

## I. Great Expectations

DAVID ECCLES, my father, was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1849, seventy-four years after Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations*. English political economy, shaped in imitation of what Smith wrote, had by this time produced the conditions Dickens used as a backdrop for his novels, and Marx and Engels used for their *Communist Manifesto*. That is to say, it was a political economy whose base was formed by a dense mass of slum dwellers.

Within Glasgow proper, the lowest depth of life was reached in that part of the city's slum known as Kucadens. Here my father was cradled and learned how to crawl. Then, like other children of the place, he leaped to the role of a breadwinner without stopping for games or schooling. When he was eight, the need for income from his labor shoved all other things aside, with the result that until about the twenty-first year of his life all he knew of reading and writing was how to sign his own name. Others born in the area did not know even that little. They passed on with only an "X" for self-identification.

Still, if the time was that of *Oliver Twist*, it was also a time of *Great Expectations*. Three years before my father was born, the towns of the British Isles had at last brought their political force abreast of the economic victories they earlier had won over the countryside. The Corn Laws had been repealed. The Conservative Party had been split in two. Victorian liberalism found its hopeful voice in the Russell Cabinet. A Great Exhibition featuring a Crystal Palace was in prospect. It would show English towns to be the workshop of the world, while the range of goods on view would also show the creative force in the political doctrine of free trade preached by Adam Smith.

As my father in his youth may have heard that doctrine explained by those who could read, they did not tell him:

That Adam Smith's fervor ran strong on behalf of apprentices, laborers, and farmers—so strong, in fact, that he was the first to suggest that labor was the sole source of value in commodities.

That his attack on monopolies was a double-edged one, applying equally to those who plundered the wealth of a nation under a royal charter, and those who plundered it in the name of liberating all commercial effort from the trappings of state control.

That the very title of his work, *The Wealth of Nations*, asserted the paramount standard of the *national* welfare, and not the wealth of *men*, as the one by which all economic activity was to be judged.

Nor did the literate call my father's attention to a passage in *The Wealth of Nations* that my generation was to learn. It is the passage that reads:

The third and last duty of the sovereign or commonwealth is that of erecting and maintaining those public institutions and those public works, which though they may be in the highest degree advantageous to society are, however, of such a nature that the project could never repay the expense to any individual or small number of individuals, and which it cannot therefore be expected that the individual or small number of individuals should erect or maintain. The performance of this duty requires, too, very different degrees of expense in different periods of society.

At the stage in his life when he would have had both the time and the capacity to read for himself, David Eccles was many times a millionaire. Thus there was no need for him to reflect on the part of Smith's text that had been carefully ignored for decades before by leaders of opinion in the economic and political community. The edited version—the one that read “no government interference”—suited him better. His own life

history proved what could be done when human energies were freed from state control and men produced and contracted freely on their own.

Had he been reminded that the doctrine of absolute freedom also produced the Kucadens slum in Glasgow, my father would have replied: "Well, there is always new territory to which the ambitious can move and where they can improve their lot through hard work." This had been true in his own case.

David Eccles was the second oldest child in a family of five boys and two girls. His father, William, was a rugged Scotsman, patient, pious, and good-humored, despite a grave personal affliction. For the greater part of his mature life, cataracts blinded both his eyes. And of this he used to say: "If the Lord has so decreed it that some men on earth must be blind, why then should it not be my lot to be one of them?"

Toward the end of his years in America it was learned that his sight could be restored. Though an operation on one eye proved successful, he refused treatment for the other one, either because he felt he would push his luck with the Lord or because as a Scot he did not want to risk what he had gained. Content to look at the New World out of one eye, he sermonized his grandchildren on the virtue of patience, saying: "I knew all along that things would turn out well."

His wife, Sarah, was a woman from northern Ireland. She was not of the sort who suffer in heroic silence. Since food was scarce, she often fed herself and others on complaints.

In the Kucadens district Grandfather eked out some sort of living for his household by making wooden kitchen utensils such as rolling-pins and potato-mashers. His feet provided the motive power for the lathes, and his fingers shaped the wares, which the older children hawked on the streets of Glasgow.

For reasons unknown to me, in the early 1850's the family moved from Glasgow to near-by Paisley. Here they lived in quarters that were nothing more than an adobe hut with a thatched roof. Here, too, when my father at last reached a man's

estate at the age of eight, the family's grim need of cash turned him into a traveling salesman and merchant. Loaded with the rolling-pins and potato-mashers produced at home, he traveled to Glasgow to sell them. Between times he skimmed about the Glasgow railroad station and various hotels, offering his strength as a porter. In his full growth he was above average in height and blessed with a strong body. But as a child he was so scrawny and undernourished that the more kindly travelers often gave him a penny and carried the bags themselves.

Apart from what the kitchen utensils and a porter's work brought in, his main cash income during this period came from yet another source. He would invest a shilling in trinkets at a wholesale outlet in Glasgow and then sell them on the streets for twice their price. His oldest brother, John, was supposed to join him in this work; but at an early age John showed all the traits that were to make him a fascinating uncle in my own days. He spent his shilling's profit on himself, and it was David's earnings that gave the family their "hard" money.

On his trips to Glasgow, which kept him away from home for a week at a time, his lodgings were flophouses. For tuppence he could get a bowl of soup and a bed. These he enjoyed as best he could in union with all the derelicts and outcasts of the city. Yet he somehow managed to hang on to his money and throat. And it was in this way that he spent the years leading up to his fourteenth birthday.

It was at this time that the Eccles household, having earlier joined the Mormon Church, left for an American adventure.

My father's family alone would refute the common charge that the Mormons only cared to convert handsome women. There was nothing alluring about the Eccles family. It consisted of a half-blind male adult who could work a wood lathe; a talentless female adult; and a brood of seven children, totaling nine people, who stood one thread away from nakedness and one crust from starvation. Yet, oddly, the strength of the Mormons came from families such as the Eccleses who were

drawn into the western sunlight from the lowest depths of life in Europe and America. Men cast out or held in suspicion by the well-bred and the well-born, men who had nothing and were giving something, even if it was nothing more than hope, could face incredible hardships and accept extraordinary internal discipline to get what had been promised or to hold what had been given.

At the time of their conversion, I doubt whether the Eccles family or thousands like them asked objective questions about the Book of Mormon any more than the Israelites asked whether the Tables of the Law were in fact written by God on top of Mount Sinai. If they scoffed at what was said about the gold plates Joseph Smith had found, then they'd be stuck in places like Paisley and Glasgow. If they believed what was said, then there was a Promised Land in Utah where they could prove by their material advancement that they had at last found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Moreover, there was the Perpetual Immigration Fund set up by the Mormon Church to get them to that proving-ground. The fund paid for a family's passage to America. Thereafter the family worked to repay the fund, which was used by other families for the trip to Utah, and so on.

So the Eccleses detached themselves from the Gentiles and became Mormons. Living at the bottom rung of the economic and social ladder, they couldn't fall any lower. They had nothing to lose except their adobe hut.