

published in 1817, by which date Ricardo stood confessedly at the head of economic science in England. The rest of his life, apart from scientific activity, need not concern us in detail. He was now an extensive landed proprietor in Gloucestershire, and in 1819 bought a seat in Parliament. He was neither a frequent nor a fluent speaker—we read that on one occasion early in his Parliamentary life he did not rise till he was loudly called on from all sides—but the House of Commons gave due respect to the authority with which his words were obviously invested. It is interesting to note that though not a Whig he was sufficiently honest and independent in view to vote almost uniformly against the government. He favoured the cause of Parliamentary Reform, was strongly sympathetic to the ballot, and “did good work in arguing for a Poor Law which should aim at its own extinction, in examining the schemes of Robert Owen, in advocating benefit clubs with old age pensions, in seconding Huskisson’s and Hume’s reforms, and in cross-examining witnesses before the committee on Agricultural Depression.”

In 1823 illness compelled his retirement from Parliament, though it was not allowed to prevent his private work. But only a few months of life remained to him. His last days were full of alternating pain and stupor, and he died, at the age of fifty-one, in September 1823.

The explicit and affectionate judgment of contemporaries on his character is sufficiently borne out by other evidence. He was a good husband and father, a man kindly, modest, and unassuming, without artifice or pretension, in discussion more ready to listen than to speak, frank in acknowledging error and in admitting conviction, and at the same time quietly cogent and compelling in the advance and illustration of his own conclusions.

We know then that Ricardo lived a comparatively quiet and uneventful life in a period which, regarded from any and every human point of view, was of boundless significance, in which, particularly, economic England lay writhing in the crucible, her obstinate viscous past seething under the heat and blast of fierce titanic forces of change. We know that while the immediate environment of Ricardo’s life embraced circumstances in which, if ever, competition was almost perfectly and perhaps beneficially realised, its remoter environment had in it much that could explain and condone any