

CHARTISM AND THE CHURCHES

A Study in Democracy

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BY

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PREFACE

THE real significance of the Chartist movement has only recently been realized. Its apparent sudden collapse under circumstances humiliating to its followers has enabled the average bourgeois historian to dismiss the whole subject with a few remarks emphasizing chiefly some humorous incidents of the closing scene. The influence of the movement in arousing the English proletariat to a class consciousness and in preparing them for their inevitable share in the political structure of English democracy has never been adequately appreciated, while the part taken by the Chartists and their leaders in the various reform movements of the time has been almost ignored. Outside of the interesting and straightforward history of Gammage, a prominent Chartist, most of the attention devoted to the subject has been by French and German scholars, the sum total of which, however, has been astonishingly small when the importance of Chartism is considered.

By the religious and political radical the idea that organized Christianity as represented in the churches has ordinarily been opposed to progress, especially scientific and political, has long been accepted as a truism. Ardent churchmen, on their side, aroused by the taunts of their opponents and under the spell of an expanding democracy and new conceptions of social justice, have in recent years endeavored to picture Christ as the first great reformer and his teachings as a platform advanced enough for the most radical. Realizing that a large

element of truth underlies the arguments of both groups and with no intention to answer generally any of the questions involved, the author has thought it worth while to take some important movement in favor of democracy and examine as closely as the available sources permitted the attitude of the various churches toward it. Because of the slight attention heretofore given it and because of its unique position as the first distinctly proletarian agitation of modern times the Chartist movement has been chosen.

In the preparation of this essay the author is largely indebted to Professor James T. Shotwell, under whose direction the work was done and from whose criticisms the thesis has profited; to Professor Edwin R. A. Seligman, who put at his disposal the Chartist collection in his private library; to Professor William Walker Rockwell of Union Theological Seminary, who read the thesis and made numerous suggestions; and to his Father.

H. U. F.

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APPENDIX I

PETITION OF THE COMPLETE SUFFRAGE CONFERENCE OF APRIL, 1842, TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sheweth,

That in the opinion of your petitioners, every member of society has an equal right with every other member to have a voice in making the laws which he is called upon to obey.

That this just principle has already been recognized in the British Constitution, for by various ancient statutes it is provided, "that no person be compelled to pay any tax or make any loan to the king against his will," and by a statute of King Edward III, it is declared, that "such laws are against reason and the franchise of the land," which enactments are confirmed and expounded by the celebrated petition of right, which provides that "no man be compelled to make or yield any gift or tax, without common consent, by act of parliament."

That the principle is further sanctioned by the dictates of that holy religion, which teaches men to do to others, as they would that others should do unto them.

That in carrying out this principle, only such limitations or restrictions should be allowed as naturally arise out of the right itself, as are necessary to its practical exercise,—and as are equally applicable to all classes of the community.

That, therefore your petitioners, after due deliberation, have arrived at the conviction, that the elective franchise ought to be extended to every man of twenty-one years of age, who is not deprived of his rights of citizenship, in consequence of the verdict of a jury of his countrymen.

That a false principle of representation namely, that of property and not persons—having been acted on for a great length of time in this country, many abuses have thereby arisen and been perpetuated; and that as the removal of these abuses

is necessary in order to render complete suffrage, as defined in the preceding propositions, practically beneficial, your petitioners are of the opinion that the details embodied in the following propositions are essential for rendering the representation of the people on the fundamental principle already declared, full, fair, and free.

That every man ought to be able and willing to give an open and conscientious vote—yet under the present circumstances of the country, and with the general prevalence of bribery and intimidation, that the system of voting by ballot should be adopted, in order effectually to secure the free exercise of the suffrage, which free exercise is sanctioned by acts of parliament declaring that “elections ought to be free.”

That for the purpose of securing a fair and equal representation of the people, it is necessary that the whole country be divided into districts each containing, as nearly as may be, an equal number of electors.

That all legal election expenses, and a reasonable remuneration to Members of Parliament for their services, ought to be borne at the public expense.

That it is of great importance to secure and maintain the responsibility of members to their constituents, and your petitioners are of the opinion that annual parliaments are a proper means for securing this object.

May it therefore please the Commons to resolve itself into a committee of the whole house, to take these premises into its deliberate consideration, or adopt such other measures as shall secure a full, fair, and free representation of the people, according to the fundamental principles hereinbefore stated.

Your petitioners, in conclusion, would express their heartfelt prayer, that Almighty God may direct your councils, for the happiness of the nation, the welfare of mankind in general, and for His own glory.

From the Minutes of the Proceedings at the Conference of Representatives of the Middle and Working Classes of Great Britain, Held First at the Waterloo Rooms, and Afterwards at the Town Hall, Birmingham, pp. 19, 20, 21.

APPENDIX II

CHARTIST GOSPEL—A NEW REVELATION

THE BOOK OF THE CHRONICLES OF THE DEMOCRATS

Chapter I

1. Victoria being Queen of the Isles and of extensive countries abroad, Sir Robert Peel being Prime Minister, Sir James Graham being Secretary for the Home Department, and the Earl de Grey being Governor of the Land of Erin.

2. In those days came Feargus O'Connor, preaching to the whole people of the United Queendom of Great Britain and Ireland.

3. Saying, the day of justice draweth nigh, for the masses are awakening from their sleep.

4. But when he saw the Tories, and the Whigs, and the Corn-Law Repealers, come to hear, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, what hath induced you to fleece and rob the people.

5. And think not to say unto yourselves we are just before God; Amen, I say unto you, Repent lest you may be punished for your evil deeds.

6. For reason is gone abroad and will soon penetrate the minds of all men, and will force them to become lovers of liberty.

7. And thus did Feargus O'Connor harass the tyrants, and despots and oppressors of every kind, even from the days of William the Foolish and the sixth year of the reign of Victoria.

8. And the lawyers, and chief priests, and factory masters conspired together to put him to death, but they could not for fear of the people.

9. But they put him into prison for the long space of sixteen months; even in York castle did they confine him:

10. So that his fame extended to all parts of the world where democracy is known; from the banks of the Thames to the banks of the sire of rivers.

11. In the sixth year of the reign of Victoria, the first and last, he went to the city of long chimneys and cotton factories to instruct the people, and thousands of thousands of people came from the surrounding towns to hear him.

12. And he opened his mouth and taught them saying;

13. Ye Chartists are the salt of the earth: Ye are the light of the world: let your light so shine before men that they may see the truths of the Charter, and seeing believe.

14. Think not I am come to destroy the Constitution; no, but to restore it: nor to injure life; no, but to preserve it. I am come to assist the needy, to instruct the ignorant, to confirm the timid, to raise you from slavery, and to establish justice.

15. No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve Whiggism and Toryism with Chartism.

16. Judge not rashly or unjustly, lest that you yourselves might be so judged; for most assuredly will the people hold those that dispense justice responsible for their acts.

17. Beware of false teachers and pretended friends who come to you in sheep's clothing, but who inwardly are ravenous wolves.

18. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his home upon a rock and the storms arose and prevailed not against it.

19. And it came to pass as Feargus O'Connor sojourned to an inn for refreshment, he saw Jonathan Bairstow; and he said unto him, Follow thou me. And when he sat down to eat with working men, and when the Whigs and Tories saw it, they marvelled amongst themselves that he should do this.

20. And the names of a few of the great apostles of Chartism were F. O'Connor, the son of Roger and nephew of Arthur, and James Leach, and Peter Murray McDouall, and John Campbell and J. A. R. Bairstow, and R. K. Philp, and William Hill and James Scholefield, and Morgan Williams, and George Julian Harney, and George White, and Thomas Cooper, and Christopher Doyle, and Bernard McCartney, and Thomas Clarke, and James McArthur, and John Duncan, and Robert Lowrie, and William Beesley, and Ruffy Ridley, and Thomas Wheeler. And there were hundreds of disciples of this great party in all parts of the Western Isles.

The Penny Democrat and Political Illuminator, pp. 17, 18 (no date).

APPENDIX III

That the Church of England and Chartism totally oppose each other, produce wholly different effects, and lead to widely and utterly different destinations, will appear if we just consider to what they each lead.

Chartism

Leads to unholy desires, wicked counsels and unjust works.

—to perils, dangers, evil and mischief.

—“to battle, murder and sudden death.”

—us to curse and oppose the magistrates in the execution of their duties, in punishing wickedness and vice.

—all nations to war, hatred and discord.

—men out of the way of truth, into error and deception.

The Church of England

Leads us to pray to that God from whom “All holy desires, all good counsel and all just works proceed.”

—“us to pray to be kept from all perils and dangers, from all evil and mischief.”

—us to pray and be delivered “from battle, and murder and sudden death.”

—us to beseech God, “to bless and keep the magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice and maintain truth.”

—us to ask God “to give to all nations, unity, peace, and concord.”

—us to pray that God “may bring into the way of truth, all such as have erred and are deceived.”

Charism

—to danger, necessity, and tribulation; and leaves those that are led by it helpless and comfortless.

—to the murder of fathers and husbands; and leaves the fatherless children and widows desolate and oppressed.

—to the disturbance of public worship, to the immediate dispersion of the congregation when in the middle of their devotions, at the sight of the pike, pistol, scythe, gun, etc.

—to scepticism, infidelity, and disbelief of the Scriptures.

—to evils which we, on account of our sins have righteously deserved.

The Church of England

—us to beseech God that He "may be pleased to recover, help, and comfort, all that are in danger, necessity and tribulation."

—us to ask God "that it may please Him to defend and provide for the fatherless children and widows, and all that are desolate and oppressed."

—us to pray thus, "Grant O Lord we beseech Thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness."

—us to pray God "to grant us grace to hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them."

—us to beseech God "graciously to hear us, that those evils, which the craft and subtilty of the devil or man worketh against us, be brought to naught."

Chartism

—professors of religion to bring reproach upon the Gospel, by their wicked and evil deeds.

—to anarchy; to disobey and rebel against the powers that be; and to the subversion of all good government.

—to poverty, misery, and transportation; the gallows, death and hell.

The Church of England

—us to ask Almighty God, to “grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same.”

—us and all subjects duly to consider whose authority the Queen hath, that we may “faithfully serve, honor, and humbly obey her.”

—to wealth, peace, freedom, pardon; and beseeches the Lord in his boundless mercy and love to “deliver us from wrath and from everlasting damnation.”

Jenkin’s *Chartism Unmasked*, 19th ed., pp. 25-27 (Merthyr Tydvil, 1840).

APPENDIX IV

A PRAYER

RECENTLY DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF A CHARTIST CHURCH
IN LONDON

O Lord, the fountain of all goodness, by whom our valleys at this time are covered with corn, and our hills teeming with innumerable flocks, the Maker of one blood of all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth, and who hath declared Thyself no respecter of persons by levelling crowned heads with beggars in one mighty sepulchre, and mingling the dust of proud and haughty tyrants with that of the meanest slave: Ere our lips give utterance, thou art acquainted with our desires and the interests of our hearts, the cruel and wicked judgments of which the tribunals of the land resound, are all naked before Thee, and no secret can be hid. Hear the prayer of Thy persecuted servant, and the silent breathings of the oppressed that surround him, on behalf of those of our brethren by whom Thy violated law hath spoken out and for which they are now breathing the polluted air of the dungeon, reduced to skeletons, with the months of their harsh and rigorous endurance. Be Thou with them, support them, preserve them, and teach them, that they may come forth from the prison cell, as giants refreshed with new wine, mighty in power to the pulling down of the strongholds of corruption, and in boldness and self possession work out the political redemption of the British People. O Lord, hasten the long wished for period, when such men as honest O'Connor, Vincent, Lovett, Collins, and many others, shall shake the Senate House by their eloquence, and direct the realm by their wisdom, that iniquity may be compelled to hide her head, and the iron rod of

despotism be for ever broken; when the laws for the separation of husband and wife shall be no more; when those ties that have been so rudely broken, shall again be united; when bastiles, the monuments of wicked legislation, shall tumble to the ground, and peace be proclaimed upon earth, and good will amongst men. Hear us, O Lord, on behalf of a wicked and persecuting church, which exists by violence and plundering of goods, instead of the freewill offerings of the heart; convert our bishops and clergy to Christianity, and release the martyr Thorogood from gaol. May tithe-barns cease to be their temples and money their God. May they abandon all choice schemes which tend to the destruction of liberty and genuine knowledge. While thus assembled to offer prayers to Thee, we supplicate for her who sits upon a human bone-and-blood built throne, swaying the sceptre of this mighty empire; may she henceforth counsel her wicked councilors, and teach her foolish senators wisdom; that her people's requests may be granted, and herself in reality be Queen Victoria by the grace of God, instead of queen of slaves. Hear us on behalf of the countless thousands of India, whom designing men are seeking to destroy by the game of horror and war; may we, as a nation and a people, refuse to take part in the shedding of human blood, and show the world, by our lives and conduct, we are determined to obey God rather than man. We pray for all sorts and conditions of men, for all spies, for all false witnesses, for all perjured jurors, for all unjust judges, and for all the victims made now at home and abroad; aid and assist us in the mighty work we have to perform; prepare us to brave persecution, and enable us to surmount every difficulty and may we never relax our exertions until our birth-right, the Charter, do come. That on earth, as in heaven, Thy will may be done. To this may all our hearts respond, and every tongue exclaim Amen.

The Chartist Circular, p. 211 (Sept. 19, 1840).

APPENDIX V

RULES AND OBJECTS OF THE EAST LONDON CHARTIST TEMPERANCE ASSOCIATION

(Recommended by the *English Chartist Circular*, p. 19, vol. i, to its constituents for the formation of similar associations.)

1. That this association be denominated the Chartist Temperance Association.
2. That the affairs of this Association shall be managed by a Committee of ten, chosen from the first members who join it.
3. That the Members and Committee shall be elected every three months. Seven to be a quorum.
4. That the Committee shall meet once a week; or oftener, if necessary.
5. That there be a general meeting of the Association once every month for the admission of Members—to receive reports and for the transaction of general business.
6. That no rule or article shall be altered without the consent of a majority of the Members, all of whom shall receive a week's notice of the same.
7. That each Member be recommended to subscribe One Penny per week to defray the expenses of the Association.
8. That it be the duty of this Association to advance the moral and intellectual welfare of the Members; by lectures, discussions, or any other means.
9. That the members of the Association are earnestly recommended to take an interest in the welfare of each other by trading with, and endeavoring to procure employment for, any of the Members who are in want of the same; and in order to facilitate this object a record of each member's trade or occupation be kept by the Secretary, and read over at the general monthly meetings of the Association.

10. That as early as the Funds will allow, a convenient place shall be hired for the use of the Association: and a library of useful books be established in order that the Members may spend their leisure hours profitably, and set a good example.

11. That the Members of this Association adopt as their motto the following beautiful rule of justice—"Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you."

12. In order that harmony of sentiment and unanimity of action may characterize the Association, all discussion on questions of Theology is expressly forbidden.

13. That persons desirous of becoming Members of this Association must abstain from all intoxicating drinks for one week previous to their admission, in order to try the principle and prevent a relapse.

14. That to prevent embarrassment in the pecuniary affairs of the Association, the Committee will not allow the debts of the Association to exceed at any time the sum of ten shillings, except by the consent of the majority of the Members, given at any public meeting.

15. That the following be the pledge and qualification of membership.

I voluntarily consent to abstain from all intoxicating liquors, except prescribed by a medical person; and, as temperance applies to all things, I renounce the use of tobacco as a common habit, injurious alike to health and good morals, and pledge myself not to use it, except as a medicine; and do further declare that I will use all moral and lawful means to cause the People's Charter to become the law of the land.

APPENDIX VI

CHARLES KINGSLEY'S APPEAL TO THE CHARTISTS, APRIL

12, 1848

WORKMEN OF ENGLAND

You say that you are wronged. Many of you are wronged; and many besides yourselves know it. Almost all men who have heads and hearts know it—above all, the working clergy know it. They go into your houses, they see the shameful filth and darkness in which you are forced to live crowded together; they see your children growing up in ignorance and temptation, for want of fit education; they see intelligent and well-read men among you, shut out from a Freeman's just right of voting; and they see too the noble patience and self-control with which you have as yet borne these evils. They see it, and God sees it.

Workmen of England! You have more friends than you think for. Friends who expect nothing from you, but who love you, because you are their brothers, and who fear God, and therefore dare not neglect you, His children; men who are drudging and sacrificing themselves to get you your rights; men who know what your rights are, better than you know yourselves, who are trying to get for you something nobler than charters and dozens of Acts of Parliament—more useful than this "fifty thousandth share in a Talker in the National Palaver at Westminster" can give you. You may disbelieve them, insult them—you cannot stop their working for you, beseeching you as you love yourselves, to turn back from the precipice of riot, which ends in the gulf of universal distrust, stagnation, starvation.

You think the Charter would make you free—would to

God it would! The Charter is not bad; *if the men who use it are not bad!* But will the Charter make you free? Will it free you from slavery to ten-pound bribes? Slavery to beer and gin? Slavery to every spouter who flatters your self-conceit, and stirs up bitterness and headlong rage in you? That, I guess, is real slavery; to be a slave to one's own stomach, one's own pocket, one's own temper. Will the Charter cure that? Friends, you want more than Acts of Parliament can give.

Englishmen! Saxons! Workers of the great, cool-headed, strong-handed nation of England, the workshop of the world, the leader of freedom for seven hundred years, men say you have common sense! then do not humbug yourselves into meaning "license," when you cry for "liberty"; who would dare refuse you freedom? for the Almighty God, and Jesus Christ, the poor Man, who died for poor men, will bring it about for you, though all the Mammonites of the earth were against you. A nobler day is dawning for England, a day of freedom, science, industry!

But there will be no true freedom without virtue, no true science without religion, no true industry without the fear of God, and love to your fellow-citizens.

Workers of England, be wise, and then you *must* be free, for you will be *fit* to be free.

A WORKING PARSON.

Charles Kingsley, *His Letters and Memories of His Life*, edited by his wife, 10th ed. (London, 1878), vol. i, pp. 156-157.

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