

John Taylor, Esq., M.D.

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BLACKHOUSE, AYRSHIRE (1805-42).

By Alexander Wilson.

"In looking over the whole field (of Chartist agitators) one cannot but be struck by the number of really clever men who came to the front; but the number of mere noisy talkers was just as remarkable. To this army of what the world has decided to call 'agitators,' every district sent its contingent. Many Scotsmen belonged to it, the most notable of these . . . being John Taylor. I believe he was a man of good family and some property, who was sincerely devoted to popular liberty. I had the opportunity of meeting him some half-dozen times, and he impressed me very favourably by his manner. He had an extremely pleasing countenance with fine black eyes of the liveliest and most kindly sort. Altogether his was a face to be trusted at first sight, and I believe at his death he left a character behind him fully confirming this. I never heard him speak in public, but those who have say he was eloquent and persuasive; but I doubt very much whether he was a fit man to stand at the head of turbulent masses of discontented reformers. For this requires a strong will and a power of instant decision and headforward daring, and these I think I may say Dr. John Taylor did not possess; at least he did not possess them in a sufficient degree to control and direct the men most active and violent in the Chartist Movement."¹

John Taylor (the subject of these comments of Lloyd Jones, pioneer of the Co-operative Movement), was born at Newark Castle, Ayrshire, on 16th September, 1805. His family had considerable property in Ayrshire and were connected with the Ayr Coal Company.² In his own words, Taylor was "born to immense affluence, and educated in the most splendid manner, with every opportunity thrown at his feet that could ever be offered to man."³ As a young man, he spent several years in France, where he became intimate with the most ardent republicans and democrats, and where he is said to have celebrated his twenty-first birthday in gaol.⁴ Some time was spent in Greece, and he served for several years as a naval surgeon. According to one authority, Taylor received a

(1) "Newcastle Weekly Chronicle." 9/8/1853.

(2) W. H. Marwick. "Economic Developments in Victorian Scotland." p. 36.

(3) "True Scotsman." 27/4/1839.

(4) Thos. Johnston. "History of the Working Classes in Scotland." p. 246.

legacy of £30,000, which he spent almost entirely on fitting out a ship to assist the Greeks in their war of liberation against the Turks.^{4a}

In December, 1832, he contested the Ayr Burghs constituency as a Radical in a three-cornered fight with Thomas F. Kennedy of Dunure and James Cruikshanks of Langley Park. Kennedy won fairly easily with 375 Whig votes, but Taylor polled 131 votes more than his Tory opponent.⁵ In 1833 he became an Editor, and founded the short-lived "Ayrshire Reformer and Kilmarnock Gazette."⁶ A libel action by Kennedy of Dunure, however, led to bankruptcy for Taylor; and a challenge to a duel, issued to Kennedy, was followed by two month's imprisonment.⁷ In a further contest in the same constituency in 1834, Taylor was defeated by 92 votes.⁸ On nomination day, 22nd February, an immense crowd at the hustings in front of the County Buildings, Ayr, included parties of non-electors who had come from many parts of Ayrshire, particularly from Irvine, to support Taylor. Lord James Crichton Stuart (Whig) absented himself and was nominated amidst great hissing, by Provost Fullarton, an "honoured and much esteemed uncle" of Dr. Taylor.^{8a}

Dr. Taylor became the friend of the radical Glasgow editor, John Tait, in whose paper, "The Liberator," Taylor found his own principles strongly advocated.⁹ After several months as an assistant to Tait, "an all-wise Providence" threw Taylor on his own resources, for in October, 1836 Tait died and Taylor was appointed editor.¹⁰ In November, the bi-weekly "Liberator" became the "New Liberator," with Taylor as sole proprietor. As formerly, however, it remained the organ of the working-class with a policy of strong support for Radicalism and trades-unionism.¹¹

As chairman of the West of Scotland Radical Association, Taylor invited Feargus O'Connor to radical rallies in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Taylor organised a tremendous reception for O'Connor in Glasgow, where he was elected President of the National Association of Scotland.¹² Radical Associations in Glasgow, Paisley and Kilmarnock were strengthened by the efforts of Taylor and O'Connor, and organised branches in the neighbourhood, which demanded "universal suffrage," "annual parliaments," and sometimes "vote by ballot."

(4a) Max Beer. "A History of British Socialism." Vol. II, p. 14.

(5) "Ayr Advertiser." 8/12/1842.

(6) R. M. W. Cowan. "The Newspaper in Scotland." p. 159.

(7) Johnston. op. cit.

(8) "Ayr Advertiser." 8/12/1842.

(8a) "Glasgow Argus." 24/2/1834.

(9) "The Liberator." 26/10/1836.

(10) *ibid.*

(11) Cowan, op. cit. p. 188.

(12) *ibid.*; also "Northern Star." 16/1/1841.

For several months Taylor's partnership with O'Connor continued, with O'Connor helping to edit the "New Liberator." In the summer of 1837, however, with the onset of stagnation in the cotton trade, there was a serious difference of opinion between Taylor and O'Connor.¹³ The Glasgow Operative Cotton Spinners were faced with an ultimatum for a 15% reduction in wages. O'Connor favoured strike action, while Taylor, whose newspaper had been receiving substantial financial assistance from the Spinners Association,¹⁴ was convinced that a strike would only weaken the Cotton Spinners Union. A decision to strike was followed within a few days by capitulation to the employers' proposed terms. These were no longer available, and after their initial victory, the employers' new proposals involved a reduction of 30-40%. During the ensuing strike, a cotton-spinner of ill-repute and notorious immorality was murdered on a Saturday night in Glasgow.

The Glasgow press immediately connected the murder with the strike, and when the authorities were unable to find the murderer, they arrested the Committee of the Cotton Spinners Association.¹⁵ This "uncalled-for, partial, cruel and unjust" action of the authorities, infuriated Taylor, who had meanwhile been once again unsuccessful in the Parliamentary Elections.¹⁶ Taylor's next few months were spent organising the defence of the Cotton Spinners, in attempting to rouse the British working classes to protest in indignation against any repetition of the Dorchester labourers' trial in the case of the eighteen Glasgow men—and in becoming well-known and exceedingly popular in the North of England.¹⁷

Despite Taylor's efforts, the Cotton Spinners were sentenced to seven years' transportation—having been convicted not on the murder charge, but on that of "conspiracy to keep up wages" and of transacting their Union business secretly. This sentence, accompanied by denunciations of trades-unionism by Daniel O'Connell, convinced Taylor that a ruthless government intended to destroy trades-unionism and that little support for the people could be expected from the Parliamentary Reformers. In the North of England and at Dumfries, "our eccentric contemporary," as he was called by the most sympathetic of his fellow Glasgow editors,¹⁸ started to preach sedition. Nothing short of a revolution, he thought, would secure justice for the working classes from a legislature motivated solely by class interest.

(13) "Northern Star." 3/2/1838.

(14) Cowan, op. cit. p. 188. An examination of the books of the Operative Cotton Spinners Association was alleged to show that £978 had been paid to the "New Liberator" between January and May, 1837. Abram Duncan, a henchman of Taylor, asserted ("Northern Star" 10/2/38) that all this money had been paid to the "Liberator" before it had become the property of John Tait, Taylor's predecessor; and denied that Taylor had ever received a farthing.

(15) "The Champion." 11/11/1837.

Halevy. "History of the English People, 1830-41." p. 300, etc.

(16) "Glasgow Constitutional." 29/7/1837.

(17) "Northern Star." 6/1/1838, 13/1/1838, etc.

(18) Cowan, op. cit. p. 189.

For the next six months, revolution was apparently left aside while Taylor continued to publish the "New Liberator." However, the collapse of the finances of the Cotton Spinners Association, under the expenses of a protracted strike and two costly trials, proved fatal also for the finances of the "New Liberator."¹⁹ In July, 1838, at a time when excitement in politics was rising with the first onset of the Chartist Agitation, and when it might have been expected that Taylor's paper must become the main organ of the Scottish Chartists, it ceased publication.

For several months, Taylor remained surprisingly quiet, but in the autumn of 1838, when the elections to the General Convention, the "first People's Parliament," were pending, Taylor felt it his duty to announce to the Radicals of Ayrshire that, despite all rumours, he would feel it his duty to accept election to the Convention, if they required his services.²⁰ At the same time he felt he must warn them that the success of that Convention would depend on their returning only those whose principles were so defined that they could be trusted implicitly by the people in the struggle for Democracy. Many of their former friends had been flirting with the Whigs, and the people must beware of such men of expediency, who called themselves "Moderatists."

Despite the "unexpected kindness" of the men of Cumnock and Ayr in calling upon him to emerge from his peaceful retirement,²¹ Taylor was not elected M.C. for Ayrshire. This honour fell upon Hugh Craig, a prospering Kilmarnock draper and bailie, who had recently become proprietor of the Kilmarnock Chartist newspaper, "The Ayrshire Examiner." Craig had been strongly supported in many districts of Ayrshire, but his election took place at Kilmarnock before the local Chartist groups had agreed on the mode of election to be adopted, and at a meeting which did not permit the Chartists of Ayr and Cumnock to carry any weight.²² This "fait accompli" of Kilmarnock aggrieved the men of Ayr, but Taylor himself does not appear to have been unduly upset.

Amongst the Chartists of Ayrshire, Taylor seems to have found his more violent political opinions inappropriate. The atmosphere was much more congenial to the policy of achieving reform by purely constitutional means. Nevertheless it was quite permissible to maintain that the "physical force" party was unjustifiable only so long as it had not tried every milder method in vain. Taylor echoed this opinion, but at the same time he was convinced that the advocates of "moral force" had put forward no plan which offered

(19) *ibid.*

(20) "True Scotsman." 27/10/1838.

(21) *ibid.*

(22) "True Scotsman." 10/11/1838.

any prospect of success. Such a position would surely destroy the movement for "hope deferred maketh the heart sick."²³

Taylor, however, had found a remedy. It was simple and it could not fail. It had been successfully employed against the Government, on one occasion in India and twice, without recourse to arms, by the American colonists. Simply by refusing to use heavily taxed articles of luxury, the working classes had both the power to become richer themselves, and at the same time reduce their rulers to obedience.²⁴ This object would be accomplished through the establishment of "Dhurna" Societies in all localities. All members would pledge not to purchase, accept, offer or use intoxicating liquors, tea and tobacco for a period of six months, and generally to abstain from the use of such articles as paid a high duty to the Government, and which supplied the extravagance of their rulers.

At "a great public-meeting" of the inhabitants of Ayr, Newton and Wallacetown, held in the Wallace Tower Hall on December 17th, 1838, the Ayr "Dhurna" Society became the first of its kind in Britain, and Dr. Taylor was elected President.²⁵ His faithful admirers in Cumnock made haste to follow suit, but little more was heard of the "Dhurna" campaign. Much more exciting events elsewhere were distracting Taylor's attention.

In Edinburgh a Conference of Scottish Chartist Association delegates met on 5th December, and adopted a series of resolutions discussing unconstitutional means of agitation, and denouncing the language of O'Connor and the Rev. J. R. Stephens. This attitude was in turn denounced by the leaders of the "physical force" party as a gross insult to the men of England.²⁶ Feargus O'Connor decided to come to Scotland to revenge himself on the Rev. Patrick Brewster of Paisley Abbey, the main Scottish protagonist of the "moral-force" doctrine. Meanwhile Stephens was arrested, and Dr. Taylor was deciding to vindicate the honour of Scotland, by shocking the "moral-force" party in its chief stronghold.²⁷ For this task, an opportunity was at hand for, on 4th December, he had been nominated by the Sandholes district of the Renfrewshire Political Union as a candidate in the Renfrewshire election of its Member of Convention.²⁸

Taylor had already been elected M.C. for Newcastle. A victory for him in Paisley, therefore, would be a most significant triumph for the "physical force" party. At first, however, Taylor's chances

(23) "True Scotsman." 22/12/1838.

(24) *ibid.*

(25) *ibid.*

(26) "True Scotsman." 15/12/1838.

(27) "True Scotsman." 26/1/1839.

(28) "Ayr Observer." 11/12/1838.

of success seemed slender. In a poll taken of the preference of the local associations belonging to the Renfrewshire Political Union, Taylor received only six votes out of twenty-four. Bailie "Jock" Henderson (later Provost of Paisley), chairman of the R.P.U. and editor of the Radical newspaper, the "Glasgow Saturday Evening Post and Renfrewshire Reformer", received the votes of sixteen districts.²⁹

On the eve of the election, "Parson" Brewster gained the approval of the Renfrewshire Political Union for his ubiquitous moral-force resolutions,³⁰ and Brewster had now become Taylor's rival candidate in place of Bailie Henderson. Then for the next few days everything went wrong for Brewster. At the election, a storm raged over Thornhill, where the demonstration was held. The candidates could not be heard. Brewster failed to carry his moral-force resolution and withdrew, in indignation, with his supporters.³¹ Taylor was left in full possession of the hill and the votes of the meeting. Brewster's eclipse was completed when O'Connor came roaring through Scotland, with packed meetings of his admirers in Edinburgh, Glasgow and even Paisley, denouncing the Calton Hill resolutions.³²

Meanwhile, Dr. Taylor's new constituents were beginning to feel very anxious about his opinions. The leading principle of the Renfrewshire Political Union—"Peace, Law and Order"—was being daily violated by Dr. Taylor, who was alleged to be stating his determination to enforce the object of the Union by physical power. In his opinion it could not be attained otherwise. Some interest was shown in his "Dhurna" societies, but considerable scepticism was expressed—for he did not seem to observe their principles in Paisley. The defence offered by his friends, that the Doctor required "a little toddy" for the sake of his health, did not help.³³

The Council of the R.P.U. immediately resolved "that this Council, in consideration of the public statements and professions of Dr. Taylor, withdraw from all connection with him," and recommended that a meeting of the members of the Union should be held on the 14th January to adopt this resolution. An amendment to approve the Thornhill decision was lost by 3 to 1.³⁴

At the members' meeting, Taylor claimed that John Henderson and the "Reformer" had treated him most unfairly, and only after considerable confusion, could he be persuaded to accept the

(29) "True Scotsman." 22/12/1838.

(30) "True Scotsman." 5/1/39.

(31) "True Scotsman." 5/1/1839, 12/1/39.

(32) *ibid.*

(33) "True Scotsman." 12/1/1839, 19/1/1839.

(34) "True Scotsman." 12/1/1839.

latter as chairman. Brewster declared that he had thought Taylor a "moral-force" man in his attempt to establish Dhurna Societies. Now he found the tobacco pipe and teapot were to be replaced by the sabre. Such foolish action was only playing into the hands of the Government, who were employing spies and traitors against them. If the people would be united, there would be no need to prate about guns and sabres. John Parkhill begged the meeting to disregard the empty professions of Dr. Taylor. He seemed to have a sabre always hanging before him, like a ghost, but he was a harmless man after all. He knew the Doctor well, and would easily undertake to eat all the Doctor would ever kill.³⁵

In reply, Taylor denied holding opinions of resistance to the Government. He was no advocate of physical force till all other power had failed. He was determined to try his Dhurna Societies plan before resorting to physical force. The statement of Thomas Eaglesim, Secretary of the Union, which alleged that Taylor had declared he would shoot any man who tried to arrest him as a member of the Convention was low slander, which could be expected of a man who would publicly detail conversation.

Taylor claimed that his opponents were prejudging him, and that he had been most unfairly treated and defamed by a report in Henderson's "Reformer," which had been copied in the "Northern Liberator" and had harmed his reputation in his Newcastle constituency. He readily admitted that he was now a poor man. Even so, he would rather remain poor than draw an income from a State Church. This attack upon Brewster met with general disapprobation, but a motion in favour of Taylor was eventually carried at 3 a.m. by a considerable majority.³⁶

Most of the leading members of the Council of the Renfrewshire Political Union resigned, and thereafter Taylor received little support from Paisley itself. However, most of the other districts of Renfrewshire accepted him as their representative, and for several months provided him with a salary of £25 per month.³⁷ Support was also forthcoming from the Dumbartonshire Associations and from Alva and Tillicoultry, which dissociated themselves from the rest of Stirlingshire to give their allegiance to the "Illustrious" Dr. Taylor. When Dr. Taylor took his seat in the General Convention on February 4th, 1839, he was the representative of Renfrewshire, Dumbartonshire, Alva, Tillicoultry, Newcastle, Carlisle and Wigton.

To the surprise of his colleagues, the middle-class Scottish representatives, Taylor's conduct during the early months of the

(35) "True Scotsman." 19/1/1839.

(36) *ibid.*

(37) After June it became £150 per annum. "True Scotsman." 6/7/1839.

"People's Parliament" remained exemplary. Hugh Craig and James Moir of Glasgow, in particular, were delighted with his energetic, yet clear-minded and conciliatory attitude.³⁸ His efforts were directed, apparently, to clothing the deliberations of his colleagues with an air of reasonable determination and unanimity.

It must be recollected, he pleaded,³⁹ that the set of men there, chosen by universal suffrage, were unknown to each other; many of them were already maligned and denounced. It was not to be wondered at that some little differences of opinion, and even some angry disputes, should have pervaded such an assembly. The very men whom they had been accustomed to look upon as unable to open their mouths without preaching blood and revolution, had, in the Convention, been cautious in their expression; and they had taken "more care not to go wrong than seemed agreeable to some of the most imprudent amongst them."

As for himself, men called him violent. It might be so; but he had never used a violent expression, or done a violent action throughout the whole of his life, save in self-defence—nor would he ever do so. But if it were violent to strike down the tyrant who trampled down the rights of the poor, then he confessed he was violent. There were allegations from some that he was a spy of the Whigs, while others accused him of being a spy of the Tories. As to that, it must be remembered that he had sacrificed all his influence, fortune, patronage, and even the very goodwill of those whom he respected, because he would not pander to their evil passions. What price, then, was it that the Government could offer, that he would think it worth while to take?

After the fall of the Melbourne Government in May, 1839, before the debate in Parliament on the National Petition, and after the adjournment of the Convention till July 1st, Taylor returned to Scotland where he attended the "very large" meetings. When he reported back to the Convention at Birmingham in July,⁴⁰ he noted that his constituents had been unanimous in thinking that the Convention had achieved more than could have been expected. They were determined to carry the Charter, and they wanted a decision on the "ulterior measures" proposed for adoption if the National Petition were rejected. In Scotland it was generally felt that the "Sacred Month" proposal amounted to nothing short of a physical revolution. Even so they would be ready to carry it out.

(38) "True Scotsman." 6/4/1839.

(39) At Birmingham Female Political Union. "True Scotsman." 27/4/1839.

(40) "Scottish Patriot." 13/7/1839.

On July 5th, Dr. Taylor was arrested, charged with responsibility for the riot on the previous night in the Bull Ring, Birmingham, which had resulted when a force of the Metropolitan Police interfered with an excited public meeting. To Taylor's constituents—and many others—the arrest was deliberate and unwarranted persecution from a nervous Government. The arrest of Lovett and Collins, greatly admired in Scotland for their caution and high moral character, for their spirited protest against the “summary and despotic arrest of Dr. Taylor, our respected colleague,” afforded in the eyes of Scottish Chartists proof of a sinister Government plot against the liberties of the people.⁴¹

There was great indignation in Campsie at the arrest. Barrhead pledged full moral and financial support for Taylor. The Chartists of the Vale of Leven were seriously perturbed by such unconstitutional measures and the Alva Female Union sent Taylor an address of confidence and support. Throughout the country numerous Chartist meetings protested against the arrests.⁴² Many divisions were healed within associations, between those who were becoming more nervous about the possible reversion to physical violence and those who were beginning more openly to suggest once again that violence might be required in the last resort.⁴³

This anger was intensified by the reports of the humiliating treatment, which had been meted out to Taylor in Warwick Jail, where the Chartist Samson had his glorious locks shaved off and was bathed in a tub along with common felons. In the House of Lords, Lord Brougham presented a petition from Mr. Taylor, a surgeon of Ayr, in Scotland, who had been arrested at Birmingham, by mistake, for a Chartist, while he was in the act of assisting a policeman; his explanation was not regarded, and he was sent to Warwick jail to be bathed, have his hair cut, etc. “Lord Melbourne promised to call the attention of Lord J. Russell to these, he thought, well-founded complaints.”⁴⁴

On Wednesday, August 7th, 1839, “John Taylor, commonly called Dr. Taylor, the Scottish delegate, was . . . placed at the bar, charged with a riot on the 4th July. He was habited in a pink shirt, green neckerchief and a blue sailor's jacket. His countenance was deadly pale and he appeared anything but pleased with his situation.”⁴⁵ “Mr. Balguy, for the Attorney-General, rose and said, that in the exercise of the discretion vested in him, he should

(41) “Scottish Patriot.” 13/7/1839, 20/7/1839.

(42) “Scottish Patriot.” 13/7/1839, 20/7/1839, 27/7/1839.

(43) “Scottish Patriot.” 17/8/1839.

(44) “True Scotsman.” 17/8/1839.

(45) “Leeds Times.” 10/8/1839.

offer no evidence against Dr. Taylor. The Jury then returned a verdict of acquitted.”⁴⁶ “The prisoner . . . looked extremely angry and was discharged.”⁴⁷

His arrest, the treatment in jail and the numerous arrests of Chartists throughout the summer of 1839, seem to have thoroughly convinced Taylor that his original attitude was correct, and that the people would have to defend themselves against violent physical attacks by a ruthless government. Even before his arrest, he had been advising Chartists to exercise their constitutional right to possess arms, and to be ready to defend their towns against the lawless tyranny of the Government. “Be ready,” he advised the Glasgow Chartists, “Be ready, cautious and determined till the 15th (July), when the day for the Sacred Month will be fixed.”⁴⁸

He was infuriated even more, however, by the failure of his fellow members of Convention to give a determined lead to the people after the rejection of the National Petition by the House of Commons on July 12th. To have adopted the Sacred Month proposal, then to have retracted, and finally to have left it for each Chartist district to decide for itself was, he felt, the surrender of their mandate and sheer cowardice.

Thereafter Taylor's words and actions became shrouded with an air of mystery. At Carlisle, on the 24th August, he delivered a most remarkable speech.⁴⁹ Before he was discharged from Warwick jail, he claimed, he had been able to have 48 hours communication with Lovett and Collins. They had arranged a plan for working out the great cause. He did not mean to say that this plan was not dangerous—nor that it did not involve both life and property, but the danger would fall on few, and no one was more ready to incur it than he was. The success of the plan was certain, and, in order that he might be prepared for it, he wished to be free and unshackled, and leave the Convention. Seeing how the people had recently been betrayed, and their energies dissipated, he thought it would be better not to continue the struggle in its present form, and would wish to retire from the Convention—but only to take a more dangerous post. Shortly he would come to ask for the confidence of the men of Cumberland. It was his determination to carry out the promise he had made to his Scottish brethren, that he would never return till he could rejoice with them on their freedom gained, or to lead them on in the attempt to win it. The time for talking was nearly over. The time for action was nearly come. The men of Cumberland must be ready when called upon.

(46) “Scottish Patriot.” 10/8/1839.

(47) “Leeds Times.” 10/8/1839.

(48) “Scottish Patriot.” 13/7/1839.

(49) “True Scotsman.” 21/9/1839.

Reported originally in the “Carlisle Patriot.”

He would not tell them what his plan was, but he asked for three things. First, he would ask for seven men who had no fears; in whom the reformers of Cumberland could place confidence, and who would have confidence in him and obey him. He would ask them to do nothing but what he himself did by example. He wished the reformers to consider well what he was saying for they might depend upon it, he would want these men within six weeks. (Sensation). They must be men whom he could trust, for the flinching of one would cause the sacrifice of the rest. He did not mean to say they would not be in danger, or that he would guarantee their lives to be for one moment safe. On the contrary, they must be prepared to sacrifice all they had before they came to act in the matter. The long nights of winter were coming on, when they would have time to think of it. Perhaps, before the winter was over he might be able to throw a little more light on the subject.

Taylor then returned to London and joined the Rump of the "People's Parliament." On September 4th he moved that the Convention should immediately dissolve—and at the same time issue a self-denying ordinance to the people, that none of the present Convention should be eligible to sit in any future one. Such a dissolution would help, he believed, to cement the union of Chartists and put an end to the rumour that they were sitting there for their own purposes. His colleagues could not agree.⁵⁰

On September 6th, Taylor joined the ranks of the long list of heretics excommunicated by Feargus O'Connor. The news of Taylor's speech at Carlisle had now filtered through, and it was considered most insolent to the Convention to be denounced as containing traitors, spies and cowards. If anything could tend to destroy the Convention, it was making such charges without bringing forward any facts in substantiation.⁵¹

Taylor retorted that the people of Durham had been prepared for and would have carried out the Sacred Month had not the Convention stultified itself by altering its resolution at the eleventh hour. The people of Carlisle had passed resolutions condemning the Convention a fortnight before he went there. O'Connor had taunted him with running away to a place of safety. He considered a place of safety to be at the head of a body of well-organised armed men, who were determined to work out their freedom. He would do all in his power to place himself in such a position at the earliest possible moment—and left the Convention with the cryptic farewell, that "they were all very brave until they were tried; but perhaps before they met again events might have proved it for them, who deserved the name and who did not."

(50) "True Scotsman." 21/9/1839.

(51) *ibid.*

It is not clear how much of his new revolutionary plans existed merely in the fertile imagination of mad Dr. Taylor. Various accounts of the sequel tend to confirm the impression that behind all this melodrama, there was being hatched some plan of insurrection.⁵² Revolutionary Committees are believed to have existed in Dewsbury, in Birmingham and in South Wales. The co-ordinating committee consisted of a revolutionary quintet, Dr. Taylor, John Frost, ex-mayor of Newport, Peter Bussey of Yorkshire, Major Beniowski a Polish refugee, and a mysterious fifth man, who was probably Robert Lowery of Newcastle, later organising secretary of the Scottish Chartists.

Meanwhile the Carlisle magistrates had issued a warrant for Taylor's arrest on a charge of sedition, founded on the speech made in the Carlisle theatre on August 24th.⁵³ Taylor was arrested on 23rd November and was committed to trial at the next assizes. He was admitted to bail—himself for £200 and two sureties of £100 each. Mr. Coulthard and Mr. Hunt stood sureties for him, and Taylor was released amidst tremendous cheering from thousands of Carlisle people who had assembled for his liberation.⁵⁴

If the revolutionary plans did exist, it soon became clear that the leaders were neither able to co-ordinate their efforts nor control their "followers." In several districts the pressure for immediate action was tremendous, and partial outbreaks took place in November, 1839, in Newport, and in January, 1840, in the West Riding of Yorkshire. John Frost and hundreds of Chartists were proved by events not so much to merit the name which Taylor had promised, as that of fool hardy.

Feargus O'Connor, though not a party to the conspiracy, apparently had grave suspicions of what was brewing and tried to dissuade some of the revolutionaries. Some light on what went wrong with the revolution is provided by his story in 1845, after he had been accused by Bronterre O'Brien of responsibility for the premature death of John Taylor.⁵⁵

O'Connor claimed to have been informed by Henry Ross that Dr. Taylor and others had actually been selling commissions in the North of England. Major Beniowski was to be appointed commander-in-chief, as he was a good officer, but that as soon as the battle was won, Beniowski, as he was a dangerous and ambitious man, was to be shot. Taylor himself had told O'Connor of his plans in Leeds in January, 1840.⁵⁶ Frost had been betrayed by Bussey,

(52) e.g. Hovell, "Chartist Movement." Chapter XI. pp. 174-7 et. seq.

(53) "True Scotsman." 30/11/1839.

(54) *ibid.*

(55) "Northern Star." 3/5/1845.

(56) *ibid.*

for the decision had been taken in Yorkshire before the Newport Rising, that the affair would be postponed to Christmas Eve. Unfortunately the Welsh people would not wait, and Taylor had known that it would be a failure.

Now he must do the whole thing himself. He was going first to Newcastle and he wanted to know if Robert Lowery could be sufficiently trusted to be put in possession of the town and barracks. Then he would hand over Carlisle to James Arthur, who would be able to recommend a man who could be trusted with the possession of Durham Castle. At Edinburgh, he would put John Duncan in command of the town and castle. At Ayr, he had purchased a ship, "The Black Joke," and had selected a crew of men who had been with him in Greece, and who were staunch Republicans. They would put to sea, intercept the ship carrying John Frost and his friends to transportation, and bring her into Ayr.

According to the 1845 version, O'Connor replied "Taylor, I always thought you mad, but I'm sure of it now," and loaned Taylor £10 to take him home. Even if the flagship of the Chartist navy had actually existed, however, it would have been doubtful if Taylor could have embarked on his modest mission—for he was rapidly becoming a physical wreck.

In February, 1840, the "Carlisle Journal" reported, "We have authority for stating that no bill will be preferred against this individual (Dr. Taylor) at the ensuing assizes for this county, for the speech delivered in our theatre on the 24th August last, and for which he was some time ago committed to our jail and afterwards admitted to bail."⁵⁷

Taylor's Chartist days were over. Even the authorities no longer seemed to take him seriously. His health was almost ruined and he was making plans to leave the country. At the end of March, 1840, it was reported from Hull that "we are glad to perceive that the health of this stern Republican has much improved by his residence amongst us, and we hope this will be an inducement for him to make it his home for a longer period, when he returns from Germany, to which he proceeds in a few days, and previous to his ultimate settlement among his old Republican companions of France, the climate of which has been declared necessary to his complete restoration to permanent health."⁵⁸ (Five months previously Taylor had been adopted by the Hull Chartists as their candidate for the representation of Hull at the next election.)⁵⁹

(57) "True Scotsman." 15/2/1840.

(58) "Northern Star." 28/3/1840.

(59) "The (Perthshire) Constitutional." 23/10/1839.

Complete restoration to health was not, however, in store for John Taylor. On 4th December, 1842, he died in Larne, after a long illness, at the house of his brother-in-law, the Rev. James Smith, Rector of Island Magee. For some time he had been studying theology, and had been enjoying "that tranquility to which he had long been a stranger," devoting himself "to profitable study and reflection. Nothing, says an eye-witness, could exceed the calmness and serenity of his mind in his latter moments, while claiming that forgiveness he freely extended to all mankind."⁶⁰

Taylor's old adversary, the "Ayr Advertiser" thought "it would seem singular in us to pass unnoticed" the death of John Taylor, Esq., eldest son of the late John Taylor, Esq., of Blackhouse, Ayrshire—"the individual, who, under the professional designation of Dr. Taylor, occupied, for many years, a large space in the public eye. Gifted with talents of a very high order, to which study and travel had imparted great polish and versatility, and with an eloquence that made him the idol of the people and the admiration of many an audience, he relinquished his profession for the strife of politics. We think we see him yet on the platform, his full black eye kindled with his subject and his long dark hair in graceful curls on his shoulders. On such occasions, fluent in speech, felicitous in expression, and impassioned in delivery, the tones of his rich melodious voice fell like bold music on the ear, while his nicely balanced and finely rounded sentences never failed to elicit a shudder at his deadly armed sarcasm, a burst of applause at the fervour and beauty of his appeals to their patriotic feelings, or a hearty laugh at his merry depiction of the ludicrous."⁶¹

R. G. Gammage, the Chartist historian, noted that Taylor's death "caused universal regret amongst all who had known him in the days of his oratorical glory. Even his political opponents could not refrain from breathing a sigh at the loss of one who, with all his trifling faults, and his somewhat reckless bearing had a noble heart that ever beat warmly for humanity and always bounded in favour of the oppressed against the oppressor."⁶²

"It is often asserted that the working-classes are very ungrateful to those of the upper ranks who may be patriotic enough to step forward on their behalf, bringing with them, and throwing into the common stock, education, genius and talent, and who at the same time sacrifice health, wealth and caste in society, and all with the benevolent view of ameliorating the condition of the working man. But this is not true . . . we maintain that the intensity with which we hate and abhor the very names and memories of our proud

(60) "Ayr Advertiser." 8/12/1842.

(61) "Ayr Advertiser." 8/12/1842.

(62) R. M. Gammage. "History of the Chartist Movement." p. 196.

oppressors does not exceed in intensiveness the love and respect we cherish for those who have proved themselves patriots and lovers of their kind."⁶³

This declaration formed part of the report of the Commemoration Dinner held in honour of Dr. Taylor—in the Ayr Arms Inn, on the 10th October, 1844 by the Chartists of Ayr, Cumnock and Prestwick. Mr. William Smith was in the chair, and the guest of honour was George Taylor, a "much respected" uncle of the "philanthropic and patriotic Dr. John Taylor," who replied to the toast to his nephew's memory. Two "fine pieces of poetry," composed for the occasion were read by the chairman, and Mr. Millar of Ayr sang "John Taylor, o my Jo."

Gammage describes Taylor as above medium height, proportionately stout, with a handsome intellectual face, large brilliant dark eyes, and a head of black flowing hair, parted in the centre, hanging in long curls below his broad-set shoulders, and wearing sometimes a sailor's dress. He was not a windy orator—twenty to thirty minutes of a clear flowing stream of words sufficed. "If ever orator possessed happiest combination of nature and art in giving utterance to words—that orator was Dr. Taylor."⁶⁴

Gammage's inventory of the virtues of Taylor is exceedingly long. Taylor was free from the arts of the demagogue. He "never sought to win popular applause by clap-trap." With him, the glory of the cause was far before any glory with which he sought to invest himself. "Without a doubt, one of the most frank, honest, fearless, single-minded and disinterested democrats of that day was John Taylor."⁶⁵

An imposing statue of Dr. Taylor was erected, by Public subscription in Ayr and Kilmarnock, and still stands in the little cemetery, on the north side of Ayr, which is known locally as "Taylor's Cemetery." The inscription commemorates Taylor's "virtues as a man, and his services as a Reformer. Professionally, he was alike the Poor Man's generous friend and physician. Politically he was the eloquent and unflinching advocate of the People's Cause, freely sacrificing health, means, social status and even personal liberty to the advancement of measures, then considered extreme, but now considered to be essential to the well-being of the State."

(63) "Northern Star." 19/10/1844.

(64) Gammage, *op. cit.* pp. 35-6.

(65) *ibid.*

On the reverse side of the pedestal, below the names of the Committees of Management in Ayr and Kilmarnock, is inscribed one of Taylor's own religious verses:—

"The dead are here, the blessed faithful dead
Whose earthly graves your bitter tears are steeping
Whose souls by us through the dark valley led,
Their Saviour holds in His eternal keeping.

Too much ye mourn that yonder heavy sod
Doth hide the lovely form from your aching sight.
Too little do ye feel that sown by God,
They yet shall blossom in His bowers of light."

JOHN TAYLOR, M.D.