory was excellent, and it was astonishing with what readiness he would recall passages from some of the oldest and most obscure of our minor poets, even though he might not have looked into their pages for years. I think that few readers excelled him in taste. His judgment was discriminating, and he was not easily betrayed into exaggerated praise, though he had a ready eye and a keen appreciation for beauty of thought and expression. In especial, whatever urged an exalted conception of human duty, or commemorated any example of self-sacrifice, in terms appropriate to the inspirations of genius, never failed to have a powerful effect upon him. I may mention, as a characteristic fact, that one of the last poems he

requested to have read to him was Mrs. Browning's "Mother and Poet."

His disposition was sanguine. The vicissitudes and mischances from which his life was seldom free, would have been sufficient to depress, or even to render discontented and morose, many men of different temperament; but in the presence of misfortune, he seldom failed to maintain a cheerfulness and a hopefulness which very few would have been likely to possess in similar circumstances. This disposition not only supported him in the midst of personal calamity, but also enabled him to carry into the efforts with which his public life was associated an eager enthusiasm and confidence in the success of the principles he advocated; though he was not one who had any faith in the "barren optimistic sophistries of comfortable moles."

Notwithstanding his antipathies were sometimes strong, he was by nature unsuspecting and trusting to an extent which, as I think, more than once led to his being too readily deceived in the characters and motives of those with whom he had intercourse. In the absence of some very convincing proof of insincerity, he was apt to place unreserved confidence in the professions of those who were interested in whatever cause he had most at heart; and, though he would sometimes express, in unmistakable terms, disapprobation of the proceedings of men with whom he was brought into contact, anything approaching to a steady and rooted distrust, even in cases where many might have considered such a feeling prudent and justifiable, was almost impossible to him. I have often thought that in judging of men, he was, as a

rule, disposed to make insufficient allowance for the vanity and self-interest by which their conduct was likely to be influenced. But even had he, in this respect, been more incredulous than he was, it could not have destroyed his belief in the accomplishment of some good purpose, in the midst of all that could tend to discourage such a belief. In consequence of an unfortunate inability on my own part to altogether share this hope, I had the more frequent opportunity of hearing him repudiate the opposite view. I have spoken of his love for the poets. One of his chief favourites, among those of the present century, was Wordsworth ; and I think this preference was due to Wordsworth's never-failing recognition of the theory that human nature cannot be so degraded but that there exists in every heart the capability of responding to a true and earnest appeal. It was this poet's thorough belief in humanity which attracted him beyond every other quality, for it was with this he most deeply sympathised.

In dealing with the questions in which he took a leading interest, he rarely failed to make allowance for all those circumstances which, in different classes of men, tend to create a divergency in regard to the formation of opinions. If an occasional impatience were visible in his manner, it was due to the earnestness of his character rather than to any want of consideration for the opinions of others, even when these were most at variance with his own. I think I am justified in saying that seldom was his warmest denunciation of principles of which he disapproved, made on the assumption that they were not conscientiously maintained by those whom he sought to con-

fute. He was very slow to attribute unworthy motives to his opponents, and if during his early life, he attacked certain men or classes of men, it was, to judge from all I have heard and read concerning those times, in circumstances of extreme provocation, and in retaliation upon an unscrupulous intolerance which never hesitated to unjustly attack the characters and motives of himself and his associates. Taking into consideration, however, the fact that his name was so often identified with the warfare of important and conflicting interests, the greater part of his career was especially free from misrepresentation ; and it is no more than just to say that it was also free from whatever could have furnished an excuse for calling into question the motives from which he acted. Whenever he was called upon to do so, as happened more than once, he never hesitated to make an upright choice between his own personal advantage and an adherence to principle.

When he decided, during the election of 1886, to become a candidate for Parliament, I undertook to urge upon him the fact that he was about to engage in a contest in connection with which it was a generally accepted theory that men of average conscientiousness in the ordinary affairs of life, might, without censure, avail themselves of the most contemptible methods of securing the triumph of their own faction—that he was about to strive for a victory which was difficult of achievement, and, if gained, not worth having. But he had taken part as an earnest politician in most of the political movements of his time without injury to his own sincerity, and he declined to regard otherwise than as an honour, the privilege of representing a large body of his fellow-countrymen in the

House of Commons. He was, moreover, persuaded that as a member of Parliament he would have a more effective opportunity of advocating the cause of those in whose behalf he had laboured for so many years, and on such a point it was impossible to question the justice of his being entirely guided by his own experience and judgment. At the same time, it is undeniable that, while acknowledging that a too positive assertion of the right of independent thought and action might become both inconvenient and injurious, he was a "party man" only in a sense in which the interests of party are understood to be subordinate to the interests of the nation, and their success consistent with an honourable self-respect on the part of those who seek to secure it.

My father never estimated the possibilities of any cause in which he was interested, by the measure of success which attended his own efforts. Had he been destined to recover from the illness which occasioned his death, there is no reason to doubt that during the years which might have remained to him, he would, in spite of failure and disappointment, have exhibited the same hopefulness and, so long as he retained his health and strength, the same energy that had marked the years through which he had already passed. Once, in reply to an observation I made to him, he read aloud the following passage from the "Sayings of George Eliot," the pages of which he happened to be turning over at the moment:—"The only failure a man ought to fear, is failure in cleaving to the purpose he sees to be best. As to just the amount of result he may see from his particular work—that's a tremendous uncertainty; the universe has not been arranged for

the gratification of his feelings. So long as a man sees and believes in some great good, he'll prefer working towards that in the way he's best fit for, come what may."

These words indicate the principle by which he was guided through long years of labour and trial, and to which he remained constant to the end.

WILLIAM CAIRNS JONES.