

MY APPRENTICESHIP

**MY APPRENTICESHIP
BY BEATRICE WEBB**

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INTRODUCTION

have chosen, there may be set up a close correspondence between the underlying controversy and all his external activities, whether in the home or in the market-place, in the scientific laboratory or in the public service.

Now, it so happens that the internal controversy which has been perpetually recurring in my own consciousness, from girlhood to old age, led me in early life to choose a particular vocation, a vocation which I am still practising. The upshot of this controversy has largely determined my day-to-day activities, domestic, social and professional. This continuous debate between an Ego that affirms and an Ego that denies, resolves itself, in my case, into two questions intimately connected with each other, the answers to which yield to me a scheme of personal and public conduct. Can there be a science of social organisation in the sense in which we have a science of mechanics or a science of chemistry, enabling us to forecast what will happen, and perhaps to alter the event by taking appropriate action or persuading others to take it? And secondly, assuming that there be, or will be, such a science of society, is man's capacity for scientific discovery the only faculty required for the reorganisation of society according to an ideal? Or do we need religion as well as science, emotional faith as well as intellectual curiosity? In the following pages will be found my tentative answers to these two questions—that is, my philosophy of work or life. And seeing that I have neither the talent nor the training of a philosopher, I express the faith I hold in the simpler form of personal experience.

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(A)

PERSONAL OBSERVATION AND STATISTICAL
ENQUIRY

[MS. dated The Argoed, September 27, 1887, referred to p. 289]

It is a matter of everyday experience that our actions, whether legislative or voluntary, individual or collective, are becoming more and more inspired and guided by descriptions of our social state. For better or for worse we have cast off the yoke of general principles in dealing with social questions—we have abandoned the English theory of *laissez-faire*, with its comfortable doctrines of the sanctity of private ownership and the unmitigated good of free contract and unrestricted competition. We have become pure empiricists, treating each symptom as it appears on the surface of society. And this change has been mainly accomplished by the strong and irrepressible emotion aroused by the narration of facts. A medical report of a specific disease raging in Manchester and other north country towns brought about the first factory legislation of 1802. All the reforms of Lord Shaftesbury and his followers, constituting the principal constructive legislation of the last fifty years, were carried over the heads of political economists and interested opponents through the indignation evoked by detailed accounts of misery and crime. Our whole literature of blue books testifies to the importance attached to the observation and statement of social facts, in the actual making of laws. But it is easy to discern the danger that lies immediately before us. Hitherto sensationalism and special pleading have been more frequent than scientific observation and correct diagnosis. It is a grave misfortune that the representation of social facts has been left almost exclusively to those who

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are strongly biassed in favour of state interference, and that the advocates of *laisser-faire*, instead of seeking justification in social research, have entrenched themselves behind assumptions which are now regarded as unfounded.

What is needed is a body of students who will seek truth for its own sake, with the single-minded desire to present a true picture, and if possible an explanation of social life. And the first step must be to ascertain a method of enquiry which will lead to a verified statement of fact, and which will aid us to break through the outer crust of events and to discover those hidden social forces which we must either submit to or control.

There are two methods open to the student of the present state of society: statistical enquiry and personal observation. Let us clearly understand what we mean by these two expressions. An eminent statistician defines the science of statistics as the "Quantitative observation of aggregates". The simple meaning of this learned expression is this: that statistics are based on the assumption that as far as the question at issue is concerned, all the units dealt with are equal. In the common uses of statistics this assumption is obviously true. In the statistics of population, of births, marriages and deaths, all qualitative difference between one individual and another, or between one individual act and another, is not only unimportant but is entirely irrelevant. Hence in the collection of these statistics we need only mechanical enumeration. For instance, if we could invent a census-taking machine, like the automatic weighing machine, and if we could force the inhabitants to pass over, under or through it, it would serve our purpose quite as well as the most highly trained body of census officials. Anyhow it is needless for the student to undertake the work of enumeration himself; indeed in nearly all instances it would be impossible. He sits at his desk and examines the figures laid before him. Therefore the definition given above is correct: the student of statistics does not observe individuals but aggregates; he does not note qualities but he examines and compares quantities.

By personal observation, or as the Germans prefer to call it, "unit" observation, we understand the examination of individual men, acts or circumstances with a view to discover the specific

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characteristics that distinguish them from other men, acts and circumstances. Thus the striking difference between unit observation and mechanical enumeration is this, that while mechanical enumeration simply notes the repeated existence of similar units, and could therefore be performed as efficiently by a machine as by a human being, unit observation demands that peculiar power of the human intellect—the discerning and registering of differences. Therefore if learned language be insisted upon, and if we define statistical enquiry as the *quantitative observation of aggregates*, we must define personal observation as the *qualitative observation of units*.

Now in social science, as in all the other sciences of organic life, quantitative and qualitative analysis must go hand in hand. For it is self-evident that in all the more complicated statistics of human life, "unit observation" should be a preliminary step to statistical enquiry. For supposing the student wishes to ascertain not only the sum total of the population, but the proportion which different classes of men bear to one another, it is clear that he must first discover and describe those qualities or circumstances which are the specific characteristics of the classes with which he is dealing. For instance, supposing he wishes to divide the population according to physical temperament, he must first determine the constitutional characteristics which make up the bilious, nervous and sanguine temperaments respectively. And the more extended his personal observation of individuals, the more likely he is to arrive at a classification which will at once include, and separate into definite classes, all the individuals of the population. When he has completed this work of personal observation, he can begin statistical enquiry. To accomplish the work of enumeration he must find men capable of distinguishing and registering the qualities, or group of qualities, which, according to his classification, are characteristic of the different temperaments. Assuming that there be definite and distinct temperaments among men, the correctness of the first step will depend on the student's power of determining salient features and specific characteristics; and the correctness of the second step will depend on the mechanical efficiency of the instrument used in enumeration and on the logical soundness of any manipulation of the figures arrived at. Thus, in all original investigation, the student of social facts

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must combine personal observation with statistical enquiry. On the one hand he must know and realise distinguishing qualities and peculiar conditions, before he can enumerate the persons possessing these qualities or living within these conditions. On the other hand, in order that his observation may rank as a social fact, he must show that these qualities or conditions are characteristic of a sufficient body of men to form a constituent part of society. To demonstrate this he must use the statistical method: he must enumerate the number of men possessing these characteristics; and if he is to arrive at any generalisation, he must compare this number with other totals—for instance with that of the entire population. Statistical enquiry without personal observation lacks all sure foundation; while personal observation unless followed by statistical enquiry leads to no verified conclusion. The two methods are in reality two equally essential acts in all scientific investigation of the structure and growth of existing societies.

Let us turn from a theoretical demonstration of the true method to an illustrative analogue of our *actual* method of social research. Imagine the whole building trade suddenly divided into two rival sets of workmen, the one perfectly understanding the excavating, levelling and forming of foundations, while the other comprised the whole army of bricklayers, stone-masons, plumbers, joiners and glaziers. Supposing these two bodies of men not only refused to work together or to learn each other's trade, but obstinately declared that they were absolutely independent of each other's help; the one body asserting that foundations needed no superstructure, while the other affirmed that buildings required no foundations. Should we advance in the making of cities? Would not all our attempts, however much energy or substance we spent upon them, be reduced to one dead level of unfinished structure and ruined edifice? And yet this is no exaggerated picture of the state of affairs among the observers and recorders of social facts. We have a large body of grave and abstract-minded men who spend their lives or their leisure in the examination of tables of figures; or to use their own expression, in "the marshalling of the figures collected with scientific accuracy and precision". So long as these figures represent so much size and weight and value of dead matter, as in commercial

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statistics, the foundations upon which a statistician rests his operations are secure. The truth of his conclusion in these instances will depend on correct measurement of the size, weight and value, and on the logic of his train of reasoning. These processes of purely statistical enquiry we may safely leave to the criticism of fellow-statisticians. But when the figures represent, not dead matter, but living men and women of various temperaments and manifold conditions, we need some better assurance than mere assumption, that as far as the question at issue is concerned, these men and women are equal units. I will take an illustration from the work of living statisticians.

Mr. Leone Levy and Mr. Dudley Baxter some years past published estimates of the total income of the working classes, estimates which have since been quoted with approval by Mr. Giffin. And how do you think they arrived at their respective estimates? By multiplying the number of individuals included in the various sections of the working class as stated in the census, by the average wage of a member of each section *when in full work*. For example, if the carpenters numbered 10,000, and if the average wage of a carpenter in full work were 30s., then the total yearly incomings of the carpenters would be £780,000. At this point, however, the two authorities diverged: for Leone Levy allowed four weeks, while Dudley Baxter allowed six weeks enforced holiday during the year. What value can we attach to a calculation of the total incomings of the working people which dismisses the burning question of the "unemployed" with a haphazard guess? Surely the evident irritation shown by intelligent working men, at the work of official and semi-official statisticians, is justified by this almost impertinent ignorance of the actual conditions with which they attempt to deal. We may say with Carlyle: "According to the old Proverb, 'as the statist thinks the bell clinks', Tables are like cobwebs, like the sieve of the Danaïdes beautifully reticulated, orderly to look upon, but which will hold no conclusion. Tables are abstractions, and the object a most concrete one, so difficult to read the essence of. There are innumerable circumstances, and one circumstance left out may be the vital one on which all turned. Conclusive facts are inseparable from inconclusive except by a head that already understands and

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knows." As usual, Carlyle has discovered the kernel; it is exactly this absence of personal experience which disfigures the work of the ordinary statistician. Those who are able to examine his basis refuse to believe in the soundness of his conclusions. He fails to present to the public mind a verified statement of fact.

On the other hand every newspaper in the kingdom abounds with the work of those who limit their research to personal observation. Opposed to the grave and abstract-minded statisticians, and intensely antagonistic in their bias, there exist among us a large body of men and women with warm sympathies and quick perceptions, who present to the public striking pictures of society. Death and disease attract more sympathy and excite more feeling than healthy growth; it is not surprising, therefore, that the diseased parts of our society should be selected as the special subjects for study and representation. The fallacy peculiar to the work of this class of student is obvious. In Carlyle's words: "Each man expands his own handbreadth of observation to the limits of the general whole"; more or less each man must take what he himself has seen and ascertained for a sample of all that is seeable and ascertainable! Thus a respectable citizen, who had diligently read East London newspapers on the evil of low-class foreign immigration, writes to his Member of Parliament to enquire whether it be not true that every third man in England is a foreigner! Those who watch the dislocated and decaying life of poverty-stricken London talk of the whole working class as demoralised and unemployed. It is exactly this tendency "to expand the handbreadth of observation to the limits of the general whole", accompanied by the humanitarian's interest in mental and physical misery, which we call *Sensationalism*. There is only one way to check this mischievous tendency. We must apply to these vivid pictures the hard and fast test of statistical enquiry. We must force those who present these striking statements to enumerate exactly the number of persons possessing the characteristics or living within the conditions described; we must compel them to compare this number with that of the whole population. And until the artist consents to bring his picture within a statistical framework, we may admire it as a work of art, but we cannot accept it as a verified statement of fact.

HOW TO INTERVIEW

(B)

THE METHOD OF THE INTERVIEW

(See page 340)

IN all sociological investigation of existing social institutions the student finds himself continuously seeking acquaintance with the persons directly concerned with the working of these institutions in order to "interview" them.

There are many uses of the interview. It may be a necessary passport to the inspection of documents and to an opportunity of watching, from the inside, the constitution and activities of some piece of social organisation. For this purpose the requisites are a good "introduction", brevity of statement, a modest and agreeable manner; and a ready acquiescence in any arrangement made, however inadequate or inconvenient. Above all, have a clear conception of exactly which documents and what opportunities you are seeking. Do not ask for too much at the first start off; you can always ask for more; and an inch given is better than an ell refused!

But by the *Method of the Interview* I mean an instrument of research and discovery through the process of skilled interrogation. As a device for investigation it is peculiar to the sociologist. It is his compensation for inability to use the chemist's test-tube or the bacteriologist's microscope.

The first condition of the successful use of the interview as an instrument of research is preparedness of the mind of the operator. The interviewer should be himself acquainted, I will not say with all the known facts—that would be to set too high a standard—but with all the data that can be obtained from the ordinary text-books and blue books relating to the subject. For instance, to cross-examine a factory inspector without understanding the distinction between a factory and a workshop, or the meaning of the "particulars clause"; or a Town Clerk without knowing the difference between getting a Provisional Order, promoting a Local Act, or working under a General Act, is an impertinence. Especially important is a familiarity

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with technical terms and a correct use of them. To start interviewing any specialist without this equipment will not only be waste of time, but may lead to a more or less courteous dismissal, after a few general remarks and some trite opinions; at best, the conversation will be turned away from the subject into the trivialities of social intercourse. For technical terms and technical details, relating to past as well as to present occurrences and controversies, are so many levers to lift into consciousness and expression the more abstruse and out-of-the-way facts or series of facts; and it is exactly these more hidden events that are needed to complete descriptive analysis and to verify hypotheses. I may note in passing that not to have read and mastered what your client has himself published on the question is not easily forgiven!

The second condition is of course that the person interviewed should be in possession of experience or knowledge unknown to you. That is not to say that persons without acknowledged reputations for specialised knowledge must always be ignored; and that there should be no speculative investment in queer or humble folk. It is, for example, almost axiomatic with the experienced investigator that the mind of the subordinate in any organisation will yield richer deposits of fact than the mind of the principal. This is not merely because the subordinate is usually less on his guard, and less severely conventional in his outlook. The essential superiority lies in the circumstance that the working foreman, managing clerk or minor official is in continuous and intimate contact with the day-by-day activities of the organisation; he is more aware of the heterogeneity and changing character of the facts, and less likely to serve up dead generalisation, in which all the living detail becomes a blurred mass, or is stereotyped into rigidly confined and perhaps obsolete categories.

More difficult to convey to the student is the right manner or behaviour in interviewing.

Regarded as a method of investigation the process of interviewing is a particular form of psycho-analysis. From within the consciousness or subconsciousness of another mind, the practitioner has to ferret out memories of past experiences—"orders of thought" corresponding with "orders of things". You may easily inhibit free

HOW TO INTERVIEW

communication, or prevent the rise to consciousness of significant facts, by arousing suspicion. For instance, whilst a careful plan of examination should be prepared, no paper of questions should be apparent: and no attempt should be made to take notes during the interview. Except in cases in which your client is not merely according an interview but is consciously co-operating in your investigation, it is a mistake to bring a secretary or other colleague: caution is increased when a man perceives that his words are being "witnessed".

It is disastrous to "show off", or to argue: the client must be permitted to pour out his fictitious tales, to develop his preposterous theories, to use the silliest arguments, without demur or expression of dissent or ridicule. The competent social investigator will not look bored or indifferent when irrelevant information or trivial details are offered him, any more than a competent medical practitioner will appear wearied by his patient's catalogue of imaginary symptoms. Accept whatever is offered: a personally conducted visit to this or that works or institution may be a dismal prospect; it may even seem waste effort to inspect machinery or plant which cannot be understood, or which has been seen *ad nauseam* before, or which is wholly irrelevant to the subject-matter of the enquiry. But it is a mistake to decline. In the course of these tiring walks and weary waitings, experiences may be recalled or elicited which would not have cropped up in the formal interview in the office. Indeed, the less formal the conditions of the interview the better. The atmosphere of the dinner-table or the smoking-room is a better "conductor" than that of the office during business hours. The best of these occasions is that you can sometimes start several experts arguing among themselves; and in this way you will pick up more information in one hour than you will acquire during a whole day in a series of interviews.

When you have got upon confidential terms, your new friend may cite private statistics or mention confidential documents; this should be met by an off-hand plea for permission to see them. If a direct offer be made to produce and explain documents, the interviewer has scored a notable success and should follow it up on the spot. "I am dreadfully slow and inaccurate at figures: I wonder

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whether I and my secretary might come here to-morrow to look through these reports again?" will often find good-natured acquiescence.

Bear in mind that it is desirable to make the interview pleasing to the persons interviewed. It should seem to him or her an agreeable form of social intercourse. I remember, in one of my early adventures in "wholesale interviewing" with a whole party, even telling fortunes from their hands, with all sorts of interesting results! Without this atmosphere of relaxation, of amused interest on both sides, it will often be impracticable to get at those intimate details of daily experience which are the most valuable data of the sociologist. Hence a spirit of adventure, a delight in watching human beings as human beings quite apart from what you can get out of their minds, an enjoyment of the play of your own personality with that of another, are gifts of rare value in the art of interviewing; and gifts which are, I think, more characteristic of the woman than the man.

I need hardly add that once the interview is over, the first opportunity should be taken to write out fully every separate fact or hypothesis elicited. Never trust your memory a moment longer than is necessary is an all-important maxim. Practice will make it easy to reproduce on paper, that very evening or on the following morning before starting out for the day's work, every phrase or suggestion that needs to be recorded, even of several successive interviews.

(C)

THE ART OF NOTE-TAKING

(See page 356)

It is difficult to persuade the accomplished graduate of Oxford or Cambridge that an indispensable instrument in the technique of sociological enquiry—seeing that without it any of the methods of acquiring facts can seldom be used effectively—is the making of

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notes, or what the French call "fiches".¹ For a highly elaborated and skilled process of "making notes", besides its obvious use in recording observations which would otherwise be forgotten, is actually an instrument of discovery. This process serves a similar purpose in sociology to that of the blow-pipe and the balance in chemistry, or the prism and the electroscope in physics. That is to say, it enables the scientific worker to break up his subject-matter, so as to isolate and examine at his leisure its various component parts, and to recombine them in new and experimental groupings in order to discover which sequences of events have a causal significance. To put it paradoxically, by exercising your reason on the separate facts displayed, in an appropriate way, on hundreds, perhaps thousands, of separate pieces of paper, you may discover which of a series of hypotheses best explains the processes underlying the rise, growth, change or decay of a given social institution, or the character of the actions and reactions of different elements of a given social environment. The truth of one of the hypotheses may be proved, by significant correspondences and differences, to be the order of thought that most closely corresponds with the order of things.

The simplest and most direct way of bringing home to the reader the truth of this dogmatic assertion of the scientific value of note-taking in sociological investigation will be first to describe the technique, and then to point out its uses. Now, it may seem a trivial matter, but the first item in the recipe for scientific note-taking is

¹ The art of note-taking has been recognised by German and French historians alike as necessary to the scientific historian. "Every one agrees nowadays", observe the most noted French writers on the study of history, "that it is advisable to collect materials on separate cards or slips of paper. . . . The advantages of this artifice are obvious; the detachability of the slips enables us to group them at will in a host of different combinations; if necessary, to change their places; it is easy to bring texts of the same kind together, and to incorporate additions, as they are acquired, in the interior of the groups to which they belong" (*Introduction to the Study of History*, by Charles Langlois and Charles Seignobos, translated by C. G. Berry, 1898, p. 103). "If what is in question", states the most learned German methodologist, "is a many-sided subject, such as a history of a people or a great organisation, the several sheets of notes must be so arranged that for each aspect of the subject the material can be surveyed as a whole. With any considerable work the notes must be taken upon separate loose sheets, which can easily be arranged in different orders, and among which sheets with new dates can be interpolated without difficulty" (*Lehrbuch der historischen Methode*, by Bernheim, 1908, p. 555).

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that the student must be provided, not with a notebook of any sort or kind, but with an indefinite number of separate sheets of paper of identical shape and size (I have found large quarto the most convenient form), and of sufficient good quality for either pen or typewriter. The reason why detached sheets must be employed, instead of any book, is, as I shall presently demonstrate, the absolute necessity of being able to rearrange the notes in different order; in fact, to be able to shuffle and reshuffle them indefinitely, and to change the classification of the facts recorded on them, according to the various hypotheses with which you will need to compare these facts. Another reason against the notebook is that notes recorded in a book must necessarily be entered in the order in which they are obtained; and it is vitally important to be set free from the particular category in which you have found any particular set of facts, whether of time or place, sequence or co-existence. In sociology, as in mineralogy, "conglomerates" have always to be broken up, and the ingredients separately dealt with.

Upon the separate sheets should be clearly written, so that other persons can read them, and according to a carefully devised system, with as much precision as possible, and in sufficient detail, a statement of each of the facts, or assumed facts, whether the knowledge of them has been acquired by personal observation, by the use of documents, by the perusal of literature, by the formal taking of evidence, by the interview, or by the statistical method, or in any other way. A good deal of the ease and rapidity of the investigation, and no small part of its fruitfulness and success, will depend on the way in which the notes are—to use a printer's word—displayed; and our experience suggests the following rules.

On each sheet of paper there should appear one date, and one only; one place, and one only; one source of information, and one only. Less easy of exact application, because less definite, and more dependent on the form of the provisional breaking-up and classification of the facts, is the rule that only one subject, or one category of facts, even only a single fact, should be recorded on each sheet. Of almost equal importance with this primary axiom of "one sheet one subject-matter"—we may almost say "one sheet one event in time and space"—is the manner in which the fact is "displayed" on

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the paper. Here what is of importance is identity of plan among all the hundreds, or even thousands, of notes. The date (in the history of institutions usually the year suffices) should always appear in the same place on all the sheets—say, at the right-hand top corner of the paper; and the source of information, or authority for the statement, in the left-hand margin. The centre of the sheet will be occupied by the text of the note, that is, the main statement or description of the fact recorded, whether it be a personal observation of your own, an extract from a document, a quotation from some literary source, an answer given in evidence, or a statistical calculation or table of figures. Some of the sheets may record suggested hypotheses, for subsequent comparison with the facts; or even a “general impression”, or a summary of a group of facts, given in addition to a note of each of the facts themselves. On what part of the sheet to write the name of the place at which the event occurred, and the various headings and sub-headings to be added by way of classification, constitutes the central puzzle-question with which the sociological investigator is confronted in devising the system for his note-taking. This cannot be definitely determined, in any elaborate or extensive investigation, except in conjunction with the principal classification or the successive classifications that may be adopted during the enquiry. Assuming that the investigation is concerned with all the social institutions of one place, and with no other places, the name of the place can, of course, be taken for granted, and not recorded on the innumerable sheets (except in so far as it may be necessary for the convenience of other persons using the same notes, when it may be given by the use of an india-rubber stamp once for all). In such an investigation the principal heading, to be placed in the centre of the top of the sheet, may be the name or title of the particular institution to which the note relates, whilst the sub-heading (which can be best put immediately under the date on the right-hand side) may denote the particular aspect of the institution dealt with, whether it be, for instance, some feature of its constitutional structure, or some incident of its activities. If, on the other hand, the investigation is concerned with social institutions in different places, the name of the place at which each event takes place becomes an essential item of the record, and it should be placed in a prominent

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position, either in the centre of the page at the top, or as the first sub-heading on the right-hand side beneath the date. The one consideration to be constantly kept in view, in this preliminary task of deciding how to record the facts that constitute the subject-matter of the enquiry, is so to place the different items of the record—the what, the where, the when, and the classification or relationship—that in glancing rapidly through a number of sheets the eye catches automatically each of these aspects of the facts. Thus, a carefully planned “display”, and, above all, identity of arrangement, greatly facilitates the shuffling and reshuffling of the sheets, according as it is desired to bring the facts under review in an arrangement according to place, time or any other grouping. It is, indeed, not too much to say that this merely mechanical perfection of note-taking may become an instrument of actual discovery.

“What is the use of this pedantic method of note-taking, involving masses of paper and a lot of hard thinking, not to mention the shuffling and reshuffling, which is apparently the final cause of this intolerable elaboration?” will be asked by the post-graduate student eager to publish an epoch-making treatise on the *History of Government*, or, perchance, on the *History of Freedom*, within the two years he has allotted to the taking of his doctorate. The only answer I can give is to cite our own experience.

The “Webb speciality” has been a study, at once historical and analytic, of the life-history of particular forms of social organisation within the United Kingdom, such as the Trade Union and Co-operative movements, and English local government from the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century. In these successive tasks we have been confronted, not with the constitution and activities of one organisation, in one particular year, in one part of the Kingdom; but with a multiplicity of organisations, belonging, it is true, to the same genus or species, but arising, flourishing and disappearing in diverse social environments, at different intervals throughout a considerable period of time, exhibiting a great variety of constitutions and functions, subject to successive waves of thought and emotion, and developing relations with other institutions or organisations within the British and in some cases within the world community. The task before us was to discover, for instance, in the tangled and

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complicated undergrowth of English local government, the recurrent uniformities in constitution and activities showing the main lines of development, together with the varieties in structure and function arising in particular places, in particular decades, or within peculiar social environments; some to survive and multiply, others to decay and disappear. The main sources of our information were, as it happens, records and persons located in the cities and villages of England and Wales, sources which, for reasons of time and expense, had each to be exhausted in one visit. But even if all this mass of MSS. and printed records, and the hundreds of separate individuals concerned, had been continuously at our disposal, whenever we cared to consult them, it would still have been desirable to adopt a method of note-taking which would allow of a mechanical breaking-up of the conglomerate of facts yielded by particular documents, interviews and observations, in order to reassemble them in a new order revealing causal sequences, and capable of literary expression. The simplest (and usually the least fertile) way of expressing the results of an investigation is to follow the strictly chronological order in which the events occur, not according to their causal connections with other events, but exclusively according to the dates of their happening. But even for this narrow purpose the conglomerate notebook is an impossible instrument,¹ unless the subject-matter happens to be the life-history of a single organisation, the data for which are all to be found in one document, and are themselves given in that document in strictly chronological order. In our investigations, dealing as they did with the life-history of hundreds of separate organisations, the data for which were to be found in

¹ An instance may be given of the necessity of the "separate sheet" system. Among the many sources of information from which we constructed our book *The Manor and the Borough* were the hundreds of reports on particular boroughs made by the Municipal Corporation Commissioners in 1835. These four huge volumes are well arranged and very fully indexed; they were in our own possession; we had read them through more than once; and we had repeatedly consulted them on particular points. We had, in fact, used them as if they had been our own bound notebooks, thinking that this would suffice. But, in the end, we found ourselves quite unable to digest and utilise this material until we had written out every one of the innumerable facts on a separate sheet of paper, so as to allow of the mechanical absorption of these sheets among our other notes; of their complete assortment by subjects; and of their being shuffled and reshuffled to test hypotheses as to suggested co-existences and sequences.

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innumerable separate documents, pamphlets, newspapers or books, or were discovered in many observations and interviews, the conglomerate notebook system would have involved disentangling and rewriting, from all the separate notebooks, every note relating to a particular year. By adopting our method of one sheet for one subject, one place and one date, all the sheets could be rapidly reshuffled in chronological order; and the whole of our material might have been surveyed and summarised exclusively from the standpoint of chronology. But, as a matter of fact, we had to use the facts gathered from all these sources, not for one purpose only, but for many purposes: for describing changes in the constitutional form, or the increase or variation in the activities of the organisation; or the localisation of particular constitutions or activities in particular areas, or the connection of any of these groups of facts with other groups of facts. By the method of note-taking that I have described, it was practicable to sort out all our thousands of separate pieces of paper according to any, or successively according to all, of these categories or combination of categories, so that we could see, almost at a glance, to what extent the thousands of vestries which served as local authorities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were entangled in the court leet structure; in what particular year they began to apply for Acts of Parliament closing or opening their constitutions; whether this constitutional development was equally characteristic of the statutory bodies of commissioners set up during the latter part of the eighteenth century, and the early part of the nineteenth century; whether, when and why exactly the referendum and initiative were introduced and for what purpose; or at what stage of development and under what set of conditions all these authorities ceased to rely on the obligatory services of citizens and began to employ persons at wages. Or to take an example from our investigations into Trade Unionism. It was only by arranging and rearranging our separate sheets of paper that we could ascertain how far piece-work, or the objection to piece-work, was characteristic of a particular kind of industry, or of a particular type of Trade Union, or of a particular district of the United Kingdom, or of a particular stage of development in the organisation concerned or of the movement as a whole. Indeed, it is not too much to say that in all our work we have found

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this process of reshuffling the sheets, and reassembling them on our work-table according to different categories, or in different sequences—a process entirely dependent on the method of note-taking—by far the most fertile stage of our investigations. Not once, but frequently has the general impression with regard to the causal sequence of events, with which we had started our enquiry, or which had arisen spontaneously during the examination of documents, the taking of evidence or the observation of the working of an organisation, been seriously modified, or completely reversed, when we have been simultaneously confronted by all the separate notes relating to the point at issue. On many occasions we have been compelled to break off the writing of a particular chapter, or even of a particular paragraph, in order to test, by reshuffling the whole of our notes dealing with a particular subject, a particular place, a particular organisation or a particular date, the relative validity of hypotheses as to cause and effect. I may remark, parenthetically, that we have found this “game with reality”, this building up of one hypothesis and knocking it down in favour of others that had been revealed or verified by a new shuffle of the notes—especially when we severally “backed” rival hypotheses—a most stimulating recreation! In that way alone have we been able “to put our bias out of gear”, and to make our order of thought correspond, not with our own prepossessions, but with the order of things discovered by our investigations.

I realise how difficult it is to convince students—especially those with a “literary” rather than a “scientific” training—that it is by just this use of such a mechanical device as the shuffling of sheets of notes, and just at this stage, that the process of investigation often becomes fertile in actual discoveries. Most students seem to assume that it is the previous stage of making observations and taking notes which is that of discovery. I can only speak from our own experience, of which I will give two examples. When we had actually completed and published our *History of Trade Unionism* (1894), after three or four years’ collection of facts from all industries in all parts of the kingdom, which we had arranged more or less chronologically, we found to our surprise that we had no systematic and definite theory or vision of how Trade Unionism operated, or what it effected. It

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was not until we had completely re-sorted all our innumerable sheets of paper according to subjects, thus bringing together all the facts relating to each, whatever the trade concerned, or the place or the date—and had shuffled and reshuffled these sheets according to various tentative hypotheses—that a clear, comprehensive and verifiable theory of the working and results of Trade Unionism emerged in our minds; to be embodied, after further researches by way of verification, in our *Industrial Democracy* (1897).

A further instance occurred in connection with my work on the Poor Law Commission. It had been commonly assumed on all sides that the Local Government Board and its predecessors had continued throughout to administer the "principles of 1834". On my insisting upon an actual examination of the policy pursued through the seventy years, I was deputed by the Commission to examine and report what had actually been the policy. This involved the examination of every manifestation of policy, such as the successive statutes, general orders, special orders, circulars, etc., numbering in all some thousands. These were all analysed by subjects, on separate sheets of paper, under my direction. To these data was added an analysis of the letters of the Local Government Board, from 1835 to 1907, addressed to a dozen of the principal Boards of Guardians (an analysis made by permission of these authorities from their letter-books), as well as their records of the inspectors' verbal decisions and advice to guardians. When the task was completed, neither the able assistants who had done the work, nor I who had directed it, had the least idea what the policy on each subject had been at each period. It was not until the sheets had been sorted out, first according to subjects, and then according to date, that the fact and the nature of a continuous but gradual evolution of policy could be detected, differing from class to class of paupers; until, in 1907, each class had come to be dealt with according to principles which were obviously very different from those of 1834. The report of this investigation was presented to the Poor Law Commission, with the interesting result that we heard no more of the "principles of 1834"! It was subsequently published as *English Poor Law Policy* (1910).

I append two samples of our sheets of notes; one recording an interview, and the other an extract from an official document.

NEWCASTLE

TOWN COUNCIL

1900
Audit

Interview.

Rodgers, T.C.
& Chairman
B^d of G^{ms}

Got himself elected People's Auditor about 1887, in order to exclude a worthless man. For many years the Auditors had been reelected without question—in 1886 (?) a worthless man, who lived by his wits, got himself nominated at last moment, on the chance of the existing holders not taking the trouble to be formally nominated. And so got elected, for the sake of the small emolument.

Rodgers, then on the Evening News, got himself nominated the following year, & held it for 5 years. Found out many irregularities, which he exposed in Evening News—principal being the failure to collect the contributions of owners towards Private Improvements (paving streets)—there was £40,000 outstanding, on which owners were paying no interest, whilst Corporⁿ was borrowing the money at interest. Corporation then turned him out of the Auditorship. He had had to fight the election every year, and lost it at last.

Recently he had been elected a Councillor. Was not satisfied with the way the business was done. Would prefer L.G.B. audit.

A SAMPLE NOTE

NEWCASTLE

TOWN COUNCIL

1892.

Committee's

Newcastle Imp. Act 1892.

*Proceedings.**Aug. 4. 1892. p. 568.*

Council resolves:

"That the powers & duties of the Council under Part 9. (Sanitary Provisions), Part 10, (Infectious Diseases) and Part 11 (Common Lodging Houses) of the N'castle-upon-T. Improvement Act 1892 be delegated to the Sanitary C'tee until 9 Nov^r next or until the Council otherwise direct."

Similarly, Powers relating to Streets, Buildings, and Plans are delegated to Town Imp. Ctee.

ECONOMIC SCIENCE

(D)

ON THE NATURE OF ECONOMIC SCIENCE

THE following notes on the Nature of Economic Science and on the Theory of Value at once summarise and extend the arguments which I imperfectly expressed in the essays referred to at p. 292.

(I) MY OBJECTIONS TO A SELF-CONTAINED, SEPARATE, ABSTRACT POLITICAL ECONOMY

I see few advantages, and many disadvantages, in collecting together all the activities concerned with the production and consumption of wealth, in all the various stages of social evolution, and in all the different varieties of social organisation by which this function is performed; and in making this object or purpose the subject of a self-contained science styled Political Economy, apart from the study of human behaviour in society—that is to say, of social institutions, or Sociology. The implied claim of the orthodox or Ricardian economics to constitute such a science of wealth production in general has already been assailed by a competent authority. “The science of Political Economy”, sums up that lucid and ingenious thinker, Walter Bagehot, “may be defined as the science of business, *such as business is in large productive and trading communities*. It is an analysis of that world so familiar to many Englishmen—the ‘great commerce’ by which England has become rich. It assumes the principal facts which make that commerce possible, and as is the way of an abstract science it isolates and simplifies them; it detaches them from the confusion with which they are mixed in fact” [*Economic Studies*, by Walter Bagehot, 1888, p. 5]. Bagehot had in mind what economic students are apt to forget, namely, that “big business” of the nineteenth-century type, which Ricardo was considering, is not the only form of wealth production; and is, in fact, in marked contrast with other forms, such as chattel slavery, tribal ownership, peasant agriculture, the manorial system, independent handicrafts, domestic manufactures, and what

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not. Even to-day there are in the world other social institutions, besides profit-making capitalist business, which produce no small amount of "wealth" even in the narrowest sense of the term. For instance, there are, in the twentieth century, state forests and mines, banks and post offices, steamship lines and railways; and municipal departments of gas and electricity, tramways and docks, dwelling-houses and restaurants. I need not again describe the Consumers' Co-operative Movement, with its multifarious industrial enterprises carried on without the incentive of profit-making. Thus, the Ricardian economics—if Bagehot's justification of its validity has any authority—has no right to the position of the science of wealth production. Political Economy, as professed and taught, deals with only one of many social institutions engaged in or concerned with wealth production; and it is misleading to ignore those other social institutions by which wealth has been, and is now being produced among hundreds of millions of people unacquainted with the "big business" or profit-making capitalism, for which Ricardo sought to formulate the "laws" that his successors have been, during the past century, so diligently refining and elaborating.

Why not drop, once and for all, the whole notion of a science of Political Economy? The term itself is a foolish one, which confuses the political with the industrial organisation of the community. Even when the modern term Economics is substituted, the "science" inherits a misleading delimitation of content and a faulty method of reasoning. What needs to be studied are social institutions themselves, as they actually exist or have existed, whatever may be the motive attributed to the men and women concerned; and whatever may be the assumed object or purpose with which these institutions are established or maintained. The organisation of "big business", or profit-making capitalism, is, at the present time, one of the most important of social institutions; and it deserves a whole study to itself, which may or may not yet warrant the name of a science, but for which an appropriate description should be found. This study of profit-making capitalism or modern business organisation would take its place alongside the separate studies of other social institutions, such as the family; consumers' co-operation; the vocational organisations of the various kinds of producers; local government;

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the state (or political organisation); international relations; the intellectual, æsthetic and religious interests of man, and possibly a host of other departments of what can only be regarded (and may one day be unified) as Sociology.

And this change of the definition or sphere of what is now termed Economics or Political Economy—which Hearn, it may be remembered, wished to call Plutology—would to-day be as much to the advantage of profit-making capitalism as it would be to the advancement of truth. It would almost necessarily involve the abandonment of the abstract, or purely deductive method, without the possibility of precise verification of its inferences, which Ricardo's authority imposed on successive generations of British economists. Now, one of the many mischievous results of the abstract and deductive method has been the underlying assumption, used as a premise for its deductive reasoning, that pecuniary self-interest is, in fact, the basis of modern business enterprise, all else being ignored as merely "friction". Thus it is assumed that all the activities of profit-makers are inspired solely and exclusively by pecuniary self-interest. This is, to my thinking, to do them injustice. Public spirit and personal vanity, delight in technical efficiency and desire for power, political and social ambition, the spirit of adventure and scientific curiosity, not to mention parental love and pride of family, and even racial prestige, all contribute to the make-up of the dominant personalities of the business world. Whether competitive profit-making or capitalism promotes greed and oppression, and depresses public spirit—like the analogous accusations that state employment favours slackness and lessens initiative, and that vocational organisation furthers exclusiveness and stale technique—are all alike questions to be investigated. "By their fruits ye shall know them"—I would add, more especially by the spiritual fruits, *i.e.* by the characteristic state of mind which any particular institution brings about in the individual, and in the community, the character which it produces, as manifested in the conduct of individuals and organisations. I believe that we have here a most fruitful field for enquiry. We might discover that each type of organisation (or absence of organisation), each social institution, has its own peculiar "social diseases", which will lead to senility or

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death unless arrested—arrested, possibly, by the presence or the development of another and complementary social institution.

Assuming that we give up the conception of a separate abstract science of Political Economy or Economics, the adjective “economic” might then be reserved to define the relations between men arising out of their means of livelihood or subsistence; or, to put it in another way, which can be weighed and measured in terms of money—whatever may be the social institution in which these relations occur; exactly as we use the terms racial, political, legal, sporting or sexual, to describe the types of relationships having other objects or ends. Thus we should have the economics of art, or of sport, or of marriage, or of medicine, as the case might be, just as we have the legal aspects of business enterprise, of the family or of municipal government.

A necessary implication of this new classification would be that what would have to be investigated, described and analysed are the social institutions themselves, as they exist or have existed, not any assumed “laws”, unchanging and ubiquitous, comparable with the law of gravity, any failure of correspondence with the facts being dismissed as friction. A second corollary is that these social institutions, like other organic structure, have to be studied, not in any assumed perfection of development, but in all the changing phases of growing social tissue, from embryo to corpse, in health and perversion, in short, as the birth, growth, disease and death of actual social relationships. And their diseases may even be the most interesting part of the study!

Let us explore some of the advantages to be gained by this new departure. For instance, confronted with the accumulation of demoralised labour in our big towns, and notably at the dock gates, the mechanistic doctrines of the orthodox economists are waste words. The so-called “economic law” “that labour goes where it is best paid”, one of the many deductions from the metaphysical theory that all men follow their pecuniary self-interest, is here glaringly falsified by events. Labour in this case goes where it is worst paid, and remains there. Can we discover the sequence which leads to this state of affairs? Taking the class of casual labourers as a whole, we observe that their economic faculty is intermittent, and

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that the majority of these individuals have always been, or have become, mentally or physically unfit for persistent work. We can even watch the process by which a countryman habituated to steady and continuous work at regular wages becomes, under given conditions, the under-employed, and eventually the unemployable worker. The attractions of the big towns are obvious. The distributive trades, and the industries of construction, offer more odd jobs and more short jobs than the manufacturing or mining industries; the metropolitan life yields greater amusement for leisure hours than the life of the countryside or manufacturing town. The existence of this particular leisure class may be summed up in the seemingly paradoxical statement: the difficulty of living by regular work and the ease of living without it! And I doubt whether those who, either by birth or temperament, belong to, or through circumstances have drifted into, this class of casual labourers suffer much discontent with their condition. For their economic desire, besides being inefficient, has sunk to the lowest level of *subjective* quality. In spite of physical misery, they prefer a leisurely life, in the midst of the debased excitements of a big town, to a working life with comparative comfort under monotonous conditions. They enjoy to the full a social intercourse unshackled by moral conventions and unrestrained by the public opinion of a small community—but (unlike the social life of the analogous class in “good society”) inspired by a most genuine spirit of warm-hearted generosity. They are an attractive people, with all the charms of a leisurely and cosmopolitan view of life, free from intellectual and moral prejudices, and as different from the true working class as are the individuals who compose the leisure classes of “London Society” from the professional classes in London and from the higher middle class of our provincial towns. But they are essentially parasitic, and like other parasitic growths, they tend to reduce the substance they feed on to their own condition.¹

¹ A more detailed description of the behaviour of the lowest class of casual labourers is given in my subsequent article on “The Docks”.

“These men hang about for the ‘odd hour’ work or one day in the seven. They live on stimulants and tobacco, varied with bread and tea and salt fish. Their passion is gambling. Sections of them are hereditary casuals; a larger portion drift from other

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To sum up: Unused economic faculty rapidly deteriorates into the intermittent state—and efficient economic desire, if satisfied without the obligation to produce, quickly becomes parasitic—a conclusion which I had failed to reach from the abstract economics of Ricardo and Marshall.

My subsequent enquiry into the low wages, long and irregular hours and insanitary conditions of the slop-clothing trade of East London (published in 1888) revealed an analogous correspondence between a low type of economic faculty on the one hand, and, on the other, poverty-stricken economic desire; resulting in the production and use of the "balloon coat" and "soaped-up trousers", commodities as hideous in appearance as they were wasteful in wear. As the extreme contrast to this specially ignominious correlation of low faculty and low desire, with its ugly offspring of slop-clothing, let us look back on the mediæval cathedral, the outcome of a combination of the faculties of the anonymous God-intoxicated designer, leading his groups of craftsmen, individually enthusiastic in the execution of their manual arts, with the effective desire for a House of God on the part of successive pious founders and the undoubting community, which was then the congregation of the faithful. As a contemporary, and a more complicated, contrast with the sweater's workshop we may visualise the scientifically efficient factory of the American business combine, organised by experts paid princely salaries, affording regular employment at good wages, relatively short hours of work, hygienic conditions and "welfare" institutions for a mass of carefully graded employees—accompanied, it is true, by hierarchical discipline and arbitrary promotion and dismissal,

trades. They have a constitutional hatred to regularity and forethought, and a need for paltry excitement. They are late risers, sharp-witted talkers, and, above all, they have that agreeable tolerance for their own and each other's vices which seems characteristic of a purely leisure class, whether it lies at the top or the bottom of society. But if we compare them with their brothers and sisters in the London Club and West-end drawing-room we must admit that in one respect they are strikingly superior. The stern reality of ever-pressing starvation draws all together. Communism is a necessity of their life: they share all with one another, and as a class they are quixotically generous. It is this virtue and the courage with which they face privation that lend a charm to life among them" (Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People*, Final Edition (1902), Poverty Series, vol. 4, chapter on The Docks, by Beatrice Potter, pp. 31-2).

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the monotony of endless repetition work in extreme subdivision of labour—producing in enormous quantities standardised commodities of respectable quality and undeniable utility, whether “packet foods”, gramophones, motor-cars or munitions of war, all accurately designed to satisfy, in the main, merely the animal instincts of self-preservation, the desire for common pleasures, and the greed for power.

The keenness with which I was following up this conception of economics as the study of the economic *behaviour* of particular individuals and classes led me to discover one notable exception to the rule, under the conditions of labour at the East End of London, of progressive deterioration of the wage-earners, alike in their production and their consumption of commodities. In the chapters on the East End Tailoring Trade and on the Jewish Community, contributed to Charles Booth's first volume (published in 1889), I thus describe the exceptional characteristics of the immigrant Jew.

“In the East End tailoring trade the characteristic *love of profit* in the Jewish race has a twofold tendency: to raise the workers as individuals, and to depress the industry through which they rise. Contractors and workers alike ascend in the social scale; taken as a whole they shift upwards, leaving to the new-comer from foreign lands the worst paid work, the most dilapidated workshop, and the dirtiest lodgings.”¹

“As an industrial competitor [I write in my subsequent chapter on the Jewish Community in the same volume] the Polish Jew is fettered by no definite standard of life; it rises and falls with his opportunities; he is not depressed by penury, and he is not demoralised by gain. As a citizen of our many-sided metropolis he is unmoved by those gusts of passion which lead to drunkenness and crime; whilst, on the other hand, he pursues the main purposes of personal existence, undistracted by the humours, illusions, and aspirations arising from the unsatisfied emotions of our more complicated and less disciplined natures. Is it surprising, therefore, that in this nineteenth century, with its ideal of physical health, intellectual acquisition, and material prosperity, the chosen people, with three thousand years of training,

¹ See Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People*, Final Edition (1902), Poverty Series, vol. 4, chapter iii., on The Tailoring Trade, by Beatrice Potter, p. 61.

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should in some instances realise the promise made by Moses to their forefathers: 'Thou shalt drive out nations mightier than thyself, and thou shalt take their land as an inheritance?'¹

(2) A THEORY OF VALUE

My brooding over the Theory of Value led me to the conception that value arises in the satisfaction of a desire by the exercise of a faculty. In "value in use", this union of exercise and satisfaction may take place in one individual, as in the man eating the food which he has produced; in "exchange-value" the union necessarily involves a relation between two or more individuals.

Price is simply the expression in terms of money of the equation at which a given faculty and a given desire, under given conditions, consent to unite and generate exchange value: it is, so to speak, the marriage settlement of economic life, and like many other matrimonial arrangements it is not always to the advantage of both

¹ Charles Booth's Final Edition (1902), Poverty Series, vol. 3, chapter on The Jewish Community East London, by Beatrice Potter, reprinted in *Problems of Modern Industry*, by S. and B. Webb (1898), pp. 43-4.

The train of thought arising from this conception of economics as to the study of different types of economic behaviour finds expression in a note to *Industrial Democracy* (1897), by S. and B. Webb, pp. 697-8:

"We are unable here to do more than refer to the existence of these popular ideas as to the standard of life. How they originate—why, for instance, the English workman should always have insisted on eating costly and unnutritious wheaten bread, or why some classes or races display so much more stubbornness of standard than others, would be a fruitful subject for economic inquiry. We suggest, as a hypothetical classification by way of starting point, that the races and classes of wage-earners seem to divide themselves into three groups. There are those who, like the Anglo-Saxon skilled artisan, will not work below a customary minimum standard of life, but who have no maximum; that is to say, they will be stimulated to intenser effort and new wants by every increase of income. There are races who, like the African negro, have no assignable minimum, but a very low maximum; they will work, that is, for indefinitely low wages, but cannot be induced to work at all once their primitive wants are satisfied. Finally, there is the Jew, who, as we think, is unique in possessing neither a maximum nor a minimum; he will accept the lowest terms rather than remain out of employment; as he rises in the world new wants stimulate him to increased intensity of effort, and no amount of income causes him to slacken his indefatigable activity. To this remarkable elasticity in the standard of life is, we suggest, to be attributed both the wealth and the poverty of the Jews—the striking fact that their wage-earning class is permanently the poorest in all Europe, whilst individual Jews are the wealthiest men of their respective countries."

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parties. And moreover, in this vale of tears many faculties and many desires do, as a matter of fact, remain unmarried; and thus fail to generate exchange value. Indeed, it should be one of the main objects of applied sociology to bring about the largest measure of unbroken continuity and mutual satisfaction in an ever-increasing stream of marriages between the economic faculties and economic desires of the human race.

Now Karl Marx and his disciples, following Thompson, Hodgskin and Ricardo, refused to recognise that it took the two to create the third. According to his theory of value, economic faculty, or, as he preferred to call it, "labour", is the sole origin of value; he assumed that economic desire is, like the ether, always present; and can therefore be neglected as a joint parent of value.¹ Consequently, he overlooked all the processes by which the correspondence or union of a particular faculty with a particular desire is actually attained. To read Marx, one would think that it was only necessary to make a yard of cloth in order to create exchange value equal to the cost of production, together with a handsome surplus! In the weird Marxian world, whilst men are automata, commodities have souls; money is incarnated life, and capital has a life-process of its own! This idea of an "automaton owner", thus making profit without even being conscious of the existence of any desire to be satisfied, is, to any one who has lived within financial or industrial undertakings, in its glaring discrepancy with facts, nothing less than grotesque.

With regard to the Co-operative Movement, it was my conception that exchange value resulted from the correspondence or union of economic faculty with economic desire that gave me the clue to what was then a new idea, and what proved to be a true idea now universally accepted, namely, that the British Co-operative Movement owed its success to the fact that it was, in essence, an *organisation of consumers*, controlling the production and distribution of com-

¹ Commodities, therefore, in which equal quantities of labour are embodied, or which can be produced in the same time, have the same value. The value of one commodity is to the value of any other, as the labour-time necessary for the production of the one is to that necessary for the production of the other. "As values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labour-time". . . . (*Capital*, by Karl Marx; translation edited by Friedrich Engels, 1887, vol. 1, p. 6.)

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modities in the interests of the consumers; and not, as had hitherto been asserted, not only by the idealists of the movement, but also by the Political Economists, an *organisation of the producers*, for the purpose of owning the instruments of production, and controlling their own employment. Further, it seemed to me that this organisation of consumers did not, of itself, supply a healthy organisation of industrial activities. To save it from internal disorder and degeneration, there needed to be some participation in control by the representatives of the various classes of producers: that, in fact, the manual workers' Trade Unions, together with the brain-workers' professional organisations, were a necessary complement to the Consumers' Co-operative Movement, as they are also to the Political State and its derivative—municipal government.

Was it fantastic to suggest that this idea of the democratic government of industry as a joint affair of consumers and producers, had some affinity with the idea of exchange value being the result of a correspondence or union between economic faculty and economic desire? "The proper relationship of Trade Unionism and co-operation [so I tell a conference of Trade Union officials and co-operators in 1892] is that of an ideal marriage, in which each partner respects the individuality and assists the work of the other, whilst both cordially join forces to secure their common end—the Co-operative State."¹

(E)

WHY THE SELF-GOVERNING WORKSHOP HAS FAILED

(See page 380)

THE Special Supplement on Co-operative Production and Profit-sharing, published with the *New Statesman* of February 14, 1914,

¹ A paper read at a conference of Trade Union Officials and Co-operators, Tynemouth, August 15, 1892; reprinted in *Problems of Modern Industry*, by S. and B. Webb, 1898, p. 208.

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(now out of print) surveyed, up to that date, the success and failure of associations of producers in France, Belgium, Italy, Germany and Great Britain respectively. For the purpose of this analysis, associations of producers were classified under three heads—the Self-governing Workshop, Partial Autonomies (where the employees exercise no effective control) and Dependents on Co-operative Stores or other associations of consumers; capitalist profit-sharing and co-partnership schemes being dealt with in a separate section of the report.

As this Supplement is not easily accessible, I reproduce our conclusions on the causes of the ill-success of Associations of Producers generally, and of the Self-governing Workshop in particular.

“If we survey, as a whole, the past three-quarters of a century of zealous and devoted work that has, in half-a-dozen different countries, been put into forming Associations of Producers which should themselves own the instruments of production and manage their own industries, it is impossible to avoid a feeling of disappointment. In none of the countries in which thousands of these societies have been started do more than hundreds exist to-day; and most of these are still in their struggling stage. They are, too, for the most part, in industries permitting of business on a small scale; and their enterprises neither employ any large numbers of workers, nor administer any considerable amount of capital. Moreover, those societies which have had any marked financial success, or have grown to any size, prove, for the most part, to have departed considerably from the form of the Self-governing Workshop—to such an extent, indeed, that it is not far off the truth to say that the chance of success seems to increase the further that form is left behind! The actual outcome of all the effort and devotion is that, even in France and Belgium, Italy and Great Britain, the countries in which alone these Associations of Producers have been successful at all, only a microscopical fraction of the manufacturing industry is to-day carried on by anything like the Self-governing Workshop, in the efficacy of which the Socialists of 1830–80 usually believed, or by any really democratically controlled Associations of Producers in any form whatsoever. Nor is it only in comparison with the capitalist organisation of industry that the Associations of Producers appear both feeble and

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fulfil. As we shall see in the second part of our Report, other forms of the democratic organisation of industry have, during the same three-quarters of a century, grown apace, and are, in some cases, increasing even more rapidly than the capitalist organisation itself.

“We cannot ascribe the failure of the Associations of Producers to the fact that they have had to depend on voluntary recruiting or that they were exposed to capitalist competition, or that they were made up of manual workers and were entirely dependent for ability on what the manual workers could supply. For all these considerations apply, as we shall see, also to the great and growing Co-operative Movement of Associations of Consumers, which has succeeded as markedly as the Associations of Producers have failed. Indeed, so far as financial and intellectual assistance from the other classes is concerned, the Associations of Producers have, at all times, in all countries, enjoyed much more help and encouragement and support than the Associations of Consumers. Similarly, of government favour, at least in France and Italy, they have had much more. In Great Britain, where the Government has done nothing for either form of Co-operation, it is the Associations of Producers that have always been patronised, advertised, and eulogised by the great industrial and political magnates, as well as by the Press. It is these Associations of Producers that have always enjoyed, too, the special sympathy, encouragement and support of those other industrial organisations of the manual working class, the Trade Unions.

“Nor can we attribute the relative ill-success of the Associations of Producers to the character of the individual workmen who have taken part in them. Alike in France and Belgium, in Italy and Great Britain, these Associations have constantly attracted many of the finest intellects and noblest characters that the wage-earners have produced. The disinterestedness, the untiring zeal, the long-suffering, patient devotion that have been put into many of these societies cannot be described otherwise than as heroic. It is sometimes suggested that these Associations have suffered from lack of capital. But in many cases capital has been forthcoming in abundance, whilst lack of capital has not prevented other working-class organisations from building up gigantic industrial enterprises, any more than

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it has stood in the way of individual capitalists amassing colossal fortunes out of beginnings even smaller than those of Associations of Producers.

“ We are driven to conclude, on the evidence, that the relative ill-success of Associations of Producers—their almost invariable experience of finding themselves thwarted, their high hopes disappointed, and their very continuance a perpetual struggle—is due to something in themselves, to be sought for in that which is common to them all, whatever their trades and whatever their countries. It is not merely that the manual workers seldom have at their command the sort of managerial ability that wins success in capitalist industry. As we shall see in Part II. of this Report, the Associations of Consumers have proved that this difficulty can be overcome. We infer that it is the very form of Associations of Producers that is ill-adapted to survive. Applied to the democratic control of industry, such a form seems to suffer inherently from three leading disadvantages which may be seen militating against efficiency in practically all the recorded experiments. The group of workmen who make a particular commodity, though they may know all the technical processes of their industry, do not seem able, when they control their own enterprise, to secure, in a high degree, either (i.) adequate workshop discipline, or (ii.) the requisite knowledge of the market, or (iii.) sufficient alacrity in changing processes. With regard to workshop discipline, experience seems to indicate that, with human nature as it is at present, it does not do for those who have in the workshop to obey the manager, to be, as committee-men, the direct employers of the manager. This drawback, however, might conceivably be got over by the spread of education and goodwill. More serious seems the almost necessary ignorance of the manual working producer with regard to the market for his commodities. Knowledge of the market means not only an acquaintance with the channels of trade, but also a wide and accurate appreciation of what it is that the users or consumers of the commodity really desire and appreciate—a knowledge that must not be limited merely to the statements that customers have actually made, for there is much that will never be put into words. The successful capitalist *entrepreneur*, like the representative of the consumer on the committee of a co-operative

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store, is always on the alert to divine and discover what each section of customers desires, *and is going to desire.*

“With regard to alacrity in changing processes, the actual producer, in any system of specialised industry—particularly if he fears to lose by the change—is at a special disadvantage just because he is himself a producer. The man who has learnt a particular art or skill, and who has spent many years of his life in a particular process, is necessarily to a large extent incapacitated from responding quickly, and without resistance, to the need for change. His very absorption in his own speciality, which has given him his high degree of technical skill, stands in his way when it is a matter of discerning and recognising the advent of a new alternative; it may be a new material, it may be a new process, it may be a new machine, it may be some entirely different commodity that serves the old purpose better. When it is at last forced upon his notice, he cannot admit that it is superior to the old; he declines to believe that the consumers can be so ill-advised as actually to prefer the new. The producer, in fact, is naturally and, as it seems, inevitably biased against a change which will be apparently to his disadvantage. The capitalist *entrepreneur* or the agent or representative of a consumers’ democracy, on the contrary, has no such bias, and is prompt to seize his advantage by the introduction of any novelty, regardless of its effect on the old style of producers.

“We think that it is these inherent drawbacks of the Self-governing Workshop, rather than any accidental or remediable defects, that account for both the relative failure everywhere of this form of the organisation of industry, and for the interesting line of development which it has taken in Great Britain, and, to a lesser extent, also in Belgium and Germany. In France and Italy, as we have seen, the constitutions of the Associations of Producers are virtually stereotyped by the conditions which the Governments impose in return for their favours. But in Great Britain these little establishments have remained free to alter as experience has directed. What we see is that the Self-governing Workshop is hardly ever, for any length of time, a stable form. Its essential feature, the union in the same persons of manual workers and managers, hardly ever endures. It is always tending to revert to the ordinary separation of the capitalist system,

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of non-working capital owners who control, of a manager subject to them who directs, and of manual working wage-earners who obey. But there is, in Great Britain as in Belgium and Germany, an alternative tendency in which we see both instruction and hope. Many of the Associations of Producers have tended to become attached, as subordinate adjuncts, to a more or less formal federation of groups of Co-operative Associations of Consumers, which are able to furnish all the capital required for the most efficient production, which supply almost a 'tied' market, and which provide, on the committee of management, representatives of a working-class constituency who are not subject to the special drawbacks of the actual producers of the commodities. The manager finds in such a committee the support needed for the maintenance of discipline and for the introduction of any innovations that are called for. The manual workers themselves, though forgoing management, may retain the position of security, independence and personal dignity which participation in ownership can afford. This is the position into which, as we have shown, the Hebden Bridge Manufacturing Co., the co-operative printing societies of Manchester and Leicester, and a whole group of other successful Associations of Producers have unconsciously drifted. This is the position, as we believe, such of the other British Associations of Producers as survive will more and more tend to assume. A similar tendency, we note, is remarked by M. Vandervelde among those of Belgium."¹ [*The New Statesman*; Special Supplement on Co-operative Production and Profit-sharing; February 14, 1914, pp. 20-22.]

Five years after this Supplement was published, there came, in Great Britain, out of what was called Guild Socialism, in 1919-23, a remarkable recrudescence of substantially the old kind of Associations of Producers. Ignoring the repeated experiences of the preceding ninety years, enthusiasts formed dozens of little "guilds" of builders, tailors, printers, furniture makers, etc., which seem to me to have had the same characteristics as their innumerable predecessors. If anything, their failure was more complete and catastrophic. A full and candid description of this latest experiment in Associations of Producers would be of great value.

¹ Émile Vandervelde, *La Coopération neutre et la Coopération socialiste*.

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There is one thing that, after further reflection, I would add to our repeated examination, between 1888 and 1923, of the attempts to carry on industry by associations of any kind, whether of producers or of consumers or of capitalists. Neither an invention nor a work of art emanates from group government, whether of producers or consumers or of profit-seeking shareholders. Given the appropriate basis for group government, all sorts of industrial operations may be successfully conducted, indefinitely expanded, and endlessly developed in range and variety, without forgoing democratic control, and with even greater security and continuity than profit-making capitalism. The collectively controlled enterprise may be, as experience has demonstrated, quick to adopt a new invention, enterprising in experiment, and courageously patient in trial until success is attained. But invention, like artistic production, must be the work of an individual mind; or, very occasionally, of the free interplay of the minds of two or three co-workers, untrammelled by any "management", whether co-operative or governmental or capitalistic. How far, and by what means social organisation can promote and increase either inventive or artistic genius deserves further study. The inventor or the artist must have sufficient leisure of body and mind, and sufficient freedom from the incessant anxieties as to daily bread, to set his spirit free. Too severe and too prolonged a penury depresses genius, and finally kills off its possessors. On the other hand, the possession of wealth, and especially the inheritance of wealth, seems almost invariably to sterilise genius. It is hard for even the most diligent enquirer in all countries, down all the centuries, to discover even half-a-dozen inventors or artists of genius who have found themselves, on arriving at manhood, in possession of any considerable wealth. It must, I think, be admitted that, for those without a competence, neither patents nor copyrights work satisfactorily in furnishing genius with its opportunity. Nor can we conclude that governments and co-operative societies are more successful patrons of inventive or artistic genius, especially when it breaks out in new and unexpected lines, than profit-making capitalism. How much can be done for genius by universal education; by scholarships and fellowships (which might be instituted in connection with great industrial undertakings as well as univer-

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sities); by lightly tasked professorships and even sinecure appointments with no other duties than observation and reflection; by "measurement and publicity", and even experimental execution at the public expense, must be left to other students to explore.

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