

biographers — Frank Podmore, Margaret Cole, E. Dolléans and Helene Simon — relied heavily upon Owen's autobiography and on his numerous pamphlets, they tended to see Owen as he saw himself. But as the autobiography was written when Owen was over 80 it is hardly surprising that there should be errors of fact in it and that when he discusses his motives — and those of other people — his memory should have played him false. It is a pity that the new edition of the autobiography should be simply a reprint without any footnotes to indicate errors or inconsistencies.

Modern scholars have been able to revise the earlier accounts of Owen's life by examining a wealth of evidence available in contemporary sources. Thus Chaloner, Gorb, Butt and Robertson have thrown new light upon Owen as an entrepreneur. A. J. Robertson in his essay on Owen's business career in Scotland shows that the New Lanark mills were a profitable concern. His discussion of the loan which Archibald Campbell of Jura made to Owen and the circumstances of its repayment reflect »adversely on his integrity as well as his ability«. The essays edited by Pollard and Salt bear witness to the extraordinary range of Robert Owen's activities. He is remembered as an enlightened employer, a supporter of factory reform, an educational reformer, the exponent of an early form of socialism, the originator of experiments in community living, a pioneer of the co-operative movement, and — for a brief period — the head of a mass trade union movement. The essays by Armytage, Desroche and Hasselmann discuss the impact of Owen's ideas and experiments upon reformers in the United States, in France and in Germany.

W. O. Henderson

J. F. C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America. The Quest for the New Moral World*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1969, 392 pp., £ 3,50.

A. L. Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen*, 2nd revised edition, International Publishers, New York 1969, 239 pp., \$ 1.35.

The bicentenary of Robert Owen's birth in 1771 has been celebrated in various ways in England. The debate in the House of Lords on Owen was perhaps the tribute that he would have appreciated most. Several new books on Owen have appeared to mark the occasion. Professor *Harrison's* study, published in 1969, is no new biography but a series of essays on various aspects of Owen's doctrines and achievements. Harrison discusses the genesis of Owen's ideas within the intellectual framework of his day; the links between the movements inspired by Owen and by other reformers in the early nineteenth century; and the attempts of Owen and his followers to put his doctrines into practice.

Harrison shows that the desire to improve the condition of the poor was the driving force behind Robert Owen's plans for the creation of what he called a »new moral world«. A successful business man, who at one time ran a large spinning mill in New Lanark, Robert Owen first came into prominence as an enlightened employer of labour. He made a name for himself as a philanthropist and New Lanark attracted a host of distinguished visitors. Owen secured the support of a number of prominent members of the aristocracy, manufacturers, merchants, and men of letters in England and Scotland.

In time Owen the philanthropist became Owen the founder of communal settlements, Owen the utopian socialist, Owen the trade union leader, Owen the founder of the co-operative movement, and Owen the educational reformer. Not one of these aspects of Owen's work proved to have lasting results. He inspired the establishment of several communities — such as Orbiston and New Harmony — in which groups of families lived and worked together. Their land and property were generally owned

collectively and not individually. But these idealistic experiments in communal living — enthusiastically described by the young Friedrich Engels in the *Deutsches Bürgerbuch* for 1845 — survived for only a brief period. As a socialist Robert Owen was equally unsuccessful. His labour exchanges (which used notes representing the time taken to make an article) were a failure and Proudhon's attempt to introduce similar exchanges into France never got off the ground. Robert Owen's brand of socialism — like the socialism of Saint Simon, Fourier and Weitling — eventually gave way to the doctrines of Marx and Engels. Robert Owen's activities as a trade union leader came to nothing. Thousands of workers joined his Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in 1834 only to desert him when six Dorsetshire farm workers — the Tolpuddle martyrs — were sentenced to transportation for seven years for administering an illegal oath to members of a trade union. In England and on the Continent the trade union movement later developed on very different lines from those envisaged by Owen. Similarly few of the co-operative societies of the 1830s — many inspired by Robert Owen's ideas — had a long life. The rise of the co-operative movement in England (particularly the establishment of co-operative retail shops) is usually associated with the Rochdale Pioneers rather than with Owen's co-operatives. Finally, Robert Owen did not achieve any great success as an educational reformer. His halls of science drew enthusiastic audiences for a brief period but then they withered away. It was Sunday schools, mechanics institutes and public libraries, rather than halls of science, which gave the English worker new opportunities to extend his knowledge.

In view of this catalogue of failures it might appear surprising that Owen's memory should continue to be honoured long after his death. It may be, as Harrison suggests, that some of those who came under Owen's spell eventually played an important role in one or other of the many progressive movements in England in the nineteenth century. Thus John Watts — mentioned by Harrison only in a couple of footnotes — began his career as a socialist lecturer in the hall of science in Manchester and subsequently became a leading figure in the public life of the city as a champion of public libraries, co-operative societies, and working class education. It is one of the merits of this book that the author examines the activities of some of the lesser known disciples of Robert Owen. Harrison is right, too, when he lays stress upon an aspect of Robert Owen's teaching that is sometimes not sufficiently emphasised. Owen believed in the possibility of changing human nature sufficiently to make possible the establishment of a perfect society — or new moral world — in which poverty, disease and crime would disappear and universal happiness would prevail. The curious name of the Orbiston community — the First Society of the Adherents of Divine Revelation — is a reminder of the utopian aspect of Owen's doctrines.

A. L. Morton's little book on Robert Owen is in two parts. The first gives a brief sketch of Owen's career, while the second contains extracts from Owen's writings. It may be recommended to students as a useful introductory volume. Neither Harrison nor Morton has much to say on Robert Owen as an entrepreneur. Recent research by W. H. Chaloner and A. J. Robertson has shown that Owen's account of his business career in Manchester and New Lanark (given in his autobiography written in his old age) is not without errors and inconsistencies. In 1813 Owen was on the verge of bankruptcy. Robertson observes that Robert Owen seems to have been guilty of »something very closely akin to fraudulent conversion«.

W. O. Henderson