

# Prologue

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## JOSEPH BURTT AND WILLIAM CADBURY

JOSEPH BURTT and William Cadbury shared a concern for the English worker, an opposition to slavery in any form, and through their membership in the Society of Friends, a long acquaintance. Their paths crossed professionally in 1904 when Cadbury, a director of the chocolate firm Cadbury Brothers Limited, offered Burtt an eighteen-month contract to investigate the working conditions of African laborers in the Portuguese colonies of São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola. Burtt's mission was to determine if rumors that slaves were harvesting cocoa on the island colony of São Tomé and Príncipe were true. The answers he found would forge a friendship and link the two men publicly in what was in some ways an unlikely collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Burtt was born in December 1862 to John Bowen and Ann Bevington Burtt in Kettering, England, fifty miles east of Birmingham. He spent a happy childhood in the countryside with his seven brothers and sisters, but since no family records have survived, how John Bowen Burtt supported his large brood remains a mystery. There was enough money for Joseph Burtt to ride horses as a child and for a tutor to visit occasionally and oversee the children's lessons. In his early teens, Burtt spent two years at the private Crypt School in Gloucester, in the southwest of England. In 1879, at the age of sixteen, he went to work for the Gloucestershire Bank in Cheltenham.<sup>2</sup>

Tragedy marked William Adlington Cadbury's early childhood. His mother, Elizabeth Adlington Cadbury, died just before his second birthday in early 1869, and William spent the next two years living with his grandfather, John Cadbury. William Cadbury held tight all his life to the memory of his mother lifting him in "her arms so that he could see a shining candlestick on the mantelpiece." That there was a candlestick there at all was a testament to the hard work of her husband, Richard. The Cadburys had been selling tea and coffee since 1824, but when Richard and his brother George took over the family firm in 1861, it was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. They almost went under in

1863 but by the next year had made a small profit, in part by moving away from coffee and tea and investing in cocoa. In 1866, they introduced “Pure Cocoa Essence,” marketing it as a nutritious hot drink and tapping into Britain’s growing consumer culture and to the new concern with “pure” foods.<sup>3</sup>

By the time William Cadbury’s father remarried, to Emma Wilson in 1871, the firm was prospering. John Cadbury built a house in Edgbaston’s Harbourn Road for himself and a second one for his son Richard. The two gardens became a happy playground for young William Cadbury, his brother, and his two sisters.<sup>4</sup>

With its stately houses and broad, leafy avenues, Edgbaston was one of Birmingham’s more affluent suburbs. It sat in marked contrast to the gritty industrial city around it. In Birmingham’s poorest slums, housing was crowded, sanitation was often inadequate, and the death rate was double that in Edgbaston. Neither Richard nor George Cadbury was blind to the inequalities; George taught in the Society of Friends’ adult school movement, which served the city’s poorest residents. As Quakers—members of the Society of Friends—the Cadburys held religious beliefs that influenced how they conducted business. Excluded from politics and the connections that came with membership in the Church of England, many Quakers had turned to business during the Industrial Revolution and acquired wealth in mining, banking, and insurance. Capitalism was acceptable, but Quaker products had to be beneficial to society and priced fairly. In the early 1800s, many Quaker families abandoned the plain dress and speech that had set them apart from mainstream English society and began publicly enjoying their wealth. They also embraced philanthropy, speaking out for prison reform and the abolition of slavery. Cocoa—presented as a healthy alternative to hard liquor—neatly supported another Quaker social cause, the temperance movement, and it was no coincidence that two other large British cocoa manufacturers, J. S. Fry and Rowntree, were also Quaker family firms.

The cause Richard and George Cadbury took up was improving the lot of the worker. An eleven-year-old William Cadbury was dispatched in 1878 to dig holes for the soil inspectors on a piece of land the brothers had purchased at Strichley. It became the site of the Bournville Works, the new factory Cadbury Brothers built in the countryside four miles from Birmingham’s industrial center. Housing was built for factory foremen, but the rest of the company’s workers continued to travel daily by train from the city. The holes William Cadbury had dug as a child were never filled in, and his gentle boast was that he had turned the first ground on the “factory in the garden.”<sup>5</sup>

The growing success of Cadbury Brothers shaped William Cadbury's "no frills" education. He attended Friends' schools in Southport, where he sustained a chronic injury to his hip playing football, and in Hitchin, where he excelled at cricket. An early fascination with the sea was quashed by his rather austere father, who expected him to pursue a "useful career" by joining the family firm. Though an amateur musician and artist—he carried a sketchbook with him on many of his travels—William Cadbury had little time for either pursuit. At eighteen, he took a job in the engineering department at J. J. Seekings in Gloucester. In 1886, he spent eight months studying drafting and machinery at the German chocolate firm of Stollwerck in Cologne. A year later, at twenty, William joined Cadbury Brothers. He maintained the Bournville Works machinery and buildings; he hired male workers; and every six weeks from 1888 through 1892, he traveled the countryside visiting clients.<sup>6</sup>

Late in 1889, William Wilson, the brother of William Cadbury's stepmother, Emma, visited Edgbaston. The eldest of Wilson's children was a precocious six-year-old named Emmeline, who was the same age as William Cadbury's half sister Beatrice. Cadbury was first charmed and then smitten, sending Emmeline small presents, writing her letters, and deciding when she was only nine that he would ask her father for permission to marry her when she turned eighteen. That he could make such a decision when he was twenty-five seems surprising now, but it was not uncommon for men of Cadbury's class to marry late and to wed much younger women. The couple married in 1902, after Emmeline returned from six months at a finishing school in Switzerland and shortly before her eighteenth birthday. William was thirty-five.<sup>7</sup>

In 1895, using his own money, George Cadbury bought 120 acres near the factory and designed Bournville Village's garden cottages, streets, and parks as a model working-class community. There were no restrictions on who could buy a house there, and the only thing missing was a pub, since George Cadbury hoped workers would prefer gardening to drinking. He gave the community to the self-governing Bournville Village Trust in 1900.<sup>8</sup>

The absence of a pub in the village suggests paternalism, but the company took great pains to avoid that label. Cadbury employees sat on works councils and participated in trade unions where their concerns were taken seriously. A minimum wage, sick leave, and a pension plan were among the innovations introduced at the Bournville Works. At the center of the company's business philosophy was the belief that a laborer was not a "living tool." Rather, as one

man who left his bank job to work for the company observed, the Cadburys “somehow conveyed the idea that their purpose was to do something *for* one, rather than to get the last ounce in the way of work; I think they generally did get the fullest in service, but they *attracted* it—they did not force it.”<sup>9</sup>

Employees were encouraged to continue their education, and the company provided a variety of on-site training programs. Sport was another welcome diversion, and William Cadbury played on the Bournville football and cricket teams and served as vice president of the Bournville (Men’s) Athlete Club when it was established in 1896.<sup>10</sup>

While William Cadbury dutifully embraced his responsibilities at the family firm, Joseph Burt succumbed to a “crisis of conscience.” In 1898, after almost twenty years working for the Gloucestershire Bank, he turned down a promotion to manager, quit his job, and helped found the utopian White-way Colony near Stroud in rural Gloucestershire. The strikes and industrial violence in several British cities in the late 1890s seem to have influenced Burt’s decision to leave a promising career at age thirty-five. “It is hard to say,” he would later recall, “if it was the horror of industrial cities or the degradation of the workers, or shame in my participation in an evil system that gave me a passionate desire to escape to some spot where I and my friends could settle and cultivate the land.”<sup>11</sup>

In our age, we might be inclined to think that Joseph Burt had had a midlife crisis, but his rejection of capitalism and his search for a “practical utopia” had a long history in England. Among the late nineteenth-century experiments was George Cadbury’s Bournville Village, his response to the growing recognition of poverty in Britain. His fellow Quaker B. Seebohm Rowntree would publish a statistical study, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, in 1901. Ebenezer Howard’s town-planning manual, *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, also captured the growing concern with social reform. First published in 1898, it envisioned “slumless smokeless cities” with easy access to public transportation and public gardens. Reissued numerous times under the title *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, the manual embodied the concerns of many Britons about the potentially dehumanizing effects of industrialization, especially on the working poor.<sup>12</sup>

The founders of White-way Colony belonged to a variety of Left-leaning organizations, including the Fabian Society, the Independent Labour Society, and especially the Croydon Brotherhood Church. Minister John C. Kenworthy opened his church—ten miles southeast of London in Croydon—each Sunday afternoon to “every kind of ‘crank,’ . . . Atheists, Spiritualists, Individualists,

Communists, Anarchists, ordinary politicians, Vegetarians, Anti-vivisectionists and Anti-vaccinationists—in fact, every kind of ‘anti’ had a welcome and a hearing, and had to stand a lively criticism in the discussion which followed.” Members of the Croydon Brotherhood Church embraced a kind of religious anarchism, rejecting the acquisition of wealth and trying to lead lives modeled on those of Christ and his disciples.<sup>13</sup>

The Whiteway colonists looked for their inspiration to Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist whose embrace of nature, admiration for the peasantry, and revolutionary reinterpretation of lived Christianity brought him to the attention of English idealists. Tolstoy argued that the Christian message had been distorted by the churches, by the state, and especially by capitalism. Rejecting these three negative influences, he advocated instead “the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth; that is, the establishment of the order of life in which the discord, deception and violence that now rule will be replaced by free accord, by truth, and by the brotherly love of one for another.” On his own estate at Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy dressed as a peasant and labored in his fields beside his workers. He did not, however, give up the title to his property.<sup>14</sup>

Members of the Croydon Brotherhood founded Purleigh Colony in Essex in 1896, but it fell apart within two years when colonists disagreed over whether to accept two tradesmen—a carpenter and an engineer—who had applied to join the commune. For some Purleighites, this dispute smacked of class bias, of a distinction made between those who had actual wealth to reject and those who did not. In the spring of 1898, William Sinclair, Arnold Eiloart, and Sudbury Protheroe joined Nellie Shaw in searching for a site for a new colony. Their plan in turn attracted Clara Lee, Daniel Thatcher, and Joseph Burt; the two men were members of the West of England Land Society and of the Society of Friends. Burt was still working for the Gloucestershire Bank in Cheltenham. That August, the group, less Protheroe, cycled or traveled by train around Gloucestershire.<sup>15</sup>

After an extended search, Eiloart and Burt purchased forty-two acres known as Whiteway and conveniently located near the railway lines connecting Stroud, Gloucester, and Cirencester. They had found a garden surrounded by small cities. Two women and six men, including Joseph Burt and his brother Gopsill, moved into a rented house in nearby Sheepscombe. In October, leaving Daniel Thatcher and Clara Lee to set up a women’s weaving cooperative in Sheepscombe, the rest of the colonists moved to the Whiteway farm.

In February 1899, Jeannie Straughan joined Whiteway, where she entered into a “free union” with Sudbury Protheroe. On the issue of free unions, the English idealists parted ways with Tolstoy, who envisioned abstinence as “the ideal . . . marriage being tolerated but not encouraged.” Rejecting chastity, the Whiteway settlers took Tolstoy’s thinking to its next logical step, arguing that dedicated Tolstoyans could not seek the sanction of either church or state for a marriage, which in any event made a woman a “chattel, . . . ringed and labelled as man’s property, losing even her name in marriage—almost her identity.” Instead, women at Whiteway donned “rational” (that is, non-constricting) dress and joined the men in working the fields. The men rarely reciprocated by helping the women in the house.<sup>16</sup>

The unmarried Burt appears not to have entered a free union during the time he spent at Whiteway, but he did become intimately familiar with hard physical labor and poverty. With no experience farming, he and the others found that “small culture by amateurs” produced “little, and we soon became very poor, in spite of many gifts from friends.” Still, Burt was enormously happy, recalling that

frost did not chill by night, nor the sun burn by day. I do not remember that rain ever fell in the sweet Arcady. . . . We felt immensely rich, and at peace with all the world. Even the poorest, we hoped, could not accuse us of taking an undue advantage of having been born in a better position than himself. If our feet were down in the potato trenches, our heads were up with the stars. We felt we were gods.

“After a few months at Whiteway,” he felt that his “mind and body seemed to be created anew.”<sup>17</sup>

After a long day of work, the colonists spent their evenings in rather bourgeois pursuits, playing the piano, singing, and reading: “Shelley, Browning, Shakespeare, Emerson, Carpenter and Ruskin were perhaps the chief favourites.”<sup>18</sup>

Of course, all was not idyllic in utopia, as Burt’s reference to digging potatoes suggests. The community’s decision to purchase two uncooperative dairy cows proved a minor comedy, and the local *Stroud Journal* included the occasional critical paragraph on the “educated” folk dabbling in the simple life at Whiteway. The commune also attracted curiosity seekers, especially in the summer, who came to gawk at the “settlers.” More serious were the persistent financial problems and the personality conflicts that threatened to tear the community apart.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the money to buy Whiteway had come from Daniel Thatcher. Joseph Burtt contributed £100, and £50 each came from William Sinclair and Sudbury Protheroe, who had received payment for their dedication to Purleigh Colony, despite its collapse. The rest of the original Whiteway colonists contributed “what little we had” to the loose change box that sat on the fireplace mantel in the main house. Having embraced a philosophy of “all things in common,” none of the men and women wanted to sign their names to Whiteway’s title deed. To transfer legal ownership of the property, however, someone had to sign, and after much debate, Burtt, Sinclair, and Protheroe agreed to do so. They then burned the title deed in a symbolic act much like Tolstoy donning peasant dress to work his fields beside his laborers. A copy of the title deed remained in the Gloucestershire county clerk’s office, but the symbolism of watching “the neatly inscribed deed” sizzling “in the flames” appealed to Whiteway’s settlers, who wished the property “to be at the service of anyone who desired to use it productively.” Within a few months, the money in the cash box was gone, and the colonists accepted the offer of financial support from the now-married Clara and Daniel Thatcher at Sheepscombe.<sup>20</sup>

The Thatchers considered joining the community at Whiteway but chose instead to maintain their own home and garden at Sheepscombe, where they “practically lived the life of any middle class couple.” A drunken brawl between two community members made the *Stroud Journal*, and the violent breakup of the free union of two of the settlers attracted the Thatchers’ attention. In September 1899, they requested a public meeting with the Whiteway colonists. Of the three men who had signed the deed to the property, only Protheroe was present: Sinclair was away, and Burtt had joined his father for a vacation in Yorkshire. Four police officers and a local journalist accompanied the Thatchers to the meeting, where Daniel Thatcher demanded that the deed to Whiteway be signed over to him. Protheroe, supported by the other colonists, refused, and an infuriated Thatcher declared, “Well, we can’t take away the land, but we *can* take away the cows!” He then left in a huff. The *Stroud Journal* sided with the Thatchers, in part, Nellie Shaw thought, because of the money the couple had spent in and around Sheepscombe. On his return from vacation, Joseph Burtt visited his friends in Gloucester in an attempt to salvage the colony’s reputation, but he made little headway.<sup>21</sup>

In October 1899, John Bowen Burtt fell ill, and Joseph and Gopsill Burtt left the colony after just over a year’s residence to care for their father. The quiet and well-regarded Joseph Burtt had emerged as a leader of Whiteway Colony, and he departed at a moment of deep crisis in its history, though

the community did survive. The Burt brothers took their ailing father first to Fritchley and then to Crich, where they built a house and designed and planted the surrounding gardens and orchards themselves. Though no longer in the fields digging potatoes, Joseph Burt continued to embrace physical labor, perhaps out of necessity. To bring in a bit of extra income, he began managing a building.

The year 1899 was a turning point in William Cadbury's life too. Richard Cadbury died, and his brother George incorporated Cadbury Brothers. William, his brother Barrow, and George's two sons (Edward and George) were appointed directors. In 1900, William Cadbury moved out of the engineering department and into sales.<sup>22</sup>

The Cadburys had embraced the Quaker ideal of "doing good in the world, preferably in full public view," and they did not limit their concern for workers to Britain. George and William were members of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, established by Joseph Sturge in 1839—three decades after Britain had banned its citizens from participating in the transatlantic slave trade and a year after slavery ended in Britain's colonies. Slavery then still continued in India (where the English East India Company had been trading since the early 1600s), and in many other places not under British control or influence. The society, in keeping with its Quaker roots, sought to end slavery through "moral, religious and pacific" means everywhere it existed.<sup>23</sup>

It was Travers Buxton of the Anti-Slavery Society who brought Joseph Burt to William Cadbury's attention. In November 1903, Cadbury was casting about for a representative to send to São Tomé and Príncipe, and Buxton suggested Burt, who had just turned down an offer to become the society's assistant secretary, in part because he thought London too superficial a place to live. The former bank clerk briefly turned utopian idealist and the socially conscious if cautious businessman thus became entangled in a controversy over cocoa and slavery that extended from Britain to Portugal, down Africa's west coast, and around to its east.<sup>24</sup>