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## Lord Shaftesbury

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On October 1st 1885, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, died. He was by far the greatest philanthropist of the Nineteenth Century and stands, together with William Wilberforce, at the head of great English philanthropists. G. M. Trevelyan has finely designated him: 'the Wilberforce of the Whites'.<sup>1</sup>

Alexander Whyte, speaking of John Knox, states that whenever God would do a great work in the world he first chooses 'a weapon' to accomplish it;<sup>2</sup> and trains that weapon to become, like Jeremiah, 'a defenced city and an iron pillar'. Young Lord Ashley was God's instrument to champion the cause of the poor and oppressed in nineteenth century England, a role he sustained with conspicuous faithfulness for over fifty years.

### I

The Victorian era is a period unique in English history, supremely energetic and optimistic. It was the age of the entrepreneur, steam engine and saw the zenith of Britain's Imperial dominance. Great individuals held the stage; in exploration, Livingstone; in poetry, Tennyson, Arnold and Browning; in novels, Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontes and George Eliot; in preaching, Spurgeon and Liddon; and in Parliament, Peel, Palmerston, Gladstone and Disraeli. It was also a serious age, quite the reverse of the late Eighteenth century with its gay insouciance as typified in the Regency Buck. In most wealthy households family prayers were held and regular church attendance enjoined.<sup>3</sup> Wilberforce and his friends, by their Slave Trade and Slavery legislation, had smashed a hole in the wall of laissez-faire and, as Mr. Garth Lean has well said: 'set new tides flowing which affected the climate of British public life for decades'.<sup>4</sup> Man was his brother's keeper and a plethora of philanthropic societies met at Exeter Hall. But there was one vast and lamentable exception. The labouring

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For further reading: John Pollock *Shaftesbury, the poor man's earl*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1985.

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1. G. M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After 1782 to 1919*, 68, Longman, Green and Co. Ltd. 1922 and 1937, Pelican Books 1965.

2. G. F. Barbour, *Alexander Whyte*, Hodder & Stoughton, 334, 1923.

3. Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, Jonathan Cape, 1976.

4. Garth Lean, *God's Politician*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 170, 1980.

classes had been seduced from the green fields to become cheap labour for the factories and mills and lived lives of unspeakable misery.

The Industrial Revolution had made England the world's greatest industrial power. A small section of the narrow North of England, comprising mainly the counties of Lancashire and Yorkshire, was supplying the world with manufactured goods. Great industrial towns had suddenly come into being and mills and factories proliferated everywhere. Vast wealth was being acquired by the manufacturers; but behind this easy facade, the operatives in mills and factories were subjected to intolerable suffering and oppression. They worked fearfully-long hours in dangerous and squalid conditions. Domestic life ceased to exist; the wife had no role in the home, the children no education. The factory absorbed all their energies and waking hours. In particular, as the result of doing heavy manual labour from a tender age, children's growth was stunted and their physique often deformed or permanently ruined.

This shocking situation is possibly best described by Benjamin Disraeli in one of his greatest novels, *Sybil; or The Two Nations*, which is concerned with the condition of the people. Writing in 1843, Disraeli divided contemporary England into two nations, the rich and the poor. This novel, which Disraeli had thoroughly researched, having listened in Parliament to the Debates on the Factory Acts, studied the Report on the Children's Employment Commission and having spent time in observation in the great northern industrial towns, is generally regarded as one of the best guides to the condition of England at that time. The rich were composed partly of the landed aristocracy, by no means all of whom recognised their obligations to their tenants, some of whom lived in surroundings of great squalor. However, a new class of oppressors had arisen in the land: they were the Yorkshire and Lancashire industrialists who owned the mills and factories and whom, while accruing to themselves great wealth, were subjecting vast numbers of men, women and children who worked for them to lives of utter degradation and unspeakable misery. Save in a few notable exceptions, these men felt no sense of obligation towards their workmen nor assumed any responsibility for their welfare. This was the price England was to pay for her industrial greatness. Lord Morley, a great judge of literature and no friend to Disraeli, has stated that: 'The author of *Sybil* seems to have apprehended the real magnitude and even the nature of the social crisis [brought about by the rapid growth of an industrial population]. Mr. Disraeli's brooding imagination of conception gave him a view of the extent of the social

revolution as a whole, which was wider, if it did not go deeper, than that of any other contemporary observer.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that it was Disraeli who was Prime Minister of the great Conservative Government of 1874–1880 which placed the coping stone on so much of Shaftesbury's social legislation.

These appalling industrial conditions prevailed in all spheres of labour, perhaps most disgracefully in the pitiless use of boy chimney-sweeps. An able and dedicated champion was urgently required and the leaders of the factory operatives chose young Lord Ashley. They could not have chosen a better man.

## II

It was a singular and romantic choice, a young nobleman to lead a working-class movement. Certainly Lord Ashley appeared to have considerable qualifications. The heir to the Sixth Earl of Shaftesbury, having a strong constitution and handsome presence, possessing an excellent intellect which had gained him First Class Honours in Classics at Christchurch, Oxford, industrious, Ashley was a man of total integrity. He already represented Dorset in the Tory interest, was becoming a capable speaker and had held minor office under Lord Ellenborough at the India Board of Control, early demonstrating his strength of character to the annoyance of his flamboyant chief.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, his whole temperament was gravely flawed by lack of confidence, depression and self-distrust. His character was full of contradictions. To designate him a manic-depressive would be far too extreme, though he exhibited some of the traits associated with that condition. His melancholia might be attributable, in some degree but not wholly, to an exceptionally harsh father and an entirely unsympathetic mother. His father was universally known as 'the odious Lord Shaftesbury'.<sup>7</sup> Young Henry Fox, son of Lord and Lady Holland, referred to him as 'disgusting and meaner than any other wretch in the world'<sup>8</sup> and of his mother Ashley wrote: 'what a dreadful woman our mother is. Her whole pleasure is in finding fault' and 'away with her memory! The idea of such fiend-warmed Hearts is bad for a Christian.'<sup>9</sup> Such an influence must greatly have diminished Ashley's self-confidence and self-esteem and might account for the devastating criticisms of people later recorded in his Diary. Gladstone, on reading the Diaries after Shaftesbury's death, had no conception that

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5. Monypenny and Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, 663–664, 1912.

6. C. B. A. M. Finlayson, *The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, Eyre Methuen, 40–41, 1981.

7. *ibid.* 47.

8. *ibid.* 15.

9. *ibid.* 14.

his gracious host held him in such low esteem.<sup>10</sup> Did this indicate a basic lack of confidence? Perhaps Shaftesbury made no allowances for others because none had ever been made to him. The only affection the boy ever knew came from the Methodist housekeeper, Maria Millis, his first Christian teacher.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly Ashley was not incapable of happiness. He was happy and successful at both Harrow and Oxford and, on walking tours with his young friend Lord Morpeth, could be exuberant; while, at Society Balls, this serious young man was, unconsciously, the breaker of many feminine hearts. Nevertheless, these moods, fluctuating violently between great elation and severe depression, never left him. He was intensely ambitious and deeply grieved when his abilities were not recognised. His initial dislike of Lady Granville, a good friend in early years, quickly changed to warm regard,<sup>12</sup> whilst his early extreme admiration of Sir Robert Peel soon changed to contempt for his expediency—'All Peel's affinities are towards wealth and capital. His heart is always towards the mill owners; his lips occasionally for the operatives'.<sup>13</sup> This was somewhat harsh to Peel who had genuine sympathy for the operatives but was fearful of the economic results of factory reform and did not like popular movements; but he certainly never appreciated Ashley's great abilities, twice offering him humiliating office. Moreover, Ashley could never distinguish between Peel's impeccable personal honour and his equivocations in public life. Henry Fox went so far as to refer to 'the dash of madness' in Ashley's character,<sup>14</sup> whilst perceptive Florence Nightingale, later a great friend and admirer, said that if Shaftesbury had not taken up the cause of reforming lunatic asylums in early life he would have ended his days in a lunatic asylum.<sup>15</sup> Shrewd Sir Walter Scott, meeting the young Lord Ashley, referred to him as 'an original'.<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, Lord Ashley was most fortunate in his marriage. His choice fell upon Lady Emily Cowper, daughter of Lord and Lady Cowper and niece to Lord Melbourne. Superficially, it seemed a strange match, the lady belonging to the cynical, brilliant and worldly Whig family of Lamb—'What has Minnie done to deserve to be linked

10. *ibid.* 604.

11. Georgina Battiscombe, *Shaftesbury. A Biography of the Seventh Earl*, Constable, 5-8, 1974.

12. *ibid.* 15, 26.

13. Barbara Blackburn, *Noble Lord. The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, Home and Van Thal, 78-79, 1949.

14. *loc. cit.* 11, 16.

15. *loc. cit.* 11, 248.

16. *loc. cit.* 11, 14.

to such a fate . . . !<sup>17</sup> asked one Whig uncle. However, the marriage was supremely happy, for the beautiful Emily's sunny disposition softened the severities in Ashley's character and her constant encouragement relieved his depressions. Moreover, his bride's parents gave Ashley at Panshanger the home life he never knew at St. Giles. Later, the widowed Lady Cowper married Lord Palmerston to become the most popular hostess in public life. Gay and worldly though she was, Ashley came to love 'poor, dear, beloved mum'<sup>18</sup> for her kindness. He also entertained the greatest respect and affection for Lord Palmerston whose shrewd worldly wisdom and generous financial support were of inestimable value to him in private life as was Palmerston's straightforward stance in public life. Of all the great Prime Ministers with whom Shaftesbury was associated, Palmerston was easily the most upright and reliable.

If Shaftesbury's morbid disposition required an intensely supportive wife, it also needed abundance of work to survive. He had worked hard at the India Board and was particularly fulfilled as a Commissioner in Lunacy, soon to be appointed Chairman of the Commission, a position he retained virtually to the end of his life, thoroughly mastering the subject and transforming the whole body of laws and administration from a harsh, inefficient system to one of the most enlightened in Europe. But this was not enough; he needed a cause to which he could devote his considerable powers. The Rev. George Bull, acting for the Lancashire and Yorkshire Short Time Committee, asked Ashley to lead the cause of the factory operatives by taking up Michael Sadler's Ten Hour Bill which had been lost at the end of the last Parliament and with it Sadler had lost his seat. Encouraged by his wife, Ashley said that he dared not refuse this request so earnestly pressed, though he made it quite clear that he would not condone the violent methods such as smashing machinery, advocated by Richard Oastler. Thus, he entered upon his career as a philanthropist. It was to shatter his ambitions for a distinguished Parliamentary career.

We note how specific was the nature of Ashley's call. Just as Lady Middleton had invited Wilberforce to Teston to urge on him the cause of Abolition of the Slave Trade, so came Mr. Bull's definite invitation to Ashley,—the last man he approached—to champion the cause of the factory workers. In the case of Wilberforce, we have a man supremely well-balanced psychologically but physically desperately fragile; in Shaftesbury's case, strong physically but gravely flawed psychologically. No doubt both needed the confidence which only a

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17. *loc. cit.* 6, 47.

18. *loc. cit.* 6, 504.

clear call from God could give as they faced unrelenting hostility and vilification from all quarters.

Two further brief comparisons with Wilberforce suggest themselves. First, Wilberforce's reputation has suffered by being identified solely with Abolition and little is known of his multifarious labours in other causes. So Shaftesbury's reputation has been diminished by too close an identification with the Factory Acts to the detriment of his other labours. Secondly, Wilberforce had a 'cabinet' of extraordinarily able men to share the burden: Thornton, Grant, Macaulay, Babington were great men by any standards, and his personal friends. Shaftesbury had no such support; he worked alone.

### III

What of the nature and extent of Shaftesbury's labours, so prodigious that Cardinal Manning, having read his life, exclaimed: 'What a prospect of work done: it makes me feel that my life has been wasted.'<sup>19</sup> Professor Geoffrey Finlayson has aptly divided Shaftesbury's evangelicalism into three sections—the religious aspect, emphasising justification by faith, reliance on the Bible, missionary endeavour and an uncompromising Protestantism—the moral aspect, deriving from the desire to strive for piety and righteousness in private and public life—and the social aspect, the result of the evangelical impulse towards benevolent and philanthropic activity.<sup>20</sup>

With regard to religious activities—apart from his devout life which commanded universal respect—we note he was Chairman or President of many evangelical societies, the foremost being the Church Pastoral Aid Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Church Missionary Society and the Society for the Conversion of the Jews. He denounced attempts to introduce Popery into the land, and opposed as dishonest the encroachments of Puseyism into the worship of the Church of England, although he joined with Pusey in attacking modernistic theology from Germany—'neology' he called it. In order to bring religion to the poor, he organised successful services in theatres, co-operated with evangelical Non-conformists, advised Palmerston on filling vacant Anglican Bishoprics. He also introduced Bills to regulate Uniformity of Worship and to reform Church Courts, neither of which reached the Statute Book; but, with the assistance of Lord Cairns, a great Christian Lord Chancellor, he helped to strengthen and secure the passage of Archbishop Tait's

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19. *loc. cit.* 13, 240.

20. *loc. cit.* 6, 50.

Public Worship Regulation Bill, designed to put a stop to ritualistic practices, and which became law in 1874.

Regarding moral issues, Shaftesbury believed that 'righteousness exalteth a nation', and, like Wilberforce, became the conscience of the nation. Geoffrey Best states: 'He had a burning desire for righteousness and justice in the conduct of international affairs.'<sup>21</sup> He vehemently opposed Britain's participation in the Opium Trade, one of the blackest pages in English history, and launched a scathing indictment on Peel's Government for its 'insolent and despotic treatment of the Ameers of Scind',<sup>22</sup> this when British Imperialism was at its height. He considered that the perpetrators of the Indian Mutiny should be swiftly brought to justice to secure a peaceful and just regime in which Christianity could flourish. His views on India were well in advance of his time.

His immense social activities took place both inside and outside Parliament. With regard to Parliament, we select the Factory Acts 1833 and 1847, the latter establishing the Ten Hour day. Also important, is his setting up in 1840 of the Royal Commission on Children's Employment, whose Report in 1842 so shocked the nation that a Mines Act was passed the same year, a triumph regarded by J. L. and Barbara Hammond as 'the most striking of Ashley's personal achievements'.<sup>23</sup> His Common Lodging Houses Acts 1851 and 1857 drew attention to the indescribably foul conditions prevailing in London's common lodging houses and effectively cleaned them up. Nor did the agony of boy chimney-sweeps escape his vigilance though it took many years and several deaths before effective legislation abolished this disgraceful traffic. His work at the General Board of Health, under the Chairmanship of his old friend Lord Morpeth and as a colleague of Edwin Chadwick, the great public health reformer and Dr. Southwood Smith, in the realm of public health was most effective and, but for administrative frustrations, would have been even greater. It is not widely known that it was Shaftesbury's idea to send out a Sanitary Commission to Scutari to deal with the disease and death which ravaged the army in the Crimea, and he successfully urged Panmure, the Secretary of State for War, to appoint one. Shaftesbury defined the Commission's powers and drew up its instructions and a hospital was set up at Scutari. The death rate was dramatically reduced and 'in Florence Nightingale's opinion it saved the British Army'.<sup>24</sup>

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21. G. F. A Best, *Shaftesbury*, Batsford, 75, 1964.

22. *ibid.* 75.

23. *loc. cit.* 11, 145.

24. *loc. cit.* 11, 247-248; *loc. cit.* 13, 181-182.



From a multitude of activities outside Parliament we select Shaftesbury's work for Ragged Schools. Since juvenile delinquency was the direct result of foul homes and negligent parents, Shaftesbury, with the devoted assistance of London City Missionaries, instituted highly successful schools which instructed boys and girls, thus keeping them off the streets and fitted them for useful work. Especially impressive was his scheme whereby promising youngsters could emigrate to the Colonies and there find work. Shaftesbury would bid them farewell at the Deptford docks saying: 'Remember the faces of those who are here present tonight'<sup>25</sup> and he followed their careers with interest. Another considerable achievement was his formation of the Labourers Friend Society, of which he invited Prince Albert to be President and which was afterwards known as the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes; its aim and achievement was to provide model homes for the working classes, the first steps ever made in that direction.

#### IV

What are the qualities which we hail in Shaftesbury and which account for his marvellously useful life?

First, there was his faith in God and commitment to the causes he espoused.

Shaftesbury had faith not only in God but in the rightness of his causes. He believed that God had prescribed his tasks for him: thus, he could not relinquish them at will but, as a faithful steward, would have to render an account of his stewardship. This accounted for his total commitment, the dedicated persistence of this morbid, sensitive man. His time and talents were held upon trust for use to the Glory of God in making the lives of the poor and oppressed more endurable; and the life of the nation purer.

This conception of trusteeship had a peculiar aspect relevant to Shaftesbury's position in life. As a premier nobleman he possessed great advantages, not to be selfishly enjoyed but to be used for the good of less fortunate people. 'To whom much was given, much was expected'.

His paternalism sprang from responsibility resulting from privilege. It is significant that he chose for his tombstone the text: 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive'; and his philanthropy had two facets. Positively, by philanthropic labours he justified his hereditary rank in society. Negatively, he was preserving such rank against the rapidly

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25. *loc. cit.* 11, 205-206.

encroaching tides of democracy, especially since Disraeli's Reform Act 1867 had given the vote to householders, a phenomenon viewed by Shaftesbury with the gravest mistrust. These principles further explain why a poor man, with a substantial estate to maintain, a large family to launch and many charitable obligations, sold valuable pictures to provide better cottages and schools for his tenants, and they refute the bitter gibes of John Bright who asserted that, although Shaftesbury cared greatly for the cotton operatives of Lancashire, he cared nothing for his tenants at St. Giles.

Answerable to God, and seeking only His approval, another text, later inscribed on his tombstone, held Shaftesbury on course: 'Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so come Lord Jesus.' Shaftesbury earnestly looked forward to the Second Coming. It acted as a comfort in adversity and as a stimulus to action. He would have said with John Calvin: 'Would you wish the Lord to find me not at work if he came?'<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, there was his enormous energy and his complete identification of himself with his causes.

Shaftesbury was certainly a man of great natural gifts, having a first-class intellect, fine presence and vast powers of concentration. So severe a judge as Lord Salisbury considered him one of the best orators in Parliament. But it was not so much his gifts as the use which he made of them that is so significant. Enormously scrupulous in his use of time, Shaftesbury directed his energies so that they always flowed along positive and useful channels. Lord Rosebery's remarks concerning Gladstone are equally apposite to Shaftesbury: 'He did not know what it was to saunter; he debited himself with every minute of his time; he combined with the highest intellectual powers the faculty of using them to the fullest extent by intense application.'<sup>27</sup> Moreover, he possessed, like Lloyd George, the ability to switch his mind from one sphere of activity to another, and thus was able to combine with a strenuous Parliamentary career a number of religious and philanthropic causes. He could proceed from the promotion of a Bill in Parliament to a Meeting of a Ragged Schools Committee, from advising Palmerston on a suitable candidate for a vacant bishopric to denouncing the Sunday post or the Opium War.

Shaftesbury never spared himself. In his early days, when he had first taken up the cause of the factory operatives, Robert Southey, the exponent of Tory paternalism, who had done so much to strengthen the sense of duty in the young Lord Ashley,<sup>28</sup> advised him not to

26. C. H. Irwin, *John Calvin: the Man and his Work*, 1909.

27. *Miscellanies, Literary and Historical*. Lord Rosebery, Vol. 1, Hodder and Stoughton, 259, 1921.

28. *loc. cit.* 6, 74-76.

inspect the factories personally, feeling that the experience would demoralise so sensitive a man. Shaftesbury took no notice. He visited factories, went down mines and knew the lodging houses and every street in the stenching, squalid slums in London. Thus, the accuracy of his facts could never be successfully challenged.

No man ever identified himself more closely with his causes. During holidays abroad with his wife and children, his thoughts constantly reverted to his work. On a hot day in a fashionable continental spa, he thought of the misery such heat would inflict upon the poor in the London slums. He would inspect a lunatic asylum in a foreign town or inquire into the public health position. Totally dedicated to the poor and oppressed, Shaftesbury even dreamed about them as Wilberforce had dreamed about the negro slaves.

Of course he had his detractors. Geoffrey Best mentions some examples, namely 'the Socialists who appreciated his concern with environment but jibbed at his aristocratic paternalism and fundamental pessimism—the doctrinaire individualists who appreciated his self-sacrifice but doubted whether he was tough enough when dealing with the poor'.<sup>29</sup> Some thought he was not sufficiently businesslike and his world of cripples, lunatics and shoe-blacks emotionally self-indulgent. There may be some truth in the fact that 'the ragged-school mothers tea-meeting in Lambeth or the special service in a Hoxton music hall, the farewell to his emigrant boys and girls at Deptford, brought the tear to his eye a little quicker than they need have done, but was it self-indulgent, emotionally or physically, in an old man to leave his fireside night after night no matter what weather to jog across London in a cab to where his sense of duty called him? It is not clear that self-indulgence outweighed self-discipline'.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, there was nothing emotionally self-indulgent about Shaftesbury's work at the Board of Health. Moreover, when his changed attitude to the Corn Laws compelled Ashley to resign his Dorset seat in Parliament, he believed he would be entirely happy in his purely social work, e.g. Ragged Schools. This type of work appealed to the 'monk' side of his character. But it was not so. He was very glad soon to be re-elected to Parliament, this time for Bath; and, moreover, realised the necessity of being at the centre of legislative power in order to advance his philanthropic causes, an advantage possessed by few of his colleagues in social work.

In order properly to estimate the extent of Shaftesbury's dedication, we must consider what he gave up. Supremely, there was his

29. *loc. cit.* 21, 116.

30. *loc. cit.* 21, 117.

ambition to be a great statesman. When Peel's great Government came into power in 1841, Ashley's commitment to the Ten Hour Bill compelled him to refuse office in it. He said: 'I have taken that course which will exclude me for ever in the official government of the kingdom. There were "paths of honour" and there were paths of "no gain and humility".'<sup>31</sup> Although subsequently offered a place in Tory Governments by Lord Derby and Whig Governments by Lord Palmerston, Shaftesbury, despite a struggle, always refused. He gave up the pleasant life of a premier nobleman in England and never enjoyed the friendship of his fellow peers either in or out of Parliament. He was never a popular man. Perhaps it was his stern evangelicalism and fidelity to his causes or possibly his rather austere demeanour that did not encourage approach. It could never be said of Shaftesbury as it was of Wilberforce: 'When he entered a room every face would turn towards him with pleasure.'<sup>32</sup> Certainly, as we have seen, he never had friends of his own intellect and social standing as Wilberforce had in the Clapham Sect and it is sad to read that, when Minny and daughter Constance were both dying, it was to W. J. Orsman, the leader of the costermongers, that he turned, asking for the help of the costermongers in prayer? Bickersteth was a good friend in early middle life, and, in later life, Shaftesbury formed two splendid friendships, with the great Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon and the Liberal statesman, W. E. Forster. But, especially after his wife's death, Shaftesbury's was a lonely life.

Again, this fine classical scholar—his Diaries abound in classical allusions—and lover of astronomy, sacrificed his love of scholarship. He virtually never read a book and could never afford to buy one. Would the tensions have been relieved had he, like Wilberforce, turned to Cowper or Walter Scott, albeit with a slight unease? And finally, in a bitter moment, when many of the operatives turned on their champion, quite wrongly I think, Shaftesbury said: 'I have sacrificed to them almost everything that a public man holds dear, and now I have concluded by giving them that which I prize most of all—I have sacrificed to them my reputation.'<sup>33</sup>

Thirdly, we note Shaftesbury's persistence and courage. Indeed, one is tempted to regard these as his supreme qualities, for without them nothing would have been accomplished. None of his causes succeeded easily. Every one involved a fight every inch of the way. Was it Factory legislation? He would address a cold indifferent House and face the bitter hostility of John Bright. Was it a Mines Bill? There

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31. *loc. cit.* 6, 150.

32. *loc. cit.* 4, 113-114.

33. *loc. cit.* 13, 140.

would be the ruthless antagonism and duplicity of the mine-owners' lobby and equivocation from his own Party leaders, for Peel and Graham never felt able to give him the solid support for his factory and mines legislation which Shaftesbury rightly felt such matters of national conscience demanded.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, when the Bill has safely passed through the Commons, heavily amended, it must needs be further emasculated by the House of Lords before it receives the Royal Assent. Then he must watch lest some fresh Bill be introduced, attempting to amend or repeal it; and then, at the right time, introduce another Bill to give fuller effect to the original intentions. It was always a case of two steps forward and one step back, try again and never lose heart. Some Bills, such as those relating to boy chimney-sweeps, took half a century to pass before the mischief was finally abolished; others never reached the Statute Book at all.

Only indomitable persistence on Shaftesbury's part enabled him to achieve the success he did. Dr. Runcie, in his address in Westminster Abbey (Oct. 1985), in an apt analogy, likened Shaftesbury to a boxer taking terrible punishment, but always coming up round after round for more until his exhausted opponent was compelled to abandon the fight.

Shaftesbury's whole life was a display of courage. We have noticed his denunciation of aggressive imperialism. Even more striking are some examples of his courage in domestic affairs. As regards physical courage, Shaftesbury, when a member of the Board of Health, worked virtually alone in London during the terrible cholera epidemic of 1849; and, even more conspicuous, is the moral courage he displayed in his opposition, both in private and in Parliament, to the assumption by Queen Victoria of the title 'Empress of India', thus incurring the wrath of the Queen and Lord Beaconsfield. Perhaps, the most impressive example is his address to the Agricultural Society at Sturminster Newton when, in the most forceful terms and to the fury of his father, he told his audience of landlords and farmers that the County of Dorset was within an ace of becoming a byword of poverty and oppression.<sup>35</sup> Popularity never weighed heavily in Shaftesbury's scales.

Let it be noted however, as a balance, that with all his courageous commitment, Shaftesbury was always judicial and prepared to entertain compromise, provided it did not impair his basic principle, as for example his acceptance of the addition of an extra half-hour on the ten-hour working day when this detriment was outweighed by

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34. *loc. cit.* 21, 92-105.

35. *loc. cit.* 11, 168.

other more favourable terms in the Bill. Especially impressive is his advice to his fellow-Peers when confronted with a measure of which they disapproved, but which had reached the House of Lords having received an overwhelming majority in the House of Commons. Shaftesbury argued that it was wrong for the Upper House summarily to reject a measure so passed by the Government of an Assembly duly elected by the people. Such a statesmanlike approach would have saved the House of Lords a generation later from its humiliating capitulation to Asquith's Government culminating in the Parliament Act of 1911.

Finally we note Shaftesbury's compassion and esteem of human nature as such, similar to that entertained by Wordsworth; for, although austere in bearing, he was a man of great practical compassion. As a very young man, he had been concerned that his sisters should make good marriages despite the disadvantages imposed by their home; a concern for others that steadily broadened. Sir James Stephen's noble words concerning Whitefield can justly be applied to Shaftesbury. 'If ever philanthropy burned in the human heart with a pure and intense flame embracing the whole family of man in the spirit of universal charity it was in the heart of Whitefield . . . he had no preferences but in favour of the ignorant, the miserable and the poor.'<sup>36</sup>

And, more particularly and beyond pity, Shaftesbury esteemed man as created in God's image and for His glory; thus it was morally wrong that he should live a degraded existence. As President of the Section on Sanitary Improvement at Liverpool Congress in 1858 he said that: 'Society must do all it could to remove difficulties and impediments; to give to every man . . . full, fair and free opportunity so to exercise all his moral, intellectual, physical and spiritual energies, that he may, without let or hindrance, be able to do his duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call him.'<sup>37</sup> He was especially anxious that working women should have time to fulfil their domestic duties.

Moreover, in his great speech in 1843, when moving an Address in the House of Commons 'praying Her Majesty to take into consideration "the best means of diffusing the benefits and blessings of a moral and religious education amongst the working classes", he called on Parliament to discharge its responsibilities to the poor and to "seek

36. Sir James Stephen, *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, Quoted by Dr. A. D. Belden on Title Page of *George Whitefield the Awakener*.

37. *Speeches of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, p. 308. Quoted by G. B. A. M. Finlayson *loc. cit.* 6, 410.

their temporal through their eternal welfare"; there were, he said "many hearts to be won, many minds to be instructed and many souls to be saved".<sup>38</sup> Such was Shaftesbury's reverence for human nature.

## V

Shaftesbury believed in philanthropic societies and belonged to many; but these were not enough. The oppression of the labouring population constituted such a manifest disgrace that it called for action from Parliament. He was in a unique position both to influence public opinion and to introduce legislation and he laboured in both spheres. Peel might strive for economic prosperity, and both Parties compete with each other for political liberty—three Reform Bills were passed within fifty-three years—but Shaftesbury, virtually alone, stood for social justice and freedom. It was morally wrong for men and women to work twelve hours a day. Man was more than an economic unit. Incidentally, when the Ten Hour Bill was passed, the extra two hours off the site made no difference to production despite all the gloomy prognostications; the workmen produced better work. Thus, he forced through Parliament a series of Bills which materially improved the lot of the poor and oppressed.

And, as the Victorian era wore on, Shaftesbury lived to witness the Government of the day assuming responsibility to improve upon his earlier legislation; especially the great Disraeli ministry of 1874 to 1880. He who had laboured so hard at the Board of Health saw the passing of the great Public Health Act 1875. The founder of the Labourers' Friend Society to provide model dwellings for the working classes saw the consummation of his labours embodied in the Artisans Dwellings Act 1875; especially he witnessed 'with unbounded satisfaction', the passing of the great consolidating Factory and Workshop Act 1878.

His last days were not entirely happy. He was seldom consulted on this new legislation and felt he had been given notice to quit. Typically, he said: 'I am like a great rock from which the sea has receded.' He also feared that Forster's Education Act of 1870 would mean the end of the Ragged Schools; and that excessive State intervention on behalf of the poor might be abused and militate against the Victorian doctrine of self-help. Always liable to melancholia, he greatly missed Minnie, though he was at times exalted by the thought of the glorious company who had gone before and

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38. Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 3rd Series, LXVII 47 to 75. Quoted by G. B. A. M. Finlayson *loc. cit.* 6, 190.

awaited him in heaven. But when he died there was no doubt what people thought of him as the Nation showed its heart for once as he had shown his for years. On the day of his Memorial Service in the Abbey the streets, despite the drizzle, were thronged with weeping people whilst processions representing some of his societies marched carrying banners: 'Naked and Ye Clothed Me', 'A Stranger and Ye Took Me In'; and Gladstone composed a fine inscription on the Eros Monument:

'During a public life of half a century  
he devoted the influence of his station,  
the strong sympathies of his heart,  
and the great powers of his mind,  
to honouring God  
by serving his fellow-men,  
an example to his order,  
a blessing to this people,  
and a name to be by them, ever  
gratefully remembered.'

## VI

What has Lord Shaftesbury to say to us today?

First, he would denounce the godlessness of the nation and attribute all the present lawlessness to its turning its back on God. Certainly, he who opposed the opening of places of entertainment on Sundays, despite the prejudice this would occasion to his beloved labouring classes, arguing that they should be allowed a half-day on Saturday for recreation, would have denounced, both in Parliament and outside it, the recent godless Bill relating to Sunday Trading and would have boldly asserted that what was morally wrong could not be economically right. He would have been appalled that such a Bill should have been initiated by the Tory Party, traditionally the Party of the Established Church and guardian of the Constitution, and that with a three-line Whip, and would have rejoiced at the summary rejection of a measure so hostile, not only to the Law of God but, in consequence, to the physical, moral and spiritual health of the Nation.

Secondly, although he would have welcomed the present good-feeling and co-operation between Anglicans and Free Churchmen, the voice which vigorously denounced the attempt of the Pope and Cardinal Manning to create a Roman hierarchy in England based upon territories would have been heard in uncompromising protest against the recent visit of the Pope to England, especially his presence in the Cathedral of Bishop J. C. Ryle.



Thirdly, he would, I believe, have welcomed the present welfare state, with the reservation that its benefits must never be permitted to derogate from man's essential responsibility to provide, so far as possible, for himself, nor should it exempt man from a compassionate and practical concern for his family and his fellows.

And, finally, I have no doubt, he would urge us courageously to attack any evil in the body politic and to persist and continue to persist until it had been excised. He would not care whom he might offend or what opposition he might meet: only that he might be found worthy at His Master's coming.

Mrs. Battiscombe best summarises Shaftesbury's life and achievement: 'Both by temperament and by circumstance he seemed destined at best to a small success, at worst to complete failure. No man has in fact ever done more to lessen the extent of human misery or to add to the sum total of human happiness.'<sup>39</sup>

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39. *loc. cit.* 11 334.