ROBERT OWEN

A BIOGRAPHY

By FRANK PODMORE

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WITH FORTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS, . . .
TWO PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES, AND FACSIMILES

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PREFACE

ROBERT OWEN died in 1858. Up to January, 1905, four biographies of him, and four only, had appeared, all in English—the last having been written more than twenty years ago.[1] When, in 1901, I formed the intention of adding another to the list, I was moved less by a sense of the inadequacy of the work of my predecessors, than by my own desire to treat of so congenial a theme. In a word, I made up my mind, as I supposed, to write because I wanted to write. But a subsequent series of coincidences has led me to question whether in following my own pleasure I was not the unconscious instrument of larger forces, and the impulse which I held at the time to be the spontaneous outcome of my own volition part of a wider movement in the world of thought, the existence of which I had scarcely suspected.

[1] *Robert Owen and his Social Philosophy*, by W. L. Sargant, 1860.

Robert Owen . . . the Founder of Socialism in England, by A. J. Booth, M.A., 1869.

Life of Robert Owen, Philadelphia, 1866 (published anonymously, but since acknowledged to be by F. A. Packard).

The Life, Times and Labours of Robert Owen, by Lloyd Jones, first edition (posthumous), 1889. Lloyd Jones died in 1886.

There is also a small pamphlet, *Life and Last Days of Robert Owen*, by G. J. Holyoake, 1859.

For, a few months after I had definitely formulated my own project, I learnt that another Englishman, who subsequently withdrew in my favour, was entertaining the same idea. Again, in the course of 1903, whilst my own work was scarcely begun, I made the acquaintance successively of a German lady, Fraülein Simon, and a Frenchman, M. Edouard Dolléans, who had conceived, about the same time as myself, the idea of writing a biography of the great Socialist.[1] In the previous year, 1902, appeared the first adequate account —for which the world had been content to wait for three-quarters of a century—of Owen's great Communal Experiment at New Harmony.[2] And finally, when the present book was already far advanced, a collection of letters written to or by Owen, which had been lost sight of for more than a generation, was found in a lumber-room and forwarded to the late G. J. Holyoake, by whom it was handed on for safe keeping to the Co-operative Union at Manchester. The timely discovery of this correspondence, of which I have made such use as my opportunities permitted, furnishes a retrospective justification—if further justification is needed—for the project formed five years ago.[3]

[1] Both these lives have already appeared. *Robert Owen: sein Leben und seine Bedeutung für die Gegenwart*, by Helene Simon. Jena, 1905. *Robert Owen*, by Edouard Dolléans. Paris, 1905.

[2] *The New Harmony Communities*, by George Browning Lockwood.

[3] All the letters quoted in the following pages, when no other source is indicated, are in this Collection, which is not yet catalogued. The letters date from the year 1823, and include a few written to or by Owen on his tour in Ireland in that year. From the fact that the letters begin just where the Autobiography leaves off, it seems probable that

Amongst those who have assisted me to obtain information, and have lent or given valuable books and documents, I have to render special thanks to Mr. T. Parry Jones, of Newtown—the place of Owen's birth and of his death—to Mr. William George Black, Professor Earl Barnes, Mr. J. C. Gray, Secretary of the Co-operative Union, Mr. A. Dransfield, of the Working-Men's Institute and Public Library, New Harmony, Indiana, Mrs. Templeton, Mr. William Tebb, Mr. C. Godfrey Gümpel, Mr. C. S. Loch and the Council of the Charity Organisation Society. To other friends I render cordial acknowledgment for help given.

the letters form part of the material collected by Owen in his life-time for the purpose of his Autobiography. I have found only two letters dated before 1823 (both of which are referred to in the following pages), and these evidently owe their preservation to the date, which is very indistinct in each case, having been misread. The Collection includes a bundle containing several hundred letters written by Owen during the last seven or eight years of his life to his personal friend, attendant and factotum, James Rigby. Most of the letters, some 3,000 in all, are docketed by Rigby, but in a few cases the docket is in the handwriting of William Pare.

F. P.

March, 1906.

CONTENTS

VOL. I

CHAPTER I

BOYHOOD

PAGE

Parentage—Description of Newtown—Childish Adventures—His Schooling—Becomes Usher at Seven—His Reading—Acquaintance with James Donne—Helps in a Shop—Journeys to London—Takes Situation at Stamford with Mr. McGuffog—Early Religious Experiences—Takes Situation in London 1

CHAPTER II

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

General Survey—Gradual Rise of Capitalist Industries—Invention of the Spinning-jenny, the Water-frame, the Mule—The Power Loom—Rapid Growth of the Cotton Trade—And of Manchester 24

CHAPTER III

LIFE IN MANCHESTER

Owen takes Situation with Mr. Satterfield—Undertakes the Manufacture of "Mules"—Starts as Employer of Labour on his own account—Is appointed Manager of Mr. Drinkwater's Mills—Leaves Drinkwater and enters New Partnership—Visits Glasgow on Business and Meets Miss Dale—Buys New Lanark Mills—Marriage—Social Life in Manchester—Dr. Percival and the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society—Owen's Contributions to the Society—Partnership with Robert Fulton . . 42

CHAPTER IV

THE FACTORY SYSTEM

PAGE

Evils of Factory Employment—Description by Dr. Aikin—The Manchester Board of Health—The Apprentice System and Child Labour—New Lanark under Dale—The Act of 1802—The Committee of 1816 62

CHAPTER V

NEW LANARK

Description of New Lanark—Of the Inhabitants—Reforms Introduced by Owen—The Silent Monitor—Forms New Partnership in 1809—Again Seeks for New Partners in 1813—Letter to Mrs. Owen—The New Partners—William Allen and Jeremy Bentham—The Sale of the Business—Triumphant Return to New Lanark 80

CHAPTER VI

A NEW VIEW OF SOCIETY

State of Education in England in 1816—Bell and Lancaster—Owen's Speech in 1812 on the Importance of Education—Genesis of his Ideas—The Argument of the *Essays on the Formation of Character* Summarised—Debt to Godwin—Francis Place—Effect Produced by the *Essays* . . 102

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW LANARK SCHOOLS

Visits Oberlin, Fellenberg and Pestalozzi—The Institution for the Formation of Character—The Infant School—The Subjects Taught—Moral Geography Lessons—Dancing, Drilling, Music—Accounts from Visitors—The Leeds Deputation—Dr. Macnab—Disputes with the Other Partners—Compromise Effected—Infant Schools in London 126

CHAPTER VIII

NEW LANARK (*continued*)

PAGE

General Description of Mills—Reduction in Hours of Labour and its Effect on Production—Child Labour—Wages—The Village Store—Character of the Population—Visitors—The Grand Duke Nicholas—Braxfield House—Owen's Family—No Praise or Blame—Religious Views—His Son Essays to Convert Him 161

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST FACTORY ACT

Owen's Position in the Cotton Trade—Agitation against Taxation—Owen's Proposals—*Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System*—The Draft Bill of 1816 and Sir R. Peel—Owen Travels through Great Britain on a Tour of Inspection—The Committee of 1816 on Children in Factories—Owen's Evidence—Attack on his Religious Views—Postponement of Legislation—The Arguments Against the Bill—The Lords' Committee of 1818 and 1819—The Bill is passed—Owen's Share in it . . . 184

CHAPTER X

FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

Peace and the Fall of Wages—National Distress and Popular Disturbances—Meeting for the Relief of Distress—Owen's Report—Argument of the Report—The Plan—The Quadrangle—Reception by the Press—Owen's Visit to Newgate—Further Development of the Plan—Genesis of Owen's Ideas—Parochial Farms—Thomas Spence—The Rappites—John Bellers' *Colledge of Industry*—Criticism by the *Black Dwarf*, Hone and Cobbett 212

CHAPTER XI

1817—1819

PAGE

Owen Denounces the Religions of the World—Further Developments of his Plan—Newspaper Criticism—Tour on the Continent in 1818—Memorials to the Governments of Europe and America, and to the Allied Powers in Congress—Address to the Working Classes—Correspondence and Friendship with the Duke of Kent—Dr. Macnab Visits New Lanark—Committee to Promote Owen's Plan—Debate in the House of Commons (1819)—Owen Stands for Parliament 242

CHAPTER XII

REPORT TO THE COUNTY OF LANARK

Owen Defines his Economic Position—Spade Cultivation—Falla's Experiment—The Currency—Proposed Labour Standard—Further Debate in the House of Commons (1821)—The British and Foreign Philanthropic Society—Visits Ireland—Expounds his Plan in a Series of Lectures—His Reception—The Hibernian Philanthropic Society—Committee of House of Commons on Poor in Ireland—Owen's Evidence 265

CHAPTER XIII

NEW HARMONY

George Rapp and His Followers—Owen Purchases the Village of Harmony—Visits America and Lectures at Washington—The Colonists at New Harmony—The Preliminary Society—Letter from William Owen—The Boatload of Knowledge—The New Harmony Community of Equality—Foundation of Macluria and Feiba Peveli—Era of Mental

PAGE

Independence—The Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach Visits New Harmony—Dancing and Concerts—The Schools—Criticism of Paul Brown—Dissolution of Community—Formation of Daughter Communities—Owen's Farewell Address 285

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF NEW HARMONY

The Affairs of the Community Wound Up—Owen's Sons—Other Communities—Causes of the Failure—Owen Visits Jamaica—His Account of the Slaves There—Journey to Mexico—Calls on the President and Asks for Grant of Territory—Discusses the New System with Santa Anna—Debate at Cincinnati with Rev. A. Campbell—Interview with Lord Aberdeen 325

ILLUSTRATIONS VOL. I

ROBERT OWEN, FROM AN EARLY MEZZOTINT PORTRAIT BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST (*Photogravure*) . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

NEWTOWN, MONTGOMERYSHIRE 4

THE OLD HALL, NEWTOWN, WHERE ROBERT OWEN WENT TO SCHOOL . 8

ROBERT OWEN'S BIRTH- AND DEATH-PLACE, NEWTOWN, NORTH WALES 22

A VIEW OF NEW LANARK 48

ROBERT OWEN, FROM A DRAWING BY MATILDA HEMING 58

THE MILLS AT NEW LANARK 80

ROBERT OWEN, FROM A DRAWING BY SMART 94

THE EFFECT OF BAD AND GOOD CIRCUMSTANCES RESPECTIVELY . . 112

M. FELLENBERG'S CHIEF SCHOOL AT HOFWYL 126

INSTITUTION FOR THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER, NEW LANARK . 132

MR. OWEN'S INSTITUTION, NEW LANARK 144

BRAXFIELD HOUSE, NEW LANARK 176

ROBERT OWEN, FROM A SKETCH BY J. COMERFORD 198

A VIEW OF ONE OF MR. OWEN'S VILLAGES OF UNION 218

ROBERT OWEN, FROM THE PORTRAIT BY PICKERSGILL 244

ROBERT OWEN, FROM A PICTURE BY W. T. FRY 270

HARMONY 286

MODEL OF ROBERT OWEN'S PROPOSED COMMUNITY 290

THE TOWN HALL, HARMONY, INDIANA 310

THE GRANARY FORT AND GEORGE RAPP'S RESIDENCE, HARMONY . . 326

THE DEBATE BETWEEN OWEN AND CAMPBELL 344