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# THE STORY OF THE DURHAM MINERS

(1662-1921)

BY

SIDNEY WEBB

FABIAN SOCIETY  
11 BLOOMSBURY STREET  
WESTMINSTER  
LONDON, S.W. 1

THE LABOUR PUBLISHING  
COMPANY LIMITED  
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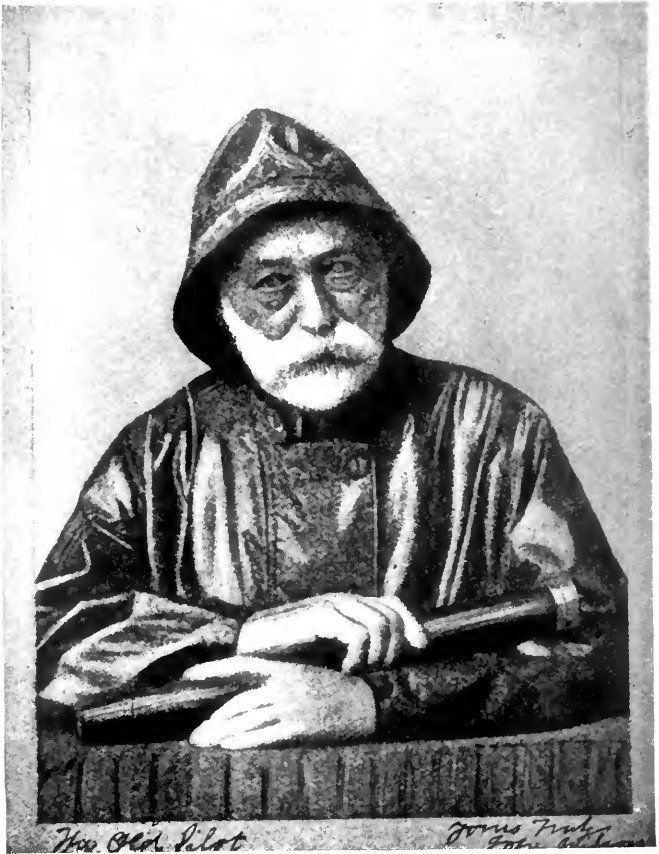




THE STORY OF THE  
DURHAM MINERS  
(1662-1921)







JOHN WILSON, M.P., D.C.L.  
President of the Durham Miners' Association. Died 25th March 1915.

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## PREFACE

THIS little book makes no claim to be an exhaustive history of the Durham Miners, still less a history of the mining industry in the County. I have merely put together in convenient form the results of some researches among the Home Office Papers in the Public Record Office and other contemporary records and local proceedings, with what I have gleaned from published sources. In this work I have been much helped by Miss Ivy Schmidt. My indebtedness to Richard Fynes (*The Miners of Northumberland and Durham*), John Wilson (*History of the Durham Miners' Association, 1870-1904*), and Mr. and Mrs. Hammond (*The Skilled Labourer*) is great. I have especially to thank Mr. J. Robson, President of the Durham Miners' Association, Mr. T. H. Cann,

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General Secretary of the Durham Miners' Association, and Mr. W. Straker, Secretary of the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confidence Association, for their courteous assistance; although they have no responsibility for any of my statements. In order to avoid encumbering the pages with footnotes, I have relegated all references to authorities and sources to the end of the volume.

I cannot hope to have escaped errors; and I shall be grateful if any Durham miner will write to me pointing out any misstatement.

SIDNEY WEBB.

41 GROSVENOR ROAD,  
WESTMINSTER, *February* 1921.



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## CHAPTER I

### BEFORE TRADE UNIONISM

COAL has been worked in the County of Durham, possibly, for more than a thousand years ; but of the conditions of employment of the Durham miner, or of how he fared, we know next to nothing except during the last couple of centuries. Generation after generation lived and died, virtually, if (after the fifteenth century) not legally, in serfdom, without record of their sufferings and their joys. Neither monkish annalist nor municipal chronicler troubled to write of the lot of the labouring poor. We may believe that the earliest collieries (like those for which the King in 1239 granted to the men of Newcastle a licence "to dig coal in the common soil of the town, without the walls thereof, in the place called Castle Field ") were only shallow excavations,

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dug into by half a dozen men, attended by as many boys, and only afterwards developed into regular pits. Yet more than five hundred years ago (in 1354), there is definite mention of the "sinking of pits" at Ferryhill; and some of these underground workings evidently became extensive, employing men by the dozen.

### *The Beginning of the Miners' Death Roll*

By 1621, at least, as we learn from a Gateshead burial record, miners were being "burnt in the pit"; and the long and terrible tale of mining accidents had already begun, by which, in Great Britain alone, possibly as many as a hundred thousand miners' lives have since been sacrificed. As long ago as 1662, 2000 miners of the Tyne and Wear districts put their marks to a petition to the King, praying for the redress of their grievances, foremost among which was the danger to which they were exposed by insufficient ventilation of the pits. Fourteen years later (1676), after a second petition, we find the King's Minister, Lord Keeper North, noting about firedamp, with a

strange mixture of accuracy and error, that "Damps or foul air(s) kill insensibly. Sinking another pit that the air(s) may not stagnate is an infallible remedy." (In spite of this recognition of the need for an upcast shaft, it was nearly 200 years before a second shaft was made obligatory by the Act of 1862.) "They are most under hot weather. An infallible trial is by a dog; and the candles show it. They seem to be heavy sulphureous air(s) not fit for breath; and I have heard some say that they would lie in the midst of the shaft and the bottom be clear. The flame of a candle will not kindle them so soon as the snuff, but they have been kindled by the striking fire with a tool. The blast is mighty violent, but the men have been saved by lying flat on their bellies." Though the Royal Society was considering the cause of explosions in 1677, it is doubtful whether the Northumberland and Durham Miners of the seventeenth century secured anything by their petitions. So far as accidents were concerned, matters got worse and worse as the eighteenth century proceeded; because the successive inventions by which the steam engine was, from 1712

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onwards, effectively adapted to the purpose of pumping out the water, enabled the pits to be made even deeper, so that the workings became more in need of the artificial ventilation that was only universally adopted in the following century. The miners themselves were unable to pursue the matter. No durable combination among them is to be traced until a century and a half later. Tumultuous rebellions, indeed, occurred from time to time ; as in 1756-7 among the miners of Shropshire, Somerset, and Carmarthenshire.

##### *The Great Strike of 1765*

The most serious miners' strike of the eighteenth century seems to have been that in Durham on 25th August 1765, when some 4000 men between the Tyne and Wear left work, in resistance to what they believed to be a concerted attempt by the coalowners to alter the conditions of hiring. The exact details are obscure, but it seems that, at this date, it was not uncommon for the Yearly Bond, of which a detailed description will be subsequently given, to be made to expire at different



dates in the same colliery for different men, "lest it should be in their power to distress the trade, by refusing to work till their demands were satisfied." In the previous year there had been a scarcity of hewers; and some coalowners near Newcastle, possibly for pits having a reputation for special hazards, had sought to attract men from other collieries by offering them several guineas each as "binding money."

### *The Leaving Certificate*

To prevent any such forcing up the price, the coalowners of the Tyne and Wear were reported to have agreed "that no coalowner should hire another's men unless they produced a certificate of leave from their last master." The men declared that such an agreement involved their absolute dependence on their employer, because "no coalowner would give such a certificate," which would lose him his hewers; and hence the terms amounted to "a binding during the will of the master." If the men dared to move they would "find that no other owner will hire them, but that they must be forced to work at pits which perhaps they do not like,

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and at what wages the master pleases (or starve, or go to other parts." The men accordingly resolved to cease work on the 25th of August, the date on which they believed their bonds to expire. The employers then declared that the Yearly Bond (of which none of the men had a copy) ran until 11th November; a statement which, if it was correct, seems to indicate that a new term had been surreptitiously inserted at the preceding binding. But on the miners ceasing work, the coalowners retreated from their position and publicly assured the men, by a broadsheet that was sent up to the Home Secretary, that there was no agreement to prevent them leaving on the expiration of their bonds, and that, if they would only work out their terms, a "discharge in writing" would be given to them. The miners remained, however, obdurate, publishing in the local newspaper admirably written explanations of their case. It is interesting to find the London newspapers, on this occasion, manifesting sympathy with the miners, as the victims of oppression and sharp practice. The coalowners became alarmed, and, through the Duke of Northum-

berland, urgently demanded military protection, whereupon three troops of dragoons from York scoured the county—a step which did not prevent various disturbances, in the course of which one of the pits at Pelton was set on fire. In October the men were induced to resume work, the yearly binding henceforth, for nearly half a century, commonly taking place in that month.

### *The Yearly Bond*

For more than three-quarters of a century after the strike of 1765 the struggles of the Durham miners centred round this Yearly Bond, which was not completely got rid of until 1872. In fact, not a few old members of the Durham Miners' Association to-day (1921) remember having themselves been bound in their youth. Matthias Dunn described the Bond, in 1848, as "this desirable arrangement," and blamed the miners for their "improvident" objection to it. It is hard to see what he meant, as the Bond was always a very one-sided business. The miners legally bound themselves, under a substantial penalty, not

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only to submit to various fines and conditions, but also to work continuously at the one colliery for a whole year—usually expressed as eleven months and fifteen days, in order to prevent any newcomers from acquiring a settlement in the parish by a year's continuous service—without absenting themselves for a single day. Yet the colliery owner gave no undertaking to furnish them continuous employment, or, indeed, any employment at all; and at some collieries the men suffered, in the course of the year, many days' loss of wages. Nor did the Bond, for many years, include any agreement as to the rate of pay. If the colliery owner chose to reduce the wages of any grade, or to "make mistakes" in the computation of the coal sent up by each hewer, or to impose new fines, or arbitrarily to "set out" (that is, not pay for) any corves or tubs not properly filled, the men had no legal redress. At some collieries, at least, it was customary to pay the "keeker," the person who passed the corves or tubs as correct, at so much for each one rejected as being improperly filled; so that he had a direct personal interest in unfairness. It is recorded that the father of Thomas Burt once

learnt, on coming to bank, that seven out of eight of his corves or tubs had been rejected, and would not be paid for, though the colliery owner would sell for his own profit the coal thus hewn for him without cost. The miners of a hundred years ago were, in fact, entirely at the mercy of the colliery owners. The Yearly Bond was for many years legally, not a contract of service between two contracting parties, but merely an acknowledgment by the men of a fictitious indebtedness. They could, at any moment, without cause assigned, be discharged and evicted from the wretched hovels that were then provided for themselves and their families. On the other hand, if during their whole year of binding they attempted to get work elsewhere, even if they were made to stand idle, they could be summarily convicted and sent to prison. Durham Gaol was seldom without some miners serving sentences for such an offence.

### *Binding Day*

It was an aggravation of the unfairness that the miners had practically no chance of criticis-

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ing or objecting to the terms imposed on them. On the Binding day the Bond was hurriedly read out by the manager in the open air, before a crowd of men of all grades—hewers, putters, firemen, enginemen, pony-drivers, onsetters, banksmen and boys—few of whom could follow what he was reading, or even hear his words. Then and there the men had to put their marks—very few could sign their names—to the document which was to bind them to involuntary servitude for a whole year. “Hiring money” or “Binding money” was paid to them: in the middle of the eighteenth century, only sixpence; a hundred years later often a few shillings. At some collieries the diabolically ingenious practice was introduced of setting up, among the crowd of men, a rush to sign, by offering £1 to the one who got there first, 10s. to the second, 5s. to the third, and only 2s. 6d. each to all the others.

### *The Binding Money*

At the opening of the nineteenth century there was a considerable extension of collieries in the county, and exceptional profits were

made, so that, in 1804, as we are told by Matthias Dunn, "a general scramble for hewers and putters took place at the ordinary binding time. The fears of procuring the necessary supply of men were industriously magnified to such a degree that from 12 to 14 guineas per man were given on the Tyne, and 18 guineas on the Wear; and progressive exorbitant bounties were paid to putters, drivers and irregular workmen. Drink was lavished in the utmost profusion, and every sort of extravagance permitted. Nor did the evil end here; for a positive increase in all the rates of wages was established to the extent from 30 to 40 per cent." But this "evil" of increased wages, in war-time, amid a high cost of living, did not long endure. "The consequence," continues Matthias Dunn, "was the bringing into the trade of a great number of labourers and their families who had hitherto never thought of pit work." The "Binding money" promptly fell away, by 1809, to 5s. on the Tyne and 10s. 6d. on the Wear, "to such as were householders," and 18s. on the Tyne and 13s. 6d. on the Wear, "to single men." Why more should have been

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paid to "single men" than to "householders" is not clear; unless it was because advantage could be taken of the householder's indisposition to move away, whilst the unmarried men were more mobile and had to be tempted to stay.

### *The Strike of 1810*

In 1810 the Yearly Bond was the cause of another big strike throughout the two counties. The colliery owners, without dreaming of consulting the miners, arbitrarily decided in 1809, for their own advantage, to change the binding time from October (when the winter demand was at hand) to January (at that date a season of relative slackness). At the 1809 binding, the men, taken by surprise, appear to have acquiesced in the change. In the course of the year, however, the disadvantage to themselves became apparent; and they had, apparently, by July 1810, entered into a conspiracy for concerted action. Delegates were elected from all the pits, who met in consultation on 18th October 1810, and resolved on a general strike in resistance to the change of date, and really in favour of the



entire abolition of the Bond. There seems to have been no definite Union, but the men held together without any formal constitution which would, under the Combination Acts, have exposed them to prosecution and imprisonment. It was afterwards alleged by a colliery engineer that there existed an oath-bound confederacy, recruited by the practice of "brothering"; so named because the confederates bound themselves by a most solemn oath to obey the orders of the brotherhood, under the penalty of being stabbed through the heart, or of having their bowels ripped up. So lurid a description is characteristic of the Government spy or secret agent, and in the absence of definite corroboration it need not be believed. What is certain is that, for seven long weeks, every pit was stopped, and no wages were received. Without organisation, without halls to meet in, without strike pay, without Co-operative Societies to fall back on, and almost without savings, the men and their families held out doggedly, suffering the greatest hardships from cold and hunger, and from the universal condemnation and contempt of their social superiors.

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The delegates' meetings were "hunted out by the owners and magistrates, assisted by the military, and [were] committed to prison." The mass meetings on the moors were dispersed by the troops, and many arrests made. "To such an extent," we are told by Richard Fynes, "was the Old Gaol and House of Correction at Durham filled that, for fear of infection, several were removed to the stables and stable yards of the Bishop of Durham," where they were guarded by soldiers. A large number of families were evicted from their cottages, and turned adrift in the snow, detachments of troops protecting the bailiff's men. At last, the miners were starved into submission; their delegates, after prolonged negotiations, accepting, at a meeting on 3rd January 1811, what were practically the employers' terms, in the form of "proposals for regulating the contracts between the coalowners and their miners on the Rivers Tyne and Wear, and of Hartley, Blyth and Cowpen," which had been drawn up by the Rev. W. Nesfield, Rector of Brancepeth and Justice of the Peace. What seems finally to have been laid down was that the binding day should henceforth be neither

in October nor in January, but in April ; that compensation at the rate of half-a-crown a day should be paid whenever the pit was laid idle for more than three days ; that all the conditions of employment, other than the Bond itself, should be clearly entered in a book ; and that one copy of the Bond should be supplied in each colliery to a representative of the men. How far these terms were carried into effect is not clear, except that for a whole generation the usual binding date continued to be April in each year.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DURHAM MINER A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

IT is not easy to realise to-day how bad was the social condition of the average Durham miner of 1821. He could, usually, neither read nor write, and learned only by rumour of what was happening outside his own village. He earned, if fortunate enough to be a hewer, 2s. 3d. to 2s. 6d. per shift—a hundred years previously it had been as little as a shilling to fourteen pence—with a few shillings once a year as Binding money, which was almost invariably consumed at the time in drink. For this he was underground for at least ten and often twelve hours a day. The boys, indeed, are said to have been habitually in the pit for sixteen and even eighteen hours, for a wage less than half that of the hewers. The cottages

in which they all lived, most of them provided by the coalowners, were, with a few exceptions, indescribably insanitary, beyond even the worst of to-day.

### *The Absence of Civilising Influences*

There were no Co-operative Societies ; no Miners' Halls ; no workmen's clubs ; no schools ; no religious or philanthropic institutes or missions ; hardly any Friendly Societies ; no insurance and no savings banks ; no music ; no organised recreation of any sort ; nothing but (from 1830 onward) an absolutely unrestricted number of beer-shops ; and, in disablement, sickness and old age, and for burial, the Parish Overseer ! The wages did not go as far as they might have done, for the man employed by the coalowner to pay the men, as we read, " constantly keeps a shop contiguous to the pit, where he lays in every necessary both for the belly and the back, and obliges the poor men to buy whatever they want from him, stopping it out of their wages." The practice of truck, as it was called, had been forbidden by statute law,

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but the terms used were so vague, and the administration of the law was so lax, that these "Tommy Shops," which habitually entangled the miner and his family in the chain of indebtedness from which he could seldom entirely free himself, continued for nearly half a century; until, indeed, they were ousted more by the upgrowth of the Co-operative Society, and by voluntary abandonment at the instance of the coalowners, than by any enforcement of the Truck Act. What escaped the Tommy Shop went, it is to be feared, to the beer-house or worse.

### *The Pitman's Holidays*

On his holidays the pitman, we are told, dressed in gaudy colours, with gaily variegated patterns. Foot-racing and cock-fighting were favourite amusements, with as much poaching as could be managed; alternating with gambling at cards, and the milder quoits, bowls and "hand-ball." We do not read of football matches. Women had worked in the pits during the eighteenth century, even in Durham—we hear of their being killed in explosions at Gateshead in 1705, and at Chester-

le-Street in 1708—but in this county they ceased to work underground about 1780. The standard of health, it is needless to say, was terribly low; the average life among all classes was short and the death-rate at all ages was high.

### *Death in the Pit*

So much a matter of course were fatal accidents in the pits, against which no precautions were required by law, and next to none were taken, that we find it stated that in the first thirty-six years of the nineteenth century no fewer than 985 pitmen were known to have been killed in this coalfield alone, in which, at that date, the average number employed cannot have exceeded about 15,000—indicating that even the recorded accident death-rate was considerably greater than it is to-day. But, as was severely animadverted on by one of the Assize Judges in 1815, it was then customary not to trouble about a coroner's inquest if the corpse was "only that of a collier"; so that we cannot now estimate how much more numerous the fatalities were. The newspapers, as we learn from one of them,

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were asked not to mention such things! At the Fat Field pit at Chester-le-Street—a deep one for that period—69 men, women and boys were killed by a single explosion. Not long afterwards, in an explosion at the Felling Colliery in 1812, 92 men and boys were killed. This calamity induced the Vicar of Felling, the Rev. John Hodgson, “braving the displeasure” as it was remarked, “of the affluent Brandlings,” to publish a detailed account of the accident, and to ask that precautions might be taken. This led to the formation of the Sunderland Society to study the subject. However interesting were the deliberations of this society, a whole generation was to pass before there was even a beginning of care for human life in the mine. With all this, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the typical miner was drunken, dissolute, and brutalised; tyrannised over by his employers and their underlings; habitually cheated out of part of his earnings by the arbitrary setting aside of his corves or tubs, if not also by the frequent “mistakes” in recording the weight or measure of the coal gotten, against which he had no protection. The manners of the pit-



man, we are told, far from improving, had in the course of the preceding century altered "materially for the worse." Whatever his grievances, whatever his sufferings, whatever the oppression to which he was subjected, the individual was powerless.

### *The Religious Revival*

Into such a community, ignored by the statesmen of the time, and virtually given up as hopeless by cleric and philanthropist alike, there came, between 1821 and 1850, two inspiring influences, Religion and Trade Unionism. First to be named must be the Methodists, notably the humble, unschooled but devoted "ranters," carrying gradually from village to village the gospel of salvation of the Primitive Methodist Church. Very moving is it to read to-day of the tireless efforts of these unlettered, hard-driven, poverty-stricken men, nearly always themselves earning a precarious living as manual working wage-earners, who nevertheless found the time and the means, as they gradually spread from one village to another, to gather together

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a tiny congregation, and to establish a humble meeting-place, which eventually became a chapel. Of their success in genuinely converting numbers of the miners there can be no doubt. "On some occasions," in 1823, we read in *Northern Primitive Methodism*, "for want of time to wash themselves they are constrained to come 'black' to the preaching, or else miss the sermon. And when the Lord warms their hearts with His dying love, and they feel Him precious in His Word, the large and silent tears rolling down their black cheeks, and leaving the white streaks behind, conspicuously portray what their hearts feel." How permanent is the influence of this religious emotion, and how effective it proves in changing life and character, varies from case to case. Not all of us to-day would be able to express our sense of human weakness, and our consciousness of man's relation to the infinite, in the terminology of a hundred years ago.

### *The Effects of Methodism*

But no one can doubt—it would, indeed, be hard to over-estimate—the enormous im-

provement which has been wrought by the Methodists in their century of persistent effort in all parts of the county. What they aimed at was primarily the salvation of the soul. But the change of heart which accompanied conversion was habitually marked, though often with backslidings, by a change of life. The Methodist, whatever his shortcomings, became a man of earnestness, sobriety, industry, and regularity of conduct. Family after family became thus transformed, to serve in its turn as a centre of helpful influence. It is these men who, in the mining villages, have stood out as men of character, gaining the respect of their fellows. From the very beginning of the Trade Union Movement among the miners, of the Co-operative Movement among all sections of the wage-earners, of the formation of Friendly Societies and of the later attempts at Adult Education, it is men who are Methodists, and in Durham County especially the local preachers of the Primitive Methodists, whom we find taking the lead and filling the posts of influence. From their ranks have come an astonishingly large proportion of the Trade Union leaders, from checkweighers and

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lodge chairmen up to county officials and committee-men. They swarm on Co-operative and Friendly Society committees. They furnish to-day, in the county, most of the working-class Justices of the Peace and Members of the House of Commons. And whilst various other factors must be recognised—notably the valuable social influence of the Roman Catholic priests over their own flocks, as successive migrations from Ireland and Lancashire swelled their numbers in the county, and the energetic public work of some of the Anglican clergy—it seems to me that it still remains true that, in the silent solid membership of every popular movement in the county, from Trade Unionism and Co-operation, from Friendly and Temperance Societies, right up to the rapidly growing Labour Party itself—no less than among their active local organisers and leaders—perhaps the largest part is contributed by the various branches of the Methodist community.

## CHAPTER III

### EARLY TRADE UNIONISM

I HOPE that I shall not be blamed for yoking together dissimilar influences if I say that, in my judgment, the gradual development of Trade Unionism in the county has been not less potent in its civilising effects on the miners as a class than Primitive Methodism. Itself largely a result of the elevation of character wrought by religious conversion upon individual leaders, Trade Unionism cannot claim to have done nearly so much by direct inspiration as the religious revival, but may possibly have indirectly accomplished, by its economic and legislative achievements, a more widely diffused social improvement in the miners' lives than any other agency. But Trade Unionism among the Durham miners had, in 1821, still half a century of struggle before it could get established.

*The Colliers' United Association*

Of a definitely formed Union we hear first after the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1825, when the "Colliers of the United Association of Durham and Northumberland" published, under the title of *A Voice from the Coal Mines*, an ably written and eloquent description of their various grievances—low rates for hewing; variations in the measures or weights according to which they were paid; non-payment for small coal; fines for inclusion of stones or slates, or of small coal; lack of proper ventilation and lighting of the pits; arbitrary failure to provide employment; harsh and tyrannous behaviour of the employer's underlings, and, in particular, the sharp practice which habitually cheated the men out of the payment of the half-a-crown a day which had been promised in 1810 whenever the pit was laid idle for more than three days. Another able pamphlet by this United Association was published early in 1826, entitled *A Candid Appeal to the Coal Owners and Viewers of Collieries on the Tyne and Wear*, the preservation of which we owe to the fact

that Lord Londonderry got hold of a copy, and promptly sent it to the Home Secretary, with an urgent appeal for assistance in suppressing "the Union of the Pitmen." The coalowners refused, in fact, to listen either to the *Voice* or to the *Candid Appeal*. Perhaps encouraged by rumours of the almost continuous succession of miners' strikes in Lancashire and Cheshire during the year 1826—perhaps hurried into action by the reported intention of the coalowners henceforth to pay no "Hiring money" whatsoever—the Durham men suddenly struck work, much to the alarm of Lord Londonderry, who importuned the Home Secretary for drastic action, lest he and the other coalowners should have to "surrender at discretion to any laws the Union propose." The "Colliers' United Association" does, indeed, appear to have presumed so far to "interfere in the management" as to ask—more than a century too early—that any differences and disputes should not henceforth be settled arbitrarily by the colliery officials, but should be referred to a committee of two viewers appointed by the proprietors and two hewers appointed by the men. But there

was no need for alarm. The Coalowners' Union Committee, which was itself not incorporated, simply ignored the Colliers' United Association, on the ground that it was "not a corporate body." Without resources and without an effective Trade Union, the men soon resumed work on the employers' terms; and earnings, we are told, presently fell lower and lower, everything in the nature of a guaranteed minimum being withdrawn, until, by 1830, as Galloway records, the earnings in many collieries went "as low as 8s. or 10s. per week owing to want of work."

*The Pitmen's Union of the Tyne and Wear*

What happened to the Colliers' United Association is unknown; but four years later we find it revived as the "Pitmen's Union of the Tyne and Wear," under "Tommy Ramsey," and "Tommy Hepburn" of Hetton, the latter being the first recorded effective leader of the miners, and plainly a man of remarkable character, great organising ability and shrewd wisdom. In February and March 1831, when the Binding day was near, two



great meetings were held, one at Black Fell, Durham, and the other on the Town Moor, Newcastle, at each of which some 20,000 miners are estimated to have been present. They resolved to petition Parliament for redress of their grievances ; to send a deputation to London ; to subscribe sixpence per head towards the expenses ; to meet at each colliery twice a week ; to elect delegates to form a General Committee ; to refuse to buy meat, drink, or candles from the colliery " Tommy Shops " ; to decline to sign any Yearly Bond, and to continue at work unbound for the future. As the coalowners refused these terms, the men ceased work, and for several weeks practically no coal was hewn throughout the whole district. The Mayor of Newcastle tried his hand at mediation ; then eleven Justices of the Peace unconnected with the industry ; and finally Lord Londonderry himself, who had in April published a threatening notice as a magistrate, and in May was, as a coalowner, pleading with the men that the fines should be " left to his honour and that of his agents." Under Hepburn's shrewd guidance the men stood firm, abstained from

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violence, and ably argued point after point. Ultimately the coalowners made a concession as to the hours of the boys, and for the lower grades of adults, which were not to exceed twelve per day, exclusive of winding and travelling time. They conceded, too, after a hard fight, that employment should be guaranteed to the extent of a minimum of 30s. per fortnight. They equivocated about the Tommy Shops. But on the retention of their arbitrary power to fine they remained obdurate. In the end it was left to each colliery to make its own terms. Lord Londonderry started making the concessions on which the men insisted, explaining afterwards, to use his own words, "I conceived my colliers were really attached to my family and their old establishment. I tried by addressing them (as well as Lady Londonderry) to work upon their sense of justice and regret, as well as their affections." Other collieries did the best they could; in some cases, as the Duke of Northumberland complained, making "a precipitate and absolute concession to the demands of the pitmen—more, I apprehend, in the eagerness of mercantile zeal than from any positive and

impending intimidation." In June 1831 work was everywhere resumed. Hepburn, the Hetton pitman, had—largely by his personal influence in preventing rioting and violence—won the first victory for Durham Miners' Trade Unionism. We find him speaking as a Radical politician, at the dinner of the Northumberland Political Union and at the gigantic demonstration at Boldon Fell, in favour of the Reform Bill, and in support of the Ministry which had introduced it. Not until August 1831 does he seem to have held any paid office in the Union, and he was then appointed organiser to visit all the pits. The Union balance-sheet for the year 1831-2 showed £32,581 subscribed by all the 63 collieries then in existence in the two counties; whilst £13,009 had been paid out in sick and funeral benefits, and £19,277 in unemployment benefit (doubtless strike pay). But probably this represented only part of the monies dealt with.

### *Ignorance brings Reaction*

Unfortunately, Hepburn's victory proved only of brief duration. No sufficient propor-

tion of the miners had yet, whether through religion or otherwise, gained the necessary strength of character, and hardly any of them were yet adequately educated, for effective Trade Unionism. It is pathetic to find Tommy Hepburn urging them to "form libraries," and to learn to read and think. During the remainder of the year the coalowners seem to have re-formed their combination. Their profits apparently fell off, partly in consequence of a new Coal Act, which required coals for the Metropolis to be sold by weight only, and so put an end to various pickings to which uncertain measurement is said to have led. The coalowners made it a fresh subject of complaint that the hewers, in order to equalise employment throughout the pit, had stinted themselves to earn no more than 4s. per day. They declared that many collieries were actually working at a loss; and they argued, in the same breath, as the reason why miners' wages ought to be reduced, that less was earned in other occupations. They proceeded to import workmen from other industries and other districts. A complicated dispute occurred at Coxlodge and Waldridge, in which

men were victimised and evicted, amid all the horrors of the cholera epidemic, whilst others were sent to prison. Threats of dismissal were made at other collieries against deputies and enginemen belonging to the Union. The Union resolved to support any men who were made to suffer for their membership. The coalowners, at first, were not united. When the binding time came, about half the collieries (including those of Lords Londonderry and Durham) renewed the Bond as before. In the other half, the owners declined to employ "deputies, shifters, banksmen and enginemen," and sometimes other prominent workmen, unless they relinquished their membership. The result was that about 8000 men struck or were refused employment.

#### *Employment refused to Trade Unionists*

The coalowners presently hardened and definitely refused employment to all Union men. Mass meetings at Bolden Fell and Newcastle Moor—the latter arbitrarily broken up by the police, with over forty arrests—were held in order to encourage the men to

stand out in defence of the Union. Funds were, however, lacking. The sickness consequent on the cholera epidemic had drained the men's exchequer; but for some weeks those at work contributed no less than 6s. out of every £1 of earnings in support of those to whom employment had been refused. Meanwhile hundreds of families were evicted from their cottages, notably at Pelton; and many arrests were made by the aid of seventy men of Sir Robert Peel's new London police force, and of a special constabulary, which the coalowners of Hetton organised from distant parts of the county, but which failed to prevent the colliers from sometimes forcibly rescuing the prisoners. Many disturbances, in fact, took place, and not a few acts of violence. A Hetton man named Errington, who had turned blackleg, was found shot dead on Hetton Moor; and when the funeral passed along the Hetton streets, the whole mining population jeered at it—an ugly and discreditable manifestation of public opinion. But all the efforts of the infantry, for which the coalowners had formally applied, were powerless to break the men's spirit. The troops, indeed, as their

Major-General wrote to the Home Office, were becoming the laughing-stock of the county. The coalowners then appealed to the Home Secretary to pass an Act of Parliament to enable them, as the Major-General himself advised, "to put down the Union." The Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, on 16th July 1832, issued a serious injunction to the magistrates calling on them to exercise all their authority to suppress the "extensive and determined combinations which have been formed and entered into by the workmen for the purpose of dictating to their masters." The severities were increased.

### *The Influx from the South*

The most extraordinary efforts were made to attract families from all over the kingdom. "Great numbers of persons, particularly from Wales, left their homes, removed their families and went to work in the North. The northern coaches were crowded with the adventurers, and the stage-waggons were piled with their bedding and boxes. Many from the shorter distances of Staffordshire and Yorkshire walked

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or hired light vehicles. And certainly, to see the numerous haggard pedestrians, or the cart-loads of squalid women and children, in and about the town of Newcastle, going and returning, was a grievous sight. Many of the strangers found matters so little flattering that they hastily beat their retreat. Others stayed and entered upon their work. Not a few, especially of the Welsh strangers, fell victims to the cholera, which raged sorely at several of the collieries. In almost all cases the condition of the newcomers was irksome in the extreme. It was no uncommon thing to see the native pitmen idly reposing on the grass or unaccountably traversing the neighbourhood, while a policeman with a drawn sword in his hand, or a firelock on his shoulder, was walking to and fro on the adjacent hillock to protect the party at work within. The police were out every night on duty about the several collieries to prevent damage to the works or outrage to the men." But notwithstanding all the efforts of the Pitmen's Union, the influx of strangers continued. At one colliery after another the Union members began to fall away. A hundred members at work in Lord



Durham's pits refused any longer to continue their heavy contributions. The strike then petered out, the Union, as it was expressly reported to the Home Secretary, being formally dissolved on 20th September 1832. It is regrettable to relate that Tommy Hepburn, who had served the miners so bravely, was left by them to starve. For weeks he wandered about in the cold vainly trying to sell packets of tea. Driven by hunger, he at last applied for work at a colliery at Felling; and could get it only upon the extorted promise that he would never again take part in any form of Trade Unionism—a promise faithfully kept until his death in 1873.

*Lord Durham's Political Economy*

What the "educated" classes thought about it may be judged from the following speech, made to his men in 1834 by Lord Durham, an exceptionally "enlightened" Radical statesman. "The pretence of these Unions has been to raise wages: the real effect has been, not the advance of the rate of wages, but merely the support of those delegates for

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a limited time in idleness and luxury. These men know, or ought to know, that the rate of wages depends on the price which is given by the public for the article worked. Now the price of coals is very low, so much so that little or no profit is made by the coalowner. In many instances he actually loses, and pays the wages of his men out of his capital, not out of his profits. Be assured that if prices rise, wages rise as a matter of course ; but that if prices fall wages also fall, and that it is as impossible for the master to pay his men advanced wages when prices are low, as it would be for you to pay your butcher and grocer higher prices for meat and tea and sugar whilst your wages are low." So, according to Lord Durham, when the workmen sell their labour they are to understand that wages depend on prices ; but when they buy their food they must believe that prices depend on wages ! It is sad to realise that, after three-quarters of a century of experience and economic teaching, during which most of the workmen have learned better, there are to-day still people thinking themselves educated—especially among journalists, politicians and

employers—who honestly believe such hopelessly bad Political Economy, and who, like the Earl of Durham of 1834, complacently lecture the Trade Unionists on their ignorance.

*The Miners' Association of Great Britain*

Not for nine years after the collapse of 1832 do we again hear of Trade Unionism; but when, in 1841, Martin Jude succeeded in forming at Wakefield the Miners' Association of Great Britain, which quickly grew to 100,000 members, both Durham and Northumberland collieries seem to have been represented through some local organisation. Apparently it is to Martin Jude, and to the energetic national association that he got under way, that the miners owe the first definite enunciation of what afterwards became their characteristic policy, namely, not to rely exclusively or even mainly on strikes, but to secure as many as possible of their demands by Act of Parliament and Home Office administration; to insist on continuous negotiation with the employers, preferably on a national basis; and concurrently to make

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the fullest possible use of whatever powers they may from time to time possess to influence, for the benefit of the miners generally, the House of Commons, the Government of the day and the Courts of Law. A special miners' newspaper, *The Miners' Advocate*, was published at Newcastle, and gained a wide circulation. A "Law Fund" was started, towards which the miners of Durham and Northumberland raised £500, in order to maintain in the law-courts the miners' legal rights. This new departure proved highly successful in diminishing oppression. W. P. Roberts, an energetic and zealous Bristol solicitor of Chartist sympathies, was engaged by the Durham and Northumberland miners' lodges at a retainer of £1000 a year—an immense sum for those days—as the "Miners' Attorney-General," to fight all possible cases before the Justices, at Quarter-Sessions and the Assizes, and in the Courts at Westminster. Up and down the country Roberts posted; here attending the inquest after a colliery explosion to bring out the scandalous neglect of proper precautions; there supporting miners' suits for wages withheld or fines illegally deducted; elsewhere

defending miners in prosecutions under the Master and Servant Act, or against actions to enforce their Bonds. In many of these cases he carried the day; and, what was more important, he made the employers as well as the magistrates realise that they would, henceforth, not find it so easy to bring the miners into court, and get them fined or imprisoned. For instance, by carrying the case to the Courts at Westminster, W. P. Roberts was successful in 1843 in getting off the sixty-eight miners of Thornley Colliery who had been wrongfully sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment for absenting themselves from employment. The men of Wingate Colliery who struck in the same year, in protest against the use of a wire rope which they thought unsafe, were less successful. Generally speaking, local strikes were found to be of little avail.

### *The Strike of 1844*

By 1844 the Durham and Northumberland men felt themselves sufficiently well organised once more to put forward their general claims ;

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and a mass meeting at Shadon's Hill, near Black Fell, was attended by some 20,000 men, who tramped in from a radius of twenty miles to resolve on a general policy of restriction of output (the men were to stint themselves to earn no more than 3s. a day for five days a week) as the only way of securing redress ; on a petition to Parliament in favour of inspectors of mines being appointed to enforce safety precautions and accurate weighing-machines ; and on a demand for the legal enactment of weekly pays. When the men's Bonds were about to expire, W. P. Roberts was employed to draw up their Statement of Claim for presentation to the coalowners ; and they concentrated on five points, namely : (1) payment by weight instead of by measure ; (2) weighing by the ordinary beam scale, subject to the public inspectors ; (3) half-yearly contracts of service instead of the Yearly Bond ; (4) payment strictly according to the weight of coal gotten, with the abolition of the system of fines ; and (5) the guarantee of at least four days' work or wages in every week. On the men's deputation submitting this Statement to the coalowners, they were

told that under no circumstances would their Union be recognised, and that the coalowners would deal, colliery by colliery, only with individual workmen. Meanwhile, at the Glasgow delegate meeting of the Miners' National Association on 25th March 1844, sanction for an immediate strike by the Durham and Northumberland men had been refused by 28,042 to 23,357 votes. But the Association agreed to support the Durham men if their employers refused all concessions on Binding day. No concessions were made, and the most momentous of all the Durham strikes was entered upon. The men in every colliery in the two counties, to the number of 33,990, refused, on 5th April 1844, to renew the Bond, unless the harsh penal conditions were relaxed, and an advance of wages was conceded. The largest mass meeting yet recorded was held at Shadon's Hill, when 40,000 men are said to have been present. The leaders explicitly pledged the men to avoid all violence or disturbance, and patiently to await the result of withdrawing their labour. From one source or another the Union managed to keep up, for a few weeks, the distribution

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to each man of half-a-crown a week, but even this small sum of strike pay soon exhausted the funds.

#### *“ The Twelve Apostles ”*

A deputation of twelve men, afterwards referred to as “ The Twelve Apostles,” was chosen to proceed to London to make known the miners’ case, and to obtain such financial assistance from other workmen as might be practicable. Something was obtained in this way, but the amount was pitifully insufficient. No less than four months passed during which nearly all the pits were idle. Great attempts were made to introduce blacklegs from other parts, but only 3519 were obtained, and only 2000 members of the Union fell away. From July onward evictions of miners’ families took place by the thousand, under circumstances often of the greatest brutality, until quite a large population was camping out in the wet on the moors. The men repeatedly offered to negotiate ; they formally proposed to the Coalowners’ Association to submit the case to arbitration ; when this was ignored,



they appealed to Lord Londonderry to act as mediator, but he refused to intervene. What he did, however, was to publish the following manifesto, which reads so harshly to-day, but which (as must in fairness be said) did not differ appreciably from the current tone of the employers or of the nobility and gentry of the period.

*The Seaham Letter*

“ Lord Londonderry again warns all the shopkeepers and tradesmen in his town of Seaham that if they still give credit to pitmen who hold off work, and continue in the Union, such men will be marked by his agents and overmen, and will never be employed in his collieries again, and the shopkeepers may be assured that they will never have any custom or dealings with them from Lord Londonderry’s large concerns that he can in any manner prevent.

“ Lord Londonderry further informs the traders and shopkeepers, that having by his measures increased very largely the last year’s trade to Seaham, and if credit is so improperly and so fatally given to his unreasonable

pitmen, thereby prolonging the injurious strike, it is his firm determination to carry back all the outlay of his concerns even to Newcastle.

“Because it is neither fair, just or equitable that the resident traders in his own town should combine and assist the infatuated workmen and pitmen in prolonging their own miseries by continuing an insane strike, and an unjust and senseless warfare against their proprietors and masters.”

*The Reverend John Burdon*

Lord Londonderry found an ally in the Rev. John Burdon, who signed himself “Incumbent of Castle Eden”; and in a broadsheet of 1st May 1844 gently reasoned with the miners, as if they had been children, as to the folly of their action and the wickedness of Trade Unionism. “You are resisting,” he concluded, “not the oppression of your employers but the Will of your Maker—the ordinance of that God who has said that in the sweat of his face shall man eat bread, and who has attached this penalty to the

refusal to labour, namely, that if a man do not work neither shall he eat."

It is perhaps not surprising that the miners were unconvinced by such a use of Scripture by a member of a royalty-owning family; and the great strike dragged on. Other broadsheets were issued on each side. Those by the employers threatened with permanent dismissal all men who did not resume work before a given day; proclaimed the total number of new workmen already secured; boasted of the very high earnings made by some hewers; asked why the miners let Mr. Roberts take all their money; pointed out that striking, and even any seeking of higher wages, was "against Christianity," as they should remember that "the Lord will provide," and so on. The men's broadsides, signed by Edward Richardson, eloquently appealed to "the deceived and deluded workmen," who had returned to work, once more to join the Union, and to stand by their fellow-workmen who were struggling for better social conditions. The Union offered to submit the case to arbitration, but the coalowners simply ignored the proposal, and let it be known that

they insisted on each colliery separately dictating its own conditions, in all cases involving a substantial reduction of the men's earnings, to the men whom it would engage. No better conditions could be obtained ; and in August 1844 the men, completely beaten by long-continued privation, sullenly returned to work on the employers' terms, declaring, however, that they would never abandon their Trade Union. But in the general commercial depression of 1847 all trace of the once-powerful Miners' Association of Great Britain disappears.

#### *The Death-blow to the Bond*

The 1844 strike was not entirely fruitless, for, as Sir Richard Redmayne records, it "gave the death-blow" to the Yearly Bond ; which was henceforth increasingly given up in favour of a fortnightly contract of service ; and where the Bond was still retained (as it was in many collieries for another generation) its harsh and one-sided conditions were greatly modified. The Lancashire miners formed a Union in order to assume the responsibility

for the retaining salary of W. P. Roberts, which was raised to £1200 ; and his energetic work in the law courts became steadily more effective. The long struggle of the Durham men, failure though it seemed, had increased, in some ways, the miners' influence.

### *The Haswell Explosion*

On 28th September 1844 a dreadful explosion occurred at Haswell Colliery, in which ninety-six men and boys were killed, and which made a deep impression on public opinion. Roberts attended the inquest and brought out the neglect of all precautions. He posted immediately to London, and successfully claimed, as the miners' representative, an interview with the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel. He pressed for a special scientific investigation of the cause of the disaster, and succeeded in getting the Government to appoint Charles Lyell, the ablest geologist, and Michael Faraday, the ablest physicist, jointly to prepare a report.

*The First Safety Law*

As soon as this was published, Roberts, whose case had been strengthened by the occurrence of several other explosions, induced the Prime Minister to undertake to bring forward protective legislation in the very next session—a promise which resulted, though only after more scientific investigations by Lyon Playfair and De la Beche in 1845, and a House of Lords Committee in 1849, involving altogether five years' delay, in the important Mines Regulation Act of 1850, passed in the teeth of the embittered opposition of the coal-owners. A special clause was inserted in the Act, expressly requiring the coalowners to allow the inspectors entrance to and egress from the mine; because Lord Londonderry had publicly declared that he would not allow any inspector to go down his pits, and that if an inspector did go down he might stay there!

The Durham miners did not long remain without local Trade Unionism. The men of various collieries of Durham and Northumberland even re-formed their County Association in 1849; and in the next few years there were

many local strikes (as at Cowpen, West Moor, Seaton Delaval, Marley Hill, Hutton, High Grange and Barrington). These were mostly unsuccessful, and the coalowners (as appears from a printed circular issued from the Coal Trade Office at Newcastle, dated 10th October 1849) systematically sought to refuse employment to any miner who could not produce a satisfactory leaving "certificate from his last employer."

#### *The Leaving Certificate and Black-listing*

A large number of men were thus victimised and black-listed, including, so tradition declares, all the "Twelve Apostles" who had been sent to London to plead the men's cause in the 1844 strike; whilst (as Fynes relates) "Edward Richardson died of starvation." An attempt by Martin Jude in 1850 to revive the National Association led to a miners' conference at Newcastle in that year, but to no lasting organisation. By the end of 1853 all trace of Union had again disappeared. For the next few years the efforts of the miners were mainly directed to supporting the

endeavours in Parliament of Lord Ashley (afterwards Earl of Shaftesbury) and T. S. Duncombe to get further legislative protection. The second Safety Law, that of 1855, was passed, I am glad to say, with the willing concurrence of many of the coalowners themselves, notably those of Durham.

### *The Teaching of Alexander Macdonald*

The new impulse came from Alexander Macdonald (1821-1881), successively hewer, under-manager and schoolmaster in Lanarkshire, who, an agitator from 1848, was from 1855 onward giving his whole energies to building up an effective national organisation. "It was in 1856," he subsequently recalled, "that I crossed the Border first to advocate a better Mines Act, true weighing, the education of the young, the restriction of the age to twelve years, the reduction of the working hours to eight in every twenty-four, the training of managers, the payment of wages weekly in current coin of the realm, no truck, and many other useful things too numerous to mention here. Shortly after that, bone began



to come to bone, and by 1858 we were in full action for better laws.”

### *The Checkweigher*

The miners of Durham and Northumberland actively supported the agitation in favour of the 1850 and 1855 Acts; and in 1860 we find their meeting at Newcastle endorsing the important Mines Regulation Bill which became law in 1861, and which first secured the supremely valuable institution of the checkweigher, destined to play such an important part in the miners' Trade Unionism. After 1863, when a new National Union of Miners was definitely established, the two Northern counties presently contributed nearly half its membership, and more than half its fighting strength.

### *The Northumberland and Durham Miners' Mutual Confident Association*

At a delegate meeting on Good Friday, 1863, William Crawford, then the agent of such Durham miners as were associated in a County

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Union, got adopted the rules of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Mutual Confident Association, based on a fortnightly contribution of a penny per member, each lodge to retain its own funds, victimisation benefit to be granted, two delegates to be sent to Newcastle every six months and no strike to take place without the approval of the Managing Committee. What laid the foundation for this, the first permanently enduring Trade Union, was, as John Wilson records, the institution, after 1861, of a checkweigher at nearly every pit, the deep impression created by the terrible explosion at Hartley Colliery in 1862, when 204 lives were lost, and the "Rocking Strike" at Brancepeth in 1863. "This was the first strike," says Fynes, "that the miners had, when the Public Press seemed to be almost unanimously in their favour, for there was scarcely a newspaper in the North of England that had one word to say on behalf of the owners, or that did not give publicity to expressions of sympathy with the men." The Brancepeth miners had revolted against the practice of arbitrarily "laying out" tubs which were inadequately filled, and refusing all

payment for the labour spent in hewing the coal that they contained. "After the tubs were filled in-by-e, and were packed as close as it was possible for them to be filled in the low places in which men had to work, they often, from the jolting in going out, were shaken down, and appeared at the bank just filled to the brim. In order to obviate any deficiency which must arise from this cause, and result in the tub being confiscated, the men had to resort to 'rocking' their tubs, an arduous and excessively painful operation." The coal-owner's weighman, receiving a commission for every tub "laid out," went so far as often to deprive the hewers of payment for as many as eight or ten tubs in a single fortnight. The men demanded that all the tubs should be weighed, and payment made to each hewer for the actual quantity of coal sent to bank; incidentally asking also for a 5 per cent advance in the price per ton. The owners agreed to weigh all the tubs, but persisted in refusing to pay anything at all for those that fell below half-a-ton. At the same time they severely reprimanded the men for their recalcitrance, and summarily discharged their spokes-

men. As a rejoinder, over a thousand men left work. The coalowners acted with prompt decision. Within ten days numerous eviction notices were served, and scores of families were ejected by the constabulary at less than two days' notice. Eventually, after intense suffering by men, women and children, the men resumed work on the owners reluctantly consenting to pay the hewers for the weight of the coal actually sent up, without increase of rate. The harshness of the owners, their disregard of equity, their tyrannous evictions, and their ruthless victimisation made a lasting impression throughout the county.

### *The Severance from Northumberland*

Things did not, however, go smoothly with the Durham and Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association. Joseph Sheldon, the Secretary, quarrelled with Towers, then the Secretary of the National Union, who edited the *Miners' Advocate*. The Durham men were not satisfied with the amount of attention that their grievances secured from the National Union, nor with its new policy of

a statutory maximum of eight hours as the working day for all underground workers. William Crawford had declared in 1863—perhaps foreseeing the desolation of home life that would be involved by the introduction of multiple shifts—that “an Eight Hours Bill could not be carried out in his district. He wanted the boys to work ten hours a day and the men six hours.” The miners of Kelloe, where a new colliery had been started in 1839, and a mixed population had come together from all parts, quarrelled so seriously with the Newcastle Committee that they even applied to the National Union for separate affiliation. There were also disputes about levies and other discontents. Finally, the half-a-century-long association of the two counties was severed. In 1864 Thomas Burt carried, with universal assent, a resolution that the miners of Northumberland secede from the Durham miners and establish a Union of their own; and that the Union have for its name “The Northumberland Miners’ Mutual Confident Association.” It says much for the ability and reputation of William Crawford that although a Durham man, he was appointed the first Secretary of

the Northumberland Union, a post which he presently relinquished for an appointment under a Co-operative Society.

For half-a-dozen years the Trade Unionism of the miners of Durham was confined practically to separate pit clubs. A mere semblance of county organisation remained for some time in existence, with Joseph Sheldon as Secretary. The delegate from the county, E. Rhymer, reporting to the Newcastle meeting of the National Union in 1865, had then to confess that "the County of Durham appeared as a black spot. They numbered about 1000, but there were only 74 represented at that meeting. The hours of the men were eight hours working, the average wage being from 4s. to 4s. 6d. The hours of the boys upon an average were 14 per day. The system with respect to the boys was the most wretched in the civilised world. They never saw the light of the blessed day from Sabbath to Sabbath. He had authority to tell them that the district he represented begged of them through him to send help to save them from starvation and misery." In succeeding years repeated attempts were made to combine the small local

pit clubs into a new county association, many meetings being addressed by John Wilson, Thomas Burt and William Crawford without immediate result. It is curious to find it recorded in 1864, of the birthplace and subsequent residence of John Wilson himself, that there was then "no colliery in the county where the opposition to the Union was more fierce and subtle than at Haswell."

### *The Wearmouth Strike*

In April 1869 there broke out, spontaneously, the dramatic strike at Wearmouth, which John Wilson describes as "the real, although not formal starting-point" of the existing Union in Durham County. The hewers' rates were suddenly reduced by something like 16 to 33 per cent in the score price and the yard price. The men found that they could not, at these rates, earn even a bare subsistence, and they appealed for a reconsideration. No concession was made by the management, which adopted, instead, the insulting expedient of sending notes authorising the gift of a quart of ale for each man.

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This roused the indignation of the miners, who resolved on an immediate cessation of work. On four of the men being summoned at the Sunderland police court under the Master and Servant Act, they were defended by W. P. Roberts, who raised so many points of law that the colliery finally cancelled the Bond and abandoned the prosecution, on the defendants promising to vacate their houses. The result was a highly dramatic procession of over 300 miners, each carrying his lamp and his rule-book, which were solemnly delivered to the overman, as a token of their relinquishing their employment. A series of public meetings at Thornley and elsewhere, participated in by W. Crake and J. Richardson, who had been victimised at Wearmouth; by W. H. Patterson and N. Wilkinson; by the veteran of the 1832 and 1844 strikes, Thomas Ramsey, and by Thomas Burt, of the Northumberland miners, and W. Brown, afterwards the Agent of the North Staffordshire miners, led up to the delegate meetings of the autumn of 1869, at which the organisation of the new County Union was elaborated.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE DURHAM MINERS' ASSOCIATION

AT last, in November 1869, the present Durham Miners' Association was definitely established. William Crake of Monkwearmouth became its first President, John Richardson its Secretary and Agent, and Nicholas Wilkinson its Treasurer; and the Association soon had 4000 members. Many collieries, however, then fell away; and in May 1870 there were only 28 in association, with little over 2000 members. Murton (with 342 members) and Thornley (with 230) were then the most strongly organised, though Derwent (174 members), Trimdon (165 members), Seaham (150) and Addison and Tudhoe (each 120) were not far behind. For some months more the membership continued to dwindle, but in December 1870 William Crawford, who had at first been taken on only as district agent,

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assumed the management, first as President, and from 1872 as Secretary, and since that date the Association has never looked back; at various times undergoing severe trials, but rapidly becoming (until it was surpassed by the Union of the South Wales miners into a single organisation) the largest separate Miners' Union in the kingdom, and steadily increasing its membership, its political and industrial influence and its financial resources. Alongside Crawford from 1875 onward stood John Wilson, who, after W. H. Patterson's death in 1896, succeeded him as Secretary. To this day the Association retains the impress of the able and forceful personality of John Wilson, by whom its policy was largely guided for no less than forty years, right down to his death in 1915.

### *Twenty Years of Organisation*

We need not pursue the internal development of the Durham Miners' Association, which has been given in detail in John Wilson's well-known *History* of 1907. We may note, however, as landmarks in the Association's annals, its recognition by the coalowners of the county

in the prosperous times of the early 'seventies, and its repeated successes, not only in securing by agreement the abolition of the Yearly Bond in 1872, but also (notwithstanding a desultory week's strike in 1874) in peacefully arranging wage-rates for the whole county in four successive arbitration proceedings between 1874 and 1876; the establishment in 1877 of a definite Sliding Scale; the formation of separate county Unions of colliery enginemen (in 1872), of coke-men (in 1874) and of mining mechanics (in 1878), and of a federation between these bodies and the Association in 1878 for common action in wages questions and disputes. Then came the insistence by the employers in 1879, notwithstanding a continuous series of reductions during five years, on a modification of the Sliding Scale "in order to give them the relief that was required" in that year of extreme slump in trade—an insistence met by a determined strike forced on the Union, against the advice of its leaders, by the stubbornness of the members—a strike which lasted six weeks but ended only, after awards by Judge Bradshaw and Lord Derby, in an acceptance of the employers' terms. The successive readjust-

ments of the Scale in 1882 and 1884 enabled the Scale to weather the storms of the following years of depression, but brought it to an end in 1889. Wages and hours were settled by agreement between 1889 and 1892, but in the latter year there ensued the longest and most embittered dispute that the county had known for nearly half-a-century. From this quarter of a century of steadily progressing organisation certain features may to-day be chosen for more detailed consideration.

### *The Seven Hours Day*

On the 31st of May 1890 the members of the Association came to a decision destined to be of momentous consequence to the social conditions of the mining community in the county. There had been a proposal to demand a further advance of wages beyond the 5 per cent just conceded. The coalowners demurred. It was suggested to the miners by their leaders that instead of a further advance in wages, which would certainly involve a serious strike, what should be asked for was a reduction in the hours of work of the hewers to seven per

day. This advice was adopted, and the demand was made. It was supported by a vote of 30,484 to 2728 in favour of a strike ; and after three months' negotiation, agreed to by the employers as from the 1st of January 1891. The Seven Hours Day, thus won without a stoppage, placed the Durham hewers for over a quarter of a century in advance of all the other coalfields, and seemed, at the time, a valuable step forward. " A more beneficial decision," observed John Wilson, " has never been come to in the whole of our history."

### *The Adoption of Multiple Shifts*

Whatever may have been the justification for this conclusion, in the circumstances of the time, it is difficult, in 1921, to ignore some subsequent developments which have proved less entirely advantageous than was then foreseen. The adoption of the Seven Hours Day for hewers may not unfairly be said to have ratified and confirmed the expedient, which the coalowners of the county had been progressively introducing, of differential hours for particular grades of underground workers, and

(as may not at first have been foreseen) of multiple shifts. Down to the middle of the nineteenth century, though the fact is now usually forgotten, the Durham and Northumberland miners had worked, like those elsewhere, all in one long shift, involving usually twelve hours or more underground, but growing more and more irregular in its length for different grades of pitmen. In these two counties it was found practicable to relieve the hewer of timbering except at the coal face, and of other duties, so as to make him a specialist in coal-getting, and leave the other work to less well-paid men. Soon after the middle of the nineteenth century the coal-owners found it more economical, even at the cost of reducing each man's hours of actual work at the face, to divide these highly specialised hewers into two shorter shifts, which the putters, and the "transit workers" generally, had to serve in one long shift. This system, which was not unwelcome to the hewers, because of the shorter working day that it brought them, seems to have become practically universal in the county before 1860. Gradually the hours of labour were reduced for

all sections. The pressure of the hewers for a shorter working day and the legislative reduction in 1872 of the hours of the younger boys co-operated, between 1870 and 1880, in bringing about an average reduction of the working time by  $12\frac{1}{2}$  hours per week. In 1878 the coalowners maintained by arbitration their right to draw coal for eleven hours a day, but in 1890 the Union insisted that the adoption of the Seven Hours Day for the hewers should be accompanied by a resumption of ten hours per day as the maximum time during which coal should normally be drawn from the pit. What Crawford and Wilson desired and intended was that the reduction of each hewer's working time should not increase the number of shifts. The cry was for "seven hours' work and ten hours' drawing." But the tendency towards multiple shifts had already gone too far to be withstood.

#### *The Precedent set by Murton*

The great and costly colliery at Murton, which had absorbed five years' expensive engineering and more than a quarter of a

million pounds before it reached the main seam, and which declared that it could not otherwise make both ends meet, started an additional "night-shift" early in the 'fifties, when it began to draw coal continuously for twenty-four hours a day, except for the intervals in which men had to be lowered or raised. The Wearmouth pit, and also Lord Londonderry's collieries, then adopted the same system, employing two shifts of transit workers to three shifts of hewers; and often having a regular fourth shift in each twenty-four hours, in which there might even be some hewers and putters, but which consisted, for the most part, of stonemen and shifters doing timbering work and repairs, along with the necessary overmen, deputies, etc. This extreme development of the multiple-shift system steadily gained ground in the years in which the shifts of hewers and boys were successively curtailed in length. Especially on the East Coast, where the pits were deepest, the distances in-bye greatest, and the seams thickest, was the "night-shift" introduced, until by 1890 twenty extensive collieries out of a total of 190 were working



on this system ; and by 1905, 25 ; employing about one-fifth of all the miners in the county, and by 1908 nearly one-fourth. The effect of the 1872 Act was, usually, to reduce the drawing time to twenty-two hours daily ; and in 1890 the Union insisted that the maximum should be twenty hours ; but felt unable to take objection to the system itself where it had been introduced.

### *The Universal Eight Hours Maximum*

Hence when, in 1908, Parliament enacted that the maximum hours below ground should be eight per day (in addition to one winding time), the easiest way of retaining the shorter day that the Durham hewers had already secured for themselves was to adopt the system of two shifts of transit workers to three of hewers, with sometimes a fourth regular shift of stonemen, shifters, timbermen, etc. Very soon after the passing of the Act three-fourths of the collieries had changed to this system, which has now become general throughout the county.

*The Effects of Multiple Shifts*

This extreme development of multiple shifts and nearly continuous drawing day and night, which, like the extreme specialisation of the coal-getter, is very unusual outside Durham (though Northumberland also has the specialisation), has both advantages and disadvantages, which will be differently balanced according to the point of view. To the coal-owners, and to the royalty owners, whose lives are not thereby affected, the multiple shifts have been, of course, a clear gain in spreading the standing charges over a larger output. To the hewers themselves the shorter hours which, in comparison with miners in other coal-fields, they enjoy have been a real advantage ; though more might have been made of the additional leisure if there had been a prompter and more extensive development of the collective organisation of that leisure, from football and concerts to recreative classes and stimulating lectures. It is not without significance that the Home Office found, in 1905, that Durham County had the smallest percentage of improper absenteeism.

*The Lot of the Miner's Wife*

But to the wives of the miners, it is to be feared, the multiple shifts of the County of Durham have proved less of a boon. It was not found convenient—though no one seems actually to have made the attempt—to arrange so that all the men resident in one house, or at any rate all those of one grade, should always be working in the same shift, changing simultaneously from fore-shift to back-shift and from back-shift to night-shift. The consequence has been that, where there is more than one man in the household, the labour of preparing meals and drying the pit-clothes has to be undertaken every few hours during the whole day and night. With the progressive overcrowding of the colliery houses that, owing to the increase in population and slackening of building characteristic of the past decade, has nearly everywhere occurred, the pressure of work on the women has been intensified. “I go to bed only on Saturday nights,” said a miner’s wife; “my husband and our three sons are all in different shifts, and one or other of them is leaving or entering the house and

requiring a meal every three hours in the twenty-four." The incessant labour thus undertaken—and, be it said, uncomplainingly undertaken—by the Durham miners' wives is the marvel of every observer. But the effect of the multiple shifts on the miner's home life, and on the social environment in which the children are reared, does not seem to have been foreseen, or to have been as yet adequately considered. Those who, like Lord Leverhulme and other enterprising capitalists, are, with a light heart, proposing the adoption of multiple shifts in other industries, might pause to inquire into their results on the average workman's home. In Durham coal-getting it is doubtless impracticable now to go back to the single shift; but it is high time that something were done to lessen the domestic toil, and to shorten the working day, of the miner's wife.

### *The Strike of 1892*

The great trial of strength in 1892 between the Durham Miners' Association and the Durham Coalowners' Association, when the whole of the pits were laid idle by the owners, and

all the workmen were thus "locked out," arose from a claim, made as early as April 1891, for a reduction of wages to the extent of something like 15 per cent. John Wilson staved off the unwelcome demand by skilful correspondence until 14th January 1892, when the two Executives at last met. The coal-owners now pressed for an instant reduction by 10 per cent, with the alternative of an open arbitration. It seemed to Wilson and his colleagues on the Executive Committee that it was by no means a good time for a fight. The price of coal had fallen, and profits were seen to be dropping. The Union had been impoverished by local disputes, and had closed the year 1891 with no more than £36,000 in investments, or not much more than 10s. for each member. The leaders made it known to the members that they advised prudence and moderation—only to be met with suspicion, vituperation, and even accusations of personal corruption from the more hot-headed and excitable. The members voted by an immense majority against both reduction and arbitration. On 27th February the employers began their complete lock-out, which lasted for three

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whole months, the terms dictated becoming harder and harder as the struggle proceeded. All the strike pay that the Association could afford during this long period did not exceed 25s. per man, and for nearly half of this it was indebted to outside subscriptions, largely from the Miners' Federation coalfields. Yet notwithstanding the provocation caused by the introduction into the county of strange police forces, there was only one slight disturbance, when four men at Castle Eden were sentenced to imprisonment for intimidation. Eventually, on the mediation, principally, of Bishop Westcott, a prolonged joint meeting was held, on 1st June 1892, at which the owners were induced to content themselves with no more than 10 per cent reduction, without victimisation, and the workmen's representatives were persuaded to accept these terms, and to agree to the establishment of a Conciliation Board. Thus ended the severest trial to which the Durham Miners' Association has yet been exposed. It drained dry the Union exchequer, and for a time it seriously interrupted the mutual good feeling between its executive committee and the bulk of the membership.

*The Lessons of the Defeat*

But it indicated to the members the need for a much larger accumulated fund than they had so far been prepared to provide, as well as the value of wider alliances than they had hitherto been willing to contemplate. It gave them a severe warning as to the supreme importance of securing, in advance, the subsistence of their families. To some extent it restored the prestige and moral authority of the Union leaders. What these latter came to realise was the need for a more widely diffused Trade Union consciousness among the members than the working of the machinery of the Association had secured, and their better education in both economics and politics; together with the importance, in bad times, of bringing political action to the support of Collective Bargaining. But learning from experience is a slow process, and it was not for some years that the lessons of the 1892 dispute were adequately realised, or produced much overt effect.

The immediate outcome of the strike was the institution, in conjunction with the closely

associated County Unions of mining mechanics, enginemen, and cokemen, of the Board of Conciliation for the Coal Trade; at first temporarily in 1895, terminating in 1896, but in 1899 in successful permanence.

### *The Permanent Relief Fund*

Parallel with the achievements of the Durham Miners' Association, and largely participating in its success, has been the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, which was established in 1862. At first objected to as a rival to Trade Unionism, and possibly supported in some quarters with such an intention, it has since been recognised as a valuable support and ally of the Union's Collective Bargaining. By standing between the victims and absolute destitution, the Fund has relieved the Trade Union from the provision of benefits found necessary in other industries. Within ten years the Fund had 230 branches, with 30,000 members; and presently the membership became practically universal throughout the two counties of Durham and Northumberland. By a regular deduction from each



man's earnings, the Fund is enabled to provide a weekly payment to every man suffering from accident or from certain diseases, and to provide terminable annuities for the widows and orphans of members killed in the pit. Its resources are augmented by the voluntary contributions of many of the coalowners, as well as occasionally by the charitable public. What is of special interest is to note the attempt to substitute the Miners' Permanent Relief Fund for the obligation of the employers to compensate for accidents. On the passing of the Employers' Liability Act of 1880, the coalowners proposed to "contract out" of the law, subject to paying additional contributions to the Fund, which should assume all their compensation liabilities. The miners refused to have anything to do with this plan, which would have made the men's contributions liable for the owners' compensation for accidents. On the passing of the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897, which considerably increased the employers' obligations, the attempt to shift the burden to the Relief Fund was renewed, this time not by contracting out, which had been practically prohibited by law,

but by a contract of reinsurance, under which the employers would have been relieved of all obligation beyond their annual subscriptions. This scheme naturally received the approval of the officials of the Fund. But the Durham Miners' Association and the Northumberland Miners' Union, largely at the instance of John Wilson, would not listen to any such arrangement. It was proposed, instead, that, in order to deal with all cases in which compensation was payable by the employer, there should be set up, for the County of Durham only, a Joint Committee representing the associations of coalowners and miners respectively, which should decide upon the liability of the employer and upon the amount to be awarded in each case, the whole sum being provided out of the employers' own joint funds. This arrangement has ever since, for nearly a quarter of a century, worked with great smoothness and economy, and with a great saving of litigation and ill-feeling between the parties. "In the formation of the Compensation Committee," reported John Wilson in 1907, "Durham stood alone. There was nothing like it in any other district or

trade ; and its action was of the greatest benefit to employers and workmen alike."

### *The Aged Miners' Homes*

In this connection may be noticed a very beneficent agitation of the rank and file, the movement for establishing Aged Miners' Homes. Started in 1899, and resulting first in the acquisition of a fine old house near Boldon, which was taken over by the Boldon members, the movement led presently to the acquisition of a whole disused colliery village at Haswell Moor, where the colliery had been closed in 1896, and to a number of other plots of land in various parts of the county, on which suitable dwellings were erected. The funds have been provided mainly by a voluntary levy of a shilling a year upon each member, to which numerous donations from coalowners and the general public have been added.

### *Relations with the Miners' Federation*

More contentious, but ending ultimately in cordiality, have been the relations of the

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Durham and Northumberland miners (together with the National Union of Miners of which they were always the most important constituents) with the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, in which the Yorkshire men took the lead. The Durham men, under Crawford and Wilson, and the Northumberland men, under Burt and Fenwick, had worked out from their experience a definite line of policy differing from that advocated by Alexander Macdonald and supported by the Federation. They agreed with him in laying the utmost stress on obtaining legislative regulation of the industry, so far as concerned the statutory prescription of every possible safeguard against accidents, the obligation to allow the appointment of checkweighmen, and the payment of adequate compensation for all casualties in or about the mine. The successive improvements effected by the Mines Regulation Acts of 1886, 1887, 1894, 1896, 1900, 1905, 1910, and 1911, and the Workmen's Compensation Acts of 1897 and 1906, were largely the result of their co-operation on these points with the growing forces of the Yorkshire and Lancashire Miners' Unions and, after 1888,

with the Miners' Federation. They agreed, moreover, with Macdonald in deprecating local, or indeed any impulsive strikes; and on maintaining continuous negotiations with the employers for the settlement by Collective Bargaining of all the conditions of employment. Their achievements in the establishment and maintenance, for so many years, jointly with the coalowners of the whole county, of the Board of Conciliation for the Coal Trade, for periodically determining "such as may be termed county questions or which may affect the general trade"; and especially of joint committees for incessantly interpreting, by separate colliery price-lists, the "county average," or agreed standard wage, into tonnage rates for individual pits or particular seams, may well be deemed to mark an advance in the machinery for Collective Bargaining superior to that reached in any other coalfield, or indeed, it may almost be said, in any other great industry except cotton-spinning and weaving. But they differed from Macdonald in their long-continued rejection of the policy of a statutory limitation of the maximum working day, at

first because they regarded this as inconsistent with their own local shifts of men and boys respectively, and afterwards on theoretic grounds, as involving an unnecessary restriction of individual liberty. They differed, too, from Macdonald and his followers in not insisting on basing their demand for wages on the necessity of maintaining, in good years and bad alike, the workman's necessary Standard of Life, and in acquiescing, accordingly, in the coalowner's view that wages should appropriately vary upwards and downwards with the selling price of coal, thus accepting, for a dozen years from 1877, their automatic regulation by a Sliding Scale.

This divergence of policy between Durham and Northumberland, on the one hand, and the Yorkshire, Lancashire and Scottish followers of Macdonald on the other, led, in 1888, to the formation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, which began with only 36,000 members but gradually came to include all the other districts; the National Union of Miners that started with such high hopes in 1863, retaining, after 1902, only Durham and Northumberland. This is not the place in which to formulate any

judgment as to the relative wisdom of the two policies. We may note the success of the Durham Miners' Association in their highly developed Collective Bargaining; the relative smoothness with which their Board of Conciliation secured increases of wages when prices rose, and the economy of avoiding stoppages when falling profits led the employers to insist on a reduction. Durham has to its credit the exceptional lowering of working hours which it secured to its hewers in 1891, and the remarkable smoothness of the working of its joint committee for awarding compensation for accidents. On the other hand the actual hours of work of the boys (generally reduced in the county in 1872 to twelve per day, and in 1890 to ten per day, in addition to the winding time) remained higher than was customary in other coalfields where they followed those of the adults. The opposition in Parliament of the miners' members from Northumberland and Durham prevented from passing into law, until 1908, the Eight Hours Bill desired by all the other mining districts. More serious still, the cleavage between the National Union and the Miners' Federation

had left the Durham men to fight alone (though generously aided by the Federation districts) in their great strike of 1892 ; and in the very next year was largely instrumental in preventing the extensive Federation strike of fifteen weeks from ending in victory.

### *Political Action*

To the cleavage over industrial policy there was eventually added a divergence in political action. In 1874 Alexander Macdonald was elected to the House of Commons for Stoke, and the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association sent its secretary, Thomas Burt, to Parliament as member for Morpeth. In Durham, where the attachment to the Liberal Party was closer, the Union contented itself at that date with a separate Franchise Association, supported only by voluntary contributions. This association, in 1874, put forward Crawford as a Liberal candidate, but was not sufficiently decisive to prevent the Liberal Party from insisting on its own candidates for both the then divisions of the county ; and Crawford withdrew rather than split the



vote. Not until the 1885 election was independent action taken, when the Durham Coal Trade Board (the federation of the miners, mechanics, enginemen's and cokemen's associations) resolved on running John Wilson, W. Crawford, and L. Trotter as Labour candidates, and to pay £500 a year to each of them as Members of Parliament. The Liberal Party deigned to accept Crawford for Mid-Durham and Wilson for Houghton-le-Spring; and these were duly returned by large majorities. But Trotter was demurred to for Bishop Auckland, and in the end his candidature was withdrawn. At the 1886 election Wilson lost his seat, largely through the defection of a section of the members of his own Association. On Crawford's death in 1890, Wilson was nominated as his successor for Mid-Durham; and thus again entered the House of Commons, not to quit it until his death in 1915.

Meanwhile, though Macdonald died in 1881, other representatives of the Miners' Federation had been returned to Parliament; and there gradually developed a cleavage between the two sections in the House of Commons. John Wilson (to whom was added J. Johnson for

Gateshead in 1904 until his death in 1911, and J. W. Taylor, of the Mining Mechanics' Union, for Chester-le-Street in 1906), like Thomas Burt and Charles Fenwick, though styled Labour candidates, were elected to Parliament as working-men members of the Liberal Party, to which they in all sincerity continued to belong. Gradually there came to be among the Trade Unionists a conviction that, much as Liberalism had accomplished in the sphere of political emancipation and the removal of religious disabilities, those who controlled the Liberal Party were not prepared to deal equally drastically with economic inequalities, or to apply Democracy to the conduct of industry. Even the further advances in Factory, Mines, and Merchant Shipping legislation, and in compensation for accidents, which nearly all workmen desired, came to be opposed alike by Liberal and Conservative capitalists. The result was the slow and gradual rise of the Labour Party (established in 1899 by the Trades Union Congress as the Labour Representation Committee) as an independent political force. In 1906 no fewer than twenty-nine members of this Party were returned to

the House of Commons ; and four years later the Miners' Federation, which had by this time twelve members in Parliament, voted decisively for affiliation to the Labour Party, thereby emphasising the isolation of Northumberland and Durham.

### *The Healing of the Breach*

The disadvantage of the cleavage between the two Northern counties and the rest of the mining community, so far as industrial action was concerned, could not fail to be appreciated, and various attempts towards union were made in Durham. The members of the Durham Miners' Association, who had then recently received financial aid in their own struggle, voted in favour of joining the Miners' Federation in 1892, but apparently did not understand that membership involved accepting the decision of the majority as regards striking. When, in 1893, the Federation decided on a national strike against the coalowners' demand for a 25 per cent reduction of wages, the Durham Miners' Association refused to join in the struggle, and was accordingly excluded

from the Federation. Towards the end of 1896 a majority of the Durham membership again voted for joining. When, however, it was explained that this would involve adhesion to the Federation policy of seeking an Eight Hours Day by legal enactment, the Association decided that it could not abandon its resistance to an Eight Hours Bill, but asked to be allowed to join for wage questions only. This was not agreed to by the Federation, and in 1897 the contributions already paid were refunded. For more than another decade the cleavage continued.

### *Parliamentary Action*

Meanwhile political opinion among the rank and file of the Durham members had been slowly changing in sympathy with the bulk of the Trade Union world. The legal assaults on Trade Unionism, culminating in the Taff Vale Case in 1900, compelled the miners to realise the need for the political unity of Labour. On industrial policy, also, the differences with the Federation were gradually disappearing. The Durham Sliding Scale had been brought to an

end in 1889, without again being established ; and whilst the Board of Conciliation worked without a scale, opinion among the men steadily hardened against the successive reductions of wage, in face of a constantly rising cost of living, that (except for a brief period of advances in 1906-7) characterised the first decade of the century. By 1908, when the Eight Hours Bill had passed into law, there was little to hinder union with the Miners' Federation ; and in order to enable the miners of Great Britain to deal, as a whole, with the conditions of their industry, this affiliation was in that year finally voted by the Durham Miners' Association. This involved, through the Miners' Federation, affiliation to the Labour Party itself, of which every contributor to the Association has thus, for over twelve years, been a constituent member. From the first General Election of 1910 onwards the Association has run its own Labour Party candidates—in January 1910, John Wilson, M.P. (Mid-Durham), J. W. Taylor, M.P. (Chester-le-Street), and Alderman House (unsuccessfully for Bishop Auckland) ; in December 1910, John Wilson, M.P., and J. W. Taylor, for their respective constituencies ; in

March 1913, Alderman House, again unsuccessfully, for Houghton-le-Spring; on Wilson's death in 1915, S. Galbraith, M.P. for Mid-Durham; and in 1918, on a redistribution of constituencies, J. W. Taylor, M.P. (Chester-le-Street), J. Swan, M.P. (Barnard Castle), and R. Richardson, M.P. (Houghton-le-Spring); whilst W. Whiteley (Blaydon), J. Ritson (Durham), J. Lawson (Seaham), J. Herriotts (Sedgefield), and J. Batey (Spennymoor) were unsuccessful. On Taylor's resignation in 1919 J. Lawson, M.P., was successfully run for Chester-le-Street.

### *Participation in Local Government*

When, in 1888-9, the administration of the county business was entrusted to an elected Council, and when, in 1894, Parish Councils were established in nearly every parish in the county, and the forty odd District Councils were democratised, the miners of the county were not backward in asserting their claim to participate in Local Government. The Durham Miners' Association did not, it is true, regard the winning of seats on the local Councils as

any part of the Trade Union business ; and action was left to spontaneous local effort. At the first election to the Durham County Council in 1889, about one-fourth of the seats—a larger proportion than in any other county—were won by workmen, mostly miners. When in 1894–5 the first elections under the new franchise took place for the Parish and District Councils, a majority of all the seats in the county is said to have been won by miners. Unfortunately, as we can now see, these victories were not inspired by any distinct Labour programme, or organised with any definite purpose. In many places, it was complained, the workmen members of the Councils acquiesced in the leadership of the mine managers, farmers, and commercial men, by whom the policy continued to be directed. The reforms introduced were so very gradual and, in effect, so inadequate, that their value failed to be popularly appreciated. Taken as a whole, the housing of the county can scarcely be said to have improved. The inequalities in the assessment of property were not remedied. Neither in amenity nor in beauty is any advance to be recorded. The improvement in

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general sanitation has been but slow and partial. Only in education can there be said to have been (since 1904) outstanding progress, so that, in spite of the election of John Wilson as Chairman of the County Council, neither the miners' hold on the elected Local Authorities, nor their influence on Local Government policy can be said to have appreciably increased for a couple of decades.

### *The Elections of 1918*

When, after interruption during the War, local elections were resumed in 1918, a new spirit became apparent. Though the Central Executive of the Durham Miners' Association still left the matter to local initiative, and held it to be outside the Trade Union sphere, most of the lodges threw themselves energetically into the struggle, voluntarily raised the necessary funds, and ran their own candidates upon a definitely Labour Party programme of local reforms. In the County Council an actual majority of Labour members was returned, and responsibility for the whole county administration was definitely assumed, a miner



(Mr. Peter Lee) being once more elected Chairman. In many of the Parish and District Councils the Labour members found themselves the dominating influence; and during the years 1919 and 1920 a stream of socially important reforms were inaugurated, the effects of which will be steadily more appreciated. Unfortunately, there are still colliery villages which continue to elect to their District Councils officials of the colliery company itself, who, with engaging frankness, make no secret of their intention of obstructing expenditure that might increase the rates that the company would have to pay, of opposing an equalisation of assessments that would involve a raising of that of the colliery itself, and of resisting any proposals for such amenities as maternity and infant welfare centres, reading rooms and libraries, public baths and wash-houses, or better paving and lighting of the thoroughfares because, under the different circumstances of their own lives, they can, in all honesty, "see no need" for such "luxuries" for the families of mere workmen.

*The Strike of 1912*

To return, however, to the industrial field, in which the Durham Miners' Association had, in the first decade of the century, acquired so powerful an influence, we see its members quickly demonstrating their loyalty to the great national federation which they had joined in 1908. The discontent that had so long prevailed, in South Wales and elsewhere, at the oppression of those hewers who found themselves assigned to "abnormal places," where even the local rate that the Trade Union had secured did not enable them to earn a living wage, came suddenly to a head in 1911. The hardship was perhaps less frequently felt in Durham, with its effective system of "cavilling," and its Joint Committee for adjusting piecework rates so as to secure the "county average," than in some other coalfields, where places of difficulty were more numerous, and abnormally small earnings more frequent. But even in Durham hewers would sometimes find themselves earning, net, under £1 in a fortnight; and the demand for the prescribed legal minimum, which the insistence of the

South Wales miners had forced to the front, was cordially taken up. The coalowners throughout the kingdom refused any concession on the point. Ministers declared in the House of Commons that a Legal Minimum Wage for miners was against all the laws of Political Economy, and that nothing would induce them to propose it to Parliament. After prolonged negotiations, and ample notice, the Federation membership decided overwhelmingly on a strike, Durham voting for it by two to one (57,490 to 28,504); and the whole mining community ceased work, at the end of February 1912, from Fife to Carmarthen; and remained out, without violence or disturbance, for nearly six weeks. In the end the Government became converted to the practicability and desirability of a Legal Minimum Wage, to be made an obligatory term of every contract of service in the industry. The Government compelled the coalowners to acquiesce in this enactment; but, at the instance of the coalowners, it steadfastly refused to allow any figure to be inserted in the statute, or to make any provision for a uniform rate to be fixed for similar labour in the several coalfields. What was

enacted, against the strenuous opposition of the miners' representatives and the Labour Party generally, was that the amount and the conditions of the Legal Minimum Wage for each coalfield should be determined separately by a joint board, presided over by a neutral chairman, whose award, in case of the failure to agree, should be final. In the result, the local rules and the amount of the daily wage had to be determined by the chairman in nearly every district, the rates fixed being everywhere slightly below what the miners had claimed. On the passage of the Bill into law, the Miners' Federation was divided as to whether or not it should be accepted as a settlement of the strike, and the men voted against resuming work by 244,011 to 201,013—Durham again siding with the majority by two to one (48,828 to 24,511). As there was not a two-thirds majority for continuing the strike, a specially summoned national conference decided that work should be resumed.

### *The Legal Minimum Wage*

The outcome of so great a struggle was at

first regarded as disappointing. The national strike, in which practically a million miners took part and no pit was able to draw coal for five weeks, had not proved quite so effective a weapon as had been anticipated. The stocks of coal were, in the aggregate, larger than had been estimated. Moreover, it had not been realised how large a quantity of coal is, at any moment, actually in transit, especially by the coasting trade. The result was that the strike failed to secure, in the then state of education among ministers and legislators, the establishment on a legal basis of a prescribed minimum of the requirements for a healthy and civilised existence. What the Act of 1912 did establish in the mining industry—and this in itself has since been recognised as no small gain—was that the law must prevent the earnings of any employed workman, so long as he is employed at all, being made to fall below a bare minimum. Although such a minimum was far below the miner's established customary standard of life, the protection afforded by the statute has since been recognised as of extraordinary value to thousands of hewers who have found themselves disadvantageously placed.

*The Demand for Nationalisation*

The Durham delegates to the Miners' Federation joined heartily, too, in the demand for the bringing to an end of the present exploitation of the mineral wealth of the nation by capitalist shareholders; and the transfer, by Act of Parliament, with all proper compensation to the colliery owners, of the mines to the community. After the formulation, in 1912, of the Miners' Federation's first Nationalisation Bill, the movement was interrupted by the War; and when it was taken up again, in 1918, with the publication of the Federation's second Bill, specifically providing for the miners' participation in the control of the nationalised mines by Pit Committees, District Councils and a National Board, the Government ignored the men's claim. At length, early in 1919, the Federation determined on a strike to secure (1) the transfer of the mines to national ownership, (2) an advance in wages of 30 per cent, and (3) a reduction of hours by 25 per cent. In February 1919, the whole Federation membership voted determinedly for enforcing the demand by a

national strike, by 611,998 to 104,997—Durham swelling the majority by voting 76,024 to 16,248.

### *The Sankey Commission*

The strike notices were already issued when the Government, alleging that it could not agree to so momentous a proposal without a specific inquiry, proposed its reference to a statutory Royal Commission, with the fullest powers of investigation and discovery. The Federation was very loth to acquiesce in so well known an expedient for evasion; but ultimately consented on condition that an interim report should be presented actually before the strike notices expired; and, most unprecedented of all, that the Federation was allowed, not only to nominate three of its own members to balance the three mine-owners whom the Mining Association had privately designated, but also three out of the six members who were to be appointed unconnected with the industry. To these stipulations the Government was constrained to agree; and the Federation thereupon

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nominated, along with Robert Smillie, Herbert Smith and Frank Hodges, three members of the Fabian Society, Sir Leo Chiozza Money, R. H. Tawney and Sidney Webb, who had become known by their economic and statistical work, to sit with three coalowners and three other capitalists under the presidency of Mr. Justice Sankey.

### *The First Sankey Report*

After a fortnight's strenuous labour, in which evidence as to the reduced hours of the hewers and the social conditions in the County of Durham played an important part, the Commission on the 20th March 1919 presented its Interim Report. The three coalowners had their own report, offering only slight concessions in wages and hours, and no change in the organisation of the industry. The "Federation Six" presented a long and carefully reasoned report, showing that, through the advantages to be secured by unification of the mines in national ownership, with participation in management by the workers, the whole of the miners' demands could be conceded



without increase in the price of coal to the consumer. Mr. Justice Sankey had his own report, in which the three disinterested capitalists joined, awarding the miners an increase of 20 per cent in wages (instead of 30) and an immediate reduction of hours by one per day (instead of two); insisting on the urgent need of an immediate extensive improvement of the housing conditions in the mining districts, even at the cost of a special tax of a penny per ton on the coal produced; and specially emphasising the following important conclusion, namely: "Even upon the evidence already given the present system of ownership and working in the coal industry stands condemned, and some other system must be substituted for it, either nationalisation or a method of unification by national purchase and or by joint control. . . . It is in the interests of the country that the colliery worker shall, in the future, have an effective voice in the direction of the mine. For a generation the colliery worker has been educated socially and technically. The result is a great national asset. Why not use it?"

*The Government Bargain*

It hung in the balance whether, in view of the fact that the miners' demands had not been wholly conceded by the Chairman of the Commission, the strike notices should be allowed to expire, and a national stoppage take place. But the Government, speaking through Mr. Bonar Law, solemnly assured the Federation that the Government accepted Mr. Justice Sankey's conclusions, "in the letter and in the spirit"; and, if the strike notices were withdrawn, desired the Commission to go on sitting, in order to examine further the various projects of nationalisation and joint control. He expatiated on the advantages to the miners that would accrue from such an authoritative Commission. In consideration of these undertakings, and notably in reliance on the Government's acceptance of Mr. Justice Sankey's emphatic conclusions, the strike notices were first extended for a week, and then, in April 1919, definitely withdrawn, on a vote of 693,084 against 76,992—a decisive majority to which the Durham members contributed by their own vote of 95,648 against 6825.

*The Second Sankey Report*

The indefatigable Commission then resumed its work, sitting almost every day for another two months, in the course of which the Duke of Northumberland, the Marquis of Londonderry, the Earl of Durham and other great royalty owners were summoned to explain publicly how they had become possessed of their mineral property, and what service to the public they rendered in return for the incomes that they derived from the coalfields. The Federation plan of nationalisation with workers' participation in control was ably expounded by Mr. W. Straker of the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association; and the conditions of employment and housing at the Horden Colliery and other places in Durham County were specifically gone into.

In the end, on 20th June 1919, the Commission again presented divergent reports, this time four in number, but—significantly enough—all agreeing substantially in proposing the immediate nationalisation of mining royalties, the undertaking of the retail distribution of coal by the Local Government

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Authorities, and the establishment of Pit Committees of the workmen, and also of District Councils and a National Board, on which both owners and workers should be represented. Mr. Justice Sankey presented a long and important report of his own, fully recommending the nationalisation of the collieries; and working out an elaborate scheme under which they should be administered in public ownership, under the control of a National Mining Board and District Councils, representing the community, the management and the working miners, with Pit Committees of miners in every colliery. One of the capitalist members (Sir Arthur Duckham) agreed in the necessity for the expropriation of the shareholders and the abolition of the existing colliery companies, but recommended their compulsory union, coalfield by coalfield, into District Trusts, of public character, on the capital of which the rate of interest would be limited by law, and the operations of which would be partially controlled by representatives of the miners and the community as a whole. The three mineowners, joined now by two of the dis-

interested capitalists, refused to agree to any disturbance of the existing ownership of collieries, and recommended only shadowy functions of discussion and advice for the Pit Committees and the joint District Councils and National Board. The Federation Six, whilst giving a general concurrence in the Chairman's proposals, reserved their assent to some of the details.

### *The Great Betrayal*

The Government was now in a dilemma. It had solemnly pledged itself to the Miners' Federation to carry out, in the spirit and in the letter, the First Sankey Report, which emphasised that the present system stood condemned, and that "some other system must be substituted for it, either nationalisation or a method of unification by national purchase and or by joint control." In consideration of this Government pledge, the universal national strike, which would undoubtedly have stopped the trade of the whole nation—it was given officially in evidence before the Commission that there had been,

at the time, only three days' stock of coal in London—had been reluctantly abandoned. Now eight out of the thirteen members of the Commission had reaffirmed the finding of the First Report, which the Government had solemnly pledged itself to accept, and had specifically recommended, not merely the nationalisation of the royalties but also the expropriation of the existing colliery companies ; whilst seven of these eight, including the judicial chairman, had worked out, for immediate adoption by Parliament, a detailed scheme of nationalisation of the industry, with participation, both local and national, of the workers in management.

### *The Capitalist Ultimatum*

On the other hand, the Government had been made to realise that it would have to face the determined opposition of the Mining Association of Great Britain, not to say also that of Lord Gainford, Lord Londonderry and the Duke of Northumberland. For some days the Premier hesitated. The scale was turned by a petition, said to have been signed by no

fewer than three hundred capitalist members of the House of Commons, including, it is alleged, some of the Coalition representatives of Durham and Northumberland constituencies, absolutely refusing to allow nationalisation to proceed. The Government accordingly repudiated its solemn pledge, and contented itself with a grudging concession to the miners of the reduction of one hour per day, and the advance in wages of two shillings per day, which Mr. Justice Sankey had awarded. None of the other recommendations—not even those on which the whole thirteen members of the Commission recorded their agreement—whether with regard to better housing, more inspection, greater publicity, pit-head baths, Pit Committees or Joint Councils, were carried out. The breach of faith was thus gross, naked and unashamed.

### *The Act of 1920*

What the Government did was secretly to come to a new understanding with the coal-owners for a financial readjustment, which actually increased the swollen profits that they

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were allowed to retain, in contemplation of an early removal of the price control and partial "pooling" of profits that had been instituted in 1915-17. This new understanding paved the way for the Act of 1920, which was forced through Parliament in the teeth of the protest of the Miners' Federation, of all the Labour members for the County of Durham, and, indeed, of the whole Labour Party. By this Act it was provided that, when the industry was decontrolled, the wages in each coalfield should be adjusted in accordance with the profits in that particular district—thus at one blow destroying, for the future, the national basis of wages, to be arrived at by negotiation for the industry as a whole, for which the Miners' Federation had struggled for so many years, and which it thought that it had attained by its patriotic action during the War. The Miners' Federation, with the hearty concurrence of its Durham members, formally declared that it would never accept any such arrangement as the statute purported to impose on the industry; and the Act (except for the very substantial addition to the shareholders' dividends that it



ensured) has accordingly remained a dead letter.

### *The Strike of 1920*

In the County of Durham, where the hours of the hewers had already been reduced to scarcely more than Mr. Justice Sankey now recommended, and where multiple shifts had become general, the excellent machinery for negotiation between miners and coalowners enabled "the Sankey Award" to be adopted in the summer of 1919 without friction or difficulty; and the county escaped the calamity of the dispute which temporarily stopped the pits of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. But the failure of the Government to carry out the pledge on the strength of which the Durham miners had acquiesced in foregoing the strike in April 1919, after casting a vote of two to one against the proposed settlement; the discontent at the apparently senseless manipulation of the retail price of coal by means of which public opinion was prejudiced against the miners; and the magnitude of the profits which a large majority of the colliery shareholders were notoriously pocketing, led to the

concurrence of the Durham miners in the demands made by the Federation in August 1920, for a reduction in the price of coal to the consumer and a simultaneous increase in the miners' wages. The Government, after some inconclusive parleying during which it made its preparations for a struggle, finally refused to the Federation any right to talk about the price to the consumer, and would only agree to an advance in wages if the general wage rates (and not merely as heretofore the piecework earnings) of each worker were made in some way dependent on output.

### *The Datum Line*

Various methods were discussed, but the one that came nearest to agreement was that which left present wage rates unaffected, and made any subsequent variation dependent on an increase or decrease in the aggregate output throughout the kingdom, measured from a prescribed "datum line." On this proposal being referred to the ballot in the last week of August 1920 the Federation voted for the issue of strike notices by 606,782 to 238,865, the

minority being unexpectedly large ; and to this result the Durham members contributed by voting for the strike by no more than 76,869 to 32,783. But though the minority was considerable, the solidarity of the men was perfect ; and when the time came, strike notices were handed in for practically the entire membership in every district. In October every mine in the kingdom stopped. In spite of an extraordinary Press campaign against the miners, which was carried on by direct and persistent inspiration from the Government offices, and of other efforts to excite prejudice, Trade Union sympathy was overwhelmingly with the strikers. Within a week the National Union of Railwaymen had decided, unsolicited, though not without some internal opposition, on a sympathetic strike on the entire railway system.

### *The Ambiguous Settlement*

Upon this the Government consented to negotiate further, and at the request of the Federation the railwaymen's strike order was suspended, in order to try to discover a

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formula which would enable the Government to concede the immediate advance of 2s. per shift on which the miners' delegates insisted. After further parleyings, such a formula was found. In order to save the face of the Government a temporary agreement was made by which the 2s. advance to be immediately granted was to be periodically increased or decreased up to 31st March 1921, according to the aggregate output; in order to placate the mineowners the Government agreed to allow them a proportionate variation in the profits they could retain for themselves; and in contempt of the Act of 1919, a national joint committee was appointed to find, before 31st March, some way of consolidating the various wage-payments on a national basis by which wages after that date should be adjusted. These complicated proposals, importing both some shadow of the "datum line" and some imperfectly apprehended dependence of the rates upon output, without any definite assurance that the principle of a national wage settlement would be maintained, were not cordially received by the miners, and were, in fact, rejected at the ballot by a small majority,

the total vote being 346,604 against acceptance of the terms and 338,045 for acceptance. The Durham members, however, voted for their acceptance by 51,589 to 38,819. As the Federation vote showed less than a two-thirds majority for a continuance of the strike, it was decided by the conference, in conformity with the now established rule of the Federation, that the terms should be accepted. The stoppage was thus brought to an end within three weeks.

### *The Economic Paradox*

But the points at issue were only temporarily decided. The economic situation seems to have been actually aggravated by the terms on which the Government insisted. It is, indeed, part of the irony of the settlement that (whilst the miners originally pressed for a reduction, by no less than 14s. 2d. per ton, in the retail price of coal, and asked for themselves only 2s. per shift increase), by the 1st of January 1921 the formula of the Government had given the whole million men nearly double that for which they had been driven to strike! After the three weeks' stoppage there

was, as invariably happens after a suspension of work in the pits, an increase in aggregate output ; partly because the coal is temporarily easier to work after the face has been "rested" ; partly because the men strive to make up the lost earnings ; and in the present case, as we may believe, partly because the coalowners were spurred into greater zeal for promoting output, notwithstanding what they called the "confiscation" of so much of their profits in the special "coal levy," by the enlarged percentage which additional output would now secure to them. Whatever the cause or causes, the weekly output increased during December 1920 to such an extent that the cherished formula of the Government gave the miners, from 1st January 1921, a further 1s. 6d. per shift, and the mineowners a corresponding enlarged percentage of the profits ; whilst the concurrent fall in export prices, itself due partly to the increased output, greatly diminished the amount of revenue that the Government was drawing from the industry. During January 1921, indeed, the increased output on which the Government had insisted became even an embarrassment ; and many

thousands of miners, in South Wales and elsewhere, were thrown idle by the great reduction of the export demand. It was the owners who then caused a steady fall in the aggregate output; and for February 1921 the miners had to suffer a reduction of 2s. per shift. What will be the outcome of the negotiations as to a national wage settlement after 31st March 1921 remains, at the moment of writing, undecided.

*The Spirit of Association among the Durham Miners as manifested in Trade Unionism*

The great advance of the miners during the last decade in national organisation, where proceedings are taken in the name of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, necessarily tends to throw into the background the action of each of the constituent County Associations. Yet it is upon the strength and efficiency of these that the Federation itself depends. In Durham the membership, which had in 1875 reached the high figure of 38,000, suffered in the slump of 1878-9, and in 1880 stood at no more than 30,000. It had recovered by 1885 to 35,000, and subsequent expansions brought

it by 1890 to 49,000 ; and by the end of the nineteenth century to 80,000. The next decade witnessed a marvellous growth of the industry within the county, where the Horden Collieries Limited (1900) and other new enterprises were started, and the population increased by as much as 15·36 per cent—an expansion which brought the Union membership in 1910 to no less than 121,805. For the last few years it has remained nearly stationary at just over 126,000, including practically every worker in or about the collieries of the county who is eligible for admission. We may record some personal changes. After twenty-seven years' presidency of the Association, J. Forman died in 1900, when he was succeeded by Alderman W. House, whose shrewd wisdom and great negotiating skill was a great asset. On his death in 1917, the office was left for a time unfilled, until the appointment of Mr. James Robson. On John Wilson's death in 1915 he was succeeded as General Secretary by Mr. T. H. Cann. An outward and visible manifestation of the Association's progress is afforded by the fine new offices at Red Hill, Durham, which were opened in October 1915, in





J. ROBSON.

President of the Durham Miners' Association.



supersession of the old Miners' Hall, which had itself been considered a great achievement on its erection forty years previously.

Meanwhile the organisation of the other mine-workers has kept pace with that of the hewers, putters and others admitted to the Durham Miners' Association. The policy in Durham has been, by common consent, for the colliery enginemen, cokemen and mechanics to unite severally in their own associations, which are, for wage negotiations and now also for political action, closely combined with the Durham Miners' Association in the federation styled the Durham Coal Trade Board. The colliery enginemen and boiler firemen, whose Union dates from 1872, are now organised in forty-two Lodges in the county, and these constitute the Durham District of the National Federation of Enginemen and Boiler Firemen, which, as a national body, itself forms part of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The cokemen, whose Union dates from 1874, now include the rapidly increasing by-product workers, and are organised in fifty-four Lodges in the county, constituting the Durham District of the National Union of Cokemen

and By-Product Workers, which, also as a national body, is a constituent of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. The colliery mechanics have had their own Union, the Durham Colliery Mechanics Association, since 1878; counting thirty years later 3100 members; and have since greatly increased. The deputies or overmen of the county are likewise united in the Durham Deputy Overmen's Mutual Aid Association, which has not joined the Miners' Federation.

*The Spirit of Association of the Durham Miners as manifested in Co-operation*

Parallel with the growth of Trade Unionism among the Durham miners has been the steady expansion among them of the consumers' Co-operative Movement. Coming into the county, apparently, in the 'forties, Co-operation seems to have had its first great expansion after 1860, when for a quarter of a century numerous societies were started. Between 1860 and 1874 more than half of the now existing societies were established, including nearly all those that have attained

considerable dimensions; and these three dozen societies now comprise over two-thirds of all the Co-operative membership of the county.

### *The Co-operative Mining Company*

In the boom of 1872-4 men's thoughts turned to the possibility of applying the Co-operative principle to coal-mining. Unfortunately, they did not then realise that the essential feature of their successful Co-operative Stores was not the combination of workmen, nor the aggregation of small savings, but the conduct of business without the lure of profit-making, for use instead of for exchange, under the control, not of associated producers or associated capitalists, but of associated consumers. Hence, as we have to record, in 1874-5 the Durham Miners' Association, along with many individual miners and some philanthropists—including Dr. Rutherford, Thomas Burt, M.P., and William Crawford—were tempted to form an ordinary joint-stock company, and to buy the Monkwood Colliery, near Chesterfield in Derbyshire, from which

they were promised large profits on their investment. It was called the Co-operative Mining Company ; and the title seems to have been the only thing co-operative about it. The Durham Miners' Association invested altogether £15,500 in this speculation, and other people some £25,000 more. As might have been expected from a coal-mine venture just at this date, at the culmination of the boom, the speculation turned out a complete failure. The mine, from first to last, never paid its way ; and within a couple of years the whole capital had to be written off as lost. The incident should serve as a warning to Trade Unions and others against speculative investments, to which they are tempted by the craving to make profit. It was an aberration in which folk were misled by a word. But there was nothing co-operative about the incident except the name of the company ; and there is no reason for ignorantly quoting it, as is often done, as a failure of the consumers' Co-operative Movement.

By 1875, indeed, business was already tending downwards towards the collapse of 1878-9 ; and new Co-operative societies in

Durham became less numerous, whilst the mortality among those that were started was great. Nevertheless, about a dozen of the existing societies date from the period 1875-1889. For the last thirty years Co-operative expansion in the county has increasingly taken the form of the spread and development of existing societies, so that only half-a-dozen or so out of the threescore separate consumers' societies doing business in the county have less than thirty years' history behind them. There may have been, in fact, too great a development of branch stores, so that, in one mining village (Easington), without any society of its own, there are competing branches of no fewer than seven rival societies. Within the last few years there has been a federal movement; and the Teesside Co-operative Federation (for jam manufacture) and the South-East Durham Co-operative Bakery indicate possibilities of further developments of joint action for common service.

Durham stands first among all the counties of England and Wales, and has done so for at least thirty years, in its percentage of Co-operative membership to total population.

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Its threescore Co-operative societies have something like 200 separate establishments, and hardly any Durham village—certainly no colliery village in the county—is now without its branch store. Unfortunately, many of the villages have more than one. The total Co-operative membership in the county was at the end of 1919 no less than 270,000, nearly half of whom must be miners; and when it is remembered that the general custom of the county is for only the head of each family to be enrolled as a member, it will be seen that no less than 90 per cent of all Durham's three hundred thousand householders—and an even larger proportion of all the miners' families—must be in Co-operative membership. The total retail sales of the county's Co-operative societies during the year 1919 were nearly 17 millions sterling, and for the year 1921 will probably be found to exceed 25 millions sterling, or not far short of £90 per member per annum, certainly a higher average trade than any other English county will show. Though the average investment in the Co-operative society of all the members in the county is apparently only somewhere in the



neighbourhood of £20, their total share and loan capital and reserve—representing the industrial capital successfully administered by committees of working men—amounts to no less than five and a half millions sterling (or more than one-nineteenth of the aggregate total for the kingdom)—a sum which (seeing that nearly half of it belongs to miners) would have made Tommy Hepburn gasp and stare.

*The Dark Shadow of the Miner's Life*

This is the place at which we can most conveniently notice the record of mining accidents in the county. It is satisfactory that among all the British coalfields that of Durham and Northumberland has long held the record for the smallest percentage of fatal accidents, not only from explosions but also from all other causes. Yet, going back no further than 1871 we had, in that year, the terrible inundation at Wheatley Hill, in which 5 men were drowned; and the explosion at Seaham where 30 were killed. In 1880 another explosion at Seaham killed no fewer than 164 men and boys. In 1882 36 lost their lives

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at Tudhoe, and no fewer than 74 at Trimdon. Three years later the accident at Usworth was fatal to 41 and that at Elemore to 28. In 1896 there were 20 killed at Brancepeth. The following year the inundation at East Hetton drowned 10. In 1902 there was a serious explosion at Deaf Hill, though happily only one life was lost ; but in 1906 another at Wingate swept away 24 men and boys. In 1909 there occurred the worst calamity of the past half-century, when the explosion at West Stanley killed 168 men and boys.

It is difficult to find much cause for satisfaction, either in these recurring disasters or in the yearly figures that the Durham Colliery Owners' Mutual Protection Association submitted to the Coal Commission. We may rejoice that, as compared with a century ago, the death-rate per million tons raised, or per thousand persons employed, has been greatly reduced. But the accident death-rate for the county, per 1000 persons employed, as stated by the above association, shows no diminution in the period from 1899 to 1918, and even a slight increase. Moreover, the number of non-fatal but serious accidents, in proportion





T. H. CANN.

General Secretary of the Durham Miners' Association.

to the persons employed, was considerably higher during the last decade than it was during the first decade of this period. I do not think that either the coalowners or the miners ought to rest satisfied until the records show a steady decline in the number of accidents, both fatal and non-fatal, in proportion to the numbers employed, if not year by year, at any rate decade by decade. The workmen have a right to expect, alike from the steadily advancing science of the mining engineers and from the ever more efficient inspection of the Home Office—now the Mines Department of the Board of Trade—that the percentage of accidents, non-fatal as well as fatal, shall steadily fall.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PROGRESS OF A CENTURY AND THE WORK BEFORE US

AT this point my story of the Durham miners has to be suspended, awaiting the developments to come. Much as there still remains to be achieved, any comparison between 1821 and 1921, in a Durham mining village, demonstrates how considerable an advance in civilisation has been made.

#### *The Factors in the Advance*

Opinions may differ as to the causes of this advance, as well as to its extent. For my part, I have no doubt in recognising, in the progress in civilisation of the Durham miners during the past century, the effect—belated and imperfect though it be—in the main, of the

influences that I have described as just beginning in the county between 1821 and 1840—the revival of religion and the introduction of Trade Unionism. From the religious revival—taking from time to time different channels in different churches, manifesting itself now in this way and now in that, but persisting always in its call to the Spiritual in man—has come, I believe, a large part, not only of the change of life, and of the sobriety and earnestness of conduct, by which so many thousands of Durham families have been transformed, but also no small share of the elevation of character, and the zeal and energy, which have brought success to the other social movements of the past half-century. Is it too much to say that it is very largely upon the foundation laid in Durham by the humble “rangers” of 1821–1840, and by the efforts of the families which have passed under their influence, that, in the various parts of the county, Co-operation and Friendly Societies, Trade Unionism and the Labour Party have been in the subsequent generations developed? And Trade Unionism itself, with its perpetual appeal to working-class solidarity instead of individual selfish-

ness, has had its own remarkable achievements made possible, as it would be the first to admit, only by the social advance of the miners since Hepburn and Ramsey and Martin Jude sought in vain to keep them upstanding; and by the universal elementary schooling, which, as we should never forget, we owe to the Radicals of the last century, who perhaps "buided better than they knew." These achievements of Trade Unionism are, indeed, wider than is commonly remembered. By its Mutual Insurance in securing legal protection and provision against victimisation, Trade Unionism has gone far to rescue the individual workman from his helpless and morally degrading personal dependence on his social and economic superiors. By its hard-won enforcement of Collective Bargaining it has discovered for itself, against the opinion of all those who thought themselves educated, how to meet the capitalist at the gate; and how to cope, with some measure of success, with his erstwhile economic superiority. And particularly in the mining industry has Trade Unionism, by its method of Legal Enactment, won triumph



after triumph, fighting at first against the greatest odds, and always having to struggle against the resistance of those who put profit before life, from the first Mines Regulation Act of 1842, through those of 1850, 1855, 1860, 1872, 1887 and 1911, up to the Eight Hours Act of 1908, and the Minimum Wage Act of 1912. Imperfect as this legislative control of the mining industry still is—backward as our country is to-day, as regards this or that particular, in comparison with the best that has been achieved elsewhere—what the Miners' Trade Unions have already secured in the legislative field, for the safety and civilisation of the mining community—and in this work the Durham Miners' Association has taken a large share—stands far ahead of that done by Trade Unionism in any other industry, excepting only the parallel achievements of the textile unions. Who can measure the part to be ascribed, out of the vast improvement in the mining districts of Durham, between 1821 and 1921, to the Mines Regulation Acts, 1842–1911, for which the miners' leaders, from Martin Jude and Alexander Macdonald to Crawford and Wilson, Burt and Smillie, have

so persistently striven? At the same time we need not underestimate the effects of such other agencies as the Co-operative societies and the various bodies providing sick and funeral benefits, in the organisation of which in the county the miners have played so large a part; nor the persistent social influence of the teachers in the elementary schools, as well as that of the various Churches; nor the growth of organised means of recreation, from games to choral societies and dramatic clubs; nor yet, finally, the improvements wrought in the environment by the Medical Officers of Health and the different Local Authorities. Taken together, acting and reacting on each other as all these agencies do, they have effected in the course of the century a most hopeful transformation.

### *The Worst Blot on the County*

We must not ignore the fact that the Durham and Northumberland Coalfield has remained, to this day, in some respects among the worst as regards the housing of the people. The cottages themselves may not often be as

bad as the worst of those of Scotland and South Wales. But both in 1901 and 1911 the Census revealed Durham and Northumberland as having a larger number of persons to each dwelling-house than any other mining county in England. Has this unhappy distinction any connection with the fact that this is the only coalfield in England and Wales—parts of Scotland are the same—in which the coal-owners provide the miners' houses, as they say, "free" ? Durham has the bad eminence of having a larger number of Local Authorities than any other coal county in England in the areas of which the entire population averages more than five to a dwelling. The overcrowding of the miners' cottages in 1921 can only be described as appalling. The bad housing, the insanitation, the ugliness, and generally the "uncivilisation," of the typical mining village—together with the terrible overwork of the miner's wife, which the bad housing intensifies—seem to me to constitute the most grievous blot upon the county.

*The Work before us*

And what does the Future hide in it? Are we too presumptuous in hoping and intending that the advance in civilisation to be achieved in this County of Durham in the ensuing generation shall be at least as great as that made between 1821 and 1921—that the children and grandchildren of the miners of to-day shall look back on the evils of our own generation in the way in which we regard those against which Tommy Hepburn fought and despaired?

*The Standard of Life*

What is that we expect and desire in the mining village of To-morrow? First, with regard to incomes, we must see to it that, by the vigilance of the Trade Union and of the law, rising ever to new heights of effectiveness, there is secured to every willing worker, in good times and in bad, not merely subsistence and full protection against irregularity of employment and personal tyranny, by whomsoever exercised, but also the highest Standard

of Life, rising with every advance in our power over Nature, that the economic circumstances of the community can afford.

*The Lessening of the Toll of Death and  
Disablement*

And the toll of miners' health and limbs and lives, now levied annually by colliery accidents, must clearly be diminished. Work in Durham pits is already less dangerous than work in other coalfields, and much less dangerous than it was in Tommy Hepburn's time. But both the scientific experts and the mining inspectors gave the Coal Commission to understand, in effect, that the number of accidents in the other coalfields could be brought down nearer to the Durham level, and the Durham percentage of accidents, notably those not arising from explosions, could be still further reduced, if all the precautions already taken in the best-equipped and best-managed mines were to become universal (which admittedly does not occur, often from lack of means, under the present divided capitalist ownership); and if the newest scientific discoveries

could be promptly applied, without needing to consider their effect on dividends. What will be asked with increasing imperativeness in the years to come, by the whole Labour Movement as well as by the miners, is: "If accidents can be rendered less frequent and less serious, even at some increase of money cost, why are the necessary steps not taken?" I am aware that any reference to this matter arouses resentment, and among humane coal-owners even pain—just as the far worse state of things did in 1812 when the Rev. John Hodgson insisted on discussing it. But there is no ground for resentment. Those who say that accidents can be rendered less frequent do not accuse the coalowners of inhumanity or the managers of failing to comply with the Mines Regulation Acts, or even the Home Office of neglecting to make the best rules. What is obvious and admitted is that there are some collieries in which the mechanical equipment and safety precautions are much better than in the worst of them; and that these latter (as is frequently said by way of explanation and apology) are generally those having difficulty in making both ends meet, or unable to obtain

the necessary capital to put in new equipment, or to adopt the more costly safety appliances, without depriving their shareholders of all dividend. Their mal-equipment is due to each of them standing alone in private ownership. It is, in fact, the separation of the ownership of the several collieries that is to-day hindering the worst of them from being put in the same state of perfect equipment as the best of them. I am sure that the coal-owners themselves do not realise that what is asserted is that it is not their carelessness, nor yet their inhumanity, but this implication of Capitalism, which they did not foresee, that is now blocking the path to greater safety.

### *Pit-head Baths*

Is it, moreover, too much to expect that the miner of To-morrow will, as a matter of course, have the opportunity of keeping his pit-clothes in his own locked cupboard at the "changing place," to be provided at the pit-head, in which he may, if he chooses, at the end of his shift, in warmth and privacy, enjoy his bath and resume his home clothes, as fit as the manager

himself to sit down in his wife's parlour? The pit-head baths, now so popular at the Atherton Colliery near Manchester, must (as even the colliery representatives on the Coal Commission recommended) promptly be provided at every mine for optional use by all the men who are wise enough to take to them.

*Working for another's Profit*

Nor can I believe that the miner will be content to expend his efforts, and incur the risks of his calling, for the purpose of enabling functionless shareholders and royalty owners to draw from the nation's mineral wealth what the law itself began in 1908 to describe as "un-earned incomes." It is, I think, inevitable that the mines should come to belong to the community, and to the community alone; to be worked under an organisation in which, without dictatorship or bureaucracy, each grade and section of those who co-operate in the work, from the highest manager to the youngest pitman, will have not only his own opportunity of advancement to functions of wider usefulness, but also, in whatever grade



he may be working, his own appropriate fragment of responsibility and his own effective share of control. Only by some such re-organisation of the mining industry does it seem that it can henceforth secure, as regards the mass of mine-workers, whether manual labourers or technicians, the utmost zealous service of free men. Only by promoting the business of supplying the nation with its coal from a scramble for private profit to the status of a public service does it seem to me that we have any chance of evoking, in all grades and sections of the industry (and of giving adequate scope for the exercise and growth of), that sense of duty in the fulfilment of one's function in the service of the community, which distinguishes the conscious Co-operator from the Wage-Slave.

### *The Education of the Miner*

But the miners must fit themselves, as so many of them are now doing, for such enlarged responsibilities, and such a rise in the status of their calling, as we expect and desire. We must see to it that, not merely elementary

schooling, but all the education and technical training of which each is capable, is actually supplied, irrespective of the parents' means, to every member of the community. It is not a question merely of establishing a limited percentage of Scholarships and Free Places, which are often out of the reach of the poorest families, but of the actual ensuring, by the active investigations of the County Council Education Committee, that no potential capacity of any kind, in any young person in the county, is allowed to go to waste for lack of opportunity and means.

#### *Adult Education*

Nor is education only for childhood and youth. Already the young miner, if not immediately on his emancipation at fourteen years old, yet after a few years have elapsed, is increasingly taking to reading and study. Possibly in no other industry have so many workmen qualified themselves for technical appointments; or prepared themselves to enter the religious ministry, or other brain-working profession; or accumulated their own

collections of books—occasionally quite extensive collections—not only in science and technology, but even more often in history and literature, and sometimes philosophy. The provision, in every village in the county, of opportunities for Adult Education, from reading-rooms and libraries to popular courses of lectures and University Tutorial Classes, will be, in the near future, as much common form as the maintenance of elementary schools is to-day. If any man or woman, at any age, is willing to take the trouble to increase his or her knowledge on any subject whatever, this mere enlargement of the mind is, in a Democratic community, a public advantage for which all reasonable facilities should be provided. Moreover, in nothing will the Village of To-morrow be more unlike that of to-day than in the steadily increasing community of education, which all grades and sections of the population will enjoy. It is in the sharing of common manners in which to express a common courtesy ; a common speech enriched by a common stock of reading, a common acquaintance with the history of the world, and a common knowledge of public

affairs—this outcome of a common education merely as the substratum of an infinite variety of individual developments—that we shall attain any general civilisation of the whole people.

### *Garden Villages*

It is plain that neither an educated nor a civilised people would consent permanently to live in the ugly, incommodious, overcrowded and often positively insanitary cottages that to-day disgrace so many of the colliery villages of the county; especially, of course, those of old standing. It is in these miners' villages throughout the Kingdom that one-tenth of all the nation's children are brought up. If the first charge upon every industry is the subsistence of those who work at it, surely the first charge upon the corporate revenue of every nation should be the homes in which the coming generation is being reared. How quickly we can make good the present alarming shortage of houses: how soon we can go further and replace the existing hideous "colliery rows" by pleasant "garden villages" of commodious cottages, in themselves things

of beauty, equipped with baths and cupboards and all the labour-saving appliances that will lighten the toil of the miner's wife, and linked together by fast electric tramways, depends only upon our determination to make this as definitely the nation's demand, and as sincerely the object and purpose of the Government, as was, in the stress of the war, the getting of unimaginable quantities of shells.

### *The Activities of the Local Authorities*

The Parish and District and County Councils could already do much—and when fully alive to their opportunities and adequately supported by enlarged Grants in Aid doubtless will find ever more to do—not only towards improving the sanitary condition, increasing the amenity, and actually adding to the beauty of the villages in which we live, but also in making it more easy to lead a good life. Our Councillors do not always remember that the very object and purpose of their Local Government, as of all government, is not merely that we should live but that we should be able to live *well*. With a well-furnished

library and reading-room in every village ; with public baths and wash-houses ; with public grounds for football and cricket and lawn-tennis and bowls ; with club-rooms for the women as well as for the men ; with organised choral societies and dramatic clubs, concerts and entertainments, popular lectures and educational classes, we shall find, in the course of the ensuing generation, possibly more of the genuine social equality of a true civilisation than even in the substantial equalising of incomes that will be coming about.

### *The Activities of the Co-operative Societies*

How much of this provision of social amenity for the village will be undertaken by the Local Authorities ; how much, on the other hand, will be assumed, as a desirable enlargement of its sphere, by the Co-operative society, in which, it may be taken for granted, membership will be practically universal, must be left to the citizens and co-operators to decide in each case. It seems, indeed, to me that the Co-operative Movement, much as it has already achieved, may possibly be, especially in the

villages, still only at the beginning of its work. I can imagine these societies, to which more than nine-tenths of all the wage-earning families in the county already belong, becoming stirred by new ambitions of social usefulness; enrolling as members not only the men but (as is being increasingly done elsewhere) also their wives and their grown-up sons and daughters; advancing from the provision of groceries and clothing to a vastly more extended popular insurance and banking than is at present contemplated; providing for each village, in aid of hard-driven wives and mothers, a co-operative laundry, and not merely a co-operative bakery, but also a co-operative kitchen for the supply of cooked food; even a co-operative restaurant, perhaps in conjunction with a social club for members and especially for the wives and the sons and daughters, with separate rooms for games and for social intercourse. There may well come to be, in Durham, a friendly emulation between the Parish Council and the Co-operative society as to which of them shall make itself the social centre and principal civilising influence of the village, or how they shall share the functions

between them. The object and purpose of the Co-operative Movement is not only "Better Business" but also "Better Living."

*Matter and Spirit*

There is, indeed, no end to the vista. Nor is it, as so many suppose, merely a matter of money. We can, of course, not devote, as a community, in any one year, even on the most desirable improvements, more wealth than the community as a whole creates. The County of Durham, it may be borne in mind, already produces annually probably more wealth per head of population than any other county except, perhaps, Lancashire. But subject to this limit—a limit which the rapid advance of science makes extremely elastic—the communal or Co-operative provision is actually a public economy—the common service is nearly always less costly than if each family provided for itself alone. What we have to do is, as a nation, to this extent to "choose equality." The miners (and the rest of the working community) need only want the improvement sufficiently to insist on its



being made a prior charge on the nation's growing production, standing before the payment to individual non-producers of any of the tribute that idleness now levies on production.

What is needed is the power of the Spirit that calls to a higher, more social, and more genuinely civilised life; the power which a hundred years ago was evoked by the religious revival of that time. Who shall to-day evoke a like spirit among the Durham miners?



## APPENDIX

### AUTHORITIES AND SOURCES RELATING TO THE HISTORY OF THE DURHAM MINERS

I CANNOT pretend to have made exhaustive researches in all quarters, but the following sources may be suggested to those able to pursue the inquiry further. The voluminous Home Office Papers (manuscript) at the Public Record Office afford valuable glimpses of the Durham miners, principally for the first half of the nineteenth century. The Calendars of State Papers (printed) contain some items of interest in the eighteenth century especially as to the strike of 1765. The records of the Northumberland Miners' Mutual Confident Association are extensive from 1874; and Mr. Straker has kindly allowed me to see some interesting printed broadsheets of 1840-50. Other broadsheets, pamphlets and newspaper cuttings of this period are in the library of the Institute of Mining Engineers at Newcastle, the proceedings of which contain many papers of great technical and some economic interest. Various volumes of proceedings

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of conferences, arbitrations and sliding scale agreements of the Durham miners are in the British Library of Political Science at the London School of Economics. The records of the Durham Miners' Association I have not seen. The printed proceedings of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain since 1888 are voluminous. The reports and evidence of the various Royal Commissions on coal, notably those of 1871, 1891-4, 1903-5, 1907-10, 1909 and 1919, contain much incidental information.

Among the books that will be found most useful are the following :

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