

the militant hatred of a Northcliffe, but a cold, contemptuous dislike. "I am anxious now . . . to bring the multitude of idle, able-bodied loafers into the recruiting net." His regrets are not for the victims of Gallipoli, Kut, Festubert, but for the "cruel luck" of "poor Winston" "pouring out his woes" over the loss of one of the best and newest of the super-dreadnoughts; for the German Ambassador and his wife, "the poor Lichnowskys." "She spends her days in tears." They had suffered a rude awakening indeed from the genial confidence of the days when they gave sumptuous dinners to London Society.

I did not believe the change of Government would make any great difference to the conduct of the War. Asquith had been harried along by the hideous exigencies of the contest, the demands of the military and naval experts, the cries of the jingo "bitter-enders." The pace of surrender to war rapacities might be hastened under the new Government—yet, I thought, not much. Given the will to a peace of conquest, all else must ultimately be subordinated to war necessities.

Asquith and Grey had followed a tortuous course of greedy secret diplomacy; if any genuine effort toward international concord were to come, it must be from another source.

How absolutely Lloyd George would soon be cut off from the Liberal Party, and left a party of one—a head without a tail—was not yet obvious. The Liberal War Committee in the House promised its support to his Government—even Asquith gave it a verbal support. At the bidding of his backers, Lloyd George appointed high Tories to his Government. On his small War Council Curzon and Milner ensured the imperialist tradition, Bonar Law, who was Leader of the House of Commons and therefore his mouthpiece, as well as Chancellor of the Exchequer, guarded the interest of Big Business. Arthur Henderson was retained to keep the workers to the bench. How largely he was a mere outsider in the Cabinet appeared, in full clarity, somewhat later. Representatives of Big Business headed several Government departments. Sir Albert Stanley, director of the underground railway combine, was at the Board of Trade; Lord Devonport, the grocer of Kearley & Tonge's, was Minister of Food; Sir Joseph Maclay, a Glasgow shipowner, who disdained a seat in Parliament, was made Controller of Shipping; Lord Cowdray, the head of Pearson's, the big contractors, became president of the newly-created Air Board; Lord Rhondda, the Welsh coalowner, was President of the Local Government Board. In short, it was a Big Business Government.

Lansdowne, the old Tory leader who had had the temerity to express a desire for peace, had been eliminated; Grey was ousted from the Foreign Office wherein he had taken up the threads laid by his predecessors, and followed them to their inevitable climax in the World War. Balfour succeeded him as Foreign Secretary with Robert Cecil as Minister of Blockade. It was said that Asquith had stipulated these two should control foreign affairs, as a condition of giving his support to the new Government. The ruthless school was not satisfied. The *Morning Post* roundly declared Cecil unfit for his post; the *Times* complained that Balfour was "tired and ill-placed," *Britannia* fulminated enraged, crying out that two

governments and not one now held sway in Britain; that of Lloyd George, and that of Balfour and Cecil at the Foreign Office, wherein, it was alleged, the dominance of Asquith, Grey, and Haldane was yet maintained. Now that Lloyd George was Prime Minister he did not protect *Britannia* from the consequences of these outbursts. Again and again it was raided, and found greater difficulty than ever in appearing; two or three of its weekly issues were often missed. Its little band of devoted adherents printed it somehow—sometimes on the roofs of houses, it was said.

The *Times* had mainly based its demand for the supersession of Asquith upon the question of "man power"; more men must be found for the spring offensive. Henderson having accepted office in the extreme war Government, declared<sup>1</sup> that to win the War the service of every man and woman should be placed at the disposal of the State. There was a new "comb-out"—a hateful term—of the men who had been exempted on account of physical unfitness, or because they were employed on essential work. A small shop-stewards' organ, the *Trade Unionist*, was suppressed for an article, "Forty Millions—Mostly Fools," wherein the poor fellows "combed out" of industry for the Army were likened to lice eradicated by a fine-tooth comb, for thus it was claimed they were regarded by their masters and rulers. The author of the screed was "Billie" Watson, a crude, unshaven fellow, a working engineer at the bench, who secured a following amongst the men in the engineering shops because he was voicing their passionate indignation at the soulless conditions capitalist society in war time thrust upon them.

Though Lloyd George had become the instrument of the extreme Tory conscriptionists, the legend that he was a liberty-loving democrat still in certain quarters survived tenuously from his land-tax days, and was industriously propagated. Press paragraphs asserted that he was about to democratise the Government of the country by setting up Parliamentary Committees after the French model, for dealing with finance, foreign affairs, and so on; that he was pledged to the conscription of wealth, in order that the rich, and not the poor, should pay for the War; to the nationalisation of shipping, mines, railways, and the food supply in the interests of the masses. In actual fact some measure of Government control was now exercised over railways, mines, and shipping. There was a 50 per cent. increase in railway fares, trains were fewer and slower, but the workers discovered no improvement in their lot. Despite the appointment of a Food Controller food difficulties increased. Women stood in queues for potatoes, sugar, meat, butter and other fats, cheese, jam, etc. In February 1918, when rationing was at long last introduced, the police<sup>2</sup> estimated that 1,300,000 people were standing in the food queues in the Metropolitan area, and this was doubtless an underestimate. The *Times* dubbed him "wizard" for his power of carrying the rival factions along with him. To me it seemed, rather, that he was a madman compelling his slaves to build a rude barrack on marshy and fever-infected land, insisting that it was a marble palace with pillars of alabaster and rarest

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Southampton.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 12th Edition.



carving; flinging to the ground some litter of coloured paper, and declaring it a blossoming garden of lovely flowers; riveting shackles upon the people, and proclaiming that he was crowning them with liberty.

The Labour Party had decided to support Lloyd George's Government. Brace and Roberts again got subordinate posts; James Parker was made a Junior Lord of the Treasury. It was the end of his connection with the I.L.P., which had sponsored him. Stephen Walsh was appointed to serve under Neville Chamberlain in the Ministry of National Service, which the working Trade Unionist was apt to regard as a ministry of national slavery. Stout John Hodge, of the Steelmelters' Union, was made Minister of Labour. A shrewd, efficient administrator of his Union, he was one of the team whose lack of idealism had crucified the spirit of Keir Hardie. Little was to be expected of him. George Barnes was at the Pensions Office. I went to him, as I had been to other Ministers, in the effort to get injustices redressed. He received me alone and cordially, repeatedly protesting anxiety to better the sad plight of the discharged men. There seemed about him an almost eager friendliness, and the wistfulness of one who has severed connection with old friends and old endeavours and finds himself a stranger in his new office, its pomps unreal, unsatisfying, its barriers overwhelming, himself a weak man, his possibilities of achievement very small.

He spoke of my mother, assuring me she was right in her war attitude; in justifying her, I thought, striving to justify himself. At moments he seemed to me a phantom, blotted out by the memory of his earlier self, as I saw him when first the "Labour Representation Committee" got its "Labour Group" into Parliament, and he was wont to speak affectionately of Keir Hardie as "our honoured chief." Often on the Terrace beside the Thames I had talked with those two so different men—friends as it seemed. Deep was the rift between them when Keir Hardie died, despised and rejected by the Party he had formed!

## CHAPTER LVI

### TRAINING THE CHILD

"ALL these little children have lost their fathers in the War!" Annie Ferne at the Mothers' Arms told me sadly, with a sweep of her hand which comprehended two-thirds of the babies on the flat roof.

I was worried about the toddlers. They grew chubby and rosy; they acquired cleanly habits; voluntary workers came to pet and play with them; toys poured into the Mothers' Arms without stint, but as soon as they came, they were broken and thrown away. Sybil Smith sent a big rocking-horse, as large as a Shetland pony, used for years by her children, but in perfect condition still. Within a month of its arrival, it was no more. Every hair of the tail and mane had gone; the eyes were gouged out, every joint in the wood severed; the remnants had been torn from their stand. To me it was amazing that young children under five years of age could have done it. To the busy staff at the nursery it was all a matter of course; one could not even get the horse repaired, for half the almost unrecognisable pieces of battered wood had been thrown in the fire or the dustbin before I knew. To me this meant more than the wrecking of a costly toy. It impressed on me that the toddlers had learnt only one sort of game: to pound and break, to tear and destroy. That must be altered. As I rushed through the day's papers, marking the news items, my eye caught a tiny paragraph: Muriel Matters had returned from studying under Maria Montessori in Barcelona. I telephoned here and there until I got in touch with her. She responded with zealous understanding. She had herself experienced the same need when she helped Larkin and Connolly in the Dublin lock-out of 1912. She had tried to procure a Montessori teacher then, and having discovered such teachers unobtainable, she had gone to Barcelona to fit herself to supply the lack. Of course, I would have it that she must come to the Mothers' Arms to initiate the Montessori Method.

Within a fortnight we had everything in readiness. Willie Lansbury had got the low shelves and little tables made for us at Lansbury's yard. A partition had been removed on the second floor at the Mothers' Arms to throw two rooms into one. The Montessori apparatus had been procured. Mrs. Savoy had made at cost price the small hair, nail, and sweeping brushes. Muriel Matters and her coadjutor, Hildegard Gunn, with admirable good taste, economy, and expedition, had run about procuring all else that was appropriate.