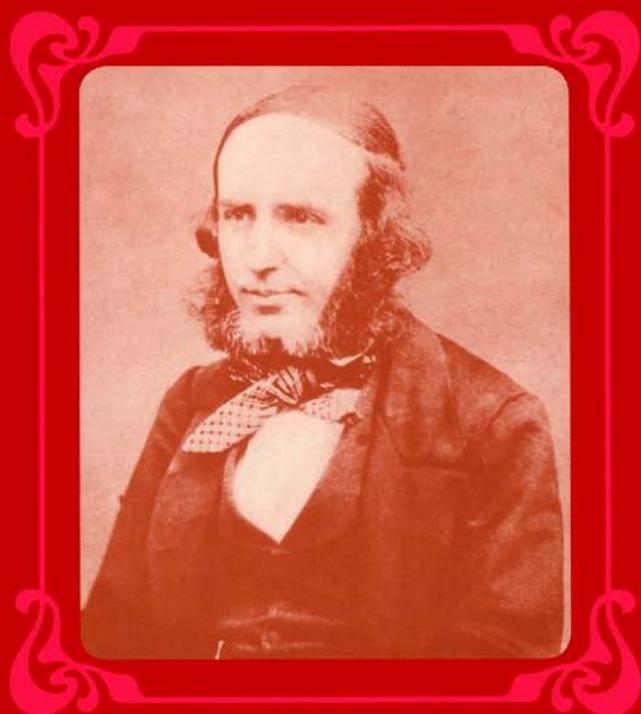


John Ludlow

The Autobiography of a Christian Socialist



Edited by A. D. Murray

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*THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JOHN
LUDLOW*

JOHN LUDLOW

*The Autobiography of a
Christian Socialist*

Edited and Introduced by

A.D.MURRAY



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To my parents

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The 1,000 page manuscript of the autobiography is among the Ludlow papers left to the University Library at Cambridge by Charles des Graz, great-nephew of Ludlow, in 1953, (catalogue no. Add. 7348.) Des Graz also left a typescript of much of the manuscript, though this is very inaccurate and has many omissions, and a most useful transcription of Ludlow's own bibliography of his books, pamphlets, lectures and contributions to journals. This bibliography has unfortunately, due to exigencies of space, had to be omitted from the present edition, but it can of course be consulted among the Ludlow Papers.

Ludlow's own footnotes are printed in the text within square brackets; the Editor's footnotes are gathered together at the end of the book. The latter, due to shortage of space, have been kept to an absolute minimum. On the few occasions where the omission of a passage has made an editorial insertion necessary, this has been enclosed in double round brackets, to avoid confusion with Ludlow's own brackets. Ludlow's punctuation was sometimes erratic, and there were also occasional minor mistakes in wording; for the sake of clarity these have been corrected, but the corrections have not been acknowledged, as in no case was the meaning of a passage changed by a correction.

Considerable alterations have been made to Ludlow's original chapter list, as some chapters have been run together and a few omitted entirely. But, as far as possible, Ludlow's chapter-headings have been preserved in the new arrangement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My initial debt is to Dr. A.R.Vidler, former Dean of King's College, Cambridge, and to the Revd. Simon Barrington-Ward, former Dean and Chaplain of Magdalene College, Cambridge. In their lectures and supervisions my interest in Christian Socialism and in its founder, John Ludlow, was first awakened. I should also like to thank Professors Emile Delavenay and Philippe Séjourné, who were my mentors in the preparation of a *maîtrise* dissertation for the University of Nice on the influence of French socialists on Ludlow and the Christian Socialists. I am also grateful to Mr. N.C.Masterman, author of a fascinating biography of Ludlow, for so willingly answering the questions I put to him.

The preparation of this edition of Ludlow's autobiography would not have been possible, given the fact that my own teaching, first in Nice and then in Oran, has kept me away from Cambridge for all but two months or so of the year, without the assistance, extending far beyond that normally due to a researcher, of Mr. A.E.B.Owen, Under-Librarian of the Cambridge University Library and in charge of the Manuscripts Department. The Ludlow papers are in the possession of the Library, and were catalogued by Mr. Owen, whose knowledge of the collection is unrivalled. My only regret is that, despite Mr. Owen's wishes, the exigencies of modern publishing conditions have forced me to edit the manuscript to less than two-thirds of its original length. Nevertheless, I feel sure that Ludlow himself, with his severely practical mind, would have carried out at least a fair

amount of hatchet-work on his very lengthy manuscript, had he not renounced the idea of publication in his lifetime.

To the staffs of Cambridge University Library and the British Museum Reading Room, and to Mr David Muspratt, Curator of Muniments and Assistant Librarian of the Working Men's College, I would like to express my thanks for their unfailing courtesy and kindness. To Mrs. Alison Ingram, typist and friend, who had to contend not only with a much-amended manuscript but also with an absent author, I owe a great deal. And finally I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the comments and encouragement of Pat Parrinder of the University of Reading, George Morgan, lecturer at the University of Nice, and, most constantly, my wife and colleague at the University of Oran, Anne.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

John Ludlow's life (1821–1911) spanned the century in which the Labour movement in Britain grew from unorganised and sporadic beginnings to a mass movement with its own political party.

Brought up in Paris and educated in the heady atmosphere of the *Collège Bourbon* at a time when the students were enthusiastically discussing the ideas of the French social thinkers, John Ludlow completed his studies and was promised a brilliant future in France. But he chose to move to England to read for the Bar, and there began to apply the socialist ideas he had learned in Paris. As founder and central figure of the Christian Socialist Movement after 1848, he devoted immense energy to the organisation of the first Working Men's Associations and to the planning and co-ordination of the nascent Co-operative movement. As editor of the movement's journal, *The Christian Socialist*, and in a large number of tracts, pamphlets and articles in national periodicals, Ludlow developed a cogent programme for Socialism through a social revolution. As *éminence grise* behind the early campaigns of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, precursor of the 'New Model' Trade Unions, Ludlow made a major contribution to the development of Trade Unionism.

But the fact that the Christian Socialist Movement ceased to work as an organised group after 1854–5 has meant that most historians of the development of socialism in Britain, from the Webbs onward, have either ignored Ludlow and the Christian Socialists, or treated them as interesting, but insignificant,

paternalist Christian ancestors of the true socialist movement.

That this assessment is inadequate, if not erroneous, can be argued from two separate sets of evidence. Firstly the assessment fails to take account of the valuable inauguratory role, both theoretical and practical, which Ludlow and his friends played in awakening the working class to a consciousness of the possibility of social, as well as political, action as a prelude to the reconstruction of society. In terms of practical results, Ludlow was here more successful than either the Owenites or the Chartists. Secondly, the assessment, by treating the Christian Socialist Movement as an isolated phenomenon, ignores the wide-ranging activities of the Christian Socialists as individuals, after the movement itself had broken up.

Here again, Ludlow is the key figure, as leading advocate for the Trade Union movement to the Government and various Commissions, as a leader of the growing national Co-operative movement and then of the Labour Association, as secretary and president of the Congresses of these two organisations, and, finally, in high Public office. On his appointment in 1875 as the first Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies, Ludlow became the Government official solely responsible for the registration and supervision of all workingmen's organisations, of which there existed by 1888 some twenty five thousand, including Trade Unions, Co-operative Stores and Associations. In this position he was able to exercise considerable influence on the growing Labour movement by advising and encouraging the development of working class organisations of all kinds. He retired in 1891, with a well-deserved C.B., and continued, in the twenty years before his death in 1911, to serve the causes he had always supported, though now in the role of elder statesman rather than activist.

* * * * *

Good Victorian autobiographies are thin on the ground. John Ludlow's personal record of a life spent in the service of the working class movement and in the attempt to develop a specifically English brand of socialism in the context of a strong, humane Christian commitment is a welcome addition to their number. But what is at least as fascinating as the record of his public life are his candid recollections of the

private reflections, reactions and emotions with which he responded to the events in which he was concerned. As with Mill, Carlyle, Dr. Arnold and so many of the Victorians, beneath the confidence of Ludlow's public pronouncements lay a deep personal insecurity. This was of a less cosmic quality than that of a J.A.Froude or Sterling; with a more pragmatic and earthbound disposition, Ludlow's doubts were linked to the major events of his life, particularly in connection with the 'seven spiritual crises of (his) life.' In describing these Ludlow eschews histrionics, and writes, with remarkable penetration, of his own motives and emotions, giving us a notable insight into the forces which beset a Victorian social conscience.

In his public life, his greatest commitment was to the Christian Socialist movement in which he collaborated intimately with F.D.Maurice; in his inner life, the greatest of his crises was that generated by the collapse of the movement and its apparent abandonment by Maurice. In [chapter 20](#), Ludlow relives the whole episode and reveals the inner conflicts he suffered. He never attempts to hide the embarrassments or failures which he experienced, whether dealing with his personal charitable visiting in the 1840s, or his public involvement in the Royal Commission on Friendly Societies in the seventies. And he actually begins his autobiography by summing up his achievement as that of a good second-rater: he felt that he had failed to realise the high promise of his early years. The reader suspects that a major motive in the writing of his autobiography was the attempt to discover the reasons for this failure.

If he is at his most serious when examining his own character, Ludlow is at his liveliest and most mordant when dealing with his contemporaries. For Ludlow was equally willing to subject the behaviour of others to his scrutiny. To those who excited his whole-hearted admiration—Maurice, Kingsley, John Bright, Proudhon and others—Ludlow was generous in his appreciation of their qualities, yet honest in his discussion of their limitations. Where his admiration was less than uncritical, his comments could be devastating, as when he pricks the balloon of Disraeli's reputation for political courage, or uncovers the hypocrisy masquerading as timidity of Lord Shaftesbury.

But if Ludlow's shrewd penetration into character sets him apart from some of his contemporaries, he remains very much a Victorian. His nicely-observed vignettes of the social life of the period are often accompanied by a moralising comment. It is with just a suspicion of relish that he recounts the peccadilloes of some of his working-men co-operators: the occasional case of 'levanting' with the funds, or tragedy due to drink or women. Again, he is not wholly free from Victorian sentimentality, notably concerning his mother, but also in referring to strong friendships and affairs of the heart. In his account of his epic courtship of his cousin, Maria Forbes, the attitudes of the two 'lovers' are almost a caricature of Victorian concepts of duty. His moral earnestness, his unrelenting driving of himself to hard work, his occasional dark night of the soul ([chapter 8](#) contains a revealing discussion of his urges to suicide) are all emotional experiences shared by many of his generation.

Yet, throughout his life, and even by his colleagues at the Chief Registrar's office, he was noted for his logical, disciplined, *French* cast of mind. He could never abide British compromise and muddle. His upbringing and education had been completely French, and although he had left France, covered with prizes, immediately on graduating *bachelier* from the *Collège Bourbon* he continued to write and think in French for several years. It was not until he was caught up in the events of 1848 that he first began to feel himself an Englishman.

Ludlow's chapter on 'Paris in the Forties' is, unfortunately, one of the several chapters which were either never written or have since been lost (it was included in Ludlow's handwritten chapter list at the beginning of the Autobiography.) Nevertheless, throughout the book from the lively account of his youth in France onwards, Ludlow refers to men, events and ideas in France. In Ludlow's socialism we find clear evidence of his debt to (among others) Fourier, Proudhon and Louis Blanc. We find also the assumption, common to almost every French socialist of the period, that social regeneration must go hand in hand with some form of religious regeneration. The introduction of French socialist ideas and, what is more important, their application in an English context were among Ludlow's major contributions to English

socialism. And not only Ludlow's ideas, but also his character, owed much to France. It is difficult to imagine any of his English collaborators forging the cogent and effective force of Christian Socialism from the somewhat vague notions of social regeneration held by Maurice, the Tory Young Englandism of Charles Kingsley, and the various reforming interests in health, education, co-operation and sanitation of their friends. It was Ludlow's ability to force others to see the logical conclusions and practical possibilities of their own ideas which made Christian Socialism a reality.

The Christian Socialist movement ceased to work as an organised group in 1854, and its concrete achievements were hardly momentous. The Working Men's College, founded in 1854, inspired many imitators and has been a permanent and effective, institution; the Industrial and Provident Societies Act of 1852 had justly been called 'the co-operators' charter'; Working Men's Associations, though they have never threatened the capitalist economy, have continued to flower and fade at intervals over the last hundred years. If these are regarded, however, as the sole results of the movement, then its later neglect by historians is perhaps comprehensible. But the Christian Socialists also had a major influence, even before 1854, on two developments of critical importance: the organisation of a national Co-operative movement, and the formation of the 'New Model' Trade Unions.

In the two decades after 1855, when Christian Socialism collapsed as a movement, there was relative industrial peace and national prosperity; in this period the foundations were being laid for the beginning of the labour movement proper.

During this 'dormant' period for working-class activity, the Christian Socialists, though now working as individuals, were, with the Positivists, among the few continuing to fight for working class progress. Even without mentioning Ludlow's work, the list of their activities is impressive: Maurice and Kingsley influenced a generation of undergraduates from pulpit and professorial chair at Cambridge, Tom Hughes and Lord Goderich (now the Marquis of Ripon) were in Parliament promoting working-class interests and Trade Union legislation, Neale and Lloyd Jones were at the head of the Co-operative movement, while a group of 'slum priests' were agitating on their parishioners' behalf. The Working

Men's College brought many Londoners, teachers, including John Ruskin, William Morris and Sidney Webb, as well as students, into contact with the Christian Socialists. Later, in the East End, Canon Samuel Barnett's Toynbee Hall, another Christian Socialist foundation, attracted other important figures such as Octavia Hill, Bernard Shaw and Beatrice Webb.

But it was not their educational work alone which kept them in the public eye; Neale, Maurice, Kingsley, Hughes, Lloyd Jones and Furnivall all published books or pamphlets on social issues, while Ludlow remained the most effective propagandist for socialism. He continued to write, throughout these years, frequent articles for reviews and periodicals of all kinds, especially the *Spectator*. In 1867 he produced an influential book, *Progress of the Working Class 1832-67* (written with the help of Lloyd Jones). This was his most substantial work of propaganda for the working class movement. But although its content was both democratic and socialist, its tone was undoubtedly pitched to appeal to the middle classes and to overcome their fears and prejudices. It might be said, indeed, that one factor which prevented Ludlow's being remembered as a major theoretician of English socialism was his tendency to write with middle-class reactions constantly in mind. This was probably less true of the other group active on behalf of the working class, the Positivists, who have been paid the attention due to them, notably by Royden Harrison in *Before the Socialists* (1954). But ever since the Webbs relied on Frederic Harrison, the leading Positivist, for their account of this period in their *History of Trade Unionism* (1894), the Christian Socialists have been neglected by historians of socialism. But this is not the place for a revaluation of the Christian Socialists, nor indeed for the badly-needed reassessment of Ludlow's socialism.

In any case, in his autobiography, Ludlow is more concerned with events than ideas. He does of course give an account of his opinions and their development at various important periods of his life, and is never slow to justify his actions when they excited controversy. But he does not attempt to give any detailed account of the principles of his socialism. He prefers to refer us to his writings. These, being voluminous and widely

scattered, have to be sifted through with careful attention before the elements of his socialism become clear. What Ludlow gives us in the *Autobiography* is a candid and forthright record of the life, work and opinions, both public and private, of a Victorian socialist reformer.

A.D.MURRAY



John Ludlow

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John Ruskin



J. M. Ludlow



Thos Woolner



F. J. Furnivall



Frederick Denison Maurice



Tom Hughes



John Westlake



J. Llewelyn Davies



R. B. Litchfield

From "The Working Men's College—1854—1904," Rev. J. Llewelyn Davies (ed.).