

On Her Majesty's Service

WASC 472

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Extracts from
E. Stafford Cripps - a Biography
and
The Cripps Version
Stafford Cripps



THE CRIPPS
VERSION

The Life of Sir Stafford Cripps

PETER CLARKE

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The Cripps Version

THE LIFE OF SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS

1889-1952



ALLEN LANE
THE PENGUIN PRESS

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Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Cnr Rosedale and Airborne Roads, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published 2002

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Set in 9.75/13 pt PostScript Linotype Sabon

Typeset by Rowland Phototypesetting Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Printed and bound in Great Britain by The Bath Press, Bath

Cover repro and printing by Concise Cover Printers

ISBN 0-713-99390-1

ESSEX COUNTY LIBRARY

with court martial duties – desertion was a major problem – throughout the period of hostilities; the dashing Freddie redeemed his playboy reputation by making good as a genuinely heroic soldier in the Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars Yeomanry; and Len, to whom Stafford was closest, resumed a military career begun in the Fourth Hussars. Estorick does not explain why their ‘splendidly healthy’ fourth brother should not have done likewise.

The fact is that his health was already giving cause for concern. ‘Stafford by no means well,’ his father noted in March 1914, ‘but I hope he may improve quickly if we have good weather.’⁸⁰ This hope proved vain, as Stafford’s diary shows. ‘In June I had a breakdown and was obliged to lie up for a month,’ he explained, adding that, when war came in August, ‘I was at the time under medical treatment and being married did not think of trying for the army as at that time married men were not wanted.’⁸¹ It is true that the current expectation was that single men would volunteer before married men. It is interesting that Stafford presents this, alongside his already uncertain health, as his reason for not attempting to enlist; and this contradicts the notion, possibly family legend but first published in Cooke’s biography, that Stafford was rejected as unfit by the army doctors.⁸² He was not held back by doubts about the justifiability of war, such as the freshly ennobled Lord Parmoor increasingly harboured. Instead Stafford threw himself into recruiting activities, showing a readiness to accept sacrifices – ‘At this time Allen my chauffeur joined the army’ – that was vicarious through no lack of belligerent zeal.⁸³

Cripps, true to form, came up with an initiative of his own. Together with Egerton, he crossed to France in October 1914 on a freelance mission to deliver winter comforts to the troops. It was just after the British army had suffered the German onslaught in the battle of the Marne. ‘This was the first impression we had of real war and even this seemed in some ways more like manoeuvres,’ Cripps wrote, ‘though the Hospital trains consisting in most instances of cattle trucks only were very impressive and terribly real.’⁸⁴ Once in France, he determined on joining the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) and, kitted out in its khaki uniform, soon became driver of a specially built two-ton lorry which Isobel persuaded her grandfather Eno to donate. For Stafford, it was again time to get out and get under; he

80. Parmoor diary, 29 March 1914.

81. RSC diary, 14 October 1917, retrospective entry.

82. Cooke, *Cripps*, p. 67; cf. Bryant, *Cripps*, p. 53, Burgess, *Cripps*, p. 18.

83. RSC diary, 14 October 1917. Estorick (1941), p. 21, gives quite the contrary impression.

84. RSC diary, 14 October 1917.

assured Isobel after six months that 'old Eno is running beautifully - just like new'. He put in almost a year of ambulance service, evacuating wounded men through Boulogne. 'No one who was not there can conceive how dependent the Army were on the BRCS in those early days,' he claimed, recalling that they 'carried nearly every conceivable Hospital requisite, garment and game including also coal, milk, coffins and stretchers with drunken soldiers!'.⁸⁵ He told Isobel of shifting six tons of mineral water off the quay in one day; subsequently of having a sore back. It was arduous and unremitting work: 'Our most disagreeable job was coal-carting which took place two or three times a week; on the hot July days tipping sacks of dusty coal in a small cellar was no joke!'⁸⁶

Throughout the summer of 1915, then, Cripps was still in Boulogne, shovelling coal. The received version (originating in Strauss's biography and faithfully repeated since) is that, faced with the use of gas by the Germans at Ypres in April 1915, 'someone in the Government remembered he was a scientist', and that Cripps was accordingly summoned home by telegram, to begin work at once in a munitions factory.⁸⁷ Cripps's own wartime record suggests that this account is, at best, a conflation. At the end of May 1915 he made a note of receiving an order: 'Hold yourself in readiness to proceed to St Omer at any time as a chemist in connection with these poisonous gases.' Cripps confessed himself 'flabbergasted' because of the implication that he would thereby be deprived of his first chance in six months' service to get home and moved quickly to secure a week's leave first.⁸⁸ Predictably, his week's leave proved 'heavenly'; after which Cripps 'then returned to Boulogne but never heard any more of the chemical job'.⁸⁹ In September, however, on leave again in England, he heard from Egerton, now employed in the new Ministry of Munitions, that chemists were indeed needed and Cripps took the initiative in offering his own services. This time he was taken on and sent to the royal gunpowder factory at Waltham Abbey, to train in the manufacture of gun cotton, and later tetryl, necessary in detonating TNT.

Cripps was to spend the next two years working for the Ministry of Munitions, under conditions satisfactory neither to his finances (which

85. RSC to IC, 11 May 1915.

86. RSC diary, 14 October 1917; RSC to IC, April 1915 (probably 1 April) and 19 April 1915.

87. Strauss, p. 30; cf. Estorick, pp. 45-6, Cooke, *Cripps*, pp. 67-8, Bryant, *Cripps*, p. 53, and Burgess, *Cripps*, p. 18.

88. RSC diary, 30 May 1915, misleadingly annotated by Isobel: 'From RSC in France: Letter of recall.'

89. RSC diary, 14 October 1917.

could well bear the temporary strain) nor his health (which could not). He had started off with a few simple axioms. 'I am sure if all the workers in the munition factories were put under military law and discipline it would be an excellent thing and would show a greatly improved output – but I suppose that means national service – and why not?' he wrote, supplying Isobel with the answer: 'Because we've got a sort of Party government still.'⁹⁰ This gibe against the Asquith Government shows him more of a hard-line militarist Tory than a champion of Labour, which maintained a strong aversion to industrial conscription; though the good labour relations under Cripps's subsequent management suggest that in practice his methods were tempered by experience.

What gave Cripps his chance was a familiar mixture of his useful family connections, his unusual professional qualifications, plus his own determination. He wheeled out impressive referees to impress the Ministry: not only Sir William Ramsay but Jack Egerton (now his brother-in-law) and Lord Parmoor himself. It was Egerton who secured Cripps's move, after two months' training, to a factory at Queensferry, near Chester on the Dee estuary, ostensibly concerned with installing a tetryl plant. His real task was to help Colonel Waring, the Superintendent, who was single-handed, and Cripps records that he 'put in 12–14 hours work every day – including Sunday – helping Col. Waring generally', since little needed doing on the tetryl plant. 'All Christmas week I worked a night shift managing the gun cotton plant which had just reached the production stage and I had the satisfaction of supervising the packing of the first gun cotton pressed,' he noted. 'I also did my own work in the day time reaching a climax on Christmas Day when I did 20 hours work.'⁹¹

Conditions at Queensferry, continually under pressure to expand output, were grim enough to tax anyone's health. Colonel Waring took ten weeks' sick leave at the end of January 1916. Shortly beforehand, in Cripps's version, 'I was appointed assistant superintendent and promised a rise in salary from the £125 p.a. I was getting.'⁹² In Waring's absence, Cripps moved into his house and took full charge of the factory for six weeks. This arrangement proved unexpectedly beneficial – for production, at least. On his twenty-seventh birthday, and apparently on little over two pounds a week, Cripps found himself running a vital war plant on 140 acres, responsible for 6,000 workers. 'At the end of the six weeks, I had a very bad breakdown which took me four months to recover from,' Cripps reported in his diary. 'When I returned in July I found that the Treasury had repudi-

90. RSC to IC, 29 May 1915. 91. RSC diary, 14 October 1917. 92. *ibid.*

ated my appointment as assistant superintendent and refused to give me any increase in salary.⁹³

Stafford's condition was naturally a source of anxiety to his family. 'He seems to get on slowly,' his father noted, 'and I hardly know what is really the matter with him.'⁹⁴ He was surely correct to say that his son had 'broken down from overwork'⁹⁵ and it is easy to see why. Queensferry became one of the three largest munitions factories in the country and, according to the Ministry of Munitions, the most efficient. Cripps remained rightly proud of his record there and did not lack well-placed witnesses to corroborate his claims. 'His breakdown was the direct consequence, as I have always felt, of his zeal,' Waring wrote to the Ministry, with indignation but without effect.⁹⁶

Cripps went back in a subordinate position, his salary still only £700 per annum. Underpaid, overworked, he found that he 'got seedy again' and in January 1917 his condition was diagnosed as colitis, an imperfectly understood affliction of the bowel with symptoms of diarrhoea that resemble dysentery. Characteristically, he did not give up work at once but carried on until June, when he again entered a nursing home and convalesced for three months, with frustratingly little to do. 'On Sept. 1st,' he noted stoically, 'I saw my two doctors and they told me that it was useless my trying to work again at Queens Ferry for at least a year as I could only do light work.'⁹⁷ He resigned at once.

This was effectively the end of Stafford's war. 'My health is still bad and there is no immediate prospect of my return to work,' Cripps wrote in October 1918. 'The last eight months I have lived an invalid's life and been able to do nothing to help my Country.' He confessed his worry at remaining in this state 'for the rest of my life'.⁹⁸ Even his father, who had repeatedly discerned false dawns over the past months, noted that 'he makes some progress but it is very slow'.⁹⁹ Perhaps some sense of anxiety, however misplaced, that he was dodging the column stalled Stafford's recovery; for the remarkable thing, given the seriousness of the prognosis in October 1918, is how quickly he bounced back with the return of peace in the next month. 'Personally I have advanced greatly', he wrote early in 1919, having been given permission to return to work in January by his doctors.¹⁰⁰ Once able to work at all, he worked without stint. According to Strauss's

93. *ibid.* 94. Parmoor diary, 1 May 1916. 95. *ibid.*, 16 April 1916.

96. Waring quoted in Burgess, *Cripps*, p. 20, which contains an excellent account of this episode, drawing on the Ministry of Munitions archives.

97. RSC diary, 14 October 1917. 98. *ibid.*, 5 October 1918.

99. Parmoor diary, 31 October 1918. 100. RSC diary, 2 March 1919.

authorized version, Cripps 'solved the problem by a daily routine to which he adhered closely for years; rise early, work in Court until about 4 p.m., work in Chambers until about 9 p.m., home, straight to bed, study in bed until 2 a.m.'¹⁰¹

Over a period of two or three years, Cripps clawed back lost ground, reserving and rationing all his strength for his legal practice, regardless of other temptations or claims upon his time. 'I have concentrated all my powers on my work up till the present time as I am not really strong enough to undertake anything else,' he explained.¹⁰² This highly disciplined strategy, once adopted, became a way of life. 'We have been out very little as with my work I am not strong enough to go out in the evenings as well,' he reported in 1921. 'I have been however much better and with the exception of my throat which is still very troublesome at times, am nearly my normal self again.'¹⁰³

For Cripps, the First World War was the beginning of a valetudinarian regime that proved lifelong. He had, as one sympathizer told Isobel, 'done his duty equally as if he had become invalided at the front'.¹⁰⁴ His colitis dogged him for the next thirty-five years, sometimes with a dramatic collapse at a moment of stress, more often as a chronic constraint which he battled with resilience, courage and blind obstinacy. The pattern of compulsive overworking, whenever he was fit enough to do so, time and again brought its nemesis in recurrent breakdowns. To say that his susceptibility to illness had a psychosomatic element does not, of course, imply that the physical symptoms were not real; but they came and went, in ways that were surely not just fortuitous coincidence, at significant moments of stress in Cripps's career. As regards his own health, he overtaxed limited resources more blatantly than he ever did as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Character and circumstance

'For leadership in the labour movement Stafford had a most unfit upbringing,' Beatrice Webb once observed, with her customary crispness. With every advantage in life – 'born and bred in a luxurious Tory household' – he then 'married, at little over twenty years old, a wealthy girl with a millionaire mother. Hence he was able to settle in a charming country home

101. Strauss, p. 33. 102. RSC diary, 26 November 1920.

103. *ibid.*, 31 December 1921.

104. Quoted by Estorick, *Leader Magazine*, 1 October, 1949.

of his own as well-to-do squire.¹⁰⁵ This was indeed one image that Cripps acquired in the inter-war years – deservedly in some respects and misleadingly in others. His home life discloses distinctive personal attitudes with a public resonance that has often been misperceived.

It is true, as we know from his diary, that he had long thought it a natural ambition to possess a country house; and that, as soon as he could, he took steps to realize it. The fact that Isobel knew no other life made it all the more necessary to provide the sort of support system to which she was habituated by temperament and training (or lack of it). The tribulations of the war years had exposed her domestic deficiencies, notably at the commencement of Stafford's munitions work at Waltham Abbey. Strauss provides one account.

It was a hard period for them both. Isobel Cripps, still in her early twenties, had been brought up in a wealthy home surrounded by luxury, and had not been taught to cook, wash up, or scrub floors. Now she found herself getting up at five o'clock every morning, wrapping cold sausages in a red handkerchief for her husband's lunch, doing her own housework, and caring for the children without even the aid of gas or electricity.¹⁰⁶

Whether this is more heart-rending or disingenuous is a nice point. For during this particular period, which actually lasted for only two weeks, Isobel was not left with these chores since Stafford had secretly arranged for her childhood nanny to join them; and, as his diary further makes clear, their two infant children were meanwhile left with relatives in Dorchester.¹⁰⁷

The fact that Stafford and Isobel had married young did not induce them to defer starting a family. John was born ten months after the marriage, in May 1912, and Diana in September 1913. They were all living at Fernacres Cottage, Fulmer, Buckinghamshire, near the commuter station of Gerrards Cross. Not quite so modest as it may sound, the property had nine bedrooms and was set in three and a half acres of grounds. This was to be let during the war, while Isobel and the children spent much time either with her

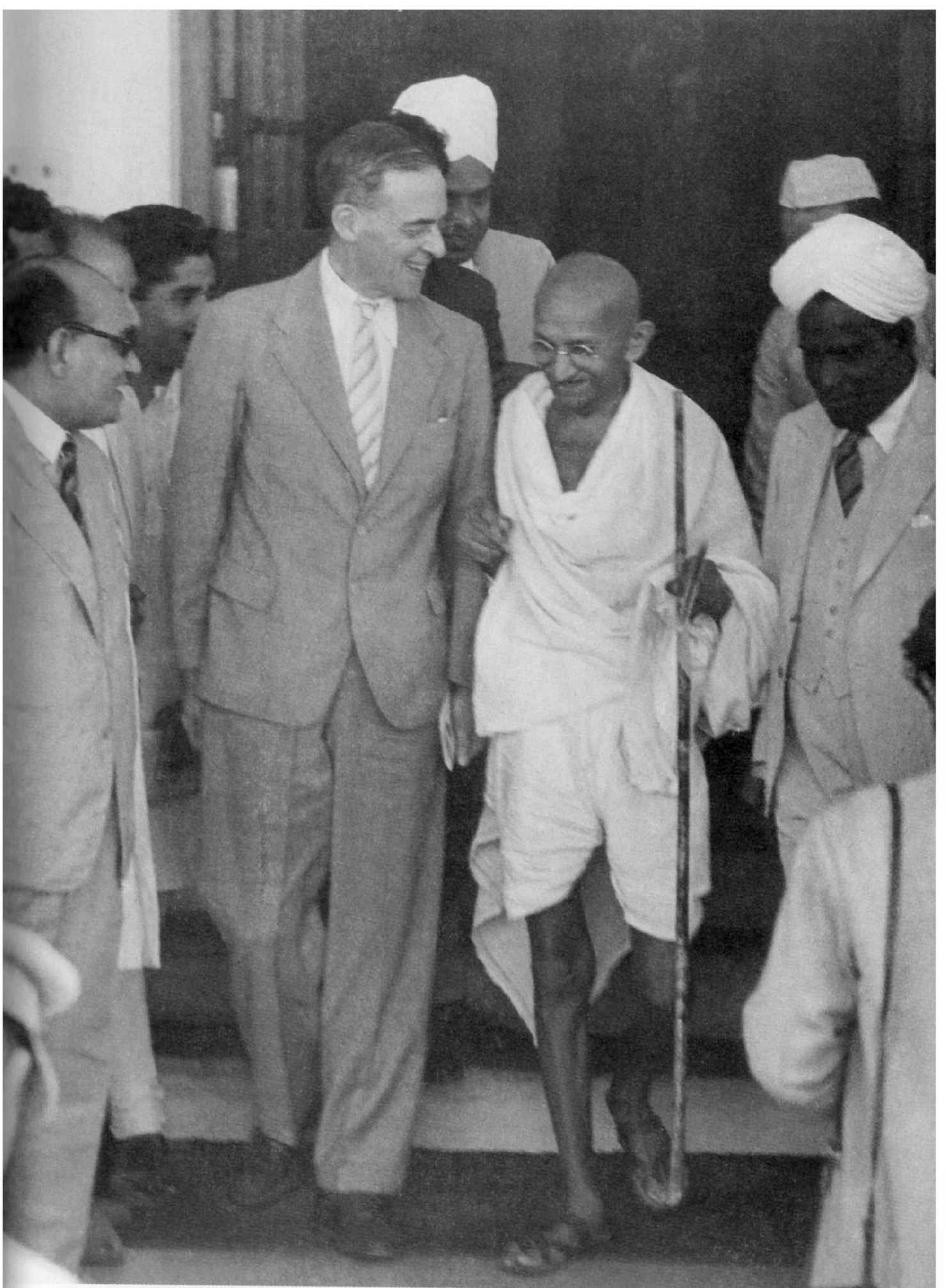
105. Webb diary, 9 July 1939, in MacKenzie and MacKenzie (eds.), *Webb: Diary*, iv, p. 436.

106. Strauss, pp. 30–31. With her husband George, she was herself a house-guest at Goodfellows in the 1930s, and thus surely able to observe her hostess's limitations. Theresa Ricketts confirmed during her interview that her mother was incapable of keeping house and that her daughters had to deputize for her.

107. RSC diary, 14 October 1917; cf. Estorick, p. 46, on Stafford arranging for 'Nana' to come and help. Burgess, *Cripps*, p. 19, wrongly suggests it was Mazelle, who arrived later.



31. (Right) Cripps arrives at 11 Downing Street, 1947.



20. (Right) Laughing it off: with Gandhi, 1942.



11. Stafford and Isobel at the 1939 Labour Party conference, Southport.



14. Moscow souvenir, 1941: signed by Beaverbrook, Stalin, Harriman, Voroshilov, Litvinov, Molotov.

EXTRACTS FROM :
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THE LIFE OF SIR
STAFFORD CRIPPS
1889 - 1952

PETER CLARKE

Allen Lane
The Penguin Press
2002

15930

WASC 472

WASC

PART B

Name: MMCL

Section : Bldg.

Periodical/Book : " Stafford Cripps "
by Eric Esterick, 1949

Date(s) : Vol. Page(s)

Title page
+
H. 45-48

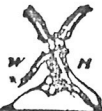
WASC 472

STAFFORD CRIPPS

A Biography

by

ERIC ESTORICK



WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD
MELBOURNE :: LONDON :: TORONTO

1949

W 5-3692

mother to his children, nurse in sickness, comrade in strength, his faith her faith, his ambitions her ambitions.

It is necessary to add, however, that when Stafford studied at University College he came into contact with a completely different order of people from his friends and family at Parmoor, Winchester and their environs. During the time that the young couple were engaged and Isobel was taken by her family on a motor tour to France, Stafford wrote a long letter to his fiancée expressing his perplexities on "poverty and riches", and Isobel, though she had lived in an environment of riches, had often sincere but unexpressed questionings on this subject herself at quite an early age. These feelings were to have a certain portent for the future but at this time their experience was not acute enough for articulation.

In the summer of 1914, Stafford Cripps, the father of two infant children, John and Diana, studied intricate cases in Chambers, sat upon the window-sill and with his colleagues played games and light-heartedly discussed the "tit-bits" of the day. Their future was assured and the world was seemingly a jolly good place in which to live. This summer, too, saw Stafford's father, whom Asquith, the Liberal Prime Minister, had appointed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, promoted to the House of Lords and become Baron Parmoor of Frieth. Parmoor was the name of his house. Frieth was the name of the nearest village.

Suddenly the revolver shot of Sarajevo echoed around the world and the epoch of war and revolution had begun. Without a moment's hesitation Stafford and his brothers volunteered for service in the armed forces. His elder brother, Seddon, became an officer in the Lincolnshire Yeomanry. Freddie Cripps, who had become a director of a Russian-English Bank in St. Petersburg, resigned his post and joined the Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars, fought in Gallipoli, Palestine and France, was wounded and decorated; a heroic soldier indeed. His brother Leonard rejoined the Fourth Hussars. Stafford ceased law work and in October of 1914 he went to France as the driver of a lorry presented to the Red Cross by his wife's grandfather. He was engaged for a year at the Boulogne base in a shuttle service supplying heavy goods. Here, as others who joined in 1914, he qualified for the Mons Medal. While he was engaged in this work he was instrumental in providing a new and special type of slipper for men suffering from frost-bite. He was waiting under orders at Boulogne in 1915 to proceed to Ypres for gas work

when he was recalled for work in the explosives department of the Ministry of Munitions.

Now a new kind of life began for him and his wife. For a time he worked at Waltham Abbey to learn the practical scientific work of the department. Stafford managed to rent a little red-brick villa at Cheshurst, near Waltham Cross. As a surprise for Isobel, Stafford had arranged for her old "Nana" who had cared for her since babyhood to come and help, and to Isobel's joy she was there to greet her on the doorstep. Stafford was alternately on day and night shift and did a very thorough and intensive short course, working through every process. Isobel and Nana were up at five-thirty getting his midday dinner ready, which he took off on his bicycle tied up in a red-cotton handkerchief.

Whilst they were here one of the first German giant Zeppelins was brought down in flames. A few bombs dropped along the river but except for one direct hit on an insignificant part of the plant no damage was done to the factory itself.

After a time he was sent to the Government factory at Queensferry, near Chester, the largest explosive factory in the British Empire. It specialised in high explosives.

This meant he had to "move house". Again with his wife and children he took a house near the factory. His job was an important one. Besides using his knowledge as a chemist he was responsible for the organisation of thousands of work-people. In this case, as usual, Cripps tackled it thoroughly, studied carefully, yet rapidly, every detail of the workings of the plant and the production processes. His capacity was so obvious and so quickly revealed in the rapid lowering of production costs that he was made assistant superintendent of the plant. His energy seemed inexhaustible, although it was far from being the case. He worked sixteen to twenty hours a day. It was a great experience in every respect. He made here his first real contact with the working-class, although the experience rang no political bells in his mind. Here he conducted himself as the most efficient of managers, a Christian gentleman, patriarchal in his willingness to meet the lowliest workmen and women in the factory and listen with unflinching courtesy to every grievance and consider every suggestion from whatever quarter it might come.

It was an experience he was not likely to forget although his complete absorption in it at the time obscured its social and political significance. There came a day, however, some twenty years later when Britain was again at war, that standing on the Opposition side of the House of Commons he joined in the

challenge to the Government of the day to take profiteering out of the industrial prosecution of the war. He told the story of his experience at the Queensferry munition plant. He said:

"I was for a considerable period of time in a position of management in what was, I think, the largest Government factory in this country. It was a factory which was erected at a cost of £7,750,000. It was a factory which was destroyed at the end of the war at the request of the people who have put this Amendment on the Paper. Among other units in this factory at Queensferry were the two finest sulphuric-acid plants in the world at the time, and part of my job was to deal with the cost accounts of the factory. In order to deal with them efficiently I had access to the cost accounts of every other sulphuric-acid manufacturing plant in England, France, Italy, Canada and the United States of America, to compare the standard which we were manufacturing and to see what economies could be made. We had to start with an entirely unskilled staff. Not a single person either of the management or the operatives had ever worked in a chemical or explosive factory before that factory was started in wartime. It was started up on war prices. We had to pay very heavy prices for our sulphur (which comes from Sicily) owing to war insurance and freight and for other war materials as well. Our cost figures were lower than those of any pre-war sulphuric acid manufacturers in this country. In fact they were so much lower that a year or two after we had started up, a deputation of the sulphuric acid manufacturers of England came to see the Minister of Munitions and said, 'We ask you to give an undertaking that you will destroy this factory at the end of the war, as otherwise every sulphuric acid manufacturer goes out of business' . . . And as a result, immediately after the war these two plants, the most efficient in the country, became derelict, and I presume that the remains of them are probably to be seen today on the site of Queensferry where they were put. That was a tremendous loss to the industry of this country. For the first time, oleum manufacture had been started; that is to say, a high concentration of sulphuric acid was available for sending in railway trucks to any manufacturer at a price that was very much lower than anything that could be quoted by other manufacturers. In normal times, where there was no acute crisis or a war, would they have contemplated putting such a factory up if they knew that at the end of two and a half years there was a danger of having to close down as a result of pressure from these very people?"

It was a great experience but one that did not last through the First World War. After some months, Stafford became exceedingly ill. Overwork, fumes from the chemical plant, and intestinal disease which he had contracted in France in the first

year of the war laid him prostrate. The doctors thought he had little chance of recovery. He was taken to a nursing home in Chester. After some months he recovered sufficiently for himself and his wife to live in a tiny flat in Half Moon Street in London whilst he found a desk job in the Ministry of Agriculture. A few more months of work and illness dragged him down again. For the next two years he was an invalid.

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WASC 473

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PART B

Name:

M. McL

Section :

Bldg.

Colin Cooke

Periodical/Book :

The Life of Richard Stafford Cripps
London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1957.

Date(s) :

Vol.

Page(s)

Title page, pp 65-75

WASC 473

The Life of
RICHARD
STAFFORD CRIPPS

Colin Cooke



LONDON
HODDER AND STOUGHTON

1957

CHAPTER IV

War and Peace

STAFFORD CRIPPS was called to the Bar, a member of the Middle Temple, early in 1913, having passed the final Bar examination a few months earlier. He had had some six months as a pupil in chambers, that stage in a young barrister's career when he turns from the theory of the textbooks to the practice of instructions, pleadings and the formulæ of litigation. Now he had to wait for the briefs to come. But work could be found; the revision of the two authorities—*Cripps on Church and Clergy* and *Cripps on Compensation*—were more than pieces of devotion to his grandfather and his father. The study of later cases and their incorporation in the textbooks served to increase his own knowledge of these difficult branches of the law to an expert level. And his time in the science laboratories inclined him to look closely at the proceedings in the Chancery Division concerned with what is to the barrister the very profitable field of patent litigation, where the question so often turns on whether the invention claimed is entirely novel, or whether it is merely a new way of doing something already well known, by a method already known. Particularly in chemical processes does this conflict occur, and the exact scientific scope of an old or a new discovery becomes then a matter of argument in the courts. It was clear that this kind of argument, in which scientific knowledge and the capacity to expound it are of at least equal importance with legal ability, offered Stafford Cripps a great potential field for cultivation. And he was quick to perceive it. The lucrative field cultivated by his father was also there; the large range of business before Parliamentary Committees and the complexities of compensation cases arising out of the acquisition of property by railways, local authorities, waterworks and gas companies.

The year 1913 passed in this preparation, and in January 1914 the way forward became clearer, on the appointment by Mr. Asquith of C. A. Cripps to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and his consequent elevation to the peerage as Baron Par-

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moor of Frieth. This meant the end of his father's practice at the Bar, and the departure of a leading King's Counsel made available to others the range of his connections. This did not, of course, mean that Stafford Cripps succeeded to those connections; a very junior barrister does not inherit the practice of a King's Counsel. But it did mean that work became available to him as a junior, and though he had to justify himself as a legal practitioner, the name of Cripps was not without its value. Opportunity had at least set the door ajar. And in another place the name of Cripps, coupled with his own personality, had given him a new experience, for in 1913 he had been appointed a Justice of the Peace for Buckinghamshire. It was an appointment he valued and held for many years, a recognition of his standing in the county and a link with the countryside and its special problems. For the problems of the contrast between riches and poverty, between his own secured position and assured future and the distresses of unemployment and illness falling on so many people, were beginning to trouble his mind. He had seen how the efforts of his late headmaster, now Bishop of Southwark, to bring about some reasonable settlement of the London dock strike of 1912 had foundered on the intransigence of a few employers bent on teaching (as they put it) the dock labourers a lesson. No sensitive man living and working in London could avoid the perplexing problem of conduct in the face of the personal distress and misery caused by a bitter industrial dispute. And from the Buckinghamshire bench he could see and hear stories of petty crime, poverty and illness, sometimes intricately mixed together.

He was, however, learning of these things. He had his own position to establish, and while he had already the distant, somewhat indistinct, goal of entering politics, as his father before him, it would be as the natural step of the successful barrister anxious to enter wider fields of public service, and (in 1914) from no burning political convictions of his own. They had yet to be thought out and reduced to principles. With a young family already about him, professional success must come first, the foothold in the law must be developed to a territory he could hold as an assured field. Then, perhaps, he could turn to the great social problems troubling the nation, the problems which again and again recurred in minds older than his own for which he had both respect and affection. He was content to remain what he himself later described as politically unconscious, accepting the Conservatism linked closely to the Church

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of England that his father had come to; not without leanings towards the Left, but still acceptably Conservative in county and capital.

Then came August 1914. The world of security and advancement vanished. The young men of Britain heard a new and strange call to a bitter and disillusioning service, and yet a service gladly given. For four years the young men of Europe were sacrificed in ventures they could not comprehend and for reasons they could not understand. Enough that the nations to which they belonged were in mortal combat and that the arbitrament of war had brought them to the ultimate test of manhood. The four Cripps brothers responded to that call. The elder three were soon in the army; Stafford, however, was rejected by the army doctors as medically unfit. But he was able to find a way to France in uniform as driver of a lorry presented to the Red Cross by his wife's grandfather. For a year he was mainly engaged in moving coal from the Boulogne base to hospitals and clearing-stations in the forward areas. It was heavy work, for the loading and unloading was by manpower and shovel, the driver being the leading man with a shovel. That was in the early months of the 1914-18 war, the months when all that seemed necessary was the concerted voluntary sacrifice of the best of our young men, standing with the Regular Army. As the battles and the casualties grew and the news of friends and relatives (and the sons of friends and relatives) killed and wounded mounted to numbers which became difficult of comprehension, so the temper and the direction of the nation changed, from "Business as Usual" to "Total Mobilisation."

The particular change that affected Stafford Cripps was the creation, on the formation of the Coalition Government in May 1915, of the Ministry of Munitions. This Ministry came into being because it had become plain that the old methods of obtaining supplies from a limited number of industrial firms could not possibly meet the needs of an army of a size beyond anything ever put into the field by Britain, with operations and requirements far beyond anything ever contemplated. A vast expansion of production was required, and as part of this expansion the Ministry embarked on the erection and management of a number of great industrial plants manufacturing explosives, the two best known being those at Gretna Green on the Solway and at Queensferry on the Welsh side of the estuary of the Dee. For the management of these factories men of

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chemical training were required, and Stafford Cripps was one of those traced to France and recalled for this purpose. He went first to the Government explosives factory at Waltham Abbey for training in the processes involved. He became, for a time, one of the process workers alternating on day and night shifts, and he related in later life how he would cycle to the works from the small house he rented near Waltham Cross with his lunch tied up in a red handkerchief on his handlebars—a worker among the workers.

Training completed, he was sent to the newly opened factory at Queensferry, then only in its first stage of ultimate expansion, as a member of the management staff. He was able to take his family with him, and began a new experience of the inside of a great industrial undertaking. The whole emphasis was on production; however much the factory could produce, the War Department could take. But it was not quite so simple as that. Firstly labour—and management—had to learn their trades. The labour force at Queensferry, which ultimately reached a total of about 7,000 employees, was drawn from the surrounding country, from Lancashire and from Cheshire. There was a certain amount of experience to be drawn from the chemical industries of Widnes, Runcorn, St. Helens and Northwich. But this was a strictly limited recruitment, for those industries themselves were expanded to meet the whole war programme. By far the greater number of the workers at Queensferry were new to the processes and the work, many of them new to working in a factory at all. This is, of course, no more than to say that the great changes due to the war of 1914-18, affecting the whole of British industry—dilution, the employment on a great scale of women, the replacement of skilled craftsmen by unskilled, new concepts of industrial relations and welfare and personal management—affected, as they were bound to do, His Majesty's Explosives Factory at Queensferry.

The factory opened with the first impact of those problems, and Stafford Cripps, as Assistant Superintendent, was at once in the thick of them. It was heavy, slogging and worrying work. For, as those who have managed factories, whether in war or in peace, know, there is no simple technique. The processes are plain enough; the people are inordinately complicated. There are prescribed tolerances in all technical processes, limits within which the machines or the plants work. But there are far more difficult tolerances to work to in a factory; the tolerances of temperament, intelligence, physical fit-

ness, capacity for work and all the other qualities in which every human being varies from his fellows. One general effect of the 1914-18 war was to make it clear how necessary it was that an industrial nation should have a greater and more exact knowledge of these things. It was the work of the Ministry of Munitions' "Health of Munitions' Workers Committee" that led to the establishment of the Industrial Fatigue Research Board under the Medical Research Council. And forty years after 1915, with the experience of another great war, the research work has spread to other problems of personnel and production that beset management.

In 1915 these ideas were new and seen only as problems of day-to-day management. And much of the weight of them at Queensferry fell on Stafford Cripps. The reason for this was not any intentional shelving of responsibility by others; it was because his own ardour and energy and quickness of apprehension brought them upon him. There is an admirable kind of man, who very often makes a very good manager, who can, as the saying goes, "take it." That is, he keeps his department going steadily along, meeting emergencies as they arise, improvising where necessary and never expecting to do more than to avoid a breakdown of production on any large scale. Such a man has usually grown up in a factory; he is so used to the perpetual opposition of temperament to technique that fills the air that he has developed his own protective sheath against it; he is, in short, a manager of long experience who has learnt to ignore what he can't cure. In a great crisis, it must be added, such men do not always rise to the occasion. But Stafford Cripps at Queensferry was a young man, still in his twenties, who had come to northern industry from a world of very different values. It mattered enormously to him that the factory should meet all demands; and it mattered enormously to him that people should realise their duty to each other and to their country. So he took upon himself many things with the aim of making Queensferry the most efficient factory in the country; the factory, that is, of highest output at lowest cost and with the fewest labour and personnel problems. So while production was kept going, cost accounts were built up and compared with the cost accounts of other plants; where they appeared high investigations were made, economies were considered and changes of method made. The endless personal difficulties of workers were the direct responsibility of the manager, and the need to make use of all available labour—for there was no alternative—meant

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that the less efficient, the grumbling, the physically unfit, the older workers, all must be kept and encouraged to work.

We have now personnel departments, welfare departments, canteens, health clinics, cost accounting departments and production departments in our great factories, and we tend to forget that most of these specialised functions became specialities only in the years after 1918. They fell on the general management when Stafford Cripps was at Queensferry, and his own range of activities covered most of them. He worked very long hours; he became responsible for the supervision of the whole of the workers; he dealt himself with the compilation and assessment of the cost accounts sent forward regularly to the Ministry of Munitions. All the time the plants must be kept going; the times of illness, the absences of key workers, failure of supplies of raw material, absence of wagons for the deliveries of munitions outwards must be dealt with. And there comes a time when the load of such problems, great and small, becomes too much; the overburdened mind is never free of them, they are with you in your few hours off duty as much as when you are formally at work. They worry and tear at you and sap at your being; you forgo exercise and relaxation to fight them, and in so doing magnify their demands upon you.

Stafford Cripps had suffered in health from his heavy work in France. The pressures of Queensferry now attacked that weakness, and the physical atmosphere of the plant did not help.¹ Continuous overwork pushed home the attack, and in January 1916 he suffered a very severe breakdown in health. He was seriously ill in a Chester nursing-home for some months, ill in body, weary in mind. His spirit was quickly resilient to the disappearance of the business of managing, but his body took longer to recover. And during those months of recovery there occurred and recurred again the great and terrible names of the little towns and villages that lie north of the River Somme and Ancre in northern France. Even now, forty years later, these names—Beaumont Hamel, Thiepval, Delvilles Wood, Trones Wood, Guillemont, Guinchy, High Wood—cannot be written by one who lived through those days without emotion. Those bloody months cost the British armies in France more than 400,000 casualties, and few homes in Britain were entirely untouched by that bitter and

¹ The Committee on the Health of Munitions Workers was at this time giving urgent attention to the appearance on a large scale of symptoms of chemical poisoning among the workers in explosives factories.

desperate fighting. When such demands for men were to be satisfied, there was need for all who could to play their part; Stafford Cripps felt keenly his own absence from active work. To be an invalid—a casualty—when such needs were to be met, when his brothers and his Winchester contemporaries were in the thick of things, was not to be borne a moment longer than was necessary. He came back to the works, invigorated in mind and impelled by the same restless energy. But his physical strength had not renewed itself as fast as his mental energy, and the fresh plunge into the complexities of Queensferry brought him low again. He was now, physically, a very sick man; further work at Queensferry was no longer possible, and he was, as it were, invalidated out of the Ministry of Munitions. For the next two years he was slowly and painfully struggling for health. He tried, for a time, to work as a temporary civil servant in the Food Production Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, but had to give it up. And so the years of war drew on with Stafford Cripps one of the vast number of casualties seeking the way back to some lease of health and usefulness.

At least he now had time to ponder on the cataclysm and his own experiences since the early days of 1914, his new knowledge of life in factories, his new comprehension of other lives than his own. Those questions of riches and poverty, of power and submission, that had begun to trouble him earlier now took on wider aspects. He could not but feel, with his old Headmaster, that something was profoundly amiss with the world. The war loomed very large in such reflections, not only because it sapped the structure of civilised life, but also, and perhaps mainly, for the profound sense of disillusionment that its course had brought. Against nobility and valour and sacrifice were to be put meanness, cowardice and sordid gain, and it looked to many thinking people as though virtue was among the vanquished. C. E. Montague in *Disenchantment*, told, unforgettably, of that waning of the spirit through the years of war, and he set, in words that cannot be bettered, the work ahead of all who had hope for the future:

“This is an individual’s job, and a somewhat lonely one, though a nation has to be saved by it. To get down to work, whoever else idles; to tell no lies, whoever else may thrive on their use; to keep fit and the beast in you down; to help any who need it; to take less from your world than you give it; to go without the old drams to the nerves—the hero stunt, the sob story, all the darling liqueurs of

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war emotionalism, war vanity, war spite, war rant and war cant of every kind; and to do it all, not in a sentimental mood of self pity like some actor mouthing in an empty theatre and thinking what treasures the absent audience has lost, but like a man on a sheep farm in the mountains, as much alone and at peace with his work of maintaining the world as God was when he made it.”¹

These words of Montague’s represent very much the mind of Stafford Cripps as the war of 1914-18 drew to an end. He was still a young man, not yet thirty; he had no strong political convictions and, indeed, did not then think that in political policies lay the answer to the state of his world. For the troubles transcended the old politics he had known; the work of one national political party could not touch upon the evil ways of thought and conduct which had fallen on so many people in so many countries. The physical rebuilding of war’s destruction could be accomplished by governments; the ways of life of peace-time could be taken up again, but a greater problem was the rebuilding in the minds of people of the countries of Europe of a true Christian ethic. He knew and had seen the patient maintenance all through the war of the Christian spirit by Archbishop Davidson, and the support gathered by the Archbishop to public statements of that spirit from leading Churchmen of other denominations as well as from leading laymen. Stafford Cripps’ father, now Lord Parmoor, had spoken many times inside and outside the House of Lords, pleading for Christian toleration towards the German people, towards conscientious objectors; he supported the views put in Lord Lansdowne’s famous letter to the *Daily Telegraph* of November 1917, setting forth principles for a just peace with Germany; and he had associated himself with the attempt, also in 1917, of Archbishop Söderblom of Upsala to bring about an International Christian Conference that “men and women who have heard the call of God should come together from all nations, in one place with one accord. So meeting they might rise above the things that divide mankind, and seek by faith a world made one in the love of God. Such an assembling of the sons and daughters of God, in time of war under the leadership of Christ, would itself be the beginning of the peace we seek.”²

Although the Conference called by Archbishop Söderblom took

¹ *Disenchantment*, Chapter XV, p. 111.

² I have used the text of an English appeal for such a conference issued by the Society of Friends at its yearly meeting in 1917.

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place as a gathering only of delegates from neutral countries, the move towards it from so eminent a worker for Christian unity served to give impetus to a corresponding movement in Britain. An interdenominational council was formed to promote the gathering proposed by the Archbishop, which became known as the Council for an International Christian Conference. Miss Marian Ellis, of the Society of Friends, became its secretary and Lord Parmoor became Chairman. The members of the Council included William Temple, then Rector of St. James', Piccadilly, the Bishop of Southwark (Dr. Burge), the Bishop of Peterborough (Dr. Woods), the Dean of St. Paul's (Dr. Inge), Dr. Scott Lidgett, Dr. Horton, Dr. H. T. Hodgkin. The two leading figures in the movement, however, were undoubtedly Stafford Cripps' father and his old headmaster, Dr. Burge. It seemed then, under the inspiration of the Archbishop of Upsala that the universal Christian conscience and ethic for which Dr. Burge had so often preached, might gather strength and grow into a defence of the world against war, with (in Archbishop Söderblom's words) "the Cross of Christ transcending all earthly divisions."

The example and precept of his old Headmaster, the firm Christianity of his father, appealed strongly to Stafford Cripps' own deep religious faith. That eminent and good men of other denominations than the Church of England should engage themselves in a common Christian approach to peace on earth seemed to him to be the natural recognition of the way of Western civilisation out of the slough of despond of the war. One must remember how very heavy the impact of war and its consequences was upon the minds of sensitive and intelligent young men and women who lived through it. They had seen their generation lose far, far too many, and of that number again too many were of the bravest and the best. The long, long lists of names on the war memorials of towns, schools, colleges, villages, companies; the rolls of honour in cathedrals and churches witness to posterity that immense tragedy. No man can even dimly guess the loss to the nation and the world; but those who can remember young men who died have some small inkling of it. One example will suffice. Of the boys who were at Winchester under Burge, which comprehends not so many years more than Stafford Cripps' own time there, one in five died; and Winchester's contribution to the post-war world was then less by several hundred. And thus to the young who survived the overwhelming aim was to save,

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if they could be saved, future generations from the fate that had fallen on their own.

Two movements appealed particularly to that urgent need. The first and greatest was the proposal to found a League of Nations; the second, and lesser, was the movement towards a more general sense of a Christian unity of purpose which would override national frontiers. The two were thus complementary; the political structure of the League of Nations would be furnished with the goodwill of Christian Churches; that goodwill which would, it was hoped, generate the impulses of disarmament and peaceful settlements, supplying a constant working ethic in international diplomacy. And since both movements transcended the domestic issues of politics, they did not demand any analysis of political issues. Nor was there, in Britain in 1917 and 1918, any great division on political programme or principle. All politics were concerned with the survival of the nation and a programme of reconstruction when survival had been secured. While there could be acute controversy on method, there could be no controversy on aims.

These were the kind of thoughts that passed through Stafford Cripps' mind as he slowly recovered his physical health. He had also his own family to think of; and if poverty did not face him, he could not give them the life and future he would wish unless he made a successful career for himself. Therefore to get back to practice at the Bar was the first necessary step, but with that could go some participation in the movements with which he was in sympathy. He could find time quietly to work for the great cause of peace in such ways as became open to him and with such strength as he could gather. With such strength as he could gather—he had been very ill, and he was never again to be free from bouts of ill-health, and never again could he enjoy the fine, free, careless physical fitness of his youth. He had to be careful of what he ate and drank; he had to seek a regimen that kept his weaknesses of body from interfering with his life. Men of less strong character tend under such a disability to become valetudinarians. Though Stafford Cripps became widely known as an austere, somewhat spartan, vegetarian and teetotaller, he never succumbed to that form of self-pity that would have led either to a parade of his austerity or to a constant search for sympathy and comfort.

At the end of his *Life of William Temple*, Dr. Iremonger relates the tribute of a Cumberland dalesman, who, when he heard of