

might cover this gap, because she was a great advocate of human and civil rights for women and children and an innovator in education, but it is not cited here. Assertions run through *The Religion of the Machine Age*, and one does not like to rely on brief statements which are not supported by footnotes. On the other hand, her bibliography is important, and many works of a sociological nature are brought in to good effect. It is a pity that the impression given to the reader is that an equally extensive background is required to comprehend this book, so it is not a book for the Arts undergraduate.

To sum up, there is a complex web here of politics, religion, sociology and science which can be unravelled with great effort. The reward is uncertain, however, because the scope of the book is too wide to be treated in sufficient depth in the space of two hundred and sixty-seven pages. The thesis about male consciousness dominating economic and social development is plausible, but there is not enough evidence to support it in this book.

NOTES

1. Nicholas Walter, review of *The Religion of the Machine Age* in *Times Education Supplement*, 25 May 1983; and Dora Russell, "Redundant Race," letter to the Editor, *Times Education Supplement*, *ibid.*

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The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper, 1864-1946. Jill Liddington *London: Virago, 1985.*

Women's history has come to seem to me like a large blank canvas, on which some outlines are drawn, from which we have been obliged recently to erase some of the very few preexisting lines drawn by traditional historians (as too ugly, too pretty or just inaccurate) and on which we are now joyfully seeing small and large areas being filled, one after another, in vivid colour and startling detail. Gradually, more and more of the pieces are linking up, and the whole, though often stark, and still far from complete, is becoming a useable context into which we can fit ourselves, gaining understanding and strength to apply to the present human condition.

Jill Liddington's life of Selina Cooper is a splendid contribution to this canvas. The research done by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris for the earlier book *One Hand Tied Behind Us* was groundbreaking, the results gratifying not only (I am sure) to the authors, but to all of us who had come across hints

of the existence of the working-class women's suffrage campaign, which had completely dropped out of history, and which they now revealed in convincing detail. Selina Cooper featured in that story but it was only when the book was going to press that Mary Cooper. Selina Cooper's daughter, came up with a newly-discovered gold mine of materials which made this biography possible and inevitable, although indeed a great deal of research remains to be done. Liddington's research is such an exciting story in itself that it would be easy to stay with it to the exclusion of the book's content. I resist the temptation because that content is so satisfying; this, despite the fact that indeed it is as researcher that Liddington most excels. Uncovering an immense amount of detail on an important subject previously unknown to history is a heady business, and it is extraordinarily difficult to accept the bulk of what is found as essential to one's own understanding but not necessarily to be incorporated into the finished work in any except the most summary form. I happen to know that Jill Liddington had considerable trouble reducing her manuscript to the present 455 printed pages (exclusive of notes), and I hope that this heroic reduction is sufficient to ensure that the book will be seen as one to be read, not merely as one to be consulted, though it is that as well.

Here is new or added light on childhood in the westcountry, child labour in the Lancashire textile mills, early local socialism and the Methodist connection; the Women's Cooperative Guild; the textile unions; the Social Democratic Federation; the Independent Labour Party; the Cooperative Holiday Association; the women's suffrage campaign locally, nationally, in the Trade Unions, within the Labour Party and among women; women's entry into local government; responses to the first world war; the birth control question; interwar women's politics; working-class experience of the Depression; the question of married women's right to work; and women's opposition to fascism and war.

Here, too, is the very personal story of a remarkable woman, not typical of any group, though sharing the experiences of many. Selina Cooper was one of those rare creatures who does not take anything for granted, does not go along with anything just because that is the way it has always been, stands firm against opposition, and causes what disturbance is necessary but no more. Jill Liddington's empathy with her subject and the vividness of Mary Cooper's memory give us moments of extraordinary insight into the experience of women seventy-five to a hundred years ago; only such detailed history can do this for us. We may read the statistics on early childhood deaths, we may know that women were beginning to trickle into local government, we may be aware of the drive for self-education among the workers: all of these

facts come alive for us through Selina Cooper's involvement. There are other things which for most of us are, at best, below the level of our conscious knowledge. We have read many accounts of middle-class daughters tied to a parental sick-bed; here we have Selina having to leave the relative independence of the mill to nurse her mother and take care of the men in the family. More startling is Mary Cooper's tale of her mother's attempt to encourage the wearing of basic sanitary protection by her fellow workers in the mill; Selina nearly lost her job because of a complaint from one of the mothers, who thought her daughter would never "get off" if her menstruation was not palpable to attract followers. Then there is the story, from

much later in Selina's life, of her visit to Hitler to plead for peaceful solutions. These are only samples; there is much more.

We may well ask with Dale Spender, of lives such as this, "Why didn't I know?". It is enormously exciting that we are now beginning to know, and with the knowledge comes the ability to understand and to build on the work of those who have gone before.

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