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Social criticism and comment in the novels of Howard Spring

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SOCIAL CRITICISM AND COMMENT IN THE NOVELS OF HOWARD SPRING

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INTRODUCTION

Howard Spring,[1] an English newspaperman turned novelist, can, perhaps, best be described as a traditionalist. He lived and wrote in the twentieth century, was always sensitive to changes in popular attitudes, but remained constant to his own convictions. His work is still worth reading for his insight into the values he considered basic to a full, complete, and rewarding life.

Spring, born of poor parents in Cardiff, Wales, on February 10, 1889, through years of hard work, gained respect both as a reporter and as an author. He and his two brothers and four sisters grew up under the worst of slum conditions. All had to find jobs at an early age, for their father only occasionally found employment as a gardener; their mother obtained what scrubbing and laundry work she could. Spring, in his youth, worked as a butcher's boy, a greengrocer's boy, and finally at age thirteen found a job as a messenger boy for the South Wales Daily News.[2] His work for the News consisted of writing down reports phoned

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[1] His full name was Robert Howard Spring. Twentieth Century Authors (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1942), p. 1323.

[2] Marion Howard Spring, Howard (London: Collins, 1967), pp. 20-26.

in from throughout South Wales. Later, in addition, he began reporting in the evenings.[3]

In several respects, Spring's early life differed from that of the usual slum child. His family enjoyed close familial ties and allowed nothing to separate one member from another. Nothing challenged parental authority, and the children learned self-sufficiency and reliance from their parents' example. These qualities are strongly apparent throughout Spring's life and in all of his novels.

From childhood, fiction, which Spring called "a master-passion of my mind," attracted him.[4] His father, though otherwise uncommunicative, insisted that his children read literary works only. The family favored Dickens and often read his works aloud. Spring, in an autobiographical sketch, described an evening of solitary reading. Returning to his room, he sat before a picture of his literary idol, taken from Forster's Life of Dickens, and read under the image.[5] While Dickens was the favorite author, Spring also admired Defoe, Bunyan, and Swift. He briefly expressed the depth of his feelings when he wrote, "I worshipped the men who wrote these books and felt that if any men on earth were worthy of emulation it was these."[6]

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[3]Howard Spring, And Another Thing . . . (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1946), p. 206. Hereafter cited as Spring, And Another.

[4]Ibid., p. 118. [5]Ibid., p. 3. [6]Ibid., p. 119.

Other than the education received from such works, Spring and his brothers and sisters attended a board school until the age of twelve. Spring's thirst for knowledge led him to pursue his formal education by attending classes at a nearby Technical School. These classes enabled him to obtain a degree from London University.[7]

While his secular education served him well, according to Spring, he received no religious education at home or at school. However, his parents regularly sent the children to a Plymouth Brethren meetinghouse nearby, not for religious reasons but in order to enjoy an afternoon alone. The Brethren imparted the idea to their young listener that the less attractive a thing, the more value it had, and anything that brought joy was sinful.[8] The only other religious body with which the boy associated was the Salvation Army. It made little impression on him except as a source of entertainment on a Saturday night when the band played valiantly outside the local tavern, withstanding the taunts of the drunks.[9]

In his early teens, Spring, on his own initiative, began attending a Wesleyan chapel where he often paid more attention to the hymns and organ music than to the sermon.[10]

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[7] Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1323.

[8] Spring, And Another, pp. 105-6.

[9] Ibid., p. 108.

[10] Ibid., p. 153.

He read widely of theological works though but constantly wondered how Wesley's dull sermons ever moved anyone. Faithfully, he participated in mid-week class meetings at the chapel. The minister there wanted Spring to enter the ministry, but because Spring's wages were needed at home, he could not afford, even with a scholarship, to undertake the necessary training. Despite the fact that he never seriously considered becoming a minister, he did do local preaching for four years. The Brethren and Wesleyan influences survived, giving him a taint of unenlightened Puritanism mixed with his own penchant for beauty. Much later in life, he said that in despondent moods he still thought of himself as a preacher[11] and that he would "always be a Greek with a strong dash of the literally God-fearing Jew."[12]

Exposure to the Plymouth Brethren doctrine almost kept him from two of his greatest loves—art and the theater. When the Brethren preached that it was a sin to possess a picture or patronize a music hall, he obeyed lest his soul be placed in jeopardy. But the boy's growing mind began to question, and Spring started attending art shows and the local music hall and loving both, though he had no formal training in their aesthetic values.[13]

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[11] Ibid., pp. 203-6. [12] Ibid., p. 130.

[13] Ibid., pp. 107, 109-10.

The first stage of Spring's life came to an end in 1911 when the older of Spring's two brothers died, putting Spring in the position of having to support his family. A job as a reporter for the Bradford Yorkshire Observer offered opportunity and more money and ultimately determined Spring's career. He left home for the first time.[14]

Spring considered the three and one half years spent in Bradford his equivalent of a university education. He was on his own for the first time and in the company of congenial young men. The work was easy, gave him valuable experience, and a rewarding kind of life.[15] Then in early 1915, Spring applied for and obtained a job on the staff of the Manchester Guardian.[16]

In late 1915, the army called him to active duty sending him to northern France as a clerk with General Headquarters Intelligence Service. Though unspectacular, his service was reliable enough to earn him the Meritorious Service Medal.[17]

The Guardian fulfilled its promise to him and rehired him on his return from the war. At this time, he met and married Marion Ursula Pye.[18] After a search of several

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[14] Ibid., p. 207.

[15] Howard Spring, In The Meantime (London: Constable, 1946), pp. 38-9. Hereafter cited as Spring, Meantime.

[16] Ibid., p. 88.

[17] Ibid., pp. 109-10.

[18] Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1323.

weeks, they found a house in Didsbury, a suburb of Manchester, where they lived eleven years before moving to London. Two children, both boys, blessed the marriage.[19]

In describing his life, Spring said that luck, mostly, had been instrumental in shaping it. He originally lived this way because he believed that the poor must trust to luck to see them through; moreover, since it never failed him, he had no reason to distrust his luck.[20] It was happenstance that brought the job on the Observer to his attention just when he had outgrown his position on the News. Later, in a different matter, when he had become engaged to marry a young lady who did not suit him, he met Marion Pye when he and she were on short business trips to London. In a third instance, a friend casually mentioned that the Guardian needed a reporter. Spring applied on a whim, and the editor hired him.

Though he had applied on the spur of the moment, Spring took pride in his work at the Guardian, which he called "the most easy-going newspaper in the world."[21] It was also, he said the only paper that read well two days late.[22]

Part of Spring's work for the Guardian consisted of writing reviews of the Manchester theater. In an attempt

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[19]Spring, Meantime, pp. 149-52. [20]Ibid., pp. 31-2.
[21]Ibid., p. 26. [22]Ibid., p. 101.

to impress his readers, he at first wrote reviews that were a bit harsh. As the acts and the people in them became familiar to him, his job became a joy.[23] The paper also assigned him to cover the Irish troubles after World War I.[24]

Spring's final series of articles for the Guardian were concerned with the election of 1931 which brought in the "National" Government and, in his opinion, ended the Labour Party for the time being. This series gained him national prominence and praise in both the United States and in Europe. It also brought him the offer of a position with the Evening Standard published in London.[25] Spring accepted the offer though it meant leaving Manchester which he had come "to know and love . . . as [he had] . . . known and loved no other city."[26]

Thus, in 1931, when he was forty-two years old, Spring moved to London. The Standard had hired him as a descriptive writer, but he himself doubted that he could fulfill the requirements of such a job. By chance, he happened to write a book review that the owner of the Standard, Lord Beaverbrook, liked. As a result, Spring became their book reviewer, and later, after the Standard initiated a book of the month policy, Spring directed that project.[27]

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[23] Spring, And Another, pp. 113-4.

[24] New York Times, May 4, 1965, p. 42.

[25] Spring, Meantime, p. 102.

[26] Ibid., p. 89; see also pp. 154-6. [27] Ibid., p. 159.

In his work as reporter and book reviewer, Spring found his cohorts honest and compatible. Reporters were not cutthroat; they sometimes even shared stories.[28] As a reviewer, he seldom received unfair criticism and only once the offer of a bribe.[29]

Considering that from an early age Spring revered fiction writers and that his life's work was writing in some form, his decision at this time to try his skill at writing novels surprised no one. He already had published some boyhood short stories, some World War I poetry, and a novel for children. In his first novel for adults, Shabby Tiger, Spring began what remained his writing pattern. He created a situation—a man, a woman, and a problem—and then let the action come as it might. In later works such as My Son, My Son, he usually had an end in view but no means.[30] But, he said "there is no one in any book I have written, who is 'taken from life.'"[31] He felt that any competent author could find enough usable material in the world, that an author should not limit himself by delineating specific persons.

Just prior to the coming of World War II, Spring left the Standard after a total of almost forty years of newspaper work. His work had encompassed all areas, from general office boy to reporter, sub-editor to book reviewer.

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[28] Ibid., p. 88.
[29] Ibid., p. 161.
[30] Ibid., pp. 25-6.
[31] Ibid., p. 23.

only when he had three novels to his credit, one a best seller, did he retire. He wished to find a spot where he could live and enjoy the countryside in a situation where local traditions persisted; and the chrome, noise, and stink of progess had not penetrated, a location where he could be in the midst of his collection of paintings, his pieces of modern pottery, and his cats, a place where he could write. He found his ideal location near Falmouth, Cornwall; there he spent the rest of his life.

However, the events of the next few years played havoc with his desire to write. In In The Meantime, an autobiographical sketch written in 1941, he complained that he had not been able to begin writing a new novel. Since completion of Fame Is The Spur in January 1940, he had been too depressed by the war to write.[32]

Five years later, he wrote And Another Thing . . ., a book of reminiscences that presented much of his personal philosophy. Herein he recalled how after World War I his few religious beliefs had vanished, leaving him an agnostic. The basis of the teachings of Jesus became meaningless; however, he did not concern himself with the loss. Because he had a lack of certain knowledge in regard to religious beliefs, he substituted a vague trust that good would triumph over evil, perhaps.[33] He explained:

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[32]Ibid., p. 24.

[33]Spring, And Another, p. 208.

> I could have ventured no farther than that at any time between the two wars, and what enabled me to go farther was a sudden realisation that the central teaching of Jesus amounted to no more than this: That God is love, and that the affairs of men will never get out of their sorry tangle till they see and acknowledge this and live in the brotherhood which it implies. Of course, I had heard this all my life, but now for the first time I realised it.
>
> The times were propitious for re-examination of one's values. Twice within my lifetime the world had been given to the physical waste and chaos of war and to its moral squalor. It would have been easy to take the common view that "it's all the Germans' fault", and to rest in the happy assurance that once the Germans had been rendered impotent we could take up again the nineteenth-century Liberal dream of steady automatic progress. But I could not do this: I could not believe that this was true. Too much was wrong that had nothing to do with Germany and the Germans. The cheapness and faithlessness of our national life between the wars, the decay of our industries, the hunger of our people, the gross materialism of such ambition as was anywhere to be discerned: all these things were there up to the moment of the war's outbreak, and Germany had nothing to do with them. Whether the war had come or not, a reckoning of some sort would have to come; and as for the war itself, it was this shiftless and unimaginative attitude that delivered us all but naked into the hands of our enemies. . . .
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> No; the war had blown things sky-high; but many of them were rotting things, and it seemed to me that it was behind and beyond the war, not in it, that we must look for the source of putrescence. One of the damnable things about war is that it takes too many men's minds off this essential research; and when it is over they are—and this is not to be wondered at—too exhausted for the enterprise.[34]

This, then, is the sum of the man, Howard Spring: slum child, devotee of fiction, newspaper reporter, contemporary novelist, lover of art and theater, and finally a man deeply religious and much concerned with the present

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[34] Ibid., pp. 208-10.

and future of his homeland. All his social criticism and comment show the influence of these characteristics, but the reader is especially aware of his love for humanity and his desire to see England a healthy nation once more.

Spring lived his last years quietly by the sea and wrote eleven more novels. He died May 3, 1965, at his home.

CHAPTER I

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HOWARD SPRING

The social criticism and comments found in the novels of Howard Spring came from more than random ideas that happened, by chance, to enter the author's mind. He had extremely strong convictions in regard to certain subjects. Through his writing, he tried to delineate some problems of life in twentieth century England and discuss the relevance of traditional absolutes to these problems.

This pattern was not as apparent in Spring's first novels as it was in those written after World War II; indeed, the war seemed to have had a profound effect upon him. To support this hypothesis, one has three autobiographical sketches of Spring's, written in 1939, 1941, and 1945. As a result of the critical reading of all of Spring's novels, it is possible to form a clear idea of what the author was attempting to say. Reading the autobiographical sketches adds color to the picture and deepens one's respect for the author as an individual.

In the first of these, Heaven Lies About Us, Spring reminisced about his life from his childhood in Cardiff until he took his first job on a newspaper. It is a charming book but contains little material of a profound nature.

The second, In The Meantime, heralded a change in Spring. He traced his life from 1911, which marked the beginning of his work for the Yorkshire Observer, through the publication of Fame Is The Spur in 1940. He preserved the same informal format, but this time he occasionally expounded upon his opinions of diverse subjects, such as book reviewers, traditional customs, and modern poetry. He also initiated his major criticism of government, business, and modern religion. And Another Thing . . . is an apt title for the third of these sketches, for Spring gently obtained the reader's attention by writing about balmy summer evenings on the Cornish coast and from that point progressed to a fully-developed argument for world peace. Spring's philosophy appears here in its mature form. All his haphazard thoughts on various subjects became synthesized into one logical, cohesive formula. It was this formula that made its appearance in Spring's post-war novels.

Generally speaking, Spring's areas of interest primarily concerned four categories: war, religion, government, and business. As can be expected, there was much overlapping. He often began one subject and let it lead him to something else; then he returned to the original topic and followed it to a third subject. For instance, he might begin by writing about an event in the war which could lead to a discussion of a particular moral question which involved aspects of religion. The cycle would be

completed by applying the moral outlook, gained from resolving the religious question, to government responsibility and business practices.

In one sense, Spring also maintained a tradition of Guardian reporters by being interested in social problems. William T. Stead, associated with the Guardian before World War I, had been interested in reforms of all kinds and in the work of the Hague Peace Conferences where he was an observer.[1] L. T. Hobhouse, reporter for the Guardian, left Oxford for Manchester because of his interest in the labor movement. His expositions on the lack of reason in the average man ended only when he went down on the ill-fated Titanic in 1912.[2]

One might also wonder, quite naturally, if G. B. Shaw influenced Spring to any degree. Spring himself answered that question by referring to Shaw's statements in Everybody's Political What's What and exposing the inconsistencies between what Shaw said he believed and the way he lived. Spring gave the example of Shaw's condemnation of capitalism while living on profits from his investments. Spring maintained that if one believed something enough to advocate it as a way of life, then one should be willing to live according to that belief; that being the case, he

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[1] Barbara W. Tuchman, The Proud Tower, A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), pp. 245-8.

[2] Ibid., p. 384.

disapproved of living on interest from investments and existed solely on what he had earned and fully endorsed this way of life for others.[3]

Marcus Aurelius was one man whose writings had a positive effect upon Spring. In later life, Spring began each day with a reading from the Meditations. Thus, not the rush of modern materialistic life but a reminder of the beauty of the world around him started the morning, leaving him better able to translate the will of God into the work of man.[4] However, for the most part, Spring's philosophy resulted from his own experiences in life rather than from the influence of any secondary source.

Nevertheless, what a man reads becomes a part of him. As the book reviewer for the Standard, Spring read an enormous number of books on a wide variety of subjects, as indicated by the collection of his reviews in Book Parade. Certain of these subjects and people appeared in Spring's novels. If he never "took from life," he assuredly absorbed bits of information while working on the Standard for use in future novels. For instance, Spring reviewed biographies of D. G. Rossetti, William Morris, and Baudelaire, men who appeared in his novels briefly but several times and

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[3]Spring, And Another, pp. 163-6.

[4]Ibid., p. 211.

with characteristics which had been noted in the reviews.[5]

One of the most awesome experiences of Spring's life, as evidenced by the prominent role it played in his novels, was the ending of the Victorian Age and the beginning of the twentieth century. He elaborated by saying, "World War I was not far away, with its disruptive charge at the very foundations of a way of living. But no one would have imagined this."[6] No one realized that an "end of an age" had been reached. Life was too safe, prosperous, and lovely.

By 1946, his philosophy was complete and singular, for, in a world torn by two total wars, he wanted to preserve the values he remembered as being prevalent in pre-1914 England. Specifically, the formulation of Spring's ideas began under conditions evident in England before World War II. He said that "it /England/ was complacent, false to its own deep instincts of decency, and decadent."[7] He referred to the between-war generation as a "lost generation," for individuality and creative genius had vanished making life drab and colorless.[8] Part of the

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[5]Howard Spring, Book Parade (London: Constable & Co., Ltd., 1938).

[6]Spring, Meantime, p. 213.

[7]Spring, And Another, p. 66.

[8]Spring, Meantime, pp. 139-40.

reason for this general disheartenment was that "many of them [soldiers of World War I] were finding that the splendid civilisation that was to blossom 'after the war' had somehow failed to arriva."[9] People who had expected eternal peace lost their illusions when it did not arrive and ceased to care, creating a situation fraught with danger.[10] To compound the difficulties, the wild post-war speculation soon ran its course, leaving many people poor and bitter.

By 1931, England was in a sorry condition as "the complete collapse of a vast edifice of sham, pretence, humbug and hypocrisy could no longer be concealed even from a people who, throughout thirteen years of 'peace' had shown little disposition to wake up to the facts of life."[11] The people gave Ramsey MacDonald an almost unprecedented carte blanche to remedy matters. But in September 1939, England found out how much that gift had cost her.

In the twenty years after World War I, the government was nothing but a mockery, "bluff and downright dishonesty,"[12] which left the Rhondda Valley in deplorable shape and refused to rectify conditions though coal was badly needed; the shipyards at Jarrow remained idle though modern ships would soon be vital to England's safety. Politicians worried

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[9] Ibid., p. 223.
[10] Ibid., p. 155.
[11] Ibid., p. 140.
[12] Ibid., p. 141.

about going off the gold standard instead of becoming alarmed about lagging industry. Spring remembered that the gold standard meant little to him for "what we saw was too many people off the food standard, and the clothing standard, and the work standard; and nothing being done about it."[13] At this time, he wanted to see Churchill become prime minister, but too few people concerned themselves with the world situation or thought seriously about ousting Chamberlain.[14]

People believed that peace was here to stay so no one spoke of qualities such as eternal vigilance which were necessary to maintain peace. The people, left vulnerable and unguarded, found it was the way of peace that it could quickly disappear, especially when taken for granted. The disruptive forces of the world were ever ready to wreak havoc on those who became complaisant.

All citizens shared the blame if they neglected to work to preserve the peace, but the country's leaders were more at fault since they were the leaders and, as such, were supposed to be more fully aware of pitfalls. Indeed, before 1939, the general populace seemed to have had a better idea than did the government that war was threatening. The government persisted in its same old line while the people tried to wake the nation. It became certain after war

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 164-7.

broke out that several government offices had possessed reports on German activities; indeed, the government had known the facts while the people were only guessing. Perhaps, Spring said, 1939 was not the time for placing blame, but he pleaded that the question not be forgotten after the war.[15]

As the crises mounted, the English realized they would finally have to act and remove the politicians of the thirties. They felt they needed a statesman, not a man of politics, because, according to Spring,

> Politicians are all very well so long as the people is in one of its slack backward moods, not caring much about its direction. But once the people is awake, with its intentions oriented, it has a nobility which demands more than shabby makeshift. A statesman is a man who fits like a glove the mood of the nation in one of its great self-conscious moments, so that he and it have no disparity of end or means, but act as one thing.[16]

Spring stated that inept politicians had filled Cabinet posts that required little talent and had directed men's actions while doing nothing themselves.[17] After spending a lazy career, they retired with a title and a pension. Only the citizens of England could correct this situation even, to the extent of instigating impeachment

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[15] Ibid., p. 164.

[16] Ibid., pp. 206-7. Abraham Lincoln was the best example of this in Spring's opinion though he felt that England was fortunate in having a statesman like Winston Churchill.

[17] Ibid., p. 50.

proceedings to prevent their becoming thralls of a totalitarian, mechanistic government.[18] Rather, men and women applauded Chamberlain for flying to Germany to preserve peace in their time. Spring believed that Chamberlain should have flown farther, sooner.[19]

The war with its rude awakening, aroused England to perceive that she was not decadent. By her stupendous recovery, she realized her potential. Spring explained by saying,

> We had exiled so much that was so splendid. In the meretricious glitter of our lives we had banished into the darkness all those who had spoken words of faith and courage, all those who had seen life as something more than a matter of self-preservation and self-interest. But they were coming back, the great law-givers and liberators; and between us, I thought, we and they will do something yet.[20]

"Do something yet"—but meanwhile there was a job to do, and if people wondered why this war produced no poetry or lovely novels like those written during the first war, it was simply that the spirit was lacking. There was now just a job to do, but the poetry would come, and when it did, it would be bitter and be written by cynical men who

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[18] Ibid., p. 163.

[19] Ibid., p. 50.

[20] Ibid., p. 218. Lytton Strachey was typical of the pre-war mood. His attitude stifled all emotion, discredited English heroes, and made one hold the courageous and the hard workers in contempt. For this, the English revered him. Ibid., pp. 163-4.

saw only wasted lives in a war that never should have happened.[21] Nor should such men be silenced for they knew much that needed to be said.

The Germans existed in a low state of moral development, in Spring's opinion, because they allowed no one to oppose the official voice and used pain and fear to change men's minds.[22] Individuality of thought which was sacred in England inspired Spring to say, "It is my present purpose to assert that what we are fighting for has little meaning if a man is not at liberty to hold his opinions with no interference from the rest of us."[23]

As the war progressed, the problem of the function of the individual in the growing totalitarian, welfare state occupied Spring's mind increasingly. As the reader progressed from the ideas of In The Meantime to the position assumed in And Another Thing . . ., Spring's perplexity with the problem of the modern state became apparent; the author concerned himself less with specific cases and became more of a philosopher. The base from which he started was the question of the role of the individual in time of war. In the case of the conscientious objector or pacifist, Spring asked, did such a person shirk his duty to his country by not fighting, or could he serve just as well as a

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[21]Ibid., pp. 105-7.

[22]Spring, And Another, p. 53.

[23]Spring, Meantime, p. 143.

farmer or industrial worker? Spring concluded that such a man could be of value in a civilian occupation and, more importantly, stated that tolerance of diversity should be nurtured in England, since it was being stamped out on the continent.[24]

Spring philosophized that during the present time, man did not live in a Christian democracy though he might say that he did, for he did not live according to the teachings of Christ which were to love God and all men. Whereas Christianity had had the sanction of western states and of their citizens for nearly two thousand years, war and worse war in the twentieth century had demonstrated how little progress man had made in that two thousand years. Fighting a second world war seemed to prove that peace was as remote as ever.[25]

Spring believed the Church had contributed to this situation, for in time of war, it had usually followed popular opinion and blessed the departing soldier instead of denouncing all who fought. True, it would be almost self-destructive for the Church to condemn all acts of war, but the true Christian, being a follower of the teachings of Jesus, would quickly reveal himself by virtue of his

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[24]Ibid., p. 141.

[25]Spring, And Another, pp. 30, 32, 35.

pacifism.[26] Spring reconciled his belief in pacifism as being the proper course for a Christian to follow with the conditions of war by concluding that whereas a true Christian should not kill to right a wrong, in the situation extant in 1939, man in his imperfection would react. The fault of the pacifist was that he usually expected great victories would be achieved through his pacifism. Rather, he must accept the results of non-resistance and content himself with a moral victory.[27]

> Though he [the pacifist] is, in my opinion, in the right on the long view, he is, as a rule, far from the being Jesus would have considered a good disciple. For one thing, he is too often merely a negative objector to the deeds of others, not a constructive worker for the world's good. To ask permission to be relieved of the consequences of men's follies is not the finest contribution to human advancement, and I sometimes wonder how many pacifists would say "Put up the sword" if they realised that the upshot of this would be their own immediate and painful death.[28]

These rare individuals who are the true Christians carry the light of Christianity in the world protected by a "buffer state of fighting men."[29] It was these same individuals who create and who make life beautiful for others,[30] for the Church forsaking the cause of pacifism had taken the self-righteous attitude of attempting to correct others' faults instead of fostering the establishment of an example which would overcome or conquer evil.[31]

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[26] Ibid., pp. 33, 41, 44. [27] Ibid., pp. 53-5.

[28] Ibid., p. 56. [29] Ibid., p. 57. [30] Ibid., p. 65.

[31] Ibid., p. 123.

If man found it difficult to follow the teachings of Jesus in the modern state, he should never stop trying, for improvement could come only through individual effort, provided that that effort was not overcome by self-interest. But when war was declared, most men had little choice but to join because of the very fact of their existing in a world of men.[32]

If the pacifist was the true follower of Jesus and if man had no option but to fight in the event of war, then, Spring queried, what was the role of the Church? If the Church was to endure and not degenerate into a cipher, then it must side with the pacifist and reject any conduct contrary to the teachings of Jesus. There was no other place, no active body, to which the pacifist might appeal for help. In order to lead these people effectively, the Church must be positive, inspired, and cease to be connected with the state.[33]

Too, all churches would have to unite in this effort (but not necessarily in form) and in their pursuits to lead the pacifists, not in the negative act of condemning the war, but in active combat against the causes and conditions of war. Otherwise, the Church must accept the consequences of its "own apathy and acquiescence."[34]

The Church, Spring firmly stated, should be "a living body, tactile to the good life at all points. This

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[32] Ibid., pp. 77-8. [33] Ibid., pp. 80-1. [34] Ibid., p. 82.

would be the sufficient sanction for its final stand."[35] Then the Church could be a rallying point for pacifist sympathy in all countries instead of limiting itself to just one geographical area. Thus, pacifism, ceasing to be an oddity, would become a working part of society. Such a commitment and stand would have the same essential value as the teachings of Jesus themselves.[36]

Spring bemoaned the fact that remedies for the world's ailments were cheap and plentiful owing to their being frequently proposed by socialists and politicians. Nevertheless, he suggested what he knew had a one-in-a-million chance. Basically, the united churches would have to make the teachings of Jesus the basis of all conduct, from man to city to state, and thus fight incipient war. This procedure, usually labeled humanitarianism, was often scoffed at though it had been put into practice more often than Christianity.[37] Actually, while being better in purpose, religion did not have as many tangible accomplishments as humanitarianism to its credit,[38] for in spite of having little assistance from religion, humanitarianism had already accomplished seeming miracles--abolition of slavery, amelioration of working conditions.[39] Spring believed that men must link religion and humanitarianism, faith and works,

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[35] Ibid., p. 83. [36] Ibid., pp. 83-4. [37] Ibid., pp. 87-8.
[38] Ibid., pp. 166-70. [39] Ibid., pp. 166-70.

"seed and soil, grist and mill"[39A] because the initiative rested with the religious person who took action on the basis of his convictions rather than with the man who waited for others to progress to his level.

Taking Spring's suggested stand against war would result in immediate loss of both members and money for the Church, such loss to double in wartime. However, after the promises of peace consequent on a declaration of victory had proved hollow, the Church would regain twice what it had lost. The process would repeat with each war, each time with a significant advance being made until the Church had become a truly vital force. This was the only chance for peace on earth, and only the Church was equipped to organize the campaign. Indeed, the Church could survive only if it worked for peace because, while it was based on peace, it existed in a State which was based on war.[40]

Such a project as Spring proposed was quite remote; he realized it would never actually be put into practice. Moreover, the State, which was the antithesis of individualism, would provide serious opposition to a Church that refused to accept a passive role in society. Free opinion, molded by the State and therefore opposed to the Church, would bring about the Church's ruin. But what a phoenix might rise from the destruction, for those persons who had

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[39A]Ibid., pp. 172-3. [40]Ibid., pp. 89-90.

worked for peace in the past would continue unflagging in their efforts.[41]

In the late thirties, Spring turned to the Bible, a book which he said contained all the answers to man's questions though it was read by few. The idea of the love of God and of his fellow man became for Spring a reality and ceased to be the usual familiar dogma of Christianity. The idea was transformed into knowledge through observation, seeing in practice on an individual basis the cause and effect of love leading to peace.[42] As it was, politics was based on expediency, business valued the profit motive, and nations were concerned with trade and balanced budgets--all material interests. No where, nationally or internationally, were ideologies at all connected with love. Rather fear was the motive power in the world. As the opposite of love, it was worse than hate, for it was meaner and led to greed so that one grabbed at the benefits of life instead of losing one's life for Jesus' sake.[43]

In war, as it seldom was in peace, a nation would care for the unfortunate, but this otherwise Christian giving was negated by base motives such as an effort to stop the spread of disease. The value of a deed rested on its motive, and Spring referred to I Corinthians, Chapter 13. In this vein, he speculated on the condition of the world

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[41]Ibid., pp. 90-2, 94-5. [42]Ibid., pp. 212-3.

[43]Ibid., pp. 213-5.

if the richer nations cared for the less fortunate with love rather than the prevention of disease as a motive. The possibilities tantalized his imagination.[44]

Spring said that the sole product of international relations from 1914 to 1939 was disharmony. If there was disharmony, then logically there must be harmony. Harmony, he continued, must be the rightful but lost condition of the world, and love and harmony were synonymous. "Since, then, we admit that harmony is the principle of the universe, we admit that love is the principle of the universe, and thus we are able to accept the teachings of Jesus that God is love."[45] By this means came Spring's "re-discovery, or more truly the discovery, of God."[46] "No," he said, "there

> was nothing but a calm assurance that these few things are true: that as disaster follows upon disharmony in the world, one may assume that the world's principle is harmony; that love and harmony are one; that Jesus was therefore teaching the central truth of life when he told us that the principle of the universe is love. Since no principle can be violated without chaos, it follows that men will never know peace, love, harmony, till the love of God the father is worked out here on earth in the shape of love of the brethren.[47]

As he was writing, Spring knew all too well what things evil brought into the world as he saw life and beauty being destroyed. More of the same havoc was the only promise the immediate future held. Therefore, he reasoned, love as the opposite of evil would lead to the good in life, love

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[44] Ibid., pp. 215-6.
[45] Ibid., p. 217.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., p. 218.

that was not give-and-take which equals expediency but love as unquestioned giving without reckoning the price.[48] The foremost aim of each man should be fulfilling his true worth leading him to the Kingdom of God.

Brotherhood called for an end to war, not just the abandonment of one weapon, and disarmament would come through love and true brotherhood rather than through a desire to be rid of a potential threat. The politician might dislike certain aspects of war but would never work to create a world without war so no progress would be made through his efforts or his expedient peace treaties.[49] For him, war was a valuable tool to use in controlling the citizens of the State.[50]

Spring, writing during World War II, pointed out that an entire new generation was growing up knowing nothing but war. The example of total destruction affected their developing minds bringing about a new phenomenon—juvenile delinquency. They knew how to destroy, not how to work creatively.[51]

The idea of a war to end war was the only justifiable reason for fighting. According to Spring, that cause was absent during World War II. No one could guarantee that there would not be a third world war; therefore, it was

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[48] Ibid., pp. 227-8.
[49] Ibid., pp. 178, 235.
[50] Ibid., p. 248.
[51] Ibid., p. 251.

necessary for the job to be completed now, thus eliminating future wars. He shared with other men the desire to stand by his countrymen in a period of crisis. He felt this impulse was the greatest challenge a pacifist must meet, for the pacifist who loved all men equally would be called a traitor by his misunderstanding fellow citizens. Spring believed each man must live according to his personal philosophy. Preaching was not enough; one must act.[52]

Many men said that the way to a better world was to have a more equal distribution of the world's material goods. Perhaps there was some merit in this idea, but there was no guarantee of peace in it. Moral maturity could still be remote and war endemic in a society with a high standard of living.[53]

Though man might not want war, he was not exerting himself to spread the spirit of love and thereby promote an opposite way of life. As it was, man preached "self-forgetfulness" while he practiced "self-indulgence."[54] What in fact did man believe if his actions did not suit his words? Spring, therefore, answered his own question by quoting the Bible: "'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' It is the key word that the world is seeking, the

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[52]Ibid., pp. 251, 253-4. [53]Ibid., p. 254.

[54]Ibid., p. 257.

identification of those things that belong unto our peace."[55]

Material forces, even atomic power, would accomplish nothing on this earth. But man turned to them while ignoring the more fundamental force of love. From Cain to Hiroshima, Spring said, man had made no moral progress. Man knew this and did nothing; therefore, he was condemned by his own inaction.[56] Spring continued that,

> The scientific pluto-democracy, which I find the best description of the world today, is not noticeably increasing our ration of love; but, also, it can do nothing—literally nothing—to separate us from our love and from our God. If I did not believe this, I should fear the world I live in, and I do not see how to any man who had not access to God's love, the world of today and tomorrow can be anything but a nightmare.[57]

Instead of the Kingdom of God, Spring saw the nightmare of totalitarian, mechanistic government gaining in strength. The State, a word synonymous with power, was a mystical body that could be the soul and spirit of a nation, that gave nothing but might require all that a man possessed unto his very life; this was the idea of the State. In actuality, it was centered around men, was based on material goods, and was concerned primarily with self-preservation.[58]

By the end of World War II then, Spring was a changed man. He had retired from his life's work of newspaper

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[55] Ibid., pp. 257-8.
[56] Ibid., p. 264.
[57] Ibid., p. 265.
[58] Ibid., pp. 72-4.

reporting to become a full-time novelist. After being a city man for fifty years, he moved to a home in the country. These changes were somewhat superficial; the more fundamental changes were in Spring's outspoken views on war, government, business, and religion. Here he pleaded for the right of the individual to dissent, to make his own way in the world. He urged more responsibility for the Church and for the private citizen. Lastly, in a world where the very words were heresy, he reminded men of sacred values, tradition, and the importance of loving God and one's fellow man.

CHAPTER II

HOWARD SPRING'S PHILOSOPHY IN HIS NOVELS

MAJOR SUBJECTS--WAR

The preceding chapter dealt with the deepest convictions of Howard Spring, the man. For Howard Spring, the novelist, these ideas naturally formed an important part of his books. His strong characters valued the things the author cherished and spoke against what the author opposed. Correspondingly, the weak characters chose careers as politicians or businessmen or were men of bigoted religious views.

While it is not the purpose herein to present a synopsis of each novel, perhaps a brief exploration of typical characters presented in each story will be helpful as a means to understanding the type of criticism Spring made. Unlike some male authors, Spring five times used a woman as his main character. Nevertheless, the same personality traits are found whether the character was man or woman. Basically, each of these characters was well, but informally, educated and had a deep appreciation of some form of art. A couple of them were writers, two

were artists, one an actress.[1] A type of supporting character often used by Spring was the unmarried elderly scholar or governess who tutored and was a major benefactor of the young hero.[2] There was also the young man of upper class background who became disillusioned, and sometimes dissipated, in the years after World War I when his ideals failed to fit the world in which he lived.[3]

Wars found a place in all of Spring's novels in one form or another. Because some of the novels began in the late Victorian era, the Boer War received some, but not much, attention. Generally, his references to the Colonial conflict were used to reflect his sentiments on English greed and a tendency to seek political justification. The Boer War, he continued, was fought for wealth in the form of diamonds and gold. No one was interested in farms but with a fortune at stake, one could easily find causes for

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[1]Howard Spring, I Met A Lady (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961); Howard Spring, My Son, My Son! (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), Hereafter cited as Spring, My Son; Howard Spring, Rachel Rosing (New York: Hillman-Curl, Inc., 1936); Howard Spring, Shabby Tiger (New York: Covici Friede, 1935); Howard Spring, There is No Armour (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), Hereafter cited as Spring, Armour.

[2]Howard Spring, The Houses In Between (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), Hereafter cited as Spring, Houses; Howard Spring, Time and the Hour (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), Hereafter cited as Spring, Time.

[3]Spring, I Met A Lady.

beginning a war.[4] An eminent businessman said, "I don't understand these so-called statesmen. Trouble—what a word to use about a pack of Boer farmers! One doesn't allow people like that to cause trouble. One just wipes them out, and takes over."[5] However, for the sake of publication, the politician must be able to justify his course of action and make his cause seem sacred. In general, Spring's characters had no interest in the war and saw little reason to question stated government policy. After all, the war was a long way from England.[6]

In The Houses In Between, Spring made use of the most elaborate literary device to be found in any of his novels. The device was the conceit or extended metaphor, and the subject was the illusory properties of peace. Most people think of the reign of Victoria as being an age of progress and peace, but using the analogy of the Crystal Palace, Spring demonstrated that this was not so. The Palace was to be a palace of peace where all nations could congregate in harmony. That was one of the first hopes to be shattered since no foreigners attended the grand opening. As a representative symbol, the Palace showed "all the good

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[4]Spring, My Son, p. 141.

[5]Spring, Houses, p. 388.

[6]Howard Spring, All The Day Long (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 128. Hereafter cited as Spring, All The Day.

intentions, all the terrible inability to do what ought to be done."[7] A song current at the time went, "You could see the Crystal Palace if it wasn't for the houses in between."[8] Always the material concern was between the viewer and the vision. Finally, in 1938 when air raid protection trenches were constructed in Hyde Park, the diggers unearthed fragments of the broken glass which the author used to suggest the once more destroyed hopes for peace.

The Victorian era of peace was illusory; the troubles were always there: in the Crimea, in the Indian mutiny, in Africa, in China, in Egypt. Iron ships, machine guns, explosive shells were all perfected by peace-loving men during these years, but it was the troubles and the modern war machines that he felt England celebrated in the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, "And this was the long Victorian afternoon and golden evening."[9] The only change from then to World War I was that the troubles were a little closer to home, and there was more chance of the entire world being engulfed in the conflict rather than its being localised in a section of a single continent.[10] The Crystal Palace held implicit in its existence a promise that the pre-World War I world with all of its glitter, prosperity, and progress would continue to expand, but that promise proved to be as hollow as the Palace itself.[11]

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[7]Spring, Houses, p. 4. [8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid., p. 395. [10]Ibid. [11]Ibid., p. 448.

The Crystal Palace was so delicate even a little tremor could damage it, and World War I proved to be much more than it could withstand. By March 1914, a Member of Parliament saw in a Cabinet quarrel and a shifting of jobs no sure sign of a coming war, but he did suspect that something was in the offing and felt that he had better be prepared.[12] But still in June, people acted as though nothing was wrong.[13] The parties and the gaiety continued through the "ripe ironic beauty of that autumn" that followed one of the most glorious, never-to-be-forgotten summers.[14]

Prior to the war, the atmosphere in England, as presented in Spring's novels, was one of optimism. No one had any awareness of the imminence of war.[15] Spring wrote, "We had been so lulled with the dream of progress, the New Jerusalem come down from heaven, that right up to the brink of the chasm we went on with no real belief in our hearts that the gathering clouds would break."[16] An international businessman might speak of war and try to warn his friends, but it was useless. People continued to "play as usual."[17]

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[12] Ibid., p. 451. [13] Ibid., pp. 456-7.

[14] Spring, Armour, p. 211.

[15] Spring, All The Day, p. 341.

[16] Howard Spring, These Lovers Fled Away (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 233.

[17] Spring, My Son, p. 450; Spring, Armour, p. 197.

If someone had intimated that, in fact, the Germans hated the English, he was scoffed at and disbelieved.[18] A bishop at an Anglo-German dinner in March 1913 could say to the wife of a Member of Parliament, "After all, we and you have one great salutary bond: we are Christian nations. In that fact is the surety that we shall see what in our hearts we all desire: peace on earth, good will to men."[19] In general, the pre-World War I naivete could lead a Member of Parliament to say that the situation was not a crisis but just a misunderstanding that needed only to be cleared up in order to preserve peace.[20] After all, it was simply another continental European assassination.[21]

Even as the situation became more grave, an infantry lieutenant could still say that summer maneuvers for the territorials were a lark and that there was no reason to take them seriously. Some might declare that war was imminent, but he did not believe it.[22] For him and for England, that beautiful autumn of 1914 proved to be not the promise that the crisis would be past by Christmas, which the fools were sure it was, but was instead a benediction.[23]

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[18]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, pp. 171-2.

[19]Spring, Houses, p. 450.

[20]Howard Spring, Winds Of The Day (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 109. Hereafter cited as Spring, Winds.

[21]Ibid., p. 58. [22]Spring, Houses, p. 453.

[23]Ibid., p. 462.

War was a word, not a reality, to the people in 1914. Having had no experience with it, they found it extremely exciting.[24] A German-English doctor cynically summed up the war feeling when he said, "A war comes when it is wanted. What excuse is made is a small point."[25] World War I was not declared in defense of the rights of the small nations or to combat a threat to international labor as Spring said many believed; it was man's crime against man[26] and made no sense except in this, that man created the conditions of war and so must suffer the results of his own sins. He could not, in honesty, blame anyone but himself for what had happened.[27]

World War I was "a gulf of horror"[28] bearing no relation to the previous "few hectic years."[29] In the trenches, among all of the war paraphernalia, would be a gramephone so the soldiers could play the popular tunes from back home—tunes that sounded funereal representing as they did the "deep quality of loss and longing" of the war.[30] Leaves from duty furnished the only respite the

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[24]Spring, Time, p. 109. [25]Ibid., p. 41.

[26]Howard Spring, Fame Is The Spur (New York: The Viking Press, 1940), pp. 341, 347. Hereafter cited as Spring, Fame.

[27]Spring, Armour, p. 232.

[28]Spring, My Son, p. 317. [29]Spring, Armour, p. 175.

[30]Spring, My Son, pp. 382, 384.

young fighters ever got and formed the "bright remembered patches between stations of the cross."[31] While the war-time parties provided necessary amusement, the tragedy was that many of the young men who partied would soon be blown to bits. Thus, a sense of doom pervaded all the wartime entertainments.[32]

War posters made gay London macabre as, in Spring's words, they "invited the sheep to the sacrifice."[33] The call of "Your King and Country Need You" made it almost impossible for a man to resist, so they came, all varieties of men united in the desire of each to look like a good military man.[34]

A man might cheer in the excitement of the adventure when war broke out and cheer in relief when peace was restored; he could make the same response to opposite occurrences.[35] But during the war he could make "the most hateful confession . . . that man has yet made on the earth. . . . /That is/ when lighted windows, the loveliest symbol of peaceful men dwelling quietly about their hearths, are put out."[36]

Much more than the symbolic lights of English homes were put out in World War I. The very lights of men's ideas

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[31] Ibid., p. 382.

[32] Spring, Houses, p. 466.

[33] Spring, My Son, p. 472.

[34] Spring, Armour, p. 209.

[35] Spring, My Son, p. 541.

[36] Ibid., p. 472.

ceased to gleam, and disillusionment became the summation of the post-war world. The first to know the reality of the war "with its consequences of poverty and unemployment and misery throughout the world, its failure to do what it said it would do—the war to end war"[37] were the soldiers who had won the victory. They became the living wrecks of the war. The young men of hope, bright future, fun, and promise returned after the war "transmogrified by filth and wounds of body and spirit."[38] Their world, unreal as it was, had gone, and nothing had come to replace it. The fortunate ones were blessed by having a disability pension which was enough to keep them housed and fed.[39] Other veterans were forced to disavow their pride and hawk ribbons and laces from door to door, and unless they wore their medals to prove their valor in the country's hour of need, no housewife would buy their frippery wares.[40] Then these heroes of 1918, who by 1924 "were already national nuisances and bores,"[41] would be forced to take a handout in order to keep from starving.[42] There was no place for them in the world which they had saved.[43]

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[37]Spring, Winds, p. 161. [38]Spring, Armour, p. 175.

[39]Spring, Time, p. 228.

[40]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, p. 358.

[41]Spring, Houses, p. 486.

[42]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, p. 358.

[43]Ibid., p. 338.

The "Age of Gin" was a phrase often used to describe the world of the twenties. Many people felt that since gin was cheap and was the usual beverage of charwomen prior to the war, that there was a certain fitness in having gin be the necessary ingredient in cocktails.[44] Now everyone gave a cocktail party that was all "vulgarity and nonsense that often sank to something worse."[45] No one entertained friends graciously at dinner parties as people had been accustomed to doing before 1914.[46]

The years 1920-30 were also called the "inebriated decade." Through the death of good men, the Bright Young Things gained their freedom to live in sin and drunkenness and the haze of dope.[47] A general feeling of disregard for police authority or for the law pervaded their childish pranks, their drinking and their use of barbiturates. One young man of the fast London set commented in wonder when he met two decent young girls,[48] girls whose mothers still cared where their daughters were, whom they were with, and what they were doing.[49] Both they and their daughters had become quite rare. Young people of the interwar years claimed they knew how to make better worlds but struggled ineptly at making better lives for themselves. Their only

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[44]Spring, Houses, p. 487. [45]Spring, Time, pp. 283-4.

[46]Spring, Houses, p. 487. [47]Spring, Armour, p. 243.

[48]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 111.

[49]Spring, Time, p. 206.

creed was being up-to-date though they could not remember the name of yesterday's friend.[50]

In 1890, a man could live a good life with relatively few worries; before 1914 such a life was possible.[51] Those who were self-made prior to the war did not have the problems to contend with as did those young men whom the war knocked to pieces.[52] These disillusioned souls turned to alcohol and dope to replace lost war buddies.[53] Spring had compassion for those of the "lost generation" and said with feeling, "God help youth without heroes."[54] It was these people, veterans of the fighting and the front line aid stations, who refused to have any children to be cannon fodder for the next war, whenever it came.[55]

What a "gulf there is between 1914 and human history ever thereafter,"[56] Spring declared. Something fine and decent ended then and has been replaced by an "increasingly tasteless world. People with taste couldn't fall into the barbarism that is sinking us."[57]

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[50]Ibid., pp. 372-3.

[51]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 430.

[52]Spring, Time, p. 227. [53]Ibid., p. 228.

[54]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 297.

[55]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 180.

[56]Spring, Armour, p. 245.

[57]Spring, Houses, p. 256.

The post-war world was supposed to enter a new Renaissance where there would be no more war, and reason and business would be triumphant. Yet in London, one found too much hurry and congestion to be able to enjoy this Renaissance. And one found also as a prophet of the new era the fat, brusque, humorless businessman.[58]

This new world had to be industrial, for there was no returning to any form of an agricultural society after the war. Industry led to a higher cost of living through taxes[59] and to increasing competition between nations, competition that ruined international relations and occupied men's minds eliminating opportunities for quiet and contemplation.[60]

The paradox of the times was that not only were men absorbed in international affairs, but also they were blind to the conditions in other countries. England refused to acknowledge that there was anything wrong in Europe.[61] Spring, as a newspaperman, perhaps felt more deeply the trials of the task of awakening a country. In Time and the Hour, he chose the work of a crusading reporter as a means of showing England's stupor until the events of 1939 shocked her into action. For this reporter, France "was a glittering

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[58]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 297.

[59]Spring, Houses, p. 455.

[60]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 301.

[61]Spring, Time, p. 362.

coach that would turn into a rotten pumpkin on the midnight stroke of doom."[62] Saying such things in print earned him the status of persona non grata in France, and his paper reassigned him to Italy. In Italy, this reporter accidentally killed an Italian fascist. The body lay untouched in an alley; no one would go near it because interfering was dangerous. Such deaths were frequent in Italy and bothered the visitor and his neighbors no more than the squashing of an insect. Hearing of such incidents, the English refused to take alarm; indeed, some men still professed to respect Mussolini.[63]

A new and much sought assignment soon came to this reporter; he was sent to Germany. If people would not believe Mussolini was a threat, the reporter reasoned, perhaps Hitler's Germany would frighten them since he was closer to home.[64] Germany, for this reporter, was "a hell on earth, a world peopled with distorted beasts. . . . Nothing is safe there that is decent."[65] Such statements led to the recall of the writer because England could not afford to antagonize a neighbor state.[66] Some in England felt Hitler was showing the world how a strong state should be governed;[67] others wanted a powerful Germany as a

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[62] Ibid., p. 343.
[63] Ibid., p. 363.
[64] Ibid., p. 364.
[65] Ibid., p. 397.
[66] Ibid., p. 421.
[67] Ibid., p. 436.

Russian buffer.[68] Few people realised what kind of conditions their nonchalance encouraged. At a time when university-educated Jews were doing menial work in England in return for a haven,[69] a lady incredulously asked the reporter if Jews were still being persecuted in this modern world.[70]

On his return, the reporter went to his publisher, a man of substantial influence, to try to get someone to listen. The publisher later recounted that,

> Joe says he's /Hitler is/ the most dangerous, and he almost went on his knees begging me to start a rearmament campaign. That wouldn't half queer my pitch. Why the Labour chaps would start frothing like Hitler himself, and I can't see the Tories either rallying under that banner at the moment

was the publisher's concise summation of the official and unofficial English attitude.[71]

What this reporter had tried to convey in 1938 was that:

> They! All over the world They were coming into their own, the anonymous They, the nobodies, the hoodlum scum with an itch for the power their own capacities could never give them. So They opened their meagre pipe lines to the boundless rivers of evil power and this flowed through them, through millions of them, ennobling them with the sense that They were men of destiny.[72]

The reporter revieved the European situation, when talking to a close friend and asked what could one man do to combat

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[68] Ibid., p. 394. [69] Ibid., p. 346. [70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., p. 370. [72] Ibid., p. 377.

the disinterest and the colossal nonchalance of the English who requested politely that he not rock the boat.[73] Spring stated flatly that "the English capacity for shutting their eyes till they find someone poking them out is phenomenal."[74]

Typical of others in England was an industrial magnate who said that dictators could feast on their own words. As long as British trade was healthy, England had no worries, and she could forget about Europe. Chamberlain applauded this speech while an avant garde publication deplored it.[75] By late summer of 1937, this same industrialist was perfecting a five year plan for armament manufacture in England and hoping he would have that much time. Part of his motive was practical profits, but at least in realising that there would soon be a market for munitions he was more far-sighted than the government.[76]

Chamberlain produced "peace in our time" which was essentially the same idealistic statement made at the opening of the Crystal Palace. There were a few who:

> wondered whether that poor well-meaning fellow really believed it: really believed that, when the madhouse was soaked in petrol and the lunatics were striking matches all over the place, you could stop the blaze by signing a piece of paper! The world was full of covenants and agreements and pacts and charters, leagues, committees and conventions; but there was no communion, and, without that, what did all the rest of it matter?[77]

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[73] Ibid., p. 440. [74] Ibid., p. 395.

[75] Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 304.

[76] Ibid., p. 370. [77] Spring, Houses, p. 536.

Even, Spring said, an eighteen year old boy could know that by 1938 appeasement would not stop Hitler and become furious with Chamberlain and the rest of the government for robbing him of his future and telling him he must fight their war.[78] His parents' generation reflected a similar bitterness. They were about to enter the third war in their lifetime to once more fight a war to end war.[79] Sarajevo was the pebble that began the "landslide whose rocks, with more and more vehemence, are hurtling about us."[80] World War II became the war as the promises of the peace of the last war were broken.[81] The only thing man seemed to have learned in the meantime was how to bomb more efficiently.[82]

If World War I was followed by disillusion, World War II brought bitterness and cynicism. There were the same fools who thought in spring of 1940 that it would all be over soon, the same despair as the warm lights of homes and villages went out again.[83] But this war came much closer to the lives of the average citizens. Identity cards were issued to all except one old lady who preferred to remain an

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[78]Spring, I Met A Lady, pp. 376-8.

[79]Ibid., pp. 401-3. [80]Spring, Armour, p. 201.

[81]Spring, Winds, p. 62.

[82]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 439.

[83]Spring, Armour, pp. 387, 401.

individual.[84] Indeed, "one was asked to admire the orderly lives of the troglodytes in the tubes" as they re-established society underground.[85] Even as one traveled, one saw evidences of the preparations made to resist German landing parties and saw children playing among the trucks and barbed wire.[86] One also saw familiar towns like Plymouth come down in ruins.[87] If one complained too much, one might be reminded that the English themselves had been systematically laying waste the country's heritage before the war. The Germans merely destroyed at a greater rate of speed.[88] Destruction, waste, and wanton spoilage accelerated until even "men, more and more, were becoming indistinguishable from material, mere expendable stuff."[89] A funeral for one soldier had to compensate for others who were blown to bits and could not be recovered to be buried.[90] As compensation, medals were passed out wholesale until one man turned his down so that he might be the only man left in England without the O. B. E.[91]

Even while the war was being decided, plans for peace and the new world were being drawn up without a thought as

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[84]Spring, Houses, p. 539. [85]Spring, Armour, p. 398.

[86]Ibid., p. 412.

[87]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, pp. 476-7.

[88]Spring, Armour, p. 398; Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 436.

[89]Spring, Armour, p. 414. [90]Ibid., p. 416.

[91]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 442; Spring, Armour, p. 390.

to who would pay the expense of them.[92] After celebrating peace in 1945, many people found out that the cost of peace was reckoned as the destruction of half of the world.[93] However, peace this time would be kept not by promises but by arms and fear of destructive retaliation for an overt gesture.[94] All this was part of the price of peace: "the time when, some say, you reap the benefits of war, and others that you pay the price of it."[95]

The Crystal Palace had been a promise of men working together for a perfect world. In 1945, there was no perfect world, just the same men and women with their virtues and their vices, still trying to work together.[96]

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[92]Spring, Armour, p. 399. [93]Ibid., p. 424.

[94]Ibid., p. 421.

[95]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, p. 473. See also Howard Spring, A Sunset Touch (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), pp. 52-3.

[96]Spring, Houses, p. 550.

CHAPTER III

HOWARD SPRING'S PHILOSOPHY IN HIS NOVELS

MAJOR SUBJECTS—RELIGION, POLITICS, AND SLUMS

Clergymen and churches appeared in most of Spring's novels and received more criticism than plaudits. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists gained an equal share of his attention. The major portion of his criticism focused on the bigotry and self-righteousness often found in formal religion. But he always portrayed the minister or priest who cared primarily for the needs of his parishioners and others as an admirable character.

In Hard Facts, two ministers were juxtaposed, one a kindly old man and one an image-conscious youngster. The older clergyman was well-satisfied to remain in a Manchester slum church instead of seeking a bishopric, for it was his idea that he could better minister to the poor if he remained among them.[1] This man's door was always left unlatched so that anyone in need of counsel, whether a church member or not, might feel free to come in and talk at any time. Charity, he said, was easy; he had given away a fortune. It was the giving of oneself to please God that

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[1]Howard Spring, Hard Facts (New York: The Viking Press, 1944), pp. 8, 54, 75.

was difficult.[2] Conditions in the parish appalled the young cleric who came to share the older man's duties. Church membership had decreased and few people continued to observe the proper ritualistic forms.[3] Appearances were important to the young man as he courted the favor of the female parishioners so that they would come to his church and bring their money.[4] He carefully concealed the fact that he had invested in and was writing for a penny newspaper because, though he liked the income, he felt contempt for cheap journalism.[5] Never did he become acquainted with the bulk of parishioners,[6] for most of them could not help him realize his ambition of becoming a bishop.[7]

A similar dichotomy was apparent when Spring wrote about Catholic priests. In Shabby Tiger, there was one priest so determined to prove publicly that his church had the most members that he kept a parade of small children waiting three hours in a Manchester rain storm. If the children went home, then the Catholic demonstration would be smaller than the one of the Anglicans on the previous

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[2]Ibid., pp. 77-8, 86. [3]Ibid., p. 76.

[4]Ibid., pp. 67, 69, 85.

[5]Ibid., pp. 67-8, 77, 81-3.

[6]Ibid., p. 213.

[7]Howard Spring, Dunkerley's (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), pp. 34-7, 41, 42-3, 46.

Monday.[8] On the other hand, in Fame Is The Spur, there was a poor country priest who loved his personal comforts but was quick to aid anyone who needed him, even to the giving up of his own hot meal to another while he himself dressed to face a blizzard because he had been called on a parish errand.[9]

Methodists, or Wesleyans as Spring often referred to them, were usually portrayed as not quite as respectable as Anglicans[10] because their congregations lacked the traditions and long history of the established church. If one wanted to be amongst the proper company when one entered God's presence, then he went to a chapel for the upper class, one where the offering plate was lined with felt to muffle the clinking of money in God's house.[11] Hypocrisy among the Wesleyans appeared in the lay preacher who spoke of love in a Sunday sermon and then went home and, on general principles, beat his daughters.[12] Self-righteousness was evident when a city preacher sought out the theater people in his parish because they, belonging to a wicked profession, must need him more than other people.[13] He was aided by a redoubtable

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[8]Spring, Shabby Tiger, pp. 156, 159.

[9]Spring, Houses, pp. 267-8.

[10]Spring, Fame, pp. 66-7. [11]Spring, Time, p. 22.

[12]Spring, A Sunset Touch, p. 126. See also Spring, Time, p. 139.

[13]Spring, Time, p. 193.

female "who did things, and had been a plague among the poor of the parish for years, inspecting their teeth and tonsils and deploring the strange foods they ate."[14] Both the parson and his assistant were suspicious of the motives of a young curate who acknowledged that he enjoyed life.[15] This curate was eventually given a living in a slum area parish. When his spiritually impoverished parishioners sought his advice, he could only tell them that they must use their common sense, for in coming to him, they showed him that their consciences had already provided the looked-for answer. Moreover, he said he was surprised when people expressed a longing for the Second Coming after making such a mess of the First. He knew that as a result of his approach to his duties and theology that he would never be called to a bishopric, which pleased him mildly.[16]

Church members often reflected the attitudes of their ministers. Most striking was the instance of an unwed mother who had taken a job as housemaid because nothing else was available. Her unmarried status was discovered; she was summarily fired and with her child was instructed to be out of the house by the time her employer returned from church. The godly woman did not wish to encounter something unclean when she returned from being purified in God's house. The

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[14] Ibid., p. 195. [15] Ibid., p. 196.

[16] Ibid., pp. 214-5.

young mother fled and by accident stumbled into a Wesleyan chapel where a lay preacher and his sister offered her and her baby a place to stay as long as necessary.[17]

Hypocrisy was further evident among church members who beat recalcitrant children for committing the sins of playing football, dancing, or reading something like Pickwick Papers on a Sunday. Children learned nothing but dissimilation, for beatings taught them to conceal, not cease, their activities.[18] Some progress had been made, in Spring's opinion, when a merchant was allowed to do business on a Sunday in order to provide food for his family.[19] One of Spring's characters said, "I know lots and lots of Christians, worthy chairmen of boards of directors and such like, who would serve an even worthier purpose as lion-meat."[20] Spring gave skin-deep Christianity short shrift.

John Wesley, whose preaching was responsible for the Methodist movement, said that a man liked to think of himself as a great sinner so that he could be great in something. Wesley, therefore, persuaded men to see themselves this way. Then the sinner could prostrate himself in grief and obtain mercy. Methodism grew so rapidly that lay preachers and local chapels had to be established to look after Wesley's converts.[21]

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[17]Spring, Fame, pp. 32-6. [18]Spring, Armour, p. 107.
[19]Spring, Time, p. 266. [20]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 112.
[21]Spring, Houses, pp. 64-5.

Everyone went to church in those days. By 1945, precious few were attending these chapels. As man's compassion and understanding declined so did church membership.[22] The church became a dead-alive thing hampered by scholarly parsons[23] who would rather spend their energies in writing religious works that would never be read even by most ministers.[24] Religion, in the opinion of the middle class, had outlived its usefulness so they ceased to practice it.[25] Strangely enough, it was among the patrons of a cheap pub that one could find the remnants of a belief in God. One bookie said to another, "Anti-Gawd. Wot d'yer make o' that? It's not right, Mo. Give the Almighty a sportin' chance, I say. Leave 'im in the runnin'. It looks to me too much like scratchin' the favorite."[26]

Religion was not the only institution to come under the fire of Spring's pen. Government practices and the conduct of Members of Parliament received a share of his attention. The old time politician of the nineteenth century was a straightforward man. If his tenants did not vote as he thought they ought to, their houses were pulled down.

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[22]Spring, A Sunset Touch, pp. 3, 62, 149.

[23]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, p. 92.

[24]Spring, All the Day, pp. 18-9.

[25]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, pp. 388-9.

[26]Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 245.

A landlord could openly offer a £5000 stipend and a seat in Parliament to any man who would always vote as his lord dictated.[27]

Politicians were different then, and, as far as the public was concerned, they were supposed to obey a rigid, unrealistic code of conduct. Divorce in 1890 could ruin a political career, as the Dilke scandal had proved.[28] Even if a Member of Parliament was the defendant in a divorce suit, the public painted all parties with the same brush, and he was guilty by association. People had changed their views since then, and divorce had ceased to be so odious by the time Spring wrote.[29]

Politics itself gradually changed character as the new century began. A laboring man who worked hard and had a bit of luck, if he contributed heavily to the party's coffers, could expect to be knighted. Few such men, though, acquired any sense of decorum or propriety with their titles; most preferred to demonstrate by coarse behavior that they were "up from nothing."[30]

Many of the new politicians were like thieves who stole with no thought of having to repay later. They knew

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[27]Spring, Houses, p. 310.

[28]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 182; Spring, Houses, p. 358.

[29]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 182.

[30]Spring, Time, pp. 91, 96-7.

that a nation's leaders were never sent to prison.[31] Never would these party hacks let old issues die and fade away.[32] Politicians were fools who forever meddled in men's lives without being concerned about the personal hardship or discomfort they might cause.[33] Spring called them "foul old men of the sea, astride the shoulders of the nations."[34] The modern system of taxation was a good example of their political mischief-making. Throughout history, the law had protected private property, but now by means of death duties, the state could steal all that a man had while he was still warm.[35]

These self-styled statesmen were constantly in a hurry and tended to use a standard, mechanised approach to obtain answers to problems that required individual study and thought.[36] Never had there been more talking and less understanding among politicians.[37] Party politics dedicated itself to what people ought to do—women should vote, the rich should be taxed, the poor should work; but people continued to do what they ought not to do.[38] Perhaps because

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[31]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 403.

[32]Spring, My Son, p. 165. [33]Spring, Houses, p. 545.

[34]Spring, My Son, p. 165.

[35]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 418.

[36]Spring, Houses, p. 448.

[37]Spring, A Sunset Touch, p. 151.

[38]Spring, Houses, p. 432.

modern politicians had a genius for "wrapping up the truth in jargon,"[39] people became immune to the standard arguments phrased in the same old terms. The result of modern political maneuverings was the welfare state where a generous government would give money to any failure.[40] To make government agencies sound better, they were disguised in alphabet names,[41] but the bureaucratic procedures and red tape remained unchanged.

Personal initiative, for all practical purposes, became a lost cause as the government took over the task of telling people what to do.[42] In the post-World War II world, most returning veterans wished to be self-sufficient. One veteran, a character in one of Spring's novels, used a little enterprise and organized a house-painting business. However, he found that without a work permit he would not be allowed to continue in his business. Currently there was no work permit available so painting remained undone, not for lack of someone to do it, but for lack of government permission. The painter left in disgust, his initiative sapped by government regulation.[43]

The same conditions of indifference that brought about the welfare state led to the rise of the Labour Party.

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[39]Spring, Armour, p. 37.

[40]Spring, A Sunset Touch, p. 167.

[41]Spring, Winds, p. 45. [42]Ibid., p. 295.

[43]Spring, Armour, pp. 420, 429-30.

Spring wrote about the difficult early years of the new party in Fame Is The Spur. Basically, the book told the story of a young man, Hamer Shawcross,[44] who came from a Manchester slum and who had both a facility with words and keen political insight. In many respects, this character was one of the strongest Spring ever created. With great single-mindedness of purpose, the young politician realized his potential and slowly but ruthlessly advanced toward his goal of becoming a respected and powerful political figure. What he finally achieved, however, was a hollow shell of his ambitions, a mockery of all that had any meaning for him. On the surface, though he was wealthy, his only Cabinet position was of a lesser sort. No one had enough confidence in his ability to make him Prime Minister, for in his political machinations he had calculated the advantages of too many friendships and alliances. He was not considered a safe man to be entrusted with a government.

There had been such promise in the burgeoning career. Alone of the political speakers, he had dared to challenge the establishment, and wave a sword which had been captured at the Peterloo Massacre from a cavalry officer. His appeal was fantastic though it took him a campaign or two

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[44]Spring published Fame Is The Spur in January, 1940, before Sir Hartley Shawcross had become a prominent member of the Labour government. Sir Hartley was a member for St. Helens, 1945-58, and attorney general, 1945-51.

to win a seat in Parliament. Then the compassion, the fervor with which he spoke became prostituted for the sake of power. "Ah, my friends!" he began his speeches as he called up the listener's sympathy for the poor, deprived, friendless boy which in reality he had never been. He had never been part of the laboring poor. When asked his formula for success, he said that a politician,

> while appearing to have nothing but his country's interest at heart, he must be an expert at appealing to panic, passion and prejudice. When these do not exist, he must know how to create them at the right moment.[45]

Yes, indeed, "he could do that sort of thing. . . . Hamer Shawcross, riding hell-for-leather on his oratorical mount, didn't give people a chance to think what he meant. He was a very great politician."[46]

Eventually, when he was an old man, he realized that everything he had worked for had gone sour once he had attained it. In the process of becoming a success, he had lost the love of his wife and son and forfeited the respect of his friends. At the end of his career, he was a lonely old man with a title.

As powerful as this character was, he seemed to epitomize Spring's opinion of politicians and politics. Influence, status, and the proper associations motivated the politician. Expediency was his byword. The deep, spiritual

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[45]Spring, Fame, p. 603. [46]Ibid., p. 288.

rewards of life passed him by. Only when the old man reconciled with his daughter-in-law and found a new purpose for his life did he become a warm, likeable person.

The whole of the Labour Party seemed to have been injured through being controlled by politicians. When first founded, the party had concerned itself with matters such as absentee landlordism, the right to strike, and the way in which the wealthy lived on interest from poor men's toil.[47] Their belief in their cause persisted through several violent physical attacks.[48]

Twenty-five years after its founding, the first Labour government took office. They had damned the wartime coalition but now discovered that solutions to problems also eluded them.[49] Miners who had struck during the Boer War and World War I remained unemployed though they simply wanted a share of the huge profits that went to the mine owners. Considering the wretched condition of the workers and the wide margin of profit, the plea had a great degree of justification.[50]

Twice more, the Labour Party came to office. Again it failed to ameliorate the conditions of the poor. The

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[47]Ibid., pp. 243, 264-5, 325-6.

[48]Ibid., pp. 258-62.

[49]Ibid., pp. 516-7.

[50]Ibid., pp. 387, 433, 532, 604-5.

lower classes believed in the Labour Party; when Labour leaders failed to live up to party promises, the poor abandoned both party and leaders.[51] The people's attitude expressed itself in the little ditty:

> To hell with the toffs, and to hell with the Czar,
> And Ramsey MacDonald, the Tory hussar.[52]

Whereas political causes might not be right or wrong, politicians fought in the name of the poor who would have been better off without their self-styled saviors.[53]

Nearly every one of Spring's novels dealt in some way with the life and conditions of the poor. Seldom have slum dwellers had so eloquent a spokesman. In this area, Spring has been favorably compared with Charles Dickens; both of them knew from firsthand experience what slum life was like.

Not shillings but pennies had to be carefully counted by the poor.[54] A hard-working widow and her brood might rely heavily on the small salary brought in by the youngest housemaid. If the child got breakfast as part of her wages, it could mean the difference between whether or not there would be enough food at home for the rest of the family and ensure that the little ones did not starve.[55]

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[51] Ibid., pp. 639-40, 651, 653.

[52] Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 286.

[53] Spring, Fame, pp. 699-700.

[54] Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 46.

[55] Spring, Fame, p. 76; Spring, Winds, p. 9.

The work required of these children seems unbelievable to readers accustomed to the restraints of child labor laws. A housemaid, age fourteen, could conceivably work sixteen hours a day, be on constant call day and night and be forced to eat her meals at odd hours.[56] Or a lodging house "skivvy" might have to haul buckets of water upstairs and down all day and scrub until her hands were red and cracked.[57] These children slept in the attic.

The hired help were not regarded as individuals by their employers, for servants who must know and keep their place were just part of the natural order of society.[58] Woe betide the nurse or footman who forgot his place; immediate dismissal without "references" could result from the smallest indiscretion.[59] Even for a job faithfully performed for many years, the reward on retirement in all probability would be negligible.[60] Perhaps the worst abuse concerned children who had no one to guard their interests; they could be bound out and innocently become instruments of someone else's hate and revenge.[61]

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[56]Spring, Hard Facts, pp. 230-1.

[57]Spring, Time, p. 16.

[58]Spring, Winds, pp. 10, 13, 92; Spring, Houses, p. 23; Spring, Hard Facts, p. 70.

[59]Spring, Houses, p. 16. [60]Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 197.

[61]Spring, Dunkerley's, pp. 21-9.

It was nearly impossible, in Spring's opinion, for the poor, by their own efforts, to raise their station in life.[62] Though slum doctors fumed, poor families with six children would have another baby.[63] Such children, for the most part, had only the gloomiest of prospects awaiting them. When they appeared in Spring's novels, it was as scavengers for scraps in the gutter[64] or, with luck, waiting in a soup line for a cup of broth.[65] Because of the lack of sanitation and the abundance of dirt and vermin, children were especially susceptible to disease: one infectious case in a neighborhood and half the children would succumb.[66] Even if a child survived bouts of illness, he might then be too weak to endure a severe winter. It was not uncommon to find a London slum child clad in rags and frozen to death.[67] Those who did live to maturity could easily be forced against their own natural inclination into a life of crime or prostitution as the only available livelihood.[68]

Countrymen had difficulty understanding slum conditions; the very idea of a family having to live in one room because of the high cost of renting a whole house was hard for them to comprehend. By the same token, city people in

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[62]Spring, Fame, p. 192. [63]Spring, My Son, p. 89.

[64]Spring, Dunkerley's, pp. 146-7.

[65]Spring, Fame, pp. 147-9.

[66]Spring, Houses, p. 383. [67]Spring, All The Day, p. 52.

London slums like Bermondsey knew nothing of fields, woods, or livestock, nor could they form an adequate concept of what a farm or forest looked like since no point of reference existed.[69]

The "ignominy and ugliness of poverty"[70] concerned Spring, especially that which existed in his beloved Manchester. His first two novels included extended references to Cheetham Hill, a Jewish slum area. Cheetham Hill, sloping upward from the city's industrial district, caught all the wind-blown dirt and grime.[71] Once the men made wealthy by industry had had their homes here so that they could rest comfortably and survey the source of their power.[72]

Rachel Rosing, a young Jewess who had grown up on and then left the Hill, could not resist returning to take a final look at the place she had fought so doggedly to escape.

> The sky was full of proud stars, but the ground about her crept with too humble an acceptance of its desolate destiny. From the central road with its pinchbeck shops, garnished with scraps of dirty meat or wretched vegetables or soiled depressed-looking clothing, with its grim grey synagogues and houses into whose fabric acid soot had been eating for generations, there ran off street after street, mean, shoddy and decrepit, disreputable ribs of that deplorable spine. In all those streets little houses huddled together, with their

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[69]Spring, Houses, pp. 211-12.

[70]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 24.

[71]Spring, Shabby Tiger, pp. 47-8. [72]Ibid., p. 72.

> shoulders hunched and their heads bent, their eyes veiled save for a slit of grudging light here and there. . . .
>
> Rachel knew it, every nook and corner of it; and she knew that were it daylight instead of dark, there still would be no amelioration in sight; no tree or shrub or flower, no graceful form of a building, no sudden sight of a bough against the sky; nothing to catch away the eye from the stony hideousness that sprawled upon the hillside for mile after saddening mile.
>
> She turned to the left when she came to the street where for so long she had lived. It stretched before her in all its dreadful black inanity. . . . She walked the entire length of the street with the thought of it in her heart like the memory of a foul disease from which she had incredibly escaped. . . .
>
> "Anything's fair that beats this. Anything."[73]
>
> Then she walked away from Cheetham Hill forever.

On the Hill, she felt she had witnessed the absolute worst kind of live that man could create for himself. Only the stars offered the faintest hope to the destitute masses. They inspired Rachel to cry out that life on the Hill was completely unacceptable to her. Now several times over, now, others must speak with her that they refused to accept it either.[74] It was these conditions that embued her with a deep desire to escape. To this end, she utilized any means, any person, to achieve her goal of financial security.[75] She realized her ambition but in the process impoverished her soul.

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[73]Spring, Rachel Rosing, pp. 90-1. See also Spring, Shabby Tiger, pp. 40, 53, 96.

[74]Spring, Shabby Tiger, pp. 96, 98.

[75]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 238.

Ancoats and Hulme, like Cheetham Hill, were also part of Manchester's slum district. Spring made this area sound utterly repulsive. No plants, no tree, shrub, or flower, would grow decently here.[76] Indeed, the soil was so bad it stank.[77] The air was no better as numberless smoking chimneys had polluted it.[78] Once one had been contaminated by the slum atmosphere, he felt the smell of it would stick forever to his skin and clothing.[79] Through the center of town and the slum district flowed that "river of scum," the Irwell.[80]

One young man returned to Manchester to find his parents living in Hulme. He said of their house that "it was as black and soul deadening as all the houses thereabouts and, as it was a corner house at a crossroads, you could look in four directions and see nothing but identical houses, without gardens, reaching endlessly into the muck and gloom."[81] Someone with a peculiar twist of mind had given the streets names like Shelley, Byron, Keats, and Southey. It was a poor place for Romantic poets,[82] for time

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[76]Spring, Hard Facts, p. 56; Spring, Winds, p. 9; Spring, My Son, p. 45; Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 106.

[77]Spring, Armour, p. 120.

[78]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 47. [79]Ibid., p. 90.

[80]Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 306.

[81]Spring, Armour, p. 119.

[82]Spring, My Son, p. 8.

and again Spring referred to the "foul range of dungeons miscalled a street"[83] and "little shops, little houses, little gray, mean streets."[84] Further similar comments on the ugliness of Manchester slums and the people forced to live in them sprinkled his novels.[85]

All Saints Church, situated in the Hulme-Ancoats section of Manchester, was a local landmark for its size, age, and ugliness. Spring called it "God's most gloomy tabernacle . . . rearing its carbon mass as though it were carved out of the black misery of Hulme that lay behind it, . . . standing in its ghoulish churchyard clotted with foul tombstones and withered witchlike shrubs."[86] Probably for its entire existence, it had been a forbidding edifice in a hideous setting.[87]

Dirt that poisoned air and water and defaced buildings seeped into even the most carefully tended households. Keeping curtains fresh meant washing them once a week.[88] If a housewife neglected her cleaning, floors, wallpaper, and furniture would soon be filthy so that a scrupulous

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[83]Ibid., p. 9. [84]Spring, Armour, p. 33.

[85]Spring, Hard Facts, pp. 1, 38, 75, 231, 265, 266; Spring, Winds, pp. 5, 10; Spring, Fame, pp. 17, 18, 62, 63, 65, 66, 75, 86, 115, 200; Spring, Armour, pp. 170, 212; Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, pp. 92, 156, 195, 238-9; Spring, All The Day, pp. 30, 31, 259, 275, 300.

[86]Spring, Shabby Tiger, pp. 118-9.

[87]Spring, Armour, p. 33; Spring, Rachel Roxing, p. 106; Spring, Hard Facts, pp. 5-6.

[88]Spring, Armour, p. 69.

person would almost become ill at the mere thought of living there.[89]

Summer or winter, the poverty of existence never changed. Snow for a fleeting instant might veil streets and roofs, but the sun that highlighted snow crystals also quickly revealed the ugliness beneath them.[90] Summer lacked even the small redeeming features of winter. As the temperature rose, odors intensified, sights became more dismal, sounds were less bearable, and tempers shortened dangerously.[91]

One summer day, a butterfly appeared in Ancoats. The enchantment of this singularly rare visitor made living there less endurable than ever, for it made a shop boy wonder about the green fields from which it came and envy the freedom of the winged creature.[92] Few enough dreams there were in Ancoats or Cheetham Hill. Butterflies were unique, and stars seldom were sufficient. Instead, slum conditions were endemic. Those who made fortunes in tenement rents would not clean up the slums, much less sanction improvement. Meanwhile, the poor had to live somewhere.[93]

London, which also appeared frequently in Spring's novels, possessed similar slum regions. Like Manchester's

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[89]Spring, Rachel Rosing, pp. 24, 52.

[90]Spring, Armour, p. 367. [91]Spring, My Son, p. 122.

[92]Spring, Fame, pp. 203-4.

[93]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 40.

Cheetham Hill, Ancoats, and Hulme, London had Bermondsey, Chelsea, and Camden Town where the same kind of houses flanked the same kind of romantically named but visually depressing streets. It was hot and humid in summer; cold and damp in winter. Nowhere did there exist a bit of green, growing foliage to relieve the eye and please the soul. As far as one could see, more and more houses strung out, all with no front yard and only a tiny backyard, and all just alike. The river aura permeated the entire scene.[94] In London, too, stood churches so begrimed they discouraged ghosts, existed dirty people plagued by envy and ennui and living in dirty streets, and mocked the same contrast of slum conditions and lovely spring days.[95]

London people, of course, added a few refinements of their own. An appallingly typical situation existed on one block where there was no running water in the houses and only one outside pump and one earth closet to serve the whole block.[96] There was no gas or electricity in the houses so that even preparing a simple cup of tea was an involved process.[97] The poor often had to submit to the further indignity of having advertisements plastered on the exteriors of their houses.[98]

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[94]Spring, Houses, p. 295. See also Spring, My Son, p. 418; Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 242.

[95]Spring, Time, p. 193; Spring, Houses, p. 384; Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 218.

[96]Spring, Houses, p. 218. [97]Ibid., p. 491.

[98]Spring, Hard Facts, p. 77.

There was a second side to the story, however, for some landlords conscientiously tried to remedy the situation by spending money on improvements. Then the tenants themselves undid the repairs, and the place looked as bad as ever with its dirty curtains and battered trashcans.[99]

London for many people represented a certain type of glamour, nonexistent in rural villages or industrial towns. But London could deceive a visitor, for beyond the elegant Bond Street shops existed some of the worst slums in England.[100] In the poverty area of Chelsea, plaques notified the public of the famous persons who had once lived in this or that house and served to doubly emphasize how low the district had fallen.[101]

Bradford, that other northern residence of Spring's, occasionally appeared in his novels. It too suffered from the industrial ills of polluted air and water, from the creation and expansion of slum areas with its consequent extinction of all green and growing things.[102] Here too had been built the tiny houses with no living space between them where there was one earth closet per row.[103]

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[99]Spring, Houses, pp. 230, 233.

[100]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 129.

[101]Spring, Time, p. 255.

[102]Ibid., p. 63; Spring, Houses, p. 187; Spring, Fame, pp. 116-7; Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, p. 39.

[103]Spring, Houses, p. 184.

In regard to slums like those in Manchester, London, and Bradford, Victorians succinctly stated that if one man could rise from the slums to a decent life, then there was nothing really wrong with the system and reform was unnecessary. After all, equal opportunity existed.[104] Establishing soup lines was the extent of early social work.

Gradually an interest in social work developed and took on various forms as it grew. Incongruously enough, men like John Ruskin and William Morris who lived on inherited money made in selling sherry or on unearned increment from a small investment in a mine were the idols of early reformers. The dictum of "No wages without work" sounded more than a little strange coming from this quarter.[105]

In The Houses In Between, two women of the upper class represented two different aspects of social reform and the course it took. One woman with a passion for organization insisted on regimenting the lives of the poor. Women who sat on their doorsteps were supposed to be herded into the settlement house restroom just because it was there. To combat begging, this reformer inaugurated a system of Incentives and Rewards; clean shoes would get a child a penny. But children preferred begging since it was easier and customary.[106] The object in this case was to abolish a

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., p. 180.

[106] Ibid., pp. 247-8.

hated practice, but any understanding of the motives and desires of the people themselves was lacking. She abhorred something so simple as a party since it made conditions bearable.[107]

The opposition spokesman dedicated her life to helping the poor because she loved them. When challenged by her institution-hating friend, she replied,

> Paradise around the corner is . . . always the promise of the reformer. There are the Golden Agers, who tell us it was all in the past, and the England's green and pleasant landers, who tell us it's all in the future, if and when. There's always something: destroy capital, destroy the aristocracy, destroy the bourgeoisie. Abolish democracy. Abolish dictators. Give the people baths and parks, do away with bugs and landlords. Always a corner to turn, and then another. After this and after that. After electoral reform. After the night of the long knives. Oh, I'm as keen as you are to see all sorts of corners turned. But you seem to think we can create a perfect world, and that only when that's done can we say "Heaven at last!" Well, I don't believe in perfect worlds. I only believe in working for 'em without any illusions.[108]

About thirty years later in 1938, the lady who did not believe in a perfect world encountered a new generation of institution haters in a bohemian-type character who wanted to abolish the State. The lady answered his argument by saying that people were primarily concerned with getting food, clothing, and shelter. As the population increased, the problem of acquisition of necessary goods grew. Someone must handle the problem, call it the State or what you will.[109]

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[107] Ibid., p. 233.

[108] Ibid., pp. 262-3.

[109] Ibid., p. 530.

The bohemian countered by saying, "With equal incomes in a classless society, none of this hatred /of wealth, position, or ignorance/ could arise."[110] In replying to this statement, the lady said that Members of Parliament were alike in income, education, and position yet they fought furiously for power; if one thought everything hinged on income, then one was as naive as G. B. Shaw, because power was the most important item to possess.[111]

Again in another novel, Spring's character cautioned a friend to beware of men who promised Utopia tomorrow and had no intention of taking care of today, for today was yesterday's tomorrow. Such dreamers never accomplished anything except to create castles in the air. They were at their worst when they advocated destruction through war to gain Utopia. Especially one must guard against the Utopian who wished to force one through misery in order to reach Paradise.[112] A lady who showed better judgment of human nature declared,

> "you're not going to reform the world with a few catchwords, a lack of information, and a plentiful misunderstanding of what men and women are up to. If you have a vision of a world full of saintly poor and devilish rich you won't get far, because all that most people want is to exchange their saintly

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[110] Ibid., p. 535.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Spring, I Met A Lady, pp. 9-10.

poverty for devilish riches. We shall begin to get somewhere when it's the other way about."[113]

Along with the anarchists and the utopians came the self-righteous reformers. They directed their energies not toward abolishing the institutions of poverty but towards recreating the poor in their own image, so pleased with themselves were they. This type of reformer should be sent to Parliament, for the violence of his hate both of criticism of himself and of the recalcitrant poor could force the passage of several needed reform bills. He could answer knowledgeably all the questions about the horrors of slum life; while he carried his fight forward, the others could continue to work peacefully for a better life on earth.[114]

However, such formal, legislated reform seemed to have accomplished very little. It appeared that one could not build the City of God like a municipal bathhouse.[115] Nothing was so sure among men that one could draft a blueprint for the remedying of all man's sufferings; anyone who thought he could was a fool. Confronted by starving reality, his little schemes became absurd.[116] According to the militant reformer, progress should change the hard life of the poor, but their kind of progress only perpetuated and increased existing conditions.[117] Reason which was to solve

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[113]Spring, Houses, p. 180.

[114]Ibid., p. 269. [115]Ibid., p. 550.

[116]Spring, I Met A Lady, pp. 115-6.

[117]Spring, Houses, p. 444.

all of man's problems had led to solutions which were not being reasonably used since the solutions were not based on an understanding of the people and conditions.[118] What a man needed, whether rich or poor, was courage. He must pick his life and then keep his courage, for this was the only answer to his problems.[119] In place of palaces of culture, the English needed better relations among men[120] along with fewer campaigns of hate and more love.[121] Spring's attitude toward most reform seemed to have been summed up by one character who said, "Isn't it characteristic of human life that our remedies should aggravate our diseases?"[122]

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[118] Ibid., p. 356.

[119] Ibid., p. 444.

[120] Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 245.

[121] Spring, Fame, pp. 558, 662-3.

[122] Spring, Hard Facts, p. 47.

CHAPTER IV

A POTPOURRI OF SPRING

A large number of Howard Spring's comments touched upon both material and immaterial comforts of man's life. Indeed, Spring had an opinion on almost every aspect of daily life. Everything from the present system of education, to Communism, to automobiles, to newspapers, at one time or another, were subjects which received the benefit of Spring's attention. In general, he tended to support the more traditional aspects of human existence, and only in a few instances did he accept modern innovations. He seemingly favored arrangements of the early twentieth century when, as he commented, peace generally prevailed. Likewise, rural men, especially, seemed to him to have a serenity and an appreciation of nature that city men, such as Londoners, lacked.[1] Such a state of peace and serenity appeared to be, for Spring at least, an ideal way of life.

Spring often wrote about the beauty of unspoiled nature, specifically as he found it in his adopted Cornwall or in the rugged hills surrounding Manchester and Bradford. In any of these places, one could take a hearty lunch of

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[1]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 296; Spring, Time, p. 105. See also Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, pp. 1 ff.

simple food and enjoy an invigorating day-long walk past rustic towns and through a glorious countryside[2] or, in Cornwall, go for a sail along the coast.[3] If one did not want to pack a lunch, a good meal could be obtained at a cottage along the route where a farmer's wife would, for a small fee, gladly supply rashers of bacon, fried eggs, and warm pie with fresh cream.[4]

With the advent of automobiles, he felt, the peace of English villages vanished to be replaced by fumes and noise.[5] Slamming doors, honking horns, and roaring motors shattered the calm of former tranquil days;[6] and the odor of gasoline, reminiscent of long-decayed plants, filled the air.[7] As bad as industrial slums like Ancoats were, at least before the twentieth century, the air in such places had not been tainted with exhaust fumes from automobiles and trucks.[8] What had formerly been lovely roads began to reek with the smell of gasoline and oil[9] as cars converted what was once "the pleasant road into a cañon misty with choky fumes."[10]

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[2]Spring, Dunkerley's, pp. 198-203.

[3]Spring, Winds, p. 63.

[4]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 116.

[5]Spring, Houses, p. 402.

[6]Spring, Winds, p. 112.

[7]Spring, Time, p. 74.

[8]Spring, Fame, p. 202.

[9]Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 8.

[10]Ibid., p. 23.

Spring disliked automobiles and preferred conditions in the years before 1920 when there were only a few cars in England. He commented acidly on the mixed blessing of increased mobility whereby people used cars to escape traffic and its odors.[11] If one wanted to go for a refreshing country hike, one should have done it before moving cars became such a great hazard as to take away the opportunity forever.[12] One auto manufacturer, Spring said, admitted to planning to make walking obsolete.[13] To prove his point, the novelist stressed the fact that a direct ratio existed between the number of cars on the road and the number of highway injuries and deaths each year; and in his opinion, all car owners should be made to demonstrate why they should be allowed to own a car. Walking, or traveling by train, he felt, could easily suffice. Few motoring licenses would have been issued, if such a proposal had been taken seriously, and it seemed "reactionary sentimentality" to a profit-hungry industrialist.[14]

Spring used the automobile as a symbol of his intense dislike of the twentieth century's preoccupation with material things. As he saw it, creating markets for the new

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[11]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 64.

[12]Spring, Time, p. 156.

[13]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 94.

[14]Ibid., p. 194.

gasoline-powered machines was relatively easy, especially when the manufacturer used ownership as a means of convincing English householders that possession of a car was a way to maintain material equality with their neighbors. Besides, as Spring argued, the modern merchandiser said, a man would not dare deprive his wife of necessary transportation and, as a result, in the near future, it would be contended that two cars would be essential. Spring seems to have felt that the ability to make people buy anything rested on an "insight into human weakness and vanity which could make people see themselves as supermen, gods almost, because they owned a machine which they could very well have done without."[15] Cars, then, were status symbols; poor girl might feel rich and important if she rode in a limousine.[16]

As roads and the traffic changed, so did the face of the land. Spring was disheartened to find roads which once went through farm land now passing by industrial plants.[17] Row upon row of unimaginative brick houses transformed fields which had abounded with flowers into small, ribbon-like, towns that were "eyesores and scabs and raped land."[18]

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[15]Ibid., p. 96.

[16]Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 182.

[17]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 378.

[18]Spring, Fame, p. 368. See also Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, pp. 439-40, 341.

Only a sprinkling of trees remained.[19] Falmouth, once a colorful, pleasant country town, was marred by questionable improvements and billboards along its concrete streets.[20] Later, World War II, he said, turned Falmouth into a drab, gray town when necessary camouflage removed the little charm that had persisted.[21] Cities, likewise, suffered from the effect of new ideas in building. Where once it had seemed ideal to give people more space, now it appeared that the goal was to crowd them into multi-family flats.[22] Charming houses that represented an older England underwent destruction, as did trees and most of the other things that might remind one of a more graceful way of life. All this, Spring felt, was being done in the name of the "Enterprise," as entrepreneurs termed the new surge of materialism.[23] Where once a duke's town house had stood, now office buildings rose and proclaimed a new prosperity.[24] Spring called the apartments that replaced the gracious houses he loved, "Ant hills. Towers of Babel,"[25] a "filing cabinet,"[26] a bee hive.[27]

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[19]Spring, Armour, p. 4. [20]Spring, My Son, p. 172.

[21]Spring, Armour, p. 393. See Spring, Fame, pp. 377-8, 379-80, 391, 392-3, for the devastating effect of coal mining on the lovely Welsh countryside.

[22]Spring, Winds, p. 367. [23]Ibid., p. 293.

[24]Spring, Time, p. 297.

[25]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 133. [26]Ibid., p. 285.

[27]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 180.

He referred to Kingsway, in London, as "the dull, dead road that was to show how completely we had forgotten the art and craft of building."[28] Perhaps the worst aspect of the situation was the people's blind acceptance of skyscrapers and throughways. Regardless of personal opinions, like sheep, they followed the new trends, whether it be about cars or the new styleless "box" houses.[29]

Spring was also repelled by modern department stores with their "brass and brassiness" supplanting the respectable individual shop.[30] In order to compete, the shops joined the trend and, for the most part, became as obnoxious as the larger stores.[31] An occasional small shop that was clean and neat but did not have the "antiseptic brightness of a hospital ward" was, in Spring's opinion, a refreshing exception.[32]

Spring, however, in no way regretted the passing of the Victorian style of interior decoration. Its heavy furniture, dark colors, and a multitude of pictures of ministering angels and sinking ships were, for him, offensive, depressing, and silly.[33] A simple, uncomplicated style,

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[28]Spring, Armour, p. 183. [29]Spring, Winds, p. 229.

[30]Spring, Time, p. 298.

[31]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, p. 42.

[32]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 234.

[33]Spring, My Son, p. 96.

Spring thought, was much more restful and attractive,[34] especially, when a room was beautified by use of modern pottery and Impressionist paintings.[35] Moreover, when Victorians built houses, they were more likely to bring in ugly, red brick from a distant county instead of using soft, lovely, native gray stone.[36]

However, Spring did discriminate between different types of modern decoration. Plastic and chrome to him represented a slovenly, shiftless kind of existence; for him, the vaunted creation of cheap modern furniture was not progress.[37] He found apartments not furnished in the "cold discomfort of the modern fashion" distressingly rare.[38] Never, he felt, could modern taste hope to achieve the loveliness and warmth which furniture of the eighteenth century conveyed. Even in wartime, furnishings from this period gave one a feeling of graciousness and comfort.[39] Likewise, the same atmosphere frequently prevailed at the country seat of a noble family. Even if additions to the house had been built in mismatched periods, even if the furniture and hangings showed wear and lack of co-ordination,

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[34]Spring, My Son, p. 70.

[35]Spring, Rachel Rosing, pp. 111, 197, 235-6.

[36]Spring, Time, p. 90.

[37]Spring, A Sunset Touch, pp. 4, 85.

[38]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 182.

[39]Spring, A Sunset Touch, p. 5.

there was still a "character that mere formality could never have attained."[40] A house built by new money could never have achieved so pleasing an effect.[41]

Spring, however, wrote of one instance when money coupled with taste produced a thing of beauty. In the years following World War I, an industrialist's widow supplied the funds to restore to its former degree of loveliness the main room of a town hall, a perfect example of the Georgian period. This was a notable event because everything else pleasant had rotted away.[42]

Spring believed that the gentry, those representatives of a more gracious way of life, had slowly deteriorated also. Most families had died out, or the heirs had moved to the cities. Because few gentry remained to be the mainstays of rural communities,[43] a character such as Lord Upavon of Rachel Rosing was an anachronism, someone to be remarked upon. His "rigorous" day of an hour long meeting in the morning, lunch, nap, tea, dinner, and nap until bedtime had become a rarity among his generation. For one reason or another, most of the gentry were intent upon making a living and not concerned with the virtue of various wines or the composition of a good meal.[44]

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[40]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 159.

[41]Ibid. [42]Spring, Time, pp. 177-8.

[43]Spring, All The Day, pp. 34-5, 36, 40, 41, 127; Spring, Winds, p. 145.

[44]Spring, Rachel Rosing, pp. 166-73.

However, sometimes when Spring wrote of the good old days, as in Fame Is The Spur, perhaps the looming threat of war caused him to look back with regret.[45] At other times, it seems that his writings reflect the reminiscences of a man growing old.[46]

In the realm of education, Spring quarrelled with the whole system, old or new, Victorian or modern. He referred to formal systems of education as "early efforts to distort a child's mind."[47] He had some very definite ideas as to the methods which ought to be used in teaching children. For instance, he favored a liberal arts education rather than an education concentrated in any one field. Education, he believed, should present the specific facts of a subject in the context of general knowledge. Proceeding on this premise then, specialists were uneducated.[48] A good education, Spring was convinced, should include exposure to the finest in literature and to classical music. He felt contempt for Englishmen who thought that learning a foreign language was somehow undignified or unpatriotic.[49] Moreover, a course of study that emphasized science should particularly be avoided.[50] Even businessmen, or maybe especially

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[45]Spring, Fame, pp. 6, 27-8, 722.

[46]Spring, A Sunset Touch, pp. 3-56; Spring, All The Day, pp. 57, 59, 78, 83, 129.

[47]Spring, Hard Facts, p. 38.

[48]Spring, A Sunset Touch, p. 111.

[49]Spring, Time, p. 23. [50]Spring, Armour, p. 13.

businessmen, should receive a liberal arts education, not a specialized education.[51]

Among systems of education, Spring flatly opposed a standardized system that forced children to proceed at the same rate.[52] He believed a certificate of graduation meant nothing except that a child had received passing marks on a set of examinations; the child was still likely to be uneducated. Moreover, there was no place in such a system for the individual, someone like a late maturer.[53] A good system, he felt, should be flexible enough to allow a great degree of variety.[54]

Spring did not have a very high opinion of many of the practices being followed in English public schools, either.[55] For instance, a headmaster of average intelligence might have "half-baked" ideas concerning the boys' relations one with another and overstate the obvious principle of equality which only served to make others aware of the headmaster's own feeling of inferiority.[56] Sometimes the methods did not produce intended results. A lesson in the workings of England's economy turned into a picnic when

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[51]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 12.

[52]The United States equivalent is the public school system.

[53]Spring, Winds, p. 359. [54]Ibid., p. 125.

[55]The United States equivalent is a private boarding school.

[56]Spring, My Son, p. 291.

schoolboys visiting a coal mine in Wales played at being miners. Needless to say, the boys missed the whole point of the visit, learning little of mining or the problems peculiar to it.[57] The school customs themselves, preserved for the sake of tradition alone, played upon the domineering tendencies of certain boys turning them into bullies. Anyone guilty of a minor breach of etiquette "was liable, by unwritten law, to be haled before a prefect and beaten . . . until the notion of the sacredness of conformity had entered his soul through the weals on his bottom."[58] Nor did the students' fathers care to change the system. Quite to the contrary, they gloried in returning to the hallowed halls for "Old Boys' Day" when they could revert to their former status as students, forsaking the advantages of adulthood.[59]

Females faced little better under the educational system. In Victorian times, their upbringing was entrusted to governesses who often had no ability or training. No woman of intelligence would take a job where the salary was a mere pittance. With bad teachers, parents obtained bad results in meagerly educated daughters.[60]

Foreign finishing schools also left much to be desired. In order to achieve the proper atmosphere, the teachers, who

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[57]Spring, Fame, p. 504. [58]Spring, Time, p. 121.

[59]Ibid., p. 100.

[60]Spring, Houses, pp. 159-60. See also Spring, Fame, p. 114.

were two dimensional people anyway, felt the girls should avoid all impure influences such as men. The girls learned languages and national dances, but not one of the graduates could cook.[61] A worse case of ignoring the practical purpose of education concerned a school girl who asked her teachers why men fought and killed in the name of God and human decency. Her teachers told her that she was not old enough to understand such things, and she had better abide by the course of study or be expelled for disrupting the curriculum. Thus was the cause of education served an ill turn.[62]

Oxford and Cambridge came in for a share of Spring's criticism of British education; he referred to Oxford as a "stinking horror."[63] He further stated that somewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century, the dons had ceased to learn anything and had become steeped in boredom.[64] A little reading and a lot of talking comprised the whole of their activities.[65] Spring proposed that the universities widen their scope and include contemporary additions to knowledge instead of restricting courses and attitudes to an outdated standard.[66]

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[61]Spring, Time, pp. 105, 244.

[62]Spring, Houses, p. 519.

[63]Spring, These Lovers Fled Away, p. 93.

[64]Spring, Fame, p. 584. [65]Spring, Hard Facts, p. 134.

[66]Spring, Dunkerley's, pp. 148-9.

Surprisingly, Spring was not an advocate of universal education until age sixteen or eighteen. In the words of one character, he "did not share the notion, which has since become so popular, that a boy was a victim of social villainies, deeply to be pitied, if he had to leave school at twelve."[67] Education began with a good job; then a boy should proceed on his own to read or take night classes, as Spring himself had done.

Rearing and educating children was a responsibility that Spring thought parents should take more seriously. In one of his novels, he commented favorably on a unique set of parents who gave their son and daughter the attic to play in. It was to be the children's own preserve where the parents could enter by invitation only.[68] Later, the boy was sent to the country to study under the aegis of a learned older man. The absence of a formal school atmosphere benefited both master and pupil by leaving the lines of communication open and teaching discipline to the youngster.[69] To complete the girl's education, she was taught the proper way of speaking and walking and comportment, for such things were important to a young lady's position.[70]

Spring disparagingly portrayed Victorian parents and attributed to them some peculiar ideas on child-rearing. Parents received their children on a purely formal basis,

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[67]Spring, Armour, p. 31. [68]Ibid., p. 13.

[69]Spring, Time, pp. 66, 74. [70]Ibid., p. 103.

resulting in a child's feeling more at ease with the servants. Parents carefully drew a line between the two different worlds, child's and adult's, and allowed no meeting ground between the two.[71] A properly reared Victorian child never walked alone in city streets, even around home, for fear something awful would happen. Paradoxically, children were considered privileged to live in the city and not in a dull, provincial village.[72] The Victorian idea was that children owed everything to their parents and must therefore repay them. Even slum children were obedient and turned over their pennies to a drunken father to avoid being beaten.[73]

Spring also criticized the attitude of his contemporaries toward children and their up-bringing. He felt that parents seldom realized that they were only trying to make "yes-men" of their children.[74] Ideally, he believed, adults should speak like adults when discussing adult subjects with children.[75] One of the best tutors to appear in Spring's novels "had this charming way of talking to children as if he and they were of an age."[76] Moreover, Spring felt children should not be over-indulged and under-disciplined; for this would lead to weak, deceitful characters, as shown

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[71]Spring, Houses, pp. 17, 20; Spring, Hard Facts, p. 20.

[72]Spring, Houses, pp. 74, 75. [73]Ibid., p. 307.

[74]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 387.

[75]Spring, Houses, p. 34. [76]Spring, Armour, p. 24.

in Time and the Hour[77] and in the character Oliver in My Son, My Son!. The current preference for easy divorce and childless marriages distressed him.[78] When, in one of Spring's novels, a young lady steeped in Communism declared that the world was not fit to bring children into, her mother countered by saying that an imperfect world needed a new generation in order to survive.[79]

Communism appeared in Spring's novels only in such oblique ways and then only in his first and fourth books. It was supplanted later by his concern for domestic policy and, of course, the Nazi ascendancy in Germany. In his comments on Communism, in part Spring blamed the inefficacy of the Labour party in dealing with the problems of the unemployed after World War I for the converts Communism made.[80] Furthermore, a British Communist, a character in one novel, stated that the pleasant life before the war represented "nothing more than the smile on the grinning mask of social corruption."[81] The system of capitalism was at fault, and the war was the final blow ending the establishment and preparing the way for the healing balm of Russia.[82]

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[77]Spring, Time, pp. 122, 130.

[78]Spring, Winds, pp. 18, 236.

[79]Spring, Fame, p. 588. The young lady became a happy mother at the end of the book.

[80]Spring, Shabby Tiger, pp. 188, 192, 203.

[81]Ibid., p. 191.

[82]Ibid., pp. 191, also 197.

The British Communists had their spokesmen in Spring's writings. In one scene, people gathered to hear a fanatical speaker cry out:

> "Now, Comrades: I want to make it clear to you why you are no better than a flock of sheep, shorn to the skin for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. And now that they're down to the skin, the next thing will be that they'll flay the very skin off your backs, and then they'll proceed to suck the marrow out of your bones."[83]

It was the young, the disillusioned, and the slow-thinking who gathered to listen. Actually, though, such soul-stirring speeches converted very few.[84]

Spring had a basic faith that the average Englishman could not for long be a disciple of Russia. One British Communist offered to fight anyone who dared to call him a Russian.[85] Another quasi-follower declared there was more promise in British beer than in Bolshevism.[86] He delivered a final judgment on the merits of Communism over capitalism by simply stating:

> "Stands to reason, you bleedin' cuckoo, if someone's up someone's down. Wot do it matter to me whether you call 'em capitalists or bolshy commissars? Someone runs the roost and someone lays the bloody eggs. An' they're never the same people."[87]

The better educated young people, sick of the conditions of life in England after World War I, proved to be

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[83] Ibid., p. 189.

[84] Ibid., p. 119.

[85] Ibid., p. 282.

[86] Ibid., p. 246.

[87] Ibid., p. 190.

more easily persuaded to join the Communist party; but their conversion did not last. One young man slipped into Russia during World War II thinking he would find a country of peace and equality. He returned to England frightened, disillusioned, and more solemn-looking.[88] Another girl visited Russia only to discover that the revolution was not so thorough, the promise of Communism not so fully realized as she had believed. By 1939, she, too, felt satisfied to make her home in England.[89]

Spring's novels treated Socialism only in passing. Engels appeared in one as a tired old man who, in reviewing his life, wondered that he had believed so much and accomplished so little. He had not even been able to make the poor people, whom he was trying to free, work with him to reach a common goal.[90] Socialism might seem to some to be the only way to achieve brotherhood,[91] but it foundered like the peace movements which had a superfluity of ideas and a lack of either foresight or insight. Brotherhood would never be real, just as war would never be finished.[92] And just as men would fight for peace, so it was those who lived on income from investments who agitated for state

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[88]Spring, Houses, pp. 540-1.

[89]Spring, Fame, pp. 544-5, 547-9, 593-4, 676.

[90]Ibid., pp. 79-80, 134-5.

[91]Ibid., p. 397.

[92]Spring, Time, pp. 348, 349.

ownership of private business to reduce the cost of goods to the consumer and end the tyranny of capitalism.[93]

One political cause received both Spring's attention and his support, and that was votes for women. His heroines were not as fanatical as the Pankhursts but were as strong in conviction and in endurance. He made them women to be admired who knew they would have to struggle, especially when even the Labour party denied them support, and courageously endure the worst of physical sufferings. One might doubt if such tactics as they employed--rock throwing, arson, hunger strikes in jail--could achieve the liberation of females. Indeed, Spring himself wondered if giving the vote to women had actually gained them anything at all.[94]

If Spring's interest in politics and government was something of an avocation and consequently appeared in his novels, then one should not be surprised to find newspapermen and novelists figuring as characters in his plots. Two novels concerned the launching of the penny newspaper, Hard Facts, and the publication firm of Dunkerley's. Actually, Spring had a poor opinion of the material printed in the penny papers, calling them furnishers of "silly driveling rubbish."[95] The success of Hard Facts, when its circulation

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[93]Spring, Winds, p. 40.

[94]Spring, Fame, pp. 458, 461, 472-6, 480, 543; Spring, All The Day, p. 298.

[95]Spring, Hard Facts, pp. 34-5, also 44-5, 48-9, 62.

jumped to over a million in a year's time, served the author's purpose as a way of demonstrating the folly of the public.[96] One might say that it did not pay to educate the poor since they would read only trash; but Spring said the greater transgressors were the people who wrote the stuff.[97] Rotten as Hard Facts was, for ill or for good, it still provided jobs for many.[98] Capitalizing on their success with Hard Facts, Dunkerley's expanded publication into special interest papers like the British Youngster which Spring called, "a horrible pennyworth with an enviable circulation."[99]

On a somewhat smaller scale, Spring found much to criticize in small town newspapers that judged success by the number of names of townspeople they could include within their pages.[100] In one of his novels, a visionary who had worked for the Manchester Guardian for a year or two tried to reform this practice by covering meetings of the town council and printing editorials about local problems. He had only moderate success.[101]

Spring also criticized major city newspapers. Too often, he felt, they would be willing to give space to a story about a sadistic murder while a column on the credence given a most improbable rumor would get no farther than the

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[96] Ibid., p. 55. [97] Ibid., pp. 95-6. [98] Ibid., p. 247.

[99] Spring, Dunkerley's, p. 89.

[100] Spring, Time, p. 160. [101] Ibid., p. 161.

copy room.[102] He also made reference to "the delightful snobbery of the London press"[103] and called the Times "an eminent-looking paper."[104]

Another phase of the modern publication industry, however, ranked higher in Spring's esteem, and that was the literary journal. Many of these magazines appeared and failed between the wars. Still, while they were in existence, they attempted to maintain a high level of literary style and professional ethics. They employed theater and book reviewers who were original in their phraseology, avoided the usual cliches, and used a fresh approach.[105] Editorial policy of these magazines frequently tended to be liberal and almost always reflected a minority opinion even if the editor had to oppose one of his own financial backers.[106] This particular type of magazine carried its editorial policy to the extent of not accepting advertisements from businessmen against whom that policy was directed, even if one of those men was a potential prime source of financial support. The editors would rather lose such funds than allow money to influence policy.[107]

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[102] Ibid., p. 257. [103] Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 280.

[104] Spring, Time, p. 203.

[105] Spring, I Met A Lady, pp. 159, 168.

[106] Ibid., p. 293. A case in point concerned the magazine's refusal to support Hitler and Mussolini.

[107] Ibid., pp. 305-6.

In other realms of literature, Spring's opinion of modern developments was less favorable. He felt that contemporary authors were impressed with their own achievements when actually they had written nothing new but had just used franker terms;[108] therefore, novels contained nothing of a sophisticated nature and were utterly lacking in taste.[109] He particularly objected to novels concerning soldiers during World War II which depicted immorality among the men.[110]

Spring believed that playwrights fell into the same pattern. The silly, modern plays were an indictment of British taste.[111] Even worse, plays served as a dramatization of the most degrading aspects of society.[112] Still, discriminating people preferred almost any live production to the inanities of the cinema.[113]

Spring never suggested that perhaps these authors were writing solely with an eye to obtaining a large profit from their labors. He did, however, mention the dependence of plays on some financial genius who would be willing to pledge funds before a play could go into production.[114] The

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[108]Ibid., p. 317. [109]Spring, A Sunset Touch, p. 106.

[110]Ibid., p. 174. [111]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 59.

[112]Spring, Winds, p. 144.

[113]Spring, My Son, p. 165; Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 273.

[114]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 327.

profit motive of this type of wizard, who could see opportunities for increasing his wealth in the most unlikely places, found its way into Spring's novels.

Building a great fortune, whether it be in producing plays or selling stocks, required that the profit motive be linked with that key word, opportunity; and the best of opportunities came in wartime. For instance, in one novel, a clever man bought two derelict ships for £5,000 in mid-1914, made minimum improvements, and sold them to the navy for £100,000.[115] This particular man described his success in making a fortune as "a little luck to begin with, a good deal of ruthlessness to go on with: . . . that's the short biography of most rich men."[116]

The worst years of World War I also proved to be conducive to fortune-making for men dealing in Manchester cotton.[117] However, the speculative boom in cotton grossly inflated shares of stock, and the prosperity which Lancashire enjoyed had a remarkably short existance.[118] London money bought the Manchester mills at a low price and sold at a high one, enabling speculators to live in a luxurious fashion. When the ruined, "over-capitalized" trade collapsed, those who had faith in the cotton trade honorably stood by

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[115] Ibid., p. 34.

[116] Ibid., p. 260.

[117] Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 58.

[118] Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 83.

it, held their stock, and went under with their businesses.[119]

The new generation of businessmen who came to the fore in the post-war era eschewed honor and failed to understand how someone else could be concerned with such intangibles. Rather, the capitalists scoffed and said that sane men, especially businessmen, no longer bothered about nonessentials like honor.[120] Even the responsibility of becoming a Member of Parliament appeared to them as no more than a prudent step. More people would be willing to trust a Member of Parliament with their investments, rather than the average stockbroker.[121]

Spring felt that accumulating a fortune involved a certain lack of responsibility and a desire to get the greatest return for the least amount invested, and he used the example of slum rental property to prove his point. The investor could easily avoid making improvements which would only lessen profits; it mattered not to him if his property was unfit for human habitation since he lived miles away in the suburbs.[122] Other income derived from investing in stocks and bonds "in the City" came from "buying something you've never seen from someone you've never met, and selling it for more than you gave for it to someone you've never

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[119]Spring, I Met A Lady, pp. 83-4.

[120]Spring, Time, pp. 298-9. [121]Spring, Armour, p. 179.

[122]Spring, Winds, p. 239.

heard of."[123] Spring declared that this was a curious kind of life.

He also commented on other aspects of financiers' lives. Often they were part of the nouveaux riches who had a knack for turning a wonderful personal event like a wedding into a vulgar spectacle.[124] Or they would make conspicuous donations to such institutions as Oxford in the expectation of being publicly rewarded with a doctor's degree.[125] Spring succinctly described one financier's life by saying "he did nothing but read The Financial Times, ring up his stockbroker and play golf."[126]

The money thus earned interested Spring greatly. He commented on the ability of inherited wealth to shape, for good or ill, the lives of those who received a share of it.[127] Actually, in such cases, money should be regarded almost as a natural gift and therefore used judiciously, not abused. Only when greed and envy caused familial strife did inherited wealth become a curse; whenever material goods became too important, trouble resulted. Wealthy people should make a conscious effort to place money in its proper perspective.[128] On the other hand, Spring often wondered "if anyone had a

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[123]Spring, My Son, p. 280.

[124]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 257.

[125]Ibid., p. 285.

[126]Ibid., p. 259.

[127]Spring, Houses, p. 436.

[128]Ibid., p. 445.

right to be rich without having done a thing about it"[129] because "living on investments means living on other people's labour."[130] Capital did not accrue when left alone, despite what some businessmen might say. And Spring claimed that it was the average employee, working at his job, who made the fortunes for the few.[131]

Spring preferred to live on his earnings and, when they ran low, to set about augmenting his income by writing another novel.[132] He felt a man should work as hard as necessary to live a decent life; the rest of his time should be spent in leisure doing as he wished.[133] Although a person should not work merely for the sake of a career lest he become something less than human,[134] Spring recognized that not everyone with an easy job would do that job well.[135] What mankind needed was more people who indulged in the harmless jobs of fishing and farming in a "world so full of harmful and hurtful and government-decorated great men."[136]

Modern attitudes which led men to choose "careers," write bad novels, and let money make itself had some lesser effects that distressed Spring. He disapproved of the

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[129]Spring, Armour, p. 206. [130]Ibid., p. 278.

[131]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 67.

[132]Spring, Armour, p. 278.

[133]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 190. [134]Ibid., p. 331.

[135]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 150.

[136]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 387.

dress, manners, and especially the painted fingernails,[137] sunglasses, and abbreviated clothing of the modern woman.[138] True beauty, in his opinion, should never be spoiled by cosmetics.[139] Neither did he particularly care for modern resorts that were "cheap, blowsy and nasty,"[140] where people came for noise and because it was the place to go on a vacation. The average working couple went to the shore but had little expectation of actually enjoying themselves, though they would later declare that they had because it was the accepted thing to do.[141] They would also tour unused buildings when the only way to catch the flavor of a place was to see it in use.[142] These people were the same kind who frequented brightly-lit restaurants that had high prices and obsequious service even though edible food was almost impossible to find in such places.[143] Roadhouses that had their motif printed on every visible surface could only appeal to someone with a complete lack of discrimination.[144]

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[137]Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 86.

[138]Spring, A Sunset Touch, p. 144; Spring, All The Day, p. 279.

[139]Spring, Rachel Rosing, pp. 53-4; Spring, Shabby Tiger, pp. 8-9.

[140]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 26.

[141]Spring, Time, p. 105. [142]Ibid., p. 182.

[143]Ibid., pp. 270, 281.

[144]Spring, Rachel Rosing, p. 191.

The rare, good restaurant, patronized by the nobility, would usually be situated on a quiet side street and be small and inconspicuous, never calling attention to itself but specializing in delicious food and good service.[145]

Cemeteries and funerals, antiques, and zoos were subjects Spring treated in passing. He felt parents should not inflict funerals upon children[146] and scoffed at mourning dress[147] and at cemeteries with their attendant tombstone cutter's yards and taverns.[148] He called antiques "loot from fallen fortunes," once-useful objects which now only collected dust.[149] And zoos were very large prisons where animals must serve a life sentence for some unknown crime.[150]

Spring's ideas, as outlined above, on education, family life, and preserving traditions, reflect his general philosophy. He felt that England gradually was becoming a mechanistic, totalitarian state, governed by dehumanising institutions and inhuman machines. In the various aspects of daily living, he saw the growth of the new state.

Specifically, he thought that education should be geared to an individual's needs, not standardized. For the

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[145]Ibid., pp. 207-8, 306. See also Spring, Time.

[146]Spring, Armour, p. 11.

[147]Spring, Dunkerley's, pp. 7, 43.

[148]Spring, My Son, p. 272.

[149]Spring, I Met A Lady, p. 114.

[150]Spring, Houses, p. 484; Spring, Shabby Tiger, p. 84.

sake of his own dignity, man should not be persuaded to live in metal anthills called apartment houses. Spring favored anything warm and gracious which could reflect the personalities of human beings. Customs should be retained because they are the mortar which bind the people of a nation together.

Thus, the major threat to England came from within, from the gradual weakening of the fabric of English life. Communism and socialism themselves were outside menaces and not to be feared as long as the average Englishman stayed true to his own convictions and retained his honor and individuality. If he could be persuaded by politicians or businessmen of the new generation to forsake time-honored practices for new bright, shiny, brittle machines, then Spring believed that England would lose its unique character.

CONCLUSION

Howard Spring's criticism and comments encompassed practically every phase of British life. Reflected in his novels the reader can see how Spring reacted to conditions around him, and much of the popularity that his novels enjoyed seems to result from Spring's ability to voice the opinions and reactions of many of his readers to those conditions.

A major question facing students of Howard Spring's writings in the few short years since his death is, was the man a great author? Was he truly a second Charles Dickens, as he has been called? Spring was talented, but not great, and certainly not a twentieth century Dickens. Spring was a gentle person, who loved the people he knew and worked with, and possessed a capacity for understanding that enabled him to see life in all its "shades of gray." He never could have written in the semi-allegorical style of Dickens; the patent evil and virtue of Dickens' novels would have been markedly out of place in Spring's writings. By the same token, the humanity and fairness of mind exhibited by Spring robbed him of that biting judgment which might have made him a great social critic. The major area of comparison between the two authors is their descriptions

of slum conditions. Here Spring wrote of what he knew as a result of the experience of growing up in a slum. His comments are more than valid, and he painted a vivid picture. However, Spring himself was forty years and more removed from the slums where he spent his youth. For the most part, he was rousing the reader's passion against areas that had long ceased to be the scourge of England. He was not writing about an apprenticed child who was a victim of society's ignorance as Dickens did. Spring wrote about an underprivileged boy of yesteryear, and his writing of a dimly remembered past removed much of the sting from his criticism, a bite that can be present only when a writer speaks of contemporary social ailments.

On subjects other than slum life in the early twentieth century, Spring's view seems rather narrow and constricted. There is in all of his writing only the barest mention of the depression of the 1930s and none at all of the influenza epidemic of 1919. Likewise, Spring blamed the condition of the Welsh miners on a callous government that ignored the plight of its citizens and ascribed the decline in the Manchester cotton trade to the manipulation of rapacious London stockbrokers looking for a quick profit. In reality, the depression in the coal and textile industries came from a general decline in British exports after World War I,[1]

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[1]Henry Pelling, Modern Britain, 1885-1955, Norton Library (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 89, 102. Coal exports in 1907 were 82 million tons, in

and, in fact, there was not much that any government could have done about them. English markets had been lost, and despite every effort, new ones were difficult to find. Spring seems never to have connected the depression in the coal trade and textile industry with the greater economic depression which was world-wide. Unfortunately, and as a result, the reader calls into question many of Howard Spring's other statements on subjects like war, politics, and business and wonders if what appeared in the novels correctly reflected the times about which he wrote at great length. If Spring was obviously biased, his criticism loses much of its effectiveness and degenerates into negative complaining. In all probability though, Spring, like many another novelist, simply was not an active researcher. He wrote of what he lived, what he saw, and what he read in the newspapers, and one must take this into account when judging the value of Spring's criticism.

Spring, however, did have a definite gift for using words to create clean and sharp visual images. The reader remembers the obnoxious self-righteousness of the Plymouth Brethren, the oppressiveness of a slum on a hot summer day, the heartbreaking idealism of the literary magazine's young editor, or the exhilaration of a cross-country hike before automobiles arrived on the English country scene. The

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1930 were 70 million tons; cotton cloth exports in the same years fell from £105 million to £86 million.

reader wishes that he might have received his education from an elderly tutor in a rural cottage, that World War I had not made England's youth so bitter, or most of all, that England had not lost the special feeling for life that Spring seems to feel she had through the summer of 1914. This, unquestionably, is the greatest value of Spring's novels: the recreation through the author's memory of the transition, both progressive and destructive, of England from Victoria's last years to the modern post-World War II world. He lived it, he felt it, he preserved it for others to live and feel. No one but an author of his experience and compassion could have accomplished this task quite so well.

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