

Pollard he found an ally, more than an ally, a friend, a hero almost, in H. J. Laski, newly appointed to the chair of politics at the London School of Economics. Laski had helped draft the second proposal for Pollard, Laski now agreed however that there was probably something in choosing a colonial subject. Beaglehole wrote to Campbell in March 1927:

This same Laski is a weedy undersized shrimp of a fellow, & now holding down Graham Wallas' job. He is about 34. God, what a mind! I heard his inaugural lecture, the finest formal thing I ever heard in my life. . . . He wrote all the editorials in the *Workers Weekly* during the General Strike, of unhappy memory, & stands by every word of them. He is a perfect lecturer, & friendly & companionable enough to be a colonial. God bless him!

Laski's biographer, Kingsley Martin, in a phrase later quoted by Beaglehole, saw 'the clue to Harold's strength and weakness . . . in his desire to love and be loved. His argument', Martin wrote, 'might be derived from Marx, but at the final test he was a follower of William Morris rather than of Lenin.'⁵ At the Laskis' on Sunday afternoons one might meet almost anyone: cabinet minister, trade union leader, Indian nationalist, American jurist or playwright. And the talk! If the company was remarkable the talk was even more remarkable—'I never heard such conversation before'—though Beaglehole did on one occasion report 'I went to Laski's on Sunday afternoon and heard some pretty good yarns—one or two of them slightly touched up since I heard them last'. Ultimately perhaps Laski was too good a talker to write the great work on political thought that some believed he had within him. That work however provided the pretext for Laski's indefatigable scouring of the second-hand bookshops. It was another bond between him and the bookish young New Zealander. The book-collecting can be followed, the flavour of the talk captured, from the two remarkable volumes of correspondence between Laski and the American Supreme Court judge, Oliver Wendell Holmes. In reviewing those volumes, twenty-five years after he first met Laski, Beaglehole sought to sum up the man. At the same time he reveals, I suspect, more than a little about himself.

They [Holmes and Laski] were both, intellectually and emotionally, humanists. They inherited, they passed on, the great tradition of eighteenth century rationalism, they were men of tough and acute mind, *of esprit*; but each in his own way too was a romantic; the mind of each was touched by an enchanted music that led him beyond the efforts and entanglements of the ordinary day.⁶

Laski too, was something of an outsider, a radical, a Jew, 'friendly & companionable enough to be a colonial'. This was becoming the yardstick. At Newton's Imperial history seminar Beaglehole met