

MOREL

BY B. U. BURKE

ENGLAND has lost, in Mr. E. D. Morel, a public servant whom posterity, with the tardy justice commonly accorded the morally great, is likely to set high among her men of character and ability. But, since the war, the smoke screen of calumny has been so effectually drawn across his career and achievements that the great majority have no realization of this, or, at best, think of a man whom they could not but have honored had they known the truth, as a misguided fanatic.

Mr. Morel leaves as public legacies by which he will be judged, the completed emancipation of the Congo, and the living, growing organization of the Union of Democratic Control, of which he was admittedly the heart and brains, ably as he was abetted in this work by the small group of radical thinkers who, with him, were responsible for its foundation. He lived to see it with branches in many lands, focal centers for the harassed minorities of the democratically minded, and lived, too, to receive a measure of appreciation due him in the ardent support of his labor constituents in Dundee.

There seems little doubt that the treatment accorded Mr. Morel while he was imprisoned during the war brought on, or at all events greatly accelerated, the heart disease which has troubled him since, and to which his sudden death is attributed. Fifty years, even though they were, as Mr. Nevinson writes in *The Labour Leader*, "crammed from the earliest age with human endeavor," was a pitifully short span for so active and needed a fighter in the lists of truth; and so vital was his personality that it is hard to realize, even after reading of the memorial service in his honor at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, that his voice is silenced and that we shall have no more of those vigorous editorials in which he alternately exposed injustice and logically pointed the wiser way.

To his French origin, on his father's side, would seem to belong this insatiable habit of unearthing and combating great wrongs in

season and out of season, not in any spirit of perversity, but to mitigate, or where possible rectify, the harm done by their perpetration. On the day of his death he wrote (I quote again from *The Labor Leader*):

"I have no use for, and no place in, public life if I am compelled being in it, to act in a way which I know to be morally wrong and destructive of my own self respect. I did not risk everything by insisting upon the lie of the sole culpability of Germany for the War because I like it, but because I was constitutionally incapable of acting in any other way."

His mother, an Englishwoman, de Horne by name, was descended from a Flemish family who migrated to escape the persecution of Alva, and who early became members of The Society of Friends and suffered for their belief, hence perhaps unflinching tenacity.

Born in Paris in 1873, his baptismal name was Georges Edmond Morel-de-Ville, though he later shortened it to the more convenient form of Edmund Dene Morel. When he was only a few years old, his father died of an illness contracted while serving on the Paris ramparts during the Franco-Prussian war, and although his mother had him educated in England, she continued to live in France until he was seventeen, when he became a clerk in a Liverpool firm dealing with West Africa. To eke out what was at first a meagre salary, he took to journalism and wrote largely of West African affairs on which he soon made himself an authority.

It was this early interest, inculcated and fed at first by close contact with West African ships and cargoes, and later by frequent visits to Antwerp and Brussels on behalf of the firm for whom he continued to work for ten years, which led in time to his knowledge of conditions in the Congo and gradual realization of the abuses being carried on there under King Leopold's regime. Thenceforth in articles, pamphlets and books he hammered the matter home to the British public, till in 1904 he was enabled to form the Congo Reform Association, with which he continued to work with unabated energy until the necessary reforms were achieved in 1913.

So great had been the interests in opposition, that the successful conclusion of this work brought Mr. Morel a world-wide mead of praise for his humanitarian endeavors, and most eulogistic tributes from all sections alike of the British public and press. His championship of native rights had not been confined to the Congo, for his books deal with conditions throughout tropical Africa, and when visiting Nigeria in 1910, he experienced what must have been a

yet keener reward for his efforts in the gratitude of the natives and their realization of all that "the white man with the straight eye" as they named him, had been able to do for them.

But African affairs had by no means monopolized Mr. Morel's attention, great as was the part he played in them. Bi-lingual, and well acquainted with the intricacies of French public life and politics, he had from the first written for French journals as well as English, and had, through the critical years that comprised the Fashoda incident especially, striven hard to bring about and cement an understanding friendship between the two peoples. His chosen work having given him an unusually deep insight into the secret diplomatic workings of the Powers, he published in 1912, in the hope of averting the war he felt to be imminent, *Morocco in Diplomacy*, a searching analysis of the fatal policies pursued by the principal European governments through the decade leading up to the crisis of 1911. But public interest being at that time still asleep as to the importance of foreign affairs and their close connection with national welfare, the warning fell unheeded and the averted catastrophe was but deferred to a later day.

The formation of the Union of Democratic Control followed almost immediately on the outbreak of war. It was no defeatist organization as it was generally misrepresented to be. The hope of its founders was to prepare the way for a future parliamentary control of foreign policy, that should preclude any recurrence of blind ministerial commitments such as had secretly bound Great Britain to France, and through France to Imperialist Russia, before the war. Its principal aim was to insure that when peace came it should, contrary to those concluding previous wars, be of a just and lasting character, and it therefore sought to build up while there was time an enlightened public opinion as to the policies which would be necessary to this end. This it attempted through the publication of many pamphlets of real historical value and its organ *The U. D. C.*, since grown into *Foreign Affairs*, a monthly covering its subject so widely that there is no longer excuse for public ignorance on matters of international interest.

For this same end, as well as in common fairness, Mr. Morel combatted, more especially in his book *Truth and the War*, the historically untenable but popularly held idea that Germany was exclusively to blame for the war, since this belief could but engender a peace of conquest which would inevitably lead to further conflicts. When a man, particularly in war time, stands apart from his fellows

by reason of clearly pronounced unorthodox opinions, no matter how just and expedient they may be, he is at once liable to be misjudged and misrepresented beyond recognition. The general vilification of his character and aims in the press, paved the way for Mr. Morel's imprisonment on a technical charge of having, through an intermediary, sent pamphlets to M. Romain Rolland in a neutral country, the fact being that he had supposed him to be still in France, in which case the offence was nil. The treatment accorded him was, however, of a severity compatible with the war fever which prompted his incarceration rather than the slightness of the charge. It was shortly after his release that he became a member of the Independent Labor Party.

Invaluable as Mr. Morel's contributions to such subjects of world wide importance as free trade, peace, and international relationships have been, there are those of us who must always regret that his masterly gift of clear, vigorous prose was never embodied in some work of purely literary value. But whenever there were wrongs to be righted—and when are there not—then was the time, and so thorough was his work in anything he undertook, that there can have been but little margin left over. We may perhaps look forward to the printing of his unpublished reminiscences, from which such interesting quotations are given in Mr. Seymour Cock's book, *E. D. Morel, the Man and His Work*, or at least their fuller incorporation in the biography Mr. Nevinson has promised to undertake. The public may then be allowed to know more of his unusually happy family life and peaceful pursuits such as his great love of gardening, and also of that brave helpmate, his wife, who steadfastly aided and encouraged his endeavors through all vicissitudes.

I cannot close more fitly than by quoting a few sentences from the very beautiful appreciation of E. D. Morel by M. Romain Rolland and printed in the December number of *Foreign Affairs*.

. . . "He was the representative of humanity without respect of race or creed. No evil but found him ready for the struggle, no people downtrodden but saw him spring to their defence. . . . Truly an heroic figure. We of today cannot measure his stature. He will tower above his age as the years pass. . . . As a Frenchman, I am proud that my race can claim its share in this great Englishman. He combines in himself the greatest attributes of both peoples; the clear-sighted idealism, which never wavers, and the fearless execution, which does not know defeat."