JOHN STUART MILL: INDEPENDENT RADICAL

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John Stuart Mill—"fearless fighter for many causes."

By WILLIAM HENRY CHAMBERLIN

HE WAS THE PRODUCT of perhaps the most intensive system of hothouse education ever devised by an ambitious and conscientious father. Introduced to Greek at three and beginning the regular study of Latin at eight, he had by the age of twelve read more classical works in the original than most students absorb in years of high school and college training. This education was broadened by long conversational walks with his father, James Mill, a psychologist and economist of some fame, author of a history of India (both the elder and the younger Mill worked in the London office of the East India Company until it was deprived of its administrative functions), and an ardent disciple of the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham.

This rigorous training in the classics was supplemented by a voracious devouring of history and literature, until John Stuart Mill, as a boy, was far better read than most educated adults. So, although he missed the experience of growing up with other boys in the rough and tumble of school life, he gained a head start in becoming what his writings reveal him to be, one of the most erudite figures in Britain's Victorian intelligentsia.

Mill grew up and in substance remained a radical democrat in politics and an agnostic in religious belief. Not without reason did Gladstone call him "the saint of rationalism," for he valued most highly the power and capacity of human reason, and he was a man of remarkable purity and unvarying integrity of character and personality. Very characteristic was his reaction when he was asked, at a political gathering of workers, whether he had written a statement dredged up by his political opponents: "The lower classes, although mostly habitual liars, are ashamed of lying."

Without hesitation he replied, "I did." And the unexpected result was an ovation, inspired presumably not by the words, but by his frankness in avowing them. Another brickbat flung at him in this parliamentary election was his defiant sentence, reflecting his belief that an eternity of punishment in hell was *inconsistent with the conception of a* beneficent Deity: "If such a being can sentence me to hell, to hell I will go."

Mill served only one term in Parliament and was defeated for re-election. By nature a scholar and publicist, he violated all the rules of the game of politics, refusing to solicit votes, to cater to selected groups, or to compromise or equivocate regarding his views—some of which were far from popular. He left behind, however, the memory of one fine bit of repartee, of the kind that wins nonpartisan appreciation in the House of Commons. Charged with having, in one of his books, called the Conservatives the stupidest party in the state, Mill retorted: "I never meant to say that the Conservatives are generally stupid. I meant to say that stupid people are generally conservative. . . . There is so much dense, solid force in sheer stupidity that any body of able men with that force pressing behind them may assure victory in many a struggle, and many a victory the Conservative party has gained through that power!"

MILL was an independent radical who usually voted with the Liberals under Gladstone. He was not an impressive orator, but he left his imprint on a body of reforming legislation that Gladstone saw through to enactment after Mill had been eliminated from Parliament. Among these measures were the disestablishment of the Protestant Church in Ireland, the first of successive Irish land reforms, the Married Women's Property Act, the National Education Act, the abolition of religious tests in the universities, and the termination of the practice of buying commissions in the army. Mill's defeat when he stood for re-election was due in large part to his propensity for espousing unpopular causes and issues.

He tried without success, but with much publicity, to make a murder charge stick in the British courts against Governor Eyre of Jamaica, who had put down a black uprising on the island with disproportionate cruelty, largely by keeping martial law in force long after the emergency had passed. He also supported the candidacy for Parliament of Charles Bradlaugh, a militant unbeliever who practiced the rather corny trick of publicly taking out his watch and challenging God to strike him dead in ten minutes.

Mill figured in one of the most famous Victorian romances, comparable with those of George Eliot and George Henry Lewes and of Robert and Elizabeth Browning. Mill's father, as he tells us in his *Autobiography*, gave him much—but not tenderness. His life had been rather starved of sentiment when, in 1830, at the age of twenty-five, he met Mrs. Harriet Taylor, the beautiful, high-spirited, warmhearted, and highly intelligent wife of a businessman named John Taylor.

For twenty years Mill and the Taylors constituted a curious triangle, Taylor being apparently convinced that the close confidential association of his wife with Mill was platonic. And so it seems to have been, even though Mill and Harriet took trips together and she displayed an almost possessive interest in his writings and, in at least one important field, influenced his opinions. This is the conclusion of Mill's modern, careful, and scholarly biographer, Michael St. John Packe, and one cannot discount the testimony of Mill himself, in his life story:

> Our relation to each other at that time [during Taylor's life] was one of strong affection and confidential intimacy only. For though we did not consider the ordinances of society binding on a subject so entirely personal, we did feel bound that our conduct should

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be such as in no degree to bring discredit on her husband, nor therefore on herself.

From a man of Mill's integrity such a statement seems convincing. Had the two been lovers in the full sense of the term, he might have been silent but hardly so positive. What seems indisputably true is that Harriet Taylor brought into Mill's life elements of warmth, tenderness, and feminine charm that had been lacking, and also a new and important intellectual influence. It was Harriet who induced Mill, in his economic works, to soften or eliminate his strictures on socialism and Communism, and it was during their intellectual partnership that Mill modified the fairly orthodox economic theories which he had absorbed from his father and his father's friend, Ricardo, to a degree reflected in this statement: "The social problem of the future we considered to be, how to unite the greatest individual liberty of action with a common ownership in the raw material of the globe, and an equal participation of all in the benefits of combined labor."

This is close to the ideal of combining individual liberty with material equality, which has certainly not been realized yet under any politico-economic system and which may be as chimerical as the squaring of the circle. It is presumptuous to judge with assurance how a man whose thought was strongly influenced by the conditions of the nineteenth century would have reacted to current challenges. But it is hard to conceive of Mill's luminous mind, which set such a high value on individual liberty, succumbing to the sophistries that are invoked to justify totalitarian methods of rule, with the complete thought control these involve.

The triangle of which Mill had been a part for almost twenty years came to an end when John Taylor died in 1849. After two years Mill and Harriet Taylor were married and, because of tactlessness on both sides, this was accompanied by a complete breach between Mill and his family—his mother, brother, and sisters. Mill and Harriet lived in suburban seclusion, saving up money for an independent life of study, writing, and travel. This prospect seemed assured when Mill retired from his work at India House on a pension in 1858.

Then, just when the prospects of their union seemed brightest, the blight of tragedy struck. Harriet contracted a fever that proved fatal on a trip to their favored Continental retreat, the old French town of Avignon. Mill at first was utterly broken and inconsolable. He had lost his only love and inseparable intellectual companion, the being who had brought the warmth of ardent feeling into his somewhat dry, austere existence. Disregarding expense, he erected a huge marble monument to be placed over her grave in Avignon and prepared a memorial inscription more in line, perhaps, with Victorian than with modern taste:

As earnest for the public good
As she was generous and devoted
To all who surrounded her
Her influence has been felt
In many of the greatest
Improvements of the age
And will be in those still to come
Were there but a few hearts and intellects
Like hers
This earth would already become
The hoped-for heaven

More eloquent are such tributes as the following, in his *Autobiography*: "Her memory is to me a religion, and her approbation the standard by which, summing up as it does all worthiness, I endeavor to regulate my life."

Mill's chief comfort during the fourteen years that passed before he died—also in Avignon, of a sudden attack of erysipelas—was his stepdaughter Helen, who devoted herself entirely to him as companion, secretary, and housekeeper, and, after his death, to the cult of his memory.

Mill owes his place among the immortals of human thought primarily to his essay *On Liberty*, written in collaboration with Harriet before her death and published a year afterward. One finds here, along with Mill's special qualities of many-sided knowledge, ripe wisdom, and cogent reasoning, a fire and passion scarcely matched in his other writings. In the beginning is the thundering affirmation of liberty's absolute value:

> If all mankind, minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.

And there is the crescendo at the end:

> A State, which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished; and that the perfection of machinery to which it has sacrificed everything, will in the end avail it nothing, for want of the vital power which, in order that the machine may work more smoothly, it has preferred to banish.

In the body of the essay one finds almost every conceivable argument for the value of dissenting minorities, and of the right of the individual to speak and act as he pleases, with the reservation that his speech and action must not injure the rights and liberties of others. The quality of the work is perhaps best conveyed through a few of its more incisive epigrammatic statements:

> He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that.

> The mental and moral, like the muscular powers, are improved only by being used.

> Genius can only breathe freely in an atmosphere of freedom.

> Originality is the one thing which unoriginal minds cannot feel the use of.

> The initiation of all wise or noble things comes and must come from individuals; generally at first from some one individual.

> The despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement.

> A general state education is a mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly like one another. [Not that Mill was opposed to government aid to education; he believed that education thrived on diversity.]

John Stuart Mill was a fearless fighter for many causes, most of them worthy, reasonable, and humane. But in this age of mass pressures – some brutal, some subtle – on the freedom and integrity of the individual, he deserves to be remembered best as the clear-voiced trumpeter of individual liberty.

Flowers

By A. D. Freeman

ACROSS the street, the blue truck gray with dust
shivers: a messenger who brings
flowers for a sick old lady.
What flowers can kill such cold?
Roses? Not even if they were
elm - tall and razor - thorned, brass - petalled.

Not even one bud in a vase of Waterford.

Now, on this day of ice, of snow corrupted,
upon my porch I have to deal with
the blind man back with his new brooms.
He gives me change. It weighs my eyelids down.

She used to love to putter in the home-made
greenhouse off the kitchen, coddling her flowers.
I'd like to write this with my finger
on the truck's dusty side.

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Denuclearization in Latin America

RECENT HEADLINES from Punta del Este tell of the difficult economic problems facing the countries of Latin America and of their efforts to create a common market. Those from Geneva tell of the difficult negotiations for a treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Very few headlines have been devoted to a recent event in Mexico City which may have great significance in both fields.

In February, after nearly four years of patient but tough negotiations, all the countries of Latin America—with the exception of Cuba, which boycotted the negotiations—unanimously approved a Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America. The treaty was signed immediately by fifteen countries, two more have ratified it since, and it is expected that the remaining countries will sign shortly. The Declaration of Punta del Este also expressed the hope of the chiefs of state of Latin America and of the United States that the treaty would be put into effect as soon as possible.

Secretary General U Thant of the United Nations, in a message welcoming the approval of the treaty, related it to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the Outer Space Treaty of January 1967 as milestones in establishing limits to the nuclear arms race. More particularly, he described the treaty as "the first and only one that establishes an effective system of control, under a permanent and supervisory organ."

The idea of a nuclear-free zone in Latin America was born in the aftermath of the Cuban crisis in October 1962. The countries of Latin America, not wanting to risk any repetition of the Cuban crisis, decided that they would not acquire or manufacture or permit the deployment of any nuclear weapons in their territory.

Unlike Antarctica and outer space, where nuclear weapons have also been banned, Latin America is a heavily populated area of the world with more than its share of political rivalries and tensions. It is not difficult to visualize a ruinous atomic arms race among the larger countries of Latin America, with all its dangerous repercussions, if any one of these countries were to decide to go nuclear. Hence the importance of their decision.

The negotiations were not easy and there were problems aplenty. Would all the countries of Latin America, including Cuba, have to sign, or could the treaty go into effect just for those countries which chose to sign? Would all the nuclear powers, including Communist China, have to agree to respect the treaty? What sort of control system should there be, and how would it be enforced? How could the treaty be framed so as not to inhibit the peaceful uses of atomic energy?

All these and a multitude of other problems were eventually sorted out and conflicting positions were reconciled. Like all compromise solutions these, too, are far from perfect. The treaty, as in the case of all previous ones in the field of arms control, bears the hallmark of "attainable" rather than of "ideal." For the treaty to go into operation eleven states of Latin America must ratify it and agree that it will apply to their countries without waiting for all of the others. The treaty's proponents are confident that necessary support will be forthcoming.

The treaty is the first one of its kind to set up a complete system of control. All peaceful nuclear reactors and other nuclear facilities are to come under the inspection system of the International Atomic Energy Agency. In addition, whenever there is a suspicion of any violation of the treaty, an on-site inspection can be ordered immediately. The treaty actually pioneers the way in setting up a simple, efficient system of inspection and control to safeguard against any illegal or clandestine activities. When the treaty goes into effect, it may well represent a breakthrough in the continuing effort to halt and control the nuclear arms race. The treaty will be an achievement not only of great benefit to Latin America—militarily, politically, economically, and socially—but it also will be of importance to the whole world.

The treaty raises some problems for the nuclear powers. The United States does not want Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands included in the nuclear-free zone. The United Kingdom and France may have questions about their territories within the area. The U.S.S.R. seems to want to wait for action by the other nuclear powers with direct interests in the area before announcing its willingness to abide by the treaty provisions. Communist China represents no problem in this respect—for the time being, at least—but it has said that though it sympathizes with the idea, it will not support the treaty because it emanated from the United Nations. The British have already announced that they hope to "associate" themselves with the treaty. There is no logical reason why the other nuclear powers should not do likewise.

The treaty will come up for discussion at the next regular session of the U.N. General Assembly in September. The deliberations there will provide an opportunity to mobilize international opinion behind the treaty and to encourage the states of Latin America to implement the treaty as soon as possible, and the nuclear powers to give it their active support.

The question of how to make progress in the field of arms control or disarmament is one of the most baffling and frustrating problems of our time. Progress has been all too slow. The success of the Latin Americans in preventing a nuclear arms race in their part of the world, by their own initiative and through their own efforts, may well turn out to be a beacon lighting the way for others. —Hallowell Bowser.

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