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BRITISH SOCIALISM
AND AMERICAN ROMANTICISM

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ABSTRACT

Although much has been said about the influence of Carlyle and Ruskin on British socialists, the influence of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman has been neglected. American romanticism influenced British socialism through three direct channels: first, the wandering scholar Thomas Davidson who inspired the Fellowship of the New Life; second, the poet Edward Carpenter who dominated the Sheffield Socialist Society and influenced other local groups; and, third, the unitarian minister John Trevor who founded the Labour Church movement. Through these channels, American romanticism acted as an important source of the ethical socialism of the Independent Labour Party.

BRITISH SOCIALISM AND AMERICAN ROMANTICISM

In 1906 William Stead sent a questionnaire to prominent members of the Labour Party asking what books had influenced them.¹ The most frequently cited authors were Carlyle and Ruskin but Emerson and Thoreau were not far behind. Much has been written about the influence of British romanticism on the British socialist movement, and perhaps the obvious impact of Carlyle and Ruskin has obscured that of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman.² It can seem difficult to assess the influence of the American romantics precisely because their views so closely resemble those of their British counterparts. Nonetheless, we can trace lines of influence from American romanticism to British socialism through Thomas Davidson, Edward Carpenter, and John Trevor, for these three consciously borrowed from the Americans rather than merely expressing a diffuse romanticism. In each case, the influence of the Americans was acknowledged, and also symbolized by the physical travels of the individual concerned. Moreover, some ideas were common amongst the American romantics but not their British counterparts, and we can follow these ideas through Davidson, Carpenter and Trevor into the British socialist movement.

The influence of American romanticism on British socialism helps to explain the particular character of British Socialism and thence the Labour Party. In Britain, the dominant socialist theory was that found within the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.), the organisation which did most to convince the trade unions to form the Labour Party. What distinguished the socialism of the I.L.P. from most forms of Continental Marxism was above all else the presence of an ethical tone deriving from a vision of socialism as a new religion requiring a new personal life.³ Where did this ethic come from? One source was the non-conformist heritage, particularly for workers in areas such as the West Riding of Yorkshire. Another was American romanticism, particularly for middle-class activists in the south of England.

I

To begin, we will identify doctrines that are found in Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, but not Carlyle and Ruskin. American romanticism differed from British romanticism in its close relationship to both unitarianism and frontier individualism. The debt to unitarianism resulted in a spiritual immanentism which later reappeared in the idea of socialism as a new religion.

The debt to frontier individualism resulted in an ideal of self-sufficiency which later reappeared in the idea of socialism as involving a new personal life. Of course romanticism is a vast and ill-defined movement, so our distinctions between its American and British forms must be suggestive not absolute, concerned with delicate shades not strong contrasts.

What is the ideal? Emerson was the dominant figure of American romanticism. His home in Concord acted as a regular meeting place for the Transcendental Club, the name of which referred to Kant's use of the term transcendental to denote the way we can know things a priori. The American romantics followed their European counterparts in taking up arms against the narrow rationalism of the eighteenth century, and Lockean empiricism in particular. Certainly Emerson was influenced by German philosophers such as Schelling, and when he travelled to Europe in 1832 and 1833, he became friendly with both Carlyle and Coleridge. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the American and British romantics shared a philosophical outlook indebted to German idealism.

Yet the American romantics drew heavily on unitarianism in a way the British did not. Emerson studied theology at Harvard, and he remained a unitarian minister until 1832, and many other American romantics also were unitarians, including William Channing and George Ripley. The appeal of their unitarianism to the Victorians is evident from the popularity in London (extending far beyond socialists) of preachers such as Moncore Conway, another

member of the Transcendental Club. Here unitarians stood for a rational and liberal approach to Christianity: they opposed what they considered to be the irrational concept of the Trinity, arguing instead for the single personality of God, and they rejected what they considered to be the immoral dogmas of eternal punishment, inherited guilt, and vicarious atonement. Thus, unitarian theology readily opened the way to a belief in a single spiritual deity existing within nature rather than a transcendent God standing outside of nature. Although such immanentism remained rare amongst orthodox unitarians until the close of the nineteenth century, the unitarian inheritance of the Americans certainly gave them a more immanentist outlook than was common amongst their British counterparts.

The immanentism of the American romantics appears in their view of God as present throughout the world, realising his divine purpose through natural processes. Emerson was a spiritual monist who believed in an Over-Soul unifying a spiritual reality, a divine mind pervading the whole of the material universe.⁴ Everything contains the divine spirit, so everything is united in a single whole. Again, because the divine dwells within everything, each thing contains the laws and meaning of the universe within itself. True, some British romantics came near to deifying nature, as when Ruskin said, 'God paints the clouds and shapes the moss-fibres that men may be happy in seeing Him at His work.'⁵ Ruskin argued that landscape painting can capture the truth and beauty of nature thereby witnessing to the glory of God. But whilst Ruskin suggested little more than that nature can offer spiritual solace, Emerson insisted on a spiritual reality within nature. Whilst British romantics typically thought nature could inspire the imaginative faculty within man, or at most point towards the divine, American romantics typically believed God and nature actually were coextensive.

The immanentism of the American romantics encouraged them to argue that people come to know God through direct intuition of an absolute being rather

than a miraculous revelation embodied in either the Bible or the Incarnation.

Emerson thought that individuals come into contact with the Over-Soul either by entering a mystical state in which they perceive the divine within themselves, or by discovering the divine in the truth, beauty, and wholeness of nature.⁶ The Emersonian sublime is a mystical, holistic freedom in which individuals recognize their true spiritual selves, and also by finding the Over-Soul within themselves come to see the divine in everything else. True, many British romantics stressed the role of the imagination and nature as sources of harmony in a fragmented world, but they typically saw harmony in terms of either the individual or an organic society without reference to the overt religiosity of Emerson.

How should we realize the ideal? The American romantics believed that personal intuitions have moral authority precisely because individuals contain the divine within themselves. Emerson argued that people should trust themselves, reject external rules, express their inner natures, and become self-reliant.⁷ Henry Thoreau, another member of the Transcendental Club, proclaimed the individual conscience, not the law, as the supreme moral arbiter; political obligation depends on the moral judgement of the individual, and the best government is a government which does not govern.⁸ Similarly, British romantics rejected the formal rules and public codes that had dominated the outlook of the Augustans in favour of a belief in the individual questioning and testing of values and experiences, and their rejection of Augustan limits sometimes spilled over into an opposition to all restrictive codes as evidenced by the appeal of Godwin's anarchism to Wordsworth and Shelley. In general, the romantics' debt to Rousseau appears in their almost unanimous call for a natural, wholesome existence based on our true instincts.

Yet the American romantics drew heavily on frontier individualism in a way the British did not. British romantics typically looked to the example of

the middle ages, although they rarely agreed on the details of an ideal community, with, for instance, Coleridge calling for a clerisy and national church to balance the forces of progress with those of stability, and Ruskin trying to revive a moral economy based on craftsmanship and guilds.⁹ In contrast, the American romantics succumbed to an idealized picture of American democracy. This gave rise to two important theoretical tendencies. First, the American romantics saw their ideal as something which was being realized through the action of the divine purpose in history. Here Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman drew inspiration from Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democratic theory, which in turn restated the eighteenth century belief in the perfectibility of mankind, a belief which fitted well with their own immanentism. Just as the democrats described the American polity as part of God's design, so the romantics could take the American ideal to be the summit of the immanent working out of the divine will. Just as the Jacksonian, George Bancroft wrote his famous history of America to show how America expressed the will of God, so William Channing spoke of the dawn of a new age in which people would surmount their political difficulties to realize their inner spirit.¹⁰ Second, the American romantics inherited the ideal of a democratic republic composed of self-sufficient farmers. They believed in the virtue of a rough-and-ready life spent working the land. True, some British romantics called for the simplification of life and the rejection of the unnatural wants created by industrial society, as when Ruskin used the example of Gothic architecture to illustrate how mechanism had replaced skill in the workplace.¹¹ But whilst Ruskin wanted a return to the skilled craftsmanship he thought produced artistic goods, Thoreau wanted people to minimize their possessions, and whilst Ruskin wanted workers to be able to exercise their creative impulses free from the regime of the machine, Thoreau wanted people to become effectively self-sufficient. Thus, whereas Ruskin established new guilds and revitalized the hand-made linen industry in Langdale, Thoreau lived

alone in a hut at Walden Pond where he tried to 'simplify, simplify' so as to obtain spiritual wealth by living close to nature, reducing his material wants, and satisfying any residual needs by his own manual labour.¹²

We will find that some British socialists took from the American romantics an immanentist theology expressing genuine religious conviction, not just a romantic pantheism investing nature with imaginative appeal, and also a rough-and-ready ideal which looked unfavourably on all possessions, not just commercial products, and which praised self-sufficiency and working the land, rather than the craftsmanship of skilled artisans. However, the imprecise nature of romanticism means our distinctions between its American and British forms have referred to matters of emphasis as much as doctrine. Thus, when we consider the particular examples of Davidson, Carpenter, and Trevor, we also will be filling out these distinctions by showing how American romanticism influenced the beliefs and lives of specific individuals. What follows is the unfolding of a definite line of historical influence, where the evidence for this influence is both textual - certain ideas are common to American romantics and some British socialists but not British romantics - and biographical - the lives and autobiographical writings of some British socialists reveal their debt to the American romantics.

II

It was on a first visit to Concord that I was told the story . . . of how when [Father Taylor] was asked whether he thought Emerson would have to go to hell, he replied that if he did the tide of emigration would likely turn that way.¹³

Thomas Davidson was born in Scotland and educated at Aberdeen before becoming a wandering scholar, moving from place to place, learning and teaching with equal enthusiasm, in a life akin to that of Giordano Bruno, the Renaissance pantheist he admired.¹⁴ Davidson arrived in America around 1866.

In Boston, he participated in a philosophical club, the members of which

included the educationist and philosopher William Harris, a friend of Emerson who did much to introduce German philosophy into America when he founded the St. Louis School of idealism. Davidson himself lectured alongside Emerson at summer schools and taught classics under Harris in the public schools of Missouri. Then, in the early 1880s, he moved on to Italy where he studied the life and thought of Antonio Rosmini-Serbati.¹⁵ When Davidson had joined the philosophical club in Boston he had talked incessantly of Aristotle, but by now he had adopted many of the beliefs he had discovered amongst the American romantics. Just as Rosmini had fused Aquinas and Hegel, so he hoped to combine Aristotelianism and American romanticism. His Emersonian immanentism suggested that forms might constitute the eternal essence of reality but he still wanted to retain Aristotle's view that forms can not exist apart from matter - individual things, not forms, are the immediate objects of reality.

According to Davidson, the purpose of philosophy is 'to unify the world' by uncovering the 'unity of the human spirit,' that is, God.¹⁶ He argued Kant had demonstrated Humean scepticism requires us to grant mind a determining role in the construction of the world. Similarly, Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise shows our current understanding of motion is mistaken: it demonstrates that the nature of change and time requires us to postulate an unchanging subject of change existing outside of time. This unchanging subject is a universal mind which performs the creative role Kant showed to be necessary. Furthermore, this universal mind exists in each individual mind: God is an ideality present within all of reality.

Davidson was an immanentist and an idealist who denounced materialists such as Comte and Spencer as obscurantists, but he also retained the Aristotelian belief that spirit or forms can not exist except in matter or individuals. He criticized the American romantics for considering Being only in its universal aspect and so losing sight of the individual: like Schelling and Hegel, they 'functioned with the forms of thought, disregarding the

content, without which the forms have no meaning (as Kant saw); and of course they arrived at a sort of Vedantic or neo-Platonic mysticism.'¹⁷ Davidson replaced Hegel's single, thinking subject with a multitude of sentient individuals. Each individual is a bundle of feelings grouped together and distinguished from one another by reference to desires. Feeling, not consciousness or matter, is the fundamental constituent of the world. God is not the formless universal of Hegelianism because spirit can not exist apart from monads of feeling.

Although individuals have separate identities, they are intimately related because each individual's desires seek satisfaction through actions whose effects then are experienced by other individuals. As Davidson explained, 'I am a feeling or sensibility, modified in innumerable ways by influences which I do not originate,' and 'these modifications, when grouped, are what I call the world, or my world, for I know no other.'¹⁸ The world of each individual consists of their experience of the actions of other desiring monads. When individuals comprehend and classify their sensations, they also construct their world, since their world is the content of their consciousness. For Davidson, therefore, education gives individuals the conceptual tools with which to arrange their feelings, and so build their worlds. Education can create a new moral order by ensuring that people build harmonious worlds. Society can be transformed by the propagation of new beliefs: 'we have but to get a new economic faith, laid down in a new economic bible, to transform our cities and our life into something as different from what they are at present as human life is from brute life.'¹⁹

Davidson's proposals for moral reform through education again illustrate his debt to American romanticism. Whilst in America, he taught at summer schools organized by Bronson Alcott, the instigator of various experiments in education and communalism. Alcott founded the Temple School in Boston as an attempt to use beautiful surroundings, play and the imagination to sustain a

type of schooling which would develop all of a pupil's intellectual, physical, moral and aesthetic faculties. He also founded a co-operative community called Fruitlands, the members of which were to till the soil, eat vegetarian food, and build social unity on religious love and progressive education. (Although Fruitlands collapsed after a year the romantics' community at Brook Farm lasted three years before then becoming a Fourierist phalanx).²⁰ The example set by Alcott inspired both Davidson's summer schools at Farmington and Glenmore, where the teachers included Harris, and his attempt to bring culture into the lives of the working people of New York through his Breadwinners College. Like Alcott, Davidson thought education should promote a broad culture, including physical exercise, morality and aesthetics. Like Alcott, he wanted education to proceed by means of learning through doing within pleasant and natural surroundings.²¹

More importantly, Davidson wanted a suitable education to inspire a new world encompassing the values that were taught by the American romantics and lived by the monks at the Rosminian monastery in Domodossola. He hoped to capture the high spiritual life of the monks, but also to free this religious spirit from the dogmatic structure of the Church of Rome by infusing it with the tolerant, all-encompassing outlook of the American romantics. It was from this perspective that he regularly praised American republicanism as a noble religion offering us more than any other religion ever had done. He wanted people to adopt a simple communal life guided by a spiritual and ethical ideal free of all dogma. He spoke of 'a small devoted band of men and women of fearless character, clear philosophic insight, and mighty spiritual love, who, living a divine life in their relations to each other, shall labour, with all the strength that is in them to lift their fellows into the same divine life.'²² Nonetheless, Davidson was not a socialist. He criticized socialism for being incompatible with his desire to keep sight of the individual, and for being a materialist ideology denying the paramountcy of a moral

reformation. Besides, socialism can not come into being unless the popular mind adopts a new ethic as to the meaning and use of wealth and life, and when this comes to pass, the solution will come naturally by itself.²³

Percival Chubb visited Davidson at Domodossola, and when the peripatetic Davidson moved to London in 1882, Chubb led the small group which gathered about him to discuss religion, ethics and social reform. At the second formal meeting of this group, Davidson suggested they take the name Fellowship of the New Life, and declare their purpose to be to reconstruct Society 'in accordance with the highest moral possibilities.'²⁴ The rules of the Fellowship reflect Davidson's utopian views.²⁵ Members initially were to perfect their individual characters in accord with the ethical precepts of love, simplicity and kindness, before then forming a community to encapsulate these principles, and finally using the example of this community to regenerate humanity as a whole.

Within the Fellowship, Maurice Adams, Chubb and Hamilton Pullen were disciples of Davidson, whilst Havelock Ellis, a young sex-therapist, joined Mrs Hinton and her sister Caroline Haddon in preaching James Hinton's evolutionary mysticism.²⁶ Other members of the Fellowship, such as H. H. Champion and Edward Pease, put social reform before moral regeneration. The differences between these attitudes surfaced at the third and fourth meetings of the Fellowship, after which the social reformers departed to found the Fabian Society. Those who remained adopted a spiritual basis:

The Fellowship of the New Life

Object. - The cultivation of a perfect character in each and all.

Principle. - The subordination of material things to spiritual.

Fellowship. - The sole and essential condition of fellowship shall be a single-minded, sincere, and strenuous devotion to the object and principle.²⁷

After this spiritual proclamation, there followed articles on simplicity of

living, the importance of manual labour, and the desirableness of forming a community of fellows. Later, when Davidson returned to America, the members of the Fellowship adopted an explicitly socialist programme.²⁸

Although Davidson combined American romanticism with the teachings of Rosmini, and although he opposed socialism, his followers in the Fellowship saw him as someone who brought them the teachings of Emerson and Thoreau, teachings they believed pointed to socialism. In this way, Davidson acted as a conduit through which American romanticism reached a number of British socialists. Many of those involved with the Fellowship saw the organisation as an expression of the ideals of the American romantics. Chubb, for instance, said 'England drew upon America for the new ethical inspiration,' and, in particular, upon Emerson whose home in Concord was 'the citadel of the new truth.'²⁹ Likewise, Pease described Davidson as a 'descendent of the utopians of Brook Farm,' a view echoed by Ernest Rhys who recalled how the Fellowship 'aimed, like Hawthorne's Brook Farm, at setting up a colony of workers and craftsmen.'³⁰ A decade after Davidson's stay in London, the official journal of the Fellowship published an editorial saying the Fellowship had been 'influenced by Thoreau and Emerson rather than Marx.'³¹

Many of the members of the Fellowship came to accept a form of socialism indebted to American romanticism. Certainly Chubb defended both an immanentist philosophy expressing a genuine religious conviction, and an ethic which identified this religious conviction with the republican ideal. The significance of Chubb's debt to American romanticism is clear from a critical review he wrote of William Morris' utopian novel News from Nowhere, a socialist vision which clearly was inspired by British romanticism. Chubb described the central defect of Morris' socialism as 'the absence in it of anything like a belief in a divine purpose running through nature and history, or in the divine essence of man.'³² Morris was no immanentist. Instead, Chubb argued, Morris fell for a paganism which portrays nature as beneficent

but still lacks any truly religious impulse. This defect led Chubb to identify further weaknesses in Morris' political strategy and socialist ideal, weaknesses which again parallel differences between American and British romanticism. With regard to political strategy, Chubb argued Morris failed to allow for the fact that socialism will arise through the divine purpose working in history. Morris' optimistic view of nature led him to a faith in the noble savage, or human nature as it is: he believed to overturn society would be to free the good innate within a humanity which had been corrupted by society; thus, he argued socialism could arise from a cataclysmic social revolution destroying bourgeois society. But, Chubb countered, once we recognize that history represents the working out of the divine purpose, we must acknowledge socialism will arise as the culmination of man's evolutionary development; thus, we must seek to remodel society by improving, not abolishing, our political and social institutions. With regard to the socialist ideal, Chubb argued Morris neglected the religious dimension to ethics. Morris envisaged a society of sensuous delights which ignored the religious virtues found in Christianity: he did not appreciate the virtues of love and sympathy which encourage self-denial, and he ignored the role of the corresponding desire to serve others as a motive to action. Instead Chubb wanted a socialism infused with a religious ideal, a social expression of Emerson's concept of the sublime, a community of people consciously aware of the way they are bound together by a common relationship to the divine. This was what he and his friends meant by fellowship. Because the true self is at one with the divine, true freedom consists of realising one's own good through the good of the community. Elsewhere Chubb described his religion of socialism as an extension of the ideal of American republicanism. He wanted 'a religious union parallel with and harmonious with that which unites men under the aegis of the republican state or party - a religion of Democracy.'³³

The crux of the socialism of the Fellowship was a faith in just such a

religion of Democracy. The members viewed socialism as a moral ideal of brotherhood, and social change as dependent on an ethical transformation. They defined socialism as a vital moral life, not an institutional arrangement, asking 'cannot moral life itself glow with a passion which makes all other passions pale,' and answering 'we believe it can, and by fellowship and sympathy to raise it to a white heat, which shall make it a prevailing power in the world, is the ethical aim of the Fellowship of the New Life.'³⁴

And they insisted the 'radical reform of our social arrangements, which is now being made, will be powerful and salutary just so far as it is based upon a clear and intelligent moral purpose.'³⁵

The members of the Fellowship tried to realize socialism - their religion of Democracy - by means of an ethical transformation in their personal lives. They shared the concern of the American romantics with education, communal living, and the simplification of life. Their journal echoed Alcott, saying, schools 'ought to be communities, miniature commonwealths or states,' and they themselves founded an experimental school at Abbotsholme on the edge of the Derbyshire moors, run by Dr. Reddie and Bob Muirhead, though disagreements over the day to day running of the school led most of the members of the Fellowship to withdraw, leaving Reddie in sole charge.³⁶ More importantly, the Fellowship was committed to providing an example of communal living. Initially members merely tried to live near to each other, but later, after much discussion on the relative merits of Latin America and London as possible sites, they rented Fellowship House, a shared residence at 29 Doughty Street in the Bloomsbury district of London. Residents included Havelock Ellis, Edith Lees, Ramsay MacDonald, Sydney Olivier, an anarchist called Agnes Henry, and Mrs Pagovsky and her daughter from Russia. The residents had separate bed sitting-rooms, and ate their meals together in the basement. Unoccupied rooms were let out to members of the Fellowship or friends who needed a temporary base in London. Things did

not go well. Edith Lees, the dominant figure within the House, wrote to Macdonald complaining, 'Miss Henry is awful! - I hate the place without you.'³⁷ The Fellowship constantly reiterated the need for individuals to restructure their personal lives according to the precepts of simplicity and comradeship. When the Fellowship was dissolved in 1898, the farewell issue of its journal told readers: 'it is not to its meetings that the Fellowship must look for the spread of its teaching, but to the lives of those who have received the Fellowship ideal.'³⁸

III

Thoreau [showed] . . . it is still possible and profitable to live . . . in accordance with nature, with absolute serenity and self-possession; to follow out one's own ideal, in spite of every obstacle, with unfaltering devotion; and so to simplify one's life, and clarify one's senses, as to master many of the inner secrets.³⁹

Edward Carpenter, born in 1844, was educated at Cambridge, where he later became a clerical fellow. He held Broad Church beliefs, and was ordained despite telling the examining Bishop he rejected the doctrine of the atonement.⁴⁰ At Cambridge, he decided he was a homosexual in a sort of revelation upon reading the second-generation American romantic, Walt Whitman.

In 1873, he toured Italy with his unorthodox cousin Jane Daubney.⁴¹ The ancient statues seemed to him to express Whitman's vision of male comradeship.

Broad Church Anglicanism now appeared shallow and dogmatic. Upon his return, he renounced his Holy Orders, resigned his fellowship, and became a university extension lecturer. In 1876, he wrote to Whitman saying 'you have made the earth sacred for me.'⁴² The following year he travelled to America where he spent a night in Concord with Emerson before going on to stay in Camden with Whitman.⁴³ He returned to America in 1884, visiting Walden Pond, where he swam and placed a stone on top of Thoreau's cairn.

When Carpenter first visited America, he looked through Emerson's translation of the Upanishads and discussed oriental literature with Whitman.

This shared interest in Indian religion indicates Carpenter's affinity to the American romantics. True, British romantics such as Southey found poetic material in the legends of India, and in Hindu festivals such as the Rath Yaga at Puri, but American romantics such as Emerson also went on to find religious inspiration in Hindu texts, and to equate Hinduism with their own immanentist belief in a single God existing throughout this world.⁴⁴ Of course, not all Indian philosophy is mystical and immanentist, but, like the American romantics, Carpenter picked out the idea that everything contains the divine.

He described how with the Gnani with whom he studied in Ceylon 'one came into contact with the root-thought of all existence - the intense consciousness (not conviction merely) of the oneness of all life - the general idea which in one form or another has spread from nation to nation, and become the soul and impulse of religion after religion.'⁴⁵

Carpenter shared the religious immanentism of the American romantics. Indeed, he argued the logical nature of all knowledge proves there is a fundamental unity underlying everything. Here he divides the act of knowledge into three constituents: knower, knowledge, and known. Neither object nor subject can be known either independently of the other or outside an act of knowledge. Objects can be known only by a conscious subject because something 'not relative to any ego or subject, but having an independent non-mental existence of its own, cannot be known.'⁴⁶ The subject can be conscious of itself only during an act of knowledge because 'when there is no act of knowledge there is no consciousness of the Ego.'⁴⁷ Further, because dead matter is impossible - though he has shown only that matter can not be known in the absence of a knower - the objects we take to be matter actually must be other egos, and because egos can not exist outside of an act of knowledge - though he has shown only that egos can not know themselves outside of an act of knowledge - everything must be united in a fundamental act of knowledge. Thus, Carpenter concluded, the world consists of a universal subject coming to

know itself - 'the World, the whole creation, is self-revelment.'⁴⁸ History is the evolution of an immanent God, the self-revelment of a universal subject. Carpenter shared the American romantics' vision of God at work in this world ensuing history will end with the fulfilment of the divine purpose, that is, a society based on the Emersonian sublime, the self-conscious unity of all.

According to Carpenter this final realisation of the unity of all will be socialism. Like Chubb, Carpenter equated socialism, not with a particular institutional or legal structure, but with an almost mystical state based on a recognition that we are all one. He himself turned to socialism as a result of just such a mystical experience:

I became for the time overwhelmingly conscious of the disclosure within of a region transcending in some sense the ordinary boundaries of personality . . . I almost immediately saw, or rather felt, that this region of Self existing in me existed equally . . . in others. In regard to it the mere diversities of temperament which ordinarily distinguish and divide people dropped away and became indifferent, and a field was opened in which all were truly equal.⁴⁹

Socialism is love or comradeship, fellowship or Democracy. In a socialist society, individuals will recognize they are mere outgrowths of a universal self, so they will be suffused with love and sympathy for their fellows. The triumph of love will establish a universal brotherhood in which there will be no place for the struggle for personal domination which underlies both political authority and private property. Humanity will live in non-governmental communities based on cooperative systems of production.⁵⁰

The socialist ideal promoted by Carpenter incorporated Whitman's belief that the soul needs religion, the mind needs Democracy, the heart needs love, and the body needs nature. Here Whitman defined his ideal in terms of 'the dear love of comrades,' not a particular institutional arrangement, arguing

that true Democracy is of the spirit, and consists of `manly love.'⁵¹ His poems combined natural simplicity, male comradeship and democracy into a mystical vision of the vitality of human life. Similarly, Carpenter argued the growth of comradely love will result in a true brotherhood of all, a real Democracy, based on the unity of all. It is this advocacy of an ideal of male love which makes him a protagonist of homosexual liberation. He identified the meaning and purpose of love with fusion not procreation; love can be equated with comradeship and divorced from sex. Again, because the love of homosexuals crosses barriers of class, they might be harbingers of Democracy.

People generally will embrace this principle of brotherhood only if they become aware of the divine within themselves, and they will do this only if they quieten their lower minds and remove the clutter of material existence by simplifying their lives, by returning to nature, and by undertaking manual labour. To build socialism, people have to transform their personal lives so as to connect with their inner selves. In particular, people have to simplify their lives because extraneous wants drown out the voice of the true self, leaving us attending to the momentary self. Here Carpenter again followed the American romantics in advocating not a return to the greater beauty of hand-made goods, but rather the elimination of as many possessions as possible, and a commitment to make things oneself even if they then turn out to be rough and ready. By simplifying their lives, people can clear away the debris of convention thereby creating the space needed for personal expression. People should return to nature and manual labour, feeling `downwards and downwards through this wretched maze of shams for the solid ground - to come close to the earth itself and those that live in direct contact with it.'⁵² People should work in the open air, live in simple shelters, and eat a diet of fruit and nuts. People should adopt a measure of self-sufficiency and emphasize personal relationships. Carpenter called for the simplification of life, manual labour, and homosexual liberation: `lovers of all handicrafts and of

labour in the open air, confessed passionate lovers of your own sex, Arise!'⁵³

Our very health depends on our developing a proper awareness of the unity of all since disease follows the breakdown of oneness and the consequent disruption of the natural and harmonious balance of the whole. As Carpenter explained, 'the establishment of an insubordinate centre - a boil, a tumour, the introduction and spread of a germ with innumerable progeny throughout the system, the enlargement out of all reason of an existing organ - means disease.'⁵⁴ Thus, neglect of the fundamental unity of all things explains the prevalence of disease in contemporary society as evidenced by the need for so many doctors, slow rates of recovery, any number of lunatic asylums, and a widespread feeling of uneasiness. The absence of simple living contributes to physical illness - processed food weaken the teeth and sedentary lifestyles produce flaccid muscles - whilst the doctrine of individualism contributes to mental illness - it is because people seek their own advantage without considering others that society has had to set up an arbitrary moral code which stimulates an unnatural sense of sin.

Carpenter provided the Social Democratic Federation with the money to begin publishing Justice, briefly joined the Socialist League, spoke at Fabian meetings, and sent notes to help Kropotkin with research, but of all the early socialist groups he was most at home in the Fellowship, which he joined in 1885. Later he recalled fondly how 'those early meetings of the New Fellowship were full of hopeful enthusiasms - life simplified, a humane diet and rational dress, manual labour, democratic ideals, communal institutions.'⁵⁵ Yet Carpenter's penchant for comradeship in small groups led him to put more effort into his local Sheffield Socialist Society than into any national organisation. Indeed, his work to establish a socialist movement in Sheffield illustrates the process by which some members of the Fellowship took their ideal out of London into the rest of the country. They inspired groups of local socialists to adopt a new way of life and to build new, moral

communities amongst themselves. The Sheffield Socialists, for instance, concentrated their energies on charitable activities such as tea-time outings for slum-children, and on enjoyable social gatherings such as those in their Commonwealth Cafe at which Carpenter played the harmonium whilst other members sang the songs collected in his Chants of Labour.⁵⁶ They combined popular culture with a moral belief in the transforming power of a rude simplicity.

The spread of the fellowship ideal throughout England owed much to the inspirational example provided by individuals such as Carpenter. Many provincial socialists looked upon his life as a model for the future: he had adopted the socialist ideal where socialism was the adoption of just such an ideal. Carpenter hoped his university extension classes would bring him into contact with manual workers, but his audience consisted almost exclusively of artisans and middle-class women. It was not until 1879 that he met Albert Fearnehough, a scythe maker, and his wife, and moved in with them in the village of Bradway, just outside Sheffield. He gave up extension lecturing, built a roofless hut by the river, and spent his days writing the first part of Towards Democracy, a poem in the style of Whitman. Later he brought some land in rural Derbyshire and built himself a house where he lived first with the Adams family and then with his lover, George Merrill. He tried to become self-sufficient by growing vegetables and selling any left-over produce from a stall in the local market.⁵⁷ He also tried to live close to nature by taking regular sun-baths and doing his writing in an open-roofed shed built beside a stream which ran across the bottom of his garden. It was this life that inspired numerous other socialists such as Harold Cox who returned to the land at Craig Farm in Tilford. When Cox went to India, he sent Carpenter the pair of sandals which provided the model for those Carpenter then began to make believing they liberated the feet.

The Sheffield Socialists fell apart after the Walsall anarchist case of 1892, but by then Carpenter already had started to shift his interest towards

a number of humanitarian causes. In 1889, for instance, he had begun a campaign against smoke pollution, pointing out the environmental costs of industry, and showing how easily the smoke nuisance could be alleviated if only industrialists would use suitable equipment.⁵⁸ An emphasis on such causes was an important extension of the socialism of the Fellowship. A belief in the unity of all things led many of its members to a broad benevolence embodied above all in the Humanitarian League, an organisation founded in 1891 by Henry Salt, a member of the Fellowship and an old friend of Carpenter's, on the principle that 'it is iniquitous to inflict suffering on any sentient being.'⁵⁹ Salt too was influenced by the American romantics. He wrote a biography of Thoreau, edited several volumes of Thoreau's writings, and began his plea for vegetarianism by citing Thoreau.⁶⁰ Carpenter became active in the Humanitarian League because, like Salt, he was a vegetarian who opposed cruelty to humans and animals alike, arguing, for example, that vivisection was immoral because all creatures contained the divine, and because, even from a utilitarian standpoint, hurting animals would not reduce human suffering but might well give rise to new diseases.⁶¹

IV

When Emerson died a friend said to me, 'It was a pity he should have gone. No doubt his work was done; he had no more to say to us. But it was good to think of him there, living on, serene and wise. It had been well if two or three of us could have died instead of him. It was a pity he should die.'⁶²

John Trevor said that Emerson and Whitman 'became part of me.'⁶³ He described Whitman as 'nearer to God than any man on earth,' and just before his marriage, he began to keep a copy of Emerson's writings 'to read occasionally as a Bible.'⁶⁴ Trevor was raised in East Anglia as a Calvinist, but in 1876 he both sailed to Australia and renounced the Bible as a religious guide. Soon afterwards, he decided to become a unitarian minister by studying at Meadville in America. Earlier he had read Emerson. Now he 'discovered'

him:

What Emerson did for me was, not to give me a formula, but to stimulate my faith - I do not mean faith of any theological sort, but rather that commanding confidence in the soundness of life which is the first step towards true self-confidence, true courage, and true Religion. I can only have any true self-confidence when I realise my oneness with a Universe that I can confide in.⁶⁵

In 1879, he returned to England and took a house in the countryside where he experienced the Emersonian sublime through nature. As he explained, a 'new sense of oneness with flowers and trees and stars brought me to God in quite a different fashion.'⁶⁶ He spent a year studying at Manchester College, London before becoming an assistant to the Rev. Philip Wicksteed, and then accepting a post as minister of the Upper Brook Street Free Church in Manchester. In 1891, he attended a unitarian conference at which Ben Tillett called on the churches to respond to the demands of the workers before the workers left the churches. Soon afterwards, he met a lapsed member of his own congregation who said he had stopped attending chapel because he had felt unable to breathe freely. Trevor responded to these events by founding the Labour Church movement to provide workingmen with a suitable religious home. In the ensuing years, he published a number of newspapers to promote the Labour Church, often referring to the American romantics, and once actually exclaiming, 'I am wasting valuable time, writing myself when I might be quoting Walt Whitman.'⁶⁷

The practice of establishing alternative churches to preach the new ethic proved very popular with members of the Fellowship such as Trevor. William Jupp, a founding member, preceded Trevor, when, in 1890, he formed a free religious movement in Croydon.⁶⁸ Jupp too had been raised as a Calvinist before becoming a Congregationalist minister, and then, influenced in part by Emerson, establishing his free religious movement on the principles of the Fellowship. For him, 'Leaves of Grass [by Whitman], and Towards Democracy

took their place with Thoreau's Walden, and Emerson's Essays and Lectures, and Conduct of Life as Scriptures "given by inspiration of God".⁶⁹ Likewise, J. Bruce Wallace was raised as a Presbyterian before becoming a Congregationalist minister and then, in 1892, founding a Brotherhood Church in Hackney, London.

Somewhat later, in 1894, J. C. Kenworthy, who had just been elected to the Executive Committee of the Fellowship, established a Brotherhood Church in Croydon.⁷⁰ Throughout the 1890s, various members of the Fellowship formed religious groups to promote their socialist ideal of a moral community based on the divine unity of all.

Trevor rejected all dogma in favour of an immanentist doctrine, according to which 'one might have risen from the soil to the stars, returned from the stars to the home, expanded from the home to Humanity, and found God everywhere.'⁷¹ His immanentism embodied the genuine religious conviction of the American romantics. Even his language was that of Emerson: he said a life with God could take 'many forms,' he pleaded only for 'the inward temple, where the lamp ever burns, and where the soul enters into communion with the great Over-Soul.'⁷² Everything is united in a one-souled harmony for humans and nature alike contain God. Here Trevor contrasted his concept of God or the divine energy with the theological concept of God or tradition. He defined theology as the application of a religious doctrine to life, rather than a life in which God appears spontaneously; an abstract system taken from traditional sources, rather than a concrete discovery of God at work within oneself.⁷³ His immanentism implied that individuals contain the divine so individuals who follow their instincts just will find God working through them. In contrast, the Calvinism of his childhood had suggested that God was beyond us so we should reject our instincts and follow the teachings of a theological tradition. Trevor rejected creeds, formal doctrines and rigid hierarchies. He sought a loosely defined religiosity expressed in life and deeds.

According to Trevor, the basis of the unity of all is a divine love, a vital force which puts people in a spiritual relationship with nature, and a relationship of mutual brotherhood with their fellows. More particularly, the divine life can be found in the labour movement as it battles to realize the truth of universal brotherhood. Indeed, 'the Labour Church was founded for the distinct purpose of declaring that God is at work, here and now, in the heart of the Labour Movement.'⁷⁴ The labour movement does not represent wage-earners alone; it stands for a labour consciousness which points to a growing sense of brotherhood amongst the downtrodden masses of the world, which in turn points to the gradual development of a 'human consciousness, world consciousness, God consciousness.'⁷⁵

Like Chubb and Carpenter, Trevor held an evolutionary theory of history with the divine progressively revealing itself in nature through a process which would climax in the self-conscious recognition of both the unity of all and the fact that all things partake of the divine. Socialism represents the harmonious society which will arise from the growth of this ideal based on the divine unity of all. Like the American romantics, Trevor looked forward to the realisation of the divine will here on earth, so he unsurprisingly complained of Ruskin exhibiting an unhealthy medievalism which 'tends back to the old life rather than forward to the new.'⁷⁶ Where he differed from many of the other members of the Fellowship was in his specific identification of the labour movement as the most advanced expression of the evolutionary process. The labour movement embodies an ideal of brotherhood extending beyond the workers themselves to embrace the whole of humanity. Once this ethic is explicitly linked to an immanentist religion, the workers simply will adhere to the teachings of the Fellowship. Thus, the Labour Church aims merely 'to set free the tremendous power of religious enthusiasm and joy which is now pent up in the great labour movement.'⁷⁷

Trevor accepted the rough and ready ethic of the American romantics,

arguing the adoption of an ethic of fellowship would arise from greater self-reliance and greater simplicity in our personal lives. The triumph of socialism depends on people following a new life based on a new religion: only if we allow our lives to flow out from the presence of God can we establish a society truly devoted to the common good that is human well-being. Here too Trevor distanced himself from British romanticism, complaining of Ruskin's failure to grasp the import of the new ethic of Liberty and Democracy.⁷⁸ Individuals should stand by the divine light within themselves rather than bowing to an external authority. True socialists reject the dead weight of theological tradition; they listen to their instincts and act in accordance with the divine energy within them. The true socialist 'is not afraid to follow the conclusions of his own reason and the feelings of his own heart, and to base his personal life and his social life upon both of them.'⁷⁹ Socialists are self-reliant. Here too, the labour movement is in the vanguard of history. Those who possess labour consciousness follow their own instincts; they work to cure the ills of the slums and thereby find God in their work, instead of wasting their time studying old texts where God can no longer be found. When people follow their impulses in this way, they are led inexorably towards nature and the simplification of life. Unfortunately, however, most people lack confidence in their spontaneous impulses, so they are unable to live life naturally and simply. It is the socialists who lead the way in showing us how we can come into contact with the divine by adopting a rough and ready life of comradeship and manual labour. Trevor described how 'the pleasure and wholesomeness' of growing his own fruit and vegetables had led him to God, and how his contact with 'the workings of Nature made Religion, for the first time, real and essential.'⁸⁰

The first Labour Church service was held at Charlton Town Hall, Manchester on 4 October 1891.⁸¹ The service opened with a reading of a poem by James Russell Lowell, after which a unitarian minister read the lesson; the

congregation sang Carpenter's hymn 'England Arise,' and Trevor then read a sermon on the entwining of religious sentiment within the labour movement.⁸²

At the next meeting, Robert Blatchford spoke to a crowd too large to fit into the building.⁸³ The movement spread rapidly throughout Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, with a few Labour Churches also appearing in other parts of the country. The movements' statement of principles echoed Trevor's beliefs:

The Labour Church is based upon the following Principles:-

1. That the Labour Movement is a religious Movement.
2. That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not a Class Religion, but unites members of all classes in working for the Abolition of Commercial Slavery.
3. That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not Sectarian or Dogmatic, but Free Religion, leaving each man free to develop his own relations with the Power that brought him into being.
4. That the emancipation of Labour can be realized so far as men learn both the Economic and Moral Laws of God, and heartily endeavour to obey them.
5. That the development of Personal Character and the improvement of Social Conditions are both essential to man's emancipation from moral and social bondage.⁸⁴

The Labour Church movement was designed to express and to promote Trevor's belief that the spiritual ethic of the Fellowship now inspired the labour movement.

In May 1892, Trevor and Blatchford founded the Manchester Independent Labour Party, and, at much the same time, Joseph Burgess began a campaign to unite just such local organisations into a national body. On 13 January 1893, a conference at the Bradford Labour Institute founded the national I.L.P., with Trevor present as a delegate from Manchester, and with an associated

Labour Church gathering.⁸⁵ The Labour Church movement maintained a close relationship with the I.L.P. for the rest of the decade. In 1894 the executive committee of the I.L.P. even passed a resolution saying, 'branches of the I.L.P., wherever practicable, should run a Sunday meeting on Labour Church lines.'⁸⁶ This relationship created difficulties as well as opportunities for the Labour Church. Trevor hoped his movement would fulfil humanity's need for God, but the relationship with the I.L.P. raised the question of how the movement should relate to Party members who rejected the very idea of a God. This question caused much anguish especially as leading individuals such as Fred Brocklehurst, the first general secretary of the Labour Church Union, considered belief in God to be irrelevant to the movement. Sometimes compromises could be found: when the question of prayer arose the matter was left to the discretion of individual chairmen.⁸⁷ Sometimes they could not: at the annual conference of 1894, Trevor and his supporters managed to retain the word God in the movement's statement of principles only after a close vote, and even then an official journal of the movement still noted that 'Labour Church folk do not bother much about God.'⁸⁸

Labour Churches often became primarily political organisations, their religious role weakened by their rejection of formal professions of faith and their ambivalence about the very idea of God. At first the movement's paper carried the message 'God is King,' but this soon changed to 'let Labour be the basis of civil society.' As political organisations, the Labour Churches provide further examples of the approach to cultural politics found within the Sheffield Socialists. They typically adopted a political style caught by Wicksteed's description of the Labour Church as 'an open recognition of the fact that the ultimate conditions of strength lie in our personal relations to each other, to nature, and to God, which no social machinery can in itself harmonise.'⁸⁹ Labour Church meetings represented a sociable form of politics more than a devout form of worship. They revolved around readings from

writers such as Emerson and Ruskin, together with songs composed by people such as Carpenter and Salt (although these songs were published as a hymn book, hardly any of them referred to God).⁹⁰

V

Davidson, Carpenter and Trevor had considerable influence on British socialism in general and the I.L.P. in particular. Although Ramsay MacDonald was a leading member of the Fellowship who lived in the communal residence in Bloomsbury, the Fellowship's main influence was through individuals such as Carpenter and Trevor. The Sheffield Socialists inspired many other local groups, including the one in Nottingham with which D. H. Lawrence was associated, and these groups often later became branches of the I.L.P.⁹¹ Carpenter gave the Bristol Socialist Society some money with which to begin a library - MacDonald was the librarian - and Katharine Conway, a member of the Bristol group who became prominent in the I.L.P., recalled, 'I came under Carpenter's influence as a morbid High Churchwoman with vague humanitarian impulses and the lead he gave me was literally from darkness and bondage out into life and liberty.'⁹² Likewise, Carpenter influenced a number of progressive groups who saw themselves as followers of Whitman, including one which flourished in Bolton.⁹³ The close ties between the Labour Churches and the I.L.P. have already been mentioned: a list of preachers at Labour Church meetings reads like a who's who of the early I.L.P.: Blatchford, Conway, Hardie, Margaret MacMillan and Tillett were regular favourites.

The easy alliance between those socialists inspired by American romanticism and the other members of the I.L.P. rested on a shared ethical socialism based on an immanentist cosmology. It was in these doctrines that the influence of American romanticism mingled with that of British romanticism and strands of non-conformity to inspire the peculiar ethical quality of much of British socialism. Many prominent members of the I.L.P., including Bruce

Glasier and Kier Hardie, owed a debt both to Carlyle and Ruskin, and to congregationalism. The British romantics believed nature reflected the best in humanity, and the idea that nature was good inspired many early socialists with a faith that the Kingdom of God could be built in this world. The congregationalists led those non-conformists who responded to historical criticism of the bible by moving towards a faith based on the example of Christ the man, and the idea of the humble carpenter's son who eschewed pomp and wealth also inspired many early socialists.

Nonetheless there were differences between those socialists indebted primarily to American romanticism and the other ethical socialists of the I.L.P. Glasier and Hardie did not share the religious outlook of Chubb, Carpenter, and Trevor. Most ethical socialists did not view nature in the mystical terms of Emerson: some did not have any genuine religious convictions – Glasier had been an active member of the National Secular Society – and others, including Hardie, described themselves as Christians. Most ethical socialists gave their socialism a religious dimension through references to Christ who almost never appeared in the writings of socialists inspired primarily by American romanticism: some such as Hardie actually believed in Christ as the Son of God, whilst others such as Glasier looked to the moral example of the human Jesus. The religious aspect of their socialism revolved around Christian symbolism, not the Emersonian sublime: Hardie told the Congregational Union that 'the Labour movement had come to resuscitate the Christianity of Christ,' whilst Glasier attacked those usurers who cry 'communist' and so 'crucify again the Christ.'⁹⁴ In contrast, Davidson, Chubb, Carpenter, and Trevor, did not talk of Jesus, or a God Incarnate, but solely of an immanent God found throughout nature. Trevor rejected the option of returning from Christianity to the religion of Jesus as yet another misguided attempt to 'restore the old' rather than 'build the new.'⁹⁵ These contrasting religious doctrines sustained different ideas of brotherhood.

Hardie and Glasier held a primarily moral concept of brotherhood. They regarded all people as of equal worth, so they conceived of an ideal society in which equality would be established, and they regarded nature as benign, so they believed they could establish this ideal society in this world. They wanted to build a community of moral equals akin to that described in the Sermon of the Mount. Thus, Hardie said, socialism was 'entitled to the support of all who pray for the coming of Christ's kingdom upon earth.'⁹⁶ In contrast, Chubb, Carpenter, and Trevor did not talk of building Christ's kingdom here on earth, but solely of giving expression to the divine already present within oneself. Their concept of brotherhood was primarily mystical; they claimed all things were fundamentally at one, and they conceived of an ideal society in which people realized their inner selves.

VI

American romanticism provided an important source of the peculiarly ethical socialism of the I.L.P. At the heart of this socialism was an immanentist belief in a God present throughout the world. This immanentism inspired a faith in human instincts, brotherhood, a moral transformation, the need to recast our personal lives, and a cultural form of politics. First, immanentism suggested that because individuals contain the divine, they can trust their instincts: there is no need to search for an intellectual basis for feelings, so action comes before theory. As Trevor said, when 'Life appears upon the scene, Tradition is compelled to weakly follow.'⁹⁷ Second, an immanentist outlook suggested that because we all contain the divine, we are all part of a single whole, so we should adopt an ethic of universal brotherhood. As a member of the Fellowship explained, each individual exists 'in organic relations with his fellows and only through these relations does he realise himself.'⁹⁸ Third, immanentist doctrines led the Fellowship, the Sheffield Socialists, and the Labour Church movement to adopt a primarily

ethical socialism. A member of the Fellowship said that 'for the great work of Social Reconstruction we want above all a new morality.'⁹⁹ Fourth, Davidson, Carpenter and Trevor all agreed the desired change in social morality has to begin with the transformation of our personal lives. Socialism has to begin with an inner conversion turning one into a new kind of person: to be a socialist is to give expression to the divine in one's personal life, for God is not a transcendent principle, but a real and living power operating throughout the universe. Finally, this stress on individual regeneration meant these socialists were preoccupied with a personal and cultural politics. The Fellowship insisted members should bear witness to a moral ideal and try to establish an example of communal living; Carpenter strove for sexual liberation and wrote songs for socialist meetings; and the Labour Church tried to bring 'the means of living' into the labour movement.¹⁰⁰

All these different facets of a socialism which drew on American romanticism appear in Trevor's statement that:

We shall never do away with bondage, and this Religion of Bondage, until we have a Religion of Freedom to put in its place - not any mere theory thereof, but actually incarnating itself in our own flesh and blood. For the great work we have to do, Economics alone will not suffice, neither will Ethics added to Economics. We must expand and grow into the larger life, wherein we enter freely into living and loving fellowship with Man, with Nature, and with God.¹⁰¹

NOTES