

Sir Edwin Chadwick

born. The social reformers made this birth possible. They called the attention of an apathetic public to social evils until that public was forced to listen. They exerted every effort to awaken that social conscience without which democracy cannot be created, and amongst these pioneers, these men and women who forced people to think and feel their responsibility towards the community, was Edwin Chadwick.

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL

EDWIN CHADWICK belongs to that type of men the details of whose life add but little to our knowledge of their character. He *was* his public career.

Edwin Chadwick was born at Longsight, near Manchester, on 24th January, 1800. His paternal grandfather, Andrew Chadwick, lived at Rochdale. Andrew was a friend and admirer of John Wesley. He was a man of resolute determination, strict and stern, a man for whom the pleasant amenities of life had no attractions, for whom duty was the first governing principle. The family carried on business as landowners and manufacturers in Lancashire. Andrew, who was intensely religious after the austere manner of dissenters, founded the first four Sunday Schools in Lancashire. It is not difficult to imagine in what awe

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and fear his grandson must have held him as he strode along the streets, a tall upright man in blue stockings and silver buckled shoes.

Andrew must have looked on his eldest son James, the father of Edwin, as a punishment sent by the Lord for some unnoticed sin, for James resembled his father as little as his own son Edwin resembled him. Artistic, musical, and a lover of natural history, James taught botany and music to the famous chemist, John Dalton. When Edwin was about twelve years old, James left Manchester and came to London, where he interested himself in politics and became editor of the radical paper *The Statesman*. David Lovell, the previous editor, had been imprisoned for a libel on the Commissioners of the Transport Services. On Lovell's release about 1816, James became editor of the *Western Times*, and later he emigrated to New York, where he once more took up journalism. He had married twice, and died in his eighty-fifth year. His first wife, who died young, was the mother of Edwin. Perhaps it was from his mother that Edwin first learnt the sanitary idea, for one of the few things he could remember

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about her was her strictness in seeing that he was properly washed and clean every morning and evening.

Edwin was first educated at the village school in Longsight, but left when his parents took up residence in London. From then until he entered an attorney's office early in his teens, he was privately educated. He had selected the law as his profession, and after gaining knowledge at the attorney's office in the routine of legal work, he entered the Inner Temple as a student.

About this time the rugged determination inherited from his grandfather Andrew began to come to the surface. Edwin had had no real education. The village school and private tutors had taught him very little; but by hard work, constant reading and a rigid fixity of purpose, so characteristic of him in his later life, he attained an all-round knowledge of law which was to be of great service to him later on. Also due to his lack of proper education was his proficiency in another sphere—a sphere in which he excelled over all other men of his time. Research workers are made, not born. The patience, the skill, the dexterity required to find things out only come to

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those who have the strength of character to devote themselves to the task. Chadwick revelled in finding things out. When he did not know he found out—and with such swiftness and thoroughness that it was a source of continual amazement to his friends and annoyance to his enemies.

Whilst working for the Bar he was forced to earn his living, for his grandfather had left him no money or land. He took up journalism, contributing to the *Morning Herald*, the *Westminster Review* and the *London Review*.

It was in 1828, in the *Westminster Review*, that Chadwick's first essay on life assurance was published. A friend of Chadwick's had called his attention to a statement made by a Government actuary before a Parliamentary Committee that although the social conditions of the middle classes had improved their expectation of a lengthened life had not advanced accordingly. Chadwick felt that the conclusions arrived at by the Government actuary were false. He was convinced that environment must affect the length of life and the health of the individual. Therefore, since environment, on the actuary's

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own showing, had improved, so should the expectation of a lengthened life be advanced. He went into the statistics of the question, and burrowed deep for facts, with the result that his article in the *Westminster Review* attracted a great deal of attention amongst Radical reformers such as James Mill, J. S. Mill and Grote. These men at once regarded him as an apt pupil. They appreciated the force of his arguments, and were interested in the various calculations he had made to prove his theory.

The writing of the article was the turning point in Chadwick's life. From it developed an association which turned his thoughts away from a private and profitable career as a barrister to the desire to work for the public good. Chadwick gained an introduction to the Mills, and became a frequent visitor to their house. Through them he was introduced to Jeremy Bentham, who had already been impressed by his journalistic activities but particularly by an article on Preventive Police which appeared in the *London Review* in 1829. In this article and in the one on Life Assurance, Chadwick set forth the whole of his social philosophy. Even at this early age he had developed the

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principles which were to be included in all his acts of public administration. To what extent he was influenced by Bentham, and to what extent he arrived at these principles through his own personal thought is difficult to decide. Many details of the New Poor Law (1834) were taken from Bentham's unfinished but amazing *Constitutional Code*, whilst many of the arguments he used in the Poor Law Commission Report had already been advanced by other writers. In any case he became, in mind if not in detail, a true follower of Bentham. Nevertheless he refused an independency from him to expound the Benthamite theory after the death of its founder.

In 1830 Chadwick became literary secretary to Bentham, who at that time was engaged in writing his *Constitutional Code*. In this work Bentham was helped by Doctor Southwood Smith as well as by Chadwick, who lived in the house for the last year of Bentham's life.

But although now on terms of personal acquaintanceship with all the disciples of Bentham—men like Mill and his son, Francis Place, Wakefield, Grote and Southwood Smith—Chadwick had not yet decided

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what course to pursue. He had been called to the Bar and became a barrister-at-law of the Inner Temple on 26th November, 1830. With his knowledge of law, with his infinite capacity for taking pains over details, and his skill in marshalling his facts, it is certain that had he decided to remain at the Bar, he would have reached a high place in that profession and received a remuneration far in excess of that which he did actually obtain for his services on the various commissions to which he was appointed.

Chadwick was obsessed with what he called his "Sanitary Idea." In his ardent desire to study facts for himself he had visited the slum areas in the East End of London and thereby fell a victim to fever. What effect did this have upon his decision to leave the Bar and accept service on a Government Commission? It is difficult to say. It probably swayed him a good deal. He saw for himself the ghastly conditions under which the labouring classes lived. He must have gained a knowledge of the inefficiency of the local authorities and of the vicious system of Dogberries. With his self-acquired knowledge, with the facts as he had seen them in his visit to the East

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End, and with what Bentham had taught him, he worked out the details of his Sanitary Idea.

Chadwick was like the inquiring child at the Zoological Gardens who asked his mother why the giraffe had a long neck. Chadwick asked "Why?" to everything: and moreover, like the child, he was exceedingly impatient if a direct and exhaustive answer was not immediately forthcoming.

Why do men steal? Why is immorality prevalent? Why do we suffer cholera epidemics? Why do we breed crippled, deformed and uneducated children? Why do we lead insanitary lives? These were the questions he asked his generation, and because he received no immediate and satisfactory answer he gave up his practice at the Bar and devoted his life to forcing an apathetic public to take an interest in its own social welfare.

At the instance of Nassau W. Senior, the eminent political economist, Chadwick was appointed an Assistant Commissioner for the districts of London and Berkshire on Lord Grey's Poor Law Commission of 1832. With the acceptance of this post, Chadwick definitely gave up the idea of

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continuing his legal practice. His Sanitary Idea had conquered. From henceforth he was to devote himself to the cause of hygiene. In 1833 his obvious capabilities, his energy and his knowledge determined the Commissioners to elect him as one of themselves.

In 1833 his work on this Commission had been temporarily interrupted by his appointment to the Factory Commission, which had been set up in April of that year. The report was issued in July, and shortly afterwards an Act which was largely inspired by Chadwick became law.

Chadwick then returned to the Poor Law Commission, whose recommendations resulted in the Poor Law Amendment Act of August, 1834. Under the Act a central authority—the Poor Law Board—was created, and to this Board Chadwick was appointed as paid secretary.

Four years later, as an immediate result of an outbreak of disease in Whitechapel, Chadwick started his Public Health agitation. In the meantime he had given constant study and thought to all the attendant evils of bad housing and bad sanitation.

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In 1834 he gave evidence before a House of Commons Committee on Drunkenness.

In the early essays on Life Assurance, Chadwick had put forward a plea for the appointment of a Registrar General who should be responsible for the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages throughout the United Kingdom. He now saw a favourable opportunity for the introduction of such a scheme, and succeeded in persuading Lord Lyndhurst to introduce a Bill in the House of Lords giving effect to this idea. This Bill became law in 1836.

In 1838 Chadwick was appointed to a Commission to consider the establishment of an efficient constabulary force in the counties of England and Wales. The report was issued in March, 1839, and contained all Chadwick's principles of preventive action.

Between 1839 and 1842 Chadwick was working on his inquiry into the sanitary conditions of the labouring population as well as being a thoroughly efficient Secretary to the Poor Law Board. As a supplementary to this he made a personal investigation on interments in towns, and wrote a

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detailed report. This brought him into real contact with the poorer people. In the course of his investigations he came into touch with ministers of religion, with undertakers, and with secretaries of burial and benefit clubs. The report is a most interesting and brilliant document and contains the germs of many later reforms in intramural interment and general arrangements for the burial of the dead.

In January, 1840, Chadwick presented a further report. This time he made researches into the question of educating the Poor Law children. He probed deeply into the matter, considering it both from the point of view of the agricultural labourer and from that of the factory labourer. He even managed to include recommendations for the education of the men in the Fighting Services. He made exhaustive inquiries into the general educational conditions existing in other countries. From his labours and initiative, a system of education for the very poorest and neglected sprang into existence and, after undergoing severe tests, was adopted as the basic principle for the education of the poor.

In 1842 Sir Robert Peel appointed a

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Royal Commission to inquire into the sanitary condition of Great Britain. This Commission, known as the Duke of Buccleuch's Commission, put itself entirely in Chadwick's hands, and he was largely responsible for its first report, which appeared in 1844.

In 1845 the Poor Law Board came to an end, and Chadwick was free to devote the rest of his life to the cause of sanitation. As a result of the agitation led by him the Public Health Act of 1848 was passed, and a central authority, to which he was appointed as a Commissioner, was set up.

For the next six years, until the breaking up of the Board, Chadwick and his fellow Commissioners were occupied in administering the Act. The energy with which they attacked their problem was such that a powerful agitation was started against them. This agitation was so successful that it led in 1854 to the breaking up of the Board, which eventually was merged into the Local Government Board in association with the Poor Law Board. Thus Chadwick's official career came abruptly to an end.

Before living with Jeremy Bentham at

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Queen's Gate, Westminster, Chadwick had occupied rooms in Lyons Inn, Wick Street. After the death of Bentham in 1832 he lived in Orme Square until in 1839 he married Rachel Dawson Kennedy, fifth daughter of John Kennedy of Manchester. Then he settled down at Stanhope Street, Hyde Park Gardens. On his retirement from the Public Health Board he moved to Park Lodge, East Sheen, Surrey.

Although divorced from active administration at the early age of fifty-four, Chadwick continued to show a lively interest in efficient government and sanitation. In 1848 he was given the Order of Commander of the Bath on the recommendation of the Prince Consort, but it was not until 1889 that he was knighted for his services, and became a K.C.B.

Chadwick fulfilled many other public duties after his retirement. Among his more important posts were President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (Economic Section) in 1861, President of Social Science Association (Public Health Section) in 1878; and in the same year President of the newly

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formed Sanitary Institute. He was also an honorary member of the *Société d'Hygiène* of France, for which he wrote several papers.

He died at East Sheen on 5th July, 1890.

Such in brief outline is the career of a dominating personality whose strong will, knowledge and forceful character are impressed on every page of the Sanitary and Poor Law legislation of the nineteenth century. That he was a reformer, a Roadmaker, whose influence is felt now, and whose insistence on public welfare was enormously beneficial to the country, will, it is hoped, be shown in the succeeding chapters. But before any adequate comprehension of his life's work can be attained it is essential that a little space be devoted to what is generally known as Individualism, and its founder, Jeremy Bentham. For all the underlying principles of Chadwick's career, or at any rate of his early career, are derived from this ideal, though it is true that later on he connected Individualism with Collectivism, and was in fact one of the earliest builders of the bridge

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of association between the two. During his long life he witnessed the evolution from Individualism through *Laissez Faire*, and Collectivism to the beginnings of Socialism.