SHAFTESBURY AND LINCOLN

By J. Wesley Bready

IN Parliament Square, London, stands the first statue ever erected on British soil to commemorate the life of a foreigner. It delineates a figure of gigantic stature—lean, lanky, angular, and slightly stooped. One furtive glance satisfies the eye that it was shaped to the likeness of no Apollo. Yet as you gaze into the face of that statue, a strange, irresistible attraction possesses you. The sunken eyes, the hollow cheeks, the wrinkled face, the care-worn brow seem quietly to melt away, and behind them emerges serene beauty—a spirit purged of dross, a brooding sympathy, a lofty mind, a kindly humour, a great heart. Here, obviously, is a man who has trodden life's roughest paths and penetrated its darkest shadows, a man who knows the pangs of life's deepest woe and has not turned aside from its bitterest cup, but who finally has come into possession of the peace and power of a transfigured soul. This statue is Britain's national tribute to the emancipator of America's slaves.

Within one hundred yards of this Lincoln Memorial, at the west door of Westminster Abbey, near the tomb of the Unknown Warrior, stands another statue of equal significance. It, too, depicts a figure long, lanky, and lean. But when one peers into the countenance, the likeness is unmistakable. Here also is a prophet, a seer; here again are the marks of vicarious suffering; here too is a man who has carried life's heaviest burdens and carried them not for himself but for others. Here also are mirrored the peace and power of the triumphant soul. This second statue is a likeness of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, the emancipator of industrial England—the British Lincoln.

But turning now from the statues of these great emancipators to the moulding influences behind their lives, we discover remarkable parallels. Lincoln's mother died before he was ten years old; yet twice she had read the Bible aloud from cover to cover to the child "Abe". And so lasting was this influence, that Biblical metaphor and imagery are everywhere traceable in Lincoln's diction. Shaftesbury never knew a mother's love or a father's care, for both his parents were worldlings. The love, however, which his parents denied him, was bestowed upon him by an old family nurse, Maria Millis. She fed the boy's starving affections and, like Lincoln's

mother, read to him aloud from the Bible every day. Maria Millis died before Shaftesbury was eight years old; but it was his profound conviction that to her he owed the deepest things of his spiritual life; and as an octogenarian he loved to honour her memory.

Between childhood and adolescence, both boys had to pass through dark and troubled waters. Then came the challenge to life's work, and here again the parallelism is pronounced. Young Lincoln, on a trading expedition to New Orleans, saw for the first time the auction of a fellow human being. Here coarse, lewd men were examining the limbs of a beautiful negro girl, and outbidding one another to possess her—body and soul. Young Lincoln's spirit revolted at this gruesome sight. His blood ran cold, iron entered his heart, and there and then he registered his immortal vow against slavery:—"If ever I am granted the opportunity to hit this accursed thing, I'll hit it hard."

Shaftesbury's challenge came in the year of Waterloo when he was fourteen years old. As he walked one day up Harrow Hill, under the shadow of the proud "public school" where he was then a pupil, the lad's attention was arrested by weird shouting. A moment later he caught the clamorous notes of a Bacchanalian song; and pausing to ascertain from whence the uproar sprang, he soon found out. Down a side street came five or six stupidly drunken men, carrying upon their shoulders a rough-hewn casket containing the remains of a fellow British workman. Then reaching the main road, in an attempt to turn the corner, they lost all self-control. Down they fell in a stupid heap, allowing casket and corpse to crash to earth. For a moment Babel was loose. The drunken wretches cursed and roared, each blaming the other for the catastrophe. Barking dogs and laughing urchins augmented the confusion. Finally extricating themselves from the heap, and hoisting the cracked coffin upon their shoulders, these strange pall-bearers staggered on towards the paupers' field, to bury a British workman in a manner that would have disgraced a savage in Central Africa.

All the while Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Shaftesbury to be, stood riveted to the spot. As happened to Lincoln at New Orleans, it ate into his vitals; like Lincoln, he too pledged a vow. As soon as words came to him, he exclaimed: "Good Heavens! Can this be permitted simply because the man was poor and friendless?" Then, as the dying echoes of the Bacchanalian song grew fainter in the distance, the future emancipator dedicated his life to a great purpose. He pledged himself that if strength and courage were vouchsafed to him, he would devote himself to the uplift of the disinherited classes.

How well Lincoln fulfilled his vow, is known the world over. The sworn foe of slavery, he became President of the world's greatest Republic. Slave owners, intoxicated by avarice, forced a Civil War to rage furiously around his person. Martyrdom came at the hour of his life's achievement; and his place among the Immortals is secure. Millions in all lands will re-echo the words of a negro mother who, after Emancipation, holding her babe before a statue of Lincoln, falteringly exclaimed: "Take a good look in de face dat man! He give you—Life."

Shaftesbury's career is less dramatic than Lincoln's; but it is not less magnificent. True, no Civil War centred around his person. Never did he lead a political party. Far from being assassinated, his life never even was threatened; and he died peacefully in bed in his eight-fifth year. Yet, quite as heroically as Lincoln, he fulfilled his vow. Though he was a poor man all his life, virtually disowned by his father, who kept a tight hand on the family purse-strings, fifty-seven of the sixty years of his public life were spent without fee or hire in a crusade of love. Moreover, although never able to afford a secretary, he refused offers of Cabinet rank and the highest and most lucrative offices of State, in order that he might be free to fulfil his vow. More than once, after being offered the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland, or equally big plums, he retired to the secret chamber of prayer, and later wrote in his Diary such words as these: "I do not believe that God has called me to accept high office of State. I do believe He has called me to plead the cause of the defenceless poor". Yet, while sacrificing everything a public man holds dear, Shaftesbury was the target of much contumely and ridicule on the part of his fellow-legislators. Continually was he dubbed by "wise politicians" a fanatic, a socialist, a wildman, a humanity-monger, even a monomaniac. Great statesmen like Gladstone and Disraeli, Cobden and Bright, for a whole generation, were blind to the importance of his labours.

Such, then, was the sacrifice he made; but what was the fruit of his toil? Volumes might be filled with this story. Here only a few suggestions can be indulged.

In 1828, when Shaftesbury made his first speech in parliament urging the need of Lunacy Reform, the treatment of these afflicted people seems unbelievable. The mediaeval idea that lunacy is the direct result of demon possession had long since been discredited; nevertheless, all over Europe the old remedies for exorcising demons were still in vogue. Cages, chains, prisons, floggings, strait-jackets, manacles, darkness and semi-starvation were all accepted as legitimate treatment for dangerously "possessed" persons. Harmless

lunatics, on the other hand, were allowed to roam the country "making sport for the people". Shaftesbury changed all this. His Lunacy Act of 1845 won for lunatics their Magna Charta. No longer were they treated as "prisoners" but as "patients", and everything possible was done to increase their comfort and effect a cure. For fifty-seven years Shaftesbury gave of his best for these afflicted members of society, and not till death did he abandon their cause.

His labours for decent Lodging Houses and Model Dwellings mark him out as one of the greatest pioneers in this field of reform. Charles Dickens acclaimed his 1851 Bill for the Registration and Inspection of Common Lodging Houses "the best Act ever passed by an English Legislature."

As first President of the Y. M. C. A., and as the most influential character behind the first National Board of Health, Shaftesbury rendered mighty service. In these capacities he campaigned particularly for the guardianship of the young, claiming as the birthright of every Briton robust health—physical, mental, moral, spiritual. When the cholera epidemics of 1849 and 1853 swept over Europe, Shaftesbury, along with his Board of Health associates, Edwin Chadwick and Dr. Southwood Smith, worked day and night to stay the progress of the plague; and as a result of their endeavors, Britain's death-rate was far below that of any Continental country. But this great Friend of the People championed the cause of health and recreation in other ways. Continuously he urged the need of gymnasiums, playing grounds, Workmen's Institutes and popular excursions; while in regard to public parks he was the chief herald of a better day. His influence, however, in this direction travelled still further afield. When British soldiers were dying like flies from preventable disease in Crimean camps, it was Shaftesbury who conceived the idea and perfected the plans for sending forth the famous Sanitary Commission. To the end of her days, Florence Nightingale maintained that this Commission "saved the British Army". Indeed had it not been for Shaftesbury's sagacity, Florence Nightingale's achievement would not have been possible.

Coming now to the Ragged School Movement, one observes that Shaftesbury's work there alone merits immortality. Often he declared: "I would rather be President of the Ragged School Union than govern Empires". And this was no idle boast. A quarter-century before the nation provided us with free and popular education, Shaftesbury and his religious zealots, a voluntary army of thousands, were going down to the lowest of the low, and bringing them not only the rudiments of secular education, but what was

infinitely more important, the gift of fellowship, understanding and love. One Recorder of the City of London maintained that, as a direct result of Ragged School Work, London's crime was reduced to less than half its previous proportions; while Lord Aberdeen declared: "In London alone, at least 300,000 of the youth of both sexes have been rescued from the ranks of the criminal and dangerous classes and made good and useful citizens". Moreover the Polytechnic Institute, Barnardo's Homes, and the National Refuges for Destitute Children are all direct offshoots from Shaftesbury's Ragged Schools, while to-day the Shaftesbury Society has many thousands of voluntary workers in the great cities of Britain.

To survey Shaftesbury's valiant struggles against the ravages of the opium and liquor traffics would lead us far afield; so also would the record of his splendid victories for chimney sweeps and agricultural gangs. Neither can we here recount his endeavors for such beloved causes as the British and Foreign Bible Society or the Church Pastoral Aid Society. To a hundred such institutions his leadership proved a tower of strength.

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But all these services, glorious as they are, would scarcely merit for Shaftesbury the title, "The British Lincoln". Only his incomparable achievements in emancipating industrial Britain have won him such distinction.

Before he passed his revolutionary Mines and Collieries Act in 1842, children, four and five years of age, girls as well as boys, were working long hours underground in the mines of free Britain. Many thousands less than ten years old were so employed; and the range of jobs allotted them was wide. Youngsters of the tenderest years generally worked as "trappers", opening and shutting doors through which the coal wagons passed, and which formed an essential part of a mine's ventilation. The labour they performed was not heavy; but when it is remembered that they sat alone in almost total darkness, that frequently water trickled down their backs, and that not infrequently rats ran away with their food, it will be seen that their lot was far from enviable. Stronger children were employed as "hurriers", and their labour was revolting to a degree. Some of them, both boys and girls, were absolutely nude: most wore only bloomers, being naked from the waist up. Around the waist was attached a leathern girdle: and from this, under their legs, extended an iron chain, fastened to the coal wagon. Thus, like dogs hitched to a cart, these helpless youngsters crawled on all fours, through passages often only 18 to 24 inches deep,

pulling wagons laden with as much as two hundredweight of coal. Often their legs were bleeding from the pressure of the chain; and they worked generally from 11 to 13 hours a day. One Government Commissioner declared, during the investigation which Shaftesbury forced upon parliament, that "were these children galley slaves, their work could not be more oppressive": and he added that he did not think it would be as bad. Another Commissioner testified: "A picture is presented of deadly physical oppression and systematic slavery". Such cruelty, moreover, was not confined to children. Women sometimes pulled coal wagons, on all fours, till the very day of child birth.

Shaftesbury's Mines and Collieries Bill dealt a death blow to all this barbarism. It emancipated every woman and every girl from underground toil; it initiated a system of rigid inspection, and tried to liberate all boys under thirteen. This clause, however, was furiously attacked by coal peers in the House of Lords, and Shaftesbury only succeeded in freeing all boys under ten. Nevertheless this Act, even as amended, humanized the industrial outlook. It probably is the most revolutionary enactment in our social history.

But greater even than his Collieries Act were Shaftesbury's labours for the Ten Hours Bill. For twenty years he fought incessantly for this reform; and as a result of his struggles, four Acts of first rate importance were placed on the Statute Book. The significance of the Ten Hours victory can scarcely be exaggerated. Britain led the world in securing for her workers this great boon; and the coveted Saturday-Half-Holiday is one of the corollaries of that glorious triumph.

The Ten Hours Bill proved to be the workers' Magna Charta. Without it, all talk of Workmen's Institutes, night schools, "self-help", public libraries and universal franchise must have proved abortive. Of what value were such institutions so long as men laboured twelve to fourteen hours a day, and had no leisure? This victory was the indispensable forerunner of a hundred reforms that followed on. It marks the most important of all mile-stones in the long struggle for the emancipation of industrial Britain. It alone would merit for Shaftesbury the proud right to be known, the world over, as—"The British Lincoln."

He probably saved Britain from Revolution and blood-shed. In any case, he won the love and understanding of the common people as no other man of his century, save Abraham Lincoln; and his funeral-service in Westminster Abbey stands unique in British history. He went to his grave mourned by a nation, and upon his spirit descended the benediction of the poor.