



RICHARD HENRY TAWNEY

Photograph 1950

RICHARD HENRY TAWNEY

1880-1962

R. H. TAWNEY rarely spoke of his forebears. His father, C. H. Tawney, Principal of the Presidency College in Calcutta, was a distinguished Sanskrit scholar; and behind him the line runs back through a clergyman, a civil engineer who became general manager to the Oxford Canal Company, an Oxford builder and timber merchant, to an eighteenth-century watchmaker of Clerkenwell. In 1819 the civil engineer, Richard Tawney, had joined with his brother, an Oxford brewer, to acquire a major share in a Banbury bank. When, by a fortunate chance, the records of the banking house of Gillett and Tawney were given to the London School of Economics (and, for want of other space, were lodged for a time in Tawney's own room) it proved impossible to kindle in the great-grandson even a flicker of interest. He took a poor view of men who spent their lives in finance, and perhaps family piety made him wish the connexion forgotten.¹

Tawney was born at Calcutta on 30 November 1880. Little can be said of his childhood except that the family lived at Weybridge, where he spent much time on the river with his sister, fished, played excellent tennis, and developed an interest in natural history: even in old age, conversation on country walks was liable to interruption by the sight of a butterfly, the recalling of its name, and meditations on its futile beauty. At Rugby his contemporaries included William Temple and Ernest Simon, both of whom were to be lifelong friends. And it was here that he obtained not only a grounding in Classics, but the intimate knowledge of the prose of the Old Testament, and no less of English verse, the marks of which appear in almost everything he wrote. From Rugby he went, in 1899, as a scholar, to Balliol, and came, at an impressionable age, under the influence not only of Edward Caird and A. L. Smith, but also of Bishop Gore, whose theological and social doctrines were to be the guide posts of his career. In 1903 he obtained a Second in Greats—a performance that drew from his father the inquiry, 'How do you

¹ Some details of the Tawney family are given by L. S. Pressnell, *Country Banking in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 34-36, 56.

propose to wipe out this disgrace?"¹ Toynbee Hall University Settlement was a posting camp for Oxford graduates and Tawney lived and worked there for a time. Refusing the offer of a post with the Charity Organization Society, because he thought its methods inquisitorial, he became secretary of the Children's Country Holiday Fund, and through this met Annette Jeanie Beveridge (sister of William, later Lord, Beveridge) who was at a receiving centre of the organization at Haslemere. They were to marry in June 1909. Mrs. Tawney was a woman of character, intellectual ability, and high spirits: she had a magpie taste for clothes, good furniture, and gossip—none of which meant much to her husband. But their companionship was close and he owed not a little to her robust sense and utter devotion.

Tawney's first academic post was a humble one. In 1906 Professor William Smart, busy as a member of the Royal Commission on Poor Law Reform, brought him in to assist Tom Jones (who was later to become secretary to a succession of prime ministers) with the teaching of Economics in the University of Glasgow. The salary of £50 a year was supplemented by writing for a Glasgow newspaper, until complaints from readers, offended by the irony that crept into the reports of social functions, led a not-unkindly editor to suggest that he should find scope for his talents elsewhere. He wrote articles, including leaders, for the *Morning Post*, then under the direction of Fabian Ware; but before long other ways of earning a living, more congenial to a man of his temperament, were opened up. In 1905 he had become a member of the executive committee of the Workers' Educational Association, founded two years earlier by Albert Mansbridge and others, and in January 1908 was appointed to the pioneer post of teacher for tutorial classes under Oxford University. For a time he travelled weekly from Glasgow to Longton in the Potteries for a class on Friday night, went on to Rochdale for a Saturday-afternoon class, and returned to Scotland—often along with members of theatrical companies—on

¹ The comment of Tawney's teacher at Rugby is worth notice: 'For any one who can take it, Greats is the best examination in either Oxford or Cambridge, whatever class a man may be awarded in it. Actually the two finest minds I have encountered as pupil and teacher, R. L. Nettleship and R. H. Tawney, were given second classes by undiscerning examiners. Of Tawney, Edward Caird said to me, afterwards, "I grant you his mind was chaotic: but his examiners ought to have seen that it was the chaos of a great mind. . ."' Frank Fletcher, *After Many Days: A Schoolmaster's Memories* (1937), p. 69. See also p. 89. Tawney's gifts did not include the speed in writing that counts for much in examinations.

the Sunday night. But after their marriage the Tawneys set up house in Manchester, for greater ease of access to his tutorial groups. He managed, as few others could have done, to make history from the time of the Tudors a live issue for weavers, potters, and miners, and gained the lasting affection of his pupils. Perhaps the most notable member of the Longton class was John Elkin, a miner, whose portrait, painted by a Staffordshire artist, was to find a place on the walls of the Master's Lodgings at Balliol; and the youngest member of the Rochdale class was A. P. Wadsworth, who was to win distinction both as an economic historian and as editor of the *Manchester Guardian*.

Manchester was the first British university to confer the title of Professor on a teacher of economic history, and in 1910 George Unwin was brought from Edinburgh to hold it. How much of Unwin Tawney saw at this time is unknown. But a brief entry in the diary or commonplace book he kept from 1912 to 1914 records a conversation which brings out the difference of political outlook between the two men. Unwin had sprung from the working-class, and feared lest the independence of this, and of the voluntary organizations it had created, should be undermined by interference from the State. 'To me, it is incredible', he said, 'that committees and elected persons can ever manage the higher life of mankind.' Tawney, with Rugby and Balliol behind him, emphasized public service as a primary duty, and looked to legislation as a main instrument of social advance. 'On the other hand', he replied, 'they can put down tyranny. We need a power to reduce to order the great industrial feudalities.' 'Yes,' responded Unwin, 'but I am afraid lest the old criticisms about the levelling tendencies of democracies may prove true. The South African War gave me an awful impression of the possibilities of whole peoples' moving to destruction. I dislike very much all attempts at social reform that treat mankind in the lump or mass. . . . I fear very much such things as the state regulation of higher education.' There are, however, hidden affinities that count for more than differences about whether the word 'state' should be spelt with a small or a capital letter, and whether pacifism is the appropriate response to violence. Before Tawney left for France, as a private in the Manchester regiment, he travelled to spend a night of talk with Unwin. He dedicated one of his books, with affection and gratitude, to him. After Unwin's death, in 1925, he went weekly to Manchester to complete the courses for Honours students in

economic history. And he collected for publication Unwin's scattered essays and notes, and prefaced these with a memoir which pays a just tribute to his friend.

During the period of his work with the tutorial classes, from 1908 to 1914, Tawney found time for original investigation. His first book on *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (1912) was rightly hailed as an outstanding piece of scholarship. It is concerned with the decline of subsistence agriculture, the substitution of pasture for tillage, the growing diversity in size of peasants' holdings, and the weakening of customary controls. Tawney argues that the changes might have occurred gradually, without enclosure by large-scale landlords and depopulation of parts of the countryside, if the rulers of England had only decreed that customary tenures be treated legally as freeholds. As it was, the small cultivators were left 'fettered by the remnants of the legal rightlessness of the Middle Ages, without enjoying the practical security given by mediaeval custom, and felt the bitter breath of modern commercialism, undefended by the protection of the all-inclusive modern State which alone can make it tolerable'. Later inquiries, largely inspired by Tawney, have modified the picture; and, in spite of urgings by his publishers, he refused to allow the book to be reprinted without the extensive amendments he never found time to make. In 1914, with the encouragement of A. L. Smith and George Unwin, he joined with two other teachers (A. E. Bland and P. A. Brown) to produce a collection of documents of English economic history from Norman to early Victorian times—a volume which, intended for extra-mural students, soon found a place among prescribed works in the few universities that had, by then, admitted economic history to the curriculum.

Appointed Director of the Ratan Tata Foundation for the study of poverty, at the London School of Economics in 1913, Tawney produced a monograph on *Minimum Rates in the Chain-Making Industry*, which vindicated the fixing of wage-rates by the recently established Trade Boards. Similar studies in other industries had to be made without his aid, for in 1915 he enlisted in the 22nd Manchester Regiment, saw service as a sergeant in France, and in the following year was severely wounded in a desperate action at Fricourt. His account of the slaughter and his own reactions to it, published in a censored article in the *Westminster Gazette* in August 1916, was later reprinted in Guy Chapman's *Vain Glory* (1937) and in his own volume of collected essays, *The Attack* (1953). This is one of the most graphic and

moving records of the First World War. It was followed by two other papers, in vigorous protest against the picture of the war given in the Press, and the departure from the ideals proclaimed in 1914.¹

After a short time at the Ministry of Reconstruction, and after having been elected a Fellow of Balliol in 1918, Tawney was appointed to a Readership in Economic History at the London School of Economics. The period in which he held this post, from 1919 to 1931, was one of intense activity in politics, educational propaganda, and journalism, no less than in teaching and scholarship.

From as early as 1905 he had served on the executive committee of the Workers' Educational Association, and from 1912 on the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education. In 1926 the second of these bodies, under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Hadow, produced the report on 'The Education of the Adolescent', which laid the foundations for the present organization of post-primary schooling, with its provisions for children who 'think with their hands' no less than for those who rack their brains. The Hadow Report contains rolling sentences that no one but Tawney could have written. The recommendation that economic history should be given a place in the final year's course of Modern Schools is certainly his, as is also the injunction that the subject should not be unduly stressed, and that pupils should constantly be reminded of 'other forces—none the less powerful because unseen—which mould the destinies of nations'. In 1928 he became President of the Workers' Educational Association, a post he was to hold for sixteen years; and his fervour for a raising of the school-leaving age and other reforms is attested by many scores of articles, some appearing anonymously as leaders in the *Manchester Guardian*, and others in the *New Statesman* and elsewhere.

Industrial politics made large claims on his energies. He was a member of the Coal Industry Commission of 1919, presided over by Lord Sankey, and of the Chain-Making Trade Board from the same year to 1922. Though he had no political ambitions for himself, he twice contested parliamentary seats in the interest of Labour. (He used to tell of one of his open-air meetings that was held at a spot in Swindon where a small flag had been set as a sign that the road was under repair. As he addressed his audience, a passing clergyman halted, then hurried on, and

¹ 'Some Reflections of a Soldier', *Nation*, October 1916 and 'The Sword of the Spirit', *Athenæum*, December 1917.

shortly returned with a Union Jack, which he planted firmly alongside the red flag.) Much of his time was given to conferences with politicians and trade-union leaders, as well as to work on committees at the humbler level of the constituency. He liked to recall a day in 1925, when the miners' leaders were away on the coalfields, and he found himself alone, save for a lady assistant, at the Union headquarters in London. The telephone rang: colliers in the north wanted to know whether they should go down the pits on the following night-shift. Tawney used to claim, with malicious glee, that it was his answer of 'No' that led to the stoppage out of which came the General Strike of 1926.

To say that he disapproved of the coal-owners would be an understatement. But it would be wrong to think that his attitude was determined solely by socialist doctrine. For when, at a later date, he served as a member of the Cotton Trade Conciliation Committee, he registered a favourable verdict on the employers, whose speech, dress, manners, and points of view were so close to those of the operatives that it was rarely difficult to bring the two sides to terms.

It was against such a background that the most widely read of Tawney's books were produced. A reprint of *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, with an Introduction by him, appeared in 1920; but his chief concern, at this point of time, was with the analysis of contemporary society. In 1919 he had written for the Fabian Society an essay which, two years later, was extended into a full-scale treatise entitled *The Acquisitive Society*. This asserts that things went wrong in the eighteenth century when 'God had been thrust into the frigid altitudes of infinite space' and 'there was a limited monarchy in Heaven, as well as upon earth'. The Enlightenment swept away much evil; but the principles of Adam Smith and Condorcet were inapplicable to the economic system that grew up after their day. What was needed was a substitution of the earlier idea of 'functions' for that of 'rights', which had dominated nineteenth-century thought. Property was justified if it aided productive work. But profits, and in particular those arising from monopolies, urban rents, and mineral royalties, were functionless and should be abolished. Shares in joint-stock companies should be turned into debentures, and industries assume the character of professions. Some should be nationalized, others conducted by municipalities, co-operative societies, or bodies like the building guilds (which were beginning their brief, lamentable careers when the book

was being written). In a final chapter Tawney deplors the abdication by ecclesiastical authority of responsibility for social and political conduct, and urges that a disestablished Church should assume once more its duty of making a Christian kind of civilization in England.

Tawney's socio-political doctrines are developed in another didactic and political work a decade later. Based on the Halley Stewart lectures given in 1929, *Equality* (1931) contains shrewd observations on the class structure of England and the circumstances that had prevented a division into 'estates' as in pre-revolutionary France. But if the small part played by legal privilege here had helped to make England the pioneer of a new economic civilization, it had also 'determined that the gospel of equality trumpeted by France should make few echoes across the Channel'. In a chapter on the strategy of equality Tawney urged the extension of social services. He made it clear that he did not regard 'a parity of pecuniary incomes' as important, but insisted that the proceeds of a more progressive taxation should be used to make accessible to all the essentials of the good life, which otherwise could be enjoyed only by the rich. He wanted to see an extension of trade unionism and industrial legislation to set limits to the power of one group to impose its will on another. And, as in his earlier work, he advocated the transfer of industries from private to public control. The book merits rereading if only to appreciate the extent to which serious inequalities have diminished in the third of a century since it was written. In a chapter added in 1952 Tawney acknowledges that other influences, beside the public intervention he had advocated, had played some part in this. But he had a keener eye for the vices than the achievements of the industrial system, and says little or nothing of the contribution made by economic or demographic change. His demonstration that there is no conflict between liberty and justice so far as the majority of the nation is concerned will now be generally accepted. But some will feel that his wish to prevent parents from purchasing for their children an education better than that offered by the State involves a sacrifice of liberty by a minority, not fully compensated by the incremental gain of equality. Tawney would, no doubt, have argued that when public education had been raised to the standard he had in mind for it, the conflict of principles, though not resolved, would lose most of its practical importance.

In 1931 Mr. and Mrs. Tawney paid a visit to the Far East.

A memorandum he wrote for a conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations at Shanghai was published, with some important additions, as *Land and Labour in China* in the following year. This, which unlike most of Tawney's books, leaves in the mind a feeling of thankfulness for conditions of life in the West, describes a society which, already old when Athens was young, had seen little of what is termed capitalism. It suffered permanently from superabundance of labour, shortage of land, and paucity of means of communication. Overcrowding was the curse of the countryside even more than of the few cities, and areas as large as European states could properly be described as congested districts. Farming, conducted like gardening on innumerable tiny patches of soil, gave Tawney the impression of 'an agriculture of pygmies in a land of giants'. The area left free from the plough or the spade was too small to allow of much animal husbandry; and the scarcity of beasts meant that work done in the West for centuries by oxen and horses absorbed the energies of vast numbers of men and women. The chief enemy of the peasant was not an engrossing landlord, but a crushing environment: 'Famine is the economic, civil war the political, expression of the pressure of population on the means of subsistence.' Cultivators were at the mercy of marauders, and when bandits or soldiers appeared whole villages were on the move, 'like animals breaking from cover as the beaters advance'. The fewness of rivers and roads and of opportunities for overseas migration, such as had provided a safety-valve in nineteenth-century Europe, were further reasons for the widespread poverty.

The remedies suggested by Tawney were eminently practical: the development of means of transport; the improvement of agricultural practice, especially in marketing, finance, and land tenure; the cautious stimulation of machine industry; and a reform of the unduly bookish instruction offered by Chinese schools and universities. Strong advocate though he was of economic and social planning, he urged that four-fifths of existing programmes should be scrapped, and attention concentrated on limited objectives. In a country paralysed by anarchy, he looked less to reconstruction at the centre than to the creation of efficient government in one or two regions that might play a part similar to that of Prussia or Piedmont in nineteenth-century Europe. And for industry he advised the fixing of minimum standards at levels well below those to be desired, in the hope that when these had gained acceptance they might be raised

stage by stage. If, as things turned out, there was no opportunity for such Fabian tactics, this is no reflection on their wisdom.

A picture of circumstances so sharply contrasted with those in England has value in the teaching of economic history: for many years Professor F. J. Fisher prescribed Tawney's book, along with Adam Smith's, for those intending to specialize in the subject at the School of Economics. The phrasing of much of it is Tawney at his best. In a letter of December 1932 J. L. Hammond justly remarked, 'As for the composition of the book, like everything you write, it makes all other writers look awkward and bald, to themselves and to others.'

In 1926 Tawney was associated with Sir William Ashley, Professor J. R. Scott, Dr. Eileen Power, and others in the creation of the Economic History Society; and during the following seven years he was joint-editor, with Mr. Ephraim Lipson, of *The Economic History Review*. Another outstanding service at this time was the production, in association with Eileen Power, of the three volumes of *Tudor Economic Documents* which are still a primary source and work of reference for students of sixteenth-century history in all British universities. His chief original contribution to his subject, however, in these middle years of his career, consisted of two works on economic morality and practice in Tudor and Stuart England.

In the opening years of the twentieth century continental historians, and notably Sombart, had written massive treatises designed to interpret the Spirit of Capitalism. Max Weber, whose abstractions, Tawney observed, 'fall with a mournful thud on English ears' had found the ancestry of this in the Reformation and especially in the doctrines of Calvin. When in 1922 Tawney was invited to give the Scott Holland lectures he took as his theme the relationship between religious doctrine and economic behaviour in England from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, and published his findings four years later in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926). His discussion of medieval thought and practice is free alike from the iconoclasm of nineteenth-century writers and the romanticism of their successors. The Schoolmen, who had usually been considered reactionaries, are presented as pioneers of a liberal intellectual movement. Weber's view of the Reformation as the triumph of the commercial spirit over the traditional ethics of Christendom is contested, and the reformed Church of England is shown to have maintained the conservative attitude of its predecessor. It is recognized that there were in Calvin's teaching elements

that could later be used to justify economic practices for which little warrant could be found in the Scriptures. But it was less the theology than the individualism associated with it that increasingly found favour, until in England the Independents repudiated all ecclesiastical discipline and compulsory conformity. Stress on the Puritan virtues of thrift, diligence, and sobriety, and a growing assumption of personal responsibility, brought a decline of a sense of social obligation. The result was the rise of rationalism and, later, of *laissez-faire*, which, in Tawney's view, had deplorable consequences for social life in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England.

Rejected by the first publisher to whom it was offered, on the ground that it would make little appeal to the general public, the book, when put into circulation by another, soon achieved sales that ran into six figures—and was even paid the compliment of a pirated edition in Fascist Italy. Its learning and devoutness, together with its vivid imagery and grave irony, conspired to produce the rare phenomenon of a work of scholarship that was also a best-seller.

A year earlier Tawney had published a reprint of Thomas Wilson's *Discourse upon Usury* (1572), with a long Introduction treating of the background against which Tudor jurists and churchmen debated a leading issue of their day. A civil lawyer who had served as Master in the Court of Requests before he became Dean of Durham, Wilson was concerned at the decisions by which common lawyers were allowing inroads to be made into traditional morality in the matter of the payment of interest. Tawney describes lucidly the credit transactions by which the needs of peasants, small masters, landed proprietors, and larger industrialists were met; and offers an account of the foreign exchanges through which, by finance bills, the resources of an international money market were being made available to English merchants and the Crown. He disposes of the legend that the sixteenth-century goldsmiths were the progenitors of English banking; and, though he shows that scrivenors and notaries played a large part in the development of lending, insists that since 'to entrust hard-won savings to an unknown financier requires, perhaps, some special infusion of commercial grace', no general or organized deposit banking appeared in the London of Elizabethan times.

All this is well known to undergraduates today, but much of it was new when Tawney wrote. The most arresting part of his Introduction is the section that deals with public policy and the

money-lender. The canon law on usury allowed investment in rent charges, annuities, and commercial partnerships, but was adamant in declaring pure interest, 'the sale of time itself', unlawful. Opposing the view that 'the stream [of doctrine] plunged into vacancy over the precipice of the Reformation', Tawney remarks that Luther saw economic life with the eyes of a peasant and a monk, but that Calvin's followers, if not Calvin himself, had a more sophisticated outlook. As a seventeenth-century pamphleteer wrote, the less austere judgement on interest 'took with the brethren like polygamy with the Turks'; and, since the growth of large business meant that borrowers were often more wealthy than lenders, it was possible to defend interest as a means by which the relatively poor could make provision for themselves. ('It is perhaps first in the sixteenth century that widows and orphans are marshalled, a tearful orchestra, by the capitalist baton.') As time went on, opposition to usury weakened.

A critic might say that the book tends to blur the difference between loans in hard money to extravagant landowners, and the provision of commercial bank credits. But its purpose is not to reach conclusions on the economic or ethical arguments for or against interest, but to indicate that the disputes can be understood only through the practical issues that produced them. Tawney's own attitude, however, is hardly one of suspended judgement. 'Can any intellectual revolution', he asks, 'be more profound than one which substitutes for a supernatural criterion, however shadowy its character and inconsistent its application, one version or another of economic expediency?'

In 1931 Tawney was given the title of Professor of Economic History in the University of London. This, there is reason to believe, he might have held earlier but for the calls on his energy of political and public activities. Possibly it was a growing lack of sympathy with the leaders of his party that made him feel he could now be more usefully employed at the School of Economics than on the outskirts of Westminster. That he took his duties seriously it is unnecessary to say: from 1932 till his retirement in 1949 teaching and research were his principal concerns. A copy of a syllabus of his seminar on *Economic and Social England (1558-1640)*, which, along with introductory remarks, has fortunately been preserved, may give some impression of his work with Honours students. History, he observes, is concerned 'not with a series of past events, but with the life of society, and with the records of the past as a means to that end'. The order of

events is a clue but no more. What is important to detect is 'not merely the distinctive peculiarities of a particular society at a given period, but the characteristics and tendencies which, though they appear in a particular setting of time and place, are not confined to it. The process of study involves not only the noting of facts, but comparison, contrast, and analysis, so that an understanding may be gained of the society, not at one point in time, but throughout its whole life.'

From the later fifteenth to the seventeenth century, Europe was making one of its recurrent essays in political centralization or authoritarian government. The movement began in Spain and reached its zenith a century and a half later in France under Louis XIV. The Tudor monarch was an insular species of that larger genus. The seminar was to begin with a survey of social and economic conditions under Elizabeth and of forces making for change, including the growth of overseas trade, the rise in prices, and the redistribution of ownership of the land. It was to go on to consider the attempts of the State to regulate markets, prices, and wages, and to make provision for the relief of distress. The significant change to be dwelt on was the rise of a bourgeois society, drawing its income from the profits of enterprise, and the impact of that society on the older semi-feudal class structure and the authority of town and State. Technical and financial matters must not be neglected, but the emphasis would be on the new political and social pressures. Most writers had treated the period from the constitutional or ecclesiastical points of view. Here the stress was to be on economic matters. But one must not overstate one's case. After dealing with the growth of capitalism, the change in the balance of power, and the conflict between Crown and Parliament, they would end with a study of religion—a word with a connotation different from that of today.

If in the later thirties Tawney's literary output was less than that of the years from 1920 to 1932 the reason is not to be sought so much in the claims made on him by his pupils, as in the fact that he was gathering material for a major work on what Professor Fisher has called the Dark Age of Economic History, which he never completed. As Mr. A. J. P. Taylor has said, 'the unwritten works of Tawney are among the lost masterpieces of the twentieth century'. Among the essays that appeared at this time are two,¹ important for those concerned with Tawney's

¹ 'Christianity and the Social Problem' (1935) and 'Christianity and the Social Order' (1937).

faith and ultimate aims, both reprinted in *The Attack*, and one,¹ in the preparation of which Mrs. Tawney shared, relating to the employments of men in Gloucestershire in the year 1608.

Occupational censuses for this early period are rare. But the zeal of a Gloucestershire antiquarian, who in compiling a Muster Roll for the county, had included the callings of more than 17,000 men between twenty and sixty years of age, had produced a document of extraordinary interest to economic historians. The analysis of the figures by Professor and Mrs. Tawney shows that less than half of the men were engaged in agriculture, that those engaged in building and transport were relatively few, and that there was a wide dispersal of industrial employment over the countryside. If a surprisingly large number of independent producers was found in agriculture, the same was true in manufacture: even in the textile industry individual production was the general rule. The Tawneys conclude that rural society and agricultural society are far from being synonymous terms; that the relations between men in industry, in the seventeenth century, cannot be expressed in terms of employer and wage-earner; and that, in textiles in particular, the picture usually given of a large body of craftsmen depending on a small number of clothiers must be modified. The handling of the figures is both cautious and skilful, and the findings of the essay are unlikely to be disputed.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Tawney wrote a powerful article on 'Why Britain Fights', published as a letter in the *New York Times*, and shortly afterwards went as Labour Attaché to the British Embassy at Washington. His stay in the United States was, however, a brief one; for his talents did not lie in administration, and he found life in a safe and opulent society irksome. Back in England, he divided his time between teaching at the School of Economics—which had been evacuated to Cambridge—activities arising from the war, in London, and service as an air-raid warden at Elcombe in Gloucestershire, where he patrolled the hills at night with his dog. The death of his colleague, Eileen Power, was a blow that brought new responsibilities, and the University Grants Committee—on which he served from 1943 to 1948—made further calls on his time. But he produced a number of essays² during

¹ A. J. Tawney and R. H. Tawney, 'An Occupational Census of the Seventeenth Century', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* v, no. 1 (October 1934).

² These include his Memoir of Beatrice Webb for the *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1943); his Fabian Society Lecture 'We Mean Freedom'

the war, two of which made substantial contributions to economic history.

In his earlier books he had made several references to the works of James Harrington written between 1656 and 1660, and when in 1941 he was invited to give the Raleigh Lecture, he took as his subject 'Harrington's Interpretation of his Age'. He acclaimed the author of *The Commonwealth of Oceana* as the first English economic thinker to find the cause of political upheaval in antecedent social change, and did full justice to Harrington's use of comparative history and his epigrammatic powers. But the thesis that it was not the Civil War that had destroyed the old régime, but the dissolution of the foundations of the old régime that had caused the Civil War, could not be fully deployed in a single lecture; and hence, in the same year, Tawney published a brilliant and provocative article on 'The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640'.¹

The upward movement in the general level of prices since the middle of the sixteenth century, it was argued, bore heavily on the older nobility, with their relatively rigid incomes, traditional habits of expenditure, and public and social obligations which, by the seventeenth century, cost considerably more to maintain. It brought gains, on the other hand, to the more enterprising class of the gentry, which, in Tawney's definition, included not only the smaller landowners (who were relatively free from customary obligations), but also office-holders, lawyers, merchants, and other men of substance. Some of the noble landlords met the situation by refusing to renew copyholds when lives ran out, buying up small freeholds and letting the land on leases, enclosing wastes and commons, introducing new types of estate management, and developing the woods and minerals of their lands. Many of them, however, lacked the will or ability for such enterprises. Like their royal masters, they disposed of part of their inheritance, largely through the growing land market of the City, to members of the gentry eager for more land and prestige. Hence, 'the upper reaches of English society came to resemble less a chain of high peaks than an undulating table-land'. And the change of economic structure meant—as Harrington said such changes must—political tension which, in this case, terminated in civil war.

(1945); A Webb Memorial Trust Lecture, 'The Webbs and their Work' (1945); and 'The Abolition of Economic Controls, 1918-1921', in the *Econ. Hist. Rev.* xiii, nos. 1 and 2 (1943).

¹ *Ibid.*, xi, no. 1 (1941).

Part of the evidence submitted by Tawney consisted of tables of figures of the ownership of manors in a large sample area. These suggested that the aristocratic families who had held land in the area in 1561 had lost many manors by 1640, to the gain of the gentry. In a close critical examination of Tawney's article, Mr. H. R. Trevor-Roper¹ pointed out that the manor was a definition of rights, not a unit of wealth; that some aristocrats with manors inside the sample area must also have held others outside it; and that Tawney's figures for the gentry in 1640 included families which had belonged to this class in 1561, but which had since been ennobled, and so had biased his tables in favour of his contention. He asserted that, in so far as a distinction could be drawn between aristocracy and gentry, the fortunes of the two moved in the same direction, but that the meaningful distinction was not between peers and gentry, but between 'court' and 'country', or office-holders and mere landlords. The individuals who rose did so on the profits not of agriculture but of office, and they gained their economic and political power, less at the expense of the aristocracy or the peasants (towards whom Tawney is alleged to have shown generous but uncritical sentimentality), than of the Crown. It was not a rising gentry, but rather a section of a declining gentry, the Independents, who were the leading instigators of the Great Revolution.

In a brief reply² Tawney pointed out that the number of manors held by a family had been taken as a valid measure of property by seventeenth-century writers, and declared that to reject contemporary usage was 'not according to light'. He added that if he had included with the aristocracy families ennobled after 1561, the figures for 1640 would still have shown the property of the peers static and that of the gentry increased. He observed that Trevor-Roper had failed to rebut non-statistical evidence for the growth of medium-sized estates, and insisted that the rise of the gentry was not just an optical illusion. Some years later Mr. J. P. Cooper³ and Professor J. H. Hexter⁴ made further incisive criticism of the thesis. But, perhaps because he was then old and disinclined to controversy, Tawney made no reply. No one has yet found an entirely satisfactory way of identifying and measuring changes in the distribution of wealth

¹ 'The Gentry, 1540-1640', *ibid.*, Supplement 1 (1953).

² 'The Rise of the Gentry: A Postscript', *ibid.* (sec. ser.), vii, (1954).

³ 'The Counting of Manors', *ibid.* (sec. ser.), viii, no. 3 (1956).

⁴ *Reappraisals in History* (1961).

in the century before the Civil War. For the present, Tawney's essay stands as a valiant endeavour rather than a fully convincing achievement. Whether in the end he or his critics will be seen to have come nearer the truth is a matter on which one with no first-hand knowledge of the period cannot offer even a guess.

During the years of retirement the Tawneys divided their time between their home in Mecklenburgh Square and their cottage at Elcombe, near Stroud. In 1950 the National Book League published his *Social History and Literature*—a delightful essay in which (characteristically in a sentence that occupies a full page) Tawney discloses the historical associations, from neolithic to Stuart times, of this corner of Gloucestershire. After giving a warning that 'to view either an individual or a society primarily as a problem is to make certain of misconceiving them', he offers a vivid picture, free from the pale cast of thought, of the Elizabethans and their unique achievements in literature. Three years later he drew together a dozen essays, all but one already in print but not easy to come by, into the volume entitled *The Attack*. But most of his time was given to further investigation into the early decades of the seventeenth century.

In 1955 the Tawneys paid a five-month visit to Australia. Needless to say, his fame had preceded him: according to Professor Crawford his books were more widely read in the Melbourne school of history than perhaps in any other in the world; and *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* was familiar to children in the higher forms of Melbourne secondary schools. He relished a visit to Gippsland to see something of the Australian bush, and was interested to find that settlement was not without the marks of tradition. But most of all he enjoyed sitting in the University Staff Club, talking to the younger teachers, whom he found refreshingly outspoken. What attracted him most about the Australians—again to cite Professor Crawford—was 'the impression, which may not have been altogether accurate, that this was a society free from the imprisoning social prejudices that he had so long fought'.

Back in England, Tawney busied himself with the final stages of his work on Lionel Cranfield, which had been on the stocks for more than two decades. Published in 1958, under the title of *Business and Politics under James I*, the book pours a flood of light on the economic situation in the early seventeenth century, on the fiscal, administrative, and political problems of the first

of the Stuarts, and on the commercial crisis and depression of the early 1620's. Cranfield, a Merchant Adventurer, is seen buying high-priced cloth in the West Country and low-priced kerseys in Yorkshire, selling these through his representatives in Middleburg, Stade, and Danzig, and bringing home the proceeds in the form of Italian silks and other luxuries for sale in London. He speculated in pepper, grain, and munitions of war; was later concerned with a purchase of Crown property, and the sale of licences to export; and held shares in partnerships for the farming of taxes, including the Great Farm of the Customs. Profits arising from these ventures enabled him to make loans and mortgages on a large scale, and within eight years of his beginning as a trader, to accept deposits, provide credits, and transfer funds in the manner, though without the name, of a banker.

In 1613, largely through the good offices of Villiers, Cranfield was appointed Surveyor-General of the Customs; and, as a reward for outstanding service to his royal master, rose in status and rank till, in 1621, he was created Lord Treasurer and Earl of Middlesex. By rationalizing the tariff, shifting the burden of duties from exports to imports, and cutting out waste and corruption, he effected a substantial rise in the revenue of the Crown. He was less successful, however, in his efforts to reduce the prodigality of James. His attempt to make the Treasurer, and not the king, the arbiter on appeals for royal bounty conflicted with the ambitions of Buckingham, and increased the number of his enemies in high places. The commercial and industrial depression reduced the yield of existing taxes and aroused general discontent. And when Charles and Buckingham returned from 'their compromising sojourn among castles in Spain', advocating war, and Cranfield, who would have had to raise the revenue for this, opposed them, his fate was sealed. Accused in the Commons of having sacrificed commercial to financial interests, and impeached, as much for his successes as for his errors, the Lord Treasurer was driven from power, and spent the rest of his life in relative obscurity.

There was much in Cranfield's career that was sordid. And the efficiency, economy, and firmness of purpose he displayed are, when all has been said, among the minor, rather than the cardinal, virtues. Yet Tawney who, in his earlier works, had tended to treat merchants and financiers with distrust, here comes near to presenting a capitalist, turned administrator, as a hero. The clarity with which he presents the economic, political,

and administrative background—the result of a lifetime's pre-occupation—makes the book, in the opinion of those qualified to judge, Tawney's outstanding contribution to history. When still at work on the volume he was once heard to say he hoped it might prove to be his masterpiece.

The seventieth anniversary of Tawney's birth had been marked by the presentation of a portrait by Claude Rogers, which hangs in the School of Economics. The eightieth, in 1960, was celebrated by a dinner of colleagues at the School, as well as by a larger one of politicians, churchmen, teachers, civil servants, and others at the House of Commons. It was also signalized by a Festschrift, *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England*, prefaced with a notable introduction on 'Tawney's Century' by F. J. Fisher. His own last published work was the memoir of his friend, J. L. Hammond, in the *Proceedings* of the Academy (1960), neither the argument nor the style of which shows any decline of powers. After the death of Mrs. Tawney, which bore heavily on him, he continued to live quietly in Mecklenburgh Square, breaking his routine austerity only by occasional visits to the Cotswolds and elsewhere. He had completed most of the tasks he had set himself in early manhood, and was not unhappy. He died in his sleep on 16 January 1962.

Tawney was a stylist. The complicated structure of his prose recalls that of Milton and Meredith, both of whom he held in esteem. His sentences are studded with figures of speech, ranging from the statuesque phrase, in his first book, about the labourers 'on whose slowly straightening backs our civilization is uneasily poised', to the quip, in his last, in which revenue from the sale of knighthoods is satirized as 'the profits of converting grubs into butterflies'. It has been said that a good book is one that can be summed up in a sentence. None of the works written by Tawney conforms to this dubious criterion, and his historical teaching as a whole cannot be put in epitome. It was, as already suggested, interfused with his thoughts on current affairs; and the blending of observations on religious, intellectual, and political changes with those on economic tendencies was not a weakness, but a major source of his strength. He held that it was a mistake to assume that economic interests played in earlier times the same leading role as in ours—'in the seventeenth century the Economic Man had a competitor for public attention in the person of the Scarlet Woman'—and he looked to future

centuries when riches might be held in contempt. Students who had the good fortune to sit at his feet rose with the sense of having been in touch not only with scholarship, but with wisdom.

If Tawney had firm convictions he was tolerant of opposition. The two leading academic controversies in which he was engaged remain unsettled; and if, in the end, some of his conclusions should be found defective, this is not a matter that would have disturbed him very much. 'All flesh is grass and historians wither, poor things, sooner than most', he once observed. His distinction is not that he arrived at final truths, but that, as Professor Trevor-Roper said, he 'threw out sudden luminous flickers of suggestive metaphor and historical intuition'. The fact that, of the ten essays written to signalize his eightieth birthday, only one has to do with Puritan doctrine, and none with the rise of the gentry, does not signify decline of interest in themes that had been in the forefront of his mind, but that the incidental observations he had made in developing them had stimulated thought in other fields.

In his teaching on contemporary issues he drew on Bishop Gore, Archbishop Temple, and the Webbs. 'Wherever I go', he said of Sidney Webb, 'I find that he has been there before me.' He was divided from many of his fellow socialists, however, on matters of both principle and tactics. Some of those who shared his political creed were estranged by what they called his religiosity; others by his failure, in spite of respect for Marx, to accept the Communist Manifesto as the final word in political wisdom. He offended pacifists by his advocacy of re-armament, and careerists by the scorn he poured, in 1931, on members of his party who, professing belief in equality, had accepted titles not imposed by the duties of office. Even the rank and file sometimes came in for censure. 'The working classes and the English Labour Movement have made one tragic mistake', he wrote in his diary in 1914. 'They have aimed at comfort, instead of aiming at getting their rights, including the right to do their duty. The contest is therefore being fought out on a low plane, and the attack can be bought off by instalments of "social reform". It has become not a question of right and wrong, but a question of more and less.' Nevertheless, he won the respect of humble men, inside and outside the party, and contributed powerfully to the changes in ways of thought about the relation of individuals to society that came about in his lifetime.

Unlike some highly principled revolutionaries, he was ruthless in the application of his faith to his personal conduct.

Acquisitiveness was the main enemy. An entry in his diary made in June 1912 puts his position forcibly:

The greatest mistake that we make with our own lives is to snatch at the particular objects we desire. . . . If we realized the riches that lie within every one of us we should know that we can all afford to be spendthrift of nine-tenths of the possessions which we treasure: success, praise, and good opinion among men, achievements, and still more material well-being. . . . Never be afraid of throwing away what you have. If you *can* throw it away it is not really yours. If it is really yours you cannot throw it away. And you may be certain that if you throw it away, whatever in you is greater than you will produce something in its place. Never be afraid of pruning your branches. Trust the future and take risks. In moral, as in economic affairs, the rash man is he who does not speculate.

Throughout, apart from his friends and his books, he clung to nothing. If he was asked for money he gave it immediately, justifying his action by saying that the fact that a man begged proved that his need was greater than yours. Needless to say, he was subject to exploitation; but his use of the word was confined to the actions of capitalists, and he learnt little or nothing by experience. Whether he ever drew a workable distinction between usury and interest is doubtful, but his attitude to dealings in money was one of suspicion. The only investment he made, apart from the purchase of his country cottage, came late in life, when he was persuaded to hold a small amount, against contingencies, in government and building-society funds.

He lived simply, and, after the death of Mrs. Tawney, frugally. His one indulgence, with the exception of trout-fishing, was smoking—not tobacco, which was expensive, but a mixture of coltsfoot and other beggarly weeds, which, bought in bulk, was plentifully scattered on the carpets of hostesses in England, America, and the Antipodes. The stuff played tricks with him. Before beginning a lecture he would thrust the glowing pipe into his pocket, and not infrequently his audience was startled by the sight of his coat in flames. 'I see I burn prematurely', Tawney would interject, without otherwise halting his discourse.

His normal expression of remoteness and gravity was sometimes discouraging to new-comers; but when a child appeared, his face, like that of Chrysostom, was a benediction. Of the letters he received on his eightieth birthday one of those that gave him most pleasure was from the children of Eastleach primary school, with whom he had played in their classroom a few months before. Children apart, his chief companions were

of the lower creation. 'Order involves the recognition of responsibilities. But obligations are only recognised where there is identity of nature. I have no duties to a tiger or a fish.' The note to this passage in his early diary reads, 'This is without prejudice to dogs and cats, which need a separate treatise.' The story of his dog that accompanied him to church, has been told before. But perhaps a witness may recall a heated domestic dispute, when Mrs. Tawney got up in the morning to find a large tin, which had held biscuits, lying empty, among crumbs, on the kitchen floor (where she kept most of her comestibles at the cottage). Her statement that a neighbour's dog, Tom, must be the culprit was vigorously contested by Tawney: no dog could have been guilty of house-breaking, theft, or greed. Asked to find an alternative, he suggested, in turn, a fox, a badger, other animals, and a cat. The last of these possibilities was conceded hesitantly, with obvious pain, for cats came only a little lower than dogs in his affection.

Tawney refused high public honours, once at least with anger that the offer should have been made. But he set store by the honorary degrees conferred on him, first by Manchester, and later by Oxford, Birmingham, Sheffield, London, Chicago, Melbourne, and Paris, as well as by his honorary Fellowships of Balliol and Peterhouse, his Membership of the American Philosophical Society, and, not least, his Fellowship of the British Academy. But he bore his honours lightly. He read the reviews of his works, with the object of being made aware of errors, and perhaps of being assured that his labours had not just been play. But he could never be induced even to glance at appreciations of himself: 'No, my boy, it is not good for one. It is bad enough to have to live with oneself, without having to read about oneself.' This was no affectation. He has been acclaimed for his courage in war and peace, for his learning, his insight, his powers as a teacher, his superb literary skill. But the hall-mark of greatness was stamped by his humility.

T. S. ASHTON

LIST OF PRINCIPAL WORKS

BOOKS

The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century. 1912.

English Economic History: Select Documents (with A. E. Bland and P. A. Brown). 1914.

Minimum Rates in the Chain-Making Industry. 1914.

Life and Struggles of William Lovett (reprint with Introduction). 1920.

- The Acquisitive Society*. 1922.
Thomas Wilson: Discourse upon Usury (reprint with Introduction). 1925.
The British Labour Movement. 1925.
Religion and the Rise of Capitalism. 1926.
Studies in Economic History: the Collected Papers of George Unwin (with an Introductory Memoir). 1927.
Tudor Economic Documents. 3 vols. (with Eileen Power). 1929.
Equality. 1931.
Land and Labour in China. 1932.
The Attack. 1953.
Business and Politics under James I: Lionel Cranfield as Merchant and Minister. 1958.

ESSAYS AND ARTICLES

- The Assessment of Wages in England by the Justices of the Peace. *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. 1913.
 *The Attack. *Westminster Gazette*. 1916.
 *Some Reflections of a Soldier. *Nation*. 1916.
 The Sword of the Spirit. *Athenæum*. 1917.
 The Study of Economic History. *Economica*. February 1933.
 Studies in Bibliography: Modern Capitalism. *Econ. Hist. Rev.* iv, no. 3. 1933.
 An Occupational Census of the Seventeenth Century (with A. J. Tawney). *Econ. Hist. Rev.* v, no. 1. 1934.
 *Christianity and the Social Revolution. *New Statesman and Nation*. 1935.
 *Why Britain Fights. *New York Times*. 1940.
 Harrington's Interpretation of his Age. (Raleigh Lecture.) 1941.
 The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640. *Econ. Hist. Rev.* xi, no. 1. 1941.
 *Beatrice Webb 1858-1943. *Proceedings of the British Academy*. 1943.
 The Abolition of Economic Controls, 1918-1921. *Econ. Hist. Rev.* xiii, nos. 1 and 2. 1943.
 *We Mean Freedom. (Fabian Society Lecture.) 1945.
 *The Webbs and their Work. (Webb Memorial Trust Lecture.) 1945.
 Social History and Literature. (National Book League Lecture.) 1950.
 Essays in Bibliography and Criticism: Modern Capitalism. *Econ. Hist. Rev.* (sec. ser.). ii, no. 3. 1950.
 The Rise of the Gentry: A Postscript. *Econ. Hist. Rev.* (sec. ser.). vii. 1954.
 J. L. Hammond 1872-1949. *Proceedings of the British Academy*. 1960.

* Reprinted in *The Attack*. 1953.