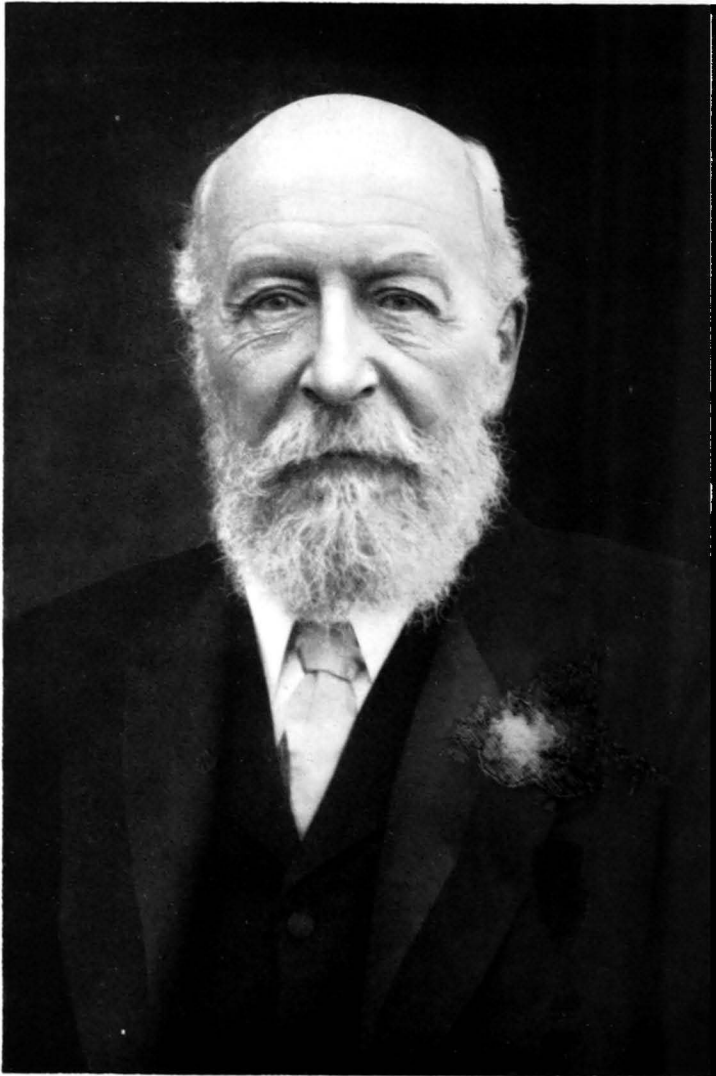


LIFE OF GEORGE CADBURY



GEORGE CADBURY AT THE AGE OF 78

LIFE OF
GEORGE CADBURY

By
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PREFACE

THE combination in its highest expression of the mystic and the man of affairs is of rare occurrence. In the political history of this country there has been one supreme example and only one. In the field of business activity the phenomenon has been more frequent, but still rare. The aloofness of the two motives is intelligible and almost belongs to the nature of things. At the best, business is an exacting and jealous occupation. It deals with material things and aims at material ends. It has no place for sentiment and cultivates no dreams of spiritual destinies. It has its moralities which cannot be disregarded with impunity, but they are secular moralities. It is no reflection on the great commercial adventurers to say that they are realists whose horizon is bounded by hard facts within which they work with single-minded purpose, and that the measure of their success is the measure of their obedience to the commands implicit in those facts. "Business is business" is a maxim which is accepted as unchallengeable, and it is understood to cover not only the code under which business is conducted, but the limitations of interest and outlook that it demands. There is no room in it for the visionary and the poet, and to do the visionary and the poet justice they rarely meddle with it. They have a congenital disinclination for the mechanism of things, and for the relentless logic of ledgers, and their fervour for the New Jerusalem makes them impatient of the chaffering of markets, the haggling with labour and the crudities of competition. They live in an imaginative realm of their own creation, and if they came down to the market place they would

be brushed aside by the powerful practical men who handle the ponderable things of life. It may be doubted whether Ruskin or Shelley could have been trusted with the conduct of a coffee-stall, and though William Morris had success in translating his mediæval dreams into the terms of business, he admitted that he owed the fact to the practical genius of another.

But in George Cadbury the two motives were so interwoven as to form a single strand of purpose. It was a superficial view which saw in him a remarkable example of dual personality, such as that, for instance, of Andrew Carnegie. The ruthless ironmaster and the Friend of Man lived concurrent lives, but they lived them on different planes, almost in separate hemispheres, and never seemed to meet. It was otherwise in the case of George Cadbury. There was a natural tendency in the outside world to think of him, whether in a friendly or an unfriendly spirit, as a man with two powerful incentives in life, one directed to the conquest of the things of the world, the other directed to the conquest of the spiritual kingdom. He was, alternately, a man of surpassing business genius and a man whose eyes were fixed far off on the shining land of Beulah.

It was a mistaken view. There can, I think—and I knew him in close intimacy for twenty years—never have been a more single-minded pilgrim on the stage of this world. The language of the great allegory springs irresistibly to the mind in writing of him. As I summon his figure before me and see the significance of his life in that large and illuminating perspective which death gives, it is the pilgrim of the seventeenth-century visionary who comes to mind. George Cadbury's journey through life had the same ceaseless urge of the spirit that drove Christian forward on his immortal quest. He saw the City of Destruction as vividly as the "God-intoxicated man" of Bunyan's dream saw it, and for him the walls of the Celestial City gleamed on the horizon no less surely. Before the tremendous alternative offered to men, the

choice between living for the things of the spirit or for the things that perish, all other issues shrank to nothing and all other preoccupations were negligible.

From this single root the tree of his life sprang in all its manifestations. It was a life of singular unity and simplicity. It was of one pattern and of one piece. The imperious motive that ran through it from youth to age governed every action and there was no sharp separation between his secular and his spiritual activities. He passed from the Adult School to his office and from the social field to the playground without any change in his attitude of mind or spirit. The functions were different, but they all subserved the single end to which thought and feeling were directed. It was his custom in his old age to say that it was his experiences in the Adult School that made the success of Bournville possible, and no one familiar with his life and his habits of thought can doubt that the impulse which made him so conspicuous a figure in the world of commerce came from the acute sense which his activities among the poor gave him of the waste and degradation of human life under the modern industrial system. The complacent valuation of business in the terms of mill chimneys and imports and exports—a valuation so universally accepted seventy years ago as to move so fine a spirit as Macaulay to eloquent thanksgiving—seemed to him to leave out the supreme factor in the calculations of national well-being. To him, as to Ruskin, the only true wealth of a nation was in the life of its people, and if that life was perishing in sunless slums and fetid hovels the country was doomed even though forests of mill chimneys sprang up over every valley and plain.

It was this sense of the overshadowing importance of human life that lay like a sleepless thought behind his activities and gave coherence and design to the scheme of his career in all its phases. It was a thought that worked in unusual isolation and detachment from the conventions of his time and the axioms of others. In

his personal relations he was the most companionable of men, simple, childlike and as devoid of intellectual pride as of caste feeling; but in the large matters of life he acted with entire independence of external opinion and prejudice. He arrived at his decisions by that "inner light" which he accepted as the infallible guide of conduct, and with which he took counsel daily in quiet walks and moods of "wise passiveness." The doctrine of the "inner light," one of the most powerful forces in human affairs and the central idea of the remarkable community to which George Cadbury belonged, has not escaped criticism from those who see in its operation, where unqualified by the teachings of collective experience, a perilous exaltation of the individual judgment. But of its driving energy and its impetus to original and decisive action there is no doubt, and it is certain that without that powerful inspiration George Cadbury would not, in the face of the accepted traditions of his time as well as the calculations of self-interest, have blazed so bold a path through the social undergrowths of industrial England.

A new time has come with new methods and new and more challenging ideas of industrial relationship and of the claims of social justice. The note of altruism, of human sympathy, almost of patriarchal responsibility, which was implicit in the impulse which George Cadbury gave to his time has been superseded by a colder and (in the narrow sense of that much abused word) more "realistic" attitude to the problems of life. But the pioneer work he did in awakening thought and making sunlit ways through darkest England remains, and whatever the comment of time on his methods may be, whether it confirms or rejects them, the spirit in which he worked will remain an imperishable memory. That, more even than anything he did, is the legacy he has left for the future. It is as one who loved his fellow men, and served them with ceaseless devotion, that his name will live among the gracious legends of the past.

PREFACE

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In the following pages the story of his life is told as briefly and simply as he wished it to be told. It has been compiled from his papers, from the recollections of those who lived with him and saw him in his daily tasks, and from my own personal intercourse with him. In writing it I have had much valuable help from Mrs. Cadbury, Mr. Edward Cadbury and other members of the family, and to them I express my indebtedness. Acknowledgments are also due to Mr. P. W. Wilson and Miss Margaret Bryant for assistance in preparing the material for publication.

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