

CHAPTER II

THE PURCHASE OF *THE NEW AGE*

THE possibility of jointly editing a periodical had been discussed by Orage and Jackson soon after they first met in Leeds in 1900.¹ At that time Orage, who was then twenty-seven, had been teaching in a Leeds Board elementary school for seven years. Although his formal education had ended after one year in a teachers' training college, his activities in Leeds indicate that through his own efforts he had acquired a comprehensive knowledge of politics, philosophy, and literature. He participated in the founding of the Leeds branch of the Independent Labour Party in 1894, and from 1895 to 1897 wrote a weekly literary column for Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader*. In addition to lecturing for the I.L.P., he travelled in the North of England as a speaker for the Theosophical Society. His interest in Plato (whose works he studied for a period of seven years) had resulted in the formation of a Plato Group, 'in origin and effect a circle for the reception of Orage's expositions of Platonic philosophy'.² According to Philip Mairet, his speculative interests had by 1900 led him away from his earlier concern with social

¹ Philip Mairet, *A. R. Orage* (London, 1936), p. 23. The information in the following paragraphs regarding Orage's activities in Leeds is from Mairet.

² Mairet, pp. 15-16. Orage said that he had devoted seven years to the study of Plato in *The New Age*, XIV (11 Dec. 1913), 177; conjecturally, the period involved was 1893-1900. He also devoted seven years to Nietzsche (1900-7?) and the *Mahabharata* (1907-14?).

reform, but this trend was reversed by his friendship with Holbrook Jackson.

At their first meeting, Jackson introduced Orage to the works of Nietzsche, which were to exercise a decisive influence over his subsequent thought. 'There are,' Orage wrote in 1906, 'books that appeal to sentiment, books that appeal to the mind, and books that appeal to the will. Nietzsche's belong to this last small but immortal section. Nobody can read his books without receiving a powerful stimulus in one direction or another.'¹ Their effect on Orage was immediate and profound. *Thus Spake Zarathustra* led him to realize that ideas, which he had increasingly isolated from life, were meaningful only in relation to action. After 1900, he was to take a renewed interest in the political and cultural activities that had been overshadowed by his interest in occult philosophy during the preceding four years.

The year 1900 also marked the beginning of Orage's lifelong friendship with A. J. Penty, then an architect with his father's firm in Leeds. His acquaintance with Penty renewed Orage's interest in the arts and crafts movement (during his youth, he had walked to Cambridge, a distance of about twelve miles, once a week in order to take drawing lessons), and Penty's theory regarding the guild organization of industry was to have a far-reaching influence on his economic thought.

¹ Orage, *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age* (London, 1906), pp. 11-12. His statement regarding the effect of Nietzsche's works is confirmed by a number of twentieth-century authors. Edwin Muir and Wyndham Lewis said that Nietzsche was the paramount influence in their early intellectual development, and Herbert Read asserts that 'for at least five years he, and none of my professors or friends, was my real teacher'. Muir, *An Autobiography*, pp. 125-7; Lewis, *Rude Assignment* (London, 1950), p. 120; Read, *Annals of Innocence and Experience* (London, 1940), p. 86.

THE PURCHASE OF 'THE NEW AGE'

In 1900, then, the ideas which were to be embodied in *The New Age* seven years later were being formulated through the collaboration of these three men. In many respects, their interests were complementary. Holbrook Jackson, at that time a lace merchant, was a Fabian Socialist with acquaintances in the political and literary circles of London. Penty contributed a craftsman's knowledge of the processes of manufacture to the former's knowledge of business organization, and his radical suggestions regarding industrialism fertilized their discussions of political theory. Orage's artistic and literary interests gave him something in common with each; his passion for speculative thought was no less important than his knowledge of the labour movement in integrating their political and cultural discussions during the following years.

Soon they were seeking a means of disseminating their ideas concerning the relationship between culture and the political and economic objectives of Socialism. 'Their project,' says Mairet,

was for a movement for cultural reform. It was to be primarily aesthetic in its motives, but with much more far-reaching aims. . . . Their minds met in the idea of a reform of *taste* in art, manners, thought, and discussion. This aesthetic revolution was gradually to engender a social force capable of overthrowing the supreme evil of the age, Plutocracy.¹

This conception foreshadows the insistence on the inter-relationship between culture and economics which is evident throughout *The New Age*. It is not surprising that they considered the possibility of founding a periodical to further their aims; but they discarded this idea and in 1902 formed a discussion group known as the Leeds Arts Club.

¹ Mairet, p. 22.

'THE NEW AGE' UNDER ORAGE

Its purview was more extensive than the name would indicate, for philosophy, politics, and sociology, as well as art and literature, were the subjects of lectures and discussions. Some of those who delivered lectures—Shaw, Chesterton, Edward Carpenter—were later to become contributors to *The New Age*.

Between 1902 and 1905, the Leeds Arts Club provided Orage with a more stimulating sphere of activity than he had found in the I.L.P. and the Theosophical Society; it also enabled him to develop those abilities for organization and co-ordination he was later to exercise as an editor. But this period was also one of increasing personal difficulties and professional frustration. He had married in 1896; at the time he was earning only eighty pounds a year, and financial problems exacerbated the tensions of what seems to have been an otherwise unsatisfactory match that later ended in divorce. Although he enjoyed teaching, he felt a growing sense of frustration as a result of his encounters with the educational bureaucracy. In 1905, he ended his career as a teacher and moved to London, intending to support himself through independent journalism.

A. J. Penty had arrived in London a few months before Orage, and Holbrook Jackson joined them in 1906. Their ideas regarding Socialism, the labour movement, and the methods and standards of industrial production, the product of six years of dialectic, had little in common with the prevailing conceptions of these subjects that they encountered in the Fabian Society in London. Orage's attitude towards the Fabians is implicit in a review of one of their pamphlets which he had written some years before. They had, he said,

a positive genius for the commonplace. The spirit of Captain Cuttle is in every Fabian tract, and 'When found, make note

THE PURCHASE OF 'THE NEW AGE'

of,' applies to everything the mysterious society publishes. . . . I am convinced that when the rest of the world shall have taken Mark Twain's advice, and 'shuffled off this mortal coil', there will still be the Fabian Society to prepare neat and accurate tables of averages and percentages for the judgment day.¹

Orage, Penty, and Jackson were concerned with the cultural and philosophic foundations of Socialism, rather than with the statistical superstructure so important to the Fabian Society.

Apparently some members of the Society were in sympathy with their point of view. In order to establish a forum in which their ideas could be discussed, Orage and Jackson decided to form what might be called a London counterpart of the Leeds Arts Club. Accordingly, an organizational meeting was held in the offices of the Fabian Society in January, 1907, G. B. Shaw acting as chairman. Holbrook Jackson moved that

a group called the Fabian Arts Group be formed by members and associates of the Fabian Society with the object of interpreting the relationship of art and philosophy to Socialism. . . . A. R. Orage seconded the resolution, and in pointing out the importance of art and philosophy to the propaganda of Socialism he said that the arguments both for and against Socialism were becoming more and more philosophic and less related to the immediate scientific application of Socialistic measures. The Society had made up its mind on these last, and it had now not only to make up its mind but to help form a Socialist opinion of the former. And he drew attention to the necessity of the Society considering so vital a question as the relation of the handicrafts and craft guilds to Socialism. . . .²

It is interesting to note that Yeats was present, and offered

¹ *The Labour Leader*, VIII (1 Feb. 1896), 36.

² *Fabian News*, XVII (Jan. 1907), 20.

‘THE NEW AGE’ UNDER ORAGE

to deliver a lecture in a series to be arranged by the Group’s executive committee. Among those who lectured to the Group in the following months were Aylmer Maude, M. D. Eder, E. Belfort Bax, Edgar Jepson, Chesterton, and Wells.

Ostensibly, the Fabian Arts Group, as a subordinate organization within the Society exploring only one aspect of its objectives (and this not a very important aspect in the eyes of the Fabian Executive), could not be in conflict with the parent body. But it was a natural gathering-place for those discontented with the policies of the ‘Old Gang’ (Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Edward Pease, Hubert Bland, and Shaw). There is a suggestion of sectarianism in Wells’s reference to the formation of the Group as ‘expressing in a most convincing way the new attitude towards Socialism and life’, a suggestion borne out by Orage’s letters to Wells.¹ Eric Gill later said that the Arts Group made ‘vague efforts to deprive Fabianism of its webbed feet—vain efforts’.²

One can understand why these efforts were in vain: although innumerable specific objections to the strategy employed by the Fabian Executive could justly be made, the dissidents did not suggest a coherent alternative policy. But their general attitude towards the Society was clearly that which Orage and Jackson had arrived at some years before: that an investigation of the cultural basis of political reform was at that time more important than the study of the ‘scientific application’ of Socialism. That these two men, who had only recently come to London, were able to organize such a group is some indication of their personal and intellectual resources at the time.

¹ *Fabian News*, XVII (Mar. 1907), 30. The University of Illinois possesses seven letters from Orage to Wells, dated 1907-8.

² *Letters of Eric Gill* (London, 1947), p. 311.

THE PURCHASE OF 'THE NEW AGE'

Meanwhile, they were finding that it was no easy matter to support themselves by occasional journalism. Orage published three books in 1906-7, but the sum he earned from them was negligible.¹ He and Holbrook Jackson thought of collaborating, but these plans never materialized. In any event, occasional journalism would not have been a suitable medium for propagating their political and cultural ideas. Random articles based on a unique and fairly complete framework of thought would have been without effect amid the welter of contemporary journalism. The ideal method of engendering the type of discussion they desired would be, as they knew, to edit a periodical themselves. Thus it is not surprising that they investigated the possibility of buying *The New Age* when they learned that it was for sale.

The New Age had had a varied history as an independent weekly. It was founded in 1894 by Frederick A. Atkins, who pursued a policy of Christian liberalism and was not unfavourably disposed towards Socialism. The contributors included Richard Le Gallienne, Israel Zangwill, and Jerome K. Jerome. After A. E. Fletcher became the editor in 1895, the subtitle was changed from 'A Weekly Record of Culture, Social Service, and Literary Life' to 'A Journal for Thinkers and Workers'. Ramsay MacDonald was a regular contributor during this socialist phase of the magazine's history. Fletcher was succeeded by Arthur Compton-Rickett,² who in turn was followed by Joseph Clayton. By 1900, the magazine was again

¹ *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age* (London, 1906), *Nietzsche in Outline and Aphorism* (London, 1907)—clear and concise expositions of Nietzsche's philosophy—and *Consciousness: Animal, Human, and Superhuman* (London, 1907), in which Orage attempted to synthesize religious concepts of higher consciousness and Nietzsche's theory of the Superman.

² Arthur Compton-Rickett, *I Look Back* (London, 1933), pp. 80-1.

‘THE NEW AGE’ UNDER ORAGE

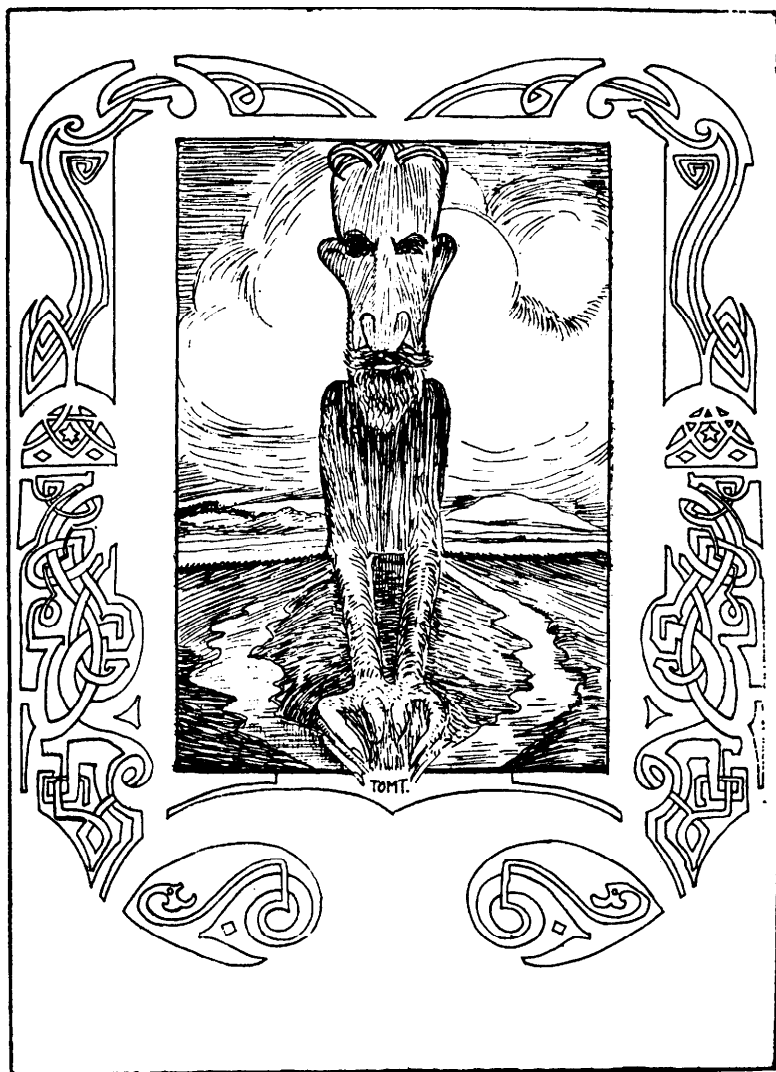
independent, though its sympathies were clearly Liberal. Between 1900 and 1907, the circulation declined, and it became so deeply in debt to the printer at the end of this period that it had to be sold.¹

The price of the magazine was low; even so, Orage and Jackson did not have sufficient funds to purchase it, and they realized that a substantial amount of capital would have to be spent before it became profitable. Therefore Jackson applied to Shaw for financial help. The latter indicated that he would give them some of the royalties from *The Doctor's Dilemma*, which was then enjoying financial success in the West End; he suggested, however, that they ‘raid the City first’, as others would be more willing to help if they did not know of his offer. Meanwhile, Orage was doing just that. One morning early in 1907, their post contained letters from Lewis Wallace, a merchant banker whom Orage had met in Theosophical circles, and Shaw, each offering to contribute five hundred pounds towards the purchase and operation of *The New Age*.²

As a result of their activities previous to the purchase of *The New Age*, it was generally assumed that the magazine's political policy would be Fabian, despite disquieting indications of heretical tendencies within the Fabian Arts Group. The first issue that appeared under their editorship (2 May 1907) contained letters from Sidney Webb and Edward Pease (the secretary of the Fabian Society) wishing them success. However, the new subtitle of the magazine was, significantly, ‘An Independent Socialist Review of Politics, Literature, and Art’, and in an editorial in the previous issue the new editors had made it clear

¹ Interview with C. B. Bonner (printer of *The New Age*), March 1960.

² Mairet, p. 36.



1. MR G. BERNARD SHAW

that they disavowed ‘any specific formula, whether of economics or of party’.¹ Before advocating any specific course of socialist action, they felt that it was necessary to establish a reputation as an independent forum open to all intelligent opinion. Contributors were free to criticize Fabian policies, but in no case were their criticisms supported editorially. The weekly commentary, entitled ‘The Outlook’, was written by Cecil Chesterton, Holbrook Jackson, and Clifford Sharp (the first editor of *The New Statesman*), with the occasional help of Shaw.² They avoided commenting on disagreements within the Fabian Society and, as a product of collaboration, the column remained free from sectarian bias. When, on one occasion, editorial support was given to an article by Wells, Orage and Jackson realized that this single instance might compromise their reputation for impartiality; consequently they obtained two articles attacking Wells’s views for the next issue.³

During 1907, while Jackson was the co-editor, the magazine was devoted primarily to political discussion. When one considers the number of critical decisions that were made within the socialist movement that year, the reasons for this preponderance are evident. In the elections of 1906, the Labour Representation Committee had proved itself an effective political force, and Socialists were debating the extent to which they should commit their fortunes to party politics. Since the Trade Unions

¹ *The New Age* (25 Apr. 1907), p. 453. Hereafter, *The New Age* is cited as ‘NA’.

² Dan H. Lawrence, the editor of Shaw’s letters, has identified four paragraphs on the railway dispute (NA, II [14 Nov. 1907], 41) as the work of Shaw, through a reference in a letter from Shaw to Holbrook Jackson dated 12 Nov. 1907.

³ NA, I (13 & 20 June 1907); letter from Orage to Wells, 9 June 1907.

THE PURCHASE OF 'THE NEW AGE'

Congress, which dominated the Labour Representation Committee and the Labour Party, was not committed to Socialism, many Socialists advocated the formation of an independent Socialist Party. The 'Old Guard' of the Fabian Society remained true to its doctrine of the 'permeation' of existing parties, while Wells attempted in vain to muster support for his theory of 'superimposition'. Since many of those involved in these debates read and contributed to *The New Age*, it soon became the battleground of their proposals.

A substantial portion of the magazine was devoted to discussion of the numerous subsidiary issues connected with Socialism. 'Nothing is more evident,' said the editors, than the fact of divergence amongst leading reformers on precisely the issues of the Socialistic propaganda. To bring those divergences into the light of intelligence . . . will be the aim of *The New Age* in its new form.¹

At that time, reformers with diverse social panaceas, from temperance to selective breeding, were attempting to graft their ideas onto Socialism. Wells, in his autobiography, has summarized the differences within the Fabian Society during those years:

Some members denounced machinery as the source of all our social discomfort, while others built their hopes on mechanization as the emancipator of labour, some were nationalist and others cosmopolitan . . . some Christian and some Atheist . . . some proposing to build up a society out of happy families as units and some wanting to break up the family as completely as did Plato.²

The last of these issues was a source of considerable conflict. Wells's novels had led many to suspect, rightly,

¹ *NA* (25 Apr. 1907), p. 458.

² *Experiment in Autobiography*, I, 247-8.

'THE NEW AGE' UNDER ORAGE

that his own views on procreation and the family were far from conventional; political expedience necessitated his denial of such views, and he duly recanted in *The New Age*.¹ But not all Socialists were willing to forsake free discussion for expedience. Florence Farr, defining marriage as 'a profession in which the amateur commands a higher price than the skilled artist', discussed the advantages of Eastern sacramental prostitution with the dispassionateness that characterized the 'new woman', and Havelock Ellis advocated a reform of the laws on homosexuality in its pages.² *The New Age* became, and was to remain, a weekly debating society, open to the expression of widely differing opinions, with an almost aggressive emancipation from Victorian discretions.

The format of the magazine was at this time similar to that of other political weeklies, There were columns on art, music, and drama; few books were reviewed, aside from those written by Socialists. Occasionally there were discussions of the works of well-known writers in terms of their relevance to the Socialist creed. Apart from a few poems and sketches distinguished only by their revolutionary fervour,³ there were no creative works.

The New Age was unsuccessful financially during 1907. Selling for a penny, its weekly deficit was about twenty pounds, in spite of the fact that contributors were seldom paid. In addition to being plagued by financial problems, Orage and Jackson apparently disagreed about the policy of the magazine. According to Mairé, 'Holbrook Jackson

¹ *NA*, I (17 Oct. 1907), 392. In his autobiography, he confesses the validity of the charges brought against him at the time, and concludes that it was a mistake to deny them.

² *NA*, I (25 Sept. 1907), 294; II (14 Nov. 1907), 45-6.

³ Written by Edwin Pugh, E. Nesbit, George Raffalovitch, and others.

THE PURCHASE OF 'THE NEW AGE'

wanted *The New Age* for the middle classes, to teach them Socialism with a Fabian and Fabian Arts Group policy, whereas Orage was determined that the paper should be more broadly socialistic, and spoke of a "socialist Spectator".¹ By the end of 1907 they had amicably agreed to part, Orage remaining editor of *The New Age* and Jackson beginning an independent journalistic career during which he edited *T.P.'s Weekly* (1911-16) and *To-day* (1917-23).

Orage was thirty-three when he became the sole editor of *The New Age*. The following description of him by Holbrook Jackson is representative of the impression he made on his contemporaries.

In appearance Orage was tall, and, at that time, slim and dark-haired, and he dressed conventionally, except for a soft felt hat, then unusual and probably a result of aesthetic revolt. It was usually worn on the back of his head. He wore a plain hand-woven silk tie, sometimes blue, but oftener an orange or flame colour. His hair was straight and worn short except for a long tuft which sometimes strayed over his forehead. His eyes were hazel, lively, and challenging, and in moments of excitement they seemed to emit a red glint. It was a feline face and there was something cat-like in his movements. He walked as though he were going to pounce on something, much as his mind pounced upon an idea or an opponent. His expression was earnest, without being solemn. There was wit in his poise and manner and he was good to look at without being good-looking. But he did not impress by his features so much as by that which was outside and beyond his features. You were conscious of his aura; you felt his presence so much that you forgot details, even the vague birthmark which broke into his complexion like an irregular sunburn, and seemed to become deeper when he was bored or out of humour.

¹ Mairet, p. 48. Presumably Orage was referring to the *Spectator* of Addison and Steele.

'THE NEW AGE' UNDER ORAGE

This appearance, so lively and so earnest, was a perfect background for his conversation. You expected a man who looked like that to talk well, and I am not alone in thinking that his better genius expressed itself in talk. Even his small talk was fascinating. The odd remarks and unpremeditated sallies, often trivial, were always amusing and sometimes something more.¹

Many of the elements of this picture appear in other descriptions of Orage. One might be inclined to discount Jackson's comments concerning the indefinable 'aura' that surrounded Orage if they were not confirmed in the autobiographies of Epstein, Rowland Kenney, and others; it seems to have affected all who knew him. Edwin Muir's comments are helpful in understanding this aspect of his character.

As a man he lived on the plane of antique virtue, and like Plutarch's heroes aroused admiration not so much for his inborn genius as for the conduct of his life, his formulation and control of his endowments. Consequently, his life had a style, like his writings: a style achieved by conscious discipline which he concealed from the world, letting it speak for itself. . . . He had an extreme faith in the power of man to create out of himself by conscious discipline the image which lies buried in him. . . . He had dealt with himself in the same faith, and ever since his youth had taken up and followed creeds which seemed to provide a short-cut to intellectual and spiritual power. . . . The effect of Orage's extraordinary spiritual effort, sustained for so many years, could be felt by anyone who met him; it gave him an unspoken ascendancy, a charm (in both senses of the word) which was peculiar to himself.²

This belief in personal development through conscious discipline was a controlling factor in Orage's early life.

¹ Quoted by Mairet, pp. 24-5.

² Muir, *An Autobiography*, pp. 172-4.

THE PURCHASE OF 'THE NEW AGE'

Lacking a 'world of thought and men such as he . . . dreamed of but never realized',¹ he had developed his intellectual powers in isolation. In spite of the unquestionable impact of the works of Nietzsche, the influence that was most decisive in developing his mind and shaping his thought was probably his study of Plato. In Orage's writings one discerns the same range of thought, from the incisive analysis of conceptual confusions to mystical speculation, and the same dialectical methods, that one finds in the *Dialogues*. Holbrook Jackson's comment that he 'remained true to one master, Socrates',² helps one understand both his character and, as we shall see, his methods as an editor.

¹ Orage uses this phrase in describing the effect of Schopenhauer's works on Nietzsche (*Friedrich Nietzsche . . .*, p. 18); it obviously has autobiographical overtones.

² Letter to *The New English Weekly*, VI (15 Nov. 1934), 114.