

Chapter II

THE FIVE PRE-WAR YEARS

THE foregoing is the result of a patient and careful study of the period 1900-1909. Looking at it retrospectively now I am frankly conscious that it is not quite as impartial and unbiassed as it might be—in the sense that I have stressed some points in my general conclusions without entering up some items which to some considerable extent modify the broad aspects.

That the facts adduced are reasonably correct I have no doubt; that viewed in the light of later developments they assume a somewhat different perspective is certain. Though the ostensible development of the first decade of the present century seems to show that the material condition of the industrial workers was fractionally worse than at the opening of the period there are some other considerations which it would be unfair not to recognise.

Political Trades' Unionism was making steady progress, and the General Election of 1906 made the Labour Party for the first time a living influence and a potent factor in our public life. The urgent advocacy of social palliative as the forerunner of a drastic change in our system bore fruit in a national recognition, reluctant perhaps, of the truth that social evil and injustice are communal responsibilities in the first degree. Old Age Pensions (non-contributory) became a right rather than a philanthropy, State Insurance became a