

Dogmas Discarded

An Autobiography of Thought 1886–1908

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I. Christian Beginnings

“To state correctly what I now am, it is necessary that I should state the means which I have had to acquire knowledge; and though this will set me to speak of myself from infancy upwards, it is a story which none can tell as well as myself. But this speaking of one’s self is a pleasure at all times, whatever affectation might have affected to the contrary; particularly, where a man is not ashamed to expose his past career to the knowledge of all.”

— Richard Carlile.

“Wait not to be backed by numbers. Wait not till you are sure of an echo from the crowd. The fewer the voices on the side of truth, the more distinct and strong must be your own.”

— Channing.

I was born on November 5th, 1886, and educated at the Hugh Myddelton High-Grade School. Here was attained some success in Mathematics, Scripture, and English.

In 1894 I became a member of the Church of St. Anne and St. Agnes, near the London General Post Office. Six years later followed Confirmation and admission to Holy Communion. I liked the Church service right enough, but I was doubtful as to the urgency or necessity of many of the Ecclesiastical ceremonies. They seemed to have no especial bearing on religion, and were too often solemn in appearance only. Long faces and nobly sad hearts never go well together. And quite early in life I learned that Church was not the place where men and women assembled, in entire forgetfulness of themselves, to worship at the sacred altar of truth. But this failure was attributed to man’s hypocritical heart, not to the influence of the Church. For no institution was ever the fount of wisdom, but only an avenue to knowledge. Even here the Church was to prove useless.

Between April 9th and July 25th, 1902, the Rev. Septimus Buss, LL.B., then Rector of St. Anne’s, delivered a series of Wednesday noon-day lectures on “The Religions of the World.” These were attended with the object of making notes of the main points in each address, and writing a descriptive report around them. Mr. Buss regularly read and corrected each effort on the Sunday succeeding the delivery of the Wednesday address thus reviewed. On the strength of his teaching I attacked the non-Christian religions with both virulence and arrogance. And Mr. Buss approved of the vigor without informing the criticism.

Thus there occurred a pitying reference to the ancient Egyptian lower class worship of the elements of nature and of sacred animals! “Symbolical of their uninitiated state of being I,” “Cannibalism E”, “Excellent,” said Mr. Buss. He forgot to mention that Christianity centered about a cannibalistic propitiation for sin! That its theology was a perpetuation of Egyptian and other Pagan theology, that its rites and ceremonies had been handed down from a cannibal past! Perhaps he did not forget to do these things, but taught rather in ignorance. In any case, he was

an excellent agent of mental darkness a splendid guide along the path that leads to the dungeon of moral and intellectual servitude. Fortunately we were to part company at an early date. And ill-informed as they were, these accounts of Mr. Buss's lectures gave promise of that separation. They were none the less priggish in tone.

The report of the address on Confucius, for example, casually states that "the very name of atheism sends a cold shiver through my blood! So I lingered over the Chinese Sage's miserable passing into the tomb's silence with unctiousness:-

"broken down by misfortune, enfeebled by age, and echoing a last cry, not of praise, but of worldly hopelessness, so little done, so much to do."

What a Pharisee it was that wrote this! One can hear the smack of the lips, the disgusting chuckle of self-satisfaction, the loudly declaimed thanks to the Creator! Actually see the oily smile of smug content at being a Christian! How copiously must I have been dosed with the poison of ecclesiastical veracity. The antidote of natural reason was at work, however, and thus escape from intellectual death was assured. For I held that

"the atheists and unbelievers' arguments must be treated of and disproved, clause by clause, until they recognize the fallacy attending their respective beliefs!"

This excerpt is culled from my account of the lecture on Brahma. It shows that I was leaving nothing to miracle. Reason was the supreme guide. And it was realized that non-belief involved counter beliefs. Very few Christians seem to grasp this fact. So I must have been very near heresy, though I did not suspect it at the time. Outwardly there was nothing very heretical in the attitude of a youth who held that reason was compatible with belief in the existence and goodness of God, divine interference with the affairs of men, and objective answers to prayer! Also with faith in the Divinity of Christ, and the verbal inspiration of the Bible! Inwardly there was the faintest spark of revolt, for I was single-eyed. Whatever was thought should be proclaimed.

Buddha, in these reports, wins my sorrowful regard on account of "the darkness cast over his would-be good life by the dismal thoughts of Eternal sleep." A little patronizing and self-righteous, thinks the reader? Perhaps you are right, so far as the form of expression is concerned. But the idea was not to pat Buddha on the cheek. I had sensed, for the moment, the awful pessimism of life; had seen its horrible uselessness, and shrunk, in Christian cowardice, from its realism. Buddha's saintly heroism came as a surprise, even when related by Christian lips. So I seemed to patronize where actually I approached with deep affection and respect. As yet it was impossible for me to stand alone. God and Immortality were essential props to my existence. But I dismissed with loathing "the undisguised polytheism of the Babylonians," and rejoiced exceedingly in "the purity of the monotheism of the Jews."

Such was my theological attitude when, in November, 1902, I noticed the advertisement of an evangelist named John Willoughby Masters, for rooms for mission services, and consequently wrote to him, offering assistance. The result was that we opened a "Christian Social Mission," at the Assembly Rooms, 5, Russell Road, Plolloway; the meetings being advertised as being conducted by "The Lyrical Gospel Herald," assisted by Master Guy Aldred, the Boy Preacher."

A circular published in connection with this Mission insisted on our sympathy with the best in all sects and no sects. We wished to work out of the old ruts, and to draw together companionable

souls by the common bonds of spiritual brotherhood and mutual consideration. All mankind had to struggle on against difficulty without and trials within. And the Christian spirit could only be conserved, under such circumstances, by broad humanitarian social work. Total abstinence was part of our creed. Yet we urged that drunkenness was a malady requiring special treatment, not a crime calling for punishment. All judging and slandering we condemned as wrong. In a word, Christianity, practically interpreted, meant to us the beautification of life on earth.

Less and less did pious other-worldism attract me. "There was so much to do, so little done," that it was necessary to inculcate incessantly the duty of social helpfulness. My very first sermon, delivered on November 10th, 1902, had this urgent dirge for its burden. Its text was found in Gal. vi., 6: "Serve ye one another, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

II. Theism

During the same month I became acquainted with a system of belief expressedly antagonistic to Christianity. This was Theism as promoted by the now late Rev. Charles Voysey, B.A., the minister and founder of the Theistic Church, and former Vicar of Healaugh, whose indictment before Privy Council shook the Anglican Church to its foundations. A reply to the Times advertisement of the Theistic Church—offering a free batch of literature to truthseekers, etc.—led to the receipt of several printed sermons by Mr. Voysey, and his “Lecture on the Theistic Church, its Foundation and the Bible.” Their author invited criticism. So I read the “Lectures,” and addressed to him a closely-written, forty-eight paged foolscap criticism of them from the Christian viewpoint. In concluding, I expressed a wish for an interview. Mr. Voysey replied promptly, thanking me for my “long and courteous criticism” of his writings, but fearing that “it would be of little use to meet and argue with a man who sees no contradictions in the narratives of Jesus, or in the genealogies, etc.” Finally, he insisted that this was all froth in comparison with the moral basis of his contention against the Christian scheme of salvation.

An interview was arranged, however, for the afternoon of Saturday, December 20th, of this eventful year. Others followed. Mr. Voysey’s earnestness was impressive, and offered serious food for reflection. One could not help thinking of the atheist who had not even the Theist’s hope of immortality, and yet served humanity with a steadfastness of purpose and loyalty to principle the Christian might well envy. Religion could only be deemed virtue—the passion for good that elevated mankind. Consequently, the disinterested service of man by the atheist was applauded as being, indeed, religion. There seemed no better way of becoming at one with God. Such conduct could only arise out of a life that was in absolute accord with the supreme harmony of the universe. Unconsciously, I had begun to embrace the teachings of Zeno the Stoic.

III. Unitarianism

Although oppressed with an ever-widening antagonism to the entire Christian scheme of salvation, and a deepening sense of the absurdity of belief in an infallible Bible, I continued Christian missionary work down to February, 1903. On the 2nd of this month I withdrew from the Holloway Mission, and definitely rejected the Christian religion in a letter addressed to my former pastor, the Rev. S. Buss, LL.B.

I had now learned to look upon life more spiritually than I had known how to do as a Christian. God had become a living and affectionate father. He was no longer the fiend who-created and allowed to come to life a soul which he foreknew would be damned eternally. Had he been, he deserved of such a monster. Fear he might inspire in the minds of others, but not in mine. For I had been born anew in the spirit of truth, and had accordingly come to despise all professions of belief inspired by fear. I was a sincere Theist for sure. But I did not dread any material punishment attendant on ignoring the authority of a deity conceived in the image of barbaric tyranny. My attitude towards such a being was definitely anti-Theistic. A God not pleased with the soul that worshiped at the altar of Truth, not cognizant of his responsibility to man, had ceased to charm one who could be won by affection where he could not be coerced by fear. Besides, as an intelligent being, I required but one God instead of three. Such a change of inward attitude was of tremendous import, and meant more than those who have not been brought up in faith of Christendom can ever hope to realize. But it was only the first step on the heretic's path; and there was a great distance still to be traversed in my search for truer conceptions of the universe and man's relation thereto.

At the moment I was passing through a frankly anti-Theistic state of mind, thus escaping from placing even a temporary trust in the illogical and doctrineless Christianity of Unitarianism. This term is used to describe the doctrine of "Churches free in their constitution, and open to the laws of natural change." How delightfully inappropriate its employment for this purpose seemed I! What relation, one was tempted to inquire, could "Unitarianism" possibly have to "Churches free in their constitution, and open to the laws of natural change?" Did it not rather suggest a settled philosophic conception of the workings of the universe, and a fixed belief as to the nature of the universe, and the underlying reality? If so, what reason, I asked myself, was there to suppose that "the laws of natural change" that had upset so many of our fore-fathers' views should refuse to mete out an equal share of iconoclastic fatalism to the cherished convictions of the disciple of Lindsey or Priestley?

Unitarianism was a definite term affirming the unity of God, and of existence in God. This implied a certain philosophic faith, and permitted of no change in primary conceptions. Consequently it could only be synonymous with a non-subscription to creeds and formularies within the limitations of Theism and a backboneless Christianity. Why, I asked, if Truth is always first in the consideration of the Unitarian, is it always measured by the Theistic standard? Theism should be judged in the light of Truth, not Truth in the light of Theism. It was the former and not the latter estimate which was according to "the laws of natural change."

I wished above all things for something definite and certain. One cannot be impartial in the struggle between truth and error, righteousness and iniquity. And if Unitarianism meant only freedom of discussion, it seemed, and still seems to me, that all limitations to its philosophic employment should be swept away, and the word relegated for doctrinal purposes to the realm of the senseless. Either this, or its exact philosophic meaning made clear, so that its relations to modern thought might be the better apprehended.

Priestley, Martineau, Lindsey, and Drummond were all Unitarians. To so describe them was to label their religious sentiments as definitely as if one said they were those of all sensible men. For “the religion of all sensible men” varies as the individual varies, and the Unitarianism of the four famous scholars mentioned did likewise.

All four would deny all claim to infallibility either on behalf of the Church or the Bible; yet Martineau’s conception and eulogy of Christ as his “Captain of Faith” was only compatible with a belief in Christ’s divinity and impeccability. All four also held—with the possible but not certain exception of Priestley—that their view of a personal creator behind the phenomena of the universe was an infallible truism.

This was the cardinal inconsistency of Unitarianism, to our mind. About it centered many others. The majority of Unitarians called themselves Christians, for example. Yet they disputed the doctrines of the “Trinity,” the “Deity of Christ,” the “Atonement,” and the “Incarnation,” as orthodoxly understood. These doctrines they repudiated as inconsistent teachings, and accepted as uncertain traditions with the other orthodox ideas of “Redeemer” and “Salvation of Christ.” Having intellectually explained them away, they incorporated them, as Theodore Parker once observed, in their piety with other pieces of damaged phraseology. They enjoined good works as the one test of true religion, and preached up noble character as the only proof of salvation. Truth and science had no terrors for them; it was only the doctrine of infallibility, that cannot be improved or advanced upon that they detested—the ecclesiasticism that tortured the bodies in order to weaken the spirits of heretics. But one sought in vain for the Unitarian who was sufficiently strong in his advocacy of freedom of thought to frankly recognize the unsatisfactory nature of placing Jesus in the seats of the deities whilst strenuously maintaining for his human character only; or, as I should now add, who was honest and logical enough to note that the postulated existence of a personal god is no solution of the enigma of existence?

Unitarians had been foremost in attacking the trustworthy nature of the four Gospel records. With these impeached, all supernatural belief in the abnormal greatness and unique character of Christ, was robbed of its foundations, yet Unitarian scholarship clung to this fetish as earnestly as orthodox “faith.” I marveled at this, no less than at the truth-seeking which coupled the denial of Christ’s divinity with the practice of both adult and infant baptism.

Of course, now as then, I fully understand and appreciate the courage that is required to renounce the doctrines of one’s childhood, and to surrender, as being but “a man of straw,” the faith of one’s dear ones. Nevertheless, if one must break with the traditions of the past in order to worship at the altar of Truth, one should do so with the thoroughness that the situation both demands and deserves. Far better for the sincere soul to find its faith mistaken, and to learn how to face fearlessly the teachings of the future, than to be tossed about on the billows of Unitarian doubt, distrust, and uncertainty. Truth cannot be arrived at by a mistaking of conventional piety for religious aspirations. Nor yet by the confounding of Theistic speculations with man’s consciousness of a something in nature that defies ultimate analysis.

Religion, as I understood and still understand it, signifies life or action that embodies depth of devotion and lofty aspiration. Its Chinese equivalent means Education and Instruction i.e., the drawing out, in the sense of cultivation, of the inspirational part of man's character, whereby men are led to forget the limitations of their material environments in their realization of their oneness with all phenomena. This fact realized, the human intelligence cannot but revolt at the self-contradictory postulation of a personal deity that not only does not explain existence, but rises up, as it were, an ugly obstruction in the philosophic sky serving only to detract from the perfect unity of working that is everywhere visible to the scientific truth-seeker's vision. For nature's harmony expresses only some unmoral principle of existence that trusts not of the sufferings of sentient life. It has no room to admit of the capricious interference of a personal creator. But this is to anticipate later development.

IV. Atheism To Netheism

Owing to certain questions which I now put with some timidity to Christian evidence lecturers, I was invited to attend the Sunday Morning Adult School Meetings of the Peel Institute, in order to refind Christ. I accepted the invitation only to lose God instead.

In addresses delivered before the members of this local Quaker Brotherhood during the ensuing twelve months, I insisted that man was truly religious only in so far as his outwardly expressed views concurred with his inward outlook on life, and his beliefs were scientifically trained and cultivated. The earlier lectures maintained that the Bible records were historically untrustworthy. Also that the bodily resurrection and divinity of Christ were absurdities. But Theism was true, and the belief in God was based on indisputable facts. Only in so far as it was frankly anti-Christian, however, could this belief be contended for as an essential ingredient of a natural religion and natural theology. Only in so far as it was the center from which to attack all "revelation" was Theism commendable to all rational men. For no sanely religious mind could afford to reverence the fallacies of Christianity whilst keeping at a distance from the orthodox after the manner of the Unitarians.

Belief in God, I argued, demanded a further belief in future existence. The latter, however, I openly admitted, was unsupported by any real evidence, and was, therefore, unscientific; which led back, of course, to my old theme of benefiting mankind here. In any case, this was the best course to pursue. Unlike Mr. Voysey, I denied the objective efficacy of prayer and doubted God's power to attend to it. My inclination was towards a mechanical deism, which I styled Theism and defended with fervor. To promote its growth I acted as a voluntary Theistic Missioner, and distributed literature freely through the post, in addition to running meetings on Clerkenwell Green, and later at Garnault Place. At these a point was made of making no collection, introducing no personalities, and welcoming courteous and vigorous opposition.

This Theistic Missionary work continued from April to September, 1904. The mission then became a Freethought one. I had ceased for ever either to advocate or to believe in the relationship or the life that grew out of the relationship between a personal being called God and a personal being called man. My soul was marching on to an embracement of the cardinal doctrines of Atheism and Agnosticism.

Timidly, I began to question the evidence which was adduced in support of God's existence. I did not deny but simply doubted it. Controversy in the public forum at Hyde Park and elsewhere caused me, in the course of the next few months, to absolutely deny the possibility of any God's existence, so long as the term God was held to relate to a universally dominating and creating personality. Huxleyan Agnosticism was given up for the wider philosophic agnosticism which declared that no person—since all persons were relative beings—was able to solve the riddle of the universe, the enigma of existence. Hitherto I had been agnostic only to God's existence, passively atheistic to his practical use. Now I became not merely atheistic for all practical purposes, but militantly netheistic[sic] towards *his* being and doctrinally agnostic towards the ultimate nature of all being. From a loose heterodoxy I had passed to the embracement of a convincing and

consistent philosophy offering the counter-affirmative to the puerile absurdities of theological metaphysics.

It may be urged that I had lost faith only in a personal God, and that this did not necessarily imply the adoption of such an extremely Atheistic attitude as I have chosen to imagine. Possibly I was leaning towards Pantheism, since Pantheists refused to reduce the infinite and incomprehensible to the level of personality and held that the noumenon was not so much impersonal as supra-personal. But this would throw no light on and would have, in fact, nothing to do with the nature of the noumenon. That which is supra-personal must be impersonal. That which is impersonal may be suprapersonal. Such was my reasoning. Seeing, however, that the highest man knows in nature is to be found in those ideals, ideas, and thoughts associated with personality, I failed to see what knowledge he could have of that which was suprapersonal. On the other hand, to describe or define the noumenon as being, from our knowledge of physical science, incompatible with any ideas of a moral creator; and to hold that the underlying principle of being manifested in stellar phenomena was too magnificent to be identified with a personal deity, was to approach the consideration of speculations as to the nature of the underlying impersonal force from two different view points, both of which had their basis in Atheism. To understand this was to be a Netheist, not a Pantheist.

V. Social Democracy

The Peel Institute was a hotbed of political Liberalism of the Daily News variety. Membership of it converted me from Toryism to advanced Radicalism. This was early in 1904, when I was finding Huxley's lectures and essays of absorbing interest. His Romanes's address of 1893 on "Evolution and Ethics" were responsible for my development into a Socialist.

In this lecture, Huxley insisted that "the influence of the cosmic process on society is the greater, the more rudimentary its civilization." He spoke of social progress checking the cosmic process at every step, and substituting for it the ethical process. The influence of the latter was directed, not so much to the survival of the fittest, as the fitting of as many as possible to survive. It thus repudiated the gladiatorial theory of existence, and permitted Huxley to rebuke "the fanatical individualism of our time" for attempting "to apply the analogy of cosmic nature to society." "Social life, and the ethical process in virtue of which it advance" towards perfection, Huxley defines as being, strictly speaking, "part and parcel of the general process of evolution." Readers of Kropotkin will see in this a support of the latter's view of "mutual aid" as "a factor in evolution." It must be remembered, however, that Huxley's "ethical process" is developed, by its author, into a plea for sentimentalism and loyalty to interests of an abstraction termed "the community." I believe in the community—in a different social order, but can see only two classes to-day. Huxley sees no classes, only a "community." And Kropotkin's "mutual aid" tends to create faith in the same paralyzing and fatal abstraction.

All this was not clear to me at the time. I never considered that Huxley, who has pleaded powerfully the grandeur of the Anarchist ideal, was here preaching up a morality, a law, and an order which tended to negate all rebel effort. But I became emancipated from neo-Darwinian fears. Capitalism and the struggle for existence were not the last words in social-evolution. Equity, mutual aid, freedom, justice, etc., did represent realizable ideals. Socialism was the inevitable goal of all social development. This vision of the coming social harmony, this conviction that the new era would dawn, filled me with new energy. I must leave the capitalist parties and enter the real movement, that of Socialism and working-class emancipation. So I turned my back on compromise and radicalism, on liberal-laborism and pure-and-simple secularism, and joined the Social Democratic Federation.

That was in March, 1905. My membership of this organization was a very stormy one, and only lasted down to October, 1906. By this date I was convinced that social democracy was a very poor affair.

In May, 1906, I fell foul of the Labor Party for its inaction in Parliament. The shallowness of its independence was disgusting in the extreme, and it was every bit as much the tail of the Liberal Party as the old-time Liberal-Labor Group had been. The Labor Party's deliberations in Parliament was marked by the same waste of time as that which characterized the Liberal and Conservative Parties' confabs. Utility was constantly subordinated to the ostentatious ornamentalism which is considered proper in Parliamentary circles. And a most rigid nominal outward conformity to traditions Labor M.P.'s should have been inwardly opposed to, was preserved. All

in the name of opportunism—and not, I fear, without some view to office. Under these circumstances I plumped for Socialist propaganda only as the workers' hope. It was necessary to spread the education that made for class-consciousness. Parliament had ceased to interest me. But I was “non,” not “anti.” Some would have defined me as not being “a ballot-box maniac,” meaning—thereby that I had not entirely discarded belief in the ballot-box. But I had ceased to believe in palliatives and clung firmly to impossiblism.

This brought me into conflict with the party on the religious question. Socialism involved Atheism since it was a philosophy of life. It was founded on a materialism which explained all abstract ideas and all institutions in the terms of Mother Earth. To embrace its teachings was to war against every myth from God to the “captain of industry.” Certainly it told of a universe of natural law, conditioned by the principles of its own existence, and ruled by no capricious deity whose will was altered by the whim of man. Belfort Bax publicly and privately applauded this stand. But the party officially declared against my “atheistic bigotry,” and practically avowed its conviction that Socialism was but a reformist legislation. Political opportunism suggested that it was secular and mundane, not atheistic and anti-religious. Such revisionism—both political and philosophical—as this and other official statements of policy pointed to, dissatisfied me. So I left the party, having derived much useful instruction from the publications of the Socialist Labor Party and the Socialist Party of Great Britain. I had no wish to capture the Socialist platform for Atheist propaganda, but I did not intend to be crippled in my exposition of Socialism. How could one offer it as a substitute for present-day society, without opposing its every principle to all the institutions of capitalism? Besides, if Socialism had no room for God, it had as little space for the Freethinkers' abstract “reason.” Here was Socialism clear-cut philosophy of materialism—representing the revolt of mother earth against the sky—the social and economic maturity of man as a social animal-being negated for votes by persons who mouthed working-class watchwords today only to eulogize the deeds of capitalist cabinets tomorrow. Here were the essentials of revolutionary propaganda being denied and twisted in order to secure middle-class smiles and smirks for men claiming to be Socialists! But not really revolutionary, not too extreme, not so strictly logical as to be above bribery, you know! Pour God! He is the believed of every public and private corruptionist.

VI. Impossiblism

“On the ground of the class struggle,” said Leibknecht, “we are invincible. If we leave it we are lost, because we are no longer Socialists. The strength and power of Socialism rests in the fact that we are leading a class struggle; that the laboring class is exploited and oppressed by the capitalist class, and that within capitalist society effectual reforms, which will put an end to class government and class exploitation, are impossible.” Yes, I felt this to be true, but I had not yet become clear in my outlook. I did not fully realize that all government was class, as was all exploitation. I had not studied Marx sufficiently to see in the parliamentary republic but the republic of the propertied class—a joint stock affair. But I was nearing the position of the revolutionary Socialist. Most “revolutionary Socialists” never arrive, especially if they become professionals.

The above excerpt from Liebknecht may be considered the keynote to the manifesto I published in the *Islington Daily Gazette* on December 28th, 1906. This was addressed to the electors of the parliamentary division of Central Finsbury, and reminded them of my eligibility for candidature at the next general election. It proceeded to lay my views before the readers at great length. For what it is worth, I cite the following extract:—

“I desire you to understand fully the manner of man who is seeking your suffrage—one who denies the existence of God, and owes neither allegiance to King nor master. I am a soldier of truth, a minister of revolt, and my one duty in life is to respect myself... Let us clear our minds of cant, and note what Socialism involves. To wit:—

“(1) A refusal to affirm loyalty to the present Constitution...

“(2) Such a philosophic outlook on society as recognizes that the economic determinism that renders inevitable the natural supercession of the present state of society by the Socialistic invalidates all belief in the capricious interference of any Deity.

“(3) A recognition of the fact that reforms (so-called) cannot remove the gyves and fetters from off the masses; since all such reforms are passed by capitalists, who merely grant palliatives to deceive the people. The latter’s economic serfdom remains thereby unaltered.

This being so, it follows that no Socialist has ever yet been returned to St. Stephen’s. I now propose to extend to Central Finsbury the opportunity of so doing. But I warn the electorate that, if returned, my fight will be on a par with Bradlaugh’s — only greater. As I do not intend going to Parliament to mend, but to end, political humbug; as I stand as a revolutionary and atheist at that for all progress is atheistic—I shall not be allowed to take my scat. But I have not gone to war without counting the cost. If returned, I do not propose to palliate existing conditions, nor to support Social Democratic Federation candidates and Labor men who are willing to so

palliate. I do not pretend that palliation is my object. I shall go to Westminster pledged to represent the hard-thinking section of the proletariat, who know that class-consciousness spells revolutions, sincerity, and common honesty. And in this an assault on the "House of Pretense," in the name of sincerity and common honesty. And in this assault I do not expect the support of either the Independent Labor Party or the Social Democratic Federation, since both of these bodies provide for mane compromise, involving a consequent betrayal of the workers...

If returned, I shall not go to the prayer-meeting and thank a non-existent Deity. But I should attribute the success to the intelligence of the proletariat, or that section thereof, which constituted the electorate of Central Finsbury.

"Should this manifesto involve prosecution for seditious libel, let me say that I am acquainted with the law on the subject, and am quite prepared to take the consequences,"

Soon afterwards I realized how absurd it was for a revolutionary to wish to go to Parliament. I accordingly defined myself as an Anarchist Communist. But it must not be concluded that I was any less a Socialist. Central power or authority seemed to rely on no especial merit for its support, and merely represented the executive committee of a society founded on property. Its continued existence was incompatible with the fundamental principles of Socialism. So I repudiated it. Hence I was an Anarchist. My own reason must decide my every act. But I believed in nothing short of communism. Hence I was a Socialist. As I meant this—and saw no value in the workers seeking palliatives either on the parliamentary or industrial field—I was an impossiblist. Also a netheist. This was early in 1907, when I identified myself with the activity of the Freedom Group of Anarchists, and imagined that I had evolved a clear conception of my mission in a life of purposeless origin.

VII. Trade Union Anarchism

There is no more virtue in the term “Anarchy” than in its companion, “Socialism.” Readers should bear this fact in mind. And just as much fakirism is imposed on a long-suffering proletariat in the name of the one as the other. With its pretense to being “a movement” and not “a party,” the Anarchist group federation can prove as narrow and as reactionary and sectarian an organization as any section of the social democracy, or pretensions signify nothing, and we live in a real, not an ideal world.

Socialists, so called, have degraded Marx’s declaration of a political class struggle to mean something which it never did and never can mean, namely, parliamentary action. The Anarchist movement has thrived on this fact. It has rightly opposed parliamentary action only to applaud “direct action.” But what is this “direct action,” this “general strike” or “lock out of the master class” I urged for a short time as an Anarchist Communist? It is a pandering to the labor leader on the industrial plane. It breeds reformist action. It is a statement of policy which implies something less than the social revolution, or the latter permits neither of strikes nor yet of parliamentary humbug. It means one thing: the entire upheaval of society, the clear-cut revolt of the bottom dog, insurrection as a means to social ownership of the means of production and distribution.

I soon fell out with the Freedom Anarchists. Their anarchy was merely Trade Union activity, their god a labor fakir named John Turner, of the Shop Assistants’ Union. Direct Action meant striking and industrial palliation, commodity struggles that led nowhere. Their anti-parliamentarism was vigorous at times, but ill-informed. For it was founded on the assumption that the workers could better their conditions under capitalism. Which is a lie. The workers as a class cannot better their conditions under capitalism.

Whilst proclaiming that real action was economic action, never once did the Anarchists come out clear for definite economic action. Industrial Unionism was in the field. That was “direct action.” So the Anarchists flirted with it, and thought the opportunity an excellent one for capturing a field of propaganda for Anarchism. The very effective criticism of Trade Union sectionalism which the industrialists put forward was not attended to, was never seriously considered. Whatever its faults, Industrial Unionism corresponded to the newer conditions of production, and was essentially a rank and file movement. It imperiled the jobs of the Trade Union leaders. Tom Mann returned here and entered upon his Syndicalist campaign, the object of which was to strengthen the Trade Unions, to centralize them, and to perpetuate their abuses. Mann’s career is notorious, and his reason for not wishing to smash Trade Unionism is now apparent from his candidature for the A.S.E. secretaryship. As Industrial Unionism declined and the less advanced and purely official movement—“Syndicalism”—evolved to the front, the Anarchists applauded the latter. Always I refer to the Freedom Anarchists and its allies of like persuasion in the States. Recently, indeed, we have been told that Anarchists do take up a definite attitude towards Trade Unionism. They do not wish to smash it! Neither do they wish to perpetuate it! Neither are they indifferent to it!

Socialists in a bid for power tried to capture the Trade Unions and so created a Labor Party which has since become a side—wing of the Liberal Party. Anarchists, in a like bid for position, have degenerated into Trade Union officials, with decent salaries and a love for the capitalist system. But no true Socialist could compromise with Trade Unionism and Parliamentarism. Anarchism is merely the attribute of revolutionary Socialism, its intellectual and political expression. It should take its stand on the education of the worker, not the capture of his organizations. Never, on the plea that organizations do not matter and solidarity does, should the Anarchist aim at perpetuating Trade Unionism since the latter can only flourish on the sectional division of labor and the negation of class solidarity. Realization of this fact has caused me, from the beginning of the Syndicalist activity in England, to oppose it, and to adopt a definite attitude of antagonism towards the cowardly compromise the “official” Anarchist movement was making for the sake of a “boom.” We do not want “booms” in isms, we want material liberty. That can only come from revolutionary abandon.

VIII. Industrial Unionism

Industrial Unionism is one of the most important propagandas of our time, and no such pamphlet as the present would be complete without a statement of the writer's attitude towards it. I came in contact with its literature towards the end of my membership of the S.D.F., and have remained a keen student of it ever since. My mind was quickly made up, and, for all practical purposes, remains unchanged on the subject. I am not an Industrial Unionist, although sympathetic towards many of the latter's contentions.

The original constitution of the I.W.W. asserted that the workers must come together on the industrial and political fields. I do not think there can be any doubt about the soundness of this contention only it does not necessarily involve Parliamentary action, as so many think. Finally, Anarchists, non-class war Unionists, and Socialists having been brought into this unripe organization, a split occurred. The Chicago section with Vincent St. John at its head, took possession of the offices and erased the reference to "political unity" from the preamble. A minority opened new offices at Detroit and remained loyal to the original preamble. Neither section is quite sound, in my opinion, but both may be said to be the I.W.W., in different senses. One section was quite entitled to alter the preamble; the other unquestionably stands by it. But it must not be supposed that the Chicago I.W.W. is anti-Parliamentarian. It is not—although it inclines that way. On the other hand, "political unity" should mean a definite attitude towards Parliament and the capitalist state—whether anti, palliative, or pro. But the Detroit I.W.W. does not adopt a definite attitude for it tries to unite S.P.ers and S.L.P.ers in its ranks Hence the conflict and confusion. To my mind, it arises from this divorcement of industrial and political action. There can be no such dual action. Working-class action, *wen* class action, is political in aim, *viz.*, the overthrow of the present capitalist system. But it will be industrial direct action in method—*viz.*, the insurrectional seizure of the workshops. Actually, not I.W.W.'s, with little limitations of sound theory and palliative strikes—which tend to increase as the organization grows—but the propaganda of insurrectional— *i.e.*, real socialism is wanted. Nothing less, nothing more. From a tendency to ignore this fact arises all this confusion.

IX. Socialism and Anarchism

Although he does not suspect it, the Anarchist usually lives in the ideal world, the world of reflexes. He battles against an abstraction called "Authority," and imagines it to be the creator of the real world, the world of production and industrial exploitation. Too often he becomes crankish and endeavors to isolate himself from his fellows. He buries his head in the sand, leads the "simple life," and imagines that he has escaped from the evils of capitalism, and that everyone else can follow his example. He applauds his own mental greatness, and forgets that it is a parasite growth. He puts his own shoulder in the limelight, and forgets the amount of social labor-power necessary to produce his mental vigor.

This personal revolt, this individual vigor of Anarchism, is good in many ways. It makes for free love unions, it emphasizes contempt for the legal and moral reflexes of the system. And it gives Anarchism a psychological power because Socialism too often insists only on the materialistic basis of all effort. If Church and State reflex capitalist interests, one should form free love unions in defiance of both, should oppose them on every occasion as the reflexes of capitalist exploitation, Anarchists see this usually. Socialists more often do not. But the latter point out that there can be no emancipation of man and woman, no real negation of domestic prostitution within the limitations of capitalism. Authority and the family are economic questions in the last analysis, evils which only Socialism can end. That is no reason why we should not revolt against their shadows, the Church, the State, and the Marriage lies. Capitalism is death, to be sure. Let us recognize as much. But to acknowledge too obsequiously all its venerable shams and hypocrisies is to cling with gladness to its bier, and even to insist on full funeral rites. This is only possible so long as we lack faith in the future and the life to come for our children on mother earth.

A Partly Discarded Egotism (1908)

The highest heights to which ever man can attain are those of liberty of thought, freedom of action, and the service of one's fellows. The successful ascent of these heights alone brings the happiness which makes for human betterment. As yet, they have been climbed only by those who have realized that short of an Atheistic basis, and Communistically expressed aspirations after individual freedom, there can be no social progress. "And I am such. In my heresy rests my salvation. My happiness is assured. Can the same be said of all my readers happiness?"

For the rest, let me add that I have come to look partly upon the world with the critical, if at times passionately remorseful, eyes of the cynic and from the sincere reformer I have emerged into the temporary egotist and egoist, not entirely removed from an occupancy of so large a place in the revolutionary movement as to see in myself the possessor of virtues which, if found in a weaker soul, could only pass for vices. My refusal to make any apology for such characteristics as those to which I refer will be interpreted by my opponents, I know, into a further evidence of my egotism. Knowing no masters, I have a supreme contempt for all who are less than masters, i.e., masters in the sense of having a natural force of character and dignity of bearing, unconsciously impressive, but devoid of either ostentations, self-assertion, or the self-shrinking tendencies of the slave; and hence I have learned to be the recipient of my own bouquets, caring neither for the praise nor the condemnation of lesser mortals possessed of more conventional proclivities.

It may be that I do not possess the hypocritical rhetoric of the politician, the malicious slanderous piety of the blaspheming beetle of the Most High, nor that acquaintance with weak verse and weaker sense of the twentieth century poet laureate; that I lack that knowledge of several tongues which the professional tutor should possess, have not been a senior wrangler, and am not a technical scientist. Such professional qualifications as I here enumerate I plead guilty to being devoid of; but nevertheless, however much praise I may bestow on others for their acquirements of arts I am not an expert in, the sole object of my praise—were it not that the said object of such praise was too critical in his analysis of all praise, and superior to the acceptance of any—is that individual who is potentially the culmination of the highest tendencies of evolution on the psychical plane, and the accompanying virtues on the physical; in whom the processes termed mendelism and natural selection have united to produce their greatest resultant; a supra-god and a superman, in whom are synthesized and reincarnated the virtues and wisdom of all the ages; the stoicism of Zeno and the nirvanic egoism of Buddha; the persistency of Hannibal and the ascetism, without the renunciation of the Oriental mendicant; nature's epitome of wisdom whose greatness knows naught of that false modesty that would cause him to deny the truth of the charge that he was capable of learning more in order that a wider scope might be given to his potentialities. Having thus described the object of my reference, I have but to add—if such addition be necessary that it is only because I but rarely glance at the mirror that I do not see its physical reflection more often. For my experience of the various movements with which I have been associated has taught me to rely on myself, and neither to entirely trust the power nor purpose of one's supporters, thus leading me to feel that alike in my potentialities and the

actual expression of those potentialities there is to be found, among my compeers and predecessors none greater, That my judgment may be a little biased I do not question; that all critics' and all writers' efforts, however involved their phraseology, implies a similar bias I do most confidently assert; and I have at least the redeeming virtue of natural frankness. Modesty, that vice of small philosophers and smaller financiers, if hard to find in the character of cabinet ministers, is unknown to the superman.

The swiftest forked radish that ever progressed from the cradle to the grave, I never bother myself about such trivial questions as morality as do most bipedian moochers. Self congratulation upon one's morality is a custom among a people whose potential and moral courage rarely changes into kinetic valor. And it is to be feared that the morality of many a moralist is as abstract as his courage. That is where my morality obtrudes itself. I am moral enough to be conventionally immoral if needs be, and honest enough to dare to be dishonest if my nature requires that I should. A decadent humanity talks of ethics; the conceited fop relates without tiring what his bored hearers, without much guessing or calculating, can easily see are but "tall" stories about himself; and the politician prates of principles. But the super-man has no need to talk of aught but that of which he thinks—the inherent revolt of his higher self against the hypocrisy of this world of cant and vale of hypocritical tears, the elimination of those sordid factors in his environment which hide from view the glory of a social horizon illumined by the rising sun of a brighter individual and communal morn.

Then there is the question of laws, which social fools and economic serfs obey, few respect, and the super-man rejects and unmakes. Valuing but my own happiness, I obey the laws and customs when they conform to my prejudices. Then it is that I exonerate the law-maker and pass a benediction upon the administration. But since laws are passed by the parasite class in defense of parasite exploitation, and I am a member of the vast proletariat, I exonerate rarely and bless seldom, more often outlawing society and ex-communicating governments for the existence of laws which excite my antagonism. For I never forget that, amid all the transient things of life, in penury and lecture rooms, the making and unmaking of laws, the fall and rise of morals, the fluctuations of finance, the passing of ancient blasphemy into New Theology—there is for me but one purpose in life—to wit, the elimination of duty from the vocabulary of humans, and applause from among those factors which animate the sincere in their sincerity.

A Present day humanity is but a knotted rope useless in itself, and possessed of diseases and criminal instincts which are useful only in that they make for their own elimination, and but afford the means whereby the pioneer of the citizens of to-morrow is enabled to expose the viciousness of to-day. Such a pioneer cannot but assert his superiority to all deities, the exteriorized creatures of diseased imaginations, and regard himself as the one concrete object of his own respect, as his contempt increases for worshipers who neither intelligently condemn nor criticize him for what he is in himself, but praise and curse him for what they lack in themselves. Such idolatry at times amuses, at others distresses, but at all times inspires one to eliminate its cause.

As it is, notwithstanding cheap phrases implying the contrary, the mob will continue for some time yet in their idolatry; toys to minister to the pleasure of those who despise them, social rubbish to be discarded, a mobocracy to be teased and condemned by a filthy and foul snobocracy.

In such an environment, why should the Social Revolutionist ape modesty when he feels indignant contempt and finds himself an outstanding figure in this earthly hell of corruption? Is the cat least among the mice, or the terrier least among the rats? Are not both feared by their respective prey in proportion as they assert their superiority? To the householder rats and mice

are domestic parasites or vermin, the dog or cat his naturally equipped eliminators of such household pests. Without going into the justice of householders' claims to deprive mice and rats of their food and of their existence, or the rights or wrongs of the latter objecting to be killed by the domestic feline and canine, let me apply the analogy to the real pioneer of tomorrow—the class-conscious super-man, and his relations to society. The unquestionable vermin of society, the unemployable decadents of divorce-court fame, fear the pioneer of to-morrow, the class-conscious worker and socialist impossibilist, who asserts the whole of his individuality against the rotten timbers of society, its laws passed by immoral statesmen and administered by the unprincipled legal metaphysicians of the bench. The reason is not far to seek I Such a pioneer is the guardian of the joy of the socialist morrow, and his being necessitates the unbeing of the well-groomed vermin who call themselves ladies and gentlemen of independent means!

As for the world's wage-slaves, with their bowed heads and backs visible only from above, but comfortable foot-stools for such as I have described above—contemptible in their chains and puerile in their understanding the propaganda of the revolutionist passively awakes their interest on account of its novelty. For were not consciousness of wage-slavery a novelty how many divines and politicians and crowned prostitutes would not be hurried off to honest toil?

But the proletariat is a despicable and degraded mass, a contemptible and willing colony of serfs, which I despise too much to even seek to exploit. To accept its praises and to return it curses, or even to betray indifference is too much trouble. Fit only to serve and pass away, get ye and worship the prostitutes who live on you until the work of the pioneer has made your continuance an economic impossibility. And then your passing will be but a herald of the world's approximation to an inheritance by a race v/hich neither worships, nor cringes, nor praises, nor curses; neither forms governments nor founds arbitrary law—dominating societies, neither reverences Mrs. Grundy nor is infatuated by Cleopatra — a race which has but learned the purity of being natural, and the modesty, the all—embracing egotism, and the supremest egoism of but respecting itself. To being a member of that race I have evolved; and it is because I have so evolved that I am what I am, an outlaw, a Socialist, an Anarchist, an Atheist, and an Individual Revolutionary; a citizen of the bright to-morrow warring against the sordid criminality of the transient today.

Ye see me in the cell, ye see me only in the grave;
Ye see me only wandering lone beside the exile's weary wave;
Ye fools I do I not also dwell where ye have sought to p16'C€ in vain?
Rests not a niche for me in every heart, in every brain;
In every brow that brooding thinks, erect with manhood's honest pride?
Does not each bosom shelter me that beats with honor's generous tide?
Not every workshop brooding woe, not every heart that shelters A grief;
For am I not the breath of life that pants and struggles for relief?

Ferdinand Freiligaft, *The Angel of Revolution*

Have you thought of the tedious days
And dreary nights of your imprisonment?
The long endurance, whose monotony
No tidings come to cheer? This were the trial!
It is the detail of blank intervals –
Of patient sufferance, where no action is,
That proves our nature. Have you this thought o'er?

J. W. Marston.

Author's Trial for Seditious (1909)

Guy Alfred Aldred, the author of the present pamphlet, was charged on a warrant before Mr. Curtis Bennett, at the Bow Street Police Court, on Thursday, August 26th, 1909, with writing, printing, and publishing "a certain scandalous and seditious libel" in the *Indian Sociologist* for August, 1900. The defendant conducted his own case throughout, whilst A. H. Bodkin appeared for the Treasury.

In opening the case for the prosecution, Bodkin stated that the prosecution was one that had been commenced by the Attorney-General for an offense of a public character and of a serious and important nature. It was committed deliberately by the defendant after warning, and not committed by him merely as a printer, but committed by him as a printer and as a writer of some of the seditious matter contained in the publication. The defendant was connected with the Bakunin Press. He held Anarchistic views, as appeared from the issue of August, 1909, in respect of which this prosecution had been undertaken, and he was a person who was known as the associate of Anarchists in London. The *Indian Sociologist* was a paper which appeared to have reached its fifth volume. It was described as an organ of freedom, and of political, social, and religious reform. It was edited by Krishnavarma from Paris, and was published for the express purpose of advocating what was called Indian independence, and in furtherance of the Indian Nationalist movement. It was patent, as far as the pages of the paper were relevant to the case, that there was preached, doubtless from the pen of Krishnavarma, to a large extent, doctrines intended to bring about the absolute subversion of the Government of His Majesty in the Empire of India, and advocating and urging those upon whom appeals of that sort would be likely to have an effect to take all means to throw off what was called the alien yoke, means including open rising, violence, murder, and assassination. In May, June, and July, 1909, the paper was printed by Arthur Fletcher Horsley of Manor Park, who was arrested, tried, and sentenced on the very same day as Dhingra was sentenced. Prominence was given to the trial and to the remarks of the Lord Chief Justice in passing sentence, and thus any person who after that date did what Horsley had done had the most ample and open warning that this sort of printing and publication of seditious matter could not be regarded as otherwise than committing a very serious breach of law.

In July, a prominent Indian official was murdered in London by the man Dhingra, and it was borne in on the minds of all thinking people that the promulgation of seditious matter sometimes led to very terrible consequences. In spite of the awful occurrence in July, the prisoner, in the August number of this paper, put himself forward as the advocate of a Free Press. About August 20th, this issue came to the knowledge of the police, and copies were applied for and obtained. It bore the name and address of the prisoner as printer and publisher. As soon as its contents had been sensed by the authorities, they decided to act promptly. It was thought quite possible that, under the Newspaper Libel Act, this paper might fall within the definition of a newspaper, and on Wednesday, August 25th, Mr. Justice Hamilton, sitting in Chambers, granted leave to serve a summons on the defendant, calling upon him to show cause why he should not be prosecuted

for libel as the editor and person responsible for what had appeared. The defendant appeared before the Judge in Chambers, and failed to show cause, Mr. Justice Hamilton making an order sanctioning the prosecution. A warrant was immediately applied for and executed, and at the defendant's premises 396 copies of the paper were seized.

The publication's contents on many pages were redolent of sedition. The accepted definition of sedition was the publication verbally, or in a document, of any matter intended to, or calculated to bring into hatred or contempt, or excite disaffection against the person of His Majesty, the Government, or the Constitution of the Kingdom, or the administration of justice, or to excite His Majesty's subjects to attempt, otherwise than by lawful means, to alter any matter that was by law established, or to raise discontent or disaffection among His Majesty's subjects, or to promote feelings of ill-will or hostility between different classes. There could be no doubt that a serious attempt had been made to raise discontent and disaffection among His Majesty's subjects.

Counsel then proceeded to call evidence of arrest. Chief Inspector McCarthy, of New Scotland Yard, then confirmed the statements of the Counsel bearing on what the prisoner had stated, etc., when arrested, adding that when asked where the *Indian Sociologist* was printed, the prisoner replied: "I must not give other people away," and refused to give any information on this score.

At this stage the case was remanded until Saturday, August 28th, when Chief Inspector McCarthy, of the special branch, New Scotland Yard, was recalled. He said it was part of his duty to keep observation on and attend meetings of Anarchists in London. He had known Aldred for about 2 years, and had seen him at such meetings, and had heard him speak at them. Defendant held the views of a philosophical rather than violent Anarchist, and his remarks were of a theoretical rather than violent kind. The witness had never heard him advocate violence. Defendant had never suggested that it was necessary for any individual members of the meetings he addressed to indulge in any form of assassination, but had said that it was necessary the people should be educated, and subsequently there would take place what the defendant termed "the social revolution." The defendant advocated what was called a general strike—anarchy through industrial conditions. Everybody would lay down their tasks and do nothing until the millennium arrives. So that by revolution, as expressed by the defendant, he had always understood some future occurrence which would take place after definite education, and not necessarily a violent uprising. When the witness arrested Aldred, the latter produced certain post cards and letters he had received from Shyamaji Krishnavarma dated from his address in Paris. In a letter of July 30th, was the phrase:—"I approve of your idea of reprinting portion of the prosecuted numbers of my paper and the reprinted portions with any remarks you may make thereon may be circulated along with the *Indian Sociologist* without mention that it is a supplement."

A police-spy, named William Sauge, of the C.I.D. Special Branch, stated that he called at the accused's house on Saturday, August 21st, and failed to secure a copy of the *Indian Sociologist*. He represented himself as a private person interested in the movement. Acting under the instructions of Chief Inspector McCarthy, he then wrote, on Sunday, the 22nd, the following letter to the defendant at his Shepherd's Bush address:—"As I notice that you have taken charge of the publication of the *Indian Sociologist*, I should feel glad if you would kindly forward me four copies of the same, and oblige, yours faithfully, Thomas W. Hudson." He enclosed six penny stamps, and received the four copies as requested. He did not think that, if it was true that the publication was of a seditious character, he was inciting the defendant to commit a deed against the law of the land by writing a letter in a false name after he had failed to secure a copy by falsely representing himself to be a friendly inquirer. He could not give any opinion as to whether it was a crime to

incite a person to distribute a seditious paper, or what was called a seditious paper. He had not given a second thought to what it meant to incite a person to commit a crime.

The prisoner here scornfully indicated that his cross-examination of this witness was at an end by sharply turning to the magistrate with a sarcastic: "I think that will do, your worship."

Detective—Sergeant Brust stated that he wrote for a dozen copies of the *Indian Sociologist* for "himself and a few friends" on August 24th, and received them by post the following day.

Detective-Sergeant McLaughlin said that he had kept the defendant under observation for some months past. He had known him as an Anarchist. He had heard him address meetings dealing with general political affairs, but not on the subject of India. He had heard him treat of imperial affairs, however, although not of India directly. He had never heard him suggest political assassination or violence of any immediate kind at these meetings. So far as the witness had observed, the defendant had always acted straightly and uprightly, and had not sought to evade observation.

This concluded the case for the prosecution.

Accused then made the following extempore.

Speech for the Defense

“In the first place, I wish to plead ‘Not Guilty’ to all counts in this indictment. In the second place, I desire, if I may, to point out, so far as the evidence already adduced is concerned, and also the opening remarks for the Treasury, that the prosecution is one of malice, conspiracy, and calculated misdirection; and I object to an immediate committal to the sessions on the ground that such committal would be one of indecent haste, likely to make for a non-securement of justice. So far as the question of malice and conspiracy is concerned, I will pass that, but for the moment, to return to it immediately. So far as the question of calculated misdirection is concerned, I will direct the Court’s attention to what Mr. Bodkin, for the Treasury described as the accepted definition of sedition. That definition reads as follows:—‘Sedition is the publication verbally or in a document of any matter intended to, or calculated to bring into hatred or contempt or excite dissatisfaction against the person of His Majesty, the Government, or the Constitution of the Kingdom, or the administration of justice, or to excite His Majesty’s subjects to attempt, otherwise than by lawful means, to alter any matter that was by law established, or to raise discontent among His Majesty’s subjects, or to promote feelings of ill-will or hostility among different classes.’ Like so many other definitions of sedition, or, for that matter, of any subject, which seem at first to be thorough and correct, when submitted to a little analysis, this definition is seen to be particularly void of meaning, and to be one that is likely not only to lead to the apprehension of any person who is known as an anarchist, but for that matter, also to any person who ventured to justify the decapitation of King Charles I. Were it to be defined as an offense against His Majesty’s person only, it might lead to an entire abrogation of the present constitution, inasmuch as that constitution is the outcome of the middle-class uprising of Cromwell against absolute monarchism, which resulted in the setting up of the Revolution dynasty of William and Mary. In so far, therefore, as this definition described sedition as being an endeavor calculated to bring into contempt, etc., it may lead to political embarrassment and misapprehension on the part of the loyal and faithful subjects of the realm, since, should the King desire—which I don’t for a moment suggest—to usurp the functions of the Commons, sedition would be the condition in which both the King’s supporters and the supporters of the Commons would find themselves, according to the point of the view. For the rest, I do not think.”

Mr. Curtis Bennett, the magistrate, who frequently interposed during the speech for the defense, now said: “You must try to put it rather short. This is really showing no defense. I cannot allow you to go on for ever in this strain. What is your defense to this charge?” The magistrate followed up this remark by moving from his seat to exchange some remarks with Mr. Bodkin. The defendant waited calmly throughout this interruption, and when the magistrate had resumed his seat, after laughing and chatting with Bodkin, he proceeded to resume the thread of his discourse as though no interruption had taken place:

“that anything is likely to create such disaffection as the sense of the non-sacredness of one’s private letters. Now, in this case, while it has been admitted by the police

that my character is quite good, and that I am upright, the authorities have caused to be sent to me certain private letters which afterwards formed the basis of the prosecution. This, I suggest, is more likely to cause serious incitement to anti-constitutional methods by people who do not view things in the same philosophic way as myself than any activity of mine. Were the individuals who did this not agents for the police, and was their action aimed at the overthrow of some established authority, it would, legally as well as morally, be described as a conspiracy. The fact that I am only an ordinary subject of these realms should secure to me the same justice as if I was an established authority. If this be so, the fact that I am a victim of this conspiracy does not make the incitement.”

The magistrate again intervened by saying this was not to the point, the prisoner replying: “By thus dealing with bus definition and the question of “conspiracy, I shall get directly to the point of the charge.” This comment the magistrate overruled, by saying that the defendant was willfully wandering from the point of the charge. The latter now somewhat tartly replied: “Well, if I am beating about the bush, you have only yourself to blame for allowing Mr. Bodkin to lose himself and the court in the woods. I am only following him.” On the magistrate again interposing, the accused, amid some “hear, hears” from the well of the court, said: “Very well, I have secured my object. In that case, I reserve my defense.” He was then committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, bail being allowed in £100 himself and two sureties in £50 each, or one in £100.

The sureties were not forthcoming until Friday, September 3rd, when the defendant was released from Brixton Jail, where he had spent the interval.

The case came on for trial at the Central Criminal Court on Friday, September 10th, before Mr. Justice Coleridge. Two days prior to this, in charging the Grand Jury to bring in a true bill against the accused, the Recorder of London, Sir Forrest Fulton stated that both Krishnavarma and the defendant had been guilty of writing and publishing “a great deal of dangerous and pestilential matter.”

When the trial came on before Mr. Justice Coleridge, the prosecution was represented by Sir William Robson (the Attorney-General), his Junior Counsel (A. H. Bodkin), and an array of other counsel. The accused here, as at the Bow Street Police Court, conducted his own defense

In reporting the case at the time, the Daily Express stated that he was “boyish and defiant throughout,” that he followed the case with keen interest, and “delivered a Hyde Park oration from the dock.” The *Globe* stated that he was perfectly calm and self—possessed, but defiant. The entire capitalist Press commented on his youthful appearance.

In opening the case for the prosecution the Attorney-General was careful not to repeat his junior counselors definition of sedition which formed so prominent a portion of the case for the prosecution before the Bow Street magistrate. This omission was quite noticeable. His speech otherwise proceeded along much the same lines as those along which Bodkin’s police court effort had developed. He stated that the defendant wrote offering help and sympathy to a man who was avowedly defending murder of the worst kind, and who had brought down upon himself the reprobation of all decent persons in every civilized community. It might be said that Krishnavarma and the defendant—as the men who had advanced and expounded such a creed were not only responsible for the death of the victim who happened to be slain by Dhingra, but also for the death of the murderer whose life was taken in obedience to the necessary law.

Attorney-General then proceeded to cite quotations from the defendant's contributions to the columns of the *Indian Sociologist*. Defendant had contributed a column of Passing Reflections above the initials "G. A. A.," and seven columns of closely-printed matter, headed "Sedition," under his full name. In the passages thus quoted, defendant declared the existence of the Government to be "a conspiracy against the liberty of the people," or, in other words, "a matter of high treason." He declared that "Prosecution for sedition was anti-constitutional"; stated that, "according to all the laws of jurisprudence, India, in its relations with England, was in a *state of nature* avowed "that the British Government glories in its association with the Czar, the cowardly murderer of many, whilst executing Dhingra, the political assassin of one"; eulogized Krishnavarma as being "a modern incarnation of the much-abused Marat," possessed, as such, of "the same political insight, same uncompromising proclivities and thoroughness"; but confessed that, in his opinion, the workers had nothing to gain as an International oppressed class from identifying themselves with the cause of Indian Nationalism. He remarked, however, that it was the duty of the English military rank and file to refuse to bear arms equally against the Indians, the Egyptians, and the class from which they (the military) were recruited at home. The defendant also wrote:—

"The question at issue is not the views of any particular person. It is the matter of the unlicensed liberty of speech and writing. If we would not be hanged separately by police repression we must hang together in opposition to political tyranny."

"Without the assistance of the British workers the tyrants who exploit them could not extend their dominions beyond the seas."

"Beccana has denounced as barbarous the formal pageantry attendant on the public murder of individuals by Governments. He sees in these cruel formalities of justice a cloak to tyranny, a secret language, a solemn veil, intending to conceal the sword by which we are sacrificed to the insatiable idol of despotism. In the execution of Dhingra that cloak will be publicly worn, that secret language spoken, that solemn veil employed to conceal the sword of Imperialism by which we are sacrificed to the insatiable idol of modern despotism, whose ministers are Cromer, Curzon, Morley 81 Co. Murder—which they would represent to us as an horrible crime, when the murdered is a Government flunky—we see practiced by them without repugnance or remorse when the murdered is a working man, a Nationalist patriot, an Egyptian fellaheen, or a half-starved victim of despotic society's blood-lust. It was so at Featherstone and Denshawai; it has often been so at Newgate; and it was so with Robert Emmett, the Paris communards, and the Chicago martyrs. Who is more reprehensible than the murderers of these martyrs? The police spies who threw the bomb at Chicago; the ad hoc tribunal which murdered innocent Egyptians at Denshawai; the Asquith who assumed full responsibility for the murder of workers at Featherstone; the assassins of Robert Emmett? Yet these murderers have not been executed! Why then should Dhingra be executed? Because he is not a time-serving executioner, but a Nationalist patriot who, though his ideals are not their ideals, is worthy of the admiration of those workers at home, who have as little to gain from the lick-splitting crew of Imperialistic, blood-sucking, capitalistic parasites at home as what the Nationalists have in India."

These passages, the Attorney-General urged, proved the serious nature of the seditious incitement of which the defendant had been guilty, especially when one remembered the excitable temperament of the Indian population to whom it was addressed.

The case for the prosecution was now brought to a conclusion by a repetition of the evidence that has already been recorded as having been given during the police court proceedings.

The defendant declined to call witnesses or to go into the witness-box himself. But he remarked that he wished to address a short speech to the jury for the defense.

This speech lasted fifty minutes, and included, of course, a good deal of matter of but transient value. Its most important passage was the following:—

“I have no apology to make either for my attitude towards Krishnavarma, or for what I have written with reference to the Indian question. I claim the absolute freedom of the Press, the absolute right to publish what I like, when I like, where I like. The only condition on which I can secure that right as a proletarian thinker is that I shall secure it for the Indian Nationalist Patriot, Krishnavarma. I can only do that by maintaining, at the price of my own liberty, the freedom of the Indian Nationalist Press, even where I may not agree with its principles. Krishnavarma has been denounced by the Attorney-General as ‘a criminal resident in Paris.’ Apparently that gentleman means he does not stay in London to risk being transported to India. Sir William Robson knows that if Krishnavarma is a criminal he can be extradited. Why is his extradition not applied for? Because the Attorney-General is repeating in this prejudiced Court in safety that which he would not dare to express as an ordinary citizen in Paris. Gentleman of the jury, I do not wish to be harsh with the prosecution, but, if you condemn Krishnavarma for not coming to London, you cannot acquit the Attorney-General for not going to Paris.”

The Attorney-General now replied for the prosecution, after which the judge addressed his summing up to the jury, who returned a verdict of “Guilty” without retiring. The following colloquy now ensued between the judge and the defendant: —

Justice Coleridge: “Have you anything to say?”

Guy Aldred: “Nothing, my Lord, except that I desire no mitigation of sentence.”

J. C. (mildly surprised): “Is that all? Have you nothing else to say?”

G.A.: “Nothing, except that I do not advocate political assassination.”

J. C. (passing sentence): “Guy Alfred Aldred, you are young, vain, and foolish; you little know that others regard your statements far more seriously than they deserve. The sentence of this Court is twelve months’ imprisonment in the First Division.”

G. A. (smiling): “Thank you, my Lord.”

The defendant then left for the cells below, prior to departing for Brixton Prison, where he served his sentence. Before leaving for Brixton, however, he was allowed to see his friend, Rose Witcop.

The authorities at Brixton treated him with every consideration, He was released from jail—having earned the full remission for good conduct—on Saturday, July 2nd, 1910. It may be mentioned that Mr. Justice Coleridge passed the highest possible sentence that the law permitted.

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Guy A. Aldred
Dogmas Discarded
An Autobiography of Thought 1886–1908
1913

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