

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

## Charles Kingsley

The subject of this paper, so well known as a brilliant novelist, a sweet poet, a sound scholar, and an eminent divine, is best remembered for the intense interest he took in the welfare of his fellowmen, for his strong sympathies for those in distress, and for his life-long efforts to elevate and improve the general condition of his poorer brethren.

Charles Kingsley was born June, 1819 at Dartmoor, Devonshire. He came of a good family, and his father, a clergyman of the Established Church, was a man of education and refinement; his mother was a woman of remarkable energy and strong originality. When Charles Kingsley was eleven years of age, his father removed to Clovelly, North Devon, one of the most picturesque spots in Gt. Britain, rich in vegetation, and noted for its wild, rugged coast; and here the boy's taste for Botany and Geology became a passion, which is apparent in his after writings. His parents, both of ardent temperament, took an almost romantic interest in the Parish work, and the people responded to the sympathy of their Rector, – a man who feared no danger, who could handle a boat, shoot a herring-net, and bear hardships equal to the best of them. No wonder then, that Charles Kingsley grew up with an ever abiding sympathy for the suffering, and with a readiness to sacrifice himself for the good of others.

It was at college that Charles Kingsley decided to join the church; he was ordained in 1842, and shortly afterwards was made Rector of Eversley. He at once entered into his clerical duties with restless energy, and began that life of usefulness which ceased only with his life. The Parish of Eversley had been sadly neglected; but the new Rector went bravely to work, and a Coal and Shoe club, a Loan Fund, and a Lending Library were quickly established; an adult evening school was held at the Rectory during the winter months, and weekly cottage lectures were established in the outlying districts for the old and feeble.

At the beginning of his ministry, there was scarcely a grown-up person of the laboring class in England who could read and write; and as to religious teaching, they had very little; in fact, the new minister had to redeem his Parish from almost barbarism; and this could only be done by incessant labor, and the utmost patience. It was by daily visiting and respectful sympathy displayed for the poor and sick, that he at last brought such reform as made Eversley a pattern to neighboring Parishes. Kingsley's sympathies for the poor and needy was not bounded by the confines of his Parish. England was being sorely tried. The first great outbreak of the Chartists in 1838, although crushed for a time, had left much excitement behind, and tho (*sic*) people were also deeply moved by the anti-corn-law agitation from 1838 to 1847. There was war in India, and disturbances in Scotland and Ireland; and at last a series of bad harvests, a commercial panic, and want of work in the manufacturing districts reduced the working classes to a miserable state of want. In Ireland, the miseries of famine, and the awful suffering there, shook the kingdom. Then came the year 1848, so monotonous (*sic*) in the history of Europe and which aroused the feelings and stirred the blood of all men. – T<sup>hos</sup> Hughes, in his preface to

“Alton Locke,” writes:

“It is only by an effort that one can now realize the strain to which the nation was subjected during that winter and spring, and which of course tried every individual man also, according to the depth and earnestness of his political and social convictions and sympathies. The group of men who were working under Mr. Maurice were no exception to the rule. The work of teaching and writing was not indeed neglected, but the larger questions which were being so strenuously mooted, – the points of the people's charter, the right of public meeting, the attitude of the laboring class to the other classes, absorbed more and more of their attention. Kingsley was very deeply impressed with the gravity and danger of the crisis: more so, I think, than almost any of his friends; probably because as a country parson, he was more directly in contact with one class of the poor man of any other. How deeply he felt for the agricultural poor; how faithfully he reflected the passionate and restless sadness of the time, may be read in the pages of “Yeast” which came out later in Frazer. As the winter months went on this sadness increased, and seriously affected his health.”

When the Chartists made their memorable rising in 1848, and the news of their petition reached Eversley, Kingsley went to London, and he and other earnest friends did their utmost to calm the excited feelings of the people, and to prevent bloodshed. – It may be well to here state that Chartism took a pronounced form of existence in consequence to the formal declaration by the leaders of the Liberal party, that it was not their intention to push reforms any further. The Reform Bill of 1832 had settled the existence of a popular representative principle; but while it had considerably extended the franchise, and by abolishing several so-called, rotten boroughs, and redistributing others' seats, had given 65 additional representatives to the Counties, and conferred the right of returning members to over 40 large towns, which had hitherto no representation, –yet it was not the working-men, but the middle classes that were now admitted to a share of the Government. The working-classes were practically left out in the cold, and were bitterly disappointed; their feelings to [*sic*] were greatly excited by the revolutionary ideas of the Continent, and when want of work and high prices brought famine to their doors, matters became serious. It was O'Connell who had given the title of The Charter. “Here is your charter,” said he to the Working Men's Association, “Agitate for it, and never be content with anything else.”

Considered now, the Charter does not seem a very formidable document; its points were six:

1. Manhood suffrage.
2. Annual Parliaments;
3. Vote by Ballot;
4. Abolition of the Property Qualification Required for a Member of Parliament;
5. Payment of Members;
6. Division of the Country into electoral Districts.

It was considered, however, by the law-makers, that reform had gone far enough for the time being, and the Chartists met with strong opposition. Justin McCarthy, in A History of Our Own Times, writes: – “The Chartists might be roughly divided into three classes: The Political Chartists, the Social Chartists, and the Chartists of vague discontent, who joined the movement because they were wretched and felt angry. The first were the regular political agitators, who wanted a wider representation; the second were chiefly led to the movement by their hatred of the “bread tax”: these two classes were perfectly

clear as to what they wanted: some of their demands were just and reasonable: none of them were without the sphere of rational and peaceful controversy; disciples of mere discontent naturally swerving alternately to the side of those leaders or sections who talked loudest and fiercest against the lawmakers, and the constituted authorities.”

The class hatred had become very intense by the year 1848. The artisans and working classes had come to believe that England was ruled for the benefit of the wealthy and of the aristocrats, who were utterly indifferent to the suffering of the poor: and the upper class believed that the men who belonged to the chartists were fierce and ungovernable communists who, if they were allowed their own way, would overthrow throne, altar, and all established society. The threatened chartists riots which took Kingsley to London were kept under; but for some eight years he and some others earnest friends of the working men had their hands full. Kingsley, as the most outspoken and powerful of those who took the side of the laboring classes at this critical time, made many friends and many enemies. His work was misunderstood by a large part of the well-to-do. Under the nom de plume of “Parson Lot,” his writings in *Politics for the People*, the *Christian Socialist*, and the *Journal of Association*, caused much comment. By his books *Alton Locke*, *Yeast*, and various tracts and pamphlets, he endeavored to get the better class to view the conditions of the poor in a different light to that generally held by them: and by loyal, conservative, and serious teaching, he tried to impress the working men with the necessity of moral restraint, and of self-education, to fit themselves for the position they wished to take in the government of the country. A writer states:

“At that time, he in his books and pamphlets, and often in his daily familiar speech, he was pouring out the whole force of his eager, passionate heart in wrath and indignation against starvation-wages, stifling work-shops, reeking alleys, careless landlords, roofless and crowded cottages, hard and canting religion. His *Poacher's Widow* is a perceiving, heart-rending cry to heaven for vengeance against the oppressor. ‘There is a righteous God’ is its burden, ‘and such things cannot and shall not remain to deface the world which he has made. Laws, Constitution, churches, are none of his, if they tolerate such; they are accursed, and they must perish, destroy what they made in their fall: nay, they will perish in their own corruption.’”

Kingsley did not support the demands of the Chartists: he knew that the majority of the workingmen were quite uneducated, and untrained to the duties of citizenship. He felt that they were unfitted at that time for manhood suffrage, but he was desirous that the intelligent and well-read men among them should have the freeman's just right of voting. He pressed upon them that there could be no true freedom without virtue, no true science without religion, no true industry without the fear of God and love of their fellow citizens. The independent footing which he took caused him to be abused on both sides; and he felt very deeply the attacks made upon him. In a letter dated June 19, 1848 to T<sup>hos</sup> Cooper, a Chartist author, and a lecturer on Strauss, but who in later years became a preacher of Christianity he referred to this: he writes: “Ever since I read your brilliant poem “*The Purgatory of Suicides*,” I have been possessed by a desire to thrust myself at all risks into your acquaintance. The risk, which I felt keenly, was the fear that you might distrust me as a clergyman having, I am afraid, no great reason to love that body of men. Still, I thought the poetic spirit ought to be a bond of communion between us. Shall God make us brother poets as well as brother men, and we refuse to fraternize? I thought also that

you, if you have a poet's heart as well as the poet's brain, which you have manifestly, ought to be more able than other men to appreciate and sympathize with my feelings towards the working classes. You can understand why I'm held back – from shame – a false shame perhaps, lest you should fancy me a hypocrite. But my mind was made up when I found an attack in the “Commonwealth,” on certain papers which I had published, in the “Politics for the People” under the name of Parson Lot. Now I had hailed with cordial pleasure the appearance of the “Commonwealth”, and sympathized thoroughly with it; and here was that very “Commonwealth” attacking me on some of the very points which I most agreed with it. It seemed to me intolerable to be so misunderstood. It had long been intolerable to me to be regarded as an object of distrust and aversion by thousands of my countrymen, my equals in privilege, and too often, alas, for my superiors in worth, just because I was a clergyman, the very office which ought to have testified above all others for liberty, equality, brotherhood, for time and eternity. I felt myself bound, then, to write to you, to see if, among the nobler spirits of the working classes, I could not make one friend who could understand me. My ancestors fought in Cromwell's army, and left all for the sake of God and liberty among the Pilgrim fathers; and here were men accusing me of “medieval tyranny.” I would shed the last drop of my life-blood for the social and political emancipation of the people of England, as God is my witness; and here are the very men for whom I would die, fancying me an “Aristocrat.” It is not enough for me that they are mistaken in me. I want to work with them. I want to realize my brotherhood with them; I want some one like yourself, intimately acquainted with the mind of the working classes to give me such an insight into their life and thoughts as may enable me to consecrate my powers effectually to their service. For them I have lived for several years. I come to you to ask you if you can tell me how to live more completely for them. If you distrust and reject my overtures, I shall not be astonished;— pained I shall be and you must know as well as I that there is no bitterer pain than to be called a rogue because you are honester than your neighbors; and a “time-server” because you have intellect enough to see both sides of the question.”

In his contribution to Politics for the People he advocates the benefits of picture-galleries, museums, and exhibitions which have since been so well taken up; in one article he writes: —“What a noble, righteous, and truly brotherly plan it would be if all classes would join to form a free National Gallery of Art and Science, which might combine the advantages of the present Polytechnic Society of Arts and British Institutions, gratis. Manufacturers and men of science might send thither specimens of their new inventions. The rich might send, for a few months in the year ancient and modern pictures; and not only pictures, but all sorts of curious works of art and nature, which are now hidden in their drawing rooms and libraries. There might be free liberty to copy any object, on the copyist's name and residence being registered. And surely artists and men of science might be found with enough of the spirit of patriotism and love to explain gratuitously to all comers, whatever their rank or class, the wonders of the Museum. I really believe that if once the spirit of brotherhood got abroad among us; if men once saw that here was a vast means of educating and softening and uniting those who have no leisure for study, and few means of enjoyment except the gin-shop and Cremorne Gardens; if they could but once feel that here was a project equally blessed for rich and poor, — the money for it would be at once forthcoming from many a rich man who is longing to do good if he could only be shown the way, and for many a poor journeyman who would gladly

contribute his mite to a truly National Museum founded on the principle of spiritual liberty, equality, and fraternity.” As an illustration of Kingsley's feelings that the people until educated, were not properly educated for the franchise, I will quote from another letter written by him, in 1856, to Mr. T<sup>hos</sup> Cooper.

“I am ready for all extensions of the franchise, if we have a government system of education therewith. Until then, I am merely stupidly acquiescent. More poor and ignorant voters; very well; more bribers, more bribers (*sic*), more pettifogging attorneys in Parliament, more local interests preferred to national ones, more substitution of the delegates' system for the representative one.”

As years went by, Kingsley's influence was spreading far and wide. He had a manly way of looking everything straight in the face, and speaking out all the good and all the ill that could be said of it in the plainest way, that impressed people in a remarkable manner. He was a man of sound knowledge, sound reasoning, sound faith and sound morality and counsel was asked of him, although he was still a young man, on the most delicate and important matters of life. His influence was very great with young men, and his correspondence increased year-by-year as each fresh book of his touched and stirred fresh hearts. Men from all parts, officers in the army and navy, men in the colonies, and young men entering business or brought up to go into holy orders, would write to him of their doubts and fears, and it is said in his “Letters and Memoirs of his Life,” published by his wisdom, that it was only those who saw the mass of letters on his study table knew what the weight of such correspondence must be to a man of his powerful sympathies, who had in addition sermons to prepare, books to write, a Parish to work, and a pupil to teach.

His stirring pamphlet “Brave words to Brave Soldiers and Sailors” written in 1855 at the time of the Crimean War, of which many thousand copies were sent out and distributed to the soldiers, moved many a noble soul. –Eversley was quite near to Aldershot Camp and to Sandhurst Military College, and Kingsley was thus brought much in contact with military men and widened his sphere of usefulness. He was frequently invited to preach and lecture to the troops, and his influence with the officers and men was very great; and Sunday after Sunday, he had the keen delight of seeing army in his congregation. Kingsley was always an advocate of sanitary science, and as years went on he devoted much time to spread the knowledge of its importance, believing that the laws of health, the comfort of homes, and the training up of a healthy generation, were matters deeply affecting the people. By the time he was 40 years of age, a marked difference was observed in the press, religious and otherwise towards him. Men understood him better; and he, with widened experience and riper judgment formed his opinions more calmly than in his earlier days. His increasing popularity as an author, and power as a preacher, brought him a larger acquaintance with all ranks and many influential and warm friends. In 1857 he was made a Fellow of the Lineal Society, which had been a great ambition of his. In 1860 he was offered and accepted the Regius Professorship of modern History at Cambridge. His lectures were very largely attended, and left a permanent impression upon many of his hearers. One of the undergraduates, afterwards a University Professor, writes of him:

“We crowded him out of room after room till he had to have the largest of all the schools; and we crowded that – crammed it. Every one who wished to live as a man ought to live

felt that the Professor of Modern History was a friend indeed. Tutors and fellows and lecturers came too, and sat on the same benches as undergraduates; and often as he told a tale of heroism, of evil conquered by good, or uttered one of his noble sayings, that rings through us like trumpet calls, loud and sudden cheers would break out irresistibly, spontaneously, and wild young fellows' eyes would be full of manly, noble tears.” In 1861 he had new and grave responsibilities: for in addition to his public class he, by the wishes of the Prince Consort, gave private lectures to the Prince of Wales. In 1863 he was made a fellow of the Geological Society, and in 1869 accepted the Canonry of Chester. In that year, as president of the educational section of the Social Science Congress at Bristol, he gave an address which made a profound sensation at the time, and about one million copies were printed and distributed by the Educational League. At Chester he started, among other things a botanical class for young men, so that their spare time might be profitably and interestingly occupied. Once a week a talk & lecture was arranged; and the weekly was so pleasant that it was no uncommon thing for upwards of 60 persons to take part in it. This was the beginning of the Chester National History Society which afterwards numbered between 500 and 600 members; and it was also the nucleus of a Scientific Society subsequently started by him.

In 1873 he was offered and accepted in lieu of the Canonry of Chester, a vacant chair in Westminster Abbey. Upon the occasion of his appointment, he received many letters of congratulation and friendship. The outburst of sympathy on all sides greatly affected him, and wiped out many bitter passages in the past. His health, however, was giving way, and he had only two years in the famous abbey; but during that brief period, he more than maintained his reputation as a preacher, by his earnest eloquence and the intense fervour of his sermons.

In 1874 Kingsley paid a visit to America where he was received with the greatest kindness and hospitality. In San Francisco he caught a severe cold, which turned to pleurisy; he recovered however, but upon his return to England in August 1874, he overworked himself, and was again taken ill, from which he only partially recovered. On Advent Sunday Nov. 29 1874 he preached his last sermon in Westminster Abbey, and on the 23rd of January 1875 without sigh or struggle, he breathed his last, aged 55.

His bust stands in the new “Poets Corner” of Westminster Abby, a national memorial; and his remains are in Eversley Churchyard where a white marble cross with the words of his choice “Amavimus, Amamus, Amabimus” marks the spot.

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