

1906

## FAULTS OF THE FABIAN.

[On Feb. 9th Mr. H. G. WELLS read a paper to a meeting confined strictly to members of the Fabian Society. It has been thought desirable to place it before the entire membership. The feeling will, however, be easily understood that the criticisms made by Mr. Wells, while perfectly legitimate in the intimacy of our society and its friends, are not of the sort that it is desirable to publish indiscriminately, amounting as they do in places to a very complete repudiation of courses to which the society as a whole has been committed. His comments are, it is considered, part of a private discussion of our policy and plans, conceived in a vein of frankness that the outsider might easily misunderstand. Particularly is any risk of press comment deprecated.]

MR. WELLS opened by declaring himself a socialist of long standing, but only recently a Fabian. "I came," he said, "into your society very curious to know what you were up to, I have made the acquaintance of a number of your members, and I have formed certain general conceptions of the range and possibilities of this association and of its difficulties, which I have embodied in this evening's paper. Let me state crudely the contrast that concerns me, my chief impression of you. I perceive on the one hand among more or less educated, more or less prosperous people of this country, a large number of socialists, partial socialists, people with socialistic sympathies, and undeveloped socialists, now quite urgently needing organization and a unifying propaganda; and on the other hand I see our society, with its seven hundred odd members, apparently under the impression that these seven hundred odd are the only thoughtful and authoritative socialists in existence in England, and that what does not occur in our meetings has nothing to do with socialism.

I want to set myself to-night to correct this extraordinary mistake some of us make. So far from our being a little band of true believers in an individualistic or quite unenlightened and hostile world, we are, I hold, an extraordinarily inadequate and feeble organization in the midst of a world that teems with undeveloped possibilities of support and help for the cause we profess to further. That image of the little band of believers was perhaps true in the eighties, but we are twenty years from that. Everything almost in the world of thought has changed since those rebellious outcast years—unless it is our society. Our society, I feel, must go the way of all things now, and change also. I am here to-night to ask it to change. I have looked over my *Fabian News*, month by month, conversed with our members, attended many of our meetings, with an ever deepening discontent at the way in which things are done by this society, at its failure either to organize, develop, or represent the

spirit of social reconstruction that is arising all about us, in its failure to use the prestige it has accumulated, to fulfil the promises it once made the world.

To begin with, let me ask what are the functions that the Fabian Society claims to discharge or does discharge or might discharge, in relation to the development of socialism at the present time. It seems to me that these are three in number. There is first of all the large amount of intellectual work that had to be done and which our society certainly has, sometimes with a certain lack of charm perhaps, with a certain diminishing enthusiasm and a certain increasing tendency to a hard practical tone, but with an undeniable persistence and vigour, managed to get done—in working out the first broad and crude propositions of socialism, and in bringing them into measurable relation with existing social institutions. In this direction the efficiency, not so much of the society as a whole, but of certain members of the society, has been very considerable, but they have carried this branch of work at last almost out of touch with any socialistic ideals at all. I believe it is not too much to claim the London School of Economics as an offspring, or at any rate a closely collateral development, of this side of our society's work. From among our members it drew capacity, energy, initiative, that we could ill spare. We gave to economic science much that might well, I think, have been kept for propaganda. But that, however, does not by any means detract from our claim to consideration upon this first score.

The second function of such a society as ours is of acting as a sort of official or representative mouthpiece for socialistic theory in England. In this direction I must confess I regard its performance with much more qualified admiration. I hope I shall not offend too deeply if I confess I think it has at times abused its authoritative claim. Time after time it has shown a disposition to intervene in contemporary political conflicts in which, I hold, socialistic principles were only remotely involved, in which indeed they scarcely apply. It spoke for socialism in relation to the Boer war, for example, it insisted upon doing this, I am told, in spite of the remonstrances of its executive; you will forgive me, I hope, for thinking it had no business to do so. It ought, I hold, to have left the war alone altogether. It was pretended that in some subtle manner Imperialism was sound socialism and nationalism wasn't—an absolutely gratuitous gloss. I have tried to make out how we were drawn into that particular indiscretion. I am inclined to think we did that because just then our genuine socialism stood at its lowest point. We were in a slack season, there was something very like a slump in socialism with the dawn of the new century, there was an extraordinary lull at that time in our faith in truly socialistic advance; we were doing nothing, and feeling dull and out of touch, and we—we became politicians. Our unnecessary, meddlesome intervention in that enormous emotional struggle, the three tailors of Tooley Street pronouncements we made, were made in sheer forgetfulness of our true concerns. They divided the forces of our society, they had a very

detrimental effect upon the public estimate of socialism. Our interference in the squabble over the conditions of teaching in the popular schools was, I think, even more unfortunate. You must admit, if you think it over, that that conflict had very little to do with the essential principles of socialism. Excellent socialists were and are to be found on either side, and over these two affairs we tore ourselves asunder, lost members, disheartened members, gained in certain quarters the reputation of being an unaccountable and disingenuous political faction, in return for no good achieved whatever that I can see. These efforts were among our failures, and I recall them to you now only to remind you of the fact that we do profess to speak for socialism as a whole, and that therefore we are under a certain obligation to justify, by the quantity of our members and the quality of their efforts, this very extensive claim.

But neither the first of these functions, that of working out socialistic theory in an exhaustive manner, nor the second, that of giving a representation and official voice to socialistic theory, seems to me nearly so important as the third and most neglected of our possible functions, which is, I hold, to carry on a vigorous socialistic propaganda among all the more educated and intelligent sections of our population. I do not for one moment suggest that the Fabian may now aspire to a control of the general socialistic propaganda of this country; there are already pretty vigorous movements going on among the working classes in the direction of socialism. You have the S. D. F., for example, the I. L. P., you have such healthy developments as the Clarion organization, or the Guild of St. Matthew, covering a world of activity that seems to lie no longer within our sphere of influence. But there remains for us an enormous field still untouched in which we not only may work, but in which I hold we ought to be working most strenuously now, and that is the field of socialistic propaganda among the educated classes and the middle classes. I believe that we particularly could undertake that. We could be, we ought to be, pouring socialistic ideas into the student class, into the professional classes; every journalist ought to be a socialist, the clergy, the religious ministers, public officials, ought to be consciously saturated with our ideas; the whole generous multitude of the educated young. All this great mass needs educating for socialism, and then organizing for socialism, and we are doing scarcely anything, and except for isolated individual efforts, a book here, a word in season there, nobody seems to be doing anything in that direction. I thought this was an important enough duty before the last election, but now I think it a supremely important duty. In London particularly, under the peculiar conditions of London, the hope of socialism resides in the middle class, in that indeterminate class of which the poor doctor and the Board School teacher may perhaps be taken as the best types. Unlike the industrial regions of the Midlands and the North, in which socialism is now making such strides, *there is no homogeneous mass of London workers of sufficient relative magnitude to serve as a permanent basis for socialistic activity.* If London

is to become socialistic, it will be through the middle classes receiving socialistic ideas. In London the general linking network of socialists *must* be middle class people, there is no other linking network possible, and it is in London particularly that you find educated people living under such conditions as to make them socialists.

It is to our neglect of this third and most urgent and important function of our society that particularly I wish to call your attention to-night.

And now, having told you of the duties I conceive we do or might perform, let me tell you quite frankly how our society strikes me in relation to the scope and magnitude of these duties. In none of these three branches of its activity does it strike me as doing anything near what it might, and what therefore it ought, to be doing. In the first place, I will begin with what is perhaps my gravest charge: the society strikes me as being ridiculously small. It is small, not only in the matter of numbers. It has an air of arrested growth; it began its existence in the meetings of a limited number of people in each others' private houses, and to this day it strikes an impartial observer as being still half a drawing-room society, which by a wild, valiant effort took a central office in a cellar in Clement's Inn, and exhausted its courage in that enterprise. Small as our membership is, our staff strikes me as small even for that. We have one secretary, and he has one assistant. It carries out the tradition of your drawing-room days, and the social note that we must lose if we are to grow, that our secretary seems to know all our members by sight. Many years ago the Fabian Society got that secretary, long ago got the underground apartments in Clement's Inn, and it has become habituated to those dimensions of staff and office, just as it has become habituated to meeting in Clifford's Inn. I submit it has to grow out of that.

The first of the faults of the Fabian, then, is that it is small; the second that strikes me is that, even for its smallness, it is needlessly poor. You have it from Mr. Bernard Shaw that poverty is a crime, and if so, then by the evidence of your balance-sheet ours is a criminal organization. Small as our activities are, we barely pay our way. It is an open secret among us that the average subscription is not enough to carry things on; and if it were not for the very heavy subsidies of one or two generous members, the Fabian Society would long ago have had to sell its not very valuable office furniture and disperse. As it is, the society is always hard up and always in debt, and every proposal in the direction of enterprise encounters a financial difficulty. I will discuss the possibilities of remedying this later, and I will pass on now to the third in my list of faults, and that is, our collective inactivity.

That, I know, is not our general impression of ourselves. No doubt we number some very enthusiastic and active members, who are responsible for much dispersed and disjointed work for socialism; but collectively, what are we at? It is not only, for example, that

we are small, but we are not growing and we are not attempting to grow. It is not only that our hands are tied by poverty, but we are not struggling to untie them. I am told of the extraordinary amount of work that the Fabian Society does insidiously through its tracts, in exchanging and disseminating information, and in all sorts of curious underground activities. Well, I think that some of these claims, and particularly certain claims of personal influence, are justifiable. But this has very little to do with the average member and what the society does as a whole. It would go on just as well if there was no society at all. We circulate some book boxes, it is true, and a few useful things of that sort. Perhaps we have a fair show of that sort of thing for our size and means; but consider it in relation to the task we have to do. Here are some documents that were sent to me to show what the Fabian Society does and is doing. Here is the letter that goes out to all the new members, exhorting them to disperse themselves among borough and district councils, education committees and so forth, and talking in a vague and inconclusive way of lectures, of writing letters to the local papers, and such like things. Then there is an information department engaged in gathering scraps of information from members with sufficient leisure to answer sheets of questions. You are asked, for example, have you any means of influencing any tram, gas, water, or other joint stock company? I wonder how many members answered that, and what it all came to when they did. I wonder what dream of concerted action was in the head of our executive. . . . There is a long list of lecturers, who for the most part, I believe, don't lecture. There is one paper headed with a pencil note Local Census—"Dropped." There is an election results form, in which our members were bothered to give all sorts of exasperating information about electorates and votes; and so on. The effect of it all is of bright, impossible ideas taken up and abandoned, of wasted good intentions, and wasted time and energy,—some of it strikes me as wasted printing. It is almost as if we were being amused to keep us out of mischief. It is quite possible that in this matter I am being unjust; no doubt it would have served a useful purpose to ascertain exactly what percentage of our members could influence gas companies. But was that ever ascertained? Did we in some subtle way get the light of socialism mixed up in the gas flicker of any middle-class home? I don't believe we did. . . .

No doubt much of all this would have been worth doing if it had really been done, if it had been anything more than playing at politico-sociological research; but even if it had been done, do measure it against the task that everyone who confesses himself a militant socialist takes up with that confession. That task is nothing less than the alteration of the economic basis of society. Measure with your eye this little meeting, this little hall; look at that little stall of not very powerful tracts, think of the scattered members, one here, one there, who may or may not have responded to those printed enquiries. Then go out into the Strand. Note the size of the buildings and business places, note the glare of the advertise-

ments, note the abundance of traffic and the multitude of people, take a casual estimate of the site-values as you go along. That is the world whose very foundations you are attempting to change. How does this little dribble of activities look then? That is what I want to keep before you in justification of these criticisms. You may say that to call attention to that contrast is pure materialism, you may say that the world has been changed by a smaller handful than those who meet here to-night, but they met under Pentecostal tongues of fire, and they adopted other methods than that of sending each other papers of questions, and saying in response to every proposal for action "The thing's been tried."

But let me get on with my catalogue of faults. The Fabian Society is small, it is shabbily poor, it is collectively inactive. What next? Well, I think that my next point must be that we are remarkably unbusinesslike, inadaptable, and uninventive in our ways. Our society grew out of a certain Fellowship of the New Life, of friends who met in one another's houses, and talked in a conversational manner. It spent its childhood in parlours and drawing-rooms, drawing-rooms that had at times a conscious touch of Bohemianism and the artistic temperament, and to this day, I hold, the traditions of those drawing-rooms cripple its procedure. To this day we do not like to entertain other socialists unless they have been properly introduced. Instead of trying to grow as large and rich and vigorous as we can, we still permit the most remarkable difficulties to be thrown in the way of the admission of new members. We don't advertise, thank you; it's not quite our style. We cry socialism as the reduced gentlewoman cried "oranges": "I do so hope nobody will hear me."

I have been making one or two new members lately, and my experience burns within me. In the first place the possible and potential Fabian has to discover our existence. Of this he may or may not learn, just accordingly as to whether he meets anybody who knows about us or not. Not only do we not advertise, but we make little or no use of the press in getting fresh members. . . . The possibility and advantages of becoming a member comes to anyone in the nature of a private and intimate tip, and then the business of documents begins. An application for membership has to be filled up, and on this the alleged basis of socialism is set forth, to which the aspirant must subscribe. This basis impresses me as being ill-written and old fashioned, harsh and bad in tone, assertive and unwise, and as likely to deter all sorts of wavering people who might otherwise come into the society and be converted into good socialists. . . . There are those who defend the rigid letter of the basis. They dread broad socialism, they smell heresy and sedition. In the old drawing-room days there seems to have been a great, and perhaps even reasonable, dread of some terrible individualist, someone wild and fierce like that Mr. Belloc who visited us before he became a member of Parliament, creating a dispute or breaking furniture, and perhaps even smuggling in a lot of friends until we

found ourselves outvoted and passing resolutions in favour of the Liberty and Property Defence League. But is there any danger of that sort now, and does it matter if there is? . . . I must confess I would at any rate take the risk of demanding only a statement that the applicant is a socialist. If you do not think that sufficient, then anyhow let us define our socialism in compact, persuasive, untechnical phrases.

Well, having accepted this basis, the ambitious socialist must then declare he or she has attended two meetings of the society as a visitor, and must be proposed and seconded by two personal acquaintances, who can answer for his or her deportment; and both proposer and seconder must not only sign the nomination paper and send it about, but must write a letter to the secretary in praise of the candidate. Of course this is as much fuss and trouble as one takes to make a member of a London social club. The papers are sent in. The executive then debates the admission of the candidate. The amount of the subscription is left to the member, and this I presume in most cases means a holograph correspondence with our secretary. Then so soon as the member is elected he receives a letter of the most terrifying sort, from which he gathers, what is not correct, that he has pledged himself to take part, according to his abilities and opportunities, in the general work of the society. It is kept from his notice that the society does no general work at all practically. He is confronted by fantastic possibilities of having to lecture, write letters to his local paper, give away tracts, hold meetings, riot, rebel; and he is informed, or not, of the name of his local newspaper, the names of the various local organizations in his district, and all sorts of things of that kind, to just the extent Mr. Pease may or may not have the leisure and information needed to fill up the blanks provided. It is a most extraordinary document, that letter. Now all this is a tremendous waste of time and energy; a disastrous waste of office energy, when you remember that you are trying to change the industrial basis of civilization through the activity of one secretary and one assistant. It is a misdirection of the new enthusiasm that comes to us, it wastes the patience, it discourages no end of possible new helpers. Does it give us anything in return? Does it even secure orthodoxy? I do not want to start a heresy hunt in this society, or I would like to ask certain of our leading members by name whether they really are prepared to sign over again now the requirements of our basis. All this fumbling over the admission of new members must, I submit, be swept away if the Fabian Society is to do its proper work in the world. One first thing we shall have to do if our society is to embark upon a new career of usefulness, is to replace this obstacle race by a perfectly simple and easily opened door.

There are all sorts of other defects and little pettinesses come to us, I hold, from those old drawing-room days. . . .

Perhaps our worst pettiness, and the one most offensive and deterrent to the serious newcomer, is our little stock-in-trade of jokes, our little special style of joking. It is quite after the manner

of the jokes one finds in a large, lax family. We play upon character overmuch. A little giggling excitement runs through all our meetings. I have a sort of idea—a theory—which I can assure you has no relation to any facts whatever, to anything that has ever happened, but which somehow will convey to you the quality of the particular fault I intend. I fable it that once upon a time two or three young persons were somehow roped in; they were shy, but they had a bright joy in observation, they did not understand, or want to understand, but to be startled, to be amused, and they were at that delightful age when the supreme joy of life is to giggle. They giggled at the socialistic idea. They giggled at every socialist who was at all out of the common. They giggled at the hair of this earnest socialist, and the hat of that. They went away giggling to describe socialism to their friends—the funniest thing in the world. I can assure you that constant flow of rather foolish laughter, of rather forced jesting, is no small defect in our work. It flows over and obscures all sorts of grave issues, it chills and kills enthusiasm. Its particular victim in this society is Mr. Bernard Shaw. It pursues him with unrelenting delight, simply because he is not like everybody else, as he rises, before he opens his mouth to speak it begins. Shaw has a habit of vivid statement, he has a habit, a brilliant habit, of seeking to arrest the attention by a startling, apparent irrelevance, and he has a natural inclination to paradox. Our accursed giggle lives on these things. Now Bernard Shaw is at bottom an intensely serious man, whatever momentary effect this instant dissolution of sober discussion into mirth may produce on him, he does in the long run, hate this pursuit of laughter. If you doubt that, go and hear Larry in *John Bull's Other Island* speaking Shaw's disgust.

"And all the while," said Larry, "there goes on a horrible, senseless, mischievous laughter . . . you chaff and sneer and taunt them for not doing the things you daren't do yourself; and all the time you laugh, laugh, laugh—eternal derision, eternal envy, eternal folly, eternal fouling and staining and degrading, until, when you come at last to a country where men take a question seriously and give a serious answer to it, you deride them for having no sense of humour, and plume yourself on your own worthlessness as if it were a superiority."

Well, I think that speaks clearly enough, and that you will not suppose that in attacking laughter I am assailing Bernard Shaw. But I do assail the strained attempts to play up to Shaw, the constant endeavour of members devoid of any natural wit or wildness to catch his manner, to ape his egotism, to fall in with an assumed pretence that this grave high business of Socialism, to which it would be a small offering for us to give all our lives, is an idiotic middle-class joke. . . .

In the old wild drawing-room days, of course, this jesting had a sort of excuse. Everything was fun then. There was so much freshness and intensity of conviction, and so much hard work afoot, and it was all so intimate and understood, that one could jest. But



that is not the case with us now. Whether the society decides to renew its youth or enter upon its old age—the spring has gone out of its joking.

My list of the society's faults grows long. Our society is small ; and in relation to its great mission small minded ; it is poor ; it is collectively, as a society, inactive ; it is suspicious of help, and exclusive ; it is afflicted with a giggle, and a deliberate and intended "sense of humour." And all these faults I have, I think, traced back to the conditions of its early origin. It met socially—to this day it meets socially. It has never yet gone out to attack the unknown public in a systematic and assimilatory manner. At a certain stage in its development its effort seemed to cease, it ceased to grow, ceased to dream, ceased to believe in any possible sort of triumph for socialism as socialism. It experienced just that arrest of growth one sees in a pot-bound plant.

Now, to cease to grow is to cease to believe in growth, to cease to fight is to abandon the thought of triumph, and to that in part I trace that underhand and indirect spirit that is so curiously present in your discussions. We have taken refuge from the fact that we are not openly winning over the world, by a queer pretence that we are, insidiously, and all the while that nothing seems to be happening—getting there. It is a queer pretence which is not altogether a pretence. So far as certain of us are concerned, things do get quietly done, and very good and considerable things too. Nevertheless, I have the temerity to think they do not compensate us for the effect upon our tone of these indirect methods. I find in our society, cropping up sometimes in a speech of this member, and sometimes in the speech of that, a curious conceit of cunning, something like a belief that the world may be manoeuvred into socialism without knowing it ; that by being very slim and lively and subtle we shall presently be able to confront the world with a delighted, "But you *are* socialists ! We chalked it on your backs when you weren't looking." We in this society, I say this with doubtings and regret, have tended more and more to become the exponents of a masked socialism that I fear and dread, that in the end may, quite conceivably, not leave one shred of the true socialistic spirit alive in us. This society is to keep like it is, all existing institutions are to keep as they are, there is still to be a House of Lords, an established church, bishops—they'll not believe in Christianity, but still bishops—Tories—they won't believe in property in land, but they will still be Tories—and yet socialism will be soaking through it all, changing without a sign of change. It is a quite fantastic idea, this dream of an undisturbed surface, of an ostensibly stagnant order in the world, while really we are burrowing underground, burrowing feverishly underground—a quite novel way of getting there—to the New Jerusalem.

You know this cryptic socialism is not a little reminiscent of the mouse that set out to kill the cat ; violent methods were deprecated ; an organization of all the available mice, and the old crude tactics of attack in multitude that extinguished Bishop Hatto, were especi-

ally discouraged. The mouse decided to adopt indirect and inconspicuous methods, not to complicate its proceedings by too many associates, to win over and attract the cat by friendly advances rather than frighten her by a sudden attack. It is believed that in the end the mouse did succeed in permeating the cat, but the cat is still living—and the mouse can't be found.

Then we are to invade municipal bodies, bring about the millennium by tempting the local builder on the town council with socialistic projects for the housing of the working classes, and by luring incompetent urban district boards administering impossible areas into the establishment of electric power stations they are about as well equipped to control as they are the destinies of this empire. Perhaps I go too far with this again. No doubt it is quite possible to achieve all sorts of good purposes through existing organizations and institutions, only—it isn't the way to socialism. Make socialists and you will achieve socialism; there is no other way. Democratic socialism is the only possible sane and living socialism. The only possible socialistic state is a state which is understood, upheld, willingly and cheerfully *lived*, by the great mass of its people. Even were it possible to achieve really socialistic institutions in our insidious way, what would it all amount to? We should have the body of socialism without its spirit, we should have won our Utopia with labour and stress—and behold it would be stillborn!

Anxious as I am to avoid controversial matter in this paper, I cannot conceal from myself that it is upon this point that the real practical conflict and division within our society is likely to arise; the division between dispersed, masked, and so-called "practical" activities on the one hand, and concentration upon propaganda upon the other, propaganda that will prepare the way for an open political campaign of socialists as socialists, in the coming years. You know this particular question is a question of the economy of energy, these minor activities, these little interferences, I contend, waste our energies and our resources, and are in the net result a loss. In the past it is quite possible that they have served a useful and educational purpose, but that time is over now. The time has come for us to attack.

It is possible that this Fabian indirectness is associated with the very name of our society. Quite early in that history, I am told, indeed in its very birth beginnings, it was decided that the time was not ripe for battle, that the electoral masses were unprepared for socialism, that fresh forces had to be accumulated, new methods and disciplines and plans worked out. Mr. Frank Podmore, one of our earliest members, discovered an analogy in the condition of Rome after Hannibal had defeated the Roman army at Lake Thrasymenus and when Fabius Maximus was made dictator. Fabius, you will remember, with such crude and insufficient forces as he had at his disposal, at once took to the hills and mountains, avoided battle on every occasion, sought petty advantages, sought opportunities of catching his enemy at a disadvantage. They were, *for the time*, the

proper tactics to pursue. He did gather and husband strength for Rome. So Fabius became our godfather, and the waiting game our method. A quotation was invented to point the moral of this choice. You all know that quotation, of course; "For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did most patiently when warring against Hannibal, though many censured his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be in vain, and fruitless." Now the interesting thing to remark is, not that this passage is a fabrication, but that it is untrue; when the time came, as you may see for yourself in Plutarch's Lives, Fabius did *not* strike hard. This waiting game, wise no doubt as its adoption was in the beginning, became at last an enervating habit of limited action.

I want you particularly to note that, to note how inactive methods react upon the soul. Fabius began by being a discreet general; he ended by being an impotent one. I am not sure that he did not come near being a disastrous one. If only Hannibal had not also had his touch of the Fabian quality, there seems little doubt that on three several occasions he might have taken Rome. But he, too, had caught the hovering habit. You will find the closing passages of Plutarch's account of Fabius Maximus melancholy but instructive reading. When the time came for action he led the party of paralysis. He opposed the counter attack that destroyed Carthage with extraordinary subtlety, persistence, and bitterness.

We read that Scipio "being appointed consul, and finding that the people expected something great and striking at his hands, considered it as an antiquated method and worthy only of the inactivity of an old man, to watch the motions of Hannibal in Italy; therefore determined to remove the seat of war from thence into Africa, to fill the enemy's country with his legions, to extend his ravages far and wide, and to attempt Carthage itself. With this view he exerted all his talents to bring the people into his design. But Fabius, on this occasion, filled the city with alarms, as if the commonwealth was going to be brought into the most extreme danger by a rash and indiscreet young man; in short, he scrupled not to do or say anything he thought likely to dissuade his countrymen from embracing the proposal. . . . He applied to Crassus, the colleague of Scipio, and endeavoured to persuade him not to yield to Scipio, but, if he thought it proper to conduct the war in that matter, to go himself against Carthage. Nay, he even hindered the raising of money for that expedition: so that Scipio was obliged to find the supplies as he could . . . Fabius therefore, took another method to traverse the design. He endeavoured to prevent the young men who offered to go as volunteers from giving in their names, and loudly declared both in the senate and forum, 'That Scipio did not only himself avoid Hannibal, but intended to carry away with him the remaining strength of Italy, persuading the young men to abandon their parents, their wives, and native municipality, whilst an unsubdued and potent enemy was still at their doors.'" . . .

The Romans destroyed Carthage, as you know, but poor old Fabius did not live to see the end. With Hannibal gone out of Italy, with the long habits of a lifetime broken and shattered, with nothing to wait for, nothing to hover round, he pined, and sickened, and died.

Well, you see how dangerous and paralysing the Fabian tradition can become. I don't suggest for a moment it has become so, to any extent, in this society. I offer this merely as a warning. Nothing has been more encouraging to me than the alacrity with which the enquiries, the suggestions I have made have been met. I am not in conflict with our executive, I am attacking no "Old Gang"—don't think I am. I believe much is wrong with our society, I have made a rather elaborate diagnosis to find out what can be done, I have had to criticise and blame, but so far as I have been able I have avoided personal conflict. I have met no Fabius among your executive practically. The readiness to help in this project of reconstruction has been very great, so great as almost to be embarrassing. Help comes in from every side, and the thing has been at times almost wrenched from my hands by eager and experienced co-operation. If we really do contrive to purge our faults and begin a new career, I am sure you will have your executive chiefly to thank.

Only a point or so of fault finding remains. But please do not run away with the impression that I have nothing but faults to find in the Fabian Society. I could, if I chose to praise, find much to outweigh all these faults, in our meetings, in our executive, in the activities I dealt with so lightly in my opening, in our staff. Praise is an agreeable exercise; it is sometimes very useful as a tonic. But that is not my business to-night; good as we are, we all know that. . . . I am playing the part of Devil's Advocate, I admit, but if I thought the Fabian Society was all wrong, should I be here to-night urging it to new enterprises? It is because I believe in our society, it is the result of much frank and intimate conversation with various members of your executive, and the firmest confidence that I shall not be misunderstood, it is in the conviction that we can rise to a searching of hearts and open confession without great stresses, that I have criticised our society so frankly.

And now, what do I propose we should do?

Obviously, my first proposal is that we should grow. We must get more members, more funds, a bigger staff, an altogether larger and more active organization. And first, as to getting new members. I think it is high time that we cut our last link with that temperately Bohemian drawing-room, sweep away all this complicated business about introductions and letters of recommendation, and simply require a declaration of general sympathy and agreement with socialism of the most elementary description, that, and the payment of a subscription from the new convert. And I propose also that we make our net still wider by getting in every possible person who is interested in socialism, or who disputes against socialism, or who

wants to watch the proceedings of socialism, as a subscriber\* to this society. Let us make this institution of subscribers a reality. Then having made our door as easy to open as it possibly can be, let us set all our members at once to the business of bringing in fresh members; let us at once set a snowball of personal propaganda going, particularly among the young.

Directly we get this under way, you will find a need for a new set of tracts. We want a special set that one can put in the hand of the possible convert, who doesn't quite see this, who wants to know that, who raises all the hackneyed old objections. Constantly I am being asked for some book or some tract of this sort, and it doesn't exist. Let us make it exist. Let us have some sort of special propaganda committee that can revise whatever tracts for the neophyte we do already publish; expand them, re-write them if necessary, add to them, and make a complete little gospeller's outfit. If I may make an unblushing proposal at this point I would say that you had better give a good piece of that job to me. I am pretty keen on it, and I am prepared—if you will give me a certain amount of freedom—to put in time and work at it. Well, then, when we have got this series of tracts, I propose we shall not only use them through our existing members in that snowball of propaganda, but also that we should publish them as widely as we possibly can.

From the very start, if we are to get this going, we shall want money, and we shall want all the secretarial assistance we can get. The real organ of growth in every society is the secretarial office. There may be convulsions of expansion, but there can be no steady growth without the sustained work of active, tactful, dexterous personalities—who will be constantly marking down, following up, trying at, new helpers, new fields of work, new resources of money, personality, enthusiasm. We want money, we want office organization, and secretarial assistance. At first I don't see any way of bringing in any of these things except by members *giving*. We must give. For this new start we shall want work given, time given, money given, thought given, zeal, and much mutual charity—the rarest of all gifts. Well, except for the last, I don't think there will be much difficulty about that part of the business. I believe you are prepared to give. I believe that if members understand they will get something like a show for what they give, they will give with extraordinary readiness. For some time they haven't had much of a show. That we have to change. I don't believe it would be really difficult to raise an initial fund of a thousand pounds or so, if we convince one another we mean business. So I think we could set the ball rolling.

But this giving will be done chiefly in the first enthusiasm of the new effort. It won't go on at the same pace. I have grave doubts of the wisdom of running a large and growing movement of this kind upon the chance of repeated gifts, and my next proposal is that we

\* In the subsequent debate, Mr. T. B. Simmons made the excellent suggestion that we should imitate the Y. M. C. A., and have members (believers) and associates (not necessarily believers).

should try to increase the average subscription of our members. I propose to revive here a suggestion made some ago by Webb, and which was not taken up at the time very encouragingly. Well—this is the second time of asking. Suppose then, instead of leaving the subscription to the choice of the new member—nobody knowing what the others give, and everyone feeling a little uncomfortable over the business—suppose we charged everyone at least five shillings as a minimum, and in addition invited them to tax themselves upon what they believed to be their incomes. Now, how much might we hope for, how much in the way of a tax can we ask for, and how much will members stand? Well, my suggestion is a graduated income tax. I propose that a quarter per cent. should be paid on an income under two hundred and fifty pounds a year and half per cent. on anything above that amount. I would go further and say one per cent. on a thousand pounds or over. I don't think that is an unreasonable demand to make from people sincerely anxious for a fundamental change in the economic basis of society, and I certainly think it would raise our average subscription from the half guinea at which it, roughly speaking, stands at present, to considerably over a pound. We ought to have this matter clearly settled before the society really begins to grow. The old system of voluntary assessments is really just another lingering trace of the drawing-room days, in which so-and-so would go to so-and-so and say, we're short this time again, and then ask someone to make it up.

Very well; so soon as you have got your tracts under way, your war chest filled, and the propaganda beginning, you will have to get into more convenient, more extensive, more attractive offices, you will have to have a thorough revision of your secretarial department, better accommodation for your ordinary meetings, and so on. Our offices at present are singularly unattractive; they give the new member no pride of proprietorship, to my eye they are aggressively, untidily, dingily "practical"—in the worst sense of the word. They miss entirely a social element we ought to have if we are to carry on a large movement. The young people we want to help us ought to come to our offices to talk, to be stimulated, to be helped, to be given work. They don't get anything of the sort. Our rooms ought to suggest a new and more pleasant way of living, they ought to be light and beautiful and hopeful, instead of being a dismal basement lit through a grating. The intruder ought to be dexterously handled—made the most of. Our secretary will probably say he has too much to do already and so on, that it isn't his speciality to convert the young and pacify bores. He's quite justified in that. So we must get in a second secretary for that side of the business.

When first I drafted this plan I felt a twinge of compunction or so at the thought of how dreadfully all this will bother Mr. Pease. But I felt too that he had to be bothered; our cause was of more account even than that, and I know now much more clearly than I did how ready he is to face such botheration for the sake of our common ends. Of course, if we do anything at all, we shall have to pile assistance upon Mr. Pease from the very beginning—helpers,

colleagues. How are we going to get them in the first instance? Perhaps in the beginning we may have to do with the services of volunteers, but for the regular persistent work which this project will involve, if it is not to shrivel and fade, we must have the whole time of specializing workers; we must have a large and increasingly numerous paid staff. I have very clearly in my eye the sort of helpers we want. We want energetic young men and young women whose ambition it is to push themselves into journalism, into political journalism, into affairs. That's the stuff we must look to. I believe if we were to offer mere maintenance allowances of seventy pounds to eighty pounds a year, we should get some extraordinarily good material. I believe there are, so far as our wants go, no end of young university men, of ambitious clerks, of board school teachers, of students, who would leap at such an opportunity, take the risks of it. I may be wrong, but that is my impression.

I suggest, therefore, that so soon as our propaganda gets under way, we should make a direct appeal to our younger members to come in as volunteer helpers and show their quality, and directly our finances permitted it, begin a salary for first one and then another of these. As I have said, I believe it is possible that we may get an average subscription from our members of about a pound a member. At that rate we should be able to run four or five new salaried propaganda secretaries for every thousand members.

So far the Fabian Society has never touched the figure of one thousand members, but unless I am the most unsubstantial of dreamers, such a propaganda as I am putting before you now, ought to carry our numbers up towards ten thousand within a year or so of its commencement. Long before that figure is reached, some process of decentralization must begin. The organization of local meetings must commence in each district as its population of Fabians thickens. I am disposed to attach great importance to the development of local and subordinate nuclei from the very beginning of the new movement. That brings me back to another and very difficult problem, which the Fabian has never, I think, really attempted to solve; and that is, the incorporation of the green members, the young members, the inexperienced members, in the society's discussions. There is not only no attempt to get them in, but it seems to me there is even something like a disinclination to welcome them when they do get up. I am enormously impressed by the difficulty a new and untried member must encounter in speaking at these central meetings. The thought of that carries me back to the days when I used to hesitate, and long to bear my witness, in Morris's little meetings at Kelmescott House. It was much less formidable at that place, but I funk'd it always, and went silently away. Now here, about this platform, you have this sort of family pew of old and tested Fabians; we include some admirable debaters, and one or two of the most interesting and most entertaining speakers in the world. Well, the young member, who is after all the more important person here, sits in the background, keeps in the background—is never lured out of it, feels he isn't wanted out of it.

Nobody looks in his direction ; your audience is looking for Webb, is looking for Shaw, it wants Bland, or Macrosty, or Pease, it is inclined to be just a little impatient, perhaps, with an inexperienced new speaker ; and so your new member comes, longing to take a part, and he really gets a most interesting display ; and he goes away with a sense that he hasn't taken a part, that he isn't in it, that he isn't doing anything, that there is nothing he can do, and at last he drifts away. That, from the point of view of socialistic progress, is a grave loss. It is our essential failure, that failure. And if that is true of our members, still more is it true of our visitors. I wonder how many thousands of people have drifted through our meetings, have felt drawn to socialism, interested in socialism, actually converted to socialism, who might with a better constructed net, have been caught and retained in its service. Even so obvious an opportunity as the talk that goes on after a meeting is made nothing of. I have noticed after a paper is read here, people, new people, shy visitors, the people we want to get in, display a tendency to push up and talk. What do we do to encourage them ? Usually we start turning out the lights.

I believe, too, that small subordinate local meetings, where inexperienced speakers can find courage for discussion, little semi-social gatherings in private houses, in students' rooms, would be of enormous help in intercepting this leakage of possible socialists. I believe it would not pass the wit of man to organize and keep alive and healthy a great network of such local nuclei centring upon your office. I would like to see a students' Fabian Society branch in every college of the London University, and in these subordinate centres discussion would arise, papers would germinate, and come up prepared and tested to the central meetings here. All this is the most possible thing in the world given secretarial efficiency ; all of it becomes hopeless, if things are to remain as they are in your central office. And to that I return as the vital and inevitable condition of any vigorous new development.

I will not go at any length into the question of the possibility of organizing the more religious aspect of socialistic propaganda—because, you know, socialism is religious, is to many people at any rate a sufficient religion ; but I can see a very clear possibility of Sunday afternoon gatherings, for example, in which the emotional spirit of our propaganda should be kept alive and intensified. I believe that among other possibilities the propaganda I am proposing to would from the first fall into a sort of working alliance with a number of the ethical societies that are scattered about London. . . .

Finally, I will mention only in the most cursory way that it seems to me if we are not able to reconstruct the Fabian with a view to propaganda, then the alternative will be to set up a sort of propaganda wing, a daughter society, to do this work that we decline. None of us, I think, want a rival society, anyhow. . . .

Mr. Wells then proceeded to outline the committee he suggested should develop the scheme he had in this broad manner sketched.