

and which she wrote a week or two before her death. Some of the pauper helpers at the Union were indignant with her for giving so much time and trouble to trying to make the sick people comfortable. But she bore them no ill-will, and regarded them as victims only a degree less wretched than the others. She had planned to see members of the Corporation and urge a more human, civilised treatment of all in the Union. But she could not finish this task. Yet her work for the poor there was the acme of her achievement, for in it she used not only her knowledge as a nurse, gained through years of ungrudging service, but there was the impulsive generosity, the deep elemental comradeship and pity for the poor which was behind all her activities. She had pride—high, fierce and deep—but she had no vanity. And so she was ready to give personal service to the poorest and most unfortunate among us.

Dora Maguire was the type of woman for whom nothing was too big, too arduous or difficult if she thought it right. At moments of crisis such women do things which capture the admiration of the world. Of this type were Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale. Yet in her constant care for the poor, her quiet selfless sincerity, and the way in which she rose superior to her own troubles of ill-health and poverty, I think that the life of Dora Maguire contains just as fine a lesson for humanity as any great act of courage, nobility, gaiety, in the face of odds. Spring is here, as I write these lines—Spring in the Ireland that Dora Maguire loved. She who always seemed to bear the breath of Spring with her is not here with us to enjoy it, though her personality, mingling with the flowers, wafts its fragrance through the open windows of eternity. She died as she would have wished: in the midst of the battle against social misery for human happiness. When that battle is won, her qualities of generous, unassuming service will be the foundation of the new social life.

CHARLOTTE DESPARD

MRS. DESPARD is not only a National, but an International, figure, known wherever people are interested in progressive social movements and revolutionary thought. Her public career was an inspiring one not only because the long service she has given to the people's cause, but because when I saw her she was approaching ninety. This white-haired veteran, erect as a young woman, was still active in the causes she had served so long. Frail as she appears, her spirit is indomitable, and, what is perhaps still more wonderful, her mind had that forward-looking eagerness and resiliency which usually belongs to the enthusiasm of youth. As with Mother Jones in America and Clara Zetkin on the Continent, age had not dampened her ardour or dimmed the lustre of her mind.

"I am looking to the young men and women in the Irish trade unions to build up a great movement in the future!" she said. At that time she was lecturing on Irish trade unionism, and had started a library to supply books of economics and social subjects to those interested.

Her entrance into public life came about 1890, when she stood as a Poor Law Guardian at Kingstown in Surrey. Though belonging to an Irish family—the Frenches of Roscommon—she lived as a child in Kent. Of her boarding school education she remembers very little that is favourable except that it introduced her to great literature, particularly to Shelley and Mazzini, those voices of Liberty who remained her chief inspiration. However, but for coming in contact with Poor Law work—after her widowhood—she might have remained as an omnivorous reader with a literary interest in great ideas. Her actual contact with the problems of poverty changed all that. Going as a visitor to a large workhouse at Lambeth—a poor district of London—she was so outraged by the callous neglect of the inmates that she could not stand aside. These were the worst days of Victorianism, when unctuous hypocrisy and barbarous social practice went naturally together. Mrs. Despard determined to make the treatment of these

social victims known, and the local clergyman put a class-room at her disposal. She was not accustomed to speak in public, and felt nervous until she thought of the way the old and helpless people were neglected; then she forgot everything else. Soon the Labour Party asked her to stand as a Guardian in Lambeth, and she had a wider scope.

She found that it was a career of battle—fighting, fighting, fighting for years against abuses and corruption—which she had taken up. But as a result of such efforts Lambeth became one of the best Boards in England. Of course, all the reactionary forces tried to block the way. One paper, the *Sun*—edited by Horatio Bottomley, the super-Imperialist, who later spent several years in gaol for fraud—distinguished itself by scurrility and had to be sued for libel. Bottomley lost the case, but the *Sun* went bankrupt!

"At the back of all my public efforts," declared Mrs. Despard, "is the education I received in Poor Law administration, where I saw people being given bad and insufficient food and heard widows with young children being shamefully bullied because in desperation they turned to the parish for relief." Her knowledge and experience of such work was invaluable later, when, on behalf of the Dublin unemployed, she came to put their case to the Commissioners. In Battersea—another London district—Mrs. Despard served as a Guardian, and did similar work. This drew her in to the advanced Labour movement in Britain — the Social Democratic Federation and the Independent Labour Party. Keir Hardie, the rugged I.L.P. pioneer, who subscribed £50 towards helping Connolly start his paper in Dublin, was one of her closest friends. She spoke at Burnley with Michael Davitt, and describes him then as being worn out by his sufferings. But people everywhere streamed in to listen to him.

So far Mrs. Despard had been content to do the work immediately to hand, though she was deeply interested in Irish history and indignant at the penal laws. "When I first heard of them as a young girl, I thought of them as a revelation of evil," she told me. But, through her other work, she began to have occasional contact with men in the Irish movement. She met Griffith and heard him speak. She spoke with Connolly on a platform in Edinburgh. Connolly's reputation as a Labour speaker was so widespread in England and Scotland that Mrs. Despard believes he was appreciated more in Britain than he was in Ireland. She recalls that, at the time of his execution, petitions poured in from the workers in almost every city calling for a reprieve. And when, at a "Hands Off Russia" meeting in London she demanded a "Hands Off Ireland" movement, too, a prominent English transport

workers' leader declared that he had learnt his Socialism from James Connolly.

Her work in the women's suffrage movement was a big interest. She took a large part in that militant suffrage agitation which that dynamic woman, Emmeline Pankhurst—an organiser with a capacity for personal sacrifice and a flair for victory—led to triumph. The first time I heard Mrs. Despard speak was in Hyde Park from a lorry during the height of the suffrage campaign. The newspapers had roused the viler elements to attack these women, and clods of earth were flying over the lorry. But Mrs. Despard, even then grey-haired and frail-looking, faced them with unflinching courage. At another meeting, after she had spoken, she demanded that the howling crowd should make a path to let her through, and they did. She went on deputations to the House of Commons, and she received a month's imprisonment in Holloway, but was released after threatening to hunger strike. She was let out at night time, and found her way down to the Embankment, where, under the gloomy arches, homeless people slept. Here she shared out the few shillings in her purse so that the oldest women were able to get a night's lodging. Her own organisation, which she helped to found—the Women's Freedom League—co-operated in the struggle for the vote, and in its journal, *The Vote*, Mrs. Despard has written many inspiring articles, some of the most notable dealing with Shelley's poetry and ideas. During the suffrage days she travelled round in a caravan making propaganda speeches in towns and villages.

When the first war came, Mrs. Despard, although she comes of a military family—her father was a naval officer and her brother a General—took a leading part in the anti-war struggle. For her this was connected with the ideas of Labour solidarity she held. In earlier days she had helped in the organisation of a great International Labour Congress in London, where the pioneers of the International had gathered. At this time she met Eleanor Marx Aveling—daughter of Karl Marx—and she pays a high tribute to this woman, whose brilliant gifts, she declared, were always at the workers' service, without regard to nationality or race. Throughout the war she stood by the principle of international Labour solidarity. The first hostile meeting she remembers was during the Boer War—which she likewise opposed—and here, because she was a woman, the jingo crowd shouted to her to go home and mind her children—a saying which, when she told them, greatly amused the boys in a club which she had founded in the East End. During an early strike in which she was concerned she made such a moving appeal that Captain Gonne—a relative of Madame Gonne

MacBride—who was quite opposed to her politically, went round to restaurants and got food—the shops were shut—bringing it back in his motor for her to distribute.

After 1916 Mrs. Despard began to be drawn closer to the Irish movement. When Terence MacSwiney was facing his last agony at Brixton, she was one of those women who, in spite of hooligan opposition, spent night after night at the prison gate. She visited Ireland at the time of the Black and Tans to investigate for herself and make the truth known to the world. She stayed in Dublin and went to Galway, to the Curragh and to Wexford, returning to England to tell what she had seen.

About the time of the "Treaty" Mrs. Despard settled near Dublin, and since took a prominent part in all the movements for social and national freedom. In these she never spared herself. Soon after the treaty, when Madame MacBride was hunger-striking in prison. Mrs. Despard sat at the gate, day and night, till her release. Friends wanted to provide a bed for her there, but all she would have was a chair. On another occasion she managed to get into the prison yard by clinging to the back of a heavy lorry which was rumbling through the gate, much to the stupefaction of prison officials who had refused to see her. She has stood on the blackened ruins in O'Connell Street, speaking at a Prisoners' meeting, when shots were fired. At one of these meetings a small boy, standing between her and Madame Gonne MacBride, was grazed by a bullet. Looking up, he said: "That was meant for one of you ladies!" In those days the ordinary people took a casual view of firing, though every time a bang was heard a bald head or two flopped below the level of the windows of the Kildare Street Club. Mrs. Despard was a woman of unusual courage who would not flinch under any circumstances. When she was born a girl, a great general was lost to the world, but it gained a worker for social progress—which it could least spare.

I witnessed one outstanding incident in Mrs. Despard's Irish activities. A hospital for hunger strikers was opened in Harcourt Street, and Mrs. Despard met the trains in Dublin to see if any of the hunger strikers released from country prisons would arrive. She brought them down to the hospital to be cared for.

One afternoon the door of the hospital opened and Mrs. Despard walked slowly in. Turning to the entrance, she spoke in gravely welcoming tones: "Come in, my friends, here you will find food and a fire!" Behind her, coming forward at her invitation, were six wild-eyed, unkempt young men, who had just been released from gaol. They filed

slowly into the room while she stood with arm outstretched. The scene seemed to belong to some old Greek tragedy. It was one of Mrs. Despard's natural gifts that her activities had a picturesque appeal—an appeal to the eye as well as to the mind. She was active in smaller movements, which rouse her sympathy, for I have seen her taking part in a demonstration and march of the Dublin street sellers who had been turned away from their pitches.

Mrs. Despard was a stormy petrel of Liberty, ever ready to ally herself with the oppressed. For nearly half a century she worked for the cause of women, peace, of oppressed nationalities, of the destitute.